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# Arbitrating Goeconomic and Geopolitical: The US-Iranian Case

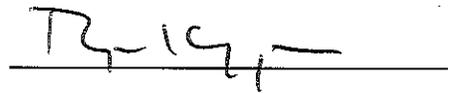
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## **Abstract**

Through scrutinizing US-Iranian relations through the lens of radical geopolitics theory, it will be shown that a core proposition of radical geopolitics theory is too restrictive, and ought to be weakened to account for the principle of economic substitution. Doing so will incorporate a degree of flexibility enhancing the explanative scope of radical geopolitics. Accomplishing this feat is facilitated with the addition of the following proposition: geopolitics arbitrage –the action of managing risk and transactions costs between geoeconomic logic and geopolitical logic made possible by the economic principle of substitution.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Former United States Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal (1892-1949), observed that ensuring Middle Eastern oil access directly influenced the future of the United States, US allies, and US enemies. Little has changed in the seventy years since Forrestal made this observation. In 2017, the United States, consumed an average of 19.96 million barrels of oil a day (EIA 2018). Over half – 10.14 million barrels – of US oil consumption is imported, of which 33% is imported from Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (EIA 2018). Despite US dependence on OPEC oil exports, US-Iranian relations remain hostile. What explains continued hostility between the United States and Iran? By scrutinizing US-Iranian relations through the lens of radical geopolitics theory, it will be shown that a core proposition of radical geopolitics theory is too restrictive, and ought to be weakened to account for the principle of economic substitution. Doing so will incorporate a degree of flexibility enhancing the explanative scope of radical geopolitics. Accomplishing this feat is facilitated with the addition of the following proposition: geopolitics arbitrage –the action of managing risk and transactions costs between geoeconomic logic and geopolitical logic made possible by the economic principle of substitution.

Relying on the theory of radical geopolitics, it will be demonstrated that geoeconomic and geopolitical logics exert influence on US-Iranian relations such that sustained hostility is nearly inevitable. Furthermore, US support of the Mujahedin-e Khalq [MEK] – a group viewed as a terrorist organization by Iran – is consistent with the influence of geopolitical logic on US policy toward Iran over that of geoeconomic logic. More broadly, the implication to radical geopolitics theory is that the US-Iran case represents an anomaly insofar as the theory stipulates that geoeconomic logic exerts more influence than geopolitical logic. What is overlooked in

radical geopolitics theory is the economic principle of substitution, which weakens geoeconomic influence in this case, through geopolitics arbitrage.

In the past forty years, the tensions between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States have been increasing. It is impossible to understand the complexity of the relationship between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran without knowing the important historical events between the two countries. Chapter one introduces four scholars, Mohammad Soltaninejad, Marina Ottaway, Dr. William O. Beeman, and Dr. Trita Parsi. Each of those scholars have written outstanding books and articles analyzing the tensions between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States from a different prospective. This chapter will help readers understand that the relationship between the two countries is highly complicated and the theory of radical geopolitics is just one analytical perspective out of many in the field of international relations.

The goal of chapter two is to give the reader some feedback about the level of the complication in the diplomatic relations of the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran by explaining some of the major events that has accrued in the past four decades. Chapter two explains the Shiite's theory of governance of the jurist (Velayat-e-Faqih), which is the heart of the Islamic Republic's governing system and how Ayatollah Khomeini using the theory became the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic. Immediately after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, tensions on territory dispute and Khomeini's vision of exporting his brand of Islam to Iraq started to rise. Saddam Hussein did underestimate the Iranian forces and began a wrongly calculated war with Iran.

The Iran-Iraq War was a threat to balance of power in that region, which led United States to take sides to keep the balance of power that serves its geopolitical interest. After the

Islamic Revolution in Iran, the MEK and the newly formed government of Iran clashed over political power that led the MEK to assassinate highly ranked members of the government. As a result, Saddam Hussein saw an opportunity to use the MEK against the Islamic Republic of Iran in the war. Therefore, Saddam Hussein officially invited the MEK to move to Iraq, which is discussed in details in Chapter two. Moreover, in this chapter the Iran nuclear crisis and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) has been explained in detail. Chapter three refers to the JCPOA, and explains the United States withdrawal from the deal by using lens of radical geopolitics.

Chapter three introduces and explains Julien Mercille's theory of radical geopolitics, and its geopolitical logic, and geoeconomic logic. Chapter three will help the readers to understand the motives behind the United States' regime change in Iran and its support for the MEK.

Chapter four will help the reader to better understand the philosophy of the MEK and the reason behind its formation after the United States' involvement in a coup d'état in Iran. Chapter four goes into details of some unusual activities that the MEK has done in the past forty years such as raising money through fraud and unethical methods, recruiting new members through human trafficking, and treating its members through cultish methods. Moreover, chapter two explores the reason that the United States listed the MEK on the Foreign Terrorist Organization list (FTO) in 1997 and the motives for removing the organization from the FTO in 2013.

Finally, in Chapter five this paper examines the motive behind the United States regime change in Iran from lens of Julien Mercille's theory of radical geopolitics. Furthermore, this chapter argues that Julien Mercille's theory of radical geopolitics reveals that geopolitical logic always serves the geoeconomic logic of the United States. However, in Iran's case for the past forty years, geopolitical logic has been dominating the United States' forging policy towards the

Islamic Republic of Iran. Geopolitical domination in the United States' foreign policy contradicts the main principle of Julien Mercille's theory of radical geopolitics, which this paper intends to theoretically contribute to Mercille's theory by suggesting that the United States is enjoying the advantage of principle of economic substitution effect over Iran. The principle of economic substitution allows the United States to arbitrage between the geoeconomic logic and geopolitical by substituting its energy needs from over 100 other oil producing countries. As a result, the United States gains the leverage to pursue its geopolitical logic for a longer time to reach to its ultimate goal, which is to install a friendly government in Iran to reach to satisfy its geoeconomic logic.

Finally, chapter six concludes by explaining the leverage that the United States enjoys against the Islamic Republic of Iran and its advantage in being able to arbitrate between the geopolitical and geoeconomic logic because of the economic principle of substitution.

### **Question**

Despite US dependence on OPEC oil exports, US-Iranian relations remain hostile. What explains the continued hostility between the United States and Iran?

### **Literature Review**

A Ph.D. candidate at the University of Tehran, Mohammad Soltaninejad, in his article "Iran and the United States: Resolution Perspective," states that the diplomatic relationship between Iran and the United States initiated in 1883, when the United States sent its first diplomatic personnel. The diplomatic relationship began due to Iran's request and intentions to escape the extreme political influence of Britain and the Soviet Union in Iran. After WWII, Iran's plan to establish positive relations with a world power paid off, and the influence of the

Soviet Union in Iran was no longer significant. The relations between the United States and Iran started even stronger and resulted in, “a close partnership in 1950’s which was followed by the inclusion of Iran into the western bloc and U.S.-engineered regional security structures in the form of the Baghdad Pact, and later the Central Treaty Organization in the 1960’s and 1970’s” (Soltaninejad 2015, 459). It is true that the relations between the United States and the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, were at their peak, but after the 1953 coup of Prime Minister Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh, tensions between the Iranian people against the United States’ government began to build.

After the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran, the relations between the two countries always experienced a degree of hostility. According to Mohammad Soltaninejad, in the past forty years the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States have gone through two conflict cycles and reconciliations.

The first conflict cycle occurred after the Islamic Revolution of Iran, when the United States viewed the Islamic Republic as a newly formed government that overthrew the Shah who had close relations with the United States. On the other hand, the newly formed government of Iran saw the United States as one of the main reasons behind the overthrow of Dr. Mossadegh’s government in 1953. The tensions quickly turned into hostility when the Islamic Republic of Iran seized the United States embassy and took the diplomats as hostages for 444 days. In 1980, in response to the hostage crisis, President Carter issued an executive order to freeze all the Iranian assets in the United States. After President Carter’s executive order, a series of sanctions followed that targeted Iran’s imports, its exports, and its petroleum. The tensions between the United States and Iran started to deescalate a few years after the Iran-Iraq War when President Mohammad Khatami took office in Iran. President Khatami announced that the Iranian people

saw the American people as friends and not enemies, and also proposed to have cultural exchange such as allowing, “professors, writers, scholars, artists, journalists, and tourists,” to travel freely between the two countries (Soltaninejad 2015, 461). In response to President Khatami’s speech, the United States’ Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, in a speech asked Iran to join the United States to create a path of normalization of the relations between the two countries.

The second conflict cycle between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran began when President George W. Bush labeled Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as the, “Axis of Evil.” Furthermore, President George Bush refused any negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program. On the other hand, the Islamic Republic of Iran held all its promised cooperation with the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan. Instead, the Islamic Republic started to use its newly gained influence over the Shiite Iraqis against the United States in Iraq. The hostility between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States tipped the balance into the hardcore conservatives’ favor, which resulted in Mahmoud Ahmadinejad becoming the President of Iran. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s presidency was based on a doctrine that “nuclear energy is our inalienable right” and only Iranians have the right to determent the future of it (Soltaninejad 2015, 462). Such doctrine resulted in a significant increase in Iran’s number of centrifuges and sanctions from the United States. Once again, the tensions and hostility between the two countries started to experience de-escalation when the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was signed.

Soltaninejad (2015) used the ripeness theory to describe the JCPOA negotiations and the start of the de-escalation of the tension between Iran and the United States. The ripeness theory explains why and when countries in conflict move towards conflict resolution. In other words,

when two countries happen to be placed in a position in which the conflict is harming all the sides, and both parties understand that a negotiation could reduce the damage, then both countries will pursue conflict resolution. As a result, the Islamic Republic of Iran, to avoid further damages from the imposed sanctions by the United States and the European Union, accepted a seat at the negotiation table with the United States. On the other hand, the United States, to prevent Iran from reaching to a nuclear weapon and further destabilizing the region, viewed the negotiations as the best way to end the conflict. However, Soltaninejad (2015) also argues that the damages of the multilateral sanctions of the United States on Iran were much higher compared to the cost of the damages that the Islamic Republic of Iran was causing the United States in the Middle East.

In her book, *Iran, the United States, and the Gulf: the Elusive Regional Policy*, Marina Ottaway (2009), the director of the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment, argues that for the United States to face the Islamic Republic of Iran's hegemony in the Persian Gulf, it needs the support of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC). Members of the GCC are Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain. Ottaway (2009) believes that not only GCC countries fear nuclear Iran, but that even Iran without nuclear power is perceived as a threat. The GCC countries are afraid of Iran due to its size, population, well-established political system, and its ambitions to export its brand of Islam. Moreover, the Islamic Republic has expanded its sphere of influence into Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria by supporting Shiite militants such as Hezbollah, and some other Sunni militants like Hamas in the region. It is true that the GCC countries spend billions of dollars in importing weapons from the United States, but they are far from having enough manpower to confront Iran. The GCC countries welcome the United States to contain the Islamic Republic of Iran, but they refuse to

directly take a stand against Iran. It is important to note that in 2008, the Bush administration sought to form an anti-Iranian alliance in the Persian Gulf to contain the Islamic Republic of Iran's growing influence in the region. None of the GCC countries, including Egypt and Jordan, were ready to take the risk of confronting Iran by forming an alliance against it, which condemned the US-led Anti-Iranian alliance to fail. Therefore, some of the GCC countries, such as Oman and Qatar, sought relations with Iran instead of confronting it.

In 1975, Iran provided security to Oman to stop the Dhofar Rebellion that was supported by Saudi Arabia. Since then, the two countries have been on good political and trade terms with one another. Even during the Iran-Iraq War, Oman managed to not take sides and keep its positive relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Moreover, Qatar shares one of the world's largest natural gas fields with Iran, which has also made Qatar the closest GCC country to Iran due to its economic ties. Qatar's close connections with the Islamic Republic of Iran do not go with the will of the other GCC countries. In the past few years, the Islamic Republic has also drastically increased its influence over Iraq. In other words, the United States is facing a significant challenge to create a coalition in the Persian Gulf against the Islamic Republic of Iran since not all the GCC countries are aligned with the United States' containment goal against Iran. According to Marina Ottaway (2009), it would be in the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran's best interest to start normalizing the relations through negotiations instead of escalating the tensions in the region.

In his book, *The Great Satan Vs. the Mad Mullahs*, Dr. William O. Beeman (2005), a Middle East researcher, a professor of anthropology at the University of Minnesota, and the Chair of the Department of Anthropology, argues that the source of the tensions between the

United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran is a not just a misunderstanding or conflict of interests, but it is a cultural and communicational issue.

Perception of the Muslims in the Middle Eastern countries about Western countries began to shift towards more negative views during and after World War I, largely due to the series of crimes that were committed by the Western countries in the Middle East. Moreover, Muslims in the Middle East believe that the Western countries divided the Muslim countries according to their interests and ruled accordingly. After the decline of the Western powers in the world and eventually in the Middle East, it was the United States who continued the path of the European powers in that region. During the World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union fought over countries in the Middle East and forced countries to choose and take sides between East and West. The United States and the Soviet Union rewarded the countries that sided with them with military equipment, which was used by the leaders of the Middle Eastern countries to crush the opposition groups like religious reformists. Such actions by the United States contributed to the anger of the religious groups that later led to events such as the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979.

According to Dr. William O. Beeman (2005, 4), both the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran “construct the ‘other’ to fit an idealized picture of an enemy.” A similar technique was used during the Cold War by the United States and the Soviet Union. It is important to note that there is the number of differences in the characteristic of the Cold War demonization, and the one that is currently occurring between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. For instance, neither Iran nor the United States is an immediate danger to one another. Both countries emphasize that they have no animosity with the people of the other

country, and most of the time a person in the government becomes the target of demonization of the opposite country (for example, Ayatollah Khamenei and President George W. Bush).

Dr. William O. Beeman (2005) takes the approach of anthropological insight to analyze and understand the tensions between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Unfortunately, the Islamic Republic of Iran perceives compromise as a sign of weakness. Furthermore, since the Iranian government is based on the Shiite Islam and “in Islamic terms, compromise with evil is not only impossible, but blasphemous,” which makes the compromise for the Iranian government more complicated (Beeman 2005, 5). In his book, Dr. William O. Beeman coins the term “U.S Foreign Policy Myth,” which means, the United States finds itself obligated to protect the normal world order and face any country that acts outside of the international norms and causes a challenge to the international order. The United States, like most of the modern Western countries, follows a set of communicative routines and principles, where after the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979, the Iranian government strongly opposed obeying the norms that were put in place by any Western country. The position that the Islamic Republic of Iran took was extreme to the extent that it also opposed following the international law and strongly challenged the international order. In other words, the United States and the newly formed government of Iran in 1979 were not able to establish a proper communication channel, which resulted in tensions between the two countries since the beginning. Evidently, the tension between the two countries goes back to how both societies view and solve disagreements.

Founder of National Iranian American Council, an adjunct professor of International Relations at Johns Hopkins University, and author of “*Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Iran, Israel and the United States*,” Dr. Trita Parsi (2007), in his book, argues that

the roots of the tensions between the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, and the United States are purely geopolitical rather than ideological. Dr. Trita Parsi (2007) strongly believes that the United States' foreign policy towards the Islamic Republic of Iran has been directly impacted by the animosity between the Israel and Iran. It is important to note that Israel did not see the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 as a threat to its security. In fact, during 1980's during the Iran-Iraq War, Israel sought to improve relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran by lobbying in Washington for Iran and against its Arab neighbors. Israel's foreign policy towards the Islamic Republic of Iran started to change after the shift in the balance of the power that accrued due to the end of the Cold War and the Persian Gulf Wars. Moreover, the Islamic Republic of Iran has advanced double policy towards Israel. On one hand before 1991, the Islamic Republic of Iran openly declared its support for Palestine, but in action it always sought to reduce tension with Israel in order to develop positive relations with the United States. In other words, Iran pursued its strategic interest, which contradicted its ideological interests. On the other hand after 1991, when the United States and Israel initiated their containment policy against the Islamic Republic of Iran and advanced a new Middle East order, Iran's position about Israel also took a turn. For the first time the Islamic Republic of Iran began to openly and strongly oppose the Jewish State. This is where the Islamic Republic of Iran shifted away from its strategic interests and advanced with its ideological interests. Since then, both the Islamic Republic of Iran and Israel have been trying to influence or undermine the United States' foreign policy in the Middle East. Israel undermined the United States' foreign policies fearing that the US policies would help the Iranian government and vice versa.

On the other hand, the Islamic Republic of Iran fears that the United States policies in the region would only be beneficial for Israel. Therefore, both Israel and the Islamic Republic do

what they have in their power to undermine the United States' policies in the Middle East. For instance, the Islamic Republic of Iran started to undermine the Israel- Palestinian peace process to counter the United States' efforts of isolating Iran in the region. Moreover, Israel strongly opposed the United States from entering into direct negotiations with the Islamic Republic of Iran in fear that the United States might decrease its security support for Israel. In other words, Israel-Iran relations have a direct impact on the United States' foreign policy in the Middle East.

The United States' foreign policy in the Middle East has not been successful due to the rivalry between that is between Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran. For the United States, healthy diplomatic relations with both countries are significant. On one hand, Israel is a close ally for the United States, and it serves the United States' strategic interests in the Middle East. Moreover, Israel enjoys the support of the powerful Jewish Americans and Christians in the United States that influence the United States' foreign policy in that region. Iran once served as a buffer against the Soviet Union and did limit its access to the Persian Gulf oil reserves. Once again, Iran could serve as a buffer against China and limit its access to the energy reserves in the Persian Gulf. Israel is afraid that United States will establish direct communications with Iran and reach an agreement that would allow the Islamic Republic of Iran to continue enriching uranium. Iran with nuclear power is perceived to be a threat to Israel.

According to Dr. Parsi (2007), the Middle East still has not found its balance after the fall of the Soviet Union, and Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran will continue to undermine the United States' policies. The instability in that region will last until the United States realizes that both the Islamic Republic of Iran and Israel must come to an agreement to reduce the tensions in the region. Moreover, the Islamic Republic of Iran must accept the two-state solution. On the

other hand, Israel also must reevaluate its military strategy and put an end to its ambition of becoming the only powerful regime in the region.

## **Chapter Two: Background and History**

According to Julien Mercille's geopolitical logic, which is one of the core principles of his theory of radical geopolitics, after the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the Islamic republic sought to export its brand of revolution and expand its influence to the neighboring countries such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Yemen, Lebanon and Syria. Such a motive by the Islamic Republic of Iran, not only pushed away the influence that the United States had over Iran during the Shah, but also clashed with the United States' interests and hegemony in the Middle East. Threatening the United States' hegemony in the Middle East would lead to a significant negative impact of geoeconomic logic in the Middle East, and eventually, to the rest of the world. Geoeconomic logic is the other core principle of Julien Mercille's theory of radical geopolitical and the main drive of geopolitical logic. In the past forty years, the United States has kept the Islamic Republic under great sanctions to prevent spread of the Iranian threat to the other countries. As part of geopolitical logic of Julien Mercille, the United States never forgives threats and harms to its credibility and hegemony, and in fact, responds strongly to such acts to ensure the other countries would receive a clear message. According to the geopolitical logic of Julien Mercille, invading Iraq in 2003 was because Saddam Hussein tried to undermine the United States' hegemony in the Middle East by invading Kuwait in 1990. The reason that the United States has not used a military action against the Islamic Republic of Iran is the negative view of the public opinion on war against Iran. According to the Julien Mercille's theory of radical geopolitics, it is in the United States' best interest to install a friendly government like the Shah of Iran to grant the United States safe access and significant influence over the energy market to increase the flow to the allies and regulate it for the enemies. Therefore, the United States believes by installing the MEK a "friendly government" would grant it such access.

The geopolitical logic explains why the United States has kept the Islamic Republic under heavy sanctions since early 1980's. The Islamic Republic of Iran has used every tool possible to undermine the United States' hegemony and credibility in the international realm. The geoeconomic logic explains why Iran is important for the United States. Iran is sitting on the fourth largest oil reserves with over 158 billion barrels and on the second largest natural gas reserves in the world with over 33 trillion cubic meters. According to the geoeconomic logic, the United States can simply buy oil and natural gas from the Islamic Republic from the free market, but such practice would not be in the United States' best interests since the Islamic Republic is considered to be a hostile regime to the United States.

In 2003, the Bush Administration when invaded Iraq faced an unexpected problem in there, which was the MEK. At first, the Administration did not have a clear vision to how to deal with the MEK that was listed in the Foreign Terrorist Organization since the mid 1990s. However, later the Bush Administration recognized the organization as Prisoners of War that led the Obama Administration to delist the group from the FTO list. Finally, the Trump Administration from its early months started to openly support the MEK and recognizing it as a group that seeks democracy and human rights in Iran.

### **The Theory of Governance of the Jurist (Velayat-e Faqih)**

Both the MEK and the Islamic Republic of Iran follow the same branch of Islam, which are identified as Shiites. The core philosophy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on the theory of the Velayat-e Faqih. The theory of Velayat-e Faqih has emerged from a principal Shiite belief, suggesting that God is just and will never leave the people without guidance, reflecting the idea of "Edalat," justice. The imamate is hence essential to and inseparable from Edalat, exemplified by the fact that after the death of the Prophet Mohammad, the Shi'ite Imams became

the religious spiritual leaders of the Muslim community. The Imamate constitutes a cornerstone of the Shiites. It is necessary to understand this political doctrine in relation to the context within which the concept of leadership has emerged. In order to overcome the ambiguities surrounding the relationship between Velayat-e Faqih and the position of Islamic jurist as a source of guidance and emulation (Marje Taqleed), it is essential to discuss the various dimensions of guardianship in the absence of the Twelfth Imam.

Shiite Islam is the second largest branch of Islam after the Sunni branch, which Shiites population is estimated to be about 300 million that is 20% of the total population of Muslims (Rezai 2016, 5). Shiites believe that only the descendants of the Prophet can be the true source of guidance, so they reject the first three caliphs, Abu Bakr, Omar, and Othman, who came after the Prophet, and revere his descendants, also known as Ahl al-Bayt. Shi'ites believe that the Prophet's bloodline continued through his daughter, Fatima Al-Zahra, and his cousin and son-in-law, Ali Ibn Abi Taleb. According to the Shiites, all twelve descendants of the Prophet either governed for some time or shaped the politics of the country in which they were living. However, it is also important to mention most of the twelve descendants of the Prophet were assassinated. Shiites believe that the twelfth descendant of the Prophet, Imam Mehdi, went into a long hiding to protect himself from the ruling caliph. Since then, the Shiites are waiting his return, which means he would govern the world. One of the significant outcomes of the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 was that it did pave the way for the Islamic extremists to gain power and led Ayatollah Khomeini to become the Velayat-e Faqih of the Islamic Republic. In other words, it did create a modern school of Shia.

### **Khomeini's Claim to Power**

The resources that the leader of the Islamic Revolution Khomeini and his supporters used to support the idea of Velayat-e Faqih were Quranic verses and the hadiths upon which they built their position in supporting Velayat-e Faqih. The leader of the Islamic Revolution argued that the Shiite “Fiqh” (jurisprudence) is complete and that it can provide solutions to all human problems. Based on this philosophy, Ayatollah Khomeini established the government in Iran after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 (Rezai 2016, 15). According to the Shiite clergy, the eleventh Shiite Imam said, “If there is anyone among the fuqaha who is in control over his own self, protects his religion, suppresses his evil desires and is obedient to the commands of his Master, then the people should follow him” (Rezai 2016, 15). The mentioned hadith was used a number of times by Khomeini to justify his position. However, Shi‘ite scholars, after the occultation of the twelfth Imam, have endorsed the concept of Velayat-e Faqih, which gives authority to Shiite Marje Taqleed (source of emulation) to make legal decisions within the confines of Islamic Law to Shiites during the absence of Shiite’s twelfth Imam. Based on some Shiite hadiths, the Maraa’je Taqleed is considered to be the indirect representative of the twelfth Shiite Imam. It is important to note that Khomeini played a significant role in giving Shiitism a political character.

According to Khomeini’s beliefs, an Islamic government must govern a Muslim country; Islamic government must expand to countries that are not governed by an Islamic government. Moreover, combat non-Islamic governments, and push back Western imperialism in the Islamic countries and install Islamic governments. Khomeini strongly believed that the Shiite revolution in Iran was not just exclusive to Iran, but it had to be exported to the rest of the world. Khomeini also believed that only Shia Islam could create a just and peaceful world, so the Islamic revolution must be exported to the rest of the world. Iran was the first country in the Muslim

world that had a successful Shiite revolution. However, Iran is not the only country with a Shiite population in the world (Rezai 2016, 18). Looking at the Shiite population in the Persian Gulf region, Khomeini's approach of overthrowing governments and installing Shiite governments was not an insane idea. Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan all have major Shiite populations. On the contrary, except for Bahrain, Iraq, and Yemen, Shiites are in minority in all the other countries that are ruled by dictators who learned the lesson from the Islamic revolution of Iran to take preemptive measures against the Shiite protestors. The roots of the revolution in Iran can be traced back to Iran's first democratic election in 1951. The coup d'état in 1953 led to rise of the nationalists and the Islamic extremists to increase their political participation through conventional and unconventional methods that eventually resulted to the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

### **The Iranian Revolution**

In 1951, for the first time, the Iranian people were able to democratically choose their 60<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister, Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh. Dr. Mossadegh promised the Iranian people that if he got elected, he would nationalize Iranian oil that had been under British control for over 40 years. Once the oil was nationalized, the United Kingdom and the United States began to weigh their options of removing the newly elected Prime Minister Mossadegh. While the British insisted on taking a military action, President Eisenhower had a better plan. It is important to note that when Dr. Mossadegh was elected as the Prime Minister, he not only nationalized Iran's oil but also seized a tremendous amount of power from the Shah. Finally, in 1953, the United States' CIA and the United Kingdom's MI6 implemented Operation TPAJAX and overthrew the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran. After the coup d'état, the unpopular Shah of Iran regained his power through Operation TPAJAX and such action from the United States left

a bad impression about the United States among the Iranian people and especially with the clergy. In other words, it was the start of tensions between Iran and the United States.

In 1979, the Shah of Iran lost his control over the political situation and was forced to flee Iran. The Iranian people and many scholars believed that the Shah's regime "was structurally weak, socially isolated, and politically alienated from the general population long before the revolution begun to unfold" (Abrahamian 1982, 27). Moreover, in mid 1970's, the price of oil was increasing in significant rates that led the Shah's regime to increase its government spending. Ultimately, the substantial increase in government spending to advance the country's grand development projects resulted in severely raising the cost of living for the average Iranian (Abrahamian 1982, 28). Iranians did experience a relatively stable cost of living in the 1960's, and such a dramatic shift was unbearable for so many middle class families in Iran. For instance, according to the annual report released by the Economist in 1976, average rent in Tehran increased almost by 300% in less than five years (Abrahamian 1982, 27).

A few days after the Shah fled, the Islamic fundamentalist Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned to Iran after 14 years of being in exile. A few months after Khomeini took power in Iran, a group of hardliners attacked the American Embassy in Tehran and took 52 hostages and demanded the United States' government return the Shah who was under cancer treatment in the US to face trial in Iran. The United States refused the demand and the Islamic government of Iran kept the hostages for 444 days. By taking American hostages, Khomeini sent a clear anti-American message and as result, the United States did cut all ties with Iran.

During the hostage crisis, President Carter was under heavy pressure and got criticized from the public that made him make a very risky decision. In 1980, President Carter ordered a group of military elites to rescue the American hostages in Iran that later was called Operation

Eagle Claw. A severe sand storm happened in Tabas, Iran that night which caused a few helicopters to crash. The mission not only failed, but also killed eight American servicemen. The failure to return the American hostages cost President Carter the second term elections. A few hours after President Ronald Reagan's inauguration, finally, after 444 days, Khomeini freed the hostages from captivity and returned them to the United States. The hostage crisis was the second major source of tensions between the United States and Iran after the 1953 coup d'état. Moreover, Iran taking hostages and refusing diplomacy by a taking hard approach was a clear message to the world that it needs to be recognized as a power in the region. After the revolution in Iran, Saddam Hussein believed that the newly formed government of Iran was not capable and organized enough to fight a war with Iraq. Therefore, Saddam Hussein underestimated Iran's military capability and attacked Iran, which was a mistake that resulted in a long and catastrophic war between the two countries.

### **Iran-Iraq War**

In September 1980, Saddam Hussein, the leader of Iraq, attacked Iran over territorial disputes over the Arvan Rud. The southern side of the river was considered the border between Iran and Iraq for decades, but Saddam used it as a pre-emptive strategy to overthrow the newly formed Islamic Government of Iran. Saddam saw Iran's revolution as a threat to his dictatorship, since the majority of Iraq's population was Shiite, and he was recognized as a brutal Sunni tyrant by the Islamic government of Iran and the Shiites. Soon after the Islamic revolution in Iran, both governments started accusing one another of wrongdoing. On one hand, the Islamic republic was accusing Saddam's regime of undermining its borders and supporting the Arab rebellion groups in Khuzestan. On the other hand, Saddam Hussein was accusing the newly formed government of Iran for its desire to export its revolution into Iraq (Marion and Peter 2003, 256). Out of fear,

in the late 1970's Saddam's regime initiated arresting and home arresting some of the well-followed Shiite clergy, including Ayatollah al-Kho'I (Tripp 2010, 230). Furthermore, tens of thousands of Iraqi Shiites of Iranian origin were deported to Iran. In 1980 alone, about 40,000 Iraqi Shiites Iranian origin were arrested and deported to Iran (Tripp 2010, 230).

Saddam believed that the Islamic government of Iran was new, weak, and on the verge of collapse. Saddam thought using military force would result in a quick victory for his regime and would stop the spread of the Shiite revolution. Saddam underestimated the motivation of the young Iranians that was triggered by the revolution (Tripp 2010, 230: Marion and Peter, 2003 256). In less than two years, Iran not only returned its lost territories but also entered the Iraqi territories and continued the war in Iraq. Saddam offered Khomeini a ceasefire, but Khomeini strongly opposed it, which led to continuation of the war for several more years. The United States tried to play neutral, but eventually ended up taking sides throughout the years of the war. It was in the United States' interest to let neither Iran nor Iraq gain control over the other's oil fields.

According to multiple CIA reports, the United States was providing intelligence on Iran gathered from reconnaissance satellites to Saddam who used the information to use chemical weapons including mustard and sarin gas on the Iranian troops. Iraq was receiving such assistance from the United States primarily for two reasons. First, Iraq was United States' ally. Second, it is true that Saddam started the war, but during most of the years of the war Iran had advanced into Iraq's territory. In other words, Iraq without the United States' help could have lost parts of its territory, which would give Iran more power over Iraqi oil fields. In 1982, Iran launched a significant counter-attack where it not only regained its lost territories but also imprisoned about 40,000 Iraqi troops (Tripp 2010, 235). Furthermore, besides the heavy

casualties that Iraq experienced in 1982, the war for Iraq became economically more damaging than Saddam Hussein had expected. Iraq's foreign reserve currency fell from \$30 billion in 1980 to about \$3 billion by 1983, and its oil revenues fell from \$26 billion to about \$6 billion by 1983 (Tripp 2010, 235; Marion and Peter 2003, 265).

On the other hand, in 1983, Hezbollah took six American hostages, and a group of Iranian leaders secretly contacted the United States' officials to negotiate a deal to free the hostages in exchange for the arms sale. The Reagan administration agreed to secretly sell weapons to Iran in exchange for the hostages; this act was later called the Iran Contra Affair. In 1986, finally, the secret arms deal came to light and the United States stopped selling arms to Iran. In July 1988, the United States' Navy shot down a civilian plane and killed all the 290 passengers on board claiming that the Airbus A300 was mistakenly identified as F-14 Tomcat on the radar. In July 1988, finally, Khomeini accepted the ceasefire with Iraq, and as he described, accepting ceasefire is more like "drinking a cup of poison" (Tripp 2010, 235). In the mid 1980s, the relations between the United States and Saddam Hussein reached their peak. The United States increased its financial credit, detailed satellite imagery, intelligence, and weaponry supplies to Iraq, which was the reason that the Iranian military began to lose ground in Iraq and started to lose hundreds of thousands of soldiers (Tripp 2010, 240). Without such support from the United States, it was impossible to drive the Iranian troops out of Iraq and push them back behind Iranian borders. From the lens of geoeconomic logic, it was in the United States' best interest to implement a strategy to push both countries to their original borders. Either Iraq or Iran gaining control over the other country's oil fields would put the United States' geopolitical logic in jeopardy predicated on containing the regional expansionist ambitions of both countries.

The liberation of Iraq in 2003 changed the politics of the Middle East significantly due to the recalibration of US national security interests in the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. When the Bush administration toppled Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, Washington believed that regime change would bring democracy to Iraq and serve as ground zero for democratization of the Middle East. The Bush administration, however, was not only wrong about democracy in Iraq, but Washington lost a significant amount of its influence with Iraq to Iran. Washington underestimated the power and influence of the Iranian clergy within the majority Shiite community of Iraq.

For decades, Saddam's regime was a great barrier for Iranian influence over the Shiites in Iraq and the Persian Gulf countries. Liberating Iraq not only empowered the Shiites, but also "helped launch a broad Shiite revival that will upset the sectarian balance in Iraq and the Middle East for years to come" (Nasr 2006, 58). About 65% of Iraq's population is Shiite, which makes it the country with the second highest population of Shiites after Iran. It is important to note "Iraq's liberation has also generated new cultural, economic, and political ties among Shiite communities across the Middle East" (Nasr 2006, 59). For over forty years because of Saddam, Shiites were not able to perform pilgrimage, but thanks to the United States, today millions of Shiites visit Iraq every year. Besides providing help to Iraq's energy and oil industry, Iran's influence over the Shiites and clergies in Iraq is immeasurable. Most of the high-level Shiite clergies have studied and been trained in Qom, Iran. Additionally, Qom oversees all projects related to "Ahl al-Bayt Foundation, which has invested tens of millions of dollars in construction projects and medical facilities in southern Iraq and promotes cultural and business ties between Iran and Iraq" (Nasr 2006, 62). Furthermore, the former Prime Ministers Jaafari and Nouri al-Maliki spent years of exile in Iran before going back to Iraq in 2003. After the Iran-Iraq war, the

Islamic Republic of Iran believed that the world stood on Iraq's side and in order to be able to defend itself it needed to increase its military capability. The Islamic Republic of Iran's ambition of strengthening its military power was about to become nuclear.

### **The Iranian Nuclear Issue, 2003-2015**

In 2003, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for the first time issued a report stating that the Islamic Republic of Iran was violating the Safeguards Agreement of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) (Hunt 2017, 320). In fact, Iran secretly was enriching uranium in undisclosed nuclear facilities. According to IAEA's report, "Iran had falsely interpreted the reporting requirements under articles 34I and 95 with regard to declaring imported fissile materials since 1991" (Hunt 2017, 320). In 2007, the United States National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) confirmed it had "high confidence" that the Islamic Republic sought to develop nuclear weapons before the signing of the Additional Protocol in fall 2003 (Hunt 2017, 320). In 2008, Barack Obama was elected as the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. After Obama came into office in 2009, he called for "stronger unilateral sanctions while keeping all the options on the table" (Hunt 2017, 320). However, the Islamic Republic of Iran ignored all the warnings and continued ignoring demands of the IAEA and the United Nations (UN) Security Council. It is important to mention that the Bush administration with the help of the Israeli government created a computer worm called Stuxnet to disable the Iranian centrifuges. This act was named, The Operation Olympic Games, and it was continued under the first year of Obama's Administration and it did damage to 1,000 out of 6,000 high-speed centrifuges of the Natanz nuclear facility (Pedraza 2015, 810).

In February 2009, Mohamed ElBaradei, the director of IAEA, said, that Iran had isolated itself and had "shut off any cooperation with the agency over the past few months" (Hunt 2017,

321). ElBaradei believed that Iran had enough low enriched uranium to create one nuclear weapon in a year or so, if it decided to build one. ElBaradei also mentioned that his “gut feeling was that Iran desired the technology to build a nuclear weapon to send a message to their neighbors as a major power in the Middle East” (Hunt 2017, 321). On 19 May 2009, a few months after ElBaradei’s comments on Iran the IAEA released a report indicating that Iran did not allow unannounced inspections of the Natanz fuel enrichment plant. Further, the IAEA requested design information about the Arak heavy water reactor, but the Iranian officials strongly opposed it. A few days later the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant was discovered by the European intelligence agencies, which was undisclosed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. After the discovery of “the Natanz reactor in 2002, and intelligence that Iran had sought nuclear weapons until 2003 (released in the 2007 NIE),” in the eyes of American officials, “Iran has cheated three” times so far (Hunt 2017, 321). After Iran’s secret sites were revealed via satellite imagery, Iran called for agency inspections to prove that the program was peaceful and “intended for low enrichment” (Hunt 2017, 322). On the other hand, United States Air Force General Charles Wald believed that in case diplomacy failed to address the problem the United States must strike Iran’s nuclear and military facilities.

In October 2009, in a P5+1 meeting in Geneva, the United States offered Iran a “fissile fuel swap” and Iran did accept the offer, but later it was vetoed by Iranian hardliners, who demanded the government retain “1,110 kilograms of its total stockpile” (Hunt 2017, 322). The stockpile of 1,110 kilograms of enriched uranium is enough for Iran to build one nuclear bomb. The P5+1 failed to quickly respond to Iran’s decision, which gave Iran enough time to start enriching at 20% capacity at Natanz Pilot Fuel Enrichment (weapon-grade level). Again, Iran did violate the Article 45 of Iran’s safeguard agreement. Unfortunately, Obama’s first attempt to

solve Iran's dilemma failed. Furthermore, The United Nations Security Council passed more than six resolutions, each one imposed harder sanctions than the previous, but it did not prevent Iran from creating highly enriched uranium.

In July 2010, the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union (EU) adopted UNSCR 1929 and then Iran started to feel the impact of the sanctions. UNSCR 1929 forced all the twenty-seven EU member states to put limitations and restrictions on Iran's imports and exports. In February 2011, James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, testified before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that: "Iran is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons, and their technological advancements contribute to our judgment that Iran is technically capable of producing enough highly enriched uranium for a weapon" (Hunt 2017, 322). At this stage Iran saw its right of enriching uranium as its natural right and was not ready to give it away at any cost.

In June 2011, the Islamic Republic of Iran decided to move the production of 20% production of uranium from Natanz to Fordow, the newly built facility, which meant Iran's access to nuclear weapons was accelerated. The Islamic Republic of Iran again violated the safeguards agreement by making Fordow its main facility for production of highly enriched uranium. Iran by accelerating its nuclear capability, clearly was taking the "hard power defense strategy."

In 2012, President Obama threatened to sanction the foreign central banks that were facilitating transactions of imports and exports of Iran's oil. President Obama believed sanctioning Iran transactions would hurt the heart of Iranian economy and would bring Iran to the negotiations table, which turned out to be true. After central banks stopped facilitating any transaction related to Iran's oil, Iran's economy dropped significantly within a few weeks. In

2013, the newly elected President of Iran Hassan Rouhani who campaigned based on negotiation with the western countries and lifting the sanctions resumed substantive negotiations and reached a basic agreement that later led to Joint Plan of Action (JPA). The JPA was signed in November 2013 and it did promise “6-7 billion in sanctions lifted and a promise of no new additional sanctions from the P5+1, on the condition that Iran not expand its existing enrichment capacity or its 3.5 percent U-235 stockpile, and that all highly enriched material be either diluted or converted to fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR)”, (Hunt 2017, 323). The JPA was just the first step of the multilateral negotiation and promised to expand into wider range of agreements in the near future.

In July 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was signed between Iran and the P5+1, which was a significant behavior change in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s foreign policy with the international community and more specifically, with the United States. On the other hand, it is fair to say that the Obama Administration took a totally new approach and tried to solve Iran’s nuclear issue through multilateral negotiation. The JCPOA restricted the Islamic Republic of Iran in five key areas. First, Iran agreed to reduce number of its centrifuges from 19,000 to 5,000 and only operates one enrichment facility that is called Natanz for a period of 10 years. Second, the deal limited the enrichment levels: Iran agreed to lower its enrichment level to 3.67% for a period of 15 years. Third, Iran agreed to reduce its uranium stockpiles from 11,000 kilograms to 300 Kilograms, which was a significant reduction. Fourth, the deal constrained the plutonium production, and Iran agreed to redesign the heavy-water reactors so it would not be able to produce any plutonium. Fifth, Iran agreed on stronger monitoring and wider range of inspections by the IAEA (Pedraza 2015, 830).

## **Domestic Forces and Legislative Response, Public Opinion, Geopolitical Review, and International Forces**

In 2010, the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress passed the Accountability and Divestment Act of 2010, which gave the president the power to lift, waive, and reduce sanctions on Iran. It is important to mention that,

The Act amended the Iran sanctions Act of 1996 such that sanctions and financial provisions can be waived at the discretion of the president no earlier than thirty days after reporting to Congress that Iran has ceased providing support for acts of international terrorism and no longer satisfies the requirements for designation as a state sponsor of terrorism or has ceased the pursuit, acquisition, and development of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons (Hunt 2017, 324).

In May 2015, the United States' Congress passed the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act to review any agreement reached between Iran and P5+1. The Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015 gave the power to the United States' Congress to review the deal for sixty days from the day of receiving all the documents related to the JCOPA. In the case that United US Congress agrees that the deal is not in the best interest of the United States, then the Congress could pass a joint resolution which would be veto-proof to prevent the deal from happening. Once the Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015 was passed and the powers of lifting sanctions on Iran were revoked, the United States' Congress expressed that it has no confidence in the executive branch. While the United States' Congress was within the sixty-day review period of the deal, it went into full power to stop the JCPOA. The Congress debated three different pieces of legislation to prevent the President from lifting the sanctions on Iran or at least delay the deal until a new president takes office in January 2017. All three pieces of legislation passed in the United States' Congress, but none of them passed with enough votes to override the president's veto power.

The American people did not perceive the JCPOA positively. All the seven polls that were conducted during July to September 2015 polls indicated the disapproval of the American

people. Moreover, polls showed that the American people did not have full trust “in the United States and international partners to enforce and monitor compliance” (Hunt 2017, 328).

A few days before the deal was signed, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced strong opposition and deep concerns about the deal. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the deal as a “stunning, historic, mistake” (Hunt 2017, 330). Other Israeli conservatives believed that the “West is committing suicide... now enslaved to the whims of the leading perpetrators of terrorism around the globe” (Hunt 2017, 331). Moreover, even the centrists criticized the deal and believed that the JCPOA is a deal that would guarantee that Iran could become a nuclear power. The former national security advisor of Israel, Major General Yaahov Amidror, also said, “The reality facing Israel following the signing of the agreement is significantly more threatening than before” (Amidror 2015, 1). Additionally, the Israelis did not believe that if Iran breached the deal, sanctions would snap back in a timely manner. Further, the Israelis knew that in case Iran did not comply with the deal Russia and China would come to Iran’s aid to prevent an effective snap back. Furthermore, the Israelis also believed that the United States did not have the political will or reputation to stop Iran if the deal was violated.

Pro-Israel lobbying has a long history in the United States and has shaped many United States’ foreign policy decisions throughout the history. For instance, organizations such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations (CoP), and the Israel Policy Forum (IPF) did influence policies like the “1996 Iran and Libya Sanctions Act, the 2003 Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act, and the appointment of President Clinton’s Pro-Israel advisors to the 2000 camp David summit” (Hunt 2017, 334). With such history of Pro-Israeli lobbying and influence, one would expect that the lobbyists would also impact the JCPOA, but in this case it was not true.

The JCPOA would relieve Iran from sanctions that would lead to tipping the balance-of-power in the Middle East. Billions of dollars poured into Iran's economy, which would later be fund Hezbollah in Lebanon that would weaken the position of the United States and its allies such as Saudi Arabia and Israel in the region. In other words, Hezbollah is already a threat to Saudi's influence in Lebanon; making Hezbollah stronger could cut the influence of Saudis from that country. On the other hand, Hezbollah is a military threat in that region for Israel and for number of times they have gone into war with one another. After the JCPOA was signed, the Russians supplied Iran with S-300 anti-aircraft system that enhanced Iran's air defense system, another thing that the neighboring countries did not want to see. In other words, Israel would stay at a verge of hot war with Hezbollah, Saudis would enter an armed race with Iran, and finally, at the end of the JCPOA Iran would become a nuclear power country.

## **Chapter Three: The Theory of Radical Geopolitics**

Julien Mercille's theory of radical geopolitics explores the "why," rather than the "how," behind political events and policies (Mercille 859 2008; Mercille and Jones 2009, 856; Mercille 2010, 329). In other words, in the case of Iran and the United States, radical geopolitics theory may be used to explain why the United States takes such actions towards Iran or why the United States shapes policy toward Iran. First, one must understand fundamentals of geopolitics. Julien Mercille divides the logic of power into two distinct and interdependent logics: "geopolitical logic" and "geoeconomic logic" (Mercille 859 2008; Mercille and Jones 2009, 856; Mercille 2010, 329). Geopolitical logic and geoeconomic logic both assist with explaining postwar American foreign policies and capitalism's desire to expand geographically. According to Julien Mercille, both logics are the heart of the radical geopolitics theory (Mercille 2008, 571). It is worth noting that geopolitics, like other theories and schools of thought, have evolved over time and has different branches. Overall, geopolitics has been explored and modified by many scholars, and it is considered to be one of the most diverse and complex schools of thoughts in international relations. However, this paper uses the radical geopolitical theory that has been introduced by Julien Mercille.

Julien Mercille argues that overaccumulation is a real threat to capitalism, and in order to avoid such threat and survive, capitalism must reach other geographies, by entering new markets, expanding trade, or investment of surplus capital to build production facilities in new places. In other words, capitalism seeks ways to reach new markets beyond its territories to ensure its economy's wellbeing at home by opening trade channels with other countries even if it means to installing new capitalist governments. Expanding and reaching other markets for the sake of a

better economy at home either through trade, investments, and gaining access to oil and gas reserves has been described by Julien Mercille as geoeconomic logic.

Julien Mercille's geopolitical logic explains the importance of maintaining American hegemony and credibility in the international arena. Furthermore, any attempt to undermine the American hegemony or credibility would not be left unchecked or be tolerated and severe consequences would follow. If one country undermines the United States' hegemony and credibility and the United States leaves it unchecked, it would be a green light for other countries to do so as well. In other words, forgivingness of the United States would prevent the "falling dominos," or to stop a growing "cancer" that could significantly affect the economic interests of the United States and harm the economic logic (McMahon 1991, 457). According to Julien Mercille's theory of radical geopolitical logic, the geoeconomic logic drives and leads the geopolitical logic. It is important to mention that in some rare cases the geopolitical and geoeconomic logics contradict each other. For instance, it is in the United States' best interest to lift the sanctions on Iran and allow its companies to invest and trade to generate profit in an untouched market, but the Islamic Republic of Iran has undermined the United States' credibility in the Middle East in any way it could in the past forty years. If the United States leaves the Islamic Republic's behavior unchecked, then it would be impossible to prevent other countries from following the Islamic Republic's path. In other words, dealing with Iran could help the United States' companies and economy, but spread of the Islamic Republic of Iran's behavior to the other countries would significantly harm the United States' economic interests. This is where the geopolitical logic comes into play to prevent long term harm to economic interests of the United States by containing and punishing the Islamic Republic so that other countries would fear following the same path.

For the United States to maintain its hegemony over the world economy, it needs to stop Iran from challenging the United States' hegemony and credibility in the region. Any challenges that cause interruption of oil flow in the Middle East would strongly harm the United States' and its allies' economies. It is important to note that the United States' oil imports from the Middle East were never significant, and it never looked at that region as a main source of energy for its domestic use. Yet, the Middle East is strategic for the United States because its European and Asian allies rely on energy from that region. In addition, the United States' rivals (such as China) are highly dependent on Middle Eastern oil and gas. Therefore, not only a stable Middle East is important for the United States to protect its allies, but also a friendly regime in Iran is highly critical to pressure its challengers. The history between the United States and Iran proves that since the early 1950s, the United States was interested in influencing the Iranian government. In 1953, the United States helped Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran, who was friend of the West, to overthrow Mosaddegh's government who nationalized Iran's oil. According to a National Security Council report in 1951, by late 1940's, the United States' oil imports from the Middle East was about 1% of its total consumption, which was not worth the trouble of overthrowing Mosaddegh's government. However, after WWII and the damages that followed, and the start of the Cold War, the United Kingdom's economy and ability to fight communism significantly relied on cheap supply of the Iranian oil.

Since the United Kingdom was a strong ally of the United States and wellbeing of United Kingdom's economy would contribute in winning the Cold War, it was in the United States' interest to help the Shah to regain power in Iran. According to the U.S. National Security Council, "The loss of Iran by default or by Soviet intervention would . . . deny the free world access to Iranian oil . . . . These developments would seriously affect Western economic and

military interests in peace or war in view of the great dependence on Western Europe on Iranian oil” (Mercille and Jones 2009, 860). On the other hand, the British Minister of Fuel strongly advised the United States about taking an action against Mosaddegh’s nationalistic government as such action could quickly spread to other countries like Saudi Arabia and Iraq, which would threaten the security of the free world (Abrahimaian 1989,188; Mercille and Jones 2009, 860). Many of the United States’ unclassified government documents clearly reveal that most of the United States’ postwar policies towards the Middle East have been consistent, and the primary goal has always been maximum control over oil reserves in that region to be able to pressure its rivals and ensure the flow of energy to its allies (Mercille 2010, 331).

For instance, a 1958 National Security Council report mentioned the importance of the United States’ involvement in the Middle East and achieving the objectives even if it meant using force. The report strongly suggested, “(a) Denial of the area to soviet domination. (b) Continued availability of sufficient Near Eastern oil to meet vital Western European requirements on reasonable terms” (National Security Council Report 1958). Since the 1950’s, many similar statements can be found in unclassified documents that have been made by United States’ key policy makers. Using geopolitical logic, the United States and the British government helped the Shah of Iran to run a coup against Mosaddegh’s government. Establishing dominance in the Middle East, controlling oil in that region, and cutting oil supplies to the Soviet Union had a direct impact on the future and security of the Western European countries and Japan, otherwise known as the “free world” (Mercille 2010, 332). On the other hand, it has always been important for the United States to ensure that the petrodollars are poured back into western countries through investments and banks. Besides investing in petrodollars, United States’ oil companies would make substantial profits in that region.

## **Chapter Four: The MEK, or the *Mojahedin-e Khalq***

### **What is the MEK?**

It is true that Mossadegh's government was overthrown in 1953 by the United States and the United Kingdom, and the Shah gained power again, but his ideology of independence from the Western countries continued through his supporters. The MEK roots could be traced back to the "Liberation Movement of Iran" in the early 1960s, which was formed by Mehdi Bazargan who was Western-educated and from a wealthy family (Abrahamian 1989, 81). The Liberation Movement of Iran was created only a few years after the overthrow of Mossadegh's government. Members of the movement declared themselves as Muslims, Iranians, constitutionalists, and Mossadeghists who sought democracy and freedom in Iran. During the uprising of 1963, the Shah's government began imprisoning members of the Liberation Movement of Iran. In response to the Shah's crackdown on the Liberation Movement of Iran, three young members of the movement started a "discussion group" to find more effective ways to fight the brutality of the Shah. One of the core questions that was discussed "was no longer whether but when and how one should take arms" (Mojahedin 1972, 7).

It is fair to say that the formation of the discussion group and its split from the Liberation Movement of Iran were the first steps for the formation of the MEK. In less than three years, the group expanded and began to recruit other members in other major cities of Iran, such as Isfahan, Tabriz, Shiraz, Mashhad, and Qazvin. The focus of the group was to study history, religion, Marxist social and economic theories, and revolutionary theories (Abrahamian 1989, 89). From the very beginning of the group's existence, its members tried to prove that Islam's teachings were compatible with science and Marxist theories by unorthodox ways of interpreting the Quran

and other Shiite books. Furthermore, the MEK started to add new meanings to the Shiite texts to make them more compatible with its belief system. It is important to mention that members of the group rejected the philosophy and atheism that Marxism advocated but strongly agreed with Marxist economic theories such as its critique of imperialism and capitalism. For instance, the members of the group believed that one of the missions of the Prophet Mohammad was to abolish poverty and the human struggle to erase class exploitation. In one of the MEK's early books, *Nehzat-e Hussein* (Hussein's movement), it is mentioned that after the death of the Prophet Mohammad, the corrupt Caliph Muawiya and his son Yazid betrayed Islam by forming an alliance with the "oppressive landlords and corrupt merchants" that resulted in social injustice (Abrahamian 1989, 89).

Social injustice created an uprising against the Caliph Muawiya, and Imam Ali (son-in-law of the prophet) had no choice but to take arms and fight the caliph knowing that the chances of winning could be slim. Moreover, Imam Hussein (Imam Ali's son and the Shiites' third Imam) knew that fighting Muawiya not only would result in killing him but also his 72 men. The MEK advocated the theory that the Shiite leaders from the very beginning of Islam fought the opposition and caliphs that betrayed the true teachings of the Prophet by sacrificing their lives through an armed struggle. The book, *Nehzat-e Hussein*, was highly influenced by Ayatollah Taleqani, Maxime Rodinson, and a professor in Tehran University and a scholar on Arab socialism named Hamid Enayat. The group even went further by challenging the Shiite theology and top clergy by openly stating that the clerical establishment interpreted the Islamic and Shiite teachings to fit the ruling classes throughout Islamic history. The purpose of the formation of the MEK was to defeat the United States' geopolitical logic and geoeconomic logic in Iran and eventually in the Middle East.

By 1965, MEK's radical ideology of combining Marxism and Islamic militant theories was fully formed and came into action (Costigan and Gold 2008, 66). The primary reason for the formation of the MEK in Iran was to fight American imperialism and capitalism that was taking Iran's natural resources for granted. Moreover, before the 1979 revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini also shared the same objective of fighting the westernization and the influence of the United States over Iran with the MEK. After the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran, tensions between the MEK and the leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, started to rise which forced the MEK and its members to flee from Iran. After the 1979 revolution, the MEK sought to gain political power in Iran where they faced strong opposition from Ayatollah Khomeini and his supporters. On the other hand, the MEK strongly challenged Ayatollah Khomeini's proposed constitution and by stating that the new constitution would give him absolute power in Iran.

In 1982, Saddam Hussein saw an opportunity to pressure the Islamic Republic of Iran by supporting one of its strongest armed oppositions. Saddam Hussein, by inviting the MEK to Iraq, provided them with money, weapons, camps, and military training. Saddam Hussein knew that the MEK had one goal in mind which was to overthrow the Islamic Republic of Iran and install itself instead, and that would serve his best interests. The MEK have accepted responsibility for many terrorist attacks in and outside of Iran. Because of the continued use of terror tactics, the United States placed the MEK on the Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) list in 1997. Most of the European countries followed the United States and placed the MEK on similar terrorist lists in 2000 (Costigan and Gold 2008, 66). The reason that the United States listed the MEK on the FTO was because of its terrorist acts against the Iranian people, military personnel of the United States in Iran, and U.S. businesses in the 1970s (Goulka et al. 2009, xi). It is important to mention that the successes of the revolutions in Cuba and Vietnam in 1971 highly inspired the

MEK which led it to target the Shah of Iran and eventually help the leader of the Islamic revolution Khomeini to overthrow the Shah in 1979.

Since the MEK members originated from the Liberation Movement of Iran which was strong supporter of Mossadegh with the belief that the Shah was installed by the United States, they attacked the U.S. personnel and businesses in Iran. Companies like Pepsi Cola, General Motors, Shell Oil Company, Pan Am, and the Iran-American Society were targeted by the MEK (Costigan and Gold 2008, 66). In 1975, the Shah of Iran signed a multimillion-dollar contract with Rockwell International to install interceptors around the Persian Gulf to expand its espionage powers to intercept communication and information gathering on the Arab neighboring countries (Hersh 1975). In 1976, in order to stop the Shah from acquiring such technology, the MEK assassinated William C. Cottrell, Robert R. Krongard, and Donald G. Smith, all of whom were members of Rockwell International (Pace 1976). Furthermore, the MEK was also known to be responsible for killing a number of U.S. Army Colonels in Tehran. After the Islamic revolution in Iran and Khomeini's return from exile, the MEK gained more military power since the Islamic Republic supported it. It is important to note that the MEK strongly supported the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, which led to the 444 days of the hostage crisis (Costigan and Gold 2008, 66; Katzman 3).

However, soon disagreements between the MEK and the leader of the Islamic Republic Khomeini started to grow. First, the MEK opposed the new Islamic constitution because it would grant Khomeini a significant amount of power. Second, in fact after the new constitution was instituted, Khomeini used his constitutional power to stop Masoud Rajavi from becoming a candidate for presidency. The MEK officially and aggressively opposed Khomeini and the Islamic Republic after Khomeini rejected MEK leader Masoud Rajavi's presidential candidacy

(Costigan and Gold 2008, 66; Katzman 4). In a few weeks, the MEK used its terrorist tactics against “more than a thousand government officials, including religious leaders, judges, and police officials” (Costigan and Gold 2008, 67). In 1981, the MEK planted a bomb in Ali Khamenei’s tape recorder and failed to assassinate him but successfully killed a few other government officials. The MEK also planted another bomb in a trashcan in the headquarters of the Islamic Republic Party and killed the country’s chief justice Ayatollah Behshti and 73 other highly ranked party members (Costigan and Gold 2008, 66). A few days later, President Mohammad Ali Rajaei and Prime Minister Mohammad Javad Bahonar were also killed by the MEK in the prime minister’s office by a bomb in a briefcase (Regencia 2018). In 1992, the MEK conducted an attack with knives and firebombs on the Iranian Mission to the United Nation’s personnel in New York, causing serious injuries. In 1998 and 1999, the MEK accepted the responsibility of assassinating the former warden of the Evin Prison, Asadollah Lajevardi, and deputy chief of the Iranian Armed Forces General Staff, Brigadier General, Ali Sayyad Shirazi.

After Operation Freedom in 2003 and the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime, the MEK lost its biggest supporter. However, even after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime, the MEK was still able to manage to survive financially. The MEK’s secret of success outdates the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime. In other words, the MEK had already “developed and established a financial support system independent of Saddam Hussein’s assistance. The primary foundation of that financial support system was the Iranian diaspora throughout North America, Europe and Australia” (Costigan and Gold 2008, 65). The MEK was granted protection by the coalition force from the early days of Operation Iraqi Freedom (Goulka et al. 2009, xi). Even with terrorist acts that the MEK committed against the United States, the coalition forces accepted the MEK’s ceasefire, agreed that the MEK would keep its weapons, and provided protection. Although the

United States listed the MEK on the FTO in 1997, in 2003 provided protection and security to the same terrorist group. In other words, such an act by the United States raised questions about the United States' integrity and it was "charged by hypocrisy in the war on terrorism" (Goulka et al. 2009, xi).

### **The Foreign Terrorist Organization List**

The Foreign Terrorist Organization was created by Congress "as part of the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996" (Goulka et al. 2009, 91). Moreover, the United States has other forms of terrorism lists, such as "state sponsors of terrorism, specially designated terrorists, and specially designated global terrorists" (Goulka et al. 2009, 91). There are a few differences between the FTO and other terrorist lists. First, the FTO is widely known. Second, the FTO recognizes the groups and bars its members and representatives from entering or immigrating to the United States. Third, providing any financial or material help to an organization listed in the FTO is considered a federal crime. The exact provisions of the FTO are stated as follows:

1. It is unlawful for a person in the United States or subject to the jurisdiction of the United States to knowingly provide "material support or resources" to a designated FTO. (The term "material support or resources" is defined in 18 U.S.C. § 2339A(b)(1) as "any property, tangible or intangible, or service, including currency or monetary instruments or financial securities, financial services, lodging, training, expert advice or assistance, safe houses, false documentation or identification, communications equipment, facilities, weapons, lethal substances, explosives, personnel (1 or more individuals who maybe or include oneself), and transportation, except medicine or religious materials." 18 U.S.C. § 2339A(b)(2) provides that for these purposes "the term 'training' means instruction or teaching designed to impart a specific skill, as opposed to general knowledge." 18 U.S.C. § 2339A(b)(3) further provides that for these purposes the term 'expert advice or assistance' means advice or assistance derived from scientific, technical or other specialized knowledge.")
2. Representatives and members of a designated FTO, if they are aliens, are inadmissible to and, in certain circumstances, removable from the United States (see 8 U.S.C. §§ 1182 (a)(3)(B)(i)(IV)-(V), 1227 (a)(1)(A)).
3. Any U.S. financial institution that becomes aware that it has possession of or control over funds in which a designated FTO or its agent has an interest must retain possession of or control over the funds and report the funds to the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

According to the US Department of State, in order for an organization to qualify for FTO it must meet the below qualifications:

1. It must be a foreign organization.
2. The organization must engage in terrorist activity, as defined in section 212 (a)(3)(B) of the INA (8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(3)(B)),\* or terrorism, as defined in section 140(d)(2) of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1988 and 1989 (22 U.S.C. § 2656f(d)(2)),\*\* or retain the capability and intent to engage in terrorist activity or terrorism.
3. The organization's terrorist activity or terrorism must threaten the security of U.S. nationals or the national security (national defense, foreign relations, or the economic interests) of the United States (U.S. Department of State).

When the US congress created the FTO in 1997 the MEK was one of the very first organizations that was placed on the list. Moreover, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) was also listed on the FTO since it was recognized by the MEK as an organization under its umbrella. The FTO and NCRI were not only recognized and listed as terrorist organizations by the United States, but also by the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and other European countries (Goulka et al. 2009, 91).

### **MEK as a Cult**

In 1985, four years into Iraq-Iran war, the MEK's popularity was still high among the Iranian people. Even with high popularity, the MEK was not able to deliver its promise and achieve its goal, which was to overthrow the Islamic Republic. In one of his speeches, Masoud Rajavi said that the reason was because the MEK members and its ranked leaders were not dedicated enough to overthrow the regime. He also claimed, because of the mixed-sex housings, that members of the MEK were distracted by their sexual interests (Goulka et al. 2009, 68). Moreover, Abol-Hasan Banisadr, the trusted ally of Masoud Rajavi, stepped down as the President-elect of the NCRI, and Masoud Rajavi divorced Banisadr's daughter, to whom he was married only for a year. Additionally, Masoud Rajavi declared that Mehdi Abrishamchi, a friend and an ally, would divorce his wife Maryam Azodanlu so the leader of the MEK, Masoud

Rajavi, could marry her. Masoud Rajavi's new wife Maryam Azodanlu was declared as the MEK's co-leader. By appointing a woman in a position of power in the MEK, Masoud Rajavi was trying to show the ideological shift towards gender equality, which was a big part of his Ideological Revolution that he declared in 1985 in France (Goulka et al. 2009, 67). Moreover, Masoud Rajavi's Ideological Revolution went beyond divorcing Banisadr's daughter, getting married to his friend's wife, and appointing his new wife as a co-leader of the MEK. The new Ideological Revolution included changes in "enforced communal living arrangements, and imposed supervision of the group's membership in exile throughout Europe" and "enforced new military discipline, rank and file, who were instructed not just to move into gender-segregated housing but also to divorce their spouses, maintain complete celibacy, and even cut off communication with friends and family, both within and beyond MEK compounds. Love for the Rajavis was to replace love for spouses and family" (Goulka et al. 2009, 68). With funds and support of Saddam Hussein, the MEK was able to build schools, medical clinics, training centers, and prisons within the camp, which made MEK camps self-sufficient (Goulka et al. 2009, 68). Such a self-sufficient camp helped the MEK leaders to isolate its members from the outside world, which resulted in absolute control over the members.

It is important to note that the MEK is controlled and led by an authoritarian leadership. The NCRI has declared that upon taking back Iran, it will run a democratic election. Actions of the MEK leaders have contradicted such a claim. The MEK itself is led by Masoud and Maryam, who never were elected. In fact, they both have declared themselves as permanent leaders of the MEK. Since the MEK is run by two fundamental ideologies, Marxism and Shiite extremism, the MEK members call Masoud "Imam-e-Hal (the present Imam)" (Goulka et al. 2009, 69). In the original Shiite doctrine, the Imam is the person who is the rightful successor of the Prophet and

shares his bloodline. In other words, no Imam was chosen or will be chosen by any sort of elections. Furthermore, the Imam is the leader of the Islamic community, believed via his relationship to the Prophet to have special insight into the divine will. After the Islamic revolution in Iran, the term Imam has been interpreted differently. Khomeini claimed to be the temporary leader in the absence of the Twelfth Imam, which was essentially the same thing that Rajavi was claiming to be. Masoud Rajavi never publicly rejected being called the present Imam by his members, which sends a clear message about what Masoud Rajavi's leadership would look like in the future if the MEK would ever gain any power in Iran.

The MEK feeds its ideology to its members by forcing them to participate in mandatory sessions about its philosophies, consistently watch Rajavi's speeches, only listen to the MEK radio broadcast and watch the MEK TV channel, and read the internal MEK newspaper. If anyone is caught doing otherwise, that person will receive a severe punishment or get sent to jail, and those who left the group are labeled as traitors and agents of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Goulka et al. 2009, 70). The MEK members are also emotionally and sexually isolated as a result of the ideological revolution. After moving to Iraq, members were forced to divorce their spouses by throw their wedding ring in a bowl in front of everyone else. Interestingly enough, this part of the ideological revolution did not apply to the Rajavi family. The Rajavis believed by implementing emotional isolation and sexual control on its members, the members would become more devoted to the MEK. However, the MEK claimed that its members took such actions voluntarily, because family life in a camp in a country that is not home was impossible. Despite false statements by the MEK to justify its inhuman actions, the leaders even went further in isolating its members. Not only relatives and former spouses were housed and separated from each other, they were also not allowed to communicate with one another. Group unit

commanders must approve in advance any sort of communication between the members since close relations are considered to be “liberal relations” (Goulka et al. 2009, 71). Furthermore, gender segregation is strongly implemented in the camp. Most of the buildings in the camp are divided between the genders. The gender segregation was so strictly enforced that there were different hours for men and women to use the gas station in the camp. There are only a few buildings where men and women are both allowed to be in at the same time. However, those buildings have a physical line that divides the hallways into men and women’s sections (Goulka et al. 2009, 72). Masoud, appointing his new wife into a position of power and declaring ideological revolution, wanted to show that MEK supports gender equality. However, the group’s behavior has significantly contradicted Masoud’s statements.

Members were forced to participate in daily sessions to confess about their sexual dreams and thoughts. Most of these sessions were public sessions and members had to keep notes on their sexual dreams and read them to the public as a form of “self-critical statements” (Goulka et al. 2009, 72). The MEK had brainwashed its members that such sexual thoughts and dreams were sinful and would hurt the group’s goal. If the members choose not to share their sexual thoughts with their supervisors by claiming that they did not have such thoughts and dreams, they would be charged with a lie since such thoughts and dreams are believed to be unavoidable.

### **Recruiting Through Human Trafficking**

The MEK claims all its members joined the group voluntarily. In the 1960s, when the MEK was created, most of the group members joined willingly to fight against the Shah of Iran, who they believed was America’s puppet. People who joined the MEK were college students and graduates, people from the middle class, and even the poor. In addition on fighting against the Shah’s idea of rapid Westernization of Iran, people were also attracted to the new Marxist-

Islamic ideology (Goulka et al. 2009, 72). Before the Iraq-Iran war, the MEK was the most popular opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Without any prior notice, the MEK was able to pull hundreds of thousands people into the street to protest the Islamic Republic of Iran's actions. However, the MEK's popularity significantly plunged among the Iranian people once its leaders moved from Iran to France, and later from France to Iraq to join Saddam Hussein's military against Iran. By 1987, about 7,000 members of the MEK gathered in Iraq, which was about 80% of the MEK's total members abroad (Goulka et al. 2009, 73).

Once the MEK experienced a significant decline in its volunteer force, it started to use human trafficking and other deceptive recruitment techniques some of these techniques included giving the choice to Iran-Iraq War prisoners of staying in Iraq prisons or joining the MEK, which would eventually lead to repatriation, smuggling family members of the MEK out of Iran to visit their family member but instead forcing them to join the MEK, smuggling people out of Iran with a promise of asylum in western countries, and fake job promises outside of Iran as translators. Once these people were trafficked into the camps, their documents were confiscated to prevent them from escaping. Later the MEK claimed that American troops destroyed all the documents of its members when the group bombed by the United States.

According to Goulka et al. (2009, 73):

These findings suggest that many MEK recruits since 1986 were not true volunteers and have been kept at MEK camps in Iraq under duress. As of June 2004, JIATF estimated that, of the MEK population at Camp Ashraf, only 5 percent had joined prior to the Iranian Revolution and 25 percent had joined at the time of the revolution. A full quarter (approximately 1,500 to 1,800) had been POWs, and 45 percent had arrived at Camp Ashraf after the 1988 move to Iraq. Thus, it is possible that nearly 70 percent of the MEK population may have been recruited through deception and kept at Camp Ashraf against their will.

It is important to note that when the United States' army was conducting interviews with the MEK members, most of these people asked the interviewer to be help them not to return the

MEK. Moreover, most of the Iranian prisoners who were deceived to join the MEK asked the US army to be returned to Iran (Goulka et al. 2009, 77).

### **MEK's Finances**

In order to understand the complexity of the MEK's finances, it would be wise to understand the differences between how the other Sunni terrorists manage their finances. Most of the Islamic extremist terrorist groups use diaspora-based financing. In other words, some of these groups are funded by different states for advancing their agenda, but other sources of funding are essential for the terrorist organizations. For instance, Al Qaeda heavily depends on organized crime and criminal activities such as "extortion and drags" to survive (Costigan and Gold 2008, 52). Basically, diaspora means raising money through multiple sources in order for the organization to survive. Most common forms of diaspora financing are fundraising activities and collecting membership dues from "associations, parties, and clubs" (Costigan and Gold 2008, 52). According to Costigan and Gold (2008) donations could be voluntary donations or could be from foundations that were created under public law specifically working for terrorist fundraising.

Sunni Islamist terrorist organizations heavily depend on "Zakat," (tax) (Costigan and Gold, 53). Zakat is one of the five pillars of Sunni Islam "and is a mandatory duty which the Qur'an states must be performed when certain prerequisites are fulfilled, though it is also possible to donate additional amounts as an act of voluntary charity in order to receive additional divine reward" (Costigan and Gold 2008, 53). Muslims, the Islamic financial institutions, and Islamic companies choose to pay Zakat in the holy month of Ramadan (Muslims' holiest month). It has been "estimated that several billion dollars are collected world wide annually through

Zakat” (Costigan and Gold 2008, 53). The amount of money from Zakat and how it gets to the Islamist terrorist organizations are both debatable but are not a topic of this thesis.

Moreover, in Islam there are other forms of charity. In most of the mosques and other religious places, many forms of fundraising activities take place. Some fundraisers only mention that the money would go to the most needy and poor, and, on the other hand, in some other countries, Zakat collectors openly raise money for the families of the suicide bombers. Whether the donors know their donations will support the Islamist terrorist organizations or how much of the Zakat amount reaches the Islamist organizations and how the money gets transferred over the borders are debatable and are not a topic of this thesis. It is worth noting the MEK is identified as a Shiite group, and its system of finances differs from other Sunni terrorist groups. Every year after paying all the necessary expenses, Shiites pay one-fifth of their fruitful earnings, savings, and valuable minerals to a religious cleric to help the needy. It is true the MEK is a Shiite group, but Shiite clergy strongly oppose it and do not support its finances.

Saddam Hussein heavily supported the MEK when the organization moved to Iraq. However, the MEK never depended on only one source for its income. Therefore, the fall of Saddam did not stop MEK’s activities and the MEK established its Iranian diaspora in the United States, Australia, and Europe. The MEK uses the diaspora-based financing system to secure its income, and it has been successfully functioning for this group.

One of the main income sources for the MEK was through recruiting new members and putting their families under pressure in order to get “donations” from them. The MEK through special events such as “cultural events, social gatherings, conventions, and rock concerts” deceived many young college and university students that had Iranian origins into joining the MEK (Costigan and Gold 2008, 71). Moreover, the MEK never revealed its true name or identity

and used fake company and organization names. Once the candidates were selected for an interview, they were asked to travel to Turkey to meet the recruiters in person. Once the candidates were interviewed in Turkey and selected for the final interview, they were told to travel to Iraq where the company or the organization was located for final decision and training. Candidates that made it to Iraq would finally be informed that the company is the MEK and their passports and other documents would be taken away from them (Costigan and Gold 2008, 72). The MEK leaders did not only see the new members as a young force, but also as a great source of income. Therefore, the new members were asked to participate in soliciting their families (Costigan and Gold 2008, 72). Families were called by the MEK leaders and were told that their children were sick and they needed immediate medical attention. Then the MEK would give the families secret account numbers to deposit funds for their children. As part of its “Ideological Revolution” in 1985, the MEK prohibited any family relations and ties for its members, but in order to continue receiving funds from families of the newly trafficked into the camps, they would grant some families permission to visit their children in Iraq. Whenever families visited the camps, “families would bring things such as books, seeds, and cooking utensils for their relatives”, and “families would give gold, silver and diamonds to the MEK for the support of their children, but the organization would appropriate these as will” (Costigan and Gold 2008, 72). Families were also taken into meetings in the camp for training about how to safely transfer funds to MEK accounts. None of the funds were ever given to the members but were used for the organization’s activities in Iraq and abroad.

There are laws in the United States and Europe in place to prevent anyone from running fundraising for any organization listed under the FTO. Laws in the United States prohibit anyone knowingly providing “material support or resources” to any organization listed under the FTO.

However, being listed in FTO did not stop MEK's fundraising activities in Europe and the United States. MEK members would misrepresent themselves as people raising money for "Committee for Human Rights (CHR)" in Los Angeles International Airport (Costigan and Gold 2008, 73). In fact, "seven individuals, including those who are believed to have knowingly donated and raised money for the MEK, were charged in a 59-count indictment with providing and conspiring to provide material support or resources to a Foreign Terrorist Organization in violation of Title 18 U.S.C. Section 2339B(a)(1)" (Costigan and Gold 2008, 73).

The MEK was also heavily active in Virginia. The MEK used "Iranian-American Community of Northern Virginia and the Union Against Fundamentalism," both as front organizations to influence the United States' Congress for a permit for "19 November 2004 demonstration in support of the MEK and NCRI in front of the capitol building in Washington, DC. Congress granted a permit, not knowing that they were actually providing material support to the MEK as defined in 18 U.S.C., Section 2339A(b)" (Costigan and Gold 2008, 73). The MEK leaders in Paris did all the planning of the demonstration in D.C. The MEK also used other fake organization names as its front organizations in Europe as well. "Iran Aid" was shut down by the United Kingdom once it was discovered that it was a MEK front organization. Moreover, in Germany two, front organizations of MEK were acting as nonprofit organizations and were supposedly raising money for asylum seekers and for kids whose parents were killed in Iran. These front organizations would place the donation boxes in the German shopping centers with fake photos of people who would receive the donations. Moreover, with false claims that the front organizations were making, eventually they gained Germany Green Party's trust and support. The MEK front organizations lost the support of the Green Party as soon as Germany's police revealed their true identity (Costigan and Gold 2008, 74).

## **Delisting and Installing the MEK**

One of the policies proposed to overcome the Iran problem in the book *Which Path to Persia?* By a group of experts with the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, was to support an insurgent group known as the MEK. Authors of *Which Path to Persia?*, agreed that the MEK is “Perhaps the most prominent (and certainly the most controversial) opposition group that has attracted attention as a potential U.S. proxy is the NCRI” (Byman et al. 2009, 107). Although the group claims that it seeks democracy in Iran and is no longer anti-American, its history has proven otherwise. In fact, the group came into existence to fight Westernization in Iran and more importantly, push back American influence. Moreover, the group lost its popularity during the Iran-Iraq war when the group joined Saddam Hussein’s army and gave intelligence to him to use against Iran. MEK’s supporters in the United States believe that the MEK is the only insurgent group that has lasted for almost forty years and has proven that it was a significant source of intelligence against the Islamic Republic of Iran and could be helpful for the United States. According to *Which Path to Persia?* If the United States ever decided to support the MEK, the first thing that it must do is to remove the MEK from FTO. It is worth noting that in 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton removed the MEK from the FTO.

In 2002, the MEK was the main source of intelligence for the Bush administration on Iran’s secret nuclear sites. Supporting an insurgent group such as the MEK and replacing the current regime of Iran with it is a complex strategy and requires the help of Iran’s neighboring countries to station, train, organize, and provide supplies to the MEK members. The United States has had such experiences in the past using one country against another. For instance, the United States used Pakistan’s help against the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan and Iran’s help to

support the Kurds in Iraq against Saddam Hussein's regime when the Shah was in power in the 1980s and 1970s (Byman et al. 2009, 118).

Most of Iran's neighboring countries not only don't have decent diplomatic relations, but also consider Iran an enemy and a hostile regime. In the event that the United States stationed the MEK in the region and its policy happened to fail, it could lead to a full-scale war in the region and possibly drag the United States into a third war in the Middle East. Despite the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran considers the United States an enemy, Iran is one of the only Muslim countries whose citizens highly support close relations with the United States. In other words, the United States recognizing a highly unpopular terrorist organization such as the MEK could distance the Iranian citizens from the United States and unite the people with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Moreover, the Islamic Republic has proven that its behavior becomes more hostile towards the United States once it is under pressure by the United States. According to *Which Path to Persia?*,

Doubtless, the Iranians would respond with terrorist attacks, as well as ramping up their support of the Taliban and anti-American groups in Iraq. They might also encourage Hamas and Hezbollah to be more aggressive toward Israel. As best we can tell, the 1996 Khobar Towers blast was an Iranian response to an \$18 million increase in the U.S. covert action budget against Iran in 1994-1995. Although that covert action program posed little threat to Tehran at the time (and another \$18 million was a paltry sum for the United States), the Iranians apparently saw it as a declaration of covert war and may have destroyed the Khobar Towers complex (killing 19 American servicemen) as a way of warning the United States of the consequences of such a campaign. Washington would have to assume that Tehran would react in similar fashion if the United States were to launch a far more determined effort than in the past (Byman et al. 2009, 120).

## **Chapter Five: Applying Radical Geopolitical Theory to Vietnam, Iraq, and Iran Case.**

### **Radical Geopolitical Theory and the Vietnam War**

Julien Mercille's radical geopolitical theory could well explain the United States' involvement and foreign policy in Indochina, Southeast Asia and more specifically, in the Vietnam War in the 1950's. Looking at that region from geoeconomic perspective, Southeast Asia was important for American companies, allies, and most importantly, it was also a front line of capitalism versus the communist bloc in Indochina region. In other words, "expansion in Southeast Asia was perceived as a solution to economic stagnation in Japan, France and Britain shortly after World War II, and this led the US to intervene to deny the region to the communist bloc and ensure that it would be aligned with the capitalist world and contribute to its economic needs. Southeast Asia's role in the recovery of Japan was crucial" (Mercille 2008, 579). Japan was extremely viewed as important for the United States because it would replace China by becoming it an economic hub and it would be a capitalist model for other countries to follow. As President Eisenhower said, "If we don't assist Japan, gentlemen, Japan is going Communist. Then instead of the Pacific being an American lake, believe me it is going to be a Communist lake" (Hearden 2005, 50). United States foreign policy's vision for Japan was to make it a successful example of capitalism for other countries in the world. Indochina and Southeast Asia were extremely important for European allies of the United States since after the war recovery of their economy was depending on that region. For instance, the British government was heavily depending on dollars it was generating in Malaya, its colony, (or today's Malaysia), to be used for trade and investment in Britain, which was essential for its economy to recover. Moreover,

American assistance to Indochina reduced the drain on French funds and allowed France to use Marshall Plan aid for economic recovery at home and thereby deflect leftist attacks on its government an important consideration, as it had one of the two largest Communist parties in Western Europe, along with Italy. But political instability in Asia was a serious obstacle to integration (Mercille 2008, 579).

The Southeast Asian and Indochina region was so substantial for the United States and survival of its allies that military intervention was needed to stop it from falling into hands of the communist bloc and ensure that the allies of the United States interests are secured. United States' involvement in Indochina region and its military intervention in Vietnam was driven by geoeconomic logic (Mercille 2008, 580).

According to Julien Mercille's radical geopolitical theory, corporation profits are one of the main drives for the geoeconomic logic. Even after 1968, corporations in the United States began opposing the war in Vietnam because the war was harming its businesses that were experiencing negative economical consequences as a result of the war. It is worth noting that although more corporations called for the United States' withdrawal from Vietnam the war continued until 1973. Involvement and continuation of the war in Vietnam could be explained by the geopolitical logic to preserve the United States' prestige and credibility in the international arena (Mercille 2008, 578). Thus, there was a shift in the United States' logic from geoeconomic to geopolitical, which is another example of the divergent between the two logics. The Nixon Administration sought a "Peace with honor," which meant to end the war without harming the United States' image and prestige in the world primarily by using the "madman" theory of increasing violence in the war before ending it to ensure that other nationalistic and movements leftists in the world would get the message (Mercille 2008, 580).

### **Radical Geopolitical Theory and the Iraq War**

According to Andrew Bacevich (2005), a professor emeritus of International Relations and History at the Boston University Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies, Carter's Doctrine in the 1970's was to increase American influence in the Middle East, especially in the Persian Gulf region to ensure American dominance over the world's largest oil reserves. In other words, the United States needed "access to cheap oil and lots of it" (Bacevich 2005,182). The United States' imports of oil have never been that significant from the Middle East, but the economy of its European and Asian allies heavily relied on the oil imports from Middle East. Other than the importance of the recovery of the United States' allies and containing the communist bloc, it was in the United States' best interests to keep the Soviet Union from accessing the Middle Eastern oil. Secretary of Defense James Forrestal during Truman's presidency mentioned, "Whoever sits on the valve of the Middle East oil may control the destiny of the Europe" (National Security Council Report 1958).

The only difference between American postwar policy and American post cold war policy towards the Middle East oil is that now in addition to Russia, China has been added to the restricted list of oil imports from the Middle East. As per National Energy Policy report in 2001, the United States' total import of oil from the Middle East was about 13% of its total oil imports, and mainly Saudi Arabia gets the highest share of American purchase of oil (Julien 2010, 332). Again, the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, yet the percentage of United States' imports of the Middle Eastern oil was not to a degree that would have a significant impact on the United States economy since countries in Latin America as well as Canada were favored sources of oil imports for the United States. In other words, the United States was even able to gradually and overtime cut its oil imports from the Persian Gulf countries and increase its imports from Canada and Latin American countries. Looking at the Iraq invasion in 2003 from geopolitical prospective,

the invasion was not about United States' consumption needs of Middle Eastern oil, but it was about gaining even more control over two-thirds of the world's oil reserves, which would increase security for American allies in terms of uninterrupted supply of energy and a leverage for the United States against its strongest competitors.

The United States could easily access Iraqi oil by purchasing it from the market, but it would not grant the influence and control that it enjoys today. It is worth noting that Iraq was one of the United States' best allies in that region until 1990, when Saddam Hussein decided to take a turn from American goals in the Middle East and invaded Kuwait in August of that year. The United States' policy towards Iraq did not change when Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons against his own people in 1988 and against the Iranians during the war with Iran, but when Iraq went against the United States' Middle Eastern strategy and invaded Kuwait. One of the reasons that the United States did not remove Saddam Hussein from power after the Kuwait invasion was to allow him to abolish the Kurdish and Shiite uprisings in Iraq (Julien 2010, 333). In other words, if any of those groups would succeed and overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime, there was no guarantee that they would be any less hostile towards the United States' interests.

In addition to that, the risk of the Iranian government influencing the Kurdish and Shiites groups was significantly high and costly for the United States. Today, the Iranian influence in Iraq is not only evident, but also very significant (Julien 2010, 333). By invading Kuwait, Saddam Hussein not only challenged the United States hegemony in that region, but also was about to gain a significant amount of power over the oil market by its control over Kuwait's oil reserves. Kuwaiti government was considered a very friendly government to the United States, and the Kuwaiti government never showed a sign of threat to the United States' strategies in the region. In addition, Kuwait was one of the largest countries investors in the United States stock

market before Saddam Hussein invading it. Saddam Hussein started to get blamed for what he had done in the past and got pressured from the United States. It was in the United States' best interests not to let one country in that region gain more power than it had over other countries' oil reserves in that region. The similar logic was evident also during Iran-Iraq war where the United States did not want either Iran or Iraq to gain control over one another's oil reserves. After the United States pushed Saddam Hussein's troops out of Kuwait, the United States' policy toward Iraq was to demonize and place harsh sanctions on Iraq to send a message to other countries that undermining the United States' hegemony would not go unchecked (Julien 2010, 333).

According to Julien Mercille's geopolitical logic, the Iraq invasion in 2003 was a response to Saddam Hussein's Kuwait invasion that was not aligned with the United States' Middle East policies. Furthermore, it sent a clear message to the world that questioning the credibility of the United States is not acceptable, will not be forgotten, and will result in harsh consequences. Similar behavior is evident from the United States towards the Islamic Republic of Iran by putting it under heavy economic sanctions. There are number of actions that the Islamic Republic of Iran took in the Middle East that according to the United States was perceived as a challenge to its hegemony in the region. Actions such as Iran advancing its nuclear plants during 1990s and the reveal of the secret Iranian nuclear sites by the MEK during early 2000s are perceived as a threat to the United States' hegemony. Other example of such behavior from the United States would be the Vietnam War, where the United States did not stop a war to preserve the image and credibility of the United States in the world. It is very simple to trace the geopolitical thread constructed in the speeches by Presidents, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. For instance, President George H.W said,

And when we win – and we will – we will have taught a dangerous dictator and any tyrant tempted to follow in his footsteps that the U.S. has a new credibility, and that what we say goes, and that there is no place for lawless aggression in the Persian Gulf and in this new world order that we seek to create (James 1991).

President Clinton said,

If we fail to respond today, Saddam and all those who would follow in his footsteps will be emboldened tomorrow by the knowledge that they can act with impunity. . . But if we act as one, we can safeguard our interests and send a clear message to every would-be tyrant and terrorist that the international community does have the wisdom and the will and the way to protect peace and security in a new era (CNN 1998).

In another speech he said, “If we turn our backs on his defiance, the credibility of U.S. power as a check against Saddam will be destroyed” and President George W. Bush said, “As President Bush in 2002 said, “this man [Saddam Hussein] has had 11 years to comply. For 11 long years, he’s ignoring world opinion, and he’s put the credibility of the United Nations on line” (CNN 1998; National Archives and Records Administration 2002). According to Julien Mercille’s geoeconomic logic, the Iraq invasion was needed to secure the energy needs of the United States’ allies and gain more control over the Middle Eastern oil to pressure its opponents, such as China and Russia if needed.

### **Radical Geopolitical Theory and the Islamic Republic**

In 1979, after the Islamic revolution in Iran, the United States lost its influence over Tehran and a few months into the revolution, the Islamic republic challenged United States power by taking over the United States’ embassy in Tehran and taking its personnel hostage for 444 days. In response, the United States’ policies towards the Islamic Republic of Iran were to isolate and keep Iran in check, which was the beginning of series of devastating economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran due to Iranian action of undermining the United States hegemony in the region. Besides the Iranian hostage crisis and the Iranian nuclear program that were perceived as threats to the United States’ hegemony, Americans saw other Iranian activities of supporting terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas as threats and

efforts to discredit the United States in the region. The United States' foreign policies towards Iran have a clear message to the rest of the world that geopolitical logic has continued even beyond the cold war. This means that challenging United States' hegemony and credibility in the Middle East would not go unchecked and strong consequences would follow. Moreover, the former National Security Council director for Gulf Affairs Ken Pollack said that the hostage crisis, "made the United States look weak in the eyes of the world, and weakness invites challenge" (Pollack 2009, 176). Looking at the Iran hostage crisis with the lens of geopolitical logic, the United States has imposed harsh sanctions against Iran and has increased the pressure and sanctions over time. Furthermore, the hostage crisis was the beginning of the Islamic Republic of Iran's efforts to undermine and discredit the United States credibility in the Middle East and the United States' first step to keep the Iranian government in check by imposing harsh sanctions. Further sanctions were imposed by the United States due to Iran's proxy terrorism in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, and according to the United States during the recent years, due to violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Since the Middle East is sitting on the world's largest oil reserves it is natural to become an important region for the United States. Moreover, according to Central Intelligence Agency, Iran has the fourth largest oil reserve with over 158 billion barrels and it holds the second largest natural gas reserves in the world with over 33 trillion cubic meters. Besides that, Iran has significant control over the Persian Gulf since it enjoys 1375 km coastal borders, which is 45% of the Persian Gulf coastal borders (Naji 2011, 165). Iran also has 24 habitable islands and 19 inhabitable islands in the Persian Gulf. Iran's key islands in Persian Gulf are, "Qeshm 14.91, Kish 89.7, Lavan 48.7, Hormuz 41.9, Hengam 33.6, Large Forur 26.2, Hendorabi 21.1, Khark 20.5, Minoo 17.8, Siri 17.2 square meters" (Naji 2011, 165). Strait of Hormuz is one of the most

strategic choke points in the world since it is the only sea passage, it is about 100 miles in length and its narrowest choke point gets to 21 miles in width (Naji 2011, 167). Any ship that enters or leaves the Persian Gulf must pass from it since it is the only passage point, and Iran enjoys a significant control over it. After the Islamic revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran has many times threatened to shut it down and tried to use it as leverage against the West whenever it experiences pressure.

According to Julien Mercille's geoeconomic logic, it would be in the best interests of the United States to establish trade and energy deals with Iran. In fact, many large American corporations have actively opposed sanctions and supported trades with Iran. For example, Dick Cheney opposed sanctions on Iran when he was working for Halliburton but supported them he went to the White House (Mercille 2008, 582). Removing sanctions and starting trade deals with a country that is extremely rich in oil and natural gas would be nothing but in the United States' best interests. This is especially the case because, Iran has an untouched market because of the sanctions, and a significant percentage of its population is under 30 years who highly support the American lifestyle and American products.

In 2003, when the Bush Administration overthrew Saddam Husain's regime, Iran proposed to the United States an unrejectable offer through the Swiss embassy in Tehran. In terms of "mutual respect," on terrorism, Iran was ready to end its support for Hamas and push for a cease-fire with Israel, full collaboration against al-Qaeda, and disarm Hezbollah in Lebanon and help with its transition to a political party. With regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iran not only would accept the Beirut Declaration of the Arab League, but also accept the two-state solution and start normalizing its relations with Israel, concerning Iraq post Saddam Hussein, Iran through its influence would help to stabilize the country. Moreover, with its

nuclear program, Iran would allow the inspections from the United States to monitor its program (Parsi 2012, 2). On the other hand, Iran in its offer also demanded some behavioral changes from the United States. Iran requested that the United States would end all its sanctions against Iran, return members of the MEK to Iran, full access to nuclear and biological technology, and respect Iran's security interests in the Middle East (Parsi 3). Washington's response was simply out of geopolitical logic: "we don't speak to evil," and "why talk to Iran when you could simply dictate terms from a position of strength?" (Parsi 2012, 4).

However, in the United States' perspective, throughout the past four decades the Islamic Republic of Iran has done what it could to challenge and undermine the United States' international credibility in that region. In other words, Julien Mercille's radical geopolitical theory, geopolitical logic is shaping the United States' foreign policy towards Iran. On the other hand, it would be in the United States' best interest to deal with a government that is friendly to the United States and its interests in Middle East: "Indeed, Bush administration officials, whose close ties to the energy industry are well known, surely share the same ultimate goals as important segments of the American business community, namely, to ensure that Iran's energy reserves are in the hands of friendly leaders and contribute to the smooth expansion of the world economy" (Mercille 2008, 583).

### **Trump's Speech and Geopolitical Logic**

In order to preserve its international credibility, the United States imposed sanctions on Iran immediately after the embassy hostage crisis, and over the years, it has significantly increased the number of its sanctions on Iran. During the Obama administration and before the JCPOA was signed, sanctions on Iran reached their highest levels to discipline Iran for its actions of damage. The only way to justify the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA is to look at it

using geopolitical logic, and by doing so, it is evident that United States' objectives in the Middle East were not met by the deal. Evidence of geopolitical logic and the United States dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the JCPOA could be found in President Trump's 11-minute withdrawal speech in May of 2018. This section will analyze some of President Trump's withdrawal speech using the lenses of geopolitical logic. As Trump stated, "The Iranian regime is the leading state sponsor of terror. It exports dangerous missiles, fuels conflicts across the Middle East, and supports terrorist proxies and militias such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Taliban, and al Qaeda (Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action 2017).

Then he mentioned,

Over the years, Iran and its proxies have bombed American embassies and military installations, murdered hundreds of American service members, and kidnapped, imprisoned, and tortured American citizens. The Iranian regime has funded its long reign of chaos and terror by plundering the wealth of its own people (Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action 2017).

As Julien Mercille's geopolitical logic suggests, the United States is not forgetting about past. In other words, events such as the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979 and the Beirut bombings in 1983 that were conducted by the Hezbollah, which killed 241 American soldiers are still not forgotten. After the JCPOA was signed, Iran increased its activities in Syria and Yemen. In addition to that, one month after the JCPOA was signed, Iran revealed its new missile Fateh-313 (range of up to 500 km) and announced that it has tested the Emad ballistic missile (range 1,700 KM) in August of 2015. In November of 2015 and in September of 2016, Iran announced a successful test of the Ghadr-110 (range 1,900 KM) and the Zulfiqar (range 700 KM). It is important to note that the Iranian missile program not did not stop after the JCPOA but even increased in speed. The Islamic Republic of Iran repeatedly has announced that its missile program is purely defensive

and is not negotiable. However, the Iranian government also claimed that its nuclear program was not negotiable before the JCPOA, but after years of negotiations the JCOPA was signed.

The other reason to understand the expansion of the Iranian missile program after the JCPOA was signed could be because of President Elect Donald Trump's threats to tear up the Iran Deal in 2016. In other words, the Islamic Republic is taking preemptive measures to defend itself in case of a conflict with Israel, Saudi Arabia, or even the United States. The Iranian diplomats have learned their lesson from the Iran-Iraq War in early 1980s, where the Western countries were not selling arms to the Iranian government, and according to the Islamic Republic of Iran, the United States and the European Union were providing military hardware to Saddam Hussein instead. In fact, Iran's Foreign Minister, Dr. Zarif in February 2016, at a speech at the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs, mentioned that Iran has not attacked any country in the past 300 years and that during the Iran-Iraq War when the Islamic Republic of Iran desperately needed missiles to defend itself all the Western countries opposed selling weapons to Iran. According to Dr. Zarif, over 130 billion dollars of military equipment has been sold to the GCC countries where Iran's highest expenditure on military has never exceeded more than 15 billion dollars, which is almost a tenth of what the GCC countries are spending. Furthermore, Dr. Zarif motioned "we are entitled to our defense within the norms of the international law, but we are preprend to cut spending in the region mutually not one-sided" (Dr. Zarif speech at the European Union Parliament 01:10:00).

However, Iran's missile program has been perceived as a threat by the United States to its allies, and ultimately, as an Iranian challenge to American hegemony in the region. Furthermore, as President Trump stated, "In theory, the so-called 'Iran deal' was supposed to protect the United States and our allies from the lunacy of an Iranian nuclear bomb, a weapon

that will only endanger the survival of the Iranian regime. In fact, the deal allowed Iran to continue enriching uranium and, over time, reach the brink of a nuclear breakout” (Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action 2017). After the sanctions were lifted, not only did Iran not stop its activities in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, but also increased them. Syria for the Islamic Republic of Iran means a border to Israel. In addition, a friendly government would allow the flow of the Iranian support for Hezbollah through Syria. Iraq not only has a Shiite majority population, but also shares long borders with Iran. Iraq is one of the places that the United States is struggling to control and were Iran uses its influence to undermine the United States’ efforts. Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran is not only discrediting the United States’ credibility in the region and challenging its hegemony, but also the Iranian government is threatening the Middle East’s stability, which could lead to interruption of the energy supply for the United States’ allies. In other words, this could harm the United States’ geoeconomic logic and its allies interests in the region. President Trump explained this logic during his speech in 2017:

The deal lifted crippling economic sanctions on Iran in exchange for very weak limits on the regime’s nuclear activity, and no limits at all on its other malign behavior, including its sinister activities in Syria, Yemen, and other places all around the world (Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action 2017).

Trump also added,

In other words, at the point when the United States had maximum leverage, this disastrous deal gave this regime and it’s a regime of great terror many billions of dollars, some of it in actual cash — a great embarrassment to me as a citizen and to all citizens of the United States (Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action 2017).

Regarding the JCPOA, he mentioned, “The fact is this was a horrible, one-sided deal that should have never, ever been made. It didn’t bring calm, it didn’t bring peace, and it never will” (Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action 2017). Although the JCPOA only addressed Iran’s nuclear program and relaxed sanctions on Iran, the United States

was hoping Iran's activities would end in Syria and Yemen. As part of the JCPOA, the United States agreed to remove the freeze on some of the Iranian assets including \$1.7 billion that the Shah of Iran paid the United States for weapons that were never delivered to Iran (Congressional Research Services Report 2018). According to the United Nations envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, the Iranian government spends more than \$6 billion a year on war in Syria (Slim, Hugo, et al 2015, 10) In other words, removing the freeze on the Iranian assets could have helped the Iranian government to advance its support for militia groups in Syria and Yemen along with a continuation of challenging the United States' hegemony.

In the years since the deal was reached, Iran's military budget has grown by almost 40 percent, while its economy is doing very badly. After the sanctions were lifted, the dictatorship used its new funds to build nuclear-capable missiles, support terrorism, and cause havoc throughout the Middle East and beyond (Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action 2017).

An increase in the Iranian military budget means for the United States that Iran is better able to challenge the United States in the region in terms of its Shiite militia groups, destabilizing the region, and having a stronger missile program. "If I allowed this deal to stand, there would soon be a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. Everyone would want their weapons ready by the time Iran had theirs." Trump also mentioned Iran's support for the Shiite militia in the region and argued,

Finally, the deal does nothing to constrain Iran's destabilizing activities, including its support for terrorism. Since the agreement, Iran's bloody ambitions have grown only more brazen. Moreover, if the Islamic Republic of Iran gets away with enriches uranium, support Shiite militias in Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Syria, and motivate Shiites in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to destabilize their governments and faces no consequences from the United States; what would stop the other countries in the Middle East from following Iran's path (Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action 2017).

As Secretary of Defense James Forrestal suggested, "Whoever sits on the valve of the Middle East oil may control the destiny of the Europe" (Shaffer 1983, 143). From the geopolitical logic

prospective, if Iran were not held accountable, the United States would lose its hegemony and control over the oil “valve” in the Middle East.

In 2012, the MEK was removed from the FTO list and was no longer considered as a terrorist organization in the United States (U.S. Department of State 2012). The delisting of the MEK would not happen without support of the US politicians such as Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen, the chair of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee; Congressman Bob Filner, Congressman Ted Poe; chairman of the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee, Mike Rogers; and Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee’s Oversight subcommittee. It is worth noting that all of the mentioned US politicians received thousands of dollars in campaign donations from Iranian organizations that advocated for delisting the MEK.

In 2013, the United States and the government of Albania reached an agreement to send MEK members from Iraq to Albania. In 2016, about 3000 of the MEK members were moved from Iraq to Albania (Kerry Remarks Before the Daily Press Briefing 2016). After the delisting of the MEK in 2012, several actions have been taken by the United States government and its officials to show their support for the MEK. According to multiple news sources, the United States donated \$20 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to help the Albanian government built camps for the MEK members in Albania (Dockins 2016: DeYoung 2016). In 2017, John McCain met the MEK leader Maryam Rajavi in Albania, and in his speech said, “Someday, Iran will be free. Someday, we will all gather in that square.” (Sen. John McCain Meets with Iranian Dissidents Relocated to Albania 2017). Furthermore, in MEK’s 2017 conference in Paris, John Bolton, the security advisor of the Trump administration, argued, “For the first time, at least in eight years that I have been coming to this event, I can say that we

have a president of the United States who is completely and totally opposed to the regime in Tehran” (Rudy Giuliani Calls for Iran Regime Change at Rally 2017). Later in his speech, he argued, “the outcomes of the president’s policy review should be to determine that the Ayatollah Khomeini’s 1979 revolution will not last until its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday”(Rudy Giuliani Calls for Iran Regime Change at Rally 2017).

Furthermore, regarding the MEK, he mentioned that

There is a viable opposition to the rule of the Ayatollahs and that opposition is centered in the room today. I have said for over 10 years since coming to these events that the declared policy of the United States of America should be the over throw of the Mullahs regime in Tehran. The behavior and the objectives of the regime are not going to change. Therefore, the only solution is to change the regime itself. And that’s why before 2019 we here will celebrate in Tehran. (Rudy Giuliani Calls for Iran Regime Change at Rally 2017).

In the same conference, Trump’s personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani who has been one of the biggest supporters of the MEK and significantly helped the organization to be delisted from the FTO, argued,

Here we are not replacing one government with a government we don’t know. You have an alternative. You have got an alternative that’s built on solid foundation of twelve principles, democracy, human rights, a nonnuclear Iran, suppression of church and state, and the rights of women, and all minorities to be protected. My goodness that sounds like a full-fledged democracy. That’s what NCRI stands for that’s what madam Rajavi stand for (Rudy Giuliani Calls for Iran Regime Change at Rally 2017).

Later in his speech, he mentioned,

Since I have been working with you and all my colleagues from the United States, we fought a worldwide battle to shed the unfair label of terrorism, in the United States, United Kingdom, European Union. That label is now gone, and you are seen as defenders of human rights because that what you are. And we won that battle (Rudy Giuliani Calls for Iran Regime Change at Rally 2017).

Towards end of his speech, he also mentioned,

Suppose the face of Iran, was a brave women, in a country that recently has had a history, in a region of the world treating women inhumanly, and there is a brave women will be the face of new, modern, liberated Iran. Will it happen? Yes. When will it happen? Now. And I want next year at this time I want us to have this convention in Tehran (Rudy Giuliani Calls for Iran Regime Change at Rally 2017).

This it is clear that Rudy Giuliani, the personal lawyer to the president of the United States, believes that the government in Iran must be changed and replaced with the MEK. It is

important to note that most of the statements that were stated by President Trump, John Bolton, and Rudy Giuliani in their speeches are inaccurate or misleading. The reason for quoting such statements is to prove the relation between American foreign policy and the theory of radical geopolitics. As of 2017, the United States imports less than 9% of its demand of oil from the Middle East (U.S. Energy Information Administration). The United States does not rely on Middle Eastern oil for its energy, and it could simply increase its purchase of oil from different countries. Furthermore, if Iran's oil is so significant for the United States, why not purchase it from the free market? Again, the same old geopolitical logic of the United States towards Mosaddegh's government in 1953 and Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 could be applied to Iran today. The United States believes that it is in its best interests to deal with a government that is friendly to the United States and its interests in the Middle East. Besides Syria, Iran is the only hostile regime to the United States' interests left in the Middle East. If the United States was able to overthrow the Islamic Republic and replace it with the MEK, the United States would not only have a friendly government installed in Iran, but it would also truly reach the goal of controlling the "valve" of the world's oil and gas and control the destiny of so many countries as the Secretary of Defense James Forrestal said.

### **The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Belt and Road Initiative, and Importance of Regime Change in Iran for the United States**

Since 2005, Iran has been showing high levels of interest in joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to overcome the impact of the US sanctions. The SCO has evolved from "Shanghai Five, founded in 1996 by the five states of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan" (Akbarzadeh 2014, 90). Originally, the Shanghai Five was created to address cross-border issues, increase security, and counter the rise of Islamic terrorism in the five

member countries. However, in 2001 the SCO began to expand its cooperation in other areas, such as trade and energy security, among its member states. The SCO members agreed to accept new countries that would have the potential of advancing the cooperation goals in Eurasia. The SCO granted Mongolia (2004), India (2005), Pakistan (2005), Iran (2005), and Afghanistan (2012) observer status, and Sri Lanka (2009), Belarus (2010), and Turkey (2012) become dialogue partners (Noi 44). President Ahmadinejad openly expressed his enthusiasm of joining the SCO as a way for the Islamic Republic of Iran to avoid United States' sanctions. Iran joining the SCO was crucial for the Islamic Republic of Iran because it would allow Iran to sell its oil and maintain trade with a few of its biggest oil consumers and also reduce the impact of the United States' sanctions. For China, Iran with its oil reserves would significantly increase the energy independence of the SCO members. From a lens of geoeconomic logic, it would be a significant loss for the United States since it would lose control over the fourth-largest oil reserves and second largest natural gas reserves to its opponents. In other words, with Iran becoming closer to China, the United States would lose its energy leverage over China.

In 2013, President Xi Jinping in Kazakhstan and later that year in Indonesia announced a need to “jointly build an ‘economic belt’ along the Silk Road” to help “deepen cooperation and expand development in the Euro-Asia region” (President Xi’s Speech at Nazarbayev University 2013). It is important to mention that China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project is a multi-trillion-dollar project. However, China has already allocated “\$40 billion for the Silk Road Economic Belt, \$25 billion for the Maritime Silk Road, \$50 billion for the AIIB, and \$40 billion for the SRF” (Clarke 2017, 71). The BRI would make trading with China more accessible for countries within the BRI, increase China’s influence through investment in infrastructure of the BRI countries, and more importantly, significantly increase China’s access to energy resources.

Over 65 countries have agreed to join the BRI, which would give China access to about 70% of the world population and 75% of the world's energy reserves (Cavanna 2018, 1). In other words, the BRI would pave the way for China to become the new hegemon power and create an alternative to the liberal international order.

It is important to note that Iran has not only been geographically centered in the heart of China's BRI but also in the center of its potential success (refer to appendix two for the map). The BRI would grant China access to the energy-rich Caspian Sea and to the Persian Gulf. Moreover, "Iran's geographic location makes it the only viable land bridge from the Persian Gulf to the landlocked Central Asian states (a market of about 65 million people) and the three states of the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia)" (Vatanka 2017). China throughout the past few years has increased its investments in Iran and has started to mine for minerals and build railroads in Iran. Furthermore, the BRI would grow an unbreakable relationship between the two countries.

For China, one of the main reasons for the creation of the BRI and the SCO is to increase its security in the region, which includes limiting the uprising of the Islamist extremists in its backyard. However, China is confident that Iran's export of its Shiite Islam is only targeting the neighboring Arab states with Shiite minorities where the United States has the strong foothold. The United States by imposing heavy sanctions on Iran is creating an opportunity for China to provide Iran with the partnership that it strongly needs. The Islamic Republic's push to get full membership in the SCO and allowing the Chinese to heavily invest in Iran's infrastructure to reach the standards of the BRI are all efforts to break the United States' tight circle of sanctions. The Islamic Republic understands the BRI and the SCO will weaken the United States' hegemony and geoeconomic logic in Eurasia. On the other hand, the United States also

understands the Islamic Republic's efforts to undermine its hegemony. Therefore, the United States sees a great interest in overthrowing the Islamic Republic and installing a friendly government such as the MEK.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

### **Geopolitics Arbitrage**

Geopolitics arbitrage is the action of managing risk and transactions costs between geoeconomic logic and geopolitical logic made possible by the economic principle of substitution. Iran is and has always been very important to United States' economic interests due to US reliance on imported oil and Iran's large proven oil reserves. The principle of economic substitution gives the leverage to the United States to substitute its required energy needs from other countries in the short run and it allows the United States to advance its geopolitical logic against Iran. The principle of economic substitution suggests a rational consumer would buy a product that enjoys the needed quality from a producer that is selling its product with more affordable pricing compared to its competitors. However, quality, availability, and price must be taken into consideration. According to the Energy Information Administration, the United States' has not imported energy from Iran in the past forty years due to the advantage of the economic substitution that the United States enjoys against Iran (refer to appendix one for more details on countries that supply energy to the United States). The principle of economic substitution allows the United States to import its needed energy from over 100 countries to substitute the short-term needs for Iran's oil. Currently, the United States is importing energy from over 100 countries, but the US rely on Canada, a friendly country, to receive the bulk (40%) of its energy needs.

By substituting other oil sources instead of using oil from Iran, and sanctioning the Islamic Republic, the geoeconomic advantage swings to the side of the United States. This results in shrinking the Islamic Republic of Iran's goal of undermining United States' hegemony and credibility in the region. In other words, the principle of economic substitution allows the

United States to arbitrage between geoeconomic logic and geopolitical logic for geopolitical gain without bearing the cost of geoeconomic logic. The principle of economic substitution allows the United States to freely pursue its geopolitical logic for as long as it takes with Iran in the short-term, which would contribute to its long-term geoeconomic logic. According to Julien Mercille's radical geopolitical theory, the geopolitical logic main purpose is to always to serve the United States' geoeconomic logic. A regime change in Iran would be a significant gain for the United States' geopolitical logic without risking its geoeconomic logic interests. In other words, since there are other countries that can guarantee the right amount, price, and quality of oil that the United States needs, gives the advantage to the United States to pursue its long-term goal that is the geoeconomic logic. In absence of the principle of economic substitution the United States forging policy was would be unquestionably different towards the Islamic Republic. Since this principle exists, the United States today supports the MEK, which works for its geopolitical logic.

However, one must not forget that the theory reveals that the regime that is in power in Iran is crucial for the United States to be friendly to its interests, and does not seek to undermine its international credibility. In the United States' view, the Islamic Republic of Iran since its inception sought to harm the credibility of the United States by taking hostage 52 embassy diplomats for 444 days. One can understand the importance of a friendly regime in Iran for the United States by simply looking back at the 1953 coup d'état where the United States helped the Shah of Iran to regain control from democratically elected prime minister Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh. Since then, the importance of a friendly regime in Iran for the United States has not changed. Furthermore, the United States protecting the MEK in Iraq from the Shiite militias after the 2003 invasion, delisting the group from FTO in 2012, relocating the MEK to Albania in

2016, politically recognizing the group, and then giving the MEK regime change promises in its yearly conferences by highly ranked U.S. officials are all signs that the United States not only seeks to change the regime in Iran, but also wants to install the MEK. This group with its original founders who were Islamists, nationalists, and Mossadeghists that formed solely to fight the United States and its forcefully installed regime in Iran. In other words, the United States is supporting a group that killed Americans, targeted American companies in Iran, recruited members through human trafficking, raised money through shady methods, and held members for over 30 years against their will in camps that Saddam provided them. The United States seeks a friendly regime in Iran that grants access to the one of the largest oil and natural gas reserves in the world and allows American corporations to invest in Iran. Furthermore, a friendly government in Iran means less cooperation with China and Russia through BRI and SCO that are threats to the United States hegemony in the world.

## Appendix One: Countries that Supply Energy to the United States

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Period
All Countries	10,598	9,859	9,241	9,449	10,055	10,144	1973-2017
Persian Gulf	2,156	2,009	1,875	1,507	1,766	1,746	1973-2017
<b>OPEC*</b>	4,271	3,720	3,237	2,894	3,446	3,366	1973-2017
Algeria	242	115	110	108	182	189	1973-2017
Angola	233	216	154	136	168	135	1973-2017
Congo (Brazzaville)	31	20	10	10	5	5	1993-2017
Ecuador	180	236	215	231	239	207	1993-2017
Equatorial Guinea	41	17	4	6	6	12	1996-2017
Gabon	43	25	18	12	3	6	1973-2017
Iran	0	0	0	0	0	0	1973-2001
Iraq	476	341	369	229	424	604	1973-2017
Kuwait	305	328	311	204	210	145	1973-2017
Libya	61	59	6	7	16	65	1973-2017
Nigeria	441	281	92	81	235	334	1973-2017
Qatar	5	7	9	8	11	6	1973-2017
Saudi Arabia	1,365	1,329	1,166	1,059	1,106	955	1973-2017
United Arab Emirates	3	3	13	4	14	34	1973-2017
Venezuela	960	806	789	827	796	674	1973-2017
<b>Non OPEC*</b>	6,327	6,138	6,004	6,554	6,610	6,778	1993-2017
Albania			1	5	7		2005-2016
Argentina	26	25	36	37	46	29	1993-2017

Aruba	14	1		0		0	2005-2017
Australia	6	2	2	10	4	2	1973-2017
Austria	0	0	0			0	1997-2017
Azerbaijan	24	30	24	15	10	8	1998-2017
Bahamas	13	12	6	5	1	6	1973-2017
Bahrain	2	2	5	2	2	2	1973-2017
Barbados							2003-2003
Belarus	1	0				2	2004-2017
Belgium	53	58	61	79	61	58	1993-2017
Belize	3	2	1	1			2006-2015
Benin							1995-2009
Bolivia	3	1			2		1995-2016
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0						2011-2012
Brazil	226	151	160	215	167	224	1973-2017
Brunei	2					1	1998-2017
Bulgaria	2		0	1			2001-2015
Burma							2003-2003
Cameroon	34	3	3	2	3	1	1993-2017
Canada	2,946	3,142	3,388	3,765	3,780	4,054	1973-2017
Chad	30	66	62	72	67	29	2003-2017
Chile	2	2	1	2	2	1	1995-2017
China	4	7	6	6	21	21	1973-2017
Colombia	433	389	318	395	483	362	1973-2017
Congo (Kinshasa)	0	1					1993-2013
Cook Islands							1999-2001

Costa Rica	1	1					1995-2013
Croatia	0				1	0	2001-2017
Curacao	1	4	5	6	3	1	2012-2017
Cyprus							2006-2011
Czech Republic	0						2011-2012
Denmark	1	3	1	1	3	9	1997-2017
Dominican Republic	1	2	1	1	0	1	2009-2017
Egypt	31	4		2	13	9	1993-2017
El Salvador	2	1					2004-2013
Estonia	14	2	0	3		1	1999-2017
Eswatini							1999-2003
Finland	20	13	11	10	23	9	1995-2017
France	35	41	29	34	38	36	1993-2017
French Guiana			0				1997-2014
Georgia, Republic of		0	3	1		1	1999-2017
Germany	3	11	6	8	6	7	1993-2017
Ghana	1	3		0	1	16	1996-2017
Gibraltar	0						2012-2012
Greece	1	1	0	1	1	3	1996-2017
Guatemala	11	7	7	8	7	8	1995-2017
Guinea							1997-2007
Hong Kong							1998-2011
Hungary	0	0	0	0	0	0	1995-2017
India	40	80	91	86	89	82	1995-2017

Indonesia	7	24	25	41	44	40	1973-2017
Ireland		2	8	8	3	7	1995-2017
Israel	2	0	0	0	1		1996-2016
Italy	27	13	16	13	18	17	1973-2017
Ivory Coast	4	0	1	0	1	8	1995-2017
Jamaica	3	1					2002-2013
Japan	9	17	14	18	22	26	1993-2017
Kazakhstan	14	19	17	15	14	11	2000-2017
Korea, South	59	67	60	102	107	105	1993-2017
Kyrgyzstan							1996-2010
Latvia	8	5	1	0	1		1999-2016
Liberia	0	0	0		1		2009-2016
Lithuania	1	4	2	2	2	4	1999-2017
Malaysia	3	2	1	1	13	9	1973-2017
Malta	1	2	0	0			1997-2015
Martinique	0	0	1	0			2007-2015
Mauritania		3	2		1	3	2006-2017
Mexico	1,035	919	842	758	669	682	1973-2017
Midway Islands							2005-2009
Morocco				0			1997-2015
Mozambique					0	0	2016-2017
Namibia							2006-2006
Netherlands	99	89	85	57	60	62	1973-2017
Netherlands Antilles							1973-2011
New Zealand							1995-2008

Nicaragua	0		0				2012-2014
Niue							2004-2008
Norway	75	54	45	61	76	79	1973-2017
Oman	9	3			30	14	1995-2017
Pakistan							1996-2008
Panama		0			1	1	1995-2017
Papua New Guinea						2	1995-2017
Peru	35	39	33	28	24	47	1993-2017
Philippines				0	1	1	1999-2017
Poland	2	5	1	1	0	0	1998-2017
Portugal	15	16	16	23	26	26	1995-2017
Puerto Rico							1973-2005
Romania	0	1		0		0	1996-2017
Russia	477	460	330	371	441	389	1973-2017
Senegal	0			1			2006-2015
Serbia							2008-2008
Serbia (Excludes Kosovo)		0	0				2010-2014
Singapore	2	15	12	19	19	20	1993-2017
Slovakia					0	0	2006-2017
South Africa	1	1	1	0	0	0	1995-2017
Spain	43	33	49	63	49	49	1973-2017
Spatly Islands							2004-2007
Suriname		0	2	0	0		2013-2016
Sweden	10	4	10	5	13	10	1993-2017
Switzerland	0		1	0	0	0	1997-2017

Syria							1993-2011
Taiwan	6	1	1	7	4	5	1995-2017
Thailand	20	9	7	1	0	3	1993-2017
Togo	1			0			1996-2015
Tonga							2004-2004
Trinidad and Tobago	67	32	26	22	28	35	1973-2017
Tunisia	7	7	4	1	1	2	1996-2017
Turkey	4	4	2	1	2	8	1995-2017
Turkmenistan	1	0		2			2002-2015
Ukraine	4	1	1			0	2004-2017
United Kingdom	149	147	117	123	122	111	1973-2017
Uruguay	0	0					1997-2013
Uzbekistan							2010-2010
Vietnam	10	13	10	9	4	6	1995-2017
Virgin Islands (U.S.)	12				0		1973-2016
Yemen						2	1993-2017

**Appendix Two: Iran at the center of China's Belt and Road Initiative**



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