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IRAN'S REGIONAL POLICY IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS: CASE STUDIES OF RELATIONS WITH THE REPUBLICS OF AZERBAIJAN & ARMENIA

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by:

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Durham University School of Government and International Affairs

2015

In the Name of God

The Compassionate the Merciful

This manuscript is dedicated to:

My Husband Dr. H. Riahi whose love and unwavering support made this possible for me, and my daughters Yasaman and Nastaran, Who encouraged me and patiently walked along this path with me.

Abstract

The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of Iran's foreign policy and behaviour, roots of continuity and factors of change in the regional context of the South Caucasus, using the case studies of its relations with two important neighbouring countries, the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

To offer a picture of regional geopolitical context in which the subject is examined, the study will discuss the importance of South Caucasus in the international system, introducing the existing challenges and opportunities in the region, as well as important regional and international players involved, their goals and policies towards those goals.

The study will also provide a review of Iran's foreign policy in different periods and discuss factors resulting in different approaches undertaken in each period. The implication of these policies will then be examined further in the context of the Middle East, as well as South Caucasus. That is to demonstrate the specific strategies Iran has taken in each of these regions, and to explain differences between the Middle East policies and that of the South Caucasus. Case studies will provide a more detailed picture of how regional policies work and what factors shape the bilateral relations.

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List of Important Acronyms

ADR	Azerbaijan Democratic Republic
AIOC	Azerbaijan International Operating Company
AIPAC	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi
BLACKSEAFOR	Black Sea Force
BSEC	Black Sea Economic Cooperation
BSS	Black Sea Synergy
BTC	Baku Tblisi Ceyhun
BTE	Baku-Tbilisi-Erzerum
CEA	Central & East Asia
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoE	Council of Europe
CPSP	Caucasus Peace and Stability Platform
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
EAPC	Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organisation
EIA	Energy Information Administration
ENP	European Neighbourhood and Partnership
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Countries
GPS	Geopolitical Positioning System
GUAM	Georgia Ukrain Azerbaijan Moldova
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency

ILSA	Iran Libya Sanctions Act
IPAP	Individual Partnership Action Plan
IRGC	Islamic Republic's Guard Corps
ISAF	International Security and Assistance Force
ISCI	Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq & Levant
LoC	Line of Contact
MCC	Millenium Challenge Corporation
MENA	Middle East North Africa
MEP	Main Export Pipeline
MKO	Mojahedine Khalgh Organisation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NIOC	National Iranian Oil Company
NK	Nagorno Karabakh
NKAO	Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast
NKR	Nagorno Karabakh Republic
NPT	Non Proliferation Treaty
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PARP	Planning and, Review Process
PFA	Popular Front of Azerbaijan
PFG	Popular Front Government
RCD	Regional Cooperation for Development
RSC	Regional Security Complex
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

TACIS	Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States
TRACECA	Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia
TRR	Tehran Research Reactor
TSFR	Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea
WTO	World Trade Organization

Declaration

I hereby declare that the current thesis, "Iran's Regional Policy in the South Caucasus: Case Studies of Relations with the Republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia", is the result of the author's original investigation, except for those quotations, citations and references that have been duly acknowledged. The research has been undertaken in the Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies within the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University. This material has not been previously submitted in application for another degree or qualification to any other institute or university.

Statement of Copyright

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

In the introduction of his 2013 book, Ramazani, a prominent scholar who spent a decade to provide the first systemic study of Iran's foreign policy back in 1950s and 60s, describes how he has been continuously struck by "the poor understanding in the United States of Iran's international role" which existed even during the Shah and under friendly circumstances, and the fact that "more than three decades after the revolution, Americans still do not really understand Iran".(ibid) This failure to comprehend Iran and its foreign policy is not limited to the United Sates; it is indeed a widespread phenomenon exacerbated in the post revolution period due to a variety of reasons. While several factors such as lack of consistent (if any) diplomatic relations and Tehran's feeble public diplomacy and miscommunications have played their role in creating such circumstances it is difficult to imagine that overcoming these shortcomings would eradicate the problem completely. The most important factor in creating such dilemma is the *complexity* of Iran's foreign policy, which quite frequently defies the conventional rules of analysis and makes its examination and modelling difficult.

One reason for such complexity is Iran's particular geostrategic location situated on the Eurasian crossroad, straddling between two important waterways of the world, the Persian Gulf in the south and the Caspian Sea to the north; both, house to significant volume of valuable hydrocarbon resources. Hence, as a land bridge, Iran connects, on the one hand, Central Asia/Caucasus to the Persian Gulf sub region, and on the other, Mediterranean/Levant to South Asia. As such, Iran is directly involved in, and influenced by geopolitical developments of four sub regions of the Persian Gulf, Eastern Mediterranean, Central Asia/Caucasus and South West Asia. The division of Persia into spheres of influence under the 1907 Anglo-Russian Treaty or Iran's occupation by the British and Russian forces during the World War II for securing the Allied supply line through the Persian Corridor, despite Tehran's official neutrality, is evidence of the importance of Iran's geostrategic location. The following map demonstrates the centrality of Iran's strategic location in Eurasia.

Map 1.1: Iran's Geostrategic Location[1]

While, being among the countries with the highest volume of proven hydrocarbon resources as well as having control over the Strait of Hormuz, where 30% of the world's annual consumption of the oil pass through, provides Iran with further strategic importance; it also creates further challenges by involving the country in global politics of energy security.

In addition to this geostrategic location in such perpetually turbulent regional setting, the exigencies of integration between the 'Islamic' and 'the republican' essence of the state- which at times seem incompatible - exacerbates factional polity and complicates decision making and execution within an already complex system of checks and balances. While several important attributes such as revolutionary, Third Wordlist, rentier state, transpire their effects on the nature of the state, the existing dichotomy and constant interplay between ideology and pragmatism, as well as frequent change of approach are important factors which have complicated Iran's foreign policy and its application in various contexts and periods, including the post Cold War era.

Nonetheless, the aforementioned geostrategic importance, as well as the vast area and

[1] NeverStop 365 Ran in Uzbakistan. (2013) Available at: <http://neverstop365.blogspot.co.uk/> (Accessed on 30.05. 2015)

large population of the country, makes Iran an important international player and regional power (albeit a medium power), no matter who rules it; a "country which is difficult to engage (with), yet impossible to ignore". (Wright 2010: Introduction)

According to Ehteshami (2002:134-5) "at least since early 1970s, Iran has been regarded as an important regional player; prior to that, it had managed to accumulate considerable strategic value as a weighty pawn in the Cold War chessboard…..". The establishment of the Islamic Republic provided Iran with another strategic angle, as ever since Tehran constitutionally holds the torch for defending the "rights of all Muslims without allying with hegemonic powers". (ibid) By becoming the reference point for oppressed Muslims and particularly the Shiite galaxy Iran has established a unique place in the politics of adjacent regions, as well as the great powers. This transformation in the state ideology and perceptions resulted in major foreign policy overhaul, turning Iran from an anchor of stability in the Persian Gulf and a close ally of the US into a "defiant, fiercely independent, proactively religious, and nonaligned power" (ibid:283), posing the "greatest challenge that US could face from a single country". (US National Security Strategy 2006)

While dealing with such an important player requires a deep understanding of the post revolutionary developments and various aspects of foreign policy transformations, speculations among world politicians, academia and media for interpreting Iran's foreign policy has often resulted in further misunderstandings. As radical interpretations of the principles set for Iran's foreign policy[1] by the Islamic Republic's constitution have put the country on a conflicting path with great powers and some regional states from the early post revolution days, the chance for developing a fair understanding of Iran's foreign policy in general and its regional policy, in particular, was missed.

Iran, in the early 1990s, was facing a confluence of landmark changes in both domestic and international scene. The end of the war with Iraq, the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the presidency of relatively moderate Hashemi Rafsanjani had opened a window of opportunity for debates and plans for creating a degree of change to major domestic and foreign policies. Meanwhile, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet

[1] Rejection of all forms of external domination, preservation of Iran's independence and territorial integrity, defence of the rights of all Muslims without allying with hegemonic powers, the maintenance of peaceful relations with all non belligerent states.

Union, which resulted in considerable transformation of the international system, had created significant changes at the regional level with great affects on neighbouring countries. Among these changes were the emergence of new sovereign states and the evolvement of Central Asia and South Caucasus into a buffer zone between Iran, Turkey and Russia.

Based on Buzan and Weaver's classification (2003:421) the small region of South Caucasus is a sub-complex in the post Soviet space, where "not only security questions, but a number of political decisions, strategies and alliances are interrelated. The unsolved conflicts have an enormous impact on both domestic politics and foreign policy strategies". As Freitag-Wirminghaus (2008:54) has explained, the presence of numerous outside players and their rivalry for geopolitical control of this globally strategic corner of the world with abundant hydrocarbon resources resulted in a phenomenon that many analysts branded it as the new Great Game; while the unresolved legal status of the Caspian Sea and consequently its hydrocarbon resources has further complicated the region's geopolitical scene.

The collapse of the Soviet Union provided Iran -which for much of the history has had the region as its sphere of influence- the opportunity for the revival of historical affinities, with the prospect of opening new horizons of influence. It also presented challenges emanating from the initial domestic instabilities in the newly independent republics and ongoing conflicts in the region. In many ways the potential for Iran to establish closer ties with and to develop considerable influence in Azerbaijan and Armenia was far greater compare to other states, as in addition to their shared legacy of the Persian Empire, both countries have common borders with Iran.

Out of these two new neighbours, Azerbaijan seemed initially the best option through which Tehran could project power and influence into the Caucasus. The largest among South Caucasus countries, with rich natural resources in contrast to other two, Azerbaijan has overwhelmingly Muslim population where the majority share the same religious sect as Shiite Iran. The existing kinship with large Azeri population of Iran was considered another valuable asset for building a lasting alliance. However, as it will be demonstrated in this study, regional developments have turned out very different from what Iran had hoped for.

This research intends to study the application and implications of Iran's foreign policy

in a regional context. That is to determine the goals, priorities and policies that Tehran pursues in a particular region within the framework of its general foreign policy. The aim is to provide a better understanding of Iran's foreign policy priorities and behaviour, roots of continuity and factors of change in regional context.

1.2. Research Assumption, Hypothesis, Questions, Methodology and Ethics

The research is based on the assumption that:

'As a neighbouring region, South Caucasus has a special place in Iran's foreign policy and relations.'

The research hypothesis maintains that:

'The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new sovereign states that shared the legacy of the Persian civilization with Iran; provided this country with significant opportunity to project power and influence in the South Caucasus, particularly through extensive relationship with the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan.'

Hence, the research will explore Iran's regional policy in the South Caucasus and how successful it has been in achieving its goals.

The main question, this research is intended to answer is:

- What have been Iran's priorities and regional policy in the South Caucasus since the end of the Cold War and how they have shaped the country's relations with the two Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan?

To find the answer to this main question the study shall answer the following questions:

- What is Iran's general foreign policy? What principles, goals and objectives, strategies and approaches Iran has been pursuing since the establishment of the Islamic Republic?
- What have been Iran's priorities in the South Caucasus after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War?
- What opportunities Iran was provided and what threats faced with in this post

Soviet space, and how they have been handled?

- How have been/are Iran's relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan and what have been the main factors shaping these relations?

This qualitative exploratory research has a dual approach methodology. The first three chapters are generally descriptive analytical while the two chapters on Iran's relations with its two northern neighbours are case studies. As Bennett and Elman (2007:170-171) have argued, qualitative methods including case studies have found a prominent place in the study of international relations subfields for many decades, as they have "considerable advantages in studying complex phenomena".

The main basis of data collection for this research is library work using various books, journal papers, think tank and governmental publications, in various formats, etc. Several databases have been used for data collection including Factiva, First Search, Nexus, Google Scholar, as well as BBC Monitoring Service which facilitates access to a rich collection of news pieces from across the world.

The research is not confined only to English language sources and databases. While many Persian language papers and books were consulted for this study, several Iranian think tanks as well as databases facilitated remote access to Persian materials, among them DID Digital library and Noormags. In some cases reliable weblogs, such as the weblog of Iran's present ambassador to Azerbaijan has been consulted.

Elite interview was initially planned to be at the core of this research, using semi structured interviews with former Iranian diplomats. However, due to Iran's political atmosphere at the time of data collection; encouraging these elites for interview proved to be a serious challenge, hence the outcomes of limited conducted interviews played only a complementary role for data collection.

As explained by the UK Data Service[1], the difference between standardised and semi structured interview is the flexibility of the latter. Though like standardised interview, the semi structured interview also has interview schedule and predesigned set of questions; but it is not confined merely to those concepts and questions and allows for examination of relevant themes and topics which come up during the interview. This

[1] UK Data Service. *Semi Structured Interviews.*Available at : <http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/teaching-resources/interview/semi-structured> (Accessed on 06.09.2015)

characteristic provides the opportunity for "pursuing and probing for novel, relevant information, through additional questions often noted as prompts on the schedule. The interviewer frequently has to formulate impromptu questions in order to follow up leads that emerge during the interview."[1] Consequently, the interviewer is constantly engaged and involved in reformulating the interview throughout the process.

The research has observed Durham University School of Government and International Affair's Research Ethics Policy[2] as well as ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (FRE) 2010 Updated September 2012[3]. Where using direct and indirect quotes from books, papers, databases, etc. appropriate referencing has been provided for citations.

For the limited number of interviews which were undertaken, Ethical Implications forms were submitted to the Department's Ethics Committee in advance. Furthermore, interviewees were informed of the place of my study and the purpose of the interview and their consent was obtained based on "simple agreement to participate in the interview process with the right to withdraw at any point."[4] Strict observation was undertaken at all parts of the research process and in written outputs for the cases "where a guarantee of anonymity" was "given as part of the process of obtaining consent".[5]

1.3. Research Context and Significance

The review of literature for this research was undertaken for the following purposes:

1- To identify the existing gaps in studies of Iran's regional policy in the South Caucasus and its relations with its northern neighbours.
2- To examine various theoretical frameworks undertaken for analysing Iran's foreign and regional policy in order to choose the most suitable approach for this research.

This study has examined and reviewed three categories of scholarly publications which

[1] Ibid.
[2] Appendix 1.
[3] For details please see: ESRC Research Ethics Framework Available at: <http://www.gold.ac.uk/media/ESRC_Re_Ethics_Frame_tcm6-11291.pdf> (Accessed on 20.06.2015)
[4] Durham University School of Government and International Affairs Research Ethics Policy, Principle 6/b
[5] ibid. Principle 7

are directly relevant to this study. First are those which have studied Iran's foreign policy in its general capacity and from different aspects, including Iran's regional policy. The second group are works that have focused on the South Caucasus and examined various issues such as security, energy, and other important regional challenges. The third group are those which have discussed Iran's bilateral relations with the south Caucasus countries.

This section will provide a brief and quick review of some of those publications which have been helpful in fulfilling the above purposes.

Ramazani, who has been writing on Iran's foreign policy since 1950's has mainly based his analysis of Iran's foreign policy developments on geopolitics and domestic politics. For example in one of his earliest post revolution papers, titled 'Iran's foreign policy' (1981), he has tried to explain the decision making mechanism in the young Islamic Republic. Then, by evaluating different models of decision making in the nonaligned countries, he has predicted that Iran's model would tilt towards Western Europe and Japan. As it would be demonstrated by this study, in practice Iran never had the chance to move towards this direction.

In a paper published a decade after the revolution, Ramazani has argued that "Tehran's foreign policy has been shaped largely by an acute interplay between its domestic situation, not merely factional politics, and its external environment, not merely superpower behaviour".(1998:202) Trying to introduce domestic roots of Iran's foreign policy, he explains that throughout Iran's long history, there has been a tension between religious ideology and pragmatism, which was solidified by the Islamic revolution and argues that the shift of the balance towards pragmatism is the result of "dynamic process of cultural maturation".(ibid) However, due to heterogeneous nature of societal maturation, one can raise the question of predictability in the face of such uncertainty. This means that since the level of cultural maturation is not the same across all levels of the society or political factions depending on both domestic and international developments this heterogeneity can give way either to ideologically driven policies or pragmatism. This, in turn, creates difficulty predicting confidently what would be in store for Iran's foreign policy.

Employment of constructivist theories for analysing Iran's foreign policy has not been limited to Ramazani and have been a popular approach among many other scholars. For

example, Savory (1990:59), has based his paper on the argument that "there is one dominant theme that has shaped the foreign policy of Iran and has thus had strong influence on its economic policy since the concept of foreign policy was first adumbrated….This theme or imperative, is 'Iranismus', the idea of a cultural identity which is distinct from that of other races and peoples in the Middle East…..".

Sariolghalam explains that the revolution resulted in resurfacing Iran's Islamic identity "and demonstrated its degree of relevance and viability in the broad mosaic of Iranian sources of identity and political possibilities".(2003: 82) Arguing that "Iran is a leader in the process of rational political change in the Middle East" (ibid: 81) like Ramazani, he justifies political oscillations and posturing as the pains of maturation that not only "will result in no conceivable damage to others; rather, Iranians could prove to be civilizing contributors to evolutionary processes in the Middle East and the Muslim world at large".(ibid: 82)

In her study of Iran's foreign policy developments, Rakel has based her analysis on two elements of history and religious culture; interpreting Iran's Islamic revolution as "one in a series of events in reaction to the domination of foreign powers and exploitation of its wealth and resources by foreigners". She also examines the role of Shi'ism in Iranian foreign policy, as Iran is the only world country with Shi'ism as the state's religion. (2007: 160-163)

By examining contested interpretations of Iran's foreign policy motivations; Salamay and Othman have assessed "three interrelated foreign policy drivers that have been particularly salient in framing the Iranian positions vis-à-vis the various changes in both the regional and international arenas: Shiism, Welayat Al-Faqih, and domestic policy struggles".(2011:197) They have concluded, "that Iranian foreign policy is strongly shaped by Shia revival and Welayat Al-Faqih ideological discourses".(ibid)

By undertaking a generally constructive approach, the papers in 'Iran and the International System' (2012) have addressed the morals and "firm Islamic tenets and beliefs that constitute the theoretical and ideological underpinning of Islamic doctrine" as well as "the political rationality of the Islamic Republic in contrast to contemporary fundamentalism".(ibid: 1) The subsequent chapters provide further insight on how Iranian elites view the international system and perceive Iran's role and place in it and how this view has shaped Iran's relations with other countries.

Arguing that "ideology is not one explanatory variable among others, but rather the primary context within which foreign policy gets shape", Waarner (2013) has tried in his book to explain "how foreign ideas that were current among foreign policy makers during Ahmadinejad's presidency" provided the context for Iran's foreign policy behaviour in that period.

The review of the literature which have relied on constructivism for interpreting Iran's foreign policy reveals an absence of consensus among scholars; meaning that although they find roots of Iran's behaviour in its 'identity', they do not have the same description about this identity or those elements which are more influential in shaping Iran's policies and interactions. Some like Marschall (2003:4) consider Iranians' "sense of pride and glory from the knowledge of their past" as the main element of the Iranian identity; others like the above mentioned examples consider different aspects of religion as the main source of Iran's political identity.

Furthermore, although prominent scholars like Hinnebush and Ehteshami, Telhami and Barnett, Dassuki and Korany and Halliday, agree that where rationalist approaches fail to adequately explain some foreign policy behaviours, ideational factors can fill the gap (Warnaar 2013:14); relying merely on ideational factors for analysing Iran's complex foreign policy would deprive the audience of a comprehensive picture in which other domestic, regional and international factors shaping Iran's foreign policy can be identified. As Halliday (2005:32-33) has put it "constructivism and its outriders run the risk of ignoring interests and material factors, let alone old fashioned deception and self- delusion".

There are on the other hand scholars who have based their study on examining material and structural factors shaping Iran's foreign policy. In his paper, Sick (1987: 698) has emphasised on one cardinal rule that he believes the United States should have learnt through experience, "that Iranian foreign policy is produced and conditioned by the hard imperatives of domestic politics ..... The supreme goal..... is to assure the continuation of theocratic rule and to preserve the legitimacy of the new regime."

Calabrese has used 'security' as an analytic tool for examining Iran's post Khomeini regional foreign policy. Arguing that traditional definition of 'national security' fails to capture the breadth and scope of Iran's multifaceted and interrelated problems which threaten both the regime and the state (1994:3) he builds a case for a broader concept

of ‘national security’ to address complex challenges faced by Iran as he believes that a security environment consisting of two interacting domestic and international sub environments shapes Iran’s foreign policy “forming the boundaries within which decisions are formulated, setting the limits of effective action”.(ibid: 6-7)

Hunter’s seminal work, ‘Iran’s foreign policy in the post-Soviet: Reassessing the new international order’, which has been a valuable reference for this research has explained how the international and regional system has evolved following the collapse of the Soviet Union and evaluated the effects of the new order on periphery states, particularly those in opposing side of the remaining superpower. It has then assessed Iran’s foreign policy and its relations with various players and regions in this emerging system with the application of realist theories.

In his chapter on Iran’s foreign policy, Ehteshami has introduced foreign policy determinants, foreign policy decision making and behaviour; and concluded that “despite its revolutionary zeal and a reputation for non-conformity and defiance since the revolution, it can be argued that revolutionary Iran has always been a ‘rational actor’ in the classic realist mold. Even some of its excesses can be seen as calculated risks or opportunist responses to difficult situations.”(2002:284) The same chapter in the 2014 edition of the same book describes the role of regional geopolitical developments in increasing Iran’s edge, while emphasising on the exacerbated isolation as well as economic and domestic challenges which impede Iran from taking further advantage of such developments.

Through the application of structural realism which prescribes “how states should behave, as oppose to explain how they actually behave” (Glaser as quoted by Juneau 2015:6), in ‘Squandered opportunity’, Juneau “has explored causes and consequences of Iran’s sub optimal performance” despite the post 2001 favourable strategic environment.(2015:1-2) He argues that although Iran’s rising power increased its assertiveness “but the peculiar nature of Iran’s power and the intervention of specific domestic factors” resulted in deviation of Iran’s foreign policy “from what would be considered the potential optimal outcomes”. This conclusion, as the author explains, is based on setting an ideal national interest as a normative baseline. However, this raises the question of the reference point for determining the national interest as there may be a divergence between what a ‘nation’ or its leaders define as their interests and what

others in different capacities do. Moreover, to blame 'Iran's foreign and domestic policies' as the only source of suboptimal achievements would be ignoring the role of the international system in foreign policy developments. As this study has argued the response received by Iran towards its 'less peculiar' policies and more cooperative behaviour was "the Axis of evil" stigma and the consequent unfavourable security environment which in turn securitised Iran's political scene and gave way to the rise of more radical elements.

The above cases are some examples of scholarly works which have tried to provide a better understanding of Iran's foreign policy by identifying material factors that shape those policies. Although relying on rationalist theories with their emphasis on 'state' and 'interest' can help in understanding material factors and systemic elements; or as Halliday (2005:33) has put it provide a "rational, empirical account" of factors shaping a state's foreign policy; but would deprive the study of examining the values and ideas which form the identity of the state and result in certain foreign policy principles and behaviours. Due to the centrality of ideology in Iran's foreign policy and continuous emphasis of the Islamic Republic's policy makers on ideological factors, one cannot expect to have a full picture of Iran's politics by relying merely on rationalist theories.

As the above arguments about the strengths and weaknesses of major international relation theories in interpreting Iran's foreign policy shows we would be left in the dark room with the elephant; unless as this study has decided, take a more comprehensive approach and not be content with one single theory.

There are on the other hand, publications which have examined Iran's foreign policy with regard to major international developments. Many of such scholarly works either cover different aspects of Iran's foreign policy and relations since a particular juncture in the history such as the end of the Cold War or the September 11th or focus on bilateral and regional relations following such developments. While a significant volume of such publications have focused on Iran's policy and relations in the Middle East, most of the works which have looked at Iran's relations with the South Caucasus have done so in a larger context, i.e. together with Central Asia or as part of the Middle East. For example, Ehteshami has argued that due to its historical, cultural and religious connections with the Middle East, CCARs (that is the 5 Central Asian republics and the two Transcaucasian states of Azerbaijan and Armenia) have become de Facto members of

the Middle East since their independence, "but function very much as the latter's periphery".(1994: 93) Other scholars, like Menashri and Hunter, on the other hand, have considered Central Asia and South Caucasus as one entity with two integral components as the latter has more common attributes with Central Asia[1] than with the Middle East. However, the review of relevant literature helped this research in deciding not to consider South Caucasus, either as part of the Middle East or an integral component of one entity with Central Asia. Instead, based on Buzan's concept of Regional Security Complex, the study has considered South Caucasus as a sub system of the post-Soviet security complex[2].

Scholars who have examined Iran's policy in the subject region often have contending views in this regard. For example, Pahlevan (1998:74) believes that the Islamic Republic was "predisposed to interpret the newly acquired independence of the Central Asian republics as a victory for Islam.... such analysis of the situation led the Islamic Republic's leadership to predict its policy in Central Asia on Islamic principles". On the other hand, Hooglund (1994:114) argues how those analysts who are (were) "convinced that Iran will spread Islamic fundamentalism throughout Central Asia and the Middle East unless the West undertakes preventive measures...." were wrong. Providing evidence to prove that "Iran's religious activities in the region actually have been muted, paring to insignificance in comparison with the roles of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia" (ibid: 117) Hooglund concludes that "Iran's view of its role in Central Asia and Transcaucasia is not the promotion of Islamic activism, but the promotion of mutually beneficial economic activities."(ibid) Similarly, Ehteshami (1997:93) describes Tehran's policy towards the region as "incremental engagement, in which Iran seeks to minimize threats to its own security by promoting stability in the neighbouring regions and by deepening economic exchange". Then, there are scholars (1998: 93) who have a view between those introduced above. For example, Menashri (1998:93) believes that it is beyond the argument that "Tehran seeks a 'return to Islam' in Central Asia..... But precisely what it is doing" and how much sacrifice is prepared to do for such cause is a matter of dispute. He reckons that Iran has mostly focused on "politically and ideologically mutual topics in its intergovernmental dealings" (ibid: 92) and wherever the "revolutionary ideology clashed with national interests, the latter dictated overall

[1] Most importantly they share the historical, political and cultural legacy of the Soviet era.
[2] Since in many occasion a same fact or rule applies to both South Caucasus and Central Asia, the study may at times mention them together, which does not overrule the fact that they are independent sub systems.

policy" without the complete abandonment of the former.

As demonstrated by the above brief, there are at least three theories regarding Iran's policy in the South Caucasus, one that believe it is ideology based and bound on spreading Islamic fundamentalism; another, which believes that Iran's policy in the region has avoided ideology; and the third which argues that Iran has had its ideological inclinations, but they were limited due to variety of reasons. Thus, one of the tasks in this research was to verify which theory is closer to reality.

Furthermore, several scholars who agreed with the third theory have offered explanations on why it has been so, though, some of their arguments can be questioned with valid counterarguments. For example, Haj Yousefi (2008) maintains that despite the hostile propaganda, Iran's policy in Central Asia and Caucasus has been more inclined towards economic and cultural affairs rather than religious politics. However, what constitutes as "cultural affairs" is, of course, open to debate, particularly when there is a high degree of sensitivity in the receiving state. Moreover, since religion is an integral part of the Iranian culture; it is very difficult for Islamic Iran to have cultural activities which do not involve religion.

Another example is Entessar and Dorraj (2013) whom by focusing mainly on the broad context of socio cultural factors which have shaped and conditioned Iran's post-Cold War foreign policy and "the ways in which strategic factors interfered with its geopolitical calculations vis-à-vis the region"(2013: 1) have examined "Iran's evolving interest in, and its foreign policy towards, the states in post-Soviet Central Asia/Caucasus".(ibid) They have argued that Iran's policy in the South Caucasus is an integral part of its Eurasian policy, and among multiple factors with different weights that shape Iran's policy in Eurasia, "the political calculus of national interest overrides ideological concerns" and "Islamic ideology is increasingly used as a mask for realpolitik".(ibid: 20) The problem with this argument is the often controversial definition of national interest, particularly when ideology is a pillar for the state. The blur boundaries of definition, and opposing views on what is in the interest of the nation, makes a firm judgment rather difficult while distinguishing true ideologically motivated policies from those that just have the ideological mask is another hurdle in the way of a fair judgment.

Based on his examination of Iranian leaders' foreign policy philosophy in light of

existing options "with regard to the country's resource needs and ideological goals and the resulting policy direction" (2012:383) towards the South Caucasus; Sadri, has concluded that "Iran's foreign policy interests in the Caucasus states are manifestly realistic" with two major goals of diversifying its energy market and balancing USA's hegemonic influence.(ibid: 386) A similar argument has been made in chapter 8 of the book 'Iranian Foreign Policy Since 2001: Alone in the World' (2013), that Sadri has co-authored with Vera Muniz. This conclusion, however, raises the question about the importance of security and regional stability in Iran's policies. Is there any evidence to show that the aforementioned goals are so important that Iran would readily sacrifice regional stability for them? If not, then could it be concluded that Iran has more important goals in its South Caucasus policies? Or could it be argued that what Sadri considers as Iran's major goals are in fact Iran's objectives towards more important goals?

The most important outcome of reviewing the aforementioned literature and other similar publications was familiarisation with different angles from which the study can examine the subject and the scope it needs to cover. More importantly, was reaching the conclusion that in order to have an accurate understanding of Iran's regional policy, instead of focusing on one or two particular aspect/s the research has to initially examine the bigger picture, which is the context in which the regional policy is formed, including states' general foreign policy framework and principles, regional geopolitics and the international environment.

The Second group of scholarly works relevant to this research has mainly focused on the study of the South Caucasus and discussed Iran's policy as an important player in the region. Among the earlier comprehensive studies of the region is Herzig's research which has examined South Caucasus from different aspects including politics, economy, and security deficits. One of the chapters in his book, "The New Caucasus" has focused on the international relations of this region; initially introducing factors that bear "on the interests and perceptions of sets of actors involved in the development of international relations of the Caucasian states". (1999: 85) It then moves on to examine the specific interests and policies of those actors, including Iran, and Turkey, whose regional rivalry shortly became irrelevant by the rise of Russia and increased influence of other external players. The author has maintained that Tehran "has adopted increasingly pragmatic policies …. better suited to its resources, with an emphasis on

the resolution of conflicts, the promotion of stability, countering any threat emanating from Azeri nationalism, the pursuit of commercial interests, and the development of north-south transportation and communication links, including oil and gas pipelines,…, roads, railways and power grids."(ibid: 113)

Afrasiabi and Maleki's descriptive paper (2003)[1] has provided an introduction various policies undertaken by Iran to deal with the post Sep 11th 'insecure environment'. While the paper has provided a useful account of Iran's initiative for managing its security environment, it lacks a theoretical base for analysis.

Nuriyev's book offers "both the historical background and the analysis of current problems and future possibilities" in the South Caucasus. (2007:6) The third part of his book has addressed the question of outside intervention and international diplomacy, which also has very briefly discussed the Iranian influence and policy in the region, as well as its concerns and relations with various regional states and players. However, as the main focus of the book is the South Caucasus itself, the chapter has understandably refrained from going into in depth analysis of Iran's policy and relations in the region.

In an article in Jafalian's 'Reassessing Security in the South Caucasus', Therme has examined Iran's foreign policy in the region, introducing two reasons for the failure of the Islamic Republic to become the first regional power in the post-Soviet era despite its numerous assets; the ethnic hurdle, and the fact that the three small republics chose to adopt a model shared by small post-colonial states, which is to benefit from relations with wide range of states to maximise their own interest, instead of allowing one particular power to unduly influence their policies.(2011:138) However, as this study has demonstrated, when the Soviet Union collapsed and Caucasus Republics became independent; Iran had just come out of a long catastrophic war with Iraq, was under sanctions and lacked financial and technological capabilities essential for a major regional power to support the emerging states. Hence, Therme's analysis has shortcomings in comprehensive examination of the context.

German's 'Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus', has been one of the most up to date and useful resources that present research benefitted from, as in addition to valuable knowledge, it has offered a good example of how different aspects of a

[1] With some modification was later included in: Maleki, A. Afrasiabi, K. (2008) Reading in Iran Foreign Policy After September 11. Booksurge Publishing.

professional research should be approached. She has initially discussed various definitions of 'region' and arguments about "where exactly South Caucasus is", and why should the three small countries with diverging interests and foreign policies be considered as a region. Following extensive discussions on foreign policy positions and contemporary security challenges of South Caucasus countries; she has then, examined the relations between regional states and various actors, including Turkey and Iran. She argues that the region is significant for Iran "both in terms of security, including territorial integrity and its economic interests".(2012:126) Following an examination of the consequences of regional geopolitical changes resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union for Iran; the author has discussed the main issues in Iran's bilateral relations with the three South Caucasus states. She has pointed out to the effects of the Karabakh conflict on development of Iran's regional influence, as well as its bilateral relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The third group of relevant scholarly works have focused on Iran's bilateral relations with either Armenia or Azerbaijan. For example in his book, 'Ravābete Iran va Jomhūrie Azerbaijan: Negāhe Azarihā be Iran', AmirAhmadiān has offered extensive information on Iran-Azerbaijan's cultural and economic relations, followed by an examination of Azerbaijan's history textbooks, continued by discussions on Azerbaijan's foreign and security views, pan Turkism and its threat to Iran's national security, and timeline of Iran-Azerbaijan relations. With the aim of creating a better understanding among Iranian policymakers about how Azerbaijan perceives Iran; the author has provided accounts of Azerbaijan's political elite on various aspects of bilateral relations, as well as a list of Azerbaijan's claims and complaints against Iran. Despite its chaotic arrangement, lack of sophisticated theoretical analysis and focus on limited aspects of bilateral relations, the book provided a valuable source of past data, as well as a good insight into Azerbaijan's political elite's perception on Iran.

'Pathology of Iran-Republic of Azerbaijan's Recent Relations', which is a pamphlet published amid rising tensions between the two countries in 2012 to examine the geopolitical and political factors exacerbating bilateral tensions, suffers from similar shortcomings. That is, failing to examine all important factors, focusing on incidents rather than roots, chaotic categorisation and lack of theoretical framework and analytical rigour.

Several publications examining Iran's bilateral relations with either Azerbaijan or Armenia have simply provided good examples of biased analysis and helped this research to avoid similar pitfalls. For example, in the 'The South Caucasus 2021: Oil, Democracy and Geopolitics' book, which has tried to "address the most vital issues of the region, such as territorial conflicts, oil and natural gas resources, geopolitical complexities, pipeline politics, important analysis of the geopolitical risks for the next decades, geopolitics of the Caucasus-Caspian Basin, religion, demographic and migration prospects and the policy course of the superpowers" (2012: viii) a chapter by Rubin examines Azerbaijan's relations with the Middle East. The author has evaluated Iran-Azerbaijan relations based on some popular but unproven assumptions, such as Iran' ambition to acquire nuclear weapons, which he believes, if fulfilled, "would be a disaster for Azerbaijan".(2012:224) In the absence of any firm theoretical foundation or much reliable empirical evidence, Rubin concludes that Iran's increased power and US decline of power would expose Azerbaijan to a more dangerous environment.

Similarly, in an article in "Azerbaijan and Its Neighbourhood in 2003-2013", while overemphasising on Azerbaijan's regional role, Weitz has provided a partisan account of existing challenges in Iran-Azerbaijan relations and has focused on ways that the US and its allies including Israel can use Baku to contain Iran's influence in adjacent regions. He maintains that "by strengthening Azerbaijan's soft power, the United States would counter Iranian threats because people of the Middle East, Central Asia, and the South Caucasus, would view Azerbaijan, a pro-Western, prosperous, and secular state, as a superior model to that of Iran's bankrupt theocracy."(2014:199) However, considering significant rise of Islamic fundamentalism and anti-Western notions in the Middle East and Central Asia which has paved the way to increased number and activity of radical fundamentalist, one might wonder that if the people of these regions really prefer secularism and pro-Westernism as preferable characteristics for their states, particularly the absence of real democratic values.

A report published by the 'European Strategic Intelligence and Security Centre', has examined the strategic implications of Iran-Armenia relations for the South Caucasus Security. The authors claim that Iran-Armenia alliance serves the hidden agenda of undermining "efforts undertaken by the international community to bring stability to the region and to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict."(2013:3) While numerous reports from international organisations involved in

the region and the resolution process of the Karabakh conflict, as well as esteemed scholars who have been monitoring regional developments have offered evidence and strong arguments to demonstrate how a variety of reasons and a range of failures by different actors have left the efforts for resolving the conflict futile; the authors have failed to offer concrete evidence to support their controversial claim. They have also maintained that Tehran's strategic choice of relations with Armenia "is indicative of Iran's will to use the Caucasus as a battlefield of a proxy war with the United States and the European Union in the framework of its nuclear program"(2013:3) and have warned about "the long-term consequences of the strengthening of the Yerevan-Tehran axis".(ibid: 60) However, as this study will demonstrate, for various reasons Iran has tried to take a non provocative, non confrontational and pragmatic approach in the South Caucasus.

Nonetheless, there has been a limited number of scholarly works with sound theoretical base and strong argument that this study could benefit from. For example; using a hermeneutic interpretative method and with a diagnostic approach, Koolaeei and Osuli (2012) have examined factors which have securitised Iran-Azerbaijan's relations from 1995 to 2012, and introduced a collection of material and ideational and normative factors, shaping the securitised bilateral relations, though they have relied more on the general and more popular definition and aspects of security, which has a more limited scope than the approach taken in this study.

Amid significant scarcity of up to date resources about contemporary Armenia, particularly its politics, Mirzoyan's thesis has offered "the first systematic study of Armenia's foreign policy during the post-independence period, between 1991 and 2004", and has been a valuable source for relevant parts of present study.(2007: vii) The dissertation has explored "four sets of relationships with Armenia's major historical 'partners': Russia, Iran, Turkey and the West (Europe and the United States), considering "both Europe and Iran … as ideational 'others', whose role in Armenia's foreign policy, aside from pragmatic policy considerations, reflects a normative quest."(ibid) Mirzoyan's chapter on Iran introduces this southern neighbour as the 'permanent alternative' in Armenia's foreign policy thinking and practice since the beginning of its independence, due to the balancing role of Iran "vis-à-vis Turkey and Azerbaijan and the Armenians' perception of their relations with Iran as a political constant".(ibid: 173) The chapter has provided historical background on bilateral

relations and the factors which facilitate these relations and has concluded by stating that "beyond the fact that the regional geopolitics have created permissive environment for this relationship, there is a deeper understanding and mutual amity that saves it from opportunistic exploitations and gives it a large degree of permanence."(ibid: 216)

The significance of this research is better elaborated following the review of relevant literature. The examination of such literature proved that while there is a plethora of research on Iran's policy in the Middle East and its relations with its Arab neighbours or other important parts of the world there is a striking deficit of empirical and conceptually-based research on Iran's policy and relations with the South Caucasus. The relatively small volume of existing scholarly publications about the subject is mostly limited to papers or book chapters, which inherently limit the scope and depth of the covered issues. Furthermore, these publications have largely adopted a narrative approach and stopped short of employing theoretical framework for analysis. Consequently, they have mostly just touched upon Tehran's most important concerns or main aspects of cooperation in its bilateral relations without going into too much details or providing any systemic analysis.

By undertaking a systemic approach and employing multiple theories of international relations this research has provided an in depth study of Iran's policy towards the South Caucasus and its bilateral relations with its two South Caucasian neighbours.

With regard to theoretical framework as demonstrated in the research context, due to the complexity of Iran's foreign policy, which transpires in both decision making and implementation no single grand theory have the explanatory capacity for capturing this complexity or the fast evolving context in which the policies are shaped. Some scholars have therefore argued for using a hybrid model or employing multiple theories to offer a comprehensive tool which would be able to explain different aspects of Iran's foreign policy. Based on this argument and in order to offer an enhanced theoretical analysis, this research has employed three popular theories of international relations, which would be explained further in other parts of this introduction.

Review of the existing literature also revealed another gap. While the Karabakh conflict has been an important factor in shaping regional geopolitical dynamics, as well as Iran's bilateral relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan most scholars have just touched upon the issue, without going into detailed analysis of such effects. Moreover, while

new data regarding Iran's involvement in the conflict has been revealed in recent yearsthe scholarly community has failed to consider them in their analysis and continued to offer analysis about Iran's approach and performance towards this conflict based on old data, and in the case of Western academics, mostly based on the narrations from Azerbaijani sources, many of them biased and controversial.

Using the acquired data through interviews with Iranian diplomats as well as news sources, this study offers an alternative narration of Iran's approach towards the Karabakh conflict that would in turn undermine some existing assumptions about Iran's bilateral relations.

1.4. Conceptual Framework

As it was explained before, in order to offer a comprehensive analysis of Iran's foreign and regional policy, this research has relied on multiple theories of international relations, which would be explained briefly in this section.

To explain the transformation of Iran's foreign policy direction and principles in the post 1979 revolution era the research has relied on constructivism theory. The seminal works of Alexander Wendt (1987;1992) Nicholas Onuf (1989) and Friedrich Kratochwil (1989) are the basis of "the newest but perhaps the most dynamic" school of thought among mainstream International Relations theories, constructivism". (Jackson & Jones 2012:104) As Drezner (2011:67) has put it simply, while material factors are considered important by constructivists, the way "social structures filter and interpret the meaning of ... material capabilities" are even more important in forming the actor's behaviour in the international arena. "Contrary to both realists and liberals, constructivists argue that the kind of goals held by a state or other actor in world politics emerge from the actor's identity." (Jackson & Jones 2012:104) As Wendt (1992:398) has put it, for constructivists, it is the identity that forms the basis of interest. Nonetheless, identity is not just about "Selves", but also "Others", those who are outside the boundaries of "Self". (Jackson & Jones 2012:105) To see international relations through the lens of constructivism, is therefore, to focus on the way states, their leaders and various actors conceptualise themselves and perceive their role in the world, which

in turn “translate into the sorts of goals and interests that those actors pursue in their foreign policy”.(ibid)

Many scholars have relied merely on constructivist approach for analysing Iran’s foreign policy. However, as Rittberger has argued although the two level analysis of constructivist that takes both “the international system and domestic society into account”(2004:5) is generally the strength of this theory, but “it creates difficulty .... when the international and the domestic value based expectations of appropriate behaviour which a state acknowledges as defining its role in a given situation are at odds with one another.”(ibid) The Islamic Republic is the obvious example of such situation, as its value system is in clear contradiction with international norms of behaviour. Therefore, this study has limited the application of constructivism to explaining the role of ideational factors which have shaped the framework and principles of Iran’s foreign policy as well as some aspects of relations with its neighbours.

The research on the other hand, has employed defensive realism theory to explain Iran’s altering foreign policy approach, significant differences between its policies in the Middle East and that of the South Caucasus and also relations with the Republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Realist theories comprise the eldest school of political thought. Different strands of realism are commonly concerned with ‘sovereign state in the anarchic world’, with anarchy being the absence of a centralised, legitimate authority as the overarching constraint of the world politics.(Drezner 2011:33) According to realists, anarchy and the absence of a world government has two direct consequences. “First, nothing can impede the normal recurrence of war; and second, states are responsible for their own self-preservation.” (Chiaruzzi 2012:39)

Defensive realism drives primarily from Waltz, who proposed “defensive strategies are often the best route to security”. (Lynn-Jones as quoted by Rudloff 2013:46) Waltz (1986:129) argued that “states will ally to negate the ascending power of another. Once the power equilibrium is restored, the allied states pursue their interests independently, only to balance again in the future when one state disrupts the distribution of power”. As Taliaferro (2000:129) has further expanded, “under anarchy, many of the means a state uses to increase its security decrease the security of other states. This security dilemma causes states to worry about one another’s future intentions and relative

power". He argues that "defensive realism proceeds from four auxiliary assumptions that specify how structural variables translate into international outcomes and states' foreign policies. First, the security dilemma is an intractable feature of anarchy. Second, structural modifiers-such as the offense-defence balance, geographic proximity, and access to raw materials- influence the severity of the security dilemma between particular states. Third, material power drives states' foreign policies through the medium of leaders' calculations and perceptions. Finally, domestic politics can limit the efficiency of a state's response to the external environment."(ibid: 131)

Many scholars have pointed out to the difficulty of distinguishing between defensive and offensive realism, as they both assume that states seek power through similar means. (Snyder as quoted by Rudloff 2013:46) Hence, they both result in states engaging "in similar foreign policy behaviors, but the key difference is in the degree to which states engage in these foreign policy strategies". (Rudloff 2013:46)

In his 2013 paper, Trevino discussed two distinct theories about Iran's behaviour particularly in the Middle East. One that based on offensive realist perspective holds that "Iran sees a chance to become a regional hegemony, meaning it intends to take all opportunities and push itself into the dominant possibly even imperial position in the Middle East." Employing defensive realism and considering Iran's history, the other view argues that Iran perceives itself as a survivor in a world full of enemies, hence looking to maximise its security as a defensive mean. The existence of two opposing interpretations for foreign policy behaviour of one state can stem from two facts. One is the complexity of that state's politics which result in misperceptions. The other is the blur boundaries between offensive and defensive realism and the fine line between power maximising and security maximising policies.

The study has also adapted parts of Buzan and colleagues' security theory. Through his early post Cold War works, Buzan made an effort to expand on existing security theories to equip them with further analytical tools for analysing and explaining the emerging world order and the relations between various actors under the new circumstances. The focus of Buzan and his colleagues was particularly on centre-periphery relations and the affects of new patterns of relations between major powers on security agenda of periphery and Third World states. "The replacement of a polarized centre by one dominated by the capitalist security community seems almost

certain to weaken the position of the periphery in relation to the centre" (Buzan 1991:451), because "the value of periphery countries as either ideological spoils or strategic assets in great-power rivalry" has been lowered.(ibid: 439) He further explains that changes in the centre would not only redefine the centre-periphery relations, but also the relations between periphery states as well.(ibid: 451)

Another concept developed by Buzan and his colleagues was 'regional security', based on the belief that "security is a relational phenomenon. (Hence), one cannot understand the national security of any given state without understanding the international pattern of security interdependence in which it is embedded."(As quoted by Stone 2009:6) The issue of amity and enmity among states is at the core of Buzan's regional security concept, which "represents a spectrum from friendship or alliances to those marked by fear"(ibid) and cannot be merely attributed to the balance of power. "The issues that can affect these feelings range from things such as ideology, territory, ethnic lines, and historical precedent."(ibid) The regional security concept has been further enhanced with the concept of 'security complex', which means "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another."(Buzan 2007:190)

While the study has used the above definitions in analysing inter regional relations in the South Caucasus as well as relations with outside players; the concept which has played an important role in this research is 'security sectors'. "The use of sectors confines the scope of enquiry to more manageable proportions by reducing the number of variables in play. Items identified by sector lack the quality of independent existence. The purpose of selecting them is simply reducing the complexity to facilitate analysis. "With this purpose in mind, Buzan and his colleagues expanded security sectors from military and political, to cover three more areas of social, economy and environment as well. As explained in Buzan's paper (1991:433) "five sectors do not operate in isolation from each other. Each defines a focal point within the security problematique, and a way of ordering priorities, but all are woven together in a strong web of linkage." As they further explain (1998: 7), "one way of looking at sectors is to see them as specific types of interaction. In this view the military sector is about relationships of forceful coercion, the political sector is about relationship of authority, governing status and recognition; the economic sector is about relationship of trade, production and finance; the societal sector is about relationship of collective identity; and the environmental

sector is about relationships between human activity and the planetary biosphere."

In summary, this study has relied on constructivism to explain Iran's post revolution foreign policy overhaul and some aspects of its bilateral relations; used defensive realism to interprete different foreign policy approaches and to analyse factors shaping its bilateral relations. Regional Security Complex theory has been employed for explaining regional dynamics in the South Caucasus, as well as systemic changes in the post Cold War era, and applied the sectoral model as the main framework for analysing Iran's relations with the two Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

1.5. Thesis Structure

In order to have an accurate understanding of Iran's South Caucasus policy and its bilateral relations with the two republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan, it is important to have a comprehensive picture of the context in which the policies and relations are formed. Iran's regional policy is developed within a two dimensional context. The first dimension is the regional context and the existing dynamics of the particular region in question. The second is Iran's general foreign policy and its international status and relations. Iran's regional policy is the outcome of the continuous complex interaction of these two contexts in which the policies and relations are formed. Based on this argument the structure of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter two; has focused on introducing the South Caucasus, its significance in the international system; and its importance for major regional and external players.

It has then moved on to introduce each important player (with the exception of Iran which would be discussed in subsequent chapters) involved in the South Caucasus, its goals and priorities and the policies undertaken for realising those goals. The chapter has concluded that the United States' main goals in the region have been 'balance of power' and 'provision of security in its broader term'. Resorting to Pipeline diplomacy, initiatives for integrating the former Soviet republics in Western oriented organisations and financial aids have been among the most important instruments employed by the United States to achieve its goals and establish a comfortable influential position in the politics and economies of the region.

EU's main goals have been diversification of energy resources and their transport routs, as well as the development of security and stability in the region. Although the Union still lacks a grand strategy or even a coherent policy towards the South Caucasus it has increased its involvements through major initiatives such as the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership Initiative.

As an organisation whose main mission is the provision of defence and security for its members in the post Cold War era, NATO had to rebuild its image for the South Caucasus countries while avoiding any tensions with Russia, so it would be able to keep a reasonable degree of presence in the region. Therefore, it has been involved in the region through programmes such as Partnership for Peace.

After initial setbacks resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the post Cold War struggles to rebuild its strength and presence, Russia's involvement in the region was increased following the adoption of 'Eurasianism' approach in its foreign policy. To guarantee its interest in this region which is considered as Moscow's backyard Russia has employed different means from competing organisations and pipeline networks to manipulating conflicts and economies for balancing its power against the US by keeping regional countries under its own sphere of influence. Where none of the above means has achieved the expected results, Moscow has used its economic leverage or military might (such as the 2008 Georgia War) to get what it wants.

While its initial ambition to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the Soviet Union with its own influence based on historical, political, economic and strategic regional pull proved to be unrealistic in the face of the great financial and technological support that the newly independent republics required for their initial stability and development Turkey has maintained efforts in staying an active influential player in the South Caucasus as well as a hub for connecting energy rich countries of the post Soviet space to international markets.

Chapter three has focused on Iran's foreign policy. It has initially offered a brief outline of Iran's foreign policy during Pahlavi's and moved on to review different periods of post revolution foreign policies, with some initial explanations about factors shaping Iran's foreign policy such as history, geopolitics and ideational characteristics. It is important to note that while factionalism is an important domestic factor shaping Iran's foreign policy, this study has only made some quick refrences where necessary,

as extensive discussion has been out of the scope of this research.

The section "from revolution to the end of the war", explains how the establishment of the Islamic Republic brought about a new set of religious based norms and identity, which although was not entirely exclusive of the 'Iranian elements of identity', but certainly had different world view, values and priorities which resulted in the complete overhaul of Iran's foreign policy amid the revolutionary atmosphere. The section has explored how the radical interpretation of foreign policy principles and the revolutionary fervour put Iran on the path of conflict with regional and great powers, and how the war with Iraq isolated the country further, pushing Tehran to gradually depart from its isolationist approach and to mend its fences and bridges initially with its neighbours and then the great powers.

The next two sections have focused on Rafsanjani and Khatami's administrations. Following some discussions on the consequences of the post Cold War systemic changes for Iran's security, important steps which were undertaken by these two presidents for further rapprochement with the world and some of the challenges they faced and successes they achieved have been introduced. The chapter has then carried on with Iran's post Sep. 11th foreign policy, explaining the consequences of a securitised international atmosphere on Iran's conciliatory efforts and how those negative effects resulted in securitisation of Iran's domestic and foreign policy, giving chance to the rise of Principalists (Neocons) to power and to take a hostile confrontational approach in the international arena. By reviewing Ahmadinejad's foreign policy, the process which resulted in deterioration of Iran's international status including further complication of the nuclear dilemma and increased punitive sanctions has been described. The following section has reviewed Rouhani's foreign policy and its relative success in defusing the securitised atmosphere against Iran which had portrayed the country as a threat to the global security.

The chapter has concluded by emphasising that Iran's foreign policy principles have remained the same throughout the life of the Islamic Republic. However, while Iran's multifaceted and complex foreign policy apparatus has continuously tried to strike a balance between ideology and pragmatism, it has frequently changed its approach in response to regional and international developments in order to guarantee state's security and survival.

Chapter four has examined Iran's policy in two regional systems of the Middle East and the South Caucasus. Following an introduction explaining Iran's place in the Middle East security complex the chapter has initially explored Iran's Middle East policy during the Cold War, both under Pahlavis and in the post revolution era. Providing an analysis of post Cold War systemic changes in the Middle East the chapter has continued to examine Iran's post Cold War Middle East policy under different administrations.

In studying Iran's policy in the South Caucasus, after provision of a historical background on Iran's relations with this region which used to be an integral part of the Persian Empire up until the 19th century the chapter has explained the significant consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union for Iran, moving on to discuss Iran's post Cold War policy in the South Caucasus. In providing evidence for the argument that Iran's main goals in the region have been extending its influence and increasing security; the case of Karabakh conflict and the role Iran has played in it has been examined using data which was published in recent years.

The chapter has concluded by identifying two major drives of 'security' and 'influence' for Iran's regional policy and arguing that Tehran has exploited various opportunities to extend its influence and forge closer relations with various regional players. However, while Iran's efforts for regional integration have been challenged in both regions, its lack of success has been more obvious and extensive in the South Caucasus. The absence of strong anti Western/American sentiment, as well as lighter ideological tendencies and greater financial-economic dependence of regional countries to the West, particularly the US are considered as the main reasons for this situation. Another reason is the level of attention and investment that Iran has been able to apply to the South Caucasus considering resource limitations.

Chapter five has focused on Iran-Azerbaijan's bilateral relations. Following some information about Azerbaijan's pre independence history, its foreign policy has been reviewed. The chapter has then provided a historical background of Iran's relations with Azerbaijan since the inception of a political entity with the name of Azerbaijan on the north of the Aras River, and has moved to examine the bilateral relations in the post Cold War era.

Using Buzan's sectoral concepts, the chapter has studied the relations under five

categories of political, military, societal, economic and environmental. Through the examination of political dimension of the relations the study has demonstrated how Baku is posing a threat to Iran's ethno territorial integrity by promoting the myth of Southern Azerbaijan and encouraging the idea of the Greater Azerbaijan. The dispute over the legal status of the Caspian Sea has also been revisited from Iran's view point of territorial integrity. It has also been explained that opposing states' natures has resulted in perception of political imposition as well as contending patterns of amity and enmity in these two countries, which has consequently created more security threats and tensions in their bilateral relations.

The military sector has discussed the limited cooperation in this area, as well as existing challenges and threats, such as the militarisation of the Caspian Sea, the potential for exploitation of Azerbaijan's air and land space for attacking Iran, Azerbaijan's arms deal with Israel and its military and intelligence cooperation with the latter against Iran, and Tehran's efforts in countering these threats have been explored in this section.

The societal sector has reviewed the complex cultural and ethnic relations between the two countries. The shared ethnicity which has provided Baku with a precedent for irredentist sentiments, shared cultural heritages which have become another bone of contention and have extended the scope of rivalry to cultural issues, as well as common sectarian confession which is perceived as an element of threat for Azerbaijan's secular state living beside a Shiite theocracy.

The economic sector has looked at areas of cooperation such as trade and energy, discussing barriers to further expansion of cooperation which are mainly either infrastructure deficiencies or political barriers, such as sanctions. The section also explains that despite their trade and economic co operations, the two countries compete over hydrocarbon resources, transport routs and markets. Moreover, the economic interdependence is not deep enough to result in closer political relations or to not be affected by political tensions.

The environment sector has introduced the Caspian pollution as the main environmental challenge between the two countries, arguing that undetermined legal status of the Caspian Sea has resulted in the failure of littoral states to accept responsibility for environmental protection of the Sea.

The chapter has concluded that while there certainly is room for improvement of bilateral relations through confidence building and détente` the existence of geopolitical imperatives and conflicting interests such as territorial disputes, resource and market rivalries, incompatible nature of states, as well as interference of outside players which has securitised the bilateral atmosphere, makes partnership between the two countries an unlikely development.

Chapter six has studied Iran's relations with the Republic of Armenia, using the same structure as chapter five. It has initially provided a historical background about Armenia and its relations with Iran over several millennia and then discussed Armenia's foreign policy particularly in the post Cold War era.

Using the same sectoral model, the chapter has examined various aspects of bilateral relations. Several political factors have been accounted for drawing the two countries closer together such as isolation, mutual concerns with regard to expansionist aspirations of Turkey and Azerbaijan, development of an alliance involving Russia, Armenia and Iran, against US, Azerbaijan and Turkey; as well as the importance of Armenian lobby for Iran has been discussed in the political sector. The fact that Armenia has never considered Iran's state ideology as an impediment for developing relations has been an important factor in facilitating the relations. The least advanced aspect of the two countries bilateral relations has arguably been the military sector.

The societal sector has examined elements of shared heritage which have brought the two societies closer and interested in one another's culture and the role that these societal factors play in improving bilateral relations have been discussed along with the role of Iranian-Armenians in development of these relations. It has been argued that the two countries' mutual respect and practical appreciation has turned their shared heritages into an invaluable asset for their bilateral relations.

While the economy has been the most important aspect of Iran-Armenia rapport since the independence of the latter, the energy has been at the core of these relations. Providing Armenia with the much needed essential supplies, particularly the fuel oil in the first post independent cold winter was a fundamental step on Iran's side for building a long lasting economic relation which has become stronger through bartering Iran's gas with Armenia's electricity. Moreover, there have been various joint economic projects between Tehran and Yerevan, including an ambitious 470 kilometre railway

which would make Armenia a key part of the International North-South Transport Corridor, connecting South Caucasus to India through Iran. Both countries have helped each other to circumvent economic hurdles resulting from regional blockade (on Armenia) and international sanctions (for Iran).

Due to very short shared border apart from one case of river pollution by Armenian industry and a proposal for developing a border park, there has been no other issue under the environment sector. The chapter has concluded by maintaining that Iran's pragmatic regional policy together with converging interests shared grievances and regional challenges have evolved its friendly relations with Armenia into a strategic alliance in recent years.

Chapter seven has wrapped up the thesis by offering final conclusions of the study. It has provided concluding analysis, both on Iran's South Caucasus policy and on its bilateral relations with the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Note on Refrencing, Translations and Transliterations

This research has used Harvard system as a guideline for refrencing, and as such most refrences have been addressed at the end of the chapters. However, there are two exceptions to this rule: 1- where the source is a website with no author, 2- where addressing sources of maps. In these two occasions, the refrence has been cited at the bottom of the relevant page.

The research has adopted the most compatible method with the pronouncement of Farsi words, which is generally based on the Library of Congress Romanisation table for Persian. However, the research has modified this method by spelling well known words, particularly names such as Azerbaijan (which is pronounced Azarbaijan in Farsi), Hashemi, Baku, regime, etc. in their popular form. All Farsi texts used in this research has been translated by the author unless otherwise stated.

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CHAPTER TWO

SOUTH CAUCASUS; REGIONAL & EXTERNAL PLAYERS

2.1. Introduction

To offer a more accurate picture of the opportunities and threats that Iran has been facing in the South Caucasus, it is important to be familiar with the main regional and external players, their goals, interests and policies in this region. Following a brief introduction about the South Caucasus and its general importance, this chapter will discuss the goals and policies of each major player together with a summarised history of their post Cold War involvement with the South Caucasus. Within this framework therefore, the relations and interactions of different players with individual countries of the South Caucasus has not been discussed in details, unless it has been part of a player's general policy which has regional consequences, i.e. Turkey's special relations with Azerbaijan. The chapter will argue that 'balance of power' and 'increased security' are two main goals of the players in the region. It will demonstrate the importance of energy resources and transit routes in exacerbating rivalry and bandwagonning between various players, and the way these players manipulate regional dynamics to achieve their goals.

2.2. Where is South Caucasus?

South Caucasus is a mountainous region, with an approximate area of 400,000 sq/km and a population of around 18 millions[1]. It straddles between the Caspian Sea on the East and the Black Sea on the West. The southern side of the region is neighbouring with the north west of Iran and the south east of Turkey. On the north, it is limited by Russia's southern plains. (AmirAhmadian as quoted by Kazemi 2005: 33)

The great Caucasus mountains with 1500 km length, starting from Taman peninsula in the north of the Black Sea, stretching to Absheron peninsula on the west side of the Caspian Sea pass through the great Caucasus land, dividing it into two northern and southern parts. On the southern parts of the mountains, from east to west, there are three Republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. (ibid)

[1] The total population has been calculated based on the CIA Factbook statistics of the South Cacasus countries' population.

Map 2.1: Map of South Caucasus[1]

2.3. General Importance of the South Caucasus

South Caucasus; once a closed and forgotten area within the former Soviet Union, became "crowded with different kind of international actors, ranging from international organizations and states to multinational corporations" following the end of the Cold War. (Lynch 2003:15) Far from complementary, the motives behind the involvement of all these players in the region and their policies are varied and frequently contradictory. In order to have a better understanding and more informed analysis of the relations and policies of regional and external players, an overview of their goals and motives is necessary.

Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia; the three South Caucasus countries form the most

[1] Caucasus - Political. Available at: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caucasus-political_en.svg> (Accessed on 10.09.2012).

complex, combustible and unstable region of the former Soviet Union. Lying at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and the Middle East, the region has traditionally played an important role as a transit corridor and been the meeting point of ancient civilisations such as Persia, Russia, Europe, and China. "Yet as Alexander Rondeli has pointed out, the important geopolitical location of the South Caucasus has been as much, if not more, of a liability as it has an asset to regional states." (Cornell 2004:126)

However, it is important to keep in mind that the application of the term 'region' to south Caucasus is defined by the actions of outside players. Regional cooperation initiatives are not generated internally among these three countries, but are promoted "by external actors seeking stability in the region". (German 2012:1)

Russia's reduced role and diminishing influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia in the early 1990s together with the determined efforts of regional states to diversify their relations with the outside world opened the doors for external actors to engage in the region. For various reasons the emerging new geopolitics became an arena of competition and rivalry between different regional and external players. While each of these players has different motives; some of the shared reasons for their interest in the region are as follows:

- **Energy Resources & Transport Routes**

As one of the eldest oil producing regions of the world, the Caspian Sea has increasingly became an important source of global energy and as such gained a particular importance in the gloal energy security. According to the US Department of Energy Information Administration (EIA), although territorial disputes and limited explorations have created obstacles for determining the exact amount of hydrocarbon resources, based on field level data, "EIA estimates 48 billion barrels of oil and 292 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in proved and probable reserves in the wider Caspian basins area, both from onshore and offshore fields. Because the reserve figures include both proved and probable reserves, the figures are closer to a high-end estimate."[1] According to BP's

[1] Available at: <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/regions-topics.cfm?RegionTopicID=CSR> (Accessed on 20.02.2016)

Statistical Review of World Energy[1]; the region holds about four percent of the world's gas and oil reserves, and that estimate has not even considered Iran and Russia's resources.

Although Caspian energy resources are not comparable to that of the Persian Gulf, still are considerable alternatives for different energy markets such as EU, and some South East Asian countries. In order to guarantee the security of energy supplies, consumer countries need to diversify their sources. Caspian's non OPEC hydrocarbon resources have attracted considerable investments from giant energy cartels, which could have otherwise be invested in the Middle Eastern countries. Hence, Caspian energy resources have become a vital factor both for economic development, as well "geopolitical configuration of the region". (Johnson 2001:12)

Within this energy rich but landlocked region, there is "no single means of exporting products without crossing another sovereign territory and no access to navigable waterways that are open to international shipping". (Burke 1999:1) While some scholars describe the general struggle "to define the region's future" as the "new Great Game"; others like Moradi (2006) believe that it is the power struggle over the control of hydrocarbon resources and transport routes that has created a post-Soviet "Great Game" with more players and greater rewards. However, "the belief that whoever secures the major share of oil pipeline transit will gain enhanced influence not only throughout the South Caucasus and Central Asia, but also on a global political scale, has highlighted the concerns over the future stability of the region." (Aydin 2012: 172)

Due to lack of infrastructure or necessary capital for exploration and exploitation of resources, or development of transport routes by regional countries; the winners of the game were those who could offer more to solve the production or export problems. Investment in the region's energy infrastructure has offered a prosperous perspective particularly for Western corporates.

- **Security**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the stability of the newly independent countries

[1] Available at : <http://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/energy-economics/statistical-review-of-world-energy.html> (Accessed on 20.02.2016)

and the region has always been of major concern. The significance of security threats from unstable neighboring countries for Iran, Turkey, and Russia has been greater due to their shared minorities with South Caucasus countries.

The overwhelming transformation process that Caucasian countries faced in the post Cold War era encompassed "the building of new institutions, new states, new borders, new identities, new foreign policies and new military system". (Lynch 2003:8) The scale of changes was so enormous that even without any conflicts; there was a great risk of instability in the area. However, there existed several other destabilizing factors as well. "The stability of the South Caucasus is threatened by its geopolitical significance, as well as numerous transnational security challenges including unresolved conflicts, organized crime, trafficking and migration."(German 2012:1) Being "sandwiched between the two major routes used for smuggling heroin from Afghanistan to Europe", as well as a "major supplier of arms and nuclear components, Russia, and the major markets for these commodities, the Middle East" (Cornell 2003:37) has exacerbated regional security challenges.

The political-military and security policies of involved players, as well as the smoldering conflicts of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh, are other factors affecting the security in this region. While the leverage of regional powers, such as Turkey and Iran, and of global powers, such as the United States, Russia and China, is part of the power configuration in the region, several international organisations are also involved. "At the regional level, there is the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (B.S.E.C.), the Black Sea Force (BLACKSEAFOR) the Caspian Sea Force (CASFOR), the cooperation between Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (G.U.A.M.) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (C.S.T.O.) within the Commonwealth of Independent States (C.I.S.). At the global level, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (N.A.T.O.) and the European Union also exercise political weight in the South Caucasus."(de Hass 2006:2)

However, the importance of the security of energy resources and transport routes for both producer and consumer countries have continuously been a major continuous concern. "The consequence of destabilization in the Caucasus would be felt throughout Eurasia and would inevitably have a significant impact even on the remote powers of the North Atlantic." (Aydin 2012:173)

- **Consumer Markets**

The independence of South Caucasus republics opened the markets of these countries to foreign trade. Different players were looking for trade opportunities in these new markets. As their economy developed, so did their trade with different countries.[1]

While this small region with the population of just about 18 million may not be considered such a large market, but it plays the role of medium and transit for Europe and Eastern countries such as China through its transport systems, providing trade opportunities for both sides. The prospect of full integrationg into 'the new Silk Road' through advanced transport and technology infrastructure such as railroads, pipelines, fibre optic cables and power transmission grid locks enhances the region's market value.

2.4. Important Players in the South Caucasus

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the three republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia; the South Caucasus emerged out of isolation catching the attention of various international players both with horrors of violent conflicts as well as the promise of fostering democratic developments. It became an arena of rivalry between regional players, complemented later with the arrival of outside players.

This section will briefly review the goals, interests and policies of major regional and external players in the South Caucasus. Although an important regional player, Iran's goals and policies would be discussed in chapter 4 while examining Iran's regional policy.

[1] For example US- Azerbaijan trade in goods for July 1992 included $0.1 million exports and $0.2 million imports. By July 2012, it has increased to $113.13 million exports and $71.5 million imports. US-Armenia trade in July 1992 was $3.2 million in exports and $0.1 million in imports. This has increased to $4.0 million export and 8.0 million imports. United States Census Bureau. *Trade in Goods with Armenia*. Available at: <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c4631.html> (Accessed on 03.10.2012)

2.4.1. The United States

Despite being among the first states to establish diplomatic relations with the South Caucasus countries and to support the sovereignty and independence of the newly independent states; the region did not bear much significance in the US foreign policy for a few years. This insufficient attention has been attributed to the "lack of knowledge and initiatives concerning the Caspian region, as well as a lack of realization of American interests there. The success of the Armenian lobby in convincing the American Congress to impose an embargo on Azerbaijan in the wake of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict illustrates the lack of proactive American policy in the region." (Allison & Acker 1997 as quoted by Oktav 2005:17)

However, as Brzezinski (1997:52) has advised; in order to secure its global hegemony and establish a favourable world order it was crucial for the US to prevent the rise of yet another Eurasian empire or strong adversary in the region. US regional policy during the first few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union included:

- Ensuring the independence and sovereignty of the former republics of the Soviet Union and preventing their subservience to Russia.
- Reducing Iran's strategic influence in the region particularly among the Muslim population. In this context, the US public diplomacy apparatus made a great effort in portraying a violent and disturbing picture of Iran in contrast with an exaggerated ideal picture of Turkey.
- Making sure "that nuclear or other major weaponry previously under the control of the Soviet regime was destroyed or returned to Russia." (Jaffe 2001:136)

Despite the US Department of Defense 1994 report describing the South Caucasus as a strategically important region due to its potential "to form an area of secular, independent, and Western friendly states between Russia and the Middle East" (Sherwood-Randall 1998 as quoted by Cornell 2005:111); it was not until the volume of Caspian energy resources came to the spotlight that more serious policy considerations were given to the region. In addition to US corporate interests; the Caspian oil boom has had other advantages for the US. One is the regional economic growth resulting from the production and transport of energy which could in turn improve the independence and sovereignty of South Caucasus countries and ensure

their move away from Russia's dominance or Iran's influence. It also offered an alternative option to the Middle East hydrocarbon resources. The 1999 US Silk Road Strategy Act clearly states that "the region of the South Caucasus and Central Asia could produce oil and gas in sufficient quantities to reduce the dependence of the United States on energy from the volatile Persian Gulf region."[1] Moreover, the politics of energy provided US with a perfect pretext for long term presence in the backyard of its rival, Russia and its adversary, Iran; as well as a defining role in regional politics. Consequently, since the second half of 1996, US started to take a proactive policy by announcing the Caucasus and Caspian basin important for its strategic interests; and appointing a 'special envoy' for this remote region.[2]

As Cohen (2005:3) has pointed out, drawing the entirety of Eurasian Convergence Zone into the American geostrategic orbit became a major US military, economic, and political policy objective, much of which has been undertaken unilaterally. In order to balance the power in its favour; US effectively undertook a double edged policy towards regional players which has consequently led to the polarisation of the region. With regard to Russia and Iran, US took a zero sum dynamic ensuing isolation to block Iran's influence in the area, and containment to prevent Russia from reasserting its hegemony over the region; while bringing Turkey, Israel, and Europe under the same umbrella of interest and general aims despite their differing goals and priorities.

- **Pipeline Diplomacy**

As Iseri (2009:34-35) has pointed out, "The political objective of the US government is to prevent energy transport unification among the industrial zones of Japan, Korea, Russia and the EU in the Eurasian landmass and ensure the flow of regional energy resources to US led international oil markets without any interruptions."

The Silk Road Strategy Act obliged the US government to "assist in the development

1 Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999. Available at: <https://www.eso.org/gen-fac/pubs/astclim/espas/maidanak/silkroad.html> (Accessed on 21.08.2015).

2 The Clinton Administration in 1994 established a special inter-agency working group to focus on Caspian policy. In May 1998, the US Trade and Development Agency, the US Export–Import Bank and the Overseas Private Investment Corp. announced the formation of the Caspian Finance Center in Ankara to facilitate the development of energy and other infrastructure projects in the Caspian region. Then in July 1998 President Clinton appointed Ambassador Richard Morningstar to the new position of Special Advisor to the President and Secretary of State for Caspian Basin Energy Diplomacy. For further detail see White House Fact Sheet, <http://www.usis.it/file9911/alia/99111705.htm> , (Accessed on 1.10.2012).

of the infrastructure necessary for communications, transportation, education, health, and energy and trade on an East-West axis".[1] However, prior to the Act, US was actively engaged in building alternative routes of energy export in partnership with several regional players. Despite compelling facts about the economic benefits of a north-south route from Russia to southern ports of Iran, US insisted on building east-west pipelines in order to avoid both Russia and Iran. Despite serious doubts over the economic viability of such pipelines, the political advantages were so significant that US Energy Secretary took it on himself to directly negotiate with different regional heads of states[2] to gain their support and commitment to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) project. Washington extended support to four other major pipeline projects including the South Caspian Gas Pipeline "which leads Azerbaijani gas via Georgia into Turkey and further to Europe." (Baran 2005: 2)

The political advantages of multiple pipeline routes for the US include:

- Reducing Russia's monopoly over export routes and, therefore, its leverage over export/importing countries as well as its control over the market.[3]
- Excluding Iran from any major Caspian energy project.[4]
- Control over the final destination of petroleum to ensure it reaches US controlled energy markets.
- Sustaining US alliance with regional players through this economic bond.
- Providing an acceptable justification for long term official US presence in the region.

- **Financial Aids**

South Caucasus countries have been continuously the subject of US financial aid since

1 Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999. Available at: <https://www.eso.org/gen-fac/pubs/astclim/espas/maidanak/silkroad.html> (Accessed on 21.08.2015).

2 Remarks by Secretary of Energy Federico Peña at the Caspian Pipelines Conference. Washington, D.C. November 19, 1997. Available at: <www.osti.gov/news/speeches97/caspian.htm> (Accessed on 20.08. 2011).

3 While Iran was completely excluded from such projects, Russia was encouraged in participation, as in the same speech Pena says: "Russia, as both an energy producer and transit country, will be an important player in developing the Caspian region. We would welcome Russian participation in the east-west energy corridor."

4 According to the Department of Energy press release, "In each meeting, Pena reinforced the U.S. government's opposition to investments in Iran's energy sector and any investment or transit of Caspian oil and gas through Iran." Pena said that the U.S. position "is clear -- we do not support conducting ordinary business with a country thatfunds, trains, and supports terrorists or seeks to acquire weapons of mass destruction." Available at: <http://www.usembassy-israel.org.il/publish/press/energy/archive/1998/june/de1602.htm> (Accessed on 02.10.2012)

their independence.[1] According to the US Department of State the goal of this assistance has been the promotion of regional security through increasing the capability of these countries to combat domestic and transnational criminal activities; development of key democratic institutions of government and civil society to promote public participation, combat corruption and strengthen the rule of law; and far-reaching economic reforms which promote stability and sustainable growth in the non-oil sectors of the economy.[2]

- **Integration into Western/Pro Western Structures**

Another strategy to help in moving the Soviet's ex- republics away from Moscow's sphere of influence was to integrate them into Euro Atlantic structures or draw them into pro-Western alliances. GUAM is an example of such US backed initiatives, "a political, economic and strategic alliance between the post-Soviet states….. The GUAM countries which Moscow saw as a Trojan horse inside the CIS, sought to deepen their partnership with Western institutions and organisations like the EU and NATO." (Baban & Shiriyev 2010:96) Russia's concerns proved right when in 1999, Georgia, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan left the CIS and GUAM found a security and military dimension following Uzbekistan's membership.

[1] Cumulative US assistance budgeted for Azerbaijan from FY 1992 through FY 2010 was $976 million (all agencies and programmes). Budgeted aid to Azerbaijan was $26.4 million in FY2011 and an estimated $20.9 million in FY2012, and the Administration requested $16.3 million for FY2013 -the numbers for FY2011, FY2012, and FY2013 include "Function 150" foreign aid, and exclude Defense and Energy Department funds- (Nichols 2012: Summary). According to the US Department of State "The U.S. to date (March 2012) has provided Armenia with nearly $2 billion in development and humanitarian assistance."[1]Also between "2006 to 2011, a Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact helped promote Georgian enterprise and economic growth through investments in physical infrastructure. In 2013, the MCC awarded Georgia a second compact, focused on education."[1] US Department of State. (2012) *Armenia*. Available at: <http://m.state.gov/md197863.htm> (Accessed on 03.10.2012) AND US Department of State. (2012) Azerbaijan. Available at: <http://m.state.gov/md5253.htm> (Accessed on 05.11.2014)

2 US Department of State. (2009) *Foreign Operations Appropriated Assistance: Armenia.* Available at: <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/167286.htm> (Accessed on 10.10.2012) and US Department of State. (2009) *Foreign Operations Appropriated Assistance: Azerbaijan.* Available at: <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/106462.htm> (Accessed on 10.10.2012) AND

2.4.1.1. US Post Sep. 11th Involvement in the Caucasus

The Post Sep.11th developments and the war on terror increased the importance of the South Caucasus for the United States as its new global strategy required significant military presence in that region. "The South Caucasus and Central Asia appeared indispensable for the successful prosecution of war in the heart of Asia." (Cornell 2005:113). Provision of landing and over flight rights as well as refueling facilities for US army by regional countries such as Azerbaijan and Georgia, not only facilitated the war on terror but also as Socor (quoted by Cornell 2005:113) has pointed out was a historical breakthrough; as it provided the opportunity for Western troops to set foot "in the heartland of Asia formerly the exclusive preserve of land empires." Since transportation of troops and equipment was faced with various political and logistic challenges, these countries' airspace proved to be "the only realistic route through which military aircraft could be deployed from NATO territory to Afghanistan. (ibid) Azerbaijan and Georgia, also, took part in the international Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operations in Afghanistan and "sent troops to the coalition stabilization force in Iraq." (Baban & Shiriev 2010:97)

However, attention to South Caucasus gradually faded particularly during Obama's initial years of administration not merely due to other pressing priorities, but also due to overall change of US foreign strategy. The failure of Bush's 'hard power' strategy resulted in the new 'smart power strategy', which reduced the instrumental position of South Caucasus for US policies.

As the August 2008 five days war between Georgia and Russia proved to US and other Western countries that Moascow's interest in the South Caucasus cannot be ignored; Obama's 'reset' policy towards Russia resulted in US "Move away from a zero sum approach to its relations with Moscow in the region". (Mankoff 2012:18) Consequently; the "US policy towards countries in the region essentially became a derivative of Russia's policy" failing to forge substantial long term partnerships. (Charap & Peterson as quoted by Koushakjian 2011:79)

However, in pursuing improved relations with Russia and trying to help in the resolution of conflicts through the involvement of regional actors, US managed to dismay Azerbaijan so far as pushing it towards Russia. "It did not take long for Azerbaijan to react by taking a more pro-Russian turn by signing several key energy

deals with Moscow and joining the three party talks over Nagorno-Karabakh where Moscow had a dominant role." (Suchkov 2011:144)

The failure of Obama's 'reset' efforts to "develop enough momentum to move the bilateral ties forward" (Kitazume 2012); as well as Russia's increasing influence in the region, along with Azerbaijan's tilt towards Russia, and other regional developments; triggered a review of US policy towards the South Caucasus. Though the 2010's US defense Secretary and Secretary of State's tour of South Caucasus was interpreted as a 'comeback' signal from the US, many analysts believe that the United State's South Caucasus policy would not change considerably.

2.4.2. The European Union

According to German, "the EU is the principal actor from outside of the wider Caucasus region engaged in efforts to promote cross border cooperation in the area" primarily as means of regional stabilisation. (2012:140)

Abundant energy deposits of the South Caucasus which can provide the answer for Europe's quest for diversification of energy supplies is a reasonable justification in itself for EU's involvement. However, "EU member states have increasing economic interests in the region- a potentially lucrative and attractive place for foreign direct investment (FDI) - specially for multinational oil companies." (Nuriyev 2010:3)

On the other hand, as explained earlier in this chapter, "the region presents practically all security challenges that typify the post Cold War system." (Gnesotto 2003:7) While the post Sep. 11th developments have increased the region's security importance; following the EU's 2007 enlargement the region has effectively become EU's immediate neighbour, meaning regional security challenges are practically at the EU's doorstep now. Hence, the development and stability of South Caucasus became a crucial imperative for EU's security and economic relationships.

Nontheless, it took several years before the EU moved towards a more active role and closer engagement with the region. The main reason might have been best described by Huseynov (2009:48) who argues that the reason was "not only geographical but also the mental distance separating the region from EU decision makers". Helly (2001:2)

believes the cause to be "lack of clear analytical grid" in the EU, that unlike US does not have a 'Silk Road Strategy' to define priorities and draw a road map. As a result, despite the fact that "the European Union appeared on the South Caucasian scene from the early 1990s, when the process of transition towards market economy and democracy began in these countries and when conflict and petroleum loomed over the political landscape of the Caucasus" (Dekanozishvili 2003); the growing significance of the South Caucasus for EU has been gradual. The Union's involvement in the region during the 1990s was mainly economic, based on short term regional developments and priorities of EU's individual rotating presidents.

In December 1990, the EU launched TACIS (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States) programme "to sustain economic reform and development process in the CIS countries and to support their integration to the world economy". (Demirag 2005:92) TRACECA and INOGATE are two important initiatives developed under TACIS.

TRACECA which is "the technical assistance program for the development of the transport corridor between Europe and Asia across the Black Sea, the countries of the South Caucasus, the Caspian Sea and the Central Asian countries was launched in May 1993."[1]The programme bears a strategic importance due to the provision of an alternative route to Europe which offers the opportunity to avoid the traditional Russian route.

"INOGATE (Interstate Network of Oil & Gas Transport to Europe) which "supports energy policy cooperation between the EU and the littoral states of the Black and Caspian Seas and their neighboring countries", was launched in 1995.[2]

EU's growing attention towards the South Caucasus was manifested in 1996 Partnership & Cooperation Agreement which came into force in 1999. The Agreement offered a legal framework for dialogue in main areas. Then in 2001, at its General Affairs Council, EU confirmed "its willingness to play a more active political role in

1 European Commission Please Release Database. (2012) *EU support to the Europe-Caucasus-Asia Transport Corridor*. Available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-141_en.htm> (Accessed on 05.11.2014)

2 International Cooperation and Development. Central Asia- Energy. Available at : <http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/central-asia/eu-central-asia-energy-cooperation_en> (Accessed on 05.11.2014)

the South Caucasus region and its intention to look for further ways of prevention and resolution of conflicts in the region and to participate in the post conflict rehabilitation". (Alieva 2006:10) The appointment of an EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus in July 2003 helped in the acceleration of the process of developing a coherent strategy for the region.

Three South Caucasus countries joined the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004. ENP "is an extension of EU governance regime- norms, standards and values- beyond the political borders of the Union." (Propescu 2006: 2) In 2005, the South Caucasus countries started consultation on the provision of Action Plans with the European Union. The Action Plans which are in fact road maps to comprehensive reforms "provide a point of reference for the programming and assistance to these countries".(Alieva 2006:11) Although the Plans are not legally binding, but the provision of enhanced strategic partnership "beyond cooperation and towards significant integration" (ibid) with the Union offers an attractive prospect and binding incentive for these countries.

The main rationale behind the ENP for the EU is "developing the zone of prosperity and a friendly neighborhood with which EU enjoys close, peaceful and cooperative relationship".(ibid) However, as some scholars[1] have pointed out issues such as lack of a definite EU membership prospect for these three countries even after extensive reforms, and lack of any 'conditionality factor' that ties the progress of these countries in the execution of Action Plans to the amount of ENP aid they receive; play as hindrance to their real progress.

Following the 2007 EU accession of Romania and Bulgaria, the Union undertook the Black Sea Synergy (BSS) initiative which also includes the South Caucasus. Based on the Commission of European Countries communication with the Council and the European Parliament "There are significant opportunities and challenges in the Black Sea area that require coordinated action at regional level. These include key sectors such as energy, transport, environment, movement and security. Enhanced regional cooperation is not intended to deal directly with longstanding conflicts in the region but ….. over the time could help remove some of the obstacles in the way."

1 See Alieva 2006: 32, Mkrtchyan 2009:27.

The above document further explains that since the broad EU policy for the region has already been set in Turkey's pre accession strategy, the ENP and the Strategic Partnership with Russia; the BSS is supposed to play as a complementary strategy to the above policies. The primary task of this inclusive initiative is, therefore, the development of cooperation within the Black Sea region and also between the region and the European Union. The initiative covers different subject areas from democracy, Human Rights and good governance to energy, transport and environment.

In May 2009, EU launched yet another initiative called 'the Eastern Partnership Initiative' which aimed to enhance relations with EU's eastern neighbours including the three countries of the South Caucasus. According to the Commission's documents "This would imply new association agreements including deep and comprehensive free trade agreements with those countries willing and able to enter into a deeper engagement and gradual integration in the EU economy. It would also allow for easier travel to the EU through gradual visa liberalisation, accompanied by measures to tackle illegal immigration. The Partnership will also promote democracy and good governance, strengthen energy security, promote sector reform and environment protection, encourage people to people contacts, support economic and social development and offer additional funding for projects to reduce socio-economic imbalances and increase stability." (The European Union External Action Service)

As demonstrated by the above examples while EU appreciates the importance of development and cross border cooperation for ensuring regional stability and security; it has avoided direct involvement in mediating efforts to end regional conflicts which is one of the most serious security threats in the South Caucasus. The Union has left the sensitive task of mediation and negotiations for conflict resolution to other international organisations such as OSCE, and the Minsk Group.

2.4.3. NATO

As an organisation whose main mission is the provision of defence and security for its members (mainly EU & US), NATO's objectives changed after the end of the Cold War; requiring to reshape its activities and review its relations particularly with the former Soviet republics in order to both survive as a viable organisation and to pursue

the security interests of its members.

Keeping in mind that the South Caucasus is "an integral part of the arc of instability stretching from North Africa to Southeast Asia, which the U.S. has identified as the most likely source of threats against U.S. and Western security interests in the foreseeable future" (Cornell 2004:128) wil help in having a better understanding of NATO's role and policies in the region.

In order to keep a reasonable degree of involvement in the region, the Alliance had to rebuild its own image for the South Caucasus countries while avoiding any tensions with Russia, who has been sensitive about any Western expansion in its sphere of influence. Therefore since 1990s NATO became involved with these countries through flexible programmes such as 'Partnership for Peace' (PfP), which "allows partners to build up an individual relationship with NATO, choosing their own priorities for cooperation".[1]

This initiative "was launched in January 1994 NATO summit to establish strong links between NATO, its new democratic partners in the former Soviet bloc, and some of Europe's traditionally neutral countries to enhance European security. It provides a framework for enhanced political and military cooperation for joint multilateral crisis management activities, such as humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping."[2]

The three South Caucasus republics joined this programme and appointed liaison officers in April 1994. Since then they have been active participants of different PfP activities. "They also participate in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), which offers them the opportunity to hold political discussions and receive assistance on political and security issues. In addition all three participate in the Planning and, Review Process (PARP) which aims to ensure interoperability between NATO members and partner countries." (German 2012:153)

As already explained the war on terror increased the importance of the region and raised its profile for NATO. Examples of the crucial supporting role that these countries played in both Afghanistan and Iraq war have already been discussed. However, for

1 North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (2014) *The Partnership for Peace Programme*. Available at: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50349.htm > (Accessed on 13.02.2015)

2 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE. (1995) *Fact Sheet: NATO Partnership for Peace*, Bureau of Public Affairs. Available at: <http://www.fas.org/man/nato/offdocs/us_95/dos950519.htm> (Accessed on 27.12.12)

exactly the same reason following the post September 11th developments the 'security deficit' of the region, was transformed to "a threat not only to regional security but also for Euro Atlantic interests". (Cornell, McDermott, O'Malley, et al. 2004:13) The Alliance, therefore, resorted to another cooperation project called Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) to help in upgrading regional security.

The IPAP instrument was inaugurated at the 2002 Prague Summit as a mechanism to tailor relations with specific countries, which may include eventual membership. "The main spheres of cooperation under the IPAP are security, defense and military issues, public information, science, environment, and democratic reforms." (Poghosyan 2012:4). "In November 2002, Georgia and in April 2003 Azerbaijan officially became aspirants to NATO membership which entails working closely with NATO allies, particularly US and Turkey for reforming their security sector." (Cornell, McDermott, O'Malley, et al. 2004:26) Armenia was the last country who agreed on an IPAP and formally tied itself to NATO in 2005.

NATO's involvement in the South Caucasus is generally limited to broad projects, rather than regionally focused initiatives (German 2012:156). Moreover, as German (2012:155) argues NATO's very presence and its relationship with the three states led indirectly to 2008 Georgia- Russia conflict and, therefore, has undermined regional cooperation programmes.

As it was already mentioned major Euro-Atlantic players have left the task of mediation for conflict resolution to Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and "limited their involvement to political support for the so called OSCE Minsk Group process." (ibid: 158) the OSCE's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh began in 1992 with the initiation of an international conference in Minsk aiming at the provision of a permanent forum for peace negotiations. Nuriyev (2007:314) considers this a major breakthrough in peacemaking operations. However, for various reasons such as lack of "expertise and interests of Western democracies in the region" or limitation of Western democracies' efforts to "mediating between the sides and producing joint proposals" (ibid: 315) or Russia's biased involvement; the OSCE has not been able to resolve the conflict completely and has only managed to establish a degree of containment which does not seem long lasting.

2.4.4. Russia

During the first few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, for two main reasons, Russia did not have a clear policy towards the South Caucasus. First; Moscow was too busy dealing with the aftershocks of such sudden and total collapse of the empire in which Russia was the core state. Salvaging the economy from total collapse and preventing further disintegration was prior to other policies. Second was the Western orientation of statesmen such as the foreign minister Kozyrev who believed that Russia "should pay little attention to the former Soviet republics that were not inclined to cooperate with Moscow". (Smolansky 1995:204)

However, a policy shift towards 'Eurasianism' became evident since 1992. This view rejected Russia's subordinate approach towards the West and insisted that Moscow must pursue its interests "regardless of whether such course of action was acceptable to its Western partners or not…. This meant, in part, re-establishing and maintaining Russian influence over the former Soviet Republics." (ibid: 205) As a result of that policy shift and following its economic revival, Russia became the most significant outside player in the Caucasus "given its ability to project power on both sides of the Caucasus mountains and the array of Soviet-era political, economic, and social links between Russia and the Big Caucasus as a whole." (Mankoff 2012:8)

The discourse about the priority of Russia's 'near abroad' which had emerged since 1992, became an official policy from 1993. (Quoted by Buzan & Waever, 2003:404) Since then, Russia has taken an assertive approach towards its near abroad, including Transcaucasia, with repeated calls from Russian statesmen claiming those regions as part of Russia's strategic sphere of influence.

According to Nixey (2012:15), "Russia's 19th-century expansion into the South Caucasus and Central Asia remains an important legacy for its 21st-century foreign policy decision-makers. It sustains a belief that Russia has a natural right to pre-eminence in both regions: one 'legitimized' by tradition as well as present-day mutual interest." There are, however, several reasons for the importance of the South Caucasus for Russia, including:

1. The region is playing the role of the buffer zone between Russia and the Middle East.

2. It is neighbouring two other important regional players; Turkey and Iran.
3. It is the house to a considerable share of the Caspian energy resources, which can affect Russia's share of Europe's energy market.
4. Competing energy routes throughout the region which have been launched or planned following the Western penetration of the South Caucasus have major geopolitical consequences for Russia's interests and policies.

Map 2.2: The South Caucasus and its Neighbours[1]

Contrary to those scholars who believe that Russia still holds imperialistic tendencies; others like De Waal (2010) argue that "Russia is undertaking the painful transition to being a 'post-imperial power', which seeks to be the most powerful actor in its neighborhood but no longer wants to re-establish an empire, with all the colonial burdens accompanied by such status."

One of Putin's first actions immediately after his rise to power was "to order the revision and reformulation of national security and foreign policy concepts as well as the military doctrine of the Russian Federation that dated from the Yeltsin era. All three revised documents accentuated the Russian determination to facilitate the achievement

1 Melikyan, R. (2011) The New Strategy of U.S policy in the South Caucasus: Priorities and Outlines. Available at: <http://romanmelikyan.livejournal.com/3442.html> (Accessed on 10.09.2012)

of a multi-polar system of international relations despite outside attempts to hinder Russia's efforts in this direction." (Kelikitli 2008:74) In this context, Russia has two main goals in the South Caucasus. The first is to make sure that regional countries stay under its own sphere of influence. The second is to contain the growing Western influence in the region. In order to achieve these goals, Russia has undertaken several policies which the followings are amongst the most important ones:

- **Pipeline Diplomacy**

Energy has been the arena for Russia's intense rivalry with other players. Since most energy infrastructures in the region were remaining from the Soviet era, the majority of the oil and gas transport routes used to pass through Russia. Securing Russia's monopoly or at least some degree of control over the pipeline networks has been at the core of the country's energy strategy, which is in the context of a rather grander strategy of keeping its dominance over Europe's energy market.

The new pipeline networks (Like Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan, Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum and Turkmenistan–China pipelines or Nabucco) are a source of threat to Russia's interests as they have curbed Russia's monopoly over the energy transport routes and reduced its revenue from transit rights and limited Moscow's control over the routes and Europe's energy market.

To counter, or at least limit such threat, Russia has initiated competing pipeline projects such as Blue Stream and South Stream. "The main purpose of the South Stream is to prevent Nabucco to transport Caspian gas directly to European market bypassing Russia. Nabucco is the backbone of Europe's attempt for diversification of natural gas. If South Stream goes forward, Nabucco pipeline will lose its strategic as well as commercial importance and Russia will be able to maintain influence over the EU and continue using energy dependency as a political weapon against the West. At the same time, Russia will be able to increase its political control over the Caucasus and Central Asia as well." (Gogbrishvili 2010: 34)

It has been contemplated that casting doubts on the security of Western backed pipelines and, therefore, reducing the reliability of these routes has been one of Russia's goals in its 2008 war with Georgia. 'Security' and 'viability' are key issues for partners

of such large ventures. “If foreign investors and companies were to lose trust in Georgia as a safe transit nation, then the Nabucco project would be shelved.”

Map 2.3: South Caucasus Energy Transport Routs; Where Oil and Water Mix[1]

- **Managing Conflicts**

Russia has been actively involved in regional ethno-territorial conflicts either as a mediator or an ally for one side. According to Hill & Taspinar (2006:17) “leading policy- makers, ..., have sought to apply a policy paradigm of controlled instability in the South Caucasus through ‘peacekeeping’ and mediation in ethnic conflicts and through military footholds in the region. This policy is based on perpetuating the conflicts within predictable and usable parameters, frustrating their settlement without allowing their escalation. The primary goal is political leverage over Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, through Russian arbitration among the parties to those conflicts and through preservation of local protectorates in areas of Russian troop deployment.”

Nixey (2012:4-10) considers Moscow’s objection to deployment of international peace

1 Ivanova, N. (2009) *The Forgotten South Caucasus: Where Oil and Water Mix.* Available at: <http://www.circleofblue.org/waternews/2009/world/the-forgotten-south-caucasus-where-oil-and-water-mix/> (Accessed on 20.06.2012)

keeping forces and adjustments in the make-up of the Minsk group as evidences which prove that Russia's interest to play a central role in the management of Nagorno-Kharabakh conflict is more the matter of gaining control rather than genuine interest in the resolution of the conflict. As a result, while there has not been considerable development in the resolution of the conflict, one of the most significant achievements of the process in the past few years has been the consequent rapprochement between Moscow and Baku, and the resulting growth of Russian influence over Azerbaijan.

- **Managing Alliances**

Moscow's top policy for countering Western sponsored regional alliances like GUAM and OSCE is to manage new regional alliances that would help Russia to keep the former Soviet republics under its own sphere of influence. This includes development of organisations such as Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). Using different means, Moscow has managed to persuade all three South Caucasus countries to join CIS with Georgia being the last one to join in 1993. However, according to German (2012:104) since the former Soviet republics were not prepared for ceding any of their sovereignty into any central authority, the CIS has failed to develop into an effective regional organisation. As a result, while the CIS has been "useful as a forum for certain kinds of interaction and association", but it lacks dynamism. (Nation 2007: 20) Nevertheless, the CIS became the origin of Eurasian Economic Community in 2001and is facilitating trade exchange and customs among the CIS countries.

Also in 2002 CSTO emerged from within the CIS and "since then it has striven to assert its legitimacy as a regional security forum." (ibid) However as Nation (2007:28) explains; "there is little evidence of any kind of effective security interaction relevant to the needs of the region as a whole. Polarization along a fault line defined by great power priorities not related intrinsically to the interests of the Caucasus itself defines patterns of association in the security realm."

According to Hill and Taspinar (2006:12) "insisting on special arrangements (like the NATO-Russian Council) … or deliberately undermining institutions (through, for example, its efforts to block the budget of the OSCE in 2005)"; are among alternative

methods that Russia has employed to achieve its goal of weakening Western sponsored alliances. So far it seems that despite incompetency of the Russian led organisations; Moscow has achieved this goal - at least partially, as the 2008 war diminished the Western leaning GUAM group. Moreover, "the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, of which all three South Caucasus states plus Russia are also members, has been weakened by Russia because of disagreements over the institution's democracy promotion agenda."(Nixey 2012:7)

- **Using Economic Leverages**

One of the Soviet era legacies is the interwoven, asymmetric economic relation between Russia and South Caucasus countries. "Russia remains the principal economic power in the region and many key enterprises are in the hands of Russian investors, including critical infrastructure such as mobile telephone communications and energy." (German 2012:98)

In an effort to gain further political leverage over its neighbours, Moscow has tried to find a strong foothold in their economies through major investments or 'equity for debt' deals. The latter is particularly true with regard to Armenia. During Kucharian's presidency, many state owned strategic assets were transferred to Russia in return to writing off the country's debt, creating concerns about Armenia's sovereignty. Georgia is also over relying on Russian capital, not to the same degree but enough to cause concerns. "There are numerous examples of Georgian companies, particularly within strategic sectors, passing under Russian control." (Geraman 2012:100) This phenomenon has continued even after the 2008 war.

Owing to its natural resources which have brought economic prosperity, Baku is less tangled in Moscow's grip than its two neighbours. Russia only controls the Baku–Novorossiysk oil pipeline and has some shares in electricity and aluminium industries. (Nixey 2012:5) However, Nixey (ibid: 6) believes that "Russia's greatest economic lever with Azerbaijan and Armenia is in the form of migrant workers and their remittances. For example, Azerbaijan has approximately two million citizens working in Russia, sending $2.5 billion back home – 10% of GDP. The Azeri population resident in Russia constitutes a particularly strong form of leverage insofar as Russia has

threatened to deport illegal workers and impose a visa regime."

2.4.5. Turkey

One of the main advantages of the independence of the former Soviet republics for Turkey was to create a buffer zone between the Russian Federation and Turkey, relieveing Ankara from the security challenges of sharing land borders with the Russian Federation.

Turkey's initial calculation was that if these republics were empowered to a degree that they could "resist outside pressure and interventions, then Turkey's historical, political, economic and strategic regional pull would gently push them towards Ankara's orbit". (Aydin 2012:174) The incentives were strong enough to encourage Ankara to officially recognise the independence of these republics even before US or other Western powers do so and to support these countries in their process towards gaining political stability.

The emergence of Turkey as NATO's new front line state with obvious Westward orientation resulted in the assumption by both Turkey and the West particularly the US, that Ankara would be able to fill in the vacuum created by the collapse of the Soviet Union and play as the new regional superpower who will help in containing Russia to rise and spread its influence in the region, and will pave the way for the infiltration of the West in the region. It could also help in preventing Iran from drawing Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union under its own influence and promoting Islamic extremism. As a result, there was a widespread support and propaganda by the West towards the 'Turkish model' of governance as opposed to the Iranian model. Therefore at least for the first decade after the end of the Cold War, Turkey was trying to balance the challenging task of an influential regional player while proving its functionality to the West both as a NATO ally and as a prospective EU member.

While quite happy for the Turkey to play a role in containing Iran's influence and development of Islamic extremism in the region; Russia has been otherwise very sensitive towards Turkey's plans. Ankara became eventually aware that "it needs to accommodate Russian interests at least until it has consolidated its own influence." (Goskel 2011:20)

Although the establishment of the Agency for Turkish Cooperation and Development in 1992 provided an instrument for economic cooperation between Turkey and Caucasus countries (Steinbach 2012: 155); since Turkey did not have the necessary capabilities required for replacing the Soviet Union, less than a decade after the end of the Cold War, while Ankara had failed to leave up to its ambitious rhetorics and the expectations of the newly independent republics, Russia's leverage in the region had prevailed.

Faced with regional realities and international distaste, Turkey's initial fervours for fulfilling its pan Turkic aspirations within the post Soviet space faded away considerably and was replaced with more economic and security dimensions. Nonetheless, Ankara has never quitted playing the role of big brother for Azerbaijan. An obvious and ongoing example is Turkey's border closure with Armenia following the occupation of Azeri territories by Yerevan despite all diplomatic and economic restrictions that it has brought for Ankara to play the role of an influential regional power.

Turkey has been actively engaged with at least one other important regional geopolitical development, which is the pipeline diplomacy. Since the early 1990s when the policy of curtailing Russia's monopoly over the pipeline routes was undertaken by Western players, Turkey has continuously been one of the most active partners in various pipeline development projects. "The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzerum (BTE) gas pipeline, as well as the Blue Stream natural gas pipeline from Russia and all the other planned connections (Kazakh oil to BTC, Turkmen, Iranian and Iraqi gas, further Russian gas through Blue Stream II, and connecting all these to Europe through Nabucco) are aimed at making Turkey a regional energy player." (Aydin 2012:175) Turkey's involvement in pipeline diplomacy has evolved throughout the two decades after the end of the Cold War. While Ankara was initially happy to be a partner in these projects, and then content for the role of energy corridor; under the AKP government the aspiration for becoming a regional energy hub has become a pillar in Turkey's foreign policy.

The pipelines have further strengthened Ankara- Baku link and created a trilateral alliance involving these two as well as Tbilisi. The unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has resulted in the exclusion of Armenia from pipeline projects, despite the

potential to provide the shortest route from Azerbaijan to Mediterranean. With US's insistence on boycotting Iran from any pipeline route, the only left option is Georgia. The pipeline based cooperation has resulted in Turkey becoming both Azerbaijan and Georgia's biggest trade partner.

The rise of the AKP to power in 2002 offered an opportunity for Ankara to review its foreign policy. The articulation of priorities in this reviwed foreign policy included stability in the neighbourhood, zero-problems and increased economic ties with neighbours (trade and investment), becoming an energy hub between Eurasia and Europe, and bridging the global religious/civilisational divide. (Goskel 2011:17) Turkey's failed attempt for EU membership and the 2003 Iraq war provided the opportunity for Ankara to act more independent of the West, as it had fewer incentives for appeasing the West.

However, it was the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict which convinced Turkey to assume a more proactive and constructive role in the region, due to concerns over exclusion from major regional geopolitical developments, which could in turn affect its economic interests particularly as a transport and energy hub. Hence, "Erdogan resurrected an idea – earlier proposed by his predecessor, Süleyman Demirel – of a Caucasus Peace and Stability Platform (CPSP)." (Oskanian 2011:24) "The CSCP maintained the channels of communication and dialogue open with Russia and has been a good tactical move to overcome tensions between Georgia and Russia." (Punsmann 2010:3)

An important characteristic of the CSCP initiative was to focus on regional players and exclude the EU and US. However, according to Gorgulu & Krikorian (2012:4) the exclusion of Western players "was of particular concern to Georgia, which has close relations with both parties." Moreover, Turkey was not seen as an objective player as it is closer to Azerbaijan than Armenia. "In the end, the platform was rejected by both Azerbaijan and Georgia, while Armenia did not directly oppose the initiative." (ibid)

Summing up Turkey's engagement with the South Caucasus it can be concluded that although Ankara has not yet succeeded in realising the ambition "for a leading role in a region extending from the Adriatic Sea to China, including the Central Asian republics, the Caucasus, the region around the Black Sea and the Balkans" (Goskel 2011:5 quoted from Freddy De Pauw) but has taken some steps in this direction by "endeavor to solve problems

with neighbors, including Armenia, to turn Turkey into an energy hub, to deepen collaboration with Russia, to increase the prominence of Islam as a soft power instrument, and to position itself as a leader in the Middle East defined Turkey's geopolitical priorities and caused realignments in the Caucasus." (ibid)

2.5. Conclusions

The emergence of new geopolitical entities and realities in the area which used to be an integral part of the Soviet Union was one of the consequences of the collapse of that superpower and the end of the Cold War.

In addition to security challenges stemming from the geostrategic circumstances of the South Caucasus, the region became crowded by numerous regional and outside players each seeking their own interests and undertaking policies to ensure those interests. Rivalries and competition of various players for influence and power, which has been particularly evident with regard to the Caspian energy resources and transport routes resulted in a situation branded by some analysts as the 'new Great Game".

'Balance of power' and 'Security' are the two concepts which can summarise US goals generally in Eurasia and particularly in the South Caucasus. Securing the position of the 'sole superpower' by spreading its sphere of influence in the region and preventing the rise of any regional power or strong adversary who can challenge such status has been the primary objective of US regional policies since the end of the Cold War. Security of 'energy resources', routes and markets are another part of this goal.

Resorting to Pipeline diplomacy, initiatives for integrating the former Soviet republics in Western oriented organisations and financial aids have been among the most important instruments employed by the United States to achieve its goals and establish a comfortable influential position in the politics and economies of the region. However, the overall scope of US interest in the region will depend very much on future strategic significance of the region for US policies; including developments in Iran-US relations.

EU's main goals in the region have been:

1- Diversification of energy supplies using Caspian energy resources as well as

diversification and increased security of transport routs both for energy and goods.

2- Development of security and stability in the region through political and economic development

To achieve these goals EU has gradually increased involvement in the region through joint ventures and multifaceted economic and political development programmes. However, while various initiatives have increased EU's involvement in the South Caucasus; they "do not yet constitute a coherent policy…… rather serve as building blocks of an emerging EU vision for the region." (Huseynov 2009:51)

The goal of NATO, as the security and foreign policy arm of the US and EU has been improvement of security and stability in the region to ensure the interests of its members. To achieve this goal, the organisation has executed various flexible initiatives aiming to develop security cooperation with regional countries with the prospect of NATO membership which has been particularly attractive for Georgia.

Russia has employed different means from competing organisations and pipeline networks, to manipulating conflicts and economies to balance its power against US by keeping regional countries under its own sphere of influence, and containing the increasing influence of the West. Where none of those means has achieved the expected result, Moscow has used its economic leverage or military might to get what it wants. The 2008 war with Georgia was a reminder for other players particularly the United States and NATO that Russia would not let any other player get the upper hand in its strategic sphere of influence and would not tolerate zero-sum games.

Despite its initial quest for filling the vacuum left by the Soviet's collapse, Turkey fell short of its ambitions and contented to being a major regional power. Nevertheless, through active participation in major pipeline network initiatives, Turkey has not only taken steps in becoming the regional energy hub but has also established close relations with both Azerbaijan and Georgia. Still, Ankara needs to have some degree of relations with all countries of the South Caucasus to be able to play the role of an influential regional player. The fact that Turkey's relations with Armenia have become the hostage of Nagorno- Karabakh conflict has reduced Ankara's influence and manoeuvring capacity.

Further polarisation of the region in the wake of rivalries for power and influence is one

of the important post Cold War developments in the South Caucasus, with Armenia continuing to be Russia's loyal ally and Georgia's considerable tilt towards the West and its enthusiasm for integration into Euro- Atlantic alliances which has further exacerbated Russia's sensitivities towards Western players. However, the 2008 Georgia-Russia war altered the geopolitical balance of the region and forced other players to recalculate their strategies.

With the exception of Iran, the goals and policies of major players in the South Caucasus was examined in this chapter. The next chapter will review Iran's foreign policy as an introduction for the consequent chapter which will examine Iran's regional policy in both the Middle East and South Caucasus.

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CHAPTER THREE

IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

3.1. Introduction

Since one country's relation with a region or a particular country is a part of a greater picture, in order to achieve a more accurate analysis of such relations, providing an understanding of the context in which the relations are shaped is an imperative. As foreign policy "constitutes an attempt to design, manage and control the foreign relations of national societies" (Webber & Smith 2002:9) then, it is a crucial part of the context in which the relations are shaped along with the overall international system and regional dynamics.

Keeping the above logic in mind, this chapter will review Iran's foreign policy particularly after the revolution in the context of the Cold War and Post Cold war eras. The chapter would introduce fundamentals of Iran's foreign policy and its journey from a revolutionary ideological towards a more pragmatic approach based on geopolitical realities.

The chapter will examine the evolution of the "neither East, nor West" arch policy throughout the history of the Islamic Republic. It will demonstrate how the early revolutionary goals of the Islamic Republic such as the 'establishment of a new international system' and the 'export of the revolution' resulted in the isolation of Iran. It will discuss how by the late 1980s Iran's revolutionary leaders came to realise the necessity for a change of their modus operandi to survive and will review their efforts for establishing relations with different countries.

The chapter will then provide an account of the persuasion of a more pragmatic approach which sought to reintegrate Iran into the international community by Presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami. The reaction of the international community towards Iran's conciliatory efforts and the consequences of those reactions for Iran's domestic development including the emergence of a new breed of revolutionary elites branded as 'Iran's neoconservatives' will also be portrayed in this chapter, together with the analysis of the foreign policy approach undertaken by these new comers and its consequences for Iran's international status and relations.

Finally the chapter will arrive to the most recent period of Iran's foreign policy which has undertaken steps in search for a degree of rapprochement with great powers that would be instrumental in breaking its increasing international isolation and mounting all round

security threats.

3.2. Historical Review of Iran's Foreign Policy in the Cold War Era

The rise of Pahlavi into power, first and foremost provided the country with a sense of national unity after disastrous developments which had almost cost Iran its sovereignty; as the country was carved up between Russia and Britain due to its geopolitical importance in their 'Great Game'. With a collapsed economy and crisis ridden polity, Iran was faced with the challenges of the World War II, while belligerent states observed no respect for the country's official neutral stance.

This section will briefly review Iran's foreign policy during the Pahlavi era and then the post revolution developments in more details.

3.2.1. Imperial Iran's Foreign Policy: Outlines

One of the most pressing issues facing any Iranian government in the first half of the 20th century was to safeguard the country's sovereignty. This critical task proved to be extremely difficult due to Iran's immediate proximity of a superpower with proven and explicit expansionist tendencies. As Fuller (1991:137) explains, "no other state has permanently seized from Iran as much Persian territory- lands that were under long term historical Persian cultural domination- as has Russia."

After consolidation of his power, Reza Shah tried to redeem the country from further devastation as it was left paralyzed and at the mercy of the great powers that had turned it into their battleground during the World War I. He developed Iran into a modern nation-state which "for the first time in well over a hundred years, … was now largely master of its own fate, with an independent foreign policy and national army to enforce the will of the state…." (ibid: 148) However, at the outbreak of the World War II; Iran's neutral stand was once again undermined by the great powers particularly Britain who found Iran's vast oil resources and strategic location critical for logistical purposes. With the country under virtual occupation of the Allied forces, Reza Shah was forced to abdicate the throne in favour of his son Mohammad Reza.

The young Shah was still in his mid twenties when the country was challenged by the crisis of 1945-6, in which Russia initially refused to withdraw the Red Army out of Iran following the end of the World War II. Under pressure from the West and following three UN resolutions, the troops were eventually pulled out; but not before provoking the Azarbaijan–Mahabad crisis[1] and receiving major oil concessions from Tehran. However, with the United State's support, the Iranian parliament refused to ratify the agreement on the concession. While the crisis became one of the important episodes which mounted to the development of the Cold War; it helped Iran to find an ally which seemed to provide support for resisting the pressures of other great powers.

Tehran's foreign policy which was essentially defensive between 1953-1963; evolved from initial passive dependency and then defensiveness to that of self confidence and assertiveness, resulted mainly from internal stability and economic growth. (Nyrop 1978:226) This evolvement together with Iran's role as a major energy supplier for the West became valuable assets for establishing cordial diplomatic relations with over 120 countries and playing an active role in international organisations.

Up until the start of the revolution, Iran was receiving economic and military assistance from both superpowers but was generally considered as an American ally. While many scholars believe that in trying to limit threats and ensure Iran's security, Shah was cleverly playing one superpower against the other; in fact fearful of the "Soviet power and intentions …. Mohammad Reza Shah violated the basically non aligned orientation of his father to move further towards alliance with the West." (Fuller 1991:154)

3.2.2 Iran's Post Revolution Foreign Policy

In order to have a better understanding of Iran's contemporary foreign policy, particular attention needs to be paid to important invariable determinants. A combination of various geopolitical factors has continuously influenced Iranian foreign policy. "Situated on an ancient landmass empire on the Eurasian crossroads, the modern state's regional reach extends to much of western Asia." (Ehteshami 2014: 263) Straddled between two important energy hubs of the world in the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf; Iran plays as a land bridge providing the only link between South Asia and the Mediterranean Sea. While this

[1] Will be discussed in chapter 4

geography has “facilitated the spread of the Persian influence in Asia” (ibid) the importance of geostrategic location has been one of the main factors which has turned the country into the battlefield of rival tribes and dynasties in ancient times, and occupation or outright interference of great powers in modern history.

Hence, history has left significant marks on the Iranians’ collective identity. There is on the one hand the glorious legacy of the Persian Empire, which ruled considerable parts of the world for centuries; while the combination of rich Persian and Islamic cultural and civilisation heritage is the everlasting source of national pride and self respect for Iranians. On the other hand the aforementioned “history of subjection to outside conquerors and dominant powers” has created “cultural features that foreigners find so baffling”. (Keddie & Gasiorowski 1990:3) Those bitter experiences have resulted in a strong sense of national resistance to any kind of foreign interference and sensitivity towards sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence.

This collective national identity resulting from Iran’s particular geopolitics and history, has a determining influence on foreign policy decision makings irrespective of the state’s ideological background. It is also an important parameter for the public to evaluate the performance of their politicians. Iranians strive to see themselves once again in a superior position corresponding to their glorious history and culture. The effects of this psyche resurfaced in years prior to the 1979’s revolution and played an important role in mobilizing the public against the Pahlavi monarchy.

3.2.2.1. From Revolution to the End of War (1979-1989)

Despite his determined efforts for turning Iran into the most modern yet formidable state in the region; Shah’s de facto alliance with the United States and the latter’s support of his dictatorship had convinced the public that “the shah's regime reflected American interests as faithfully as Vidkun Quisling's puppet government in Norway reflected the interests of Nazi Germany in World War II.” (Cottam 1979:4) This in turn was interpreted “as a sign of Iran’s complete subservience to the United States and its loss of independence…which developed into a profound source of alienation.”(Ramazani 1989:203)

The more religious sectors of the society also felt that their traditional values have been threatened by Shah's secular efforts, which limited religious influence, not only by imposing restrictions on Islamic manifestations, but also through ever increasing import of Western culture mainly via media and trade. There were, of course, many other reasons which can be considered as roots of the 1978-9 Islamic revolution but are less relevant to this study.

Revolutionary leaders reinterpreted Iranians' shared national identity, their friends and foes, by focusing on the aforementioned sensitivities and set a different perspective for Iran's place in the world throughout the course of the revolution and immediately after the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The country took a turn from the secularisation path pioneered by Pahlavis, towards a more religious identity, in which the 'Iranian' dimension of national identity came second to its 'Islamic' dimension.

As Wendt (199:337) has put it, "structural change, or cultural change, occurs when actors redefine who they are and what they want." The Islamic Republic brought with itself a new set of religious based norms and identity which although was not entirely exclusive of the elements of the 'Iranian identity', but certainly had a different world view, values and priorities which resulted in the complete overhaul of Iran's foreign policy amid the revolutionary atmosphere. "For an Islamic regime, state borders within the international system are artificial constructs, created largely by the former colonial or imperialist powers of Europe. Hence they lack legitimacy." (Karabell1996:81) As Moshirzadeh (2006: 22) explains, from an Islamic point of view, the international system does not consist of several units as nation states, but is comprised of two camps, '*Daar ul Islam'* and '*Dar ul Kufr'*. In such system, all Muslims are part of one great entity called '*Ummah*'. As emphasised in many statements by the leaders of the Islamic republic, they saw it as their duty to unify the *Ummah* under the umbrella of Islam. While Shiism has been Iran's official religious sect since the Constitutional Revolution; the above mentioned view provided a plural approach towards the Muslims in the Islamic Republic's foreign policy. An examination of Ayatullah Khomeini's correspondences and speeches reveals the importance he attached to 'unity' throughout his political life, and his firm belief that unity has been the secret for the victory of the revolution.[1]

Expanding on another Islamic rule called "the rejection of authority *(ghāedeye Nafye Sabil*)"; which means that under no circumstances should non Muslims be allowed to have

[1] Sahifeye Nur, collection of Ayatullah Khomeini's correspondences and speeches

authority over Muslims, Moshirzadeh (2006:23-24) explains how resisting superpowers' hegemony in the international system received a priority in Iran's foreign policy agenda. Karabell (1996:85) considers Iran's persistent negation of Israel's legitimacy and refusal to recognise it as a local manifestation of that belief.

To this date the above mentioned principles which conveniently also fulfil Iranians' national sensitivities towards their country's sovereignty and independence, have been the cornerstone of Iran's foreign policy. These principles and notions were crystallised in one slogan taken from Ayatollah Khomeini's speech, 'neither East, nor West, only the Islamic Republic'. Although different groups of elites have had different interpretations about the limits of the above statement, the resulting interactions have at times contradicted the norms of neorealist international relations. According to neorealist, the international system is the most influential element in defining and formulating the state's behaviour in the international arena. Haji Yousefi (2008:63) believes that since at the time of the Islamic revolution, the international system was still bipolar; Iran's main foreign policy framework should not have changed. He explains that despite the complete transformation of Iran's political system, according to the logics of bipolar world and the Cold War era, Iran should have still allied with one of the superpowers. However, Iran's new foreign policy was based on the assumption that the Cold War and bipolar system could not have a serious effect on the country's foreign policy. (ibid: 64) Failing to see any logic in making an alliance with either superpowers Tehran sought to keep a distance from both.

Determined to transform the existing international system by establishing Islamic norms, Iran refused to commit to the status quo, and adopted a revisionist approach, urging developing, and particularly Muslim countries to help in reshaping the world order. The export of the revolution became, therefore, a top agenda for revolutionary idealists. The first task set for the post revolution provisional government was termination of the "subservient de facto alliance of the Shah's regime with the United States" (Ramazani 1989:204) and placing the bilateral relations on a plane of equality. Bazargan, the provisional prime minister adapted a non-aligned or in his own word "negative equilibrium" policy, an accommodationist approach, which "sought to maintain Iran's independence within the context of the existing international system on nation state." (Ramazani 1989:206)

However, for revolutionary extremists who called themselves *'Maktabis',* or *'follower's of*

the Imam path' (pairove khate Emam), the export of the revolution in order to establish an Islamic world order took priority to national interests, hence completely ignorant towards the imperatives of the existing international order or necessary arrangements for achieving their goals, they become frustrated with the provisional government's soft approach towards the West and eventually took the matters in their own hands. Iranian's deep anger and hatred resulted from the 1953 coup against democratically elected prime minister of Iran …. and US government ardent support of the Shah's… dictatorship for the next 25 years" (Hornberger 2005), was fused with genuine fear that the US government would repeat that story when the United States decided to receive Shah. (ibid) This encouraged a group of students to capture the US embassy on 4th November 1979 and take hostage its diplomats for 444 days with the full support of Ayatollah Khomeini[1], though the provisional prime minister resigned in objection to the events. The event provided a sound basis for isolation of Iran and a good justification for the US to even attack the country. Many Iranian elites believe that throughout the next decades Iran has been paying the price for the hostage taking.

With resignation of the provisional government, the *Maktabi's* era marked with radicalism and emphasis on relations with the nations started. The state attached high importance to relations with various movements, providing cultural, economic, political and sometimes military support for freedom movements. (Izadi 2010:23) Ehteshami (2002:297) calls this period as the "consolidation stage..... characterised by the power struggle between liberals and more radical forces (*Maktabis*), gradual entrenchment of clergies in power and rejection of Middle East status quo", resulting in "the emergence of post Pahlavi foreign policy and domination of *Maktabis* in the government machinery by the end of the this period."(ibid)

Iran's domestic instabilities, its international isolation and the hostility of regional countries rooted in the sense of threat from Iran's intention for the export of the revolution encouraged Saddam to seize its neighbour's time of weakness for settling old border disputes through military confrontation. "Iraq claimed territories inhabited by Arabs (the Southwestern oil-producing province of Iran called Khouzestan), as well as Iraq's right over

[1] "The United States expects our young people to sit and watch while they take Shah over there for conspiracy and have another base for conspiracy in here." Speech delivered on 5th Nov 1979. Available at: <http://www.jamaran.ir/fa/NewsContent-id_12991.aspx> (Accessed on 27.06.2015)

Shatt el-Arab (Arvandroud)..... Iraq claimed the 200-kilometer channel up to the Iranian shore as its territory, while Iran insisted that the thalweg--a line running down the middle of the waterway--negotiated last in 1975, was the official border."[1]

To win the international support, Saddam justified the invasion on the basis of the threat posed by Iran's efforts to export the revolution. Adib Moghaddam (2007:1999) emphasizes that "Saddam Hussein was convinced that military confrontation with Iran would be tolerated because the international community did not suggest otherwise; external signals were interpreted as green light-*if not carte blanche*- by government elites." Reviving the old Arab-Ajam animosity, Saddam managed to have the support and sympathy of most Arab countries. The war increased Iran's isolation leaving it with no friends but Syria, Libya and Lebanon. Tehran's refusal to settle the hostage crisis on time resulted in the UN Security Council's refusal to take the prompt action against Iraq's invasion, although it was in clear violation of the UN charter. (Halliday 2011:5)

In addition to Iran's anti Western foreign policy, Maziar (1999:20) has suggested further reasons for prolonged isolation of Iran, including: "the role of some Western powers, specially France, in supplying the Iraqi war effort and providing sanctuary for IRI's exiled opposition figures"; as well as "the Regan administration's emphasis on restoring America's prestige abroad and combating terrorism with force." However, Ehteshami (2002:297) considers "the pro-Iraq line of the moderate Arab forces, who had during this period been totally alienated by Tehran" as the main element of Iran's isolation.

The Iran-Iraq war was a clear manifestation of unfairness and hypocracy of power politics, where all great powers rallied behind Saddam Hussain, turning a blind eye not only on the act of invasion itself but also on his inhumane atrocities. Even Iran's official complaints against war crimes such as the use of chemical weapons by Iraq were ignored for several years.[2]

Moreover, the United State's policy of neutrality and containment aiming at restraining both countries gradually became Iran's containment policy. The State Department's

[1] *Iran- Iraq War (1980-1988).* Available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/iran-iraq.htm> (Accessed on 20. 04.2011)

[2] "Complaints from the Iranian side were made as early as November 1980. Yet it took the international community, including the most prominent none governmental organizations (NGOs) at least three and half years to investigate the allegations systematically. The Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute (SIPRI) testified to that in May 1984." (Adib Moghaddam 2007:104)

Information Memorandum of October 1983 officially declared an end to containment policy towards Iraq except for arms sales.

This total ignorance and silence towards Saddam's atrocities by the international community in general and the great powers in particular became a major building block of Iran's wall of distrust which exacerbated its siege mentality, and became the basis for overemphasis on self reliance.[1]

As the provision of arms and other war necessities became more difficult and the economic stagnation resulted from the war, sanctions and isolation, taught some tough reality lessons to Iran's leaders; the urgency for breaking the isolation was realised; as "a policy of unrelenting hostility and pressure ..... was hampering Iran's ability to sustain itself at home while fighting a total war." (Sick 1987:702)

Ayatollah Khomeini's belief that the preservation of the system (state) is the most essential duty[2] allowed any policy adjustment necessary for survival. In October 1982, his approval "marked a fundamental shift, not in Tehran's foreign policy goals but in its strategy for pursuing those goals." (ibid) With his support, Iran's foreign policy of open doors was launched on July 1984 by President Khamenei who explained the policy as involving "rational, sound and healthy relations with all countries" and aimed at serving Iran's interest and ideology. (Ramazani 1989: 212) The new conciliatory foreign policy did not overrule the principle of 'neither East, nor West'. It simply meant that "in pursuing its overriding goals of the Islamic revolution and Iranian independence, Iran must reject both Eastern and Western *domination* of any kind."(ibid) In practice, desperation for the supply of arms pushed the door as wide open as a gate. The 'Irangate' or 'Iran-Contra' involved the purchase of arms from the US, through Israel, in such high prices that the gained profit was used by Washington to finance the Contras. Irangate is an example of the victory of pragmatism over ideology in Iran's foreign policy approach.

The new approach started paying off in other fronts as well, including improvement of relations with the Soviet Union which had gradually deteriorated particularly following the arrest and prosecution of the communist Tudeh party members. The Soviet Union's initial

[1] President Obmama made a point about this in his 14.07.2015 interview with the NewYork Times "We have had in the past supported Saddam Hussein when we knew he used chemical weapons in the war between Iran and Iraq, and so, as a consequence, they have their own security concerns, their own narrative." Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/15/opinion/thomas-friedman-obama-makes-his-case-on-iran-nuclear-deal.html> (Accesssed on 17.07.2015)

[2] Hefze nezām az aujabe vājebat ast.

welcoming reaction to the Islamic revolution based on calculating the anti imperialist nature of the new government in Tehran as a potential instrument for securing Soviet's interests in the region proved to be unsubstantiated both due to the Soviet's dark history with Iran and its invasion of Afghanistan. Moreover, "the crusade to export the revolution …., aggravated the difficulties in Iran's relations with the Soviet Union. The ethnic and geographic proximity of the two countries fuelled the USSR concern about the possible contagion of the Islamic revolution among Soviet Muslims." (Ramazani 1989:210) However, following the 1985 visit of Iran's economic delegation to the Soviet Union, slow but steady development of relations was resumed.

In response to Iran's efforts to improve relations with its neighbours, Arab countries of the region, while maintaining their civil relations with Tehran and "accommodating Iranian policy on oil and other issues …., without harm to their own basic interests", also "reaffirmed their support for Iraq" as a realistic approach to dangers of power imbalance in favour of Iran. (Sick 1987:713)

Eventually, following continuous defeats in war fronts which resulted in great number of casualties, considerable loss of equipments, and lives, and increased probability of direct US involvement in the war, Iran accepted the UN 598 resolution in July 1998.

The end of the war opened new prospects for Iran's foreign policy. Nevertheless, just when the hopes for normal relations with the West were booming, the death decree against Rushdie proved that striking a balance between ideology and pragmatism was more difficult than initially perceived. In objection to the decree, several West European governments reduced their diplomatic mission in Tehran which consequently hindered normalisation of relations with the West.

3.2.2.2. Rafsanjani's Administration (1989-1997)

The Rushdie case was still a source of tension with the world, when Ayatollah Khomeini passed away in June 1989; opening a completely new chapter in the history of Iran. "A major reason why such an eclectic collection of revolutionaries was able to operate together effectively was the charismatic presence of …., Ayatollah Khomeini. (He) was … the essential steady hand on the tiller, and when he died a potentially dangerous vacuum was left at the heart of Islamic Republic." (Ansari 2007:12)

However, the vacuum was quickly filled by the complementary role played by then the president Khamenei and the head of parliament Hashemi Rafsanjani. Iran's political scene was reconfigured with Khamenei assuming the role of the leader and Rafsanjani becoming the president. Despite their differences on various issues including foreign policy,[1] the two mostly demonstrated a united front and managed a smooth transition to the post Khomeini era.

Though a surprisingly fortunate consequence of Iran's sanctions was that the country emerged out of 8 years long war "with negligible financial debt" (ibid), there was still an urgent need for foreign investments and loans if the war torn country was going to be back on development track. Hence the 'era of reconstruction' started, with Rafsanjani at the helm pledging "to rebuild the nation's war-ravaged economy and avoid a new war"[2] in his oath to the office, while emphasising that political independence is not possible without economic independence. His economic policies required reintegration of Iran into the international system through reconciliatory strategies, for which he took immediate action.

While the economy was a top priority in this period, the main approach was to avoid making enemies and increase efforts in improving Iran's reputation in the international arena. Within three years at his helm, the country reportedly gained an 8.3% growth in GNP without any foreign investments,[3] and made a strong return to the international oil market.

The end of hostility with Iraq and the Soviet's withdrawal from Afghanistan drew Iran closer to its northern neighbour. Shevardnadze's direct talk with Ayatollah Khomeini and the latter's emphasis on improving relations with the Soviet Union in order to counter Western threats had already paved Rafsanjani's way to improve bilateral relations with Moscow. A series of agreements reached in 1989 established the foundation for future Russian-Iranian relations. The agreements included a "multibillion dollar trade and military cooperation" (Ehteshami

[1] For example, look at: Teimourian, H. (1989) report in the Times (London): *Rafsanjani's delay in taking helm; Iran*, claiming that "The Ayatollah had demanded to be allowed to appoint 'an ambassador at large' to represent him at international gatherings, but Hojatoleslam Rafsanjani had resisted, apparently fearing that the Ayatollah might acquire the power to make foreign policy independent of Government." "Another sign of the power struggle in Tehran coming … was a militant speech by Ayatollah Khamenei on the subject of talks with US on the Western hostages in Lebanon.Denouncing Hojatoleslam Rafsanjani's advocacy of such talks in the strongest terms except in name, the new nominal leader of Iran said that no one in the country would negotiate with the United States unless Washington ended 'its deceitful policies and its support for Israel."Available at: <http://www.nexis.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/search/newssubmitForm.do> (Accessed on 15.07.2015).

[2] Xinhua General News Service, (1989) *Iranian President Pledges Reconstruction, Peace*. Available at: <http://www.nexis.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/search/newssubmitForm.do> (Accessed on 13.07.2015)

[3] Xinhua General News Service, 24 August 1992, *Iran Achieves 8.3 Percent Growth Rate in gnp.* Available at: <http://www.nexis.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/search/newssubmitForm.do> (Accessed on 13.07.2015)

2002:299) between the two countries.

Wary of formation of Arab alliances in the region which "could only lead to the marginalization of Iran's regional role" (ibid: 300); efforts were made to improve relations with Pakistan and Turkey "who were also the founding members of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)". (ibid)

In summer 1990 diplomatic relations with Iraq were resumed. Iran's neutral stand in the first Gulf War, "which was in sharp contrast to its interventionist and adventurist policies of the post revolution period" (ibid:301) paved the way for improving relations with regional and trans regional countries, including the resumption of diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, the Gulf war brought with itself a dilemma that Iran had profoundly tried to avoid. The Western military forces which had heavily moved into the Persian Gulf in the aftermath of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait were to stay there based on security pacts signed with some GCC countries.

While Tehran was looking forward to a more fortunate future in the international arena, the turn of events, and in particular, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, raised new serious challenges for the country.

3.3. Post Cold War Era

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War marked a new era in the international arena. The most significant development in macro level was the transformation of the international system, which ultimately affected regional orders. It is, therefore, necessary to have a brief review of the systemic changes following the collapse of the Soviet Union, before examining Iran's foreign policy in the post Cold War era.

3.3.1. Systemic Changes

In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was much contemplation about 'the new international order' among scholars and politicians alike. For many, particularly in the West, a unipolar system with the United States as the sole superpower was the obvious option, "something for which it (US) was culturally and institutionally unprepared." (Friedman 2012) Nonetheless, the US posture and behaviour

in those years was a confirmation of that expectation, as the 1992 'Draft Defence Planning Guidance' asserted that "other powers must recognize that World order is ultimately backed by US". (Quoted by Hunter 2010:5) However, further international developments, many initiated or advanced by Washington's actions prevented the full establishment of US hegemony and cast serious doubts about "America's ability to perform as the global hegemon". (ibid: 4) Since then, rapid world developments have prevented any particular international system to be established and stabilised.

After discussing characteristics of different international systems, Huntington (1999:35) concludes that the post-Soviet system is *Uni-Multi polar*. In this system, there is only one superpower, but needs the cooperation of some great powers in tackling major international problems. Hunter (2010:4) believes that "the post Soviet international system is still evolving and the outcome of this evolution is hard to predict." Vaezi (2011:36) on the other hand believes that despite all the efforts for establishing an absolute unipolar system, neither that nor any new sustainable and stable structure could have taken shape and the international arena is in a "transitional state". Despite this transitional status, there is no doubt that since the end of the Cold War, the balance of power in any respect has still been in favour of the West, with the East lagging far behind. (Hunter 2010:4)

As Hunter (2010:xi) has explained "less powerful states are far worse off within a system either dominated by a single hegemonic power or jointly managed by a small group of key actors; specially when these middle powers are of particular interests to key players." Despite steps taken for raproachment with the world, Iran's relations with the US had remained hostile with Rafsanjani emphasising that "The Americans should - in deed, not in words-prove to our people that they have changed their policy and their stand is like that of ... the Europeans".[1] Hence, in the post Cold War international system, Iran, which is a "typical potential middle power, located in a geopolitically sensitive region" (ibid), had a difficult time adjusting and surviving.

It was in such environment, that the country had to continue its post war reconstructions and develop its relations with the international community. Perhaps Ramazani's 1992 paper; "both North and South"[2] has summarised Iran's efforts to survive in this new environment by improving its regional relationships with both Southern and Northern

[1] The Globe & Mail (Canada), 23.04.1991: *No ties with U.S. until Hostility Ends, Iran says.*
[2] a counterstatement for the popular 'Neither East, Nor West' post revolution tenet.

neighbours.

As Ehteshami (2002:265) has argued there was a range of factors in addition to the end of the Cold War, that was affecting Middle East politics, including: "the impact of globalization, structural economic difficulties…, deepening sub regionalism … and finally political Islam emerging as a divisive rather than unifying force." (ibid)

3.3.2. Continuation of Rafsanjani's Administration (1990-1997)

While his administration coincided with developments which eventually resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union; due to various considerations including Iran's need for sophisticated arms, Rafsanjani was careful not to alienate Moscow at the time of its weakness. Iran's reaction to Azerbaijan's independence was both a manifestation of pragmatism and an example of the importance it observed for its northern neighbour. "Unlike Turkey, Iran did not recognize Azerbaijan's independence until after USSR collapse." (Friedman 2000:69)

The 'geographical separation' resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of its southern republics provided Tehran with more confidence in dealing with Moscow. (Tarock 1997:207) However, the importance of bilateral relations was emphasised repeatedly by Iranian officials, including Rafsanjani's July 1995 interview, in which he explained that the "promotion of Iran-Russia relations serves the interests of both nations in finding political solutions to regional conflicts, i.e. in Central Asia and the Middle East". (ibid) Unfortunately, Iranian political elites failed to recognise that at that particular juncture of history, Moscow needed Tehran more than Tehran needed Moscow, as the latter was faced with various challenges in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Iran was Russia's only partner that could support it through regional crises and help in preventing the expansion of Western influence. This lack of accurate evaluation of Iran's value for Russia resulted in Tehran's failure to bargain effectively with Moscow. (ibid)

As for Russia; interestingly all three major groups of Duma legislators, with different foreign policy priorities, were emphasizing on Moscow's improved relations with 'near abroad', with a scope that included Iran. Therefore, even in the early 90's that Russia's

foreign policy had a "strong pro-Western tilt" due to its Atlantisist approach; still a reasonable degree of relations with Iran was maintained. "Iran's low-key reaction toward the first Muslim insurgency in Chechnya (1994-1996) and toward Russia's pro-Serb and anti Muslim policy in Bosnia in 1993-1995 helped cement relations further."(Friedman 2002: 66-69)

Following Rafsanjani's efforts for improving diplomatic relations with Arab neighbours; with focus on encouraging the GCC countries to enter into a regional security alliance with Iran; an important signal for such conciliatory efforts came in December 1991 GCC summit affirmation to "lend momentum to bilateral relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran in the service of common interests…." (Ramazani 1992: 402) Yet, these positive gestures never went as far as Iran was hoping for. The US vehement objection to inclusion of Iran in the Persian Gulf security arrangements; concerns of member countries about Iran's aspirations to become a dominant regional player, and the conflict over the three islands with the UAE, were among the reasons for GCC not to enter in a security pact with Iran. (ibid) Iran's disappointment in reaching a regional security arrangement became a hindrance in further development of relations with these countries.

To survive the threats of a world dominated by a hostile superpower, Iran also took initiatives to improve relations with European countries. Following the 1992 declaration of Edinburgh's European Council, which stated EU's interest in holding "Critical Dialogues" with Iran, seven rounds of critical dialogues between Iran and the European Community helped improving bilateral relations, particularly in trade and economy. However, upon the German court's decision about the involvement of Iranian officials in Berlin assassination[1], European ambassadors were recalled and dialogues were suspended. As Halliday has argued (1994:326) despite Iran's enthusiasm to improve relations with Europe its initiatives "were not sufficient to overcome the international isolation in which Iran found itself, or to address its growing impasse". At the end of the day, the best outcome of those efforts was the coexistence of hostility with trade and diplomatic initiatives, and "limited prospects of normalization." (ibid)

US hostile approach towards the Islamic Republic did not change much in response to Iran's considerable efforts in rationalising its foreign policy approach and performance. The Clinton administration passed the Iran-Libya Non-Proliferation Act in 1992 and in

[1] The Mykonos case

1993 established the 'dual containment policy' against both Iraq and Iran "with the objective to isolate these regimes politically, economically, and militarily." (Rakel 2007:172) The 1995 Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), prohibiting investment in these two countries' energy sector was an extension to this policy. Many European countries opposed and even acted against these sanctions. For example, in July 1995, the French-based oil company, Total and the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) signed a deal for development of offshore oil and gas fields in Sirri. The EU threatened to complain to the World Trade Organization (WTO) if Washington put ILSA into effect. (ibid: 171) Notwithstanding such objections, the sanctions left their undeniable marks on Iran's image and conciliation efforts both internationally and domestically. Internationally, it created a psychological environment in which foreign investments in Iran appeared to be risky. Politically, whilst Iran was trying to improve relations particularly with Europe, the US managed to highlight issues regarding Iran's support of terrorism, Human Rights violations, opposition to the Middle East peace process, efforts for acquiring WMDs, etc. Such profile would obviously resulted in distrust and damaged the profile Iran was trying to build as a rational actor. As Sajjadpour (2007:149-150) explains, the containment policy also had military consequences for Iran, as US managed to convince Europe to avoid selling arms and military or dual use equipments to Iran. Domestically, sanctions were used by hard liners as evidence against moderate pragmatists to prove that playing by Western rules and engagement with the West will only result in further pressure and increase efforts for regime change.

As Rakel (2007:177) has concluded Iran' foreign policy under Rafsanjani remained "generally Islamist-based, non-aligned, and pro-South." Pragmatism was merely an approach and did reorient Iran's foreign policy.

3.3.3. Khatami's Presidency (1997-2005)

The 1997 election of Khatami to the presidency flourished hopes for reforms in several aspects including the foreign policy. While taking the presidential oath, Khatami introduced his conciliatory foreign policy by saying "My government considers dialogue between civilisations in the contemporary world essential, and will avoid any action or behavior causing tension……. We will have relations with any government that observes our independence and sovereignty, meaning the decisions made within our national interests.

But we will resist any power wishing to exercise dominance over us... (and we will continue) to defend the rights of the Moslems and the oppressed, especially the Palestinian nation, and stand against the expansionism of the arrogant powers."[1] With that vision, 'détente' and 'confidence building' through 'rapprochement' was at the core of his foreign policy, which not only "reinforced the non-ideological aspects of Rafsanjani's foreign policy" but took further steps by "preaching compromise, rule of law and moderation. (Ehteshami 2002:302)

In executing his détente and rapprochement strategies, Khatami not only used the official foreign policy apparatus but managed to facilitate track II diplomacy, benefitting from the development of the 'civil society' that he was fostering. Many of the NGOs which were developed as part of the civil society during his administration established some sort of communications with their peers abroad. The same happened with scholars, academia and many other walks of the society. For the first time in decades, the international community could see beyond the official face of Iranians, which helped in the creation of mutual understandings and sympathy. This in turn helped in softening official international approach towards Iran. Soon, positive responses came from all over the world, even the most unlikely countries such as Israel[2] and Iraq.[3] However, Khatami's most important achievement in the first four years of administration was improving Iran's international status and image, particularly with the EU. As a result, a few months into his administration, EU ambassadors who had left Iran following the Mykonos affair returned to the country. The gesture was reciprocated by Iranian diplomats; Iran-EU diplomatic relations were resumed. The new round of Iran-EU dialogues called *Constructive Dialogues* started in July 1998, discussing important topics in bilateral relations, as well as regional and international issues.

Moreover, the ghost of Rushdie fatwa which was haunting Iran' relations with Britain for years, was laid to rest following Khatami's initiative in assuring the British government that Iran does not intend to take any actions for implementing the fatwa. (Sabet Saeidi 2008: 63) Full diplomatic relations with Britain were resumed following the 1998 meeting of

[1] Mid East Mirror, 1997, *Mohammad Khatami's Third Republic?* 4th August [online] Available at: <http://www.nexis.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/search/newssubmitForm.do> (Accessed on 30.08.2015)

[2] For further details see Agance France Press report of 29th August 1997, *Israel Mulling Repayment of Debt to Iran as goodwill gesture.* Available at: <http://www.nexis.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/search/newssubmitForm.do> (Accessed on 14.07.2015)

[3] For further details see Agance France Press report of 9th August 1997, *Iraq urges Iran to Respond to Saddam's Appeal for Friendship.* Available at: <http://www.nexis.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/search/newssubmitForm.do> (Accessed on 10.06.2015)

foreign ministers of the two countries in New York. For the first time since the revolution, reciprocal visits between Iran and EU's most high ranking officials were exchanged[1]. Notwithstanding the immense pressure from domestic hardliners, each one of these visits not only had remarkable effects in improving Iran's image but also resulted in considerable trade and economic deals and financial agreements.

As some analysts have suggested Russia's willingness to improve relations with Iran further, was in the face of concerns over the possibility of Iran-US rapprochement which particularly was quite strong during the first years of Khatami's administration. Khatami took the first step in this direction by proposing in his 1998 CNN interview, for the exchange of writers, scholars, artists, etc. between the two countries with the purpose of creating a "crack in the wall of mistrust"[2]; emphasising that "all doors should now be open for such dialogue and understanding and the possibility for contact between Iranian and American citizens".[3] The most obvious US gesture for rapprochement was Albright's March 2000 speech, which offered an apology for the role that the US had played in 1953 Coup. "The Clinton Administration and Congress later eased sanctions to allow U.S. exports to Iran of food and medical supplies and importation from Iran of goods such as carpets and caviar."(Katzman 2002: summary)

These positive gestures remained futile when Iran's supreme leader refused to accept the offer for dialogue without some tough preconditions for the United States including formal withdrawal of support for Isreal, lift of various sanctions imposed on the country, ending various accusations and stopping the official policy of considering Iran a rogue state that sponsors terrorism; and US administration refused to comply with those demands. An unrepeatable opportunity was missed so hesitantly that in his 2004 press conference Khatami declared his regret of the fact that "the Islamic government did not use the opportunity offered by the Clinton Administration."[4]

Khatami's proposal to declare the 2001 as the year for "Dialogue among Civilizations", not only "bestowed much respect upon Iran and its president" (Ehteshami and Zewiri 2011: xv), but also provided yet another chance to build a respectable international image for Iran.

[1] i.e. Italy's prime minister visited Iran in 1997 and in 1999 President Khatami visited France and Italy.
[2] Transcript of interview with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami (January 1998), Available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html> (Accessed on 20.03.2011)
[3] ibid
[4] *Khatami Regrets Lost Opportunity for Normalization of US-Iran Relations* (2004). As quoted from Radio Farda Newsroom on <http://www.payvand.com/news/04/aug/1282.html> (Accessed on 18.05.2011)

As Sajjadpour (2002:157) explains; attractive conceptualisations such as dialogue among civilisations had an effective role in disarming many anti Iranian elements. This ability together with proactive foreign policy and a successful public diplomacy were among the factors which resulted in the failure of US containment policy and brought about relative success for Iran at that period. Nonetheless, the unresolved US-Iran animosity prevented Tehran from completely breaking its international isolation, or to have an even hand in its relations with different countries.

3.3.3.1. Post September 11th Foreign Policy

Before fully adjusting to realities of the post Cold War era and finding its right place in the evolving international and regional system; Iran was faced with a new era brought about by September 11th events and rapid consequent developments. As the US president announced a black and white policy of 'either with us or against us, an immediate global polarisation was shaped and evolved in a short span of time. "NATO unanimously invoked article five of the North Atlantic Treaty, which describes an attack on one member as attack to all." (Burke 2011:27) Soon, other important international actors such as China and Russia who were also concerned over the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and militancy joined in supporting the US cause. (Hunter 2010:5)

During the first post Cold War decade US had behaved mostly as a "conservative hegemon" with the principle goal of maintaining its supremacy and preventing the emergence of another regional or global competitor, acting cautiously on its transformative impulses. Therefore even the ultimate goal of regime change in countries branded as 'rogue', like Iran, Syria, Iraq and Libya was mainly pursued through a policy of isolation and containment. September 11th events provided the Bush administration the required justification for "pursuing an idealistic and transformative foreign policy that included the use of force." (ibid)

Iran's sincere state and public response to the shocking events, from Khatami's strong condemnation of the act, to the youth candle vigils sympathising with the American people, did not help much in distancing the country from the political crusade that the US had started. Neither did all the tacit help and support that Tehran provided for the US to uproot Al-Qaida from Afghanistan and to establish an allied backed government. More important

than the search and rescue missions for finding stranded US pilots, was the political support that Iran provided for allies to reach a positive outcome during the Bonn summit. "(Iran) used its longstanding influence to persuade the leaders of the Northern Alliance to sign the Bonn Accords in December 2001, in which the main Afghan political factions agreed on the formation and makeup of an interim post-Taliban government under Hamid Karzai. This agreement was essential to US-led efforts to overthrow the Taliban." (Rajaeei 2004:166)

Iran's accommodationist approach continued despite serious concerns over US military presence in its immediate neighbourhood. The logic was that since Iran's claims about Taliban's threats have proved right, its good gestures will not only help in eradicating the Salafis' threat on its borders, but would eventually result in a degree of confidence building required for rapprochement with the US and playing a greater regional role. The hopes were crushed with Bush's 2002 Statement of the Union address in which Iran was declared as part of the 'Axis of evil'. The statement "very publicly humiliated Khatami …making mockery of his ambition to build bridges with the West." (Ansari 2007:47) As Maloney (quoted by Salvin 2012) has explained "the dialogue that existed on Afghanistan was the single unparalleled opportunity to create a diplomatic process with Iran since the 1979 Islamic revolution." Such great opportunity was spoilt not only by Bush's speech but also by his administration's continuous ignorance towards any subsequent Iranian initiatives, including the proposal to assist in training of 20,000 new Afghan army recruits which was offered only 2 months after the 'Axis of evil' speech, or the agenda for comprehensive negotiations sent to the State Department in May 2003, and the same year's proposal to trade senior Al-Qaeda detainees for members of MKO[1] in Iraq, etc.

Iran's re-emerging alienation from Europe as a result of the Post Sep.11th regional and international realignment around the US war on terror, and lack of "any meaningful allies to rest on for international support and protection" left it vulnerable under increasing international pressure. (Ehteshami 2004:186) The second Gulf War and the fall of the Baathist regime, though eradicated the threat of Iran's vicious neighbour and regional rival, created a more complicated dilemma. Already branded as part of the axis of evil, and under pressure for permanent suspension of its nuclear activities; Iran was challenged by American client states constituting a larger realignment affecting Central Asia and the

[1] Mojahedine Khalgh Organisation (People's Mojahedin Organisation)

Caspian basin to the detriment of Iran's long term interests; and completely encircled "by a pro-US security belt comprised of Kuwait, Turkey, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Iraq." (Afrasiabi & Maleki 2003:25)

Facing with such security dilemma, Iran's political atmosphere started a gradual but extensive securitisation, resulting in a more robust, less flexible approach. The first signs of such evolvement appeared by principalists winning the control of the parliament (Majles) in which "Iran's much heralded agreement to suspend its uranium enrichment and sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to the NPT was dismissed …..as irresponsible and irrelevant." (Ansari 2007:47) The strong open criticisms and accusations with which the Iranian negotiating team was faced despite the supreme leader's prior firm support during negotiations and the fact that in such crucial issues of national interest, no agreement could have been made without his full confirmation, was tip of an iceberg which surfaced fully by the 2005 victory of Ahmadinejad in presidential election. As his last executive act, President Khatami ended the self-imposed suspension of uranium enrichment. (Ehteshami & Zewiri 2011:143)

As explained by Azghandi (Quoted by Haji Yousefi 2010:5-6) Iran's foreign policy developments during Rafsanjani and Khatami "required Iran to accept the dominant order of international relations, to respect international rules and principles, to attempt for creating peaceful coexistence with other countries, particularly cooperation with the neighbouring and European countries….". As the outcomes of such approach was undermined by the post September 11th negative atmosphere, conservative elements of the state who objected the aforementioned approach vociferously, found ample evidence to rest their case, which in turn provided opportunity for their rise to power.

3.3.4. Ahmadinejad's Presidency (2005-2013)

In a survey undertaken regarding Bush's 'Axis of Evil' speech, Heradestvit and Bonham (2007:421) concluded that the "metaphor had an impact on political discourse in Iran and strengthened the rhetorical position of conservatives vis-à-vis reformers by reviving militant revolutionary language with the Great Satan as the main target of the theocratic and conservative forces." The metaphor was interpreted as Bush's declaration of a crusade

against the three mentioned countries[1] and resulted in further securitisation of the international system against Tehran, exacerbated by the Iraq war. The public perception was that the US would attack Iran after settling the post war Iraq, and that prospect was so offputting that could justify policy adjustments and strategies to prevent it. As Yafe (2008:40) has explained, the threat of a prospective US occupation was perceived by Iranians as "not just a threat to the Islamic Republic, (but) a threat to 2500 years of Persian history and modern Iranian nationalism".

Iran's significant domestic response to securitisation of international politics came with Ahmadinejad's administration "dominated by the security apparatus and an agenda largely driven by the political paranoia of the revolutionary era". (Ehteshami & Zewiri 2011: 141) Ansari (2007:45) explains that while moving away from 'dialogue' and emphasis on confrontational policies towards the West was at the heart of principalist's foreign policy; their strategy for keeping in power had "three components: political and economic populism, repression and the sustenance of crisis in foreign relations." Ahmadinejad effectively took a rejectionist policy reviving the anti Israeli, anti imperialist, pan Islamist notions of the immediate post revolutionary period with a strong flavour of messianic Shiism. According to his foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki; this policy included three main elements: (a) strong anti Western stand (b) diversification of international partners, (c) self reliance.[2]

- ***Strong anti Western Stand***

The core of principalists foreign policy -whom Ahmadinejad posed as one- constituted a sustained robust and confrontational approach towards the West (Ansari 2007:46), based on the argument that the West and particularly the US have existential problem with the essence of the Islamic Republic due to its incompatibility "with the notion of international integration and collaboration". (ibid) This approach though won Ahmadinejad the support of conservatives at home -at least throughout his first term- had disastrous international

[1] Based on Bush's remarks on 16th Sep 2001, when he said "This crusade.... This war on terrorism is going to take a while", many analysts have reffered to consequenct various forms of aggressions towards other nations as his crusade. For example, look at page. 4 of Fayazmanesh, S. (2013) *Containing Iran: Obama's Policy of Tough Diplomacy*, or Kracofe, C.A. (2009) *George W.Bush and the Dark Crusade*.

[2]. *Iran Foreign Policy: After 1 Year*. Manuchehr Mottaki's lecture at the roundtable held by Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies. Available at: <http://en.merc.ir/View/tabid/98/ArticleId/273/Iran-s-Foreign-Policy-After-One-Year.aspx> (Accessed on 15.01.2012)

consequences. Within months, the confidence that his predecessors had built with the international community over the years crumbled down like a sand castle. His blunt comments about wiping Israel off the map, "questioning the validity of the Holocaust" (Ehteshami & Zewiri, 2011:143) and suggesting to the West to make up for their crimes against Jews by giving away a part of their own land instead of Palestine, was followed "by a chorus of condemnation from across the world" (ibid), even the United Nations Secretary General and the Palestinian National Authority. Concerns over regional and international consequences of his actions resulted in his foreign minister being summoned to the parliament to answer for the relevance of his comments with the country's national security and interests.[1] However, the supreme leader's full support of his approach[2] proved that Ahmadinejad is not acting outside the framework approved by the supreme leader, who has the final say in such matters. It was also an evidence of increased divergence of views on Iran's foreign policy among the key decision makers.

Paradoxically, despite all his tough postures, Ahmadinejad was one of the most ardent advocates of direct negotiations with the US. (Maloney & Taykeh 2011: A35) Western analysts, who had always believed that Iran-US rapprochement would only happen when someone from the leader's camp would govern the country, were optimistic that Ahmadinejad would be able to end decades of Iran-US hostility. His 2006 letter to George Bush was a clumsy opening to some kind of dialogue, which was snobbed off with the US administration's refusal to respond.

Listing Iran at the top of the 2006 US security concerns by the US global strategy document and allocation of funds to promote democracy in Iran, destabilise the country and bring about regime change are just some of the hostile signals sent to Tehran, resulting in further securitisation of the country (ibid). While repeatedly rejecting any form of dialogue between the two countries without Iran unconditionally giving up all its nuclear activities, the Bush administration was "the active leader of a Western policy towards Iran that combines economic sanctions and threats of military intervention in an attempt to influence Iran's national and foreign policy". (Rasmussen 2009:5)

[1]dpa German Newsagency. (2007) *Ahamdinejad's Foreign Policy Under Fire in the Parliament.* Available at: <http://rawstory.com/news/2007/Ahmadinejad_s_foreign_policy_under__01232007.html> (Accessed on 29.02.2012)
[2]. Klinghoffer, J. (2009) *Khamenei Stands by Ahmadinejad's Foreign Policy.* Available at: <http://politicalmavens.com/index.php/2009/06/09/khamenei-stands-by-ahmadinejads-foreign-policy/> (Accessed on 29.02.2012). Khamenei reportedly said: "I do not accept the sayings of those who imagine that our nation has become belittled in the world because of its commitment to its principles, this path will continue until final victory**."**

Based on Obama's criticism of the Bush administration's policy towards Iran and his promise for a different approach, hopes were raised that he would adopt a different approach towards Iran. An analysis of Obama's comments and statements regarding Iran, particularly his 2008 speech in the AIPAC annual conference[1] in which he introduced Iran as "the greatest strategic challenge to the United States and Israel"[2] indicates that there was initially no considerable difference in his attitude towards Iran from that of the Bush administration. However, it should be kept in mind that domestic and international pressures coming from Israel and the Arab allies of the US who demanded time limits for negotiations with Tehran or their concerns on the extent of the potential US-Iran rapprochement created serious obstacle for Obama's first administration in taking constructive diplomatic steps. While the confrontational voices coming from Tehran had already created a sense of threat; Iran's nuclear ambition and the post 2003 regional geopolitical shift in favour of Tehran had intensified the atmosphere of power rivalry, reflected in both obvious and clandestine efforts by regional countries to undermine Iran's influence. As Hunter (2010:70) has explained; Secretary Clinton and "other US officials made it clear that improving ties with Iran cannot and will not come at the expense of US relations with its Arab allies, who expressed anxiety over possible US-Iran reconciliation."

Obama's 2009 Nauruz message to Iranian people and leaders, expressing conditional "US extended hand"[3], received a cautious response by Iranian officials including the supreme leaeder who stated that "if the United States changed its behaviour toward Iran; Iran would also change its behaviour toward America". (ibid: 70) However, before reciprocal positive gestures can get the two countries to any significant milestone; Iran's post presidential election upheavals blocked the way for any further improvements. Throughout the whole second term of Ahmadinezhad, the situation was so tense that the question was not 'whether a military confrontation between the US and Iran would happen'; but was 'when and how' it would happen.

On the other hand, EU countries that prior to Sep.11th events had maintained their relations with Iran independent of US policies, started "to routinely mimic Washington's concerns about Iran's 'three sins' (Human Rights violations, support of terrorism, nuclear

[1] Just a few days before his nomination for presidency by his party.
[2] *Transcript: Obama's Speech at AIPAC*. (2008) Available at:
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91150432> (Accessed on 01.08.2012)
[3] Providing that Iranians would "unclench their fist" and "accept some real responsibilities".

proliferations) at every encounter with Iranian officials."(Ehteshami 2004:192) While Ahmadinejad's bellicose comments created a deep crack in the shaky foundations of Iran-EU trust, the nuclear standoff helped the US and its allies to securitise 'Iran related' issues and build a consensus against the country in the West. In his speech after Western sanctions were imposed on Iran's Central Bank, Ahmadinejad called Europeans as puppets and the US as their puppet master, elaborating that like impotent servants, Europeans immediately repeat what their master says.[1]

On one side, Iran accused the West led by the US of trying for the regime change by various means from inflaming public discontent, and supporting irredentism in minorities to crippling sanctions and constant threat of war. The West, on the other side, accused Iran of developing nuclear technology beyond civilian purposes and moving towards achieving military capabilities. The nuclear standoff had practically obstructed any outlook for Iran-West reconciliation.

- ***Diversification of International Partners***

Ahmadinejad's administration pursued a policy of diversifying partners in order to curb increasing US efforts to further isolate Iran perhaps more seriously, and definitely more vocally than his predecessors. His provocative comments could be interpreted as a seriously miscalculated measure to build some form of union against a common enemy (Israel) in the Muslim world, which of course back fired. "For the first time in many years Tehran was finding itself distant from both its Arab and non-Arab Muslim neighbours."(Ehteshami & Zweiri 2011:143) Though his comments and postures captured the attention and admiration of the public in the Muslim world, they were antagonised by various forms of political structures, regionally and internationally.

Iran also made considerable efforts in building alliances with Latin America, exploiting the existing populist and anti US trend in the region. Although post revolutionary Iran has already had longstanding and robust bilateral ties with countries like Cuba and Venezuela, the relations with the region increased significantly during Ahmadinejad. Within four years of his first administration, "Iran opened six new embassies in Latin America including

[1] Reuters. (2011) *Iran's Ahmadinejad Slams European Puppets of US.* Available at : <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/23/us-iran-sanctions-ahmadinejad-idUSTRE7AM0ZI20111123> (Accessed on 10.06.2012)

Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Uruguay, in addition to the five embassies already in operation – Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico and Venezuela."(O'Conner & Sheridan 2009 as cited in Stubits 2009:10)

According to a report by the International Monetary Fund "trade between Iran and Latin America tripled between 2007 and 2008, rising to $2.9 billion—almost half of which was between Brazil and Iran." (Quoted by Romero 2009:41)

In its active quest for allies in Latin America; Tehran was more looking for political support than economic relations. (Farhi 2009:25) Nonetheless, trade and economic relations with those countries could provide a degree of relief from ever increasing international sanctions bending on crippling Iran's economy.[1]

This increased attention towards Latin America was domestically portrayed as part of Tehran's 'aggressive foreign policy' touted by Ahmadinejad as opposed to his predecessors' 'passive' policy in the face of hostile policies of other countries. (Farhi 2009:25) Ahmadinejad's candid statement was an evidence of Iran's effort to give the US a taste of its own medicine; "when the Western countries were trying to isolate Iran, we went to the U.S. backyard."[2]

Another aspect of the diversification initiative was the 'East look' policy, based on the assumption that "moving towards the East is less risky than building relations with the West with its hegemonic tendencies." (Ehteshami & Zewiri 2011: xiv) Russia and China are the two most important Eastern countries that Iran focused on expanding its relations with. "As major world powers and permanent members of the UN Security Council, both nations are essential to either inhibiting or shielding Iran's nuclear and regional ambitions."(Fite 2011:3)

Common characteristics facilitate the relations between Iran and the aforementioned countries. All three have been great empires in the past, and have gone through major revolutions with international consequences. Their shared anti West/US hegemony sentiment is not only essential in creating better retrospective understanding of foreign

[1] For example as Morgenthau (quoted by Farah 2009:18) has pointed out "Hugo Chávez's decision to allow the establishment of Iran's Banco Internacional de Desarrollo (BID) in Caracas provided Iran with a 'foothold into the Venezuelan banking system', 'a perfect sanctions busting' method".

[2] Press Tv. (2009) *Ahmadinejad Defends Presence in US Backyard*. Available at: <http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/96234.html> (Accessed on 10.04.2012).

policy dilemmas, but also offers the prospect of an alliance which can "offset the geopolitical dominance of the US. The three countries seek the construction of a multi-polar international system. Central to this arrangement is the control of oil and gas resources." (Ahari as quoted by Jun & Lei 2010:51) This prospect becomes more realistic at times of increased discontent between Chin/Russia and the United States. For example as China's relations with the United States became tense following the US intervention in China's maritime disputes with her neighbours; in May 2014 China's President called for the creation of "a new Asian structure for security cooperation based on a regional group that includes Russia and Iran and excludes the United States."[1]However, "the ties that bind China and Russia to Iran are primarily based on opportunistic assessment of the costs and benefits of partnership. Leaders in Moscow and Beijing are principally concerned with the security and prosperity of their nations, and they will pursue international relationships from that standpoint." (Fite 2011:4) Iran's relations with these two countries have been on a very pragmatic terms with no ideological baggage, preconditions or even extreme reactions to the fact that in several occasions both countries have caved in under the US pressure and voted for imposing further sanctions on Iran in the Security Council. This pragmatic approach has paid off to some degree. "In 2005, Iran was granted the observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The Organization, which is dominated by China and Russia, often espouses views which challenge US leadership in the global system. Iran's position in the SCO places the Sino-Iranian relationship in a multilateral framework and seriously undermines US-led attempts to politically isolate Iran for its suspected pursuit of nuclear weapons." (Fite 2011:9)

However, Tehran's asymmetric economic and political reliance on these countries has developed so deep that one can argue that Iran's extreme measures for 'nor West' has resulted in 'just East' policy.[2] Moreover, as many analysts have pointed out, with their opportunistic approach China and Russia are exploiting Iran's unfortunate circumstances to their own interest. Therefore, the relations will only survive as long as the acquired benefits by China and Russia through Iran would outweigh the value of their relations with the West particularly the US.

[1] CBS News. (2014) *China Calls for New Security Pact with Russia, Iran*. Available at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-calls-for-new-security-pact-with-russia-iran/> (Accessed on 26.09.2014)
[2] As in contrast to the 'neither East, nor West' policy, that had been the cornerstone of Iran's post revolution foreign policy for many years.

- ***Self Reliance***

Although the nuclear programme has been mainly portrayed by the Islamic Republic as a symbol of resistance to the Western sponsored world order, and as a proof of Iran's strategic threat to the international community by the US and Israel; it can also be viewed as a measure of self reliance. In addition to the bitter experience of the 8 years war with Iraq in which Iran learnt that no one will scratch its back, the absence of any meaningful alliance and reliable strategic partnership based on mutual interest and respect has left Iran with no other option than self reliance, and a focus on science and technology development particularly in security sector, as a major avenue to this end. "Self reliance…. runs deep in the Islamic Republic and, if Iran's sense of isolation continues to deepen its siege mentality, then it would be logical for it to look at nuclear option even as a tactical pawn." (Kori & Yaphe as quoted by Ehteshami 2004:193) While investment on technological developments had been initiated by previous administrations; it was conceptualised and vocally portrayed as part of self reliance policy to justify the nuclear development project by Ahmadinejad's administration. Tehran's emphasis on the "country's right to peaceful use of nuclear technology, know how, and power" (Ehteshami & Zewiri 2011:145) within NPT framework, while faced with increased international isolation and hostility may be better understood if this outlook is added to Iran's 'Western resistance' approach.

As Leverett (2010) has argued, based on Wikileaks documents, the Obama's first administration was not actually looking for a solution to Iran's nuclear dilemma; instead, it was looking for a "pivot to pursue crippling sanctions on Iran". Therefore when Iran requested the IAEA to help in providing Uranium for its Tehran Research Reactor (TRR), and Brazil and Turkey offered to mediate, the administration judged that "if the United States continued to insist on certain conditions in any prospective arrangements to refuel the TRR, it could effectively guarantee that Tehran would never accept a deal"; (ibid) driving Iran to pursue Uranium enrichment of 20% and significantly increasing the number and improving the technology of centrifuges.

This in fact provided justification for the US to intensify its efforts on moving the international community towards more punitive sanctions on Iran. (Hunter 2010:75) Moreover, the United States and Israel undertook parallel paths to sabotage Iran's nuclear programme and slow down the progress. These efforts included infecting nuclear facilities with Stuxnet virus (Langner 2013), preventing the shipment of dual use or required

materials for nuclear development projects, the assassination of Iran nuclear scientists, etc.

The situation became more critical when in Nov 2011 the IAEA reported that accumulated intelligence from ten governments suggested that Iran was secretly working on nuclear weaponry. Consequently, "four resolutions have included progressively expansive sanctions to persuade Tehran to comply. In addition to four rounds of UN expansive sanctions; EU and the United States have imposed additional sanctions on Iranian oil exports and banks since 2012." (Forgwe 2015)

3.3.5. Rouhani's Presidency (2013-Present)

Iran's "petroleum exports, which provided about 85 percent of government revenues, declined to about 1.5 million .... in 2012 from about 2.5 million barrels per day in 2011."[1] The currency devaluation had reached over 60% by October 2012, and the economy was on the verge of hyper inflation due to a combination of severing international sanctions, deep rooted corruption and gross mismanagement of the economy by the government. Hence, quite understandably, the most important concerns of the electorates from different factions and levels of the society were the economy and foreign policy particularly the unresolved nuclear dilemma.[2]

Rouhani won the June 2013 presidential election on the platform of 'prudence' and 'hope', with an immediate focus on the resolution of the nuclear dilemma and economic development through various means including sanctions relief.

In his inauguration speech, President Rouhani outlined the framework of Iran's foreign policy under his administration:

"The administration will try in its international interactions to increase national and regional security through mutual trust between Iran and regional and international countries. Transparency is the key for establishing trust. Détente, creation of mutual trust

[1] *2014 Index of Economic Freedom*. Available at: <http://www.heritage.org/index/country/iran> (Accessed on 20.03.2014)

[2] The fact that during the pre election televised debates between the eight presidential candidates, the performance and achievements of Iran's principle nuclear negotiator, who was a candidate himself, were criticised one way or another by all other 7 candidates was a reflection of the widespread disenchantment with the path and direction that Iran's foreign policy, particularly the nuclear negotiations had taken.

and constructive engagement will lighten up our path. I openly emphasize that Iran has never been looking to fight with the world. We direct all our efforts to restrain hawks and warmongers…. The only way for interaction with Iran is dialogue on an equal stance, confidence building, mutual respect and reduction of enmities…. I openly announce that if you want an appropriate response, then talk with Iran not with the language of sanctions, but the language of reverence."[1]

In a paper published in May-June 2014 issue of the "Foreign Affairs", Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif elaborated Iran's foreign policy under the new administration "based on achieving understanding and consensus at the national level and constructive engagement and effective cooperation with the outside world. Iran's policies will be guided by the principles of dignity, rationality, and prudence."(2014:8) He has then explained Iran's key goals, pursued through its foreign policy. The first outstanding goal is to "expand and deepen its bilateral and multilateral relations through meaningful engagement with a wide range of states and organizations, including international economic institutions…. Multilateralism will play a central role in Iran's external relations. That will involve active contributions to global norm-setting and assertive participation in coalitions of like-minded states to promote peace and stability."(ibid) Another key goal is to "continue to support the cause of oppressed people across the world, especially in Palestine, and will continue its principled rejection of Zionist encroachments in the Muslim world."(ibid: 9)

Summing up Rouhani's statement together with his foreign minister's paper, it can be concluded that Iran's foreign policy principles have remained the same as all other post revolutionary periods. The approach for achieving the key goals has, however, changed from confrontational to détente and dialogue, the same approach which was initiated by Rafsanjani and widely promoted under Khatami's administration. This change of approach which was manifested internationally by Rouhani's speech at the UN general assembly was welcomed by most countries, and his phone conversation with Obama signaled the potential to end to decades of Iran-US stalemate and the positive resolution of the nuclear standoff. Just two months in taking the office he achieved relative success towards one of his most urgent aims described by Zarif as "to diffuse and ultimately defeat the international anti-Iranian campaign, spearheaded by Israel and its American benefactors, who seek to 'securitize' Iran—that is, to delegitimize the Islamic Republic by portraying it as a threat

[1] Riāsat Jomhūrie Eslāmie Iran. (2013) Matne Kāmele Sokhānāne Dr. Rouhani dar Marāseme Tahlif. Available at: <http://www.president.ir/fa/70145> (Accessed on 01.01.2014)

to the global order."(ibid) Iran's new team of nuclear negotiators headed by the foreign minister managed to strike a historic deal in July 2015 to much dismay of the world's hawks from US Senate to Iran, Israel and some Persian Gulf countries. Despite heavy criticisms from radical conservative factions, the supreme leader demonstrated his support for Rouhani's approach, in general, and the negotiating team in particular throughout the negotiation process. His support was quintessential in containing the damage that radical groups could have inflicted on the progress and the outcome of negotiations.

Within days of striking the final deal with 5+1, Tehran was hosting political and economic delegates from all over the world, particularly Western countries such as Germany, France, and Italy, who were negotiating for business and investment in Iran.

3.4. Conclusions

In order to provide an understanding of the context in which Iran's relations are shaped, this chapter has provided an account of Iran's foreign policy before and after the end of the Cold War. Following a brief review of imperial Iran's foreign policy; the chapter has mainly focused on Iran's post revolution foreign policy. It has initially explained the role of invariable determinants such as geopolitical factors in defining the foreign policy. Then by using constructivist theory of international relations, has described how the change of state identity as a consequence of the Islamic revolution resulted in structural and cultural changes which brought about foreign policy transformation due to evolved worldview and role assumption. The establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran not only changed the course of Iran's foreign policy but created such serious challenges for the international system both at regional and global level that no major actor could afford to remain indifferent or ignorant towards it, making Iran a determining factor in domestic policies of many countries. (Halliday 1991:3)

Through review of different post revolution periods, the chapter has demonstrated that Iran's foreign policy is based on two pillars of ideology and pragmatism. Whilst the ideology defines the principles, the pragmatism drives a rather complex game to insure the survival of the state. A continuous interplay of domestic and international factors defines

the weight of ideology and pragmatism in foreign policy decision making. An examination of different approaches taken towards the grand foreign policy rule of "neither East nor West", in different periods has provided an insight to the above fact.

As described in the chapter, during its first post revolution phase, Iran had a radical rejectionist foreign policy, with emphasis on the export of the revolution and support of freedom movements across the world, which resulted in isolation from the international community. In mid 80s, facing grave threats to its survival and learning from the harsh realities of the world politics, the country started to break out of its isolation and establish relations with other countries, yet insisting on its ideological manifestos both vocally and practically.

With reconstruction and economic development as the main priority of the post war era, a more pragmatic approach was adopted and practical steps were taken under Rafsanjani's administration, in order to reestablish relations with other countries and attract foreign investments. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union that left US as the only remaining superpower resulted in systemic changes in the international arena. "It brought to fore the importance of geopolitics, geostrategic instability and globalization in Iranian foreign relations."(Ehteshami 2002:302)

With a more proactive and stronger pace, the foreign policy trend set by Rafsanjani was continued under Khatami's administration with a 'détente' and 'reconciliation' approach. While Rafsanjani's prime goal was economic developments; Khatami's focus was on political developments. As Suzhin (2006:152) had put it, "the efforts of Rafsanjani and Khatami and their associates furnished the country with an economic infrastructure that enables it to make a leap into the future." According to him "in spite of certain controversies, mistakes and errors, the 16 years leadership between those two outstanding presidents was responsible for Iran's real strengthening and evolution as a leading power in the Middle East."

However, the post September 11th dramatic developments created such hostile and securitised the environment around Iran, which not only frustrated its efforts and hopes for building constructive relations with other countrie, but also exacerbated Tehran's siege mentality which resulted in securitisation of its politics and empowerment of neoconservative elites represented by ascendance of Ahmadinejad to presidential office.

Iran's new uncompromising foreign policy posture particularly with regard to its nuclear profile; left Tehran once again isolated and challenged with increased security concerns. The ideologist essence of Iran's foreign policy manifested and practiced in different forms of anti Israel; anti US alliances left its conciliatory efforts for confidence building and integration in the international community rather futile. In addition to post 2003 geopolitical developments which have increased regional power rivalries; the nuclear standoff resulted in further punitive sanctions and mounting pressures leaving the country on the verge of economic collapse and under serious threat of military attack. This critical situation required an urgent reevaluation and adjustment of foreign policy approach for paving the way towards fruitful negotiations aiming at resolving the crisis instead of just buying time.

Rouhani's administration put once again into effect the 'détente' and 'confidence building' policy which had in the past helped Iran to establish and benefit from a positive relationship with the world. The immediate outcome of this policy was the reduction of securitised environment against Iran, and reaching a final nuclear deal in negotiations with world powers.

As demonstrated by this review, "despite its revolutionary zeal, and reputation for non-conformity and defiance since the revolution, it can be argued that revolutionary Iran has always been a rational actor in the classic realist mold. Even some of its excesses can be seen as calculated risks or opportunist responses to difficult situations. Looking back at the post Khomeini era, one cannot help but be struck by how normal, largely non aggressive, and pragmatic Iran's foreign policy has been since 1989." (Ehteshami 2002: 284) While "the challenge for Iranian policymakers…. is to build Iran up as a bridge between East and West, not as the exclusive domain of any world's individual power blocks" (Mafinezam & Mehrabi 2008:84); increased international pressure and isolation has moved its foreign policy from the initial 'neither East nor West' towards a 'more East' direction. However, this may change, as a result of relative repprochment with the West following the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and 5+1.

Through the review of Iran's post revolution foreign policy, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Throughout the three and half decades since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Iran's foreign policy principles have remained the same. These principles

include the rejection of the present international system, avoiding the hegemony of any particular power and striving to stay independent, rejection of 'the Zionist regime' and support of oppressed people.

- Iran's complex foreign policy apparatus which involves several state and quasi-state organisations has constantly tried to strike a balance between ideology and pragmatism to ensure independence and security of the state, through an extremely complex process.

- While foreign policy principles are set by constitution; and the foreign policy apparatus and the framework is supervised by the supreme leader; the president and his foreign policy team have a pivotal role in shaping the foreign policy approach. The review undertaken in this chapter and a comparison of developments under four post-Khomeini presidents demonstrates how despite invariable principles and agencies, the character and world view of the president and his executive team (variable agencies) can affect the state's destiny in the international arena.

- As history has proved, so long as Iran refuses to accept the norms and realities of the international system and to play by the rules, it remains isolated, under constant threat and robbed of its most obvious rights and opportunities.

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CHAPTER FOUR

IRAN'S REGIONAL POLICY

4.1. Introduction

As it was argued in the introduction and demonstrated in chapter 3, Iran has a complex foreign policy, in which one can see both elements of change and factors of continuity and many inconsistencies. This chapter will examine regional implications of Iran's foreign policy developments, both in the Middle East and in the South Caucasus.

While Iran is also involved in regional developments of Central and South Asia, this chapter will only focuse on making a comparative analysis between its policies in the Middle East and that of the South Caucasus, as despite the existing common factors such as considerable energy resources, there is a more significant contrast necessary for facilitating a better comparison.

In analysing Iran's regional policy, some important ideational and geopolitical factors must be taken into account as they shape the dynamics between Iran and the regions in which it is a medium power and a major player.

1. In both regions, Iran is one of the few countries which has never been officially colonised and managed to sustain its sovereignty throughout the history despite continuous foreign interventions. Being one of the few natural states in both regions and the fact that "nearly every one of Iran's neighbours sits on a land that constituted Iranian territory at one time" (Mokhtari 2005:210), has convinced Iran that it has the potential and interest to play a major role well beyond its borders.
2. As explained in chapter 3, while Iran's strategic location and its rich resources has made it an attractive target for great power rivalries throughout the history, the failure to secure its territorial integrity or prevent foreign interventions in the past, has left Iranians with an unhealed wound sensitive to involvement of the great powers in the neighbouring regions.[1] Being located within or adjacent to penetrated systems, subject to high level of external intervention[2] has exacerbated and can in part explain Iran's approach in both regions, based on a

[1] See also Ehteshami 2002:285
[2] For more details see Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, 2002: 2

> "conspiratorial interpretation of politics and an obsessive fear of internationally-orchestrated instability." (Maloney & Takeyh 2008:4)

The origin of factors shaping Iran's regional policy, as Mesbahi (2010:176) has put it, is in "the Iranian penchant for projective ideational policy, a sense of mission and purpose, but also in the twin factors of geographical realities of being a linchpin-pivotal state, and the disproportionate impact of its relations with the US for the mega-regional complex of the Middle East/Persian Gulf/Eurasia."

Keeping the above factors in perspective, this chapter will demonstrate that since the end of the war with Iraq, Iran has pragmatically adopted a cooperative approach in its regional policies. In order to curb isolation and make up for its vulnerabilities in the face of the new international order and growing trend of globalisation, Iran has continuously emphasised on regionalism through the establishment of regional institutions which exclude outside powers, creation of closer co operations with regional countries and proposing development of regional security arrangements. This approach however has had decreasing effect in achieving Iran's regional aims and objectives due to several reasons including deep seated mistrusts and rivalries, external interventions, and what Hunter (2010:172) calls "peculiarities of Iran's foreign policy".

Since this study will provide further details of Iran's bilateral relations with its South Caucasus neighbours in the next chapters; this chapter will only discuss issues at regional level with regard to Iran's policy in the South Caucasus. The case of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will also be examined as a comprehensive example in which many aspects of Iran's South Caucasus policy can be demonstrated. Iran's Middle East policy on the other hand will be discussed in more details based on important political milestones such as different post revolution or post Cold war periods as this chapter is the only opportunity to review Iran's policy in that region. Therefore, a significant difference between the structures and the level in which the two regions would be discussed can be noticed.

4.2. Iran's Regional Policy in the Middle East

While the Middle East has been the main focus of Iran's foreign policy particularly after the Islamic revolution, Iran has been effectively a defining actor in the post 2003 regional developments. Although Iran has always assumed an important role in the Middle East developments and sustained its goal "to be the dominant power in the Persian Gulf" since biblical times (Friedman 2011), this section will demonstrate that its post revolution policies have been considerably different from that of the Pahlavi era.

4.2.1. Iran in the Middle East Security Complex

As Buzan & Waever (2003:188) have explained; more than 20 states, many relatively equal in weight form the Middle East Regional Security Complex (RSC). Due to the number and dispersed geography of countries, the RSC has developed in three sub-complexes, with the Levant and the Persian Gulf as the two main sub-complexes.

The Persian Gulf sub-complex was formed less than a decade before Iran's revolution and following Britain's withdrawal from the area in 1971. "In recent decades the centre of gravity in the Middle East has shifted from the Levant to the Persian Gulf." (Hokayem & Logrenzi as quoted by Chubin 2009:168) While the Persian Gulf energy resources which constitute nearly 70% of the world's proven energy deposits are one of the main factors for the importance of this sub complex; the role it plays as a major transit route for the export of energy is also crucial for the global economy which is dependent on sustainable flow of energy from the region.

In addition to having the longest Persian Gulf shore, "Iran is the largest, most populous and resources rich (except for oil) country in the region". (Hunter 2010:187) Considering the aforementioned facts as well as the cultural and political influence which according to Tarock (1997:199) makes Iran's importance in the region comparable to China in South East Asia or Germany in Europe; it is only logical to conclude that as a major regional player "Iran cannot be ignored or kept out of the political game, for what happens in Iran makes a significant impact not only on the

Persian Gulf but also on the Middle East as a whole. This was so under the Shah and it is more so under Ayatollah's." (ibid)

4.2.2. Iran's Middle East Policy in the Cold War Era

More than two decades of Iran's modern Middle East policy was shaped during the Cold War era, influenced by characteristics and imperatives of the bipolar world order. This section would review the two pre and post revolution periods of Iran's Middle East policy during the Cold War.

4.2.2.1. Imperial Iran's Middle East Policy

The post World War international developments as well as the oil revenue provided Iran with the opportunity and capability to gradually become a significant regional actor. Concerned with the possibility of the Soviet Union filling the vacuum resulted from the British evacuation of the Persian Gulf; in 1969 US called upon its allies "to accept a much larger share of the burden of their own defence against communism (Nixon Doctrine)". (Milani 1994:331) US temptation to replace Britain in the Persian Gulf was challenged by Iran's serious objection to any foreign intervention, despite Shah's pro US tendencies. As Milani (ibid) has argued, the US desire for presence in the Persian Gulf goes back to 1960s, and Iran's opposition to "an American military presence predates the establishment of the Islamic Republic". Consequently, Iran took a more proactive policy in the region which could also guarantee Western interests without their direct presence.

Using significant oil revenue gained from quadrupling oil prices, Shah managed to build up significant military capabilities and fill the vacuum quickly by establishing its hegemony in the Persian Gulf. It is important to bear in mind that US confidence in Shah as its own proxy in the Persian Gulf for insuring America's interest was the only reason for accepting Iran's superiority in the region. Even then US was trying to balance Iran's power with the application of the twin pillar policy; though it actually relied primarily on Iran to perform the role of the 'policeman' of the Persian Gulf region, "as Saudi lacked the necessary population or military to play an important regional security

role". Back then Iran was the main pillar of stability in the Persian Gulf. (Ramazani 1979:826)

Shah's general Middle East policy was based on 'détente' and 'diplomatic resolution of the conflicts'. As the security of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz was of vital importance for Iran's trade and oil export; "on January 27, 1968, the Shah expressed Iran's readiness to cooperate with any littoral state to ensure the security and stability of the region." (Nyrop 1978:236)

While relations with small Persian Gulf littoral states was cordial; following the conclusion of "a continental shelf agreement regarding the seabed rights in the Persian Gulf" the relations with Saudi Arabia improved continuously. (ibid: 236-237) However, negotiations on joint security arrangements for the Persian Gulf did not bear any fruits due to trilateral rivalry between Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

According to Hunter (2010: 188-189); Iran's relations with the Arab countries of the Middle East was a reflection of its relations with the West. "Before the revolution, Iran strengthened the position of pro Western governments, while its own security was undermined by radical Arab states" (ibid) due to tense relations with pro Soviet radical Arab countries. It was in this context that despite Saudi Arabia's rivalry, Iran had friendly relations with this country and other Persian Gulf littoral states.

For radical Arab regimes such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq; Iran was not only a rival for regional influence, but also a major obstacle for achieving their goals. Another bone of contention in relations with these countries was Iran's political and economic relations with Israel, which was primarily based on a shared sense of 'strategic loneliness' and isolation between Iran and Israel. While Iran supplied 50% of Israel's oil, it consistently "reaffirmed its position that Israeli forces should be withdrawn from territories occupied in the June 1967 war, including Jerusalem, that the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people should be reinstated, and that all parties in the Arab-Israeli confrontation should be guaranteed the right to survival." (ibid)

Iran's relation with Iraq was normalised following the 1975 Algiers Accord which offered settlement of old border disputes, yet the pattern of power rivalry did not change. Although full diplomatic relations with Damascus was established after the 1946 independence of Syria; the relations were not smooth, particularly due to Shah's

refusal to take Syria's side against Israel and supported Sadat's conflict resolution efforts. (Maltzahn 2013: 18-21)

The relations with Egypt which was unilaterally discontinued by Nasser due to Iran's relations with Israel, was improved under Sadat. Shah supported Sadat's negotiations with Israel and tried to encourage other Arab countries to choose the same path. Shah's support of Sadat brought them so close together, that Egypt was the only country who warmly welcomed the ousted Shah and his family following the 1979 revolution.

4.2.2.2 Iran's Post Revolution Middle East Policy

As discussed in chapter 3, the establishment of the Islamic Republic changed Iran's political identity and system, which in turn resulted in a different world view, role perception and foreign policy. Rejecting the international system which is perceived to have given free hand to great powers for oppressing Muslims and robbing them off their resources; the new leaders of Iran perceived Islam as "the preeminent weapon for the world's exploited people to use against great powers" (Bakhash 2003:248), and the Islamic revolution as the way to establish a system which would champion Islamic ideals. Based on this view they sought to export the revolution initially to the Middle East.

To enlighten the masses in the neighbouring countries, Iranian leadership felt little compunction in publicly denouncing other Muslim heads of states as tyrants and corrupt leader(s) who have strayed from the Islamic path (ibid). Ayatollah Khomeini called the practice of Islam by pro Western governments as 'the American Islam'. Iran saw itself as the master of 'true Islam', the protector of the 'oppressed', and the torch holder for the uprising of the Islamic *Ummah*. Therefore "since 1979, where geopolitics has mattered, Iran has added a religious dimension to its power projection ability…. Since the revolution, Islamic issues have emerged to affect Iran's regional profile and its policies toward many of its neighbours." (Ehteshami 2002:287)

Insisting on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as an issue concerning all Muslims, the Islamic Republic provided strong rhetorical and material support for the Palestinian cause. By opposing to various peace talks and criticizing Arab leaders for their compromising approach, it made a great appeal among the Muslim public. "Iranian

leaders supported Islamic movements beyond their borders out of both conviction and calculation" (Bakhash 2003:249) as such support "served as means of projecting Iranian influence abroad and allowed Iran to create for itself a presence in Lebanon or to become a player…. in the politics of the Arab-Israeli conflict."(ibid)

Tehran's appeal among the Arab masses came at the price of deeper animosity and rivalry from Arab leaders, particularly Iraq which was looking for championing the Palestinian cause, Saudi Arabia which as the guardian of Muslim holy places, saw Muslim leadership as its own right, and Egypt which considered itself as the major player in the Arab-Israel negotiations. Each of these governments saw their roles being undermined by Iran. As such Iran was left "with only one major ally in the region and that was Syria." (Ramazani 1989:210) Iran's regional isolation during the 8 years war- which was extensively discussed in previous chapter- can be partly blamed on the above mentioned factors as well as Arab nationalism and the role of outside powers.

4.2.3. Iran's Post Cold war Middle East Policy

The most obvious systemic change resulting from the end of the Cold War for the Middle East was as Halliday, (as quoted by Haji Yousefi 2006:61) has put it, the shift in regional alignments. As explained by the neorealist theory of international relations the change in the structure of international system would result in change in the behaviour of states due to creation of a new self help system. In the post Cold War new self help system, the allies of the former Soviet Union or those like Iran who had chosen to stay independent had a more difficult time for remaining independent or forging new alliances.

As Buzan had suggested (1991:439) the effects of the post Cold War systemic developments was not limited to changes at the centre, or the centre- periphery relations, but had consequences for relations between periphery states as well. Hunter (2010:8) argues that, Iran's significance as a bulwark which could prevent "Soviet expansion in sensitive regions such as the Persian Gulf, South Asia, and the Middle East" was eroded. Subsequently countries in the aforementioned regions, who were not concerned about the Soviet inroads anymore, "adopted a less cooperative and at times even a hostile posture towards Iran."(ibid: 7)

Haji Yousefi (2007:65) on the other hand, believes that the most important implication of the collapse of the bipolar system in the Middle East was that the formal Arab allies of the USSR turned to US to guarantee their security; while Iran's resistance was exploited by various countries as a stage to enhance their own regional position and value to the West.

4.2.3.1. Rafsanjani's Administration (1989-1997)

Although "by the end of Iran-Iraq war, the Persian Gulf region had become more volatile, with no clear hegemonic force, but many rivals for the position" (Milani 1994:337); the end of the war provided a more favourable environment for improving Iran's regional relations.

Since Rafsanjani's main priority was economic development and this was only possible through the establishment of closer regional and international ties, "a more concerted attempt to mute the ideology and reinforce pragmatic strain in foreign policy came with Rafsanjani's presidency in 1989." (Bakhash 2003:252) Calculating that improved relations with the Persian Gulf countries would increase Iran's influence in OPEC for higher oil revenue which was much needed for economic development; "Iran, the champion of radical changes in 1980s, became the advocate of regional stability." (Milani 1994:336)

After months of negotiations between foreign ministers, Iran's relations with Saudi which were cut off after the Bloody Hajj[1] were resumed in 1991. As an initial step for reconciliations with all GCC states; Iran also took forget and forgive approach towards Iraq's major bankroller during the 8 years war, Kuwait. Emphasising on the commitment to regional stability and refraining from intervening in domestic affairs of the Persian Gulf States; Rafsanjani also befriended small littoral sheikhdoms, with Oman playing the role of mediator. (Milani 1994:339)

Tehran's approach to 1990-1991 American war for expelling Iraq from Kuwait was proof of its emerging pragmatism. While Iran was "the first Persian Gulf country to condemn Iraq and demand its withdrawal from Kuwait", to ensure its national interest;

[1] Explained in Chapter 3

Tehran opted for active neutrality. (ibid) The administration also used that war as a pretext to re-establish diplomatic relations with Egypt, Jordan and Morocco. These efforts paid off generally, except for Egypt which was reluctant to show any flexibility.

In the immediate aftermath of the Kuwait war hopes were rising for development of some kind of regional security arrangement, which reflected Iran's long term goal of maintaining regional security by littoral powers. However, Tehran's hopes turned to concerns over the possibility of exclusion from such arrangements following the Damascus Declaration and Egypt's strong opposition to Iran's active involvement. (The Independent 21.02.1991, quoted by Rakel 2007) Iran was further disappointed when Kuwait and Bahrain signed separate long term security pacts with the United States, which provided the opportunity for the latter to contain Iran and isolate it from the international community in order to force it "to adopt a more accommodating foreign policy *vis-à-vis* the West and its allies in the Persian Gulf." (quoted by Tarock 1995:204-5) The Kuwait war had the most undesirable regional consequences for Iran, as it provided the opportunity for direct and extensive US presence in the Persian Gulf.

Finally recognising the GCC's lack of desire to form any meaningful alliance with Iran; Tehran reoriented its foreign policy and took a 'de-Arabisation' approach. "Iranian policy-makers stated that Iran should no longer focus on Persian Gulf countries if the latter were not willing to give up their American orientation. Iran should rather stress the importance of countries such as India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, those of CEA, and China, which were more sympathetic to Iran." (Marschall as quoted by Rakel 2007: 175)

4.2.3.2. Khatami's Administration (1997-2005)

As explained in chapter 3, Khatami's foreign policy was focused on 'confidence building' and 'détente'. While Rafsanjani's painstaking reconciliatory efforts had already paved the way for improved relations, Khatami's sincere belief in 'tolerance', and 'respect' towards others reflected in his character and demeanor, had a great impact on improving Iran's international image which consequently helped his 'confidence building' efforts.

Making the best use of the opportunity arisen from Khatami's chairmanship of the

Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC); efforts were made in mending the fences and reducing tensions with the Arab countries. The most obvious signs of improved relations came with the Saudi King Abdullah's attendance in Tehran Summit. Rafsanjani's February 1998 visit from Saudi Arabia and Bahrain provided the momentum for improving relations with the Persian Gulf countries. Relations with smaller GCC states, particularly Qatar and Oman improved and UAE became one of Iran's most important trading partners despite territorial disputes over the three islands[1].

During Khatami's May 1999 visit from Saudi, the two countries came to an agreement to reduce the negative affects of price fluctuations by stabilising oil prices through cooperation for output management in OPEC. These developments were followed by the supreme leader's favourable message for stronger relations with Saudi Arabia which was reciprocated by an invitation, followed by reciprocal visits between the two countries' Defence Ministers discussing the possibility of a security agreement.

It is important to keep in mind that despite Khatami's policy of 'détente' and 'dialogue', certain elements of Iran's foreign policy including animosity towards Israel and support of groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine, still continued, though with reduced intensity.

Russia's fall 2000 announcement for resuming arms sales to Iran and expansion of technological cooperation was another significant development in Iran's regional relations. "The Moscow-Tehran alliance gained a new momentum following the official visit by (the) Iranian President …. to Russia in March 2001, an event Khatami hoped would mark '*a new spring'* in the two countries' cooperation." (Jalali 2001:1) In October 2001, Russia signed an agreement to sell Iran up to $300 million a year in conventional arms. (ibid) The arms deals and consolidation of relations were widely seen in Iran as strategic alliance in the face of mutual "national security challenges. However, since the 'Treaty on Foundations & Principles of Cooperation' merely stated that "if one side was subject of the aggression, the other side would not help the aggressor", the relations stopped short of strategic partnership. (Hunter 2010:112)

Just a few months into Khatami's second term and while Iran was still adjusting to regional consequences of the end of the Cold War and US presence in the Persian Gulf;

[1] There is a long term dispute between Iran and the United Arab Emirates over strategic Islands of Abu Musa, Greater and Lesser Tunb.

the September 11th events and the following international developments once again altered regional patterns of alliance.

Iran took a cooperative approach towards the US led alliance in Afghanistan hoping to achieve three goals of uprooting the Talibans from its eastern neighbourhood, developing stability in the region, as well as indirect and limited means of reducing tensions with the US. To this end, in addition to providing some logistic support such as search and rescue missions, Iran used its influence over the Afghan Northern Alliance to establish Karzai's government. However, the US response to Iran's good will was to brand it among the 'Axis of Evil'. The domestic and international backlash for this negative development was discussed in chapter 3. Regionally, it triggered the sensitivities among neighbours and raised suspicions about Iran's intentions once again. US hardened posture towards Iran emboldened Persian Gulf Arab countries for tougher stance towards Iran.

Another regional development which could potentially make the situation even more difficult for Iran was the May 2003 'Road map' for resolving the Palestine-Israel conflict, which among other plans, was supposed to create a Palestinian state by the end of 2005. If fully implemented, the road map could have "eventually open the floodgates to better Arab-Israeli relations, establishment of ties with Syria and Lebanon, and open diplomatic and economic relations between Israel and Iran's (Persian) Gulf neighbours." (Ehteshami 2004:191)

Some experts believe that the key to Iran-US grid locked relation is Israel. While Iran's positive approach and support towards US war on terror did not go unnoticed in Washington; "The underlying reality is that no matter what Iran does, unless it alters its attitude toward Israel .... no fundamental policy change in Washington will occur." (Sariolghalam 2003:70)

With Afghanistan still in turmoil, "Tehran had hardly had time to catch its breath when the fall of Baghdad in April 2003 caused an even bigger shake up on its western doorstep." (Ehteshami 2004:187) Feeling encircled by the US presence in the Persian Gulf, the east and the west of the country, even Iranian public felt anxious about the next US move. There were assumptions that the encirclement is part of a bigger plan for war with Iran; while Iran's rivals and adversaries were hoping that further developments in the neighbouring countries will reduce Iran's regional influence and

bring gradual change both in Iran and in the region. The Persian Gulf states were almost sure that Iran's encirclement by the US would contain the country and check its influence. However, regional developments did not exactly take the direction that these states were hoping for.

While the immediate positive consequence of Iraq war for Iran was the overthrow of its arch regional enemy, further developments provided more positive outcomes for Tehran, as Iraqi oppositions who had spent decades of their exile in Iran returned to their country, bidding for influencial roles in the new Iraq. Iran "encouraged its closest allies—the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the Badr Organization (ISCI's former militia), the Islamic Dawa Party, and …. the Sadrists—to participate in politics and help shape Iraq's nascent institutions. Tehran's goal has been to unite Iraq's Shiite parties so that they can translate their demographic weight (some 60 percent of the country's population) into political influence, thereby consolidating Shiite control over the government." (Eisenstadt, Knights & Ali 2011: ix) By doing so, Iran was trying to ensure the establishment of a friendly government who can sympathise with Iran's grievances; to maximise its interest by exerting influence, and to limit damages resulting from the US military involvement in its neighbourhood; just like any other rational actor. While the Iraqi government tries to balance between the US and Iran's demands; Tehran has clearly made the Iraqi leadership aware that it would "oppose any Iraqi-American security pact that would permit an extended US military presence in Iraq or allow US forces to monitor or attack Iran from Iraqi bases."(Yaphe 2008:407)

Nonetheless, while the 'establishment of a friendly government has been an important issue for Iran; but its top priority has always been 'Iraq's relative stability'. This factor has been so important that in 2008 Yaphe (406) wrote "if Iran were forced to choose between a precarious Islamic state and a stable, united, secular state, it would almost certainly choose the latter."

Although capturing the Middle East security interdependence merely based on ethnic and religious terms, is an oversimplification (Buzan & Waver 2003:188), these two are among the most important factors formulating relations in this region. In addition to perception of regional countries; as Ehteshami (2004:188) explains, the fact that Iran is one of the few non Arab players among several Arab, largely Sunni actors has a bearing on Iran's regional role perception and further complicates its status as the only non-

Arab and Shiite state. The history has proven repeatedly that unless there is a deep rooted pre existing enmity between two Arab states, Arab nationalism takes precedence to any relations between Iran and any Arab country. The most obvious example is Iran's relations with Syria. Syria was the only regional Arab country that stood by Iran during the Iran- Iraq war as its rivalry and enmity with Iraq took priority over its pan Arab tendencies. However, despite developments of its relationship with Iran to the degree of 'strategic alliance'; throughout more than three decades of cooperation between these two countries, "Syria has never sacrificed its Arab connection for Iran's sake. It has always supported Arab positions in their disputes with Iran, including the Islands dispute with the UAE." (Hunter 2010:209)

With such sensitivities towards Iran; the Arab countries of the region became seriously alarmed of Iraq's developments for several reasons. The establishment of a Shiite dominated government in Baghdad holding close friendly relations with Tehran, as well as Iran's increased influence in this country tipped the regional balance of power in favour of Tehran. There were also sectarian concerns about the rise of Shiites in the region and the threat that it could pose particularly to those countries with some Shiite population. "King Abdullah II of Jordan had already coined the term Shiite Crescent (al-Hilal ash-Shi'i) in an interview with the Washington Post in Dec 2004. He predicted that an alleged Shiite expansion would alter the traditional Sunni dominated make up of the Middle East, a creeping danger which might split up the Arab and the Muslim world." (Broning, Hajiyousefi, Puelings & etal as quoted by Allul 2010:1)

4.2.3.3. Ahmadinejad's Administration (2005-2012)

Despite Ahmadinejad's serious criticisms of his predecessors and his vows for a return to the post revolution values, Iran's regional policy did not change dramatically during his administration. With regional stability, cooperation and influence being top priorities, and the US presence in the region as a major concern; Iran's policy under Ahmadinejad continued not only in the same direction but also with similar conciliatory approach, though with an aggressive posture. It was exactly this posture uncompromising posture particularly towards Israel, that alarmed the world. Negatively

affecting Iran's relations with the Persian Gulf States; it provided perfect evidence for the US and Israel to prove Iran's existential threat for the latter and its potential threat for the world security.

"Despite a much less congenial atmosphere, Ahmadinejad's government demonstrated great eagerness to expand relations with the Gulf Arab states." (Hunter 2010:211) During his 2007 landmark visit for attending the annual GCC meeting and tour of GCC member countries, Iran's proposals for development of a joint organisation for the Persian Gulf security system and an economic cooperation council were repeated. While the US failure in fully achieving its goals either in Afghanistan or Iraq caused its regional allies "to suffer a rather sharp deficit in legitimacy, a much buoyed Iran felt itself in a position to build important security, intelligence and military infrastructure in neighbouring countries." (Hadian & Hormuzi 2011:18) Moreover, Ahmadinejad intended "to deflect Gulf states fears of Iran's nuclear program….. and to reassure them about Iran's intentions in Iraq". (Hunter 2010:199)

Nonetheless, increased concerns over Tehran's growing influence in the region, encouraged regional countries to look for ways to become more active in Iraq's developments and to contain Iran's influence and prevent the formation a *'Shiite Crescent*' in the region. In 2006 "a former security advisor to the Saudi King Abdullah was quoted saying that Saudi Arabia has ―the religious responsibility to intervene in Iraq because the country was ―the birthplace of Islam and the de facto leader of the world's Sunni community." (Terhalle as quoted by Allul 2010:1)

In another development, Iran's regional stature accentuated following Israel's defeat in its 2006 attack on Hezbollah's strongholds in Lebanon. During the 34 days military conflict with Israel which ended in Hezbollah's acclaimed victory, Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) who had already trained highly qualified Hezbollah militia provided enhanced logistic and human support for their ally. Looking at Hezbollah's achievements through the prism of Iran- Israel proxy war, this was yet another victory which demonstrated Iran's outreach in the region.

Before Ahamdinejad's charm offensive and his proposal to Saudis for cooperation in stabilizing both Iraq and Lebanon gets anywhere, Israel's December 2008 attack on Gaza and the consequent blockade which prevented Palestinians from access to basic humanitarian needs highly strained Iran's relations with the Arab states. While Arab

officials took a passive approach towards the horrific Gaza events that shook the world and Egypt even cooperated with Israel in completing the blockade by closing the Rafah passage; Iran uncompromisingly and vocally supported Palestinians. This in turn increased public criticism of the governments in the Arab world for their passive approach towards Gaza.

As Ehteshami (2009:1) has explained, "deepening its financial, political and military links with the essentially Sunni Palestinian rejectionist groups (Hamas and Islamic Jihad)", has given Tehran new levers to pull at the heart of the Arab politics. This in turn has resulted in Arab government's resentment of Iran's interference in inter Arab affairs percieved as "Iran's plan to dominate the Arab world". The blunt statement by the Head of Egypt's Foreign Committee that emphasised "Egypt would not tolerate the presence of an Iranian Islamic Emirate in Gaza" (quoted by Chubin: 2009); and some Arab states indication that "they would not attend the Arab Summit which was to be held in Doha if Qatar invited Iran to participate as an observer" (quoted by Hunter 2010: 199)[1]; were clear manifestations of such resentment.

Iran's conciliatory efforts such as the foreign Minister's 2009 visit to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and UAE with the purpose of defusing tensions had only short term effects. While some GCC countries like Qatar and Oman continued to enjoy good relations with Iran; the downward spiral of relations with others such as Saudi, Kuwait, and Bahrain has continued ever since. US policies for building an anti-Shiite coalition focused on Iran in order to jump start the Arab- Israeli peace process and repeated talks of a US attack on Iran have been other important elements in emboldening Arabs to take a tougher stand towards Iran. (Hunter 2010: 200)

Another important factor which has added "a new layer of authority" (Ehteshami, 2009:2) to Iran's increasing regional stature and consequently exacerbated negative feelings among its rivals was the ongoing nuclear development which was presumed by the West and its allies to have a military dimension. Insisting that the enrichment activities are only for civil and peaceful purposes; for years, Iran resisted increasing international pressure to suspend its enrichment project. "The quo dos from being an independent political, military and now scientific actor are in some ways immeasurable.

[1] *Entekhāb News*, March 17, 2009 'Amr Moussa: Az Iran barāye hozur dar conferānce Doha da`wat nashodeh ast', Available at: <http://ww.entekhab.org/portal/index.php?news=1750&print> (Accessed on 25.06 2013)

But they do reinforce the impression and image of a powerful Iran acting in its national interest on the international stage…. Iran's apparent prowess has invited counterbalancing instead of band-wagoning and Iran's pro-Western neighbours have chosen to draw closer to the US and seek protection from the West and also from India and China as a way of heading off Iran's influence." (ibid)

The ascendance in Iran's regional power has created an unprecedented development in the Arab- Israeli relations. The shared goal of containing Iran's influence and outreach in the region has brought the two sides closer together in their quest for tougher international posture towards Iran.

Economic diplomacy was an important dimension of Iran's policy towards the GCC countries during Ahmadinejad's first five years. "By increasing its volume of trade and investment with GCC countries, Iran was hoping to enhance its value to these countries as an economic partner. Aside from this deliberate policy, Iran was also forced to rely more on trade with GCC countries—the UAE in particular—as a result of the escalating sanctions." (Habibi 2010:1) However, this strategy became futile in the face of increasing pressures particularly since Iran's banking system became yet another target of punitive sanctions. Tougher international sanctions, as well as concerns over Iran's growing regional influence, limited Iran's economic relations with regional countries, particularly its main partner UAE. "In the past, GCC countries often exhibited a lukewarm attitude both toward international economic sanctions and with respect to possible military action against Iran's nuclear program. While reluctantly going along with the UN-approved international sanctions (though the record varies from country to country), GCC countries generally refused to cooperate with unilateral U.S. sanctions."(ibid) As of January 2010, some GCC countries, offered greater cooperation with U.S. efforts to isolate Iran economically, which resulted in a major setback in Tehran's efforts for maintaining its ties with these countries.

While the application of its soft power has been an important aspect of Iran's regional policy, two important developments diminished the affects of this policy during Ahmadinejad's second term. First was the 2009 controversial presidential election and the robust crackdown of mass oppositions to the results which presented a cruel anti democratic image of the Islamic Republic to the world, including the Muslim people.

Second, was Iran's contradictory response to the uprisings in different Middle Eastern countries. Iran vocally supported the uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Bahrain; even claiming that they have been inspired by Iran's Islamic revolution. This in turn resulted in more concerns about Iran's interference in domestic affairs of the Arab world. Following the events in Bahrain, where the Shiite majority called for reforms by their Sunni rulers, fingers were once again pointed at Iran, accusing Tehran of instigating Shiite opposition and interfering in her neighbour's internal politics. This in turn resulted in Bahrain's further band-wagoning with Saudi Arabia to a degree that Saudi troops were deployed to suppress demonstrators. There were even calls for Bahrain's integration with Saudi Arabia in order to counter Iran's threat, a development which was faced with Iran's vehement objection. Subsequently, Bahrain became one of the battlegrounds for Iran-Saudi proxy war for influence.

On the other hand, Iran took an exactly opposite approach towards the Syrian uprising as it threatened the Islamic Republic's long term ally, the Assads. Since early 1980s, Syria has hosted the lifeline between Iran and the resistance groups in Lebanon and Palestine. This facilitated the formation of an axis of resistance in the Middle East, which has subsequently provided Tehran with a strategic depth right at the heart of the Arab world. Without Assad or a similar ally of the same weight Iran's regional influence would decline and Tehran would lose a strong foothold in the Levant.

Syria's uprising with calls for comprehensive reforms rapidly evolved into a sectarian battle, with Iran openly and officially providing moral, financial, and military supports for the Syrian regime, while the Persian Gulf States such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia arm and support anti Assad fighters. In other words, developments in Syria opened yet another front for Iran- Saudi Arabia proxy war. As the heavy crackdown of Syria's uprising developed into what Bashar Al Assad officially declared in mid 2012 as a civil war with regional consequences; public opinion, particularly in the Arab world, turned against the Assad regime and its allies. This negative opinion became more sever towards Iran due to undeniable hypocrisy in Tehran's approach towards uprisings in various Arab countries. These developments consequently perished Iran's prospect of developing friendly relations with post uprising governments in the Arab world, particularly Egypt. Although there initially were positive signs which raised hopes for defrosting Iran-Egypt relations, Tehran received cold shoulder in response to its warm rapport towards Morsi's government, apparently due to its support of the Syrian regime.

In other words, the post Arab Spring regional developments and Iran's role particularly in Syria has undermined the umbrella image that the Islamic Republic had since the victory of the Islamic revolution made for itself as the guardian of the whole Muslim Ummah and downgraded its outreach to sectarian level.

Graph 4.1, which demonstrates the results of a poll conducted by the Pew Research Centre with regards to Iran's favorability rating in the Middle East reflects considerable decline in favourable views towards Iran in the Arab countries of the Middle East.[1]

Another negative consequence of Iran's policy in Syria was the breakaway of Hamas from the axis of resistance, as it refused to support the Syrian government. Hoping to find similar support from the Arab countries, particularly Egypt, Hamas external leadership who were hosted by the Syrian government for years, left the country in 2012.

To limit the damage and in order to be able to maintain some leverage in Syria in case Assad is removed, Tehran took some precautionary steps. On the one hand Iran and Hezbollah have built "a network of militias inside Syria to preserve and protect their interests in case President Bashar al-Assad's government falls or is forced to retreat from Damascus…." (DeYoung and Warrick 2013) While these militias are fighting alongside Assad forces for now, "officials think Iran's long-term goal is to have reliable operatives in Syria in case the country fractures into ethnic and sectarian enclaves."(ibid)

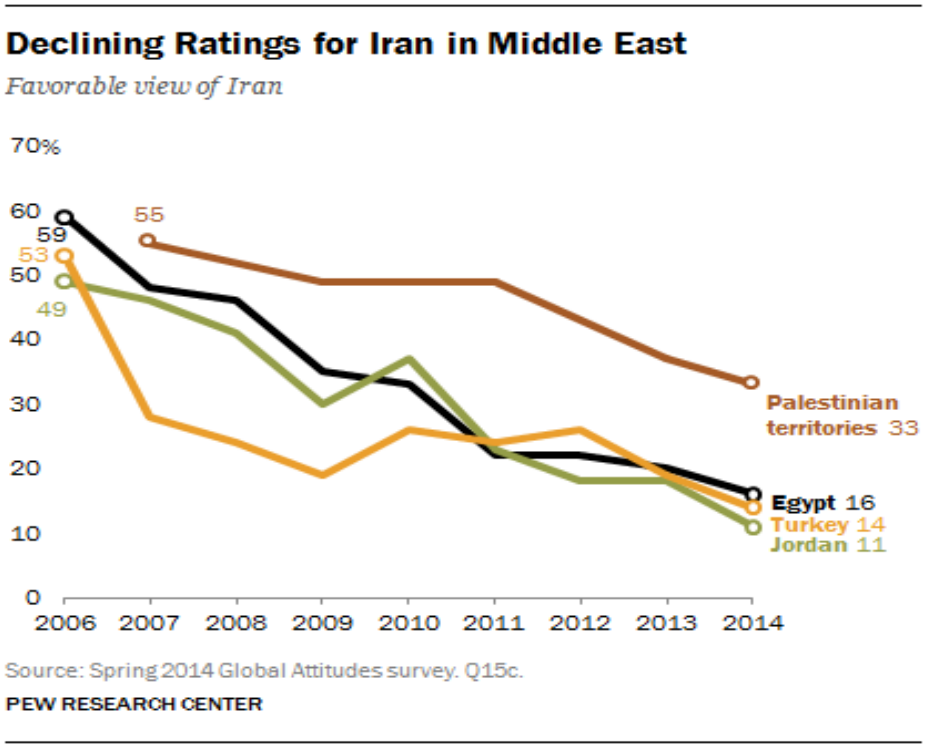
On the other hand, continuously emphasizing that the Syrian crisis should be resolved through national dialogue; Iran, has made several attempts in brokering deals through negotiations with more moderate factions of the Syrian opposition, despite being left out of internationally organised peace talks.[2] Moreover, Tehran hosted a 29 nation conference in August 2012 as well as holding talks with some Syrian opposition groups in the same summer. Although, according to Ali Larijani, Iran's Speaker of the

[1] Pew Research Centre. (2014) *Declining Rating for Iran in Middle East*. Available at: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/06/18/irans-global-image-largely-negative/iran-report-6/> (Accessed on 07.05.2015)

[2] According to a member of Syrian National Council's executive committee, "as early as 2011, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei sent three emissaries to Istanbul in late October to try to broker the deal. The Supreme leader has reportedly sought to coax the Islamist group into supporting President Bashar Assad in exchange for four high-ranking positions in the Syrian government." (Birnbaum 2012) The Committee however, refused to meet with emissaries and declared that as long as Iran supports Assad against the Syrian people they would not meet or negotiate with its representatives.

Parliament; little progress was made (Bozorgmehr 2012) Iran is still insisting on finding a political solution for Syria's predicament.

Graph 4.1: "Declining Ratings for Iran in Middle East"



4.2.3.4. Rouhani's Administration (2013-Present)

In a paper published in the first issue of Foreign Affairs after Rouhani's election; Mohsen Milani (2013) predicted that the new administration will start delivering on the promise of bringing moderation and rationality to Iran's foreign policy "with a charm offensive toward all of Iran's neighbors, particularly the Arab states of the Persian Gulf", which would include "reaching out to Saudi Arabia to explore the possibility of ending their lingering cold war and finding a way to manage their competition". However, increased turmoils in the region proved that prediction to be easier said than done.

The relations with the Persian Gulf countries initially seemed to take an upward slope with the two sides sending positive signals for each other. The September 2013 appointment of Admiral Shamkhani, who is the most prominent ethnic Arab in the Islamic Republic's state apparatus as the Secretary of the Supreme National Security

Council, was interpreted as a step for building bridges with the Arab neighbours. Similarly the removal of Prince Bandar Bin Sultan -who had time and again demonstrated clear anti Iran stance- from the head of Saudi Intelligence Services in the early 2014, was reported as King Abdullah's positive step for mending fences with the Islamic Republic. Moreover, Saudi Foreign Minister, Saud al Faisal[1], invited Foreign Minister Zarif to attend the two day meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in Jeddah in June 2014, though the latter was not able to attend as it coincided with yet another round of negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme.

Relations with the smaller Persian Gulf countries seemed to pick up as well. Zarif's tour of Persian Gulf countries[2] in December 2013 opened the way for return visits by officials from these states. On March 2014 the first ever joint political committee between Iran and Qatar was convened in Tehran, discussing further development of bilateral ties with the purpose of bringing the two countries closer together and support of political dialogue, starting with extensive discussions about regional security issues in that meeting. Consequently, the two countries reached an agreement to cooperate for resolving Syria's humanitarian crisis. (Osiewicks 2014:256)

The already warm rapport with Oman demonstrated in the fact that Sultan Qaboos was "the first official guest" (ibid) of Iran's appointed president after his inauguration; was furthered with Rouhani's visit in March 2014; emphasising upon his departure on the importance that Iran attaches to its relations with "littoral states of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman due to significance of strategic Hormuz Strait". (ibid)

More important, was the landmark visit of the Kuwait Emir Sheikh Sabah, who "flew in at the head of a high-level delegation including the foreign, oil, finance, commerce and industry ministers."[3] The two sides signed several cooperation agreements "including a memorandum of understanding to coordinate their security efforts. The visit also focused on controversial regional issues, including Iran's military

[1] Also known to have unfriendly feelings towards Iran.
[2] Though avoiding Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.
[3] Alarabiya. (2014) *Kuwait's Emir Makes landmark Visit to Iran*. Available at: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/2014/06/01/Kuwait-s-emir-makes-landmark-visit-to-Iran.html> (Accessed on 05.05.2015)

involvement in Syria, the situation in Iraq and Egypt, and the Middle East peace process....."[1]

This positive trend did not last long though. As the radical Salafi group ISIL which had gained momentum in Iraq and expanded into Syria, proclaimed worldwide caliphate in 2014 and made significant advances in Iraq, capturing strategic areas and moving closer to Iran's borders as well as Iraq's centre; Iran-Saudi initial war of words turned to hostile actions while each side pointed the finger at the other. Tehran, which had continuously warned about the empowerment of extremist groups in Syria financed by the Persian Gulf states, accused particularly Qatar and Saudi Arabia of helping the ISIL to ascend in the region; while Arab countries blamed Iran for its strong support of the Al-Mailki Shiite government in Iraq despite its highly discriminatory policies which had alienated Sunnis, pushing them into the arms of extremist groups.

The rise of ISIL - recognised as a major threat to the international peace and security- in Iraq; created a serious security challenge for Iran due to its geographical proximity to its borders as well as deep enmity towards Shiites. In response to this challenge, Iran was quick into action, providing full political and military support to counter any further advances. While supporting transition of power from Maliki to Al Ebadi's government in Baghdad; Iran has officially provided various Shiite and Kurd militias with supply of arms and equipments, training and strategic consultations. The involvement of Iran's Qods brigade which was initially discreet and reportedly limited to advisory role became a significant factor in pushing back the ISIL advances; while the international coalition against the terrorist group, which also includes Arab countries limited their support to air strikes and provision of equipment and training for the Iraqi army and Kurdish militant groups.

Iran's enhanced influence in Iraq due to its direct involvement in countering the ISIL, parallel to the positive progress of nuclear negotiations exacerbated the concerns of its regional rivals further and the relations once again took a downward spiral, specially after the death of King Abdullah who had a relatively softer approach towards Iran and the coming to power of a more hardliner and hawkish King Salman in January 2015.

[1] ibid

In September 2014, another development complicated the already tense relations further. “Taking advantage of Yemen’s fractured and weak government, the Houthis emerged from their northern base and seized Yemen’s capital, Sana, …” (Juneau 2015: 5) As the Houthis who “rightly believe that the political order in Yemen has long excluded them and is dominated by Sana-based elite with no interest in giving them a greater say” (ibid) continued to advance into more strategic parts of the country; their ties with Iran provided the pretext for “overblown accusations that Tehran has taken over yet another Arab country”. (ibid) To contain Houthis further advances and offset Iran’s increasing influence in Saudi’s backyard; Riyadh, spearheading a coalition of nine countries started military intervention in Yemen in March 2015.

Iran has so far stayed committed to its détente policy; vocally condemning military intervention in Yemen and offering a proposal for diplomatic resolution of the conflict, while providing humanitarian, advisory and possibly some financial aid to Houthis. As many analysts have argued, there is no evidence of Iran’s military or logistic support of the Houthis.

While the policy has contained the escalation of Riyadh-Tehran tensions into military confrontation, with Yemen becoming another proxy battleground, rhetorical remarks from officials on both sides have become more confrontational. Iran’s Supreme Leader warned Saudis vehemently against their “crime” and “genocide” in Yemen, predicting that they will definitely lose their war with Houthis and “their nose will be rubbed to the soil”. (Abi Habib 2015) On the other hand, addressing a GCC Summit in Riyadh in early May 2015, Saudi King Salman “called on fellow Gulf leaders to stand up to Iran, saying there was a need to confront an external threat that ‘aims to expand control and impose its hegemony’, threatening regional stability and creating sectarian sedition”. (Vela 2015)

The concerns of Iran’s rivals and adversaries became more overwhelming with finalisation of Iran’s nuclear deal, as it is effectively the recognition of Iran as a de facto nuclear state, providing Tehran with further prestige and enhancing its regional

influence. Moreover, "lifting of sanction will release tens of billions of dollars of frozen Iranian assets, allowing Tehran to meddle in the region even more"[1].

In yet another attempt for building confidence with neighbours, Foreign Minister Zarif visited 3 Perian Gulf countries in the immediate weeks after reaching the historic nuclear agreement with the world powers; and proposed for establishing an assembly for regional dialogue among Persian Gulf countries.[2]

4.3. Iran's Regional Policy in the South Caucasus

The importance of South Caucasus for other regional and international players and their policies in this region was discussed in chapter 2. This section will focus on Iran's interests and policies in the South Caucasus, starting with a brief historical review of regional developments since its separation from Persia.

4.3.1. The South Caucasus: Separation from Persia, Autonomy under the Soviet

As discussed in chapter 2, due to its sensitive geopolitical position at the crossroad of regional and global powers, throughout the history, South Caucasus has been the centre of many security developments particularly as its geographical openness has left it vulnerable to various armies and empires sweeping across the territory. (Sadri 2010:1)

Although Iran has three millennia of shared history with the region; this study will discuss developments of post Russia-Persia wars of the 19th century. During the first round of wars, the Russian Tsar conquered the Persian Khanates of Shuragel, Sheka and Shiravan in 1804, Karabakh in 1805 and Baku in 1806. The Talysh Khanate went under Russia's control in 1813.

The second Russia-Persia war (1826-1828) ended in yet another painful chapter of Iran's history as Abbas Mirza, the Qajar crown prince was forced to sign the

[1] Financial Times (2015) *Obama's Hard Truth for the Gulf States on Iran*, Available at: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/79969e84-f8a2-11e4-be00-00144feab7de.html#axzz3aP76rPMA> (Accessed on 16.05.2015)

[2] VOA. (2015) *Pishnahāde Zarif barāye tashkile majma'e gofto guhāye mantaghe'ie keshvarhāye Khalije Fars* Available at: <http://www.voanewsfarsi.com/content/iran-zarif-gulf/2896630.html> (Accessed on 24.08.2015).

Turkmenchay Treaty in order to contain further advancement of the Tsarist army through the Persian territory. Under the 1828 treaty, Persia's rule over the South Caucasus was completely surrendered to Russia, leaving the Aras River as the new border between the two countries. The conquered territories gradually underwent the process of integration into the Russian Empire, first as the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, and later as individual Soviet republics with reengineered borders and demographics, as well as relative autonomy. (ibid: 9-10)

Map 4.1: Persian Territorial Losses after Two Treaties with Russians[1]

4.3.2. Iran & the Collapse of the Soviet Union

The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, could have been a blessing for Iran, as the threat of living in the immediate proximity of a superpower with a history of expansionist tendencies was eradicated. It created a new geopolitical situation on Iran's northern borders with significant implications for its foreign policy.

As already discussed in chapter 3, the post Cold War systemic changes both at regional and international level "activated a totally new set of dynamics" and "forced Iran, largely unprepared, to engage in unknown prospects or regional competitions, pressures and opportunities in the new Northern frontier". (Mesbahi 2004: 109-110) While the eradication of the most important threat to Iran's territorial integrity and stability, and

[1] Availble at: http://www.iranpoliticsclub.net/maps/maps10/index.htm (Accessed on 28.05.2015)

creation of an opportunity for Tehran to revive its historic ties with the Caucasus were the most significant positive outcomes of the Soviet's dissolution; the negative consequences comprise a list including the followings:

- The collapse of the Soviet Union meant the loss of a bulwark against further pressure and regional intervention from the West. While still a superpower, the Soviet Union was acting as a counterbalance to Western inroads, forcing a more cautious approach, especially if the subject of Western enmity was located in the proximity of the communist superpower. The collapse of the superpower and demands of the newly independent republics opened the region's doors to presence and intervention of external powers that mostly had strenuous relations with Iran.
- The "competitive dimensions of relations between the great powers and middle-sized powers with the potential to become credible regional powers" was accentuated, leaving a war ridden Iran in fierce competition with other regional powers. (Hunter 2010:8) Consequently, the perception of some neighbouring medium powers towards Iran was changed. For countries like Turkey and Pakistan, Iran was no longer a partner against the Soviet inroads as it became a rival in the new system.
- A stable powerful country with long history of statehood was replaced by several weak, unstable republics with little or no history of statehood. These new republics were facing domestic challenges such as nation-state building, legitimacy, economy, etc. as well as external challenges such as foreign policy approach, alliances, boundaries, conflict with neighbours, etc.

  To put it simply, a relatively sound and stable neighbourhood was turned into a completely unstable and conflict ridden region, posing serious threats to Iran's security and stability.
- The emergence of new Caspian littoral states created more shareholders and therefore rivals for the Caspian basin and resources which used to be under the shared ownership of Iran and the Soviet Union who were peacefully using the Sea, based on 1921 and 1940 bilateral treaties.

4.3.3. The Importance of South Caucasus for Iran

According to Iran's former Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharrazi; "on the one hand due to civilizational, historical, cultural commonalities, and the fact that two of its three countries are Iran's immediate neighbours; and on the other hand because of its particular geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-strategic position, South Caucasus is of special importance in Iran's foreign policy. Particularly, because due to several determining internal factors such as ethnic conflicts and border disputes, as well as external factors such as great power rivalries, the region has inherently more potential for destabilisation and tension".(quoted by Moradi 2006: 38)

The above remarks demonstrate the importance of the South Caucasus for Iran in three dimensions:

1- Cultural-historical commonalities: The fact that the region used to be part of Persia's sphere of influence for numerous centuries has created a particular bond between the South Caucasus and Iran. The remaining cultural commonalities strengthen this bond.
2- Geographical location which bears geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-strategic importance: While an extensive discussion in Chapter 2 has covered these aspects in general, one important issue for Iran is the access that the region can provide for Iran to north and east European markets. Likewise, Iran can provide access to the Persian Gulf for European countries. However, Iran has also been directly affected by policies of different players who have been drawn to this region exactly because of the aforementioned importance.
3- Security and stability: Due to proximity of the region to Iran's borders, any instabilitay and conflict can affect Iran's security and in some cases internal stability. Likewise, security challenges faced by Iran can affect the security and stability of this small region. Furthermore, South Caucasus is the buffer zone between Iran and other regional and international powers. Their role and policies in this region have direct consequences for Iran's security.

4.3.4. Iran's Post Cold War Policy in the South Caucasus

Frustrated with its strategic loneliness, Iran was hoping to build up close relations with the newly independent republics of the former Soviet Union. There were great expectations among many Iranian decision makers that "in the absence of superpower pressure, Tehran is better placed to create a new regional order in which Iran would be holding the balance of power". (Ehteshami 2002:304) This ambition was primarily based on Iran's natural bond with the people of some Soviet successor states due to geographical contiguity, as well as cultural and historic commonalities.

Iran's natural role as the key transit link between the Caucasus and the Middle East, the Persian Gulf and the open sea; and its political importance as an influential power in the Middle East and Southwest Asia, were among the elements which strengthened Iran's self perception as a nexus and centre of regional economic and political activities. (Mesbahi 2004: 120-121)

However, the aforementioned threats rsulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union were more immediate and real than hypothetical opportunities. The most immediate threat was various consequences of the Karabakh conflict, from refugee crisis, to spill over in Iran's neighbouring provinces. Iran's policy with regard to the Karabkh conflict has been discussed later in this chapter as an example of its priorities and policies in the South Caucasus.

The presumed opportunities, however, turned out to be more wishful thinking than reality for several reasons. First, as a country which had just come out of an 8 years long war without any international support, Iran lacked the financial and technological resources that the newly independent republics needed to build their infrastructure and achieve economic development. Moreover, Iran was not the only neighbour who had the opportunity and desire for playing a greater role in the region.Turkey, was a significant rival, with much stronger economy and more advanced technology, while after just a few years, Moscow was on the rise again; claiming its place as the main regional power, whom others have to be watchful of.

On the other hand, a significant part of what Iran perceived as an asset called 'shared cultural and historical heritage' with newly idependent Soviet repblics, was the Islamic culture, which was irrelevant to the Republics of Georgia and Armenia. The Republic

of Azerbaijan, Iran's best bet in exploiting its religious connections for further influence in the region, was indeed the most secular republic among previously Soviet republics, where its first post independence president announced very early on that "we shall build a secular state". (Khovratovich 1991) As it would be demonstrated later in this chapter and the next, all presidents of the Republic of Azerbaijan took a firm stance against any ideological influence by Iran. Far from becoming an asset in developing closer relations and spreading influence in Azerbaijan; religion became a bone of contention between the two countries and ultimately counterproductive.

Furthermore, very soon, US involvement in the region, and its firm policy of 'everything without Iran', rubbed Tehran off material opportunities, such as transport routs.

With such landscape, Iran's South Caucasus policy had to focus more on containing the threats, than exploiting opportunities. Developing regional stability and improving security both across the region and for Iran's interests; while containing the threats emanating from the involvement of outside powers, particularly the United States, and their efforts to marginalise Iran, became Tehran's main goals in the region.

Iran's objectives for achieving the above goals have been to:

- Participate in conflict resolution initiatives.
- Establish partnerships with regional countries through economic and cultural cooperation.
- "Achieve a balance of power vis-à-vis other regional players" (Sharashenidze 2013)
- Establish delimitation plans which maximise Iran's share of the Caspian Sea resources.

Conflict resolution initiative was one of the main strategies undertaken by Tehran for improving regional stability. By pursuing this diplomacy, Iran was hoping to also limit external powers' intervention, while enhancing its regional influence and leverage.

During the reconstruction era which coincided with the demise of the Soviet Union, Iran effectively undertook a regionalist approach to counterbalance its vulnerabilities in the face of the growing trend of globalisation, hoping to facilitate its economic

recovery by "expanding trade and attracting investment through development of mutually beneficial state-to-state relations and integration into the global economy". (Maleki 2009: 3)

Development of economic and cultural ties with South Caucasus countries was considered as the most suitable step "for a general intensification of relations with the neighbouring countries, whose economies used to be oriented towards Moscow and inter republican trade of the Soviet Union." (Mohsenin 174:2001) While such relations could provide new markets for Iran's non- oil exports, as well as "potential suppliers of raw materials for its industries, and potential partners in economic cooperation of all kinds, particularly the energy" (ibid); it could become the foundation for closer cooperation and also increase Iran's sphere of influence. Tehran's efforts in evolving the RCD[1] into a platform for regional integration by reviving the moribund organisation and transforming it into the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) and helping the newly independent Muslim republics of Central Asia and the Caspian basin to join the organisation was an important step in this direction. Several organisations which facilitate trade, communication and transport among member countries are established under the auspices of ECO, including a shipping line and an investment and development bank. However, as Dorraj and Entessar (2013:10-11) have explained in detail, notwithstanding Iran's enthusiasm and efforts in championing ECO, significant obstacles have reduced the success of the Organisation. The economic vulnerability of member states, which is more due to mismanagement, widespread corruption, and lack of sophisticated infrastructure, is a major impediment for ECO's success. Moreover, the "political and ideological divisions, especially between Iran and the ECO's increasingly neo-liberal and pro-Western Eurasian states, will continue to hamper robust and meaningful cooperation among the organization's members."(ibid: 11)[2]

Despite Tehran's continuous emphasis on self reliance and exclusion of extra regional powers; major regional players lacked sufficient economic, technological and financial resources to fully support the needs of the newly independent states. Consequently

[1] Regional Cooperation for Development

[2] According to ECO 2014 Statistics report, Iran has had the lowest share of intra-regional trade of merchandise in 2011 (p.51). None of the ECO countries are among Iran's 5 top export destinations. Available at: <http://www.ecosecretariat.org/in2.htm> (Accessed on 24.04.2016) According to ECO forecasts Iran's share of total regional trade turnover by 2030 is unlikely to exceed more than 5%. Available at: <http://www.ecosecretariat.org/in2.htm> (Accessed on 24.04.2016)

Western countries who were able to offer substantial investments in developing security and infrastructure were welcomed by new republics; creating a situation in which "Iran's strategic predicament (was) not shared by any of its regional neighbours". (Herzig 2012: 505-506) Therefore, "Tehran's interest in using regionalism to exclude the United States or assert its own leadership role has often been counterproductive when it comes to engaging neighbouring states in cooperation." (ibid: 505)

The existing hostility between Iran and the United States has been a major factor in shaping Iran's regional relations. While increased Western penetration of the region was of major concern for Iran and preventing such development a top agenda; Tehran's nightmare came true with the Caspian oil boom in the early 1990s, followed by the expansion of US presence in the region. Consequently the South Caucasus became "one of the newest fronts in US-Iranian competition". (Cordesman 2013: VI)

The ideological nature of Iran's political system provided the best ammunition for Western public diplomacy apparatus to raise concerns about Iran's influence in the post Soviet space, particularly in Muslim countries. Before Iran's sustained pragmatic approach which kept a low profile on ideology and gave priority to regional stability and cooperation surprises the world, continuous propaganda about Tehran's intention to export the revolution had taken its toll and pushed regional countries into a defensive mode.

Taking major steps for further penetration of the region based on the Silk Road Strategy Act[1]; US effectively undertook a policy of isolating Iran and preventing the country from reaping the benefits of its strategic location, network infrastructure and resources in the region by total exclusion of Iran from development projects. Iran could have provided "the pivotal route in and out of Azerbaijan" (Karagian 2002:167) which would have been "strategically very advantageous" due to "extensive network of ports, highways and roads along the southern coast of the Caspian Sea" as well as "an extensive pipeline network for crude oil and natural gas and many well equipped ports on the coasts of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman". (ibid) The Iranian route was also "the safest option for the long term export of Azerbaijan's oil". (ibid) However, based on US strategy of 'everything without Iran', other players were eventually convinced to avoid the Iranian route at all costs. According to Johnson (2001:21) "Iran

[1] Introduced in Chapter 2

could have developed into a key state for the export of Caspian gas ….. had not the USA maintained its policy of isolating it internationally and effectively locked it out from influence in the Caspian region."

Moreover, to keep US happy, regional countries maintained a cap on their level of relationship with Iran, while some played skillfully with Iran card for increasing their value to the West. This situation in turn has had two important results regarding Iran's regional relations. First and foremost, it has enhanced Iran's Russio-centric policy. Furthermore, "the character and range of Iran's relation with Central Asian and Caucasian countries has become dependent on the latter's and not Iran's priorities and objectives". (Hunter 2010:172) In other words despite their smaller size and population, and much smaller resources, these countries set the terms and defined priorities and character of their relationship with Iran. If it wasn't for the West's determination to contain Iran's influence through isolation which consequently limited the country's options, Tehran should have been the determining player in bilateral relations. (ibid: 173)

Iran's isolation has not only limited its success in achieving economic and political goals in the region but has deserted it from a powerful stand in the Caspian demarcation negotiations to reach a domestically convincing legal regime. The Caspian Sea, is the world's largest inland body of water and "contains great fishery resources, including 90% of the world's stock of sturgeon, as well as vast oil and gas deposits in the subsoil. It is crossed by important transportation routes connecting Europe and Central Asia." (Janusz 2005:2)

The emergence of new littoral states following the breakup of the Soviet Union resulted in the dispute over the legal regime of the Sea and corresponding mining rights. Numerous rounds of negotiations have been held over the years, "the five countries (have) agreed not to operate exploration and extraction projects in the disputed sectors of the Caspian Sea before its legal regime is finalized. The countries could recover hydrocarbon only in their own sectors of the Caspian coasts." (Beheshtipour 2014)

Various proposals for dividing the Sea between the littoral states based on historical treaties and different approaches towards the nature of the Caspian have been put forward. Tehran initially argued that the Caspian is actually the largest lake in the world, and not a 'sea' as it is landlocked. Hence, the international Law of Seas cannot be

applied to determine the legal rights of littoral states, proposing the Soviet-Iranian Treaties of 1921 and 1940 as a governing regime until the five littoral states jointly devise a new legal framework. This meant the division of Caspian surface and shared ownership of the seabed which contained minerals, as otherwise by dividing the Caspian based on "the prevailing median (or modified median) line approach to delimitation, Iran would have by far the smallest share of undersea access rights." (Blum 2003:618) The shared ownership would have given Iran the chance of more benefit from the Caspian hydrocarbon resources. The plan could also prevent or at least limit the presence of Western powers based on "the twin principles of condominium[1] and consensus". (Mehdiyoun 2000:183)

As Azerbaijan adamantly opposed the 'shared ownership' proposal and Russia's position on the Principle of Condominium kept altering according to developments in its relationship with Western countries, Iran became further isolated in the region. Tehran officially announced on Sep 1998 that it accepts the principle of sectoral division, on the condition that a single division scheme would be applied to both surface and the seabed. "In addition, Iran has argued that such a division must be equal (i.e. that each littoral state's share must be 20 percent of the waters and the seabed)." (ibid: 184)

After more than two decades of negotiations, the five Caspian bordering countries have managed to achieve certain progress, "admitting the possibility of applying the principle of sectoral sectioning on the Caspian Sea." (Kapyshev 2012:25) What convinced Iran and Russia to accept the principle of sectoral division was not the compelling legal arguments of their opponents, but the domestic and international forces of politics that left them with no other viable options.

The prolonged negotiations have resulted in some agreements considering important issues. In 2003, the littoral states signed their first agreement called the Caspian Sea Environmental Convention in Tehran. During the second summit of the Caspian littoral states in 2007, agreements were reached about fishing and shipping in the Caspian Sea. "An important outcome of this summit was that the five Presidents agreed in their 25-point summit declaration that their military forces are not aimed for use to attack any of the parties" and that "under no circumstances they will allow for their territories to be used by other states. The five leaders appeared united in preventing the US from

[1] To put it simply condominium is the shared sovereignty of two or more states over a territory. Shared ownership.

undertaking military action from bases in any of the Caspian littoral states." (Katz 2008) In 2010 a military and security treaty was signed by the five countries in Baku and in 2014 a political declaration by presidents of all five countries set out "a fundamental principle for guaranteeing stability and security, namely, that only the Caspian littoral states have the right to have their armed forces present on the Caspian". The declaration implicitly rules out any future possible deployment of NATO forces in the basin.[1] (Dettoni 2014)

Table 4.1 has provided a summary of two different approaches to the status of the Caspian Sea and their legal implications.

Table 4.1: Caspian Legal Status Alternatives[2]

Classification	Applicable regime	Effect
Sea	United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982)	- Coastal states have 'territorial sea', breadth not exceeding 12 miles, and continental shelf. - Territorial seas do not extend 'beyond the median line every point of which is equidistant from the nearest points on the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial seas of each of the two states is measured.' - Land-locked states (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan) can claim right of access to high seas.
Lake	Customary international law governing border lakes	- Border states regulate use of water through international agreements. - Each state has exclusive rights over resources and water surface in its national sector. - Lakes can be delimited several different ways, such as by coastal line or median line.
Sources: UNCLOS 1982, Chatham House 2005		
Caspian Legal Status Alternatives		

Iran's approach to the South Caucasus became even more cautious in the post September 11th era. Tehran has "toned down its rhetoric, and even been willing to engage in issue-area negotiations with the United States in Geneva. Such stylistic alterations do not reflect shifts in Iran's threat perceptions …… but do signal calculated

[1] For 2014 Caspian Summit Statement see Appendix 4.1.
[2] US Energy Information Administration. *Overview of Oil and Natural Gas in the Caspian Sea.* Available at: <http://www.eia.gov/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=csr> (Accessed on 11.05.2015)

adjustments to a new regional and international environment." (Sariolghalam 2003:69) However, the adjustments did not stop US containment efforts towards Iran, if anything the nuclear dilemma added a new justification for mounting regional as well as international pressures. The 2012 blunt remarks of the then US Undersecretary of State for Central Asia and Caucasus which stated that "consistent with America's sanctions on Iran, the United States is encouraging all of the countries of the region to avoid trade and other transactions with the government of Iran in order to pressure Iran to engage with the international community about its concern about Iran's nuclear program" (Witt 2012) was a clear manifestation of significant exacerbation of a policy which was already in place since the end of the Cold War.

Nonetheless, Tehran has used every window of opportunity to forge closer relations with regional countries. A significant example of such approach is Iran's closer relation with Georgia following the 2008 five days war with Russia. As Georgia became further under pressure by Russia's sanctions and rising gas prices; Tehran extended the hand of friendship, providing Georgia with gas supplies, thus relieving the pressure. Subsequently, Iran's relation with its Western oriented neighbour was developed to the level of visa free regime just when Iran's international isolation had intensified.

As tensions over Iran's nuclear dilemma increased, and Israel threatened to attack Iran, the South Caucasus was being contemplated as a viable platform for carrying such attack. While these small countries worried about the consequences of potential war for them, Iran was concerned that either Azerbaijan or Georgia, may let their air or land be used by adversaries to carry out military attacks.

4.3.4.1. The Case of Karabakh: Conflict & Mediation

Background on Conflict

Among several ethno territorial conflicts which have been going on since late 1980s, the Karabakh conflict has been of particular concern to Iran primarily due to its shared borders with the war zone, as well as geopolitics of the conflict which has involved extra regional players.

While most historians and analysts consider the 'divide and rule' policy of Stalin as the root of the conflict, a thorough examination of the history reveals that the foundations of this conflict were laid down by Tsar in late 19th century, when Moscow started the integration campaign of the Persian conquered territories into Russia. During this period due to their shared Christian religion, Armenians established a close relationship with the Russians, and "were settled by the Russians in territory inhabited by Azeri populations, leading to conflicts between Christian Armenians and Muslim Azeri Turks". (Sadri 2010:10) Then in the 1920s and 1930s Stalin carved out the borders of the Soviet republics precisely in a way to make them "weak and vulnerable, and to cut off local ethnic communities from each other". (Nygren 2010:14)

The autonomous status of the Nagorno-Karabakh with large Armenian population had left both Azeri and Armenians dissatisfied, as the Azeris considered Nagorno-Karabakh their own territory and Karabakh Armenians were looking for unification with their brethrens in Armenia. "Conversely in Armenia, Azeris were moved from their homes and relocated to Azerbaijan." (Sadri 2010:11) The ethno territorial tensions between the two ethnic groups which were simmering for decades; was being managed within the confines of the Soviet Union, though with every change of government calls for the change in the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh were renewed by Armenians.

The conflict resurfaced during the Soviet *Perestroika*, as the controls were relaxed. In February 1988, the legislative assembly of Nagorno-Karabakh with the majority of Armenians "passed a resolution demanding freedom from the Azerbaijan SSR and status under the jurisdiction of Armenian USSR." (Nuriyev 2007:163) The call was rejected by the USSR Supreme Council which endorsed Azerbaijan's sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabakh. To contain the secessionist movements in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan authorities appealed to Moscow for granting equal autonomy to Azerbaijanis in Armenia. The call was faced with the brutal reaction of Armenia who violently expelled Azeri's. Azerbaijan reacted by withdrawing the autonomous status of the Nagorno-Karabakh which was followed by further violence from both sides. Soviet government's failure in undertaking any action to contain the violence resulted in further deterioration of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan to a degree that in late 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union a full scale war was erupted between the two republics, while the Nagorno-Karabakh proclaimed independence. (ibid)

Map 4.2: The Nagorno Karabakh Conflict[1]

Exploiting Azerbaijan's domestic instability in which, three presidents were appointed over the course of two years; in 1992 and 1993 Armenian militia not only occupied Karabakh, but also the neighbouring cities of Lachin, Kelbajar, Qubadli, Fizuli, Aghdam and Jabrayil, eventually occupying nearly 20% of Azerbaijan's territory. Though to this date, neither Armenia nor any other UN member states have recognised Karabakh's independence, it has an active government and elections and receives financial and political support from Armenians all over the world, particularly Armenians in the US. Moreover, the self proclaimed republic has an army[2], and representative offices in the US, France and Britain. Amid tardiness and power plays of regional and international players, Karabakh is effectively moving towards full independence. Meanwhile, Armenia has been adamant towards Azerbaijan's repeated demands for withdrawal from the occupied territories and provide the opportunity for Azeri refugees to return to their homes. (Nuriyev 2007:166)

Based on its history of ideologically motivated policies, the initial expectation was that Iran would overtly take side with Muslim Shiite Azerbaijan against the Christian Armenia. Meanwhile, the existence of a large Azeri population across the country, particularly in the north, as well as considerable Armenians; had exacerbated the impact of this conflict for Iran's domestic stability as Tehran did not want to disgruntle any of

[1] Available at: <http://www.nonformality.org/2007/12/conflicts-europe/> (Accessed on 28.05.2015)
[2] The Karabakh army has about 18,000 soldiers and around 40,000 militias, with considerable volume of equipments such as armoured personnel carriers, T72 and T55 tanks, artillery, missiles, etc. (Amirahmadian 2007)

these minorities. Therefore, while condemning Armenians violation of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and providing humanitarian aid to Azeri refugees, Iran officially took an active neutrality stand to avoid openly taking any sides the way Turkey did. Nonetheless, revealed evidence in recent years shows that despite its official neutral stance, Iran had initially supported and helped Azerbaijanis in their war with Armenians. In his 2011 message for the anniversary of Ali Ekram Hemmatev[1]; Ayatollah Ameli, Ardebil's Friday Imam and the supreme leader's representative in Ardebil province[2] described Iran's support during the first few years of Azeris' struggle, emphasising:

"*Iran undertook large scale actions (to support Azerbaijan). Many young people from Azerbaijan came to Iran for training in asymmetric warfare. Plenty of armaments were given to young people who were longing for some military equipment to defend Shusha. Also with the government's consent and based on requests from Rovshan Javadov[3] and Rahim Ghasiev[4] for establishing a defence system, a joint military base was established. In these military bases, Ardebili and Tabrizi military commanders helped their Azeri brothers wholeheartedly to prevent Armenian aggression and establish refugee camps.*"[5]

Ameli also said that Iran assisted Azerbaijan in bringing 'thousands of gunmen' to the front line from Afghanistan. Though Azerbaijan's media tried to refute Ameli's claims; in response to Yeni Musavat's newspaper, Sardar Hamidov, the commander of the Azerbaijani battalion which took part in Aghdam defence confirmed the participation of Afghans and mercenaries of other ethnic origins who were brought to Azerbaijan by Iran. Moreover, in an interview with the local media, the former speaker of the Azerbaijani parliament Yagub Mamedov confirmed Ameli's claims. This information

[1] the deceased president of Tallish Autonomous Republic.
[2] One of Iran's northern provinces which has majority Azari population
[3] special unit of the Interior Troops (OMON)
[4] Azerbaijani Minister of Defence in 1992-1993
[5] Find the voice record of the sermon in Azeri language on <http://fars.tv/audio/3099/%D8%B3%D8%AE%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A8%DB%8C%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B4%D9%87-%D9%82. Find the Persian Translation on: http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/164266/%D9%86%D8%A7%DA%AF%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%87-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%AC%D9%86%DA%AF-%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%8C-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C-%D9%88-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B7-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%80-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%88>

was also confirmed by the former Azerbaijani Defence Minister Rahim Gaziyev and the former leader of the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan Haji Nuriyev. Speaking to Azerbaijani media, Nuriyev said "*Time has already come to open the facts about Iran's help to Azerbaijan. We remember Iran's help, which was provided in the battlefield; we would have been in a more difficult situation without it.*"(Baghdasaryan 2011)

In a more recent comment, Mohsen Rezaei the Secretary for Iran's Expediency Council and the former Commander in Chief of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has described Iran's support of Azerbaijan in the early years of the Karabakh conflict in an interview with Sahar International TV channel. [1]

"*I had personally ordered for the situation in Karabakh to be assessed and for the Azeri army to be suitably equipped and trained…. Many Iranians participated in the Karabakh war. In addition to those casualties who were carried back to Iran; numerous Iranian martyrs are buried in Baku…..*"

Describing the situation in 1991 Azerbaijan, Yunusov (2003:7) has stated that "there were even reports of Islamic Revolutionary Guards arriving from Iran with large quantities of weapons." The Head of Nongovernmental Centre for International War against Terrorism has also confirmed Iranians' claims. Rovshan Noruz Oghlu, emphasises that "*Iran's demeanour regarding attack on the Republic of Azerbaijan has always been honest and grand, something we observed in the Karabakh conflict*."[2] He confirms that

"*Iranians were fighting alongside Azerbaijan people in the Karabakh. They knew the meaning of the war. Tens of Iranian citizens, who had participated in Iraq War took part in the Karabakh fronts as well. They were from all Iranian ethnicities; Fars and Kurds as well as Azeris…. We have investigated and found out that in Feb 1992 in Khujali, Iranians fought alongside Azeris against separatists. Some of their graves are in Khujali, Lachin, Kelebjer, Qubadli and Shusha. We have found graves of 11 Iranians… Iranian volunteer warriors arrived in Azerbaijan in groups and fought in*

[1] *Mohsen Rezaei: Shohadāye Iranie jange Gharehbāgh niz dar Baku madfun hastand*. Available at: <http://www.yjc.ir/fa/news/4291588>, (Accessed on 01.11.2014)

[2] Young Journalists Club. (2013) *Some Iranian Martyred in Karabakh War- Azerbaijani Expert*. Available at: http://www.yjc.ir/en/news/319/some-iranian-martyred-in-karabakh-war-azerbaijani-expert (Accessed on 01.11.2014)

various fronts in Karabakh. Their goal was to help Azerbaijan Republic and defend a Muslim country."[1]

In an interview with Azerbaijan's Interpress, the commander of Bozghurd battalion, Nuruddin Khuja explains that "*we requested Iran's help in Zangilan events. If it wasn't for Iranian's artillery support Zangilan people would have been massacered; a tragedy worse than Khojali*."[2]

The remarks of the Vice Chairman of Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee in response to a critical letter from Siyavush Novruzov, a representative of Azerbaijan's ruling party Yeni Azerbaijan, provides another evidence for Iran's initial support of Azeri's struggle in Karabakh. Mansour Haghighat Pour, previously an IRGC commanders and the governor of Ardabil Province has written:

"*I was a special adviser to former Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev during the Karabakh war. So, casting a doubt on the truthfulness of my words, you indirectly blame your late President. ..... through the efforts of chief of the Special Purpose Police Detachment of Azerbaijan, Rovshan Javadov, more than 2,000 Afghan warriors (Mojaheds) were transferred by IRGC from Afghanistan to Azerbaijan to fight against Armenians*."[3]

The fact that Afghan Mujahedin were fighting for Azerbaijan was subsequently confirmed by Armenia's Foreign Minister Ohanian. He said, "*at some points Afghan warriors were based in Karabakh, but later they left upon the reached agreement."*[4]

Examining the above evidence, the question then arises as to why and when Iran ceased its military support of Azerbaijan. Describing developments which led to discontinuation of Iran's cooperation; Mr. Ameli quotes Rovshan Javadov; "*After the revolution and following the presidential inauguration, he (Elchibay) invited me (Javadov) for the first official visit. I knew he is going to ask me about my plans for Karabakh, so I took the operation plan in a folder with me and went to the meeting. But*

[1] Ibid.
[2] Dānā News. (2014) *E`terāfe farmāndeye Gordāne Bozghurd darbāreye naghshe Iran dar jange Azerbaijan va Armanestan.* Available at: <http://www.dana.ir/News/85349.html> (Accessed on 27.08.2015)
[3] Panorama. (2013) *Former Iranian General: More than 2,000 Afghan Militants Fought on Part of Azerbaijan in Karabakh War.* Available at: http://www.panorama.am/en/analytics/2013/04/08/mansour-haghighat-pour/ (Accessed on 10.05.2013)
[4] Asre Iran. (2011) *Jange Azerbaijan va Armanestan; āyā Iran jangjuyāne Afghan rā be mantaghe e`zām mikard?*, Available at: <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/165286/%D8%AC%D9%86%DA%AF-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8> (Accessed on 01.11.2014)

the president pointed out to a folder which was on his desk -the folder was transferred from Israel to Turkey and from there to his desk- and said 'I'm aware of your cooperation with Iranians. From now on you have to discontinue all your relations with Iran. We do not need Iran's help. If I know that I can get back Karabakh with Iran's help, I prefer to hand it to Armenians. Karabakh is not a serious problem and would be resolved by itself in a short matter of time. Our war is with Iran. We have to prepare ourselves to fight Iran. Our main enemy is not Armenia; it is Persians (Fars)'."[1]

Mr. Ameli continued his explanation by saying "*After that, things changed. First Azerbaijan stopped cooperation and refrained from receiving Iran's help. Then the Iranians who had gone to help Azerbaijan were indecently imprisoned. Even more surprising was the fact that they were interrogated and tortured by Israeli and Turkish interrogators. Later all their services were considered as treason. Those Azeris who were trained in Iran were arrested and tortured to confess that they were not trained to fight for Karabakh, but for establishing another Hezbollah to fight for Iran's interest*."(ibid)

The conclusion which can be drawn from the above evidence is:

- Contrary to popular perception and despite its official neutral position, Iran was initially involved in direct military and humanitarian aid towards Azerbaijan. This aspect of Iran's policy was largely an outcome of its ideological nature, based on which defending oppressed Muslims is the duty of a Muslim state. Nevertheless, even with ideological goals in mind, 'influencing Muslim brothers' and 'keeping them under the umbrella of Islam' would have been the next priority after the liberation of Karabakh, serving the political goal of 'spreading its sphere of influence.'
- Discontinuation of Iran's military support for Azerbaijan was not a policy choice made by Iran, but the consequence of Azerbaijan's domestic developments and foreign policy orientation.

The evidence also proves that Iran's approach towards the Karabakh conflict in early

[1] Fars News. *Sokhanrānie Ayatollah Ameli, emām jome`ye Ardebil*. Available at: <http://fars.tv/audio/3099/%D8%B3%D8%AE%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A8%DB%8C%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B4%D9%87-%D9%82> (Accessed on 8.05.2013)

years was multifaceted both driven by ideology, as well as pragmatism. Sending men and armament as well as establishing training camps for Azeri warriors, was ideologically based. Keeping such enormous help a secret for many years, despite all negative propaganda by Baku, was rooted in pragmatism, as supporting Azerbaijan openly would have dragged Iran into the quagmire of the conflict, ruined its blossoming relations with Armenia and undermined its status as an impartial mediator. Moreover, it would have not definitely been tolerated by Russia. 'Avoiding antagonising Moscow' has been an important element of Iran's regional policy even before the end of the Cold War; hence the covert involvement in the Karabakh. This strategy also helped in avoiding direct involvement of other players and giving them an excuse for military presence on Iran's northern border.

Mediation Efforts

Tehran's mediation efforts in Karabakh conflicts are more comprehendible within the framework of Iran's Realpolitik. Understandably, the first and foremost incentive for Iran to offer its mediation services was to secure its borders and resume stability in the region. According to Ramezanzadeh (Quoted by Suleymanov & Ditrych 2007:106), "Iran mobilized its efforts only after Armenian troops reached the Azerbaijani-Iranian border at the Araxes. Their further advance to the east might have caused not only a tremendous flow of refugees across the river but even the collapse of the Azerbaijani state. The latter could have had catastrophic consequences for the security of the Caspian region."

Ramezanzadeh also believes that Iran's role as the mediator "should be seen as part of its North-West Asia strategy. Iran emphasizes the inviolability of recognized international borders. It does not accept territorial claims based on historical arguments as legitimate, as such claims and arguments would lead to endless conflicts in the region."(1996:2)

In his book, Iran's chief negotiator in the Karabakh conflict, Vaezi (2008:129) provides other reasons for Iran's mediation. He argues that one of the main reasons was to balance the power between Azerbaijan and Armenia, as a strong Christian Armenia or a powerful Azerbaijan who could support irredentism in Iran's northern provinces was

not favourable by Tehran. He explains that based on political realism Iran was trying to institutionalise and stabilise its political involvement in the region through mediation. Describing the context in which Iran's mediation was initiated, he points out to the militariy imbalance in the war fronts, and the negative effects of political disputes and power rivalries in Baku on morale while political groups were exploiting the war and military forces to achieve their factional goals. (ibid: 131)

In an atmosphere filled with toxic political disputes, Baku's unstable interim government was unable to make essential decision for resolving the conflict. Moreover, Elchibey's radical nationalism had left Azerbaijan with no regional ally but Turkey. Incontrast with Azerbaijan, there was a relative political stability and unity in Armenia. None of political parties and factions let their differences to go beyond a certain degree and threaten the Republic's political stability. Karabakhians, on the other hand, were not showing any flexibility. According to chief negotiator Vaezi (2008:131), this was due to their victories in Stepankerat, the occupation of most of Karabakh and the fall of Khojali.

Under such difficult circumstances, while enjoying the trust and confidence of both sides, Iran started its mediation efforts. It took a process of six months active engagement starting from January 1992 after the partial occupation of Karabakh till May 1992. Eventually, following the March 1992 Tehran negotiations with participation of high ranking delegates from both sides, an agreement was reached for "a temporary cease-fire, a lifting of the blockade of Armenia by the Azeri side, the deployment of observer forces and an exchange of prisoners of war and bodies". (Ramezanzadeh 1996:3)

Iran's mediation efforts continued despite violation of the ceasefire within a week. On May 1992, Iran's President Rafsanjani hosted and met with the presidents of the two belligerent republics and consequently a joint declaration was signed and issued emphasising on "restoring stability in the region, based on international law and the principles of the UN Charter". (ibid) However, the intensification of war while the three presidents were negotiating for peace in Tehran had resulted in Armenian forces' occupation of Shusha. The fall of Shusha, followed by the occupation of yet another strategic city of Lachin was not only a turning point in the war but also a breaking point in Iran's mediations.

Shusha was Azerbaijan's most important stronghold in the Karabakh. "The occupation of these two cities opened a strategic roadway into Armenia through which arms and supplies could flow." (Sadri 2010:34) Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement expressing concerns and condemning "any military operations aimed at occupying new areas". It called upon all involved parties to "refrain from any provocative act while continuing efforts towards peaceful solutions".[1] The statement was followed by President Rafsanjani's message to the Armenian president expressing "Iranian nation and officials' concerns over recent developments in Karabakh."[2] However, the above developments not only hampered Iran's mediation efforts but also raised domestic criticism of the government for not taking a firm stance against Armenia. Although Iranian officials have repeatedly declared their willingness for further mediation, the regional and international atmosphere has been even less favourable for Iran to play such an influential role in the region.

SajjadPour believes (1995:208) that as a consequence of the above developments; Iran has since resorted to a 'guarded neutrality' and been assertive on the "issue of non violability of international borders….. The principle of the sanctity of borders is contrary to those formulas which prescribe a land exchange between Armenia and Azerbaijan[3]: giving a corridor from Armenia to Azerbaijan to connect Azerbaijan to Nakhjavan, and a corridor from Azerbaijan to Armenia, to connect Armenia to Karabakh. Such formula would deprive Iran from a common border with Armenia." Consequently Iran's common border with Azerbaijan would extend significantly, which considering irredentist activities and rhetorics of Azerbaijan it is perceived as a security threat by Iran.

Iran has consistently urged for a solution by regional countries and without the interference of outside powers. In 2010, Bahrami, Iran's then ambassador to Azerbaijan criticised outside powers for merely looking out for their own interests.[4] On February 2013, the new Iranian envoy to Azerbaijan "warned against possible deployment of peacekeeping forces in Karabakh, saying the move would cause new security problems in the region." Speaking to IRNA, Mr. Pak Ayeen emphasised "The deployment of

[1] Channel 1, IRIB Television. 14.30 GMT. 9 May 1992
[2] English IRNA, 06:14 GMT, 13 May 1992
[3] i.e. The Goble plan
[4] TREND Newsagency. (2013) *Iran Ready to Mediate in Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Envoy*. Available at: <http://ilna.ir/en/news/news.cfm?id=319> (Accessed on 01.05.2013)

peacekeeping forces to the Karabakh region is not only an ineffective measure to resolve the region's dispute, but will create new security problems in the region."[1]Iran's insistence on a solution by regional players and its opposition to the deployment of peace keeping forces arise from its security concerns particularly its antagonistic relations with the West.

The Karabakh conflict is far from over despite years of mediation by various players including Russia and OSCE. "Since 1994, a self-controlled ceasefire has been in place, but exchanges of fire are a regular occurrence along the Line of Contact (LoC) between NK and Azerbaijan, causing both military and civilian casualties." (Centre for Security Studies 2013:1) Like a smoldering volcano, the conflict has the potential of activation, melting away regional stability and international security at any time. Nonetheless, as de Waal (2009:1) has argued "although it is in the long-term interests of everyone to affect a peaceful resolution of the dispute, yet all the key players are more or less comfortable with the status quo, despite all its negative aspects. The leaders responsible for taking decisions on a peace process prefer not to make decisions that could win their countries long-term benefits, calculating that the risks involved in making compromise are too great."

Due to its international isolation and poor relations with Azerbaijan, Iran is currently what de Waal (2013:4) calls "the sleeping giant of the conflict". Any change in Iran's domestic circumstances or its international status may have grave effects on this conflict. However, under present circumstances, like other players, Iran is happy with the status quo, as the conflict reduces Azerbaijan's chances of seriously investing on its irredentist ambitions. Armenia's regional isolation has provided Iran with a close and sympathetic regional ally while Turkey has been unable to spread its regional influence as it aspires due to its closed borders with Armenia.

Through the prism of the Karabakh conflict one can see different aspects of Iran's regional policy, from ideological support of its Shiite Muslim brethren to official neutral stance and active mediation; insisting on the sanctity of international borders while opposing the deployment of peacekeeping forces on its shared borders with the

[1] Press TV. (2015) *Peacekeepers Will Intensify Woes in Karabakh: Iran Envoy*, Available at: <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/02/21/290060/iran-opposed-to-karabakh-peacekeepers/> (Accessed on 30.10.2014)

conflict zone; it all comes down to two major concepts: ‘security’ and ‘influence’.

4.4. Conclusions

A combination of several ideational elements, and geographical realities of being a linchpin pivotal state, as well as the nature and consequences of Iran’s general foreign policy have shaped Iran’s regional policy in both the Middle East and South Caucasus. While there is controversy among various scholars about whether Iran is in search of hegemony in adjacent regions or not; a brief review of Iran’s policies in the Middle East (the Persian Gulf and the Levant) and the South Caucasus identifies two major drives of ‘security’ and ‘influence’ in Iran’s regional policy.

With ‘security’ in perspective, one can see how in the face of strategic its loneliness engendered by its particular normative identity; Iran has employed various means to maintain stability in its immediate neighbourhood in both the Middle East and the South Caucasus. Tehran has constantly emphasised that the regional security should be maintained through regional arrangements and cooperation and made futile efforts in keeping the transregional countries out of its adjacent regions.

As part of its security measures throughout the decades Iran has built a strong network of proxies in the heart of the Arab world which provides Tehran with strategic depth in the Middle East and has been relatively effective in fighting the battles away from Iran’s borders. This strategy has also helped Iran to develop its regional influence and outreach.

Despite decades of relentless efforts by rivals and adversaries, particularly the United States for isolating Iran out of regional dynamics, Tehran has exploited limited opportunities mainly emanating from the failure of other players to extend its influence and forge closer relations with different players. An obvious example in the Middle East is the case of Iraq. While most Arab states were playing as spectators in the immediate post 2003 period, refusing to open embassies or forgo accumulated debts under Saddam; Iran seized the right moment by political empowerment of Iraqi Shiites and establishment of friendly relations with Iraqi Kurds to develop its sphere of influence deep into layers of Iraqi administration, economy and society.(Chubin

2009:170) As a result, Iran's influence has increased considerably tipping the regional balance of power in favour of Tehran. Similarly, Iran took advantage of Georgia's post 2008 war to forge closer relations with this country at the time it was suffering from Russian gas embargo and US reluctance to engage in its struggle, by offering to export gas to Tbilisi.

While Iran has attached different degrees of importance to each region, with the Middle East enjoying the outmost importance; its regional approach, particularly since the end of the war with Iraq, has been similar in many ways. Emphasising on regionalism, Iran has pragmatically taken an accommodating and constructive approach towards its neighbours, particularly in the South Caucasus. Such understanding is completely true if one ignores the early months of the Karabakh conflict, when despite its official neutral stance, Iran provided Azerbaijan with military support based on ideological beliefs which perceived Azerbaijan as a Muslim land and its support as a religious duty. However, Azerbaijan's unappreciative response to this support taught Iran some bitter lessons about the limits of ideological investment on a secular state, which resulted in Tehran taking a pragmatist approach in the South Caucasus ever since.

Notwithstanding, Iran's pragmatic policies, together with its regionalist approach have been increasingly unsuccessful particularly in the post Sep 11th era. The US strategy of containing Iran's influence in its northern neighbourhood together with mounting international sanctions have effectively limited Iran's influence in the South Caucasus and deserted Teran from reapping significant potentials in its relations with this region.

It may not be an overestimation to say that Russia has been the top beneficiary of Iran-US animosity and US policies to isolate Iran in both regions, as the consequent vulnerabilities has been the main factor in development of Iran's Russo-centric policy. Faced with various degrees of animosity or rivalry by other important players, Tehran has constantly tried to avoid antagonising Russia by observing Moscow's concerns and sensitivities in the region even at the expense of its own regional policies and priorities.

While Iran's efforts for developing extensive regional cooperation have been challenged both in the Middle East and the South Caucasus, the failure has been more obvious and extensive in the South Caucasus. The absence of strong anti Western / American sentiment, as well as lighter ideological tendencies and greater financial-economic dependence of regional countries to the West, particularly the US; have been

the main reasons for this situation. Unlike Middle Eastern countries who were at times prepared to resist US pressure to some degree to cooperate and have close relations with Iran particularly from the end of Iran-Iraq war till mid 2000's; South Caucasus countries easily gave in to US strategy of 'everything without Iran' and ignored Iran's proposals for a regional security arrangement or opportunities that Iran's strategic location and infrastructure could have offered them.

Another reason is the level of attention and investment that Iran has been able to apply to the South Caucasus considering the limitation of its resources. In other words, the heavy burden of confronting US influence and allies in the Middle East by supporting proxies, building alliances, and managing developments in that region has severly limited country's resources for due attention towards the South Caucasus. Meanwhile, there is the fact that a more proactive policy and increased outreach by Iran would have undermined Iran's strategy of 'not antagonising' Russia.

The next two chapters will examine Iran's bilateral relations with its two neighbours in the South Caucasus, the Republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia adapting Buzan's sectoral model.

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CHAPTER FIVE

IRAN'S RELATIONS WITH THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

5.1. Introduction

In 1918, a new political entity was established in the North of Aras River, which its founders chose to call it the Republic of Azerbaijan. This politically motivated name selection became the first brick in building future relations between Iran and the newly founded republic in north of Aras. This chapter will examine Iran's relations with its most important neighbour in the South Caucasus, the Republic of Azerbaijan since its inception.

The chapter will discuss the integration process of the short lived Azerbaijan Democratic Republic into the Soviet system, and demonstrate that while the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic had no sovereignty or independent foreign relations; it was a valuable asset for the Soviet's expansionist aspirations particularly towards Persia. The collapse of the Soviet Union provided the Soviet Azerbaijan with the opportunity to regain its independence and conduct foreign policy and relations as a sovereign state. As such, Azerbaijan's history has been reviewed in three unequal periods, one as short as two years and the other two, as long as several decades. This historical review is mainly focused on developments relevant to Azerbaijan's relations with Iran and excludes other less relevant historical developments.

The chapter will then provide background on Azerbaijan's foreign policy, particularly in the post independence era, and its relations with main players in the region during different administrations. It will subsequently evaluate Iran's bilateral relations with Azerbaijan, adapting Buzan's sectoral security model. However, while Buzan's categories look at the subject from a security perspective and mainly focuses on threats; the perspective for this study is 'relations', and therefore, in each category, it looks at opportunities as well.

Through this analysis it will be demonstrated how the two countries' shared heritage which, could have provided them with ample opportunities, has negatively affected their bilateral relations due to several reasons, including lack of trust and opposing nature of the states. This negative dynamics, together with regional and international developments have securitised the relations between the two countries and created further tensions.

The chapter will conclude that as a result of several misperceptions and miscalculations; Iran has failed to have a consistent realistic and proactive policy towards Azerbaijan which in turn has resulted in short term, reactive policies. It will also conclude that Iran-Azerbaijan relations in general can be analysed based on defensive realism theory of international relations.

Since the chapter is not only studying historical developments, but also important recent events, most of the data is retrieved from sources like news agencies and networks; think tanks etc.

5.2. Azerbaijan's State Formation

Located on the eastern side of the South Caucasus and on the Western coast of the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan is Iran's north Western neighbour sharing 676 Km of common borders. Iran can essentially provide Azerbaijan with the shortest and the most economic transport route to the Persian Gulf and from there to the international markets. This is a significant opportunity for a landlocked country with no direct access to open seas. Iran is also Azerbaijan's mere access provider to its outer part, the Autonomous Republic of Nakhjavan in the west which is separated from the mainland Azerbaijan by the territory of the Armenian Republic.

As Cornell (2011:3) has put it, the most appropriate single word which can describe Azerbaijan throughout its history is 'crossroads'. "Situated between Europe and Asia, Azerbaijan is marked by major routes of migration, conquest, trade and transit from east to west and from north to south."(ibid) This important geographical location is the reason that Azerbaijan can open the CIS and European market's gateway for Iran. Dr. Maleki, Iran's former deputy foreign minister has emphasised on the importance of Azerbaijan for Iran by stating that "although Azerbaijan has particular problems, but I always think if I was the foreign minister, I would have deployed my strongest men to Baku, as it can both be a threat or can open Europe's doors to Iran."[1]

[1] *Taghire siāsate hasteie Iran ghat'ei ast.* Available at: <http://irdiplomacy.ir/fa/page/1920117/تغییر+سیاست+هسته+ای+ایران+قطعی+است.html> (Accessed on 10.12.2013)

5.2.1. Brief Pre Independence History

"The earliest political entity known to have occupied the geographic space of the modern state of Azerbaijan is Caucasian Albania." (Sadri 2007:29) According to Cornell (2011:5), significant establishment of Turkic tribes in the Caucasus goes back to the ninth and tenth centuries when warrior clans "entered into the service of the Sassanid dynasty of Persian Empire and gained impetus in subsequent centuries with the emergence of the Oghuz Turks Seljuk dynasty."

While the establishment of Turkic tribes in the Caucasus Albania provided an ethnic link between them, Azeri Turks of Persia and Ottoman Turks; "Azeri Turks have been separated from their brothers in Turkey by religious persuasion. …. The Azeri Turks mixed Islam with their pre Islamic religious beliefs." (Sadri 2007:30) The resulting mixture was bent towards mysticism. Tolerance of Shiism towards mysticism was an essential factor in its adaptation by Azeris. From these Turkic Shiite tribes, the Safavids who emerged from Ardebil in fifteenth century, were particularly strong, constituted a "military brotherhood of Turkish nomads" (ibid) and established a dynasty in Iran's Azerbaijan. As the expansionist aspirations of Ottoman Turks brought them in direct conflict with Safavids, the shared ethnic heritage between the two dynasties proved to be of less importance compared to religious orientation or territorial struggles. "In the ensuing battles between the Ottoman and Safavid armies, very few Safavid Turks deserted to the Ottoman Turkish enemy." (ibid)

Over the time, both Muslim empires grew weaker and their influence in the Caucasus waned while the Russian Empire was on the rise with great expansionist agenda. Although the 1747 assassination of Nadir Shah effectively ended Persia's direct rule over territories located on the northern side of the Aras River, the khanates were still considered as part of Persia's political and cultural orbit.

Russia's efforts to annex Persia's Caucasian khanates had started in the late 18th to early 19th centuries. The desire for the annexation of the region was not merely rooted in Russia's geographical location or its greatest goals in the Middle and Near East. In addition to economic interests; "Peter *I* wanted to put an end to the rule of Iran in the Transcaucasus and to prevent the Ottoman Empire capture the territory." (Seyid-zade

2010:8) Following Iran's defeat in the first Russia-Persia war (1804-1828) and the signing of the Gulistan Treaty by the two warring Empires, several cities and khanates of Persia were ceded to Russia. These included Karabakh, Ganje, Baku, Shaki, Shervan, Darband (Derbent), Quba, Lankaran Khanates and a part of Talysh Khanate. All these khanates were parts of the Aran region[1]constituting parts of the present day Republic of Azerbaijan.

The ambiguities of the Gulistan treaty which had left the extent of borders open to interpretations; together with mounting pressures from the public particularly clergies who were pushing for the resumption of Muslim territories pushed Persia into yet another losing war with Russia in 1826, ending in dramatic defeat of Persians and concluded by the 1828 Turkmanchai Treaty. Upon this treaty, the Aras River was set as the precise border between Russia and Persia. Also Nakhjavan and Yerevan Khanates were ceded to Russia in perpetuity. Map 5.1 shows the Persian territories lost to Russian Empire under the two treaties of Gulistan and Turkmanchai. Persia's loss of sovereignty over the Caucasus khanates had serious ethnographic consequences for Turkish people living in the northern parts of this country as Caucasus Albanian Turks were separated from their brethrens living in Persia.

In contrast to their general policy in other Muslim territories of the Empire, throughout the 19th century Russians did not interfere with the traditional system of governance in the South Caucasus. This resulted in the speedy development of trade and seasonal or permanent migration of a vast number of Persian labours to the Caucasus. Consequently, there was an overwhelming feeling of connection and belonging towards Persia among Caucasian people till the early years of the 20th century. (Bayat 2009:4)

During this period, Russians extracted commodities from the region without making appropriate investments. They rushed to Baku only at the end of the nineteenth century for exploiting oil reserves. "It was at that time when fundamental and radical changes in socio-economic, political and cultural life occurred in Azerbaijan." (Nuriyev 2007:32) Producing then more than half of the world's oil turned Baku, the largest city of the Caucasus into "one of the most dynamic industrial world centers of the time"

[1] in its old non-political definition.

(ibid); drawing prominent Western investors and entrepreneurs such as Rockefeller and Rothschild to invest in development of local industries and infrastructure.

Map 5.1: Persian Khanates Prior to 1803 Russia-Persia War[1]

The economic development was followed by a dramatic social change notable in the emergence of a middle class who were influenced by the mainstream European life. Baku was transformed "into a cosmopolitan centre, with a large proletariat living and working in appalling conditions under Russian control. As such the city was a receptive target for both nationalist groups and early Bolshevik movement. Further the Russian revolution of 1905 brought a political awakening in Azerbaijan." (ibid: 33) The awakening provided fertile ground for the formation of various political organisations. In such atmosphere, the 'Musavat Democratic Islamic Party' was founded in Baku in 1911. The party "had begun as a pan Islamic modernist party seeking to liberate and modernize the wider Islamic world. But with Rasulzadeh at its helm it drifted increasingly in a Turkish direction" (Cornell 2010:18) particularly when it was merged with the 'Turkish Federalism Party' and renamed 'Turkish Federalist Musavat Party' in 1917. In May 1918, the party seized the opportunity arisen from the collapse of the

[1] Available at: <http://www.iranpoliticsclub.net/maps/maps10/index.htm> (Accessed on 28.05.2015)

Tsarist Empire and the weakening of the Russian authority over its southern periphery as a result of the First World War; to break away the territory north of the Aras River known as Aran, from the Russian's rule and to establish a new country.

According to the prominent Russian historian Barthold, "the easternmost country populated mainly by Turks and Tatars was to be named the Eastern and Southern Transcaucasia Republic". (As quoted by Ghalichian 2012:17) However, to serve the expansionist aspirations of the party's leaders who were supported by pan Turanist ottomans; Rasoulzadeh, then the leader of Musavat party, suggested calling this new entity as the 'Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan' (ADR). Baku, Elizabeth Guberniasi, the southern areas of Tbilisi and Yerevan and the territory of Zaghatala were considered as parts of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan. (AmirAhmadian 2005:30) "With this single decision of the Musavat party, the various peoples, tribes and minorities living in the area, which until then had been called by the general name of Turks (or Tatars) became 'Azerbaijanis' or 'Azeris'." (Alekparov as quoted by Ghalichian 2012:17)

The action was met with surprise and serious objections from the Persian elites, including prominent Iranian Azerbaijani politicians such as Shaeikh Mohammad Khiabani and Ahmad Kasravi. The latter wrote; "It is rather strange that they call Aran, Azerbaijan now, as Azerbaijan or Azerbaygan is the name of another territory, which in Pahlavi Aran is larger and more popular than it….. These two territories have always been separate and Aran has never been called Azerbaijan before". (As quoted by Bayat 2011:1) Also, the Iranian Embassy in Turkey objected to calling the newly established country as "Azerbaijan"; but no further actions were taken by the government. In the opening chapter of his book which has documented and reviewed correspondents between Baku- Tehran elites and newspapers regarding the name of this new country, Bayat argues that although many Iranian elites failed to trace Ottoman's pan Turkish (Turanist) footprints behind this name selection, there was an outcry against it, manifested by heated debates in both Iran and the new country's newspapers. (2011:12-13)

The ADR was rather short lived as it was invaded by the Bolshevik's Red Army in 1920. The government was swiftly overtrown without facing much resistance since "the bulk of the Azerbaijani forces were engaged in suppressing an Armenian separatist

uprising that had just broken out in Nagorno-Karabakh". (Nuriyev 2007:35) In 1922, the area now popularly recognised as 'Azerbaijan' was integrated into a new political entity called 'Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic' (TSFR). This political entity was later abolished to give room for the practice of Lenin's doctrine of 'recognition and protection of ethnic identities'. The practice of the doctrine had several consequences, some of which are directly relevant to this chapter, including:

1. What constituted the ADR was recognised as the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan.

2. Since the creation of convoluted boundaries was an imperative for the practice of Lenin's doctrine; over the time upon Soviet leader's decision, about 28000 sq/Km of the Azeri territory was given away to neighbouring Soviet republics. In 1924, Gavije and Zangezur provinces were separated from Azerbaijan's territory and annexed to Armenia.(Amirahmadian 2005:2)

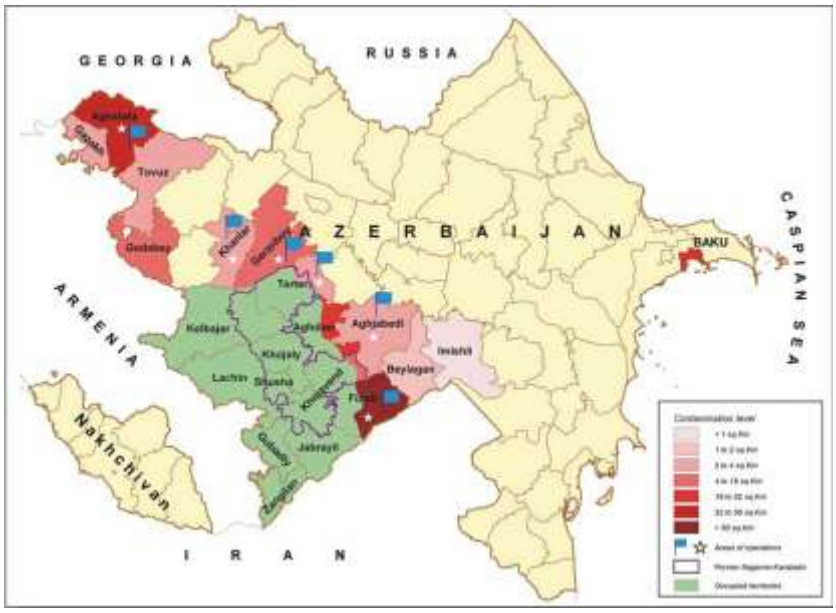
3. In the same year, an autonomous province called Nagorno Karabakh with majority Armenian population was established in the mountainous part of the old Karabakh province which was well in the borders of the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic. (ibid, and Sadri 2010:32)

4. Nakhjavan, "a region with large Azeri population, was cut off from Azerbaijan by the territory of Armenia, whose Soviet determined borders stretched all the way south to the Iranian borders. Despite this recognition of their identities, Azeris in Nakhjavan really wished to be joined with Azerbaijan and Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh wished to be joined to Armenia. The Soviet refusal to do so meant that the Azeris and Armenians would go to war to redraw their boundaries as soon as they gained independence."(Sadri 2010:32)

The new political entity which was established in the territory ruled by Musavats, not only kept the name of Azerbaijan but also its perceived functionalities. In fact the new 'Soviet Azerbaijan' had the same role in the Bolshevik's general strategy that it had in the general strategy of Ottomans, which was to be the bridge for political expansion towards the East. Bolshevik's support of Pishevari's secessionist movement and their

direct intervention in Persia's internal affairs by sending troops to Azerbaijan province and deployment of armed military brigades in Anzali in 1921 was indeed undertaken under the banner of the 'Republic of Azerbaijan'. (Bayat 2011:14)

Map 5.2: Map of the Republic of Azerbaijan & the Neighbouring Countries [1]



Map 5.2, demonstrates how Nakhjavan has been separated from the mainland Azerbaijan by the Armenian territory.

As the relaxation of political atmosphere under Gorbachev provided the opportunity for the revival of nationalist sentiments in the Soviet Republics, calls for transfer of autonomous oblast of Mountainous Karabakh and autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Nakhjavan to Armenia increased, but the demand was refused by the Soviet authorities. Consequently, systemic harassment of Azeri inhabitants of Karabakh by radicalised Armenians was increased to a degree that they were forced to leave. Wave after wave of tens of thousands of Azeri refugees reached Baku and the neighbouring towns and villages in early 1988. "The rise of Azerbaijani nationalism was very much

[1] Available at: <http://www.jmu.edu/cisr/journal/10.2/focus/ismaylov/ismaylov-img-3.jpg> (Accessed on 13.11.2013)

an awakening spurred by conflict in mountainous Karabakh and a response to the threat of Armenian expansionism. …. Nothing did more to mobilize Azerbaijan's population and spur the Azerbaijani national movement than the issue of Mountainous Karabakh."(Cornell 2010:46-7) Continued unrest resulted in further organisation of Azeri nationalists, particularly Azerbaijan's Popular Front which over the next few years developed such an outreach and influence among Azeri public that it could easily start and stop widespread crippling strikes which could further damage Soviet's troubled economy.

In November 1989, "Moscow simply ended its direct rule over the Karabakh and returned the territory under Azerbaijan's jurisdiction". (ibid: 53) Armenians retaliated almost immediately by annexing the province just after three days and allocating a budget for it. The extreme reluctance of Baku Communist leaders to even condemn the Armenian's act resulted in demonstrations and harassment of Armenians of Baku by angry Azeris. The simmering tensions reached a point that in January 1990, Moscow declared a state of emergency and moved troops to Baku in order to crush the Popular Front who was the main organizer of the unrests, leading to the events of 'Black January' that resulted in high death toll.

The heavy handed reaction of the Soviet security forces aiming at the protection of local communist authorities' and containment of national movements not only in Azerbaijan but also in other Soviet Republics backfired. "Azerbaijan became the first of the USSR's Muslim republics to declare independence, issuing the 'Declaration on Restoring the State of Independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan' on 30 August 1991, and was first to be recognised by the outside world, initially by Turkey, on 9 November 1991."(Landau as quoted by Hemming 1998:8)

Azerbaijan's short history of statehood, its Soviet history and the rise of Azeri nationalism played an important role in shaping the foreign policy of the newly independent Azerbaijan in its initial years of independence. Moreover, it has been an important factor in shaping its relations with Iran throughout the post independence history.

5.2.2. Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

As Aliyev (2013:2) has put it "for a predominantly Muslim country with a post-Soviet history, yet one that is on the political map of Europe, but has a neighbourhood that includes Russia, Iran and Turkey, effective foreign policy is not just an international relations instrument - it is a survival tool."A collection of several factors has turned Azerbaijan into the most strategic state in the South Caucasus. Located on an East-West crossroad, the country is a "a natural bridge between Europe and Asia, the Muslim and Christian worlds and a gateway to energy and transportation corridors for the entire region in which it is located." (ibid)

Contrary to the above favourable factors, Azerbaijan is faced with geopolitical barriers which certainly affect its foreign policy. Lacking natural defences, this small country of over 9 million populations is sandwiched between two regional powers, Russia and Iran. The country does not share any borders with Turkey, the one regional power considered as its natural ally due to cultural and linguistic bonds. As a result, while Azerbaijan is deprived of the benefits of common borders with Turkey, it still has to consider Ankara's role and influence in its calculations. In order to have a tension free relations with its powerful neighbours, Baku has to consider their interests and sensitivities which quite often are far from complementary and quite contradictory.

5.2.2.1. Historical Review of Azerbaijan's Post Independence Foreign Policy

Azerbaijan's main priority, in the immediate aftermath of its independence, was to protect state's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Ayaz Mutalibov, the leader of Azerbaijan's Communist party under Gorbachev became the first appointed president of the newly independent Republic of Azerbaijan. The general understanding is that during his short term presidency he was executing policies dictated by Moscow. While this can be considered as an overestimation of his dependence to Russia, it obviously shows Russia's degree of influence and the direction of Azerbaijan's foreign policy during Mutalibov's administration.

While Azerbaijanis were busy with their internal power struggle, Armenians pulled together to separate Karabakh from Azerbaijan through military confrontation. The Armenians' occupation of Shusha and Lachin in May 1992 was a final shot on

Mutalibov's legitimacy. He was ousted by the nationalists who elected Elçibey as the next president.

Elçibey's radical nationalist policies not only failed to prevent Armenians from further advances; but also resulted in Azerbaijan's isolation both regionally and internationally. Elcibey's policies were in sharp contrast with the country's urgent need to develop its regional relations and to employ these relations as leverage against Armenia. "The crux of the nationalist movement in Azerbaijan consisted of shedding the Russo-Soviet legacy and of (re)asserting Turkic identity through emphasizing common ethnic origins and a language similar to that of the Anatolian Turks. Some nationalists also spoke of reunification with the Iranian province of Azerbaijan – referred to almost exclusively as southern Azerbaijan in the Republic of Azerbaijan – and welcomed the propagation of Islam."(Mehdiyeva 2010:273) Both Azerbaijan and Elçibey paid a heavy price for such policies. "The PFA's unconditionally pro-Turkish stance reduced gains from the Azerbaijani-Turkish partnership, as Turkey became increasingly anxious to show its unwillingness to antagonize Russia." (ibid) Elçibey "declined membership of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), arguing that it would create another version of Russian dominance." (Aliyeva 2002:3) Upon his persistent demand all Russian forces and border troops withdrew in May 1993, making Azerbaijan the only former Soviet Republic with no Russian troops on its territory. However, while pulling out from Ganje, the 104th Russian Airborne Division left behind their artillery. About three weeks later "a coup led by the popular army commander Surat Huseinove toppled President Elçibey and his Popular Front government, bringing back to power Heidar Aliyev, the former Azerbaijani Communist party leader." Husainov was the commander of the 709th Brigade of Azerbaijani Army based in Ganje. (Human Rights Watch 1994:32) Analysts, interpret the consequent election of Aliyev as people's cry for political stability, the much needed pretext for economic development.

Unlike his two predecessors who defined Azerbaijan's foreign policy around their ideological amities and enmities towards regional powers; Aliyev who was an experienced politician, devised his foreign policy based on his percieved state identity and assessment of national interests and priorities. For a poverty stricken, underdeveloped country which had lost its territorial integrity in armed conflict with its smallest neighbour and was faced with potential security threats from three regional powers; the immediate objectives were containment- if not the resolution of the conflict,

reducing regional security threats and attracting foreign investment for developing the economy. Azerbaijan's level of relationship with any of major regional and international actors, therefore, has been determined based on two priorities; the 'Karabakh conflict' and the 'economic development'.

To achieve these objectives, Aliyev undertook a multi vector foreign policy involving both regional and international actors. In this pragmatic approach, Baku was skilfully flexible in managing relations with major regional and international players in a way that it could avoid "being pulled into one of the great powers' orbits and pursue an independent foreign policy. There are not many states that can simultaneously and effectively sustain active membership in the CIS and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation while being dedicated to certain levels of Euro-Atlantic integration." (Aliyev 2013: 11) This policy also meant Azerbaijan's commitment "to the principle of maintaining a secure corridor between Europe and Asia for the free flow of trade, people, energy, resources, technology and communications. Ensuring its openness in both directions in Eurasia is a crucial guideline for Azerbaijan in formulating its foreign policy strategy." (ibid: 3)

In addition to their cultural, ethnic and linguistic similarities; Turkey is Azerbaijan's "sole link to Euro Atlantic block." (Nuriyev 2007: 17) Therefore, it has always been considered as Azerbaijan's closest ally in the region. Nevertheless as Mehtiyev (2012) has argued; in order to prevent Turkey's excessive influence which may reduce their hold on Azerbaijan, over the years Aliyev's have been trying to keep Ankara at arm's length, and strengthen an 'Azeri' identity distinct from 'Turkish' identity.

Since none of the regional powers could provide the heavy investment required for the development of necessary infrastructure and networks for exploiting its natural resources, Azerbaijan resorted to the partnership with Western countries. Negotiations were already stepped up during Elçibey following Baku's bid for developing its oil fields. A deal with a consortium of eight large Western companies was close to conclusion when the coup happened. Upon his ascendance to power, Aliyev took a firm bargaining approach in renegotiating with Western companies for a more favorable deal; the first major oil contract was signed in Sep 1994. The deal which focused on development of Azeri – Chirag - Guneshli deepwater oil fields and involved 8 Western oil companies; was labeled as the contract of the century and "helped Heidar Aliyev to

stabilize political situation by extending implicit foreign presence which led to future oil contracts." (Afandiyev 2008:40)

Although Azerbaijan's natural resources and transport links were of major interest to Western countries, there were also further political incentives for their heavy investments not only in economic projects but also in more political social ones. In the immediate post independent years, Western countries were hoping to turn Azerbaijan into a model Muslim democracy that is friendly both towards the West and Israel. More than two decades later, while there is a positive relationship between Azerbaijan and the West, as well as Israel, democracy has generally received more of a lip service than actual policy attention. "When Azerbaijan joined the Council of Europe (CoE) in 2001, the country ratified a list of treaties, and undertook certain, clearly-defined obligations – e.g., to consolidate democratic institutions, respect the rule of law, and fundamental human rights."(Amani 2013) However, according to 2013 Freedom House report "Azerbaijan is ruled by an authoritarian regime characterised by intolerance for dissent and disregard for civil liberties and political rights."[1]Upon taking the power in 1991; Heidar Aliyev "established relative domestic stability, but he also instituted a Soviet-style, vertical power system based on patronage and the suppression of political dissent. Ilham Aliyev succeeded his father in 2003, continuing and intensifying the most repressive aspects of his father's rule." (ibid) Despite its dark democracy and Human Rights records, as explained in details in chapter 2, Baku has grown closer to the US as a result of its practical support for US war on terror.

Fully aware of the consequences of antagonising Moscow, and in order to avoid destabilising effects of such development; and in a bid to attract Russia's sympathy (if not support) regarding the Karabakh conflict; Aliyev took on some appeasement initiatives. "He …. agreed to join CIS, vowed a different FP from his predecessor. Also signed up to a treaty on Collective Security and Economic Cooperation. By making some concessions to Moscow in the oil sector, Azerbaijan's new government counted on the creation of a pro Azerbaijan lobby in Moscow. In fact, influential members of the Russian energy lobby did contribute to relaxing pressure on Azerbaijan." (Nasibli 2004:161) However, Russia did not back out on its outright support for Armenia, and Aliyevs have continuously stood up to Russia's pressure for stationing its troops on

[1] Available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2013/azerbaijan> (Accessed on 23.11.2013)

Iran-Azerbaijan border and establishment of CIS antiaircraft defence system. (ibid) Over the time, "Baku also countered the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement by leaning closer towards Russia and fostering a new agreement over the Caspian Sea using rights. As a result, Russia has no power to destabilize Azerbaijan internally and the Western ties and energy policies give Baku ample space to maneuver."(Mazziotti, Sauerborn & Scianna 2013:7)

Azerbaijan has also developed a close relationship with the United State's strategic ally in the Middle East, Israel. In fact no other Muslim country has such close relationship with Israel and this in itself is an incentive for Azerbaijan: a partnership with Israel which no other Muslim state has, no matter how rich, strong or secular they are. This unique relation is a bargain chip for Azerbaijan among Western guardians of Israel. "For Azerbaijan, developing its strategic and political relations with Israel is a key foreign policy priority." (Aliyev 2013:8) The relationship practically "extends far beyond all levels of cooperation between the two states, including common policies in increasing people to-people contacts" (ibid) and has several benefits for Azerbaijan. First of all it has resulted in Israel's heavy investment in Azerbaijan's market and infrastructure. Moreover, it has guaranteed "the support of the Israel lobby particularly in Congress" (ibid: 9) which can relatively make up for the absence of a strong Azerbaijani lobby to counteract the powerful Armenian lobby. Israel is a major arms supplier for Azerbaijan while Baku provides about 30% of Israel's energy needs.

While significantly contributing to "the realization of such major regional projects as TRASECA, the Great Silk Road, alternative oil pipelines, and GUUAM" (Nuriyev 2004:15) as well as working closely with NATO's Partnership for Peace Program; as many analysts have pointed out, joining the Non Alliance Movement in 2011 was a manifestation of Baku's policy to keep its options open and to not lose its flexibility and manoeuvring ability by binding itself to one particular partner, group or regional programme.

5.3. Iran-Azerbaijan Relations

Iran's relations with Azerbaijan can be reviewed in three main periods. First is from the establishment to the collapse of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. The second period is after integration in the Soviet Republic. Finally, the third period focuses on the post Cold War era.

5.3.1. Relations with the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918-1920)

As discussed before, although the Caucasus became officially the territory of the Russian Empire following the execution of Gulistan and Turkmanchay treaties; it took many years and forceful policies to distance its people from their Persian background and neighbour. Wary of creating further discontent among the Caucasian public, the Tsarist Empire had avoided annotation of boundaries in areas where Aras was not the border. People could travel back and forth from Persia to Caucasian cities. Nomads were seasonally migrating between the northern parts of Persia and southern parts of Russia. Kinship relations and marriages continued regardless of the two treaties. (Amiri 2006: 243) As a result of Russia's further investment in the Caucasus, trade relations between Persia's northern provinces and Caucasus was developed. The industrial boom in Baku following the exploitation of Caspian oil resulted in increased employment opportunities. During the latest years of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century, 50% of Baku's Muslim workers were from Persia. (ibid)

The establishment of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) provided the first instance of state to state relationship between Baku and Tehran. Initially, this relationship was not close enough to reciprocate the existing connections between the two nations. While Bayat (2009:13) considers the heavy influence of Ottomans as the source of this deficiency, Amiri (2006:245) provides further reasons. According to his research, in addition to controversial name selection, the followings were among the reasons for the slow development and cold relations between the two countries prior to August 1919:

- Persia's territorial claims over considerable parts of Azerbaijan and Nakhjavan, sending an official petition to Paris Peace conference hoping for Britain's support.
- Persia's concerns based on rumours that Azerbaijani agents are seeking political and cultural influence in Tabriz.

Nonetheless, ADR's gradual realisation of the Ottomans' complete ignorance towards the identity and independent nature of the state of Azerbaijan melt away its icy approach towards Persia. Following the Ottoman's World War defeat and reduction of its direct interference in the Caucasus affairs, efforts were made by the ADR for strengthening both its independence and its relations with Persia. The followings are the heights of Persia-Azerbaijan relations from the second half of 1919 to April 1920:

- Official recognition of Caucasian Azerbaijan's independence by Persia. For a small newly established country recognition of its independence by its important neighbour was a major achievement.

- Establishment of diplomatic relations and exchange of official delegations to the other's capital and the opening of consulates with wide arrays of activities.

- Increased trade relations between the two countries and improved economic cooperation both at people to people and state to state level. (Amiri 2006: 246)

Generally speaking Persia-Azerbaijan relations had stabilised during the last few months. If the independence of the Caucasus Republics had continued, many problems and challenges resulted from the Tsarist rule and Ottoman's interference may have been resolved in those days. The proposal made by Baku delegate during the 1919 Tehran-Baku negotiations in Paris is an example of how things could have worked out for Persia. During these negotiations, Toopchibashev, Baku's special envoy had proposed for economic-political union (including common foreign policy) of the two countries. (Bayat 2009:13)

5.3.2. The Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan (1920-1991)

Despite the integration of ADR into the Soviet Union, "the name Azerbaijan, although barely two years old, was maintained since it suited the newly established communist authorities, who could use it in the future as a political lever to expand their influence and rule over the similarly named province in Iran, with the final aim of joining this province with the communist controlled state via the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan." (Galichian 2012:21)

When stabilised, Bolsheviks undertook policies that had grave affects in shaping Persia-Azerbaijan relations for decades to come. These policies were part of a new phase which started in national differentiation of various groups, particularly Muslims. In this phase, Moscow replaced the horizontal relations between the capitals of the republics, with "direct vertical relations between Moscow and each republic". (Cornell 2010:39) Consequently, Moscow sought to "isolate each national group within the Soviet Union and hence to prevent contacts with the outside world- in the case of Azerbaijan, specifically with Turkey and Iran." (ibid) In order to achieve this goal, Azerbaijan had to be cut off both from its kin and its history. The first step towards this objective was to officially rename the population who used to be called 'Turks', as 'Azerbaijanis' without any reference to their background. Change of alphabet for the second time in about ten years, was the next step. The population who were just getting used to learning Latin which had replaced Arabic alphabet, were faced with an overnight change to Cyrillic. "In one stroke, this policy made the majority of the population illiterate." (ibid) Another policy was onslaught of literary and cultural figures of Azerbaijan which had the enduring consequence of "blackening the memories of national and cultural leaders, distorting their words and misinterpreting their intentions, confiscating their published writings and manipulating the content of literature and school curricula. These policies reached beyond the lives of destroyed individuals, to affect later generations in ways that the present generation is only beginning to grasp." (Altsadat as quoted by Cornell 2010:39)

De-Persianisation was another step in Moscow's centralisation plan. One aspect of this policy was the wide spread attack on anything which had any signs of Persia and Persians in the Caucasus. Under the Soviet pressures all Persian schools and Farsi teaching institutes were shut down by 1931. Persian residents of the Caucasus were

forced to either change their nationality or face deportation. Consequently tens of thousands of people who were robbed of their livelihood were forced back to Iran within the time space of 1933-1938. (Bayat 2009:16) Mehdiyeva (2003:280) considers the purpose to have been "the breaking (of) Azerbaijan's historical bonds with Persia." However, these steps were just a preamble to a more sophisticated plan which also involved inventing the history. Forging a distorted history for a population of majority illiterates, who had lost many of its cultural elite as well as their Persian acquaintances - exactly the sort of people who could decry the fake- was not a difficult task.

According to Mehdiyeva (ibid) "to make this historical revisionism more acceptable, the Soviet authorities falsified documents and rewrote history books." Galichian (2012:21) describes how purportedly 'scientific' and 'historical' efforts for proving the Republic of Azerbaijan as an ancient political entity which included publication of openly anti Armenian, anti Persian materials were undertaken. In these publications Persia was portrayed as a foreign hegemonic power with no relations other than ruthless oppression towards the Caucasus. The province of Azerbaijan (the real historical Azerbaijan) in north of Persia was reduced to 'Southern Azerbaijan'. Due to relevant isolation of the Soviets in the period between the two World Wars these developments with important strategic implications in the Soviet's foreign policy were remained unnoticed in Iran. (Bayat 2009: 16-17)

The events following the World war II proved the integrity of the Russian orientalist, Barthold, who had argued that the purpose of the above historiographic forgeries were to pave the way for the future annexation of Iran's[1] Azarbaijan provinces. Following the occupation of Iran by Allied forces despite declaration of neutrality by Tehran, "a succession of crises, in large part the product of foreign intervention, with which the Iranian government was ill equipped to deal, led to a final denouement in 1946." (Fawcett 1992:2) When the war ended, while the United Kingdom and the United States pulled out their troops from the Iranian's occupied territories; the Soviets refused to do so. Providing support for secessionist parties, Moscow managed the establishment of two People's Democratic Republics of Azerbaijan and Mahabad within Iran's territory. Preventing Iranian army and government forces to reach the province of Azarbaijan; the Soviets helped the People's Republic of Azerbaijan to declare autonomy after a

[1] Upon the formal request of Reza Shah Pahlavi, Persia was to be renamed as Iran since 1935.

coup de tat. Although the republics were short lived and collapsed following the Soviets forced withdrawal (thanks to pressures from the Western governments) in December 1946, the nightmare of secession has lived in the psyche of the Iranian elite ever since.

Following the withdrawal of the Soviet troops the famous Iron Curtain prevailed. The north and south of the Aras were practically separated with strict border lines and non indigenous guards. Although the Caucasus was officially given away to Russia in 1820s; but for over 70 years since these treaties had come to affect people from the two sides of the Aras had maintained their close relations with the other side. Contrary to the common belief, it was not after the signing of the treaties, but at this juncture of the history when the Iron Curtain fell that people and ethnicities from the two sides of the River were practically separated. Following these developments; Iran's relations with Azerbaijan became limited within the framework of Iran-Soviet relations. Nonetheless "Baku continued to produce many literary and other works that expressed a strong desire to renew ties with Iranian Azerbaijanis", heavily criticising Iranian Azerbaijanis circumstances. (Shaffer 2002:57)

Generally speaking, following the 1946 events, the Soviet Azerbaijan had a negative place in Iran- Soviet relations. Iran's government viewed Radio Baku's propagandas as interference in its domestic affairs. Socialist Azerbaijan, especially Baku had become the heaven for Iranian and Azerbaijani socialists, where left wing parties particularly the Tudeh party were receiving continuous support. (Bayat 2009:23) However, following the improvement of Tehran's relations with Moscow during Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's era; up until the collapse of the Soviet Union most of trade and economic relations of Iran with the USSR, Eastern Europe and even Scandinavian countries were undertaken through Azerbaijan. (Valigholizadeh 2012:18)

Following the improvements of Tehran-Moscow relations in the post 1979 revolution era; Rafsanjani, then the speaker of Iran's parliament travelled to the Soviet Union. In this trip he also visited Baku, demonstrating the importance of Azerbaijan for Iran and laying "the groundwork for building relations with the Republics of Central Asia and Transcaucasia nearly two years before the Soviet collapse." (Calabrese 1994:81)

However, the turn of events leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union directed the transformation towards channels which were probably unforeseen by Iran. As months passed on towards the 1989 fall, "the issue of connections and unity with the

Azerbaijanis in Iran became a focal point of PFA activity." (Shaffer 2002:136) While many nationalist activists of the Soviet Azerbaijan, were simply looking for stronger relations with Iranian Azerbaijanis through trade and cultural communications, "others adopted a more militant approach and sought to directly confront Iran over control of south Azerbaijan." (ibid) "On December 31, 1989, after about a month of relatively passive protest, large numbers of demonstrators attacked border stations and the fence separating the two countries. This was followed in Baku on January 4, 1990, by a 150,000-person protest against the tight border restrictions with Iran. In addition, thousands of Azerbaijanis began crossing the border illegally (and legally when the regimes tried to 'release steam' and arranged for mass meetings and reunions), reaching a peak of 5,000 on January 18, 1990—only four days after the Karabakh-motivated violence in Baku." (Brown 2004:557)

Considering the situation as an opportunity for extending its influence in the Soviet Azerbaijan, Iran took a positive approach to these crossings and meetings by providing accommodations and special headquarters for these guests. With considerable leniency from the Soviet border guards and Iranian authorities' cooperation, Azerbaijani's border crossings continued up until the Black January and the events which led to the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

An important point to be considered with regards to Azeribaijanis' border crossing into Iran was the way it was interpreted by the Islamic Republic's media. The border crossings were certainly the result of the PFA's agitation for 'the removal of all political borders for development of economic and cultural relations with southern Azerbaijan'. While demonstrators at the borders were clearly chanting 'Azerbaijans to be united, Tabriz to be the capital'; the Iranian media reflected the events as the cries of 'Muslim' Azerbaijanis to join their 'Muslim' brethren in Iran, portraying a predominantly nationalist move as religious aspirations. This demonstrates the degree of misperception which existed in Tehran with regards to public demands, incentives and aspirations in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Such misperception has been consistently, but in varying degrees the root of miscalculations in Iran's policies towards Azerbaijan.

5.3.3. Republic of Azerbaijan (1991-Present)

Since Azerbaijan's foreign policy and relations in the immediate post independence era, is distinctive from the following years that Aliyev brought a degree of stability to the country, and a clear foreign and security policy was compiled, Iran's relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan will be reviewed within two periods of early years and Aliyev's era.

5.3.3.1. Early Years (1991-1993)

Despite its enthusiasm for developing relations with the former Soviet republics; in order to avoid antagonising Moscow, Tehran took a cautious approach in doing so and only recognised Azerbaijan's independence after the official dissolution of the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, Iran was the first country to open an embassy in Baku and start diplomatic relations with this country. Moreover, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a special order for provision of help and support for Azerbaijani diplomats and public.[1]

"At the time … the Azerbaijanis saw in Iran a country inhabited by millions of ethnic Azerbaijanis, and if perhaps not a direct military ally, at least a pro-Azerbaijani oriented mediator in the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. There was a great increase of Iranian religious missionaries in Azerbaijan, where there were a lack of qualified mullahs. Trade between the two states also went through a period of unprecedented growth."(Souleimanov 2011) In the immediate aftermath of Azerbaijan's independence, both as a consequence of the general collapse of the Soviet's economy and the Karabakh conflict; most agricultural and industrial sectors of Azerbaijan had collapsed, therefore, Iran's role in providing necessities for Azerbaijan was crucial. Counting on the support which Iran could provide for his country, Azerbaijan's President Mutalibov's first destination abroad was Tehran. In his 1991 visit "an agreement was reached in Tehran to use the territory of Iran for contacts with Nakhjavan under blockade by the Armenians. Documents were also signed for setting up a Free Economic Zone in Nakhjavan and expanding the relations between the two countries."(Nasibli 2004:164) Though down played and generally ignored; Iran's role in providing basic services to Nakhjavan's population was crucial. The quote from

[1] Heydar Aliyev va didgāhe dūstie dāemi bā Iran. Available at : <http://www.baku.mfa.ir/index.aspx?siteid=193&pageid=24893> (Accessed on 26.04.2016)

Heidar Aliyev's memoires could best demonstrate the importance of the support provided by Iran:

Duo to Armenia's advances, the Autonomous Republic of Nakhjavan was completely disconnected with Baku and other cities of Azerbaijan. We did not have gas and electricity there, the water was not enough either, life had become very difficult for us. It was then that Ali Akbar Velayati the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Hashemi Rafsanjani, then Iran's president invited me to Tehran. We discussed provision of aid to Nakhjavan and signed a protocol, based on which Iran started the export of electricity to Nakhjavan. Particular supplies of food aid were also sent to Nakhjavan. Iran facilitated the traffic between Nakhjavan and Azerbijan via a bridge. Many other types of help were also provided.[1]

Repeating similar comments, Aliyev has emphasised; *undoubtedly, it was Iran's brotherly, fair and right approach that made these developments possible*.[2]

As extensively discussed in chapter 4, Iran also took two other important strategies with regards to the Karabakh conflict. First was the provision of military support including arms and training for Azerbaijani militias.

The second was mediation and futile efforts in the conflict resolution. The failed mediation attempt was perhaps the first incident which directly affected the trust and friendship between the two countries. As explained previously, just as the two belligerent sides reached a ceasefire agreement on May 1992 in Tehran; Armenians occupied the most strategic military stronghold of Azerbaijan in Shusha. "This spontaneous military operation against Azerbaijan damaged the regional status of Iran as a mediator in the eyes of Azeris, especially when rumors arose saying that Ter Petrosian knew about the attack in advance and used the trilateral meeting in Tehran in order to cover this plot and to catch the Azeri military off guard." (Dyanat 1998:191)

Iran on the other hand, has always had its own suspicions regarding Armenian's advances in Shusha, a mountainous fortress with high walls overlooking Armenian frontiers in surrounding areas. Iran's former ambassador to Armenia emphasises that *Shusha is naturally indomitable. There was no way to occupy the fortress unless*

[1] Sefārate Jomhurie Eslamie Iran dar Baku. *Aliyev va Didgāhe Dūstie Dā'emi bā Iran*. Available at: <http://baku.mfa.ir/index.aspx?siteid=193&pageid=24893> (Accessed on 20.10.2013).
[2] ibid. and <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/290737/weblog/paakaein> (Accessed on 20.10.2013)

through airborne operations, which Armenians did not have. Shusha was somehow given away by some parties in Azerbaijan in their bid for power.[1]The unfortunate developments put indeed an end to Mutalibov's government.

Elçibey's presidency reversed Tehran-Baku course of friendly relations. His call for Iran's downfall in an interview in Turkey "stirred up serious protests among the Iranian elites and alienated Iranian public opinion." (Alaolmolki as quoted by Suleimanov 2011) "The politicization of the myth of Greater Azerbaijan – ardent demands for cultural autonomy for the Azeri population of Iran, which would be the first step to unification of the two Azerbaijans – formed part of Elçibey's public discourse and foreign policy strategy." (Mehdiyeva 2003:281) These developments worked as a wakeup call for Iran to realise the potential threat emanating from its newly independent neighbour and to overcome the illusion of brotherhood. The stark reality encouraged Tehran to get involved in re-arranging Baku's political scene in a more favourable shape through clandestine but influential steps. "The most effective response was on the unofficial level when Iran used Elçibey's vehement anti-Iranian, pro-Turkish rhetoric to encourage separatist sentiments among the Talysh ethnic minority…. Because the Talyshs had succeeded in preserving their essentially Persian ethnic identity throughout the Soviet period, Elçibey's 'Turkification' campaign alienated and embittered many of them. So it is only understandable that they became very receptive to Iranian incitement…. In June 1993, the Talyshs, under the leadership of Alikram Gumbatov, proclaimed the formation of an autonomous Talysh- Mughan Republic which was widely regarded as an Iranian puppet regime. The secessionist attempt might have succeeded had the timing not coincided with Elçibey's ousting from power." (Mediyeva 2003:271-272)

Overwhelmed by continuous Armenian advances as well as instability and economic meltdown which had taken the country on the verge of total collapse; Elçibey invited the experienced politician in Nakhjavan, Heidar Aliyev to come to the rescue. An interesting fact which has not been reflected much is that Aliyev was reportedly flown to Baku in President Rafsanjani's private jet. (Uli Nasab 2013) This apparently minor detail shows Iran's close involvement in early developments of Azerbaijan, as well as its friendly relations with key politicians. While there are some speculations about

[1] Interview with Iran's former ambassador in Armenia. August 2013

Iran's role in the coup against Elçibey, no clear evidence has been put forward. These claims however provide an indirect connection between Iran and the coup. For example Azerbaijan's former ambassador to Iran writes: "Discontented with Elçibey's policy with respect to Iran…… Tehran started supporting the opposition in Azerbaijan … This resulted in the June 1993 Coup d'état against Elçibey's government." (Nasibli 2004:165)

5.3.3.2. Aliyevs' Era (1993-Present)

In order to stabilise the country both domestically and internationally, Aliyev took steps in rebuilding relations with its powerful neighbours, including Iran. "In contrast to his nationalist opponents, Heydar Aliyev's stance on the issue of Azerbaijanis in Iran was significantly more pragmatic and followed the concept of 'sanctity of territorial integrity' that served as the basis for his overall foreign policy concept." (Brown 2004:584) Emphasis on cultural historical bonds between the two countries replaced the irredentist notions promoted by APF government. Following Aliyev's positive gestures, the relations between the two countries "entered a period that some analysts have called détente."(Souleimanov & Dytrich 2007:104) Several high profile visits were made by the heads of states and other politicians of the two countries to mark the change in the course of bilateral relations.

The effects of efforts in improving bilateral relations were clearly manifested in Iran's stance towards the war. In his July 1993 trip to Tabriz which could be interpreted as a symbolic manifestation of support for Azerbaijan in the face of Armenia's occupation of Aghdam, Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei said: *The government of Armenia and the Armenians of Karabakh are oppressing the Muslims of the region, and we denounce the recent actions by the Armenians of Karabakh who acted with the support of the government of Armenia. We also expect the Armenians in our country to denounce these actions.*[1] This development which can also be interpreted as an immediate response to Aliyev's conciliatory steps towards Iran was followed by the condemnation of

[1] *Sokhanrānie rahbare enghelāb dar ejtemā'e azime mardome Tabriz.* (1993) Available at: <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=10527> (Accessed on 30.08.2015).

Armenian offensive against Azeri cities by the leaders of Iranian Armenians community in Tehran.[1]

When Armenians reached the city of Kalbajar in August 1993, Iran demanded Armenia's immediate withdrawal in a telegram forwarded to Armenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, terming their action as 'aggression'. (Mirzoyan 2007:191) Further Armenian advances towards Nakhjavan provided Iran with a perfect pretext to overtly get involved in the conflict. Initially, Iran's ambassador to Armenia warned the Armenian president against any further penetration of the Azeri territory.[2] This warning was immediately backed by Iranian forces crossing the Aras and their presence in Azerbaijan's territory to prevent further Armenian advances.[3] As Cornell explains "an occupation of central lowland parts of Azerbaijan would bring Baku under a direct threat of Armenian incursion that could have catastrophic consequences for regional security."(Quoted by Souleimanov 2011) This was part of the reason for Iran's firm and decisive action at this stage despite its official neutral stance and Russia's serious objection. There were also reports of continuous presence of Iran "at Baku's request protecting an area around two dams being built on the river Araks (Aras)"[4], pointing out to two hydroelectric dams of Khodā Āfarin and Ghizghalesi, which were under construction as joint ventures by the two countries.

Furthermore, together with Turkey, Iran pushed for the UN resolutions 874 and 884 which called for preservation of ceasefire and end of hostilities, and demanded for withdrawal of Armenian troops from the recently occupied territories of Azerbaijan. "It was the uncompromising stance taken by Teheran (and Ankara) that at last nearly eliminated the determination of the Armenians to annex the Azerbaijani enclave."(Ramezanzadeh as quoted by Souleimanov 2011)

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[1] *Armenians of Iran condemn Karabakh Armenians.* (1993), Available at: <http://www.nexis.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T22564694679&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=26&resultsUrlKey=29_T22564694635&cisb=22_T22564707807&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=10903&docNo=29> (Accessed on 20.11.2012).

[2] Interview with Dr. Koleini. Iran's former ambassador to Armenia. August 2013

[3] ibid.

[4] *Iranian Forces Guarding Dam Projects in Azerbaijan* (1993) Available at: <http://www.nexis.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T22564649673&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T22564649677&cisb=22_T22564649676&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=10903&docNo=1> (Accessed on 24.06.2012)

Moreover Iran cordially welcomed hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijani refugees by setting up camps in Azerbaijani side of the border. To understand the sentimental value of the help Iran provided for Azerbaijani refugees; one need to remember that at the time Iran's economy was still recovering from the ruins of 8 years war, while hosting more than two million Afghan refugees, as well as its own displaced population resulting from war with Iraq.[1] Tehran also mobilised the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (IKRC), a charitable organisation for providing relief and shelter for the poor and needy, to provide services for Azerbaijani refugees.

However, before the relations really take off; Azerbaijan's close relation with the West proved to be a serious impediment in forging closer ties with Iran. While the Contract of the Century was being finalised; US sanctions on Iran were escalating. Upon a Congressional Act, US companies were banned from entering into any project in which Iran was involved. Consequently Richard Kauzlarich, the US ambassador to Azerbaijan, "openly threatened that, should Baku not accept the American demand to expel the Iranian company from AIOC, US companies — with their almost 40 percent share — would leave the consortium". (ibid) Baku caved in under the US pressure; ignoring its commitment under the treaty it had already signed with Iran upon which the NIOC[2] was allocated some shares in the same consortium, and Iran was eventually expelled from the Contract of the Century. This was a major blow to the efforts made by both sides to rebuild bilateral relations. Tehran's outrage was manifested in its firmer approach towards the Caspian demarcation issue. Iran's Foreign Minister immediately announced that "as long as the legal status of the Caspian Sea is not clear, such agreements (Contract of Century) are not applicable."[3]

While verbally claiming that the two countries historic ties were too strong to be affected by Iran's dismissal from the consortium; in practice, Tehran took immediate steps to show Baku the price of betrayal. "Iran took considerable pains to prevent the construction of a main export pipeline (MEP) from the Caspian Sea at Baku and limit the exploitation of Caspian oil resources. Tehran … announced that it would not consent

[1] BBC Farsi. *Iran digar panāhjuye Afghāni va Arāghi nemipazirad.* (2005) Available at : <http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/story/2005/04/050419_l-afghan-iraq-iran.shtml> (Accessed on 12.12.2013)

[2] National Iranian Oil Company.

[3] Moscow Times. (1995) *Azeris Cut Iran Out of Caspian Oil Accord.* Available at: <http://www.nexis.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T22564741335&format=GNBFI&sort=DATE,A,H&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T22564741329&cisb=22_T22564741328&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=145252&docNo=1> (Accessed on 12.03.2012)

to a proposed oil pipeline to the Turkish port of Ceyhan via Iran's territory, and that it instead preferred the MEP to lead to terminals on the Persian Gulf."(Souleimanov & Dytrich 2007:105) Though Aliyev tried to make amends by offering "a 10 percent share in the consortium in Shah-Deniz, another prospective field with no U.S. interests", and signing another Azerbaijani-Iranian treaty allowing Iranian companies to participate in the exploitation of two more Azerbaijani fields — Lenkoran and Talysh— amounting to a $1.5 billion deal a year later (ibid), the wound inflicted by Iran's expelling from the Contract of the Century remained unhealed.

Tehran-Baku bilateral relations stayed relatively trouble free from 1995 till 2003 when Heidar Aliyev passed away. He visited Iran and was cordially received 5 times from 1994 to 2002. The bulk of his period coincided with Khatami's administration, under which a policy of détente and rapprochement in foreign relations, particularly with regional countries, was undertaken. Despite closer military cooperation between Azerbaijan and the West and modernisation of Azerbaijan's airbases by the US in 2003 and negotiations between Azerbaijan and NATO about closer cooperation, the relations between the two countries did not become strenuous. (Khatin Ughlu 2013) The fact that both heads of states were avoiding tensions was quintessential in improving relations, despite considerable differences.

Bilateral relations between the two neighbours took a downward spiral during Ahmadinejad's administration. Since his initially uncompromising, confrontational approach negatively affected Iran's relations with the West and isolated the country internationally, regional countries, in general, showed less interest in close relations with Iran, particularly in the face of mounting US pressure. Yet the situation was worse in the case of Azerbaijan. The two countries in total summoned each other's ambassadors six times. Iran recalled its ambassador from Baku once. Till 2012, a total of 60 civilians from both sides were arrested in the other country accused of espionage and terrorist activities. Each country issued protest notes against the arrest of its respective civilians in the other country. (Khatin Ughlu 2012)

Among a spectrum of Baku's accusations against Iran, one can find "efforts for establishing religious extremist groups, broadcasting destructive and divisive programmes from the Iranian Azeri language channel- Sahar, espionage activities and efforts for establishing terrorist groups in Azerbaijan, and developing relations with

Armenia." (ibid) Baku officials and experts complained that even Iranian ambassadors in this period had a 'security' approach. They also criticised the interference and parallel actions of the IRGC in issues under the jurisdiction of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[1]Iran, on the other hand, complained from Baku's irredentist incitements among Iranian Azeris, close relations with US and Israel, cooperation with Israel for espionage and assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists, promoting Western cultures such as Eurovision contests, anti religious approach and efforts for clamping down the rights and demands of Muslim population including banning hijab in schools.[2]

Amid all the tensions, however, both countries' officials generally kept up the appearance in the public, shaking hands, smiling and emphasising on 'brotherly' or even 'strategic'[3] relationship based on strong historic foundations. Such positive remarks were particularly prevalent among Iranian officials. Tehran's continued détente policy gradually led to development of an interesting phenomenon during Ahmadinejad's administration. In this phenomenon, as Iran became further isolated and economically weaker while Azerbaijan grew both economically and politically stronger and more internationally integrated; a particular style of bilateral relations emerged between the two countries, called by some Iranian experts and scholars as the 'unilateral reverence diplomacy'[4]. What the critics of Iranian diplomacy meant by this ironic title was that despite its relevant might and influence; Iran's diplomatic apparatus kept an overfriendly approach towards Azerbaijan, ignoring frequent offensive or provocative actions, overreaching the hand of friendship in the face of obvious hostile postures from Baku.

A comparison of the visits paid by the heads of states in this period with other periods might best demonstrate the reverse term that bilateral relations had taken under Ahmadinejad. During the 10 years reign of Heidar Aliyev as the head of the Republic of Azerbaijan; he visited Iran five times, two of them for taking part in regional summits. During the same period only Hashemi Rafsanjani as the head of Iranian state once visited Azerbaijan officially in 1994. From 2003 to 2013, Iran's heads of state paid 6 official visits to Baku (one by Khatami, 5 by Ahmadinejad), two of them for taking

[1] *Deutsche Welle.* (2013) *Badtarin dorāne monāsebāte Iran va Azerbaijan dar zamāne Ahmadinejad*. Available at: <http://www.dw.de/بدترین-دوران-مناسبات-ایران-و-آذربایجان-در-زمان-احمدینژاد/a-16856511> (Accessed on 12.11.2013)
[2] ibid.
[3] Farsnewss. (2013) *Iran dar Jomhurie Azerbaijan: Ravābete Tehran-Baku strategic ast*. Available at: <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13920325000739> (Accessed on 10.01.2014)
[4] Modele Ehterame yek Janebe.

part in regional summits. Elham Aliyev, on the other hand, visited Iran only three times, two of which were for taking part in regional summits. Ahmadinejad's last visit was less than two months after Aliyev's refusal to take part in the summit of the Non Aligned Movement in Tehran, apparently 'to demonstrate Iran's ultimate effort in strengthening bilateral relations.'[1] This statistics shows how the deterioration of bilateral relations had resulted in the reverse order of high rank visits. Looking at the context one can conclude that increased number of visits by Iran's president particularly from 2009 onwards has been out of concern and with the purpose of confidence building, rather than the outcome of close friendship.

The relations between the two countries deteriorated to a degree that in an interview with a prominent diplomacy website, Hassan Rouhani; then the presidential candidate[2] remarked that *it is not an exaggeration to say that the Republic of Azerbaijan has become a security threat for Iran. Some anti Iranian actions undertaken in the Republic of Azerbaijan indicate the inclination of some Azeri officials to endanger the security and territorial integrity of Iran. Iranian officials should in no way be indifferent or ignorant towards such actions. This in no way means creating crisis and adding further to the tensions to confront this situation, there is a need to prudence, tolerance and assertiveness; which hopefully will be paid attention to in the coming administration.*[3]

More than two years into Rouhani's administration, as the general international atmosphere towards Iran seems more positive; its bilateral relation with Baku has taken off quite rapidly. As prescribed during his campaign; Rouhani's government took a firm stand when in November 2013 Azerbaijan closed its borders in Poldasht and Shah Takhti following an anonymous shoot out with no casualties in the area.[4] Though a minor event, it was a sign for the end of the 'unilateral reverence diplomacy'.

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[1] Bultan News (2012) *Safare Ahmadinejad be Baku payāmi roshan barāye maardome Azerbaijan*. Available at: <http://www.bultannews.com/fa/news/105722/%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D9%86%DA%98%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%88-%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B4%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86> (Accessed on on 15.10.2013)

[2] Became Iran's 11th president in 2013.

[3] Diplomācie Irani. (2013) *Hasan Rouhani: Jomhurie Azerbaijan be tahdide amniati barāye Iran tabdil shodeh ast*. Available at: <http://fa.arannews.com/?MID=21&type=news&BasesID=2&TypeID=1&id=38532#sthash.NhA8S17a.dpbs> (Accessed on 20.10.2013)

[4] When Iran's requests for opening the borders did not get any results; it closed its borders on Azerbaijan in Jolfa and Bilesavar with prior notice to Baku's officials.[4] ISNA (2013) *Yek maghāme Sefārate Iran dar Baku baste*

The new administration has tried to reshape the relations on a more proportionate status, while taking a positive and opportunity based approach (Taraghi Nejad 2015), down playing existing threats such as Azerbaijan's close relations with Israel.[1] Aliyev's visit in spring 2014 was reciprocated by Rouhani's visit in autumn, followed by a series of officials' visits from various sectors with the purpose of expanding the relations particularly in economy and trade. As the result of this win-win diplomacy, as Iran's ambassador has put it *the two countries have passed the confidence building stage rapidly and are looking to improvement of bilateral relations.*(ibid)

5.3.4. Iran-Azerbaijan Relations: Sectoral Analysis

In order to provide an analytical view of Iran-Azerbaijan bilateral relations, to understand the pattern of enmity and amity between the two countries and the obstacles for closer relations this section provides analysis based on Buzan's idea of security sectors. "Sectors might identify distinctive patterns, but they remain inseparable parts of complex wholes. The purpose of selecting them is simply to reduce complexity to facilitate analysis." (Buzan, Weaver & de Wild 1997:8)

5.3.4.1. Political Sector

According to Buzan, "political security concerns the organisational stability of states, system of government, and the ideologies that gives them stability" (Buzan, Weaver & de Wild 1997:8) Expanding on this he explains that "political threats are aimed at the organizational stability of the state. Their purpose may range from pressuring the government on a particular policy, through overthrowing the government, or fomenting secessionism, and disrupting the political fabric of the state, so as to weaken it…." (1991:118) Based on this definition and a general review of political relations between

shodane marzhāye Jolfa va Bilesavar rā ta'eid kard. Available at: http://isna.ir/fa/news/92081710928/-یک-مقام-سفارت-ایران-در-باکو-بسته-شدن-مرز های (Accessed on 28.11.2013).

[1] Iran's ambassador in Baku calimed in an interview that Azerbaijan-Israel relations are not strategic... Zionist media are trying to influence Tehran-Baku relations negatively by propagating Baku-Tel avive relations. More details in: Ekhtelāfāte marzie Iran va Azerbaijan bartaraf shod. (2014) Available at: <http://www.seratnews.ir/fa/news/178085/%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%81-%D8%B4%D8%AF> (Accessed on 23.04.2016)

the two countries provided in previous sections; the followings can be considered as main political issues Iran-Azerbaijan relations.

5.3.4.1.1. Territorial claims

Iran's Northern Provinces

Despite variations in statistics, most authenticated sources consider relative percentage population of Iranian Azeris about 16% of Iran's total population.[1] Some specialists believe that Iranian Azeris are of different ethnic origin from that of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as the first one has a Persian/Aryan background and the latter is of Caucasian Albania ethnicity. According to these experts, the shared Azeri language is not a definitive factor in proving shared ethnicity. This study is not focusing on the aforementioned argument but on the fact that using the perceived shared ethnicity; Azerbaijan has time and again, through different platforms incited secessionist notions, threatening Iran's territorial integrity by promoting concepts such as the Greater Azerbaijan and Northern/ Southern Azerbaijan.

As explained before "the name Azerbaijan was first used to denote the territory of the modern-day Republic of Azerbaijan only in 1918. This happened under the auspices of the Ottoman Porte, which used the post-revolutionary chaos and the Civil War in Russia, the weakness of Iran and the relative lack of interest of Britain (who at the time had occupied large parts of Iran) to promulgate its own imperial ambitions." (Mehdiyeva 2010: 275)

Irredentist sentiments which were initially encouraged by the Soviet Union to serve Moscow's expansionist ideas received a momentum under the AFG through Elçibey's idea of creating a Greater Azerbaijan; damaging the trust of Iranian officials had towards Azerbaijan. "Although Elçhibey's statements did not fuel nationalist sentiments among the Azerbaijani population of Iran, their impact upon Iranian perceptions of the Azerbaijani threat can hardly be questioned." (Souleimanov & Dytrich 2007:104)

[1] <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (Accessed on 03.03.2014)

Despite Heidar Aliyev's efforts in damage control as well as managing ultra nationalist voices coming from his country, the issue remained highly sensitive and later created considerable tensions in bilateral relations. Generally following on his father's footsteps, Elham Aliyev tried to stay away from such controversial issues in relations with Iran during his early years of leadership. About a year into his reign, Brown (2004:592) wrote "Ilham simply does not make reference to the Southern Azerbaijan issue at all, and almost never even mentions the Azeris there, generally preferring to refer to compatriots who live in different countries of the world. More amazingly, while his Presidential website has long transcripts of his talks to Azeris living in the Ukraine, Georgia, Byelorussia, Moldova, Russia, Europe, and Turkey, there is no mention of the Azeris in Iran." While this approach helped in containing the tensions to some degree; the substitute idea of calling the Republic of Azerbaijan as the 'common motherland' for all Azerbaijanis of the world and Aliyev as the leader of all Azerbaijanis is still irritating for Iran as the first notion is ignorant towards the fact that Iran is home to the majority population of the world Azerbaijanis and the latter notion bears the connotation of Iranian Azeris' allegiance to Aliyev and the Republic of Azerbaijan and, therefore, pose a threat to Iran's political security.

Moreover, the policy of distancing from irredentist notions did not last long. Parallel to deterioration of Iran's status in the international community and increased isolation, as well as deterioration of its relations with Azerbaijan, the myth of the 'Greater Azerbaijan' was revisited more frequently and through different platforms. "The idea of the New or Greater Azerbaijan was periodically revisited, even in 2012, by various politicians, organizations or media from Azerbaijan or Turkey. There is talk that Azerbaijan should take advantage of the situation created by the Arab spring and by a potential destabilization of Iran, in order to turn the idea into reality. The territorial limits of the Great Azerbaijan dream are not precisely drawn; however, references were made about Dagestan and Georgia, including northern Iran and an exit to the Persian Gulf."(Pivariu 2012) One example of such efforts is a proposal put by some Azerbaijani MP's to change the name of their country to the "Republic of Northern Azerbaijan".[1]

[1] BBC Farsi. (2012) *Talāsh dar pārlemāne Jomhurie Azerbaijan barāye afzudane onvāne shomāli be nāme in keshvar*. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2012/02/120209_l23_iran_azarbayjan_change_name.shtml> (Accessed on 06.03.2014)

In March 2013, the secessionist South Azerbaijan National Liberation Front held a conference with the title of "the Down of Southern Azerbaijan" in Baku.[1] Iranian Azeris were encouraged by speakers of this conference in which some Azeri MPs and former officials attended, to seize the opportunity of Iran's economic struggle and international isolation to build an independent state. (Aghayev 2013) Consequently, Azerbaijan's ambassador to Tehran was summoned to be warned that such provocative actions can seriously damage neighbourly ties. (ibid) "A few days later, the Iranian newspaper *Kayhan,* which is close to the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, published an article calling for a referendum on the accession of Azerbaijan to the Iranian Republic. In April, the Iranian parliament began to draft a law providing for the annexation of Azerbaijan."(Weiss 2013)

Irredentists' voices and claims coming from Baku have initiated a vicious circle in which some Iranian nationalists have started a counterattack by promoting the idea of "northern Iran" for the Republic of Azerbaijan and demanding reintegration of this republic into Iran, playing into the hands of media for creating further phobia of Iran among the Azerbaijani public.

In addition to encouraging secessionist movements; Baku is generally following two paths for promoting the myth of the Greater Azerbaijan. One is through the change of Azerbaijani nationals' perception, not only towards present day Iran but also the historical facts about the relations between the two countries. Through the publication of books, papers, specific brochures targeting ethnography… in several languages "with the support of the officials of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Science and government ministries" and financed heavily by Heydar Aliyev Foundation (Galichian 2012:38) Azerbaijanis learn a fabricated history which convinces them of their right to demand for the integration of the Southern Azerbaijan into the Republic of Azerbaijan. This fabrication of history has particularly targeted younger generations. Azerbaijan's curricular books were revised in 1991. In the revised version of history books from the fifth grade in primary school to university, there is a great emphasis on national values and sentiments of Azeri nation, while Azerbaijan's geography is introduced way over the present day Republic of Azerbaijan's borders, covering the whole north western parts of Iran. (AmirAhmadian 2005:186) The Republic of Azerbaijan is introduced in

[1] Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. (2012) *Mahāfele Iranie tajzieh talab dar Jomhurie Azerbaijan be Amrica vābaste hastand*. Available at: <http://news.irib.ir/NewsPage.aspx?newsid=28796> (Accessed on 06.03.2014)

its curricular history books as an ancient country which has been constantly under the threat of occupation by Persian kings. Iranian public figures such as Nezāmi Ganjavi and Khāghāni[1], Khāje Nasir Tusi,[2] etc. are introduced as Azeri public figures and Iranian cities such as Tabriz and Ardabil are introduced as Azerbaijani cities. The Teacher's Guidance book for History specifically introduces Azerbaijan as an independent country which was divided in two during Iran-Russia wars, the northern part has acquired its independence quickly, and the second part is still under Iran's occupation. (ibid) Through this strategy, Azerbaijan's new generation grows up believing to have territorial rights over Iran's north western provinces with grudges against Iran in their hearts.

Proactive promotion of the myth of the Greater Azerbaijan, both by politician and scholars has been another strategy to communicate the idea internationally, particularly among Western scholars and politicians. Lack of active scholarly and often political response by Iranian scholars and officials have convinced some Western audience of the reality of Azerbaijan's claims, so much that some of these scholars use these myths as facts for analyzing the two countries' behaviour and propose solutions based on their perceived facts. Relying on these analyses, efforts have been made to encourage Western, particularly US politicians to support the cause for realizing the Greater Azerbaijan dream. In 2012, Congressman Rohrabacher wrote to the US Secretary of State to urge the United States to back struggles for freedom of Azeris from Iran. He stated, "The people of Azerbaijan are geographically divided and many are calling for the reunification of their homeland after nearly two centuries of foreign rule. Aiding the legitimate aspirations of the Azeri people for independence is a worthy cause in itself. Yet, it also poses a greater danger to the Iranian tyrants than the threat of bombing its underground nuclear research bunkers."[3] Although his proposal received a cold shoulder by the US Department of State,[4] the case shows the extent of efforts made in this regard. In the face of such clear and outright threat to its territorial integrity, the Islamic Republic, like any other state in the world's anarchic system, is expected to take

[1] Persian language poets born in present day cities of the Republic of Azerbaijan.
[2] Born in Tus, a non Azeri north east province of Iran, died in Baghdad.
[3] PRESS RELEASE*** *Rep. Rohrabacher Urges Secretary Clinton to Back Freedom from Iran for Azeris*. Availabe at:< http://rohrabacher.house.gov/press-release/press-release-rep-rohrabacher-urges-secretary-clinton-back-freedom-iran-azeris> (Accessed on 06.03.2014)
[4] BBC Farsi. (2012) *Nāmeye Ozve Kongereye Amrica darbāreye Jodā Shodane Azerbaijan az Iran*. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/world/2012/08/120829_u06_rohrabacher_letter_clinton_azeri.shtml> (Accessed on 06.03.2014)

measures to ensure its own security and integrity. As pointed out in an event at Harvard University "truly, the main difficulties in the relations between Tehran and Baku emanate from this factor".[1]

An important point that many scholars and politicians often tend to miss is Azerbaijan's double standards over the relations between ethnicity and territorial claims. While Baku categorically denies Armenian's claims over Nagorno Karabakh based on the principle of the sanctity of territorial integrity; it encourages irredentism based on presumed shared ethnicity with regard to Iranian Azerbaijanis.[2]

Caspian Sea Demarcation

Over the last two and half decades, the two countries' dispute over the Caspian Sea demarcation has not been resolved. Azerbaijan which was the first among littoral states to undermine the existing treaties on the legal status of the Caspian Sea and to sign contracts for exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbon resources; insists on considering Astara-Hossain Gholi Khan as the defining line for maritime border between the two countries. Based on this division, Iran would only receive 11% share from the seabed resources. Tehran, however, insists on equal division, based on which it could have a 20% share. The dispute over the Caspian Sea demarcation has had many consequences, including militarisation of the Sea. An example of the seriousness and sensitivity of the issue was the 2001 maritime incident in which an Iranian military boat ordered two Azerbaijani ships operated by BP out of the disputed area. While the Azerbaijani government had licensed the BP led consortium to carry out exploratory activities in the field called by Baku as Arax-Alov-Sharq, Iran had licensed national companies to explore the same block which it calls Alborz.

While most analysts see these developments through the prism of rivalry over hydrocarbon resources, one should keep in mind the profound importance of territorial

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[1] Kennedy School of Government. *Azerbaijan- Iran Relations: Challenges and Prospects* (Event Summary) Available at:< http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/12750/azerbaijan_iran_relations.html> (Accessed on 13.03.2014).

[2] For more detailed analysis of Azerbaijan's double standard approach with regard to the issue of ethnicity and territorial integrity see: Brown, c. "Wanting to Have Their Cake and Their Neighbor's Too: Azerbaijani attitudes towards Karabakh and Iranian Azerbaijan." In: *Middle East Journal. Vol.58. No.4. Autumn 2004, pp.577-600.*

integrity for the Islamic Republic. Time and again Iranian authorities have emphasised that Iran's territorial integrity is not negotiable. They, in fact, take pride in not losing an inch of the country's territory despite 8 years of war and 35 years of international pressures and various territorial claims by neighbours. As Iran's former ambassador to Armenia emphasizes "*Iran had lost considerable parts of its territory under various dynasties. Even under Pahlavi's, Sadrak was given to Turkey and Bahrain was separated from Iran. The Islamic Republic has not and will not let this happen again."*[1]

5.3.4.1.2. Opposing State Ideologies & Policies

Since Iran has a theocratic system in which all the affairs of the state are overseen by religious authorities to ensure they are within the confines of religious teachings and Azerbaijan has a secular state in which there is an emphasis on separation between the church (or the mosque in this case) and the state affairs, the two states are essentially incompatible. This opposing nature has resulted in the escalation of tensions between the two countries in more than one way, which will be briefly discussed in this section.

Perception of Political Imposition

Despite Iran's pragmatic policy towards Caucasian countries which was discussed in Chapter 4, there has been a widespread perception among Azeri political elites that Tehran is trying to impose its own model of governance on Azerbaijan. Revolutionary ideals such as export of Islamic values can be a precedent for such perception, but Azeris have also evidence to prove their perception. Iran's active cultural and religious presence in Azerbaijan which will be discussed further in the societal section is one, though as Iran has argued in the past, such activities could be considered as efforts to increase social relations between the two nations based on cultural commonalities.

[1] Interview held in August 2013.

Iran's objection to accelerated Westernisation and secularisation of Azerbaijan is considered as another evidence of its political imposition on Azerbaijan. As in some occasions, increased criticisms over Azerbaijan's secularisation process in the Iranian public sphere coincided with mass demonstrations and protests towards government policies in Azerbaijan, Baku authorities have argued such domestic developments to be incited by Iran. Iranian elites, however, reject the accusation, pointing out to the fact that accelerated secularisation process has coincided with the Arab spring instigating Azeri people's protests and objection towards government policies.

Amities & Enmities

As Buzan has put it, the concepts of amity and enmity cannot be attributed solely to the balance of power. Issues that can affect the quality of relations range from elements such as ideology, territory, ethnic lines, and historical precedent. (Stone 2009:6) Diverging geopolitical alignments in the South Caucasus have resulted in a particular pattern of amity and enmity between Iran and Azerbaijan and their allies. In this pattern, each country is allied with the enemy of the other, seriously damaging the mutual trust necessary for friendly relations.

Azerbaijan Allies: As explained in chapter 3, defined by its ideological essence, the Islamic Republic's foreign policy rejects the present international system and its affiliated norms and patterns of behaviour. The Islamic Republic's efforts to resist, alter or at least correct what it perceives wrong and unjust has left Iran in conflict with present international system and Western powers who sponsor it, and has turned them to the country's powerful adversaries.

Azerbaijan, on the other hand, has no problem with this system. Through establishing a positive approach towards the system, it has made efforts to exploit the existing opportunities to its own interest. This means establishing close relations and alliances with exactly those countries that Iran antagonizes. Azerbaijan's partnership with such countries means prioritizing their demands and interests over Tehran's, which can obviously pose various kinds of security threats to Iran. Controversies over transport routs which resulted in bypassing Iran despite being the shortest and most economic

route or the case of Baku- Ceyhan-Tbilisi project from which Iran was suspended both due to US pressure, are examples of such dilemmas.

Speculations on how far Baku is willing to go with its allies and against the interests of Iran have at times tarnished the relations further. In 2011 for example, there were speculations about relocating members of the terrorist group MKO[1]from Iraq to Azerbaijan. In a vehement response to these speculations, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs' spokesman remarked that "we hope that neighbouring countries will note our sensitivity and do not do anything to damage their good relations with Iran by taking measures which will have very negative consequences for them."(Kaleji 2012) Iranian Azeri MPs demonstrated an even tougher reaction to these speculations by proposing the revision of Turkmanchai treaty, emphasizing that Iranian Azeri speaking population will show an unpredictable response to conspiracies of Azerbaijani authorities if they continue their anti Iranian, anti Islamic conspiracies.[2]

While Iran has always been critical of Azerbaijan's close relations with Western countries, particularly US; it has always tried to cope with the needs of the South Caucasus countries for the presence of Western countries and organisations for developing their economy and security. However, Tehran has not been and could not have been so compromising towards Baku-Tel Aviv's increasingly close relations, which in turn has affected Tehran-Baku relations seriously.

Although, Baku has refrained from opening an embassy in Israel out of concerns about other Muslim countries' reactions; the two countries have had a flourishing relationship, particularly since the early 2000s. Aliyev's remarks revealed in a 2011 Wikileaks cable can best demonstrate how far these relations have gone. According to the cable, during the May 2008 visit of the Israeli Agriculture Minister, Aliyev described the bilateral relations as 'the tip of an iceberg which nine-tenths of it is below the surface'. This clearly implies a much deeper and broader relationship between the two countries than meets the eyes.[3] The summary of the same cable reports that "Azerbaijan's relations with Israel are discreet but close. Each country finds it easy to identify with the other's

[1] Mojahedin-e-Khalq Organization (People's Mojahedin of Iran)

[2] Fararu. (2011) *Iran momken ast dar Ahdnāmeye Torkamanchāy bāznegari konad.* Available at : <http://fararu.com/fa/news/99433/ایران-ممکن-است-در-عهدنامه-ترکمنچای-بازنگری-کند> (Accessed on 09.03.2014)

[3] The full text of the relevant cable can be found in the complementary section of the article *Wikileaks: Azerbaijan-Israel Relations behind the scenes*. Published in Feb 2011, Available at: <http://azerireport.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2618> (Accessed on 20.01.2014)

geopolitical difficulties and both rank Iran as an existential security threat….. and the two countries' cooperation flows from this shared recognition." Further down in the same cable there is an interesting evidence of Baku's closeness to Tel Aviv as in contrast to its relations with Tehran:

"The Azerbaijani authorities assiduously protect Israeli interests in Baku. For example, xxxxxxx told Emboff that the GOAJ[1] had noticeably improved local security at the Israeli Embassy when the most recent operations began in Gaza. When authorities got word of a planned demonstration on January 2, they dispatched buses to the place where the protesters were preparing to set off for the Embassy and arrested them on the spot. Police detained 25 of the 150 demonstrators rounded up, and 20 of them were sentenced to 10 or 15 days, detention. In sharp contrast, the GOAJ allows demonstrators to picket the Iranian Embassy, so long as the subject of the protest is the treatment of Azeris in Iran."(ibid)

Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister's reaction to criticisms coming from Iran with regard to Israeli President's visit is another clear example of Baku's priorities. When Iran's Chief of Armed Forces warned that "Peres's visit would create problems between Iran and Azerbaijan" (RFL/ June 05 2009); Elmar Mammadyarov replied to Firuzabadi's remark by saying that "Iran's latest statements about a planned visit to Baku by Israeli President Shimon Peres are regrettable and should not have come from Iran's military forces. ….. Azerbaijan does not interfere in other countries' foreign affairs and will not allow other countries to do so." (ibid) This frank response was in sharp contrast to the soft and appeasing tone that Azeri officials normally take towards their powerful neighbours.

While Iran's concern about the involvement of its adversaries in the neighbourhood is natural, it is more understandable in the case of Israel's activities in Azerbaijan since they pose a direct threat to Iran's security. This issue will be further discussed in the military sector. Azerbaijan's partnership with Western countries and Israel has created a vicious circle in its bilateral relations with Iran. In this circle, the closer Azerbaijan gets to its allies the more tension is created in its relations with Tehran. On the other hand, the more isolated Iran has become internationally the more provocative Baku has become.

[1] Government of Azerbaijan

Iran's Ally: Azerbaijan has long been complaining about Iran's partnership with Armenia and has particularly tried to justify its alliance with Israel based on Iran's partnership with Armenia. While Iran has always officially supported Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, its partnership has provided Armenia with the opportunity to bypass the sanctions and blockade imposed by both Azerbaijan and Turkey. Without the provision of a lifeline by Iran, Armenia may have had to give in to economic pressures and take a more compromising approach in the Karabakh conflict.

However, Azerbaijani elite conveniently ignore Iran's crucial support of Azerbaijan in the early years of the conflict and Baku's ungracious response to those supports. Iran's alliance with Armenia is the direct consequence of two developments in Azerbaijan's domestic and foreign policies. First was the promotion of the myth of Greater Azerbaijan as a core policy of Elçibey's government and continuous residual effects of that policy in Azerbaijan's approach towards Iran. "The consequences of the thirteen month-long Elçibey government was remarkable and — from an Azerbaijani perspective — quite catastrophic. Iran, a country that had until that time, by statute, backed Islamic movements around the world, started to support Christian Armenia, which found itself at war with Shia Azerbaijan. (Cornell as quoted by Souleimanov and Dytrich 2007:104) PFG's policy towards Russia and Iran resulted in the emergence of "a new geopolitical triangle encompassing Moscow-Tehran-Yerevan." (Nasibli 2004:158)

Another development was Azerbaijan's partnership with the West which undermined Iran's policy of excluding or marginalizing foreign powers from regional dynamics and establishing partnership with regional countries. Iran's former ambassador to Armenia emphasises that as long as Azerbaijan is not prepared for a real partnership, Iran would not invest beyond a certain degree in its relations with this country.[1] Meaning that Tehran would certainly do not sacrifice its relations with other regional countries for the sake of Azerbaijan. As a result of the aforementioned developments and with Iran's Russia centric regional politics as a catalyst, Iran together with Russia, Armenia and Greece established a strategic partnership (Valigholizadeh 2012:32) Regardless of the roots and causes of Iran's partnership with Armenia, Baku views this relationship as a threat to positive developments in the Karabakh conflict.

[1] Interview with Dr. Koleini held on August 2013

5.3.4.2. Military Sector

According to Buzan and colleagues (1998:51) military security is "the two level interplay of the armed offensive and defensive capabilities of states' perception of each other's intentions". Regional and international geopolitical developments, particularly in recent decade have resulted in the replacement of military cooperation opportunities between Iran and Azerbaijan with posing military threats for one another. As it will be demonstrated in this section, transregional actors have had a pivotal role in the escalation of such threats and tensions.

Over 600 kms of shared borders have bound the two countries with considerable degree of mutual security concerns; while their tension ridden political relation has limited military and defence cooperation and at time has taken them on the verge of military confrontation. Iran's cooperation with Azerbaijan in this area is based on the need for ensuring its border and domestic security.

Tehran's military and technical cooperation with Azerbaijan officially started in March 1992 when the two countries signed an agreement based on which Iran provided training for Azerbaijani soldiers. These trainings never included Azerbaijani officers and ended in 1996. The first military pact between the two countries was signed during Khatami's administration. In the same period, Defence Ministers met to discuss further defence co operations. Despite several such meetings and verbal emphasis on further co operations, there is not much evidence to show that these promises have actually been materialised, and there is not much likelihood of that under difficult relations that the two countries have had particularly within the last few years. The only significant achievement in this area was an MOU signed between Iran's Interior Minister and his Azerbaijani counterpart in 2010. Based on this MOU the two countries have committed on cooperation in combating organised crimes, drug trafficking, money laundering etc. (Moradi 2011) Furthermore, following the April 2015 visit of Iran's Minister of Defence from Baku, the two sides agreed on establishing a joint working group comprised of officials and experts from both side to boost cooperation in defence and security areas. (Niayesh 2015)

Although the shared borders are conflict free but drug trafficking has become an increasingly worrying concern for Azerbaijan. Despite heavy anti narcotics penalties and continuous conflict with drug trafficking mafia which has resulted in the death of thousands of Iranian soldiers; drug smugglings from Afghanistan, through Iran into other countries has witnessed dramatic increase in recent years. According to a 2009 US embassy cable from Baku released on Wikileaks, the volume of heroin smuggled from Iran to Azerbaijan had increased from 20 kg in 2006 to 59 tons in 2009.[1] Despite this report and claims by Azerbaijani officials about the involvement of Iranian security services in trafficking drugs to Azerbaijan[2], the United Nations office on Drug and Crime has pronounced Iran as one of the most active countries in fighting against narcotics.[3]

While tensions and disputes between the two countries have never degenerated into an actual military conflict, the two countries bear military threat to each other. One aspect of such threats is the militarisation of the Caspian Sea. Although both countries have in the past emphasised on demilitarisation of the Sea, regional geopolitical transformations following NATO's involvement and increased tensions among littoral states due to undetermined legal status of the Caspian Sea have mounted the arms race in this region. With the exception of Russia and Iran which have always had a strong naval presence in the Caspian Sea, up until 2002 the other three littoral states only had small coast guards with fishing control boats equipped with small arms. (Sargsyan 2010) However, following the failure of the Ashgabat summit in April 2002 in reaching an agreement on the legal status; a series of manoeuvres were exercised by littoral states with the purpose of asserting their might and will to safeguard what they perceive as their share of the Sea. In August 2003, Azerbaijan held the "GOPLAT naval manoeuvres on the protection of oil and gas producing platforms with the participation of 18 US seamen." (ibid) In other words, Azerbaijan opened the path for the US presence in the Caspian Sea, a development which both Iran and Russia despise very much.

[1] BBC Farsi. (2012) *Iran va Azerbaijan dar Wikileaks: pulshu'ei va mavāde mokhadder*. (2012) Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2012/06/120609_l23_lp_neighbours_wikileaks_iran_azarbayjan.shtml> (Accessed on 10.10.2013).

[2] ibid

[3] New York Times. (2012) *The West's Stalwart Ally in the War on Drugs: Iran (Yes, That Iran).* (2012) Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/12/world/middleeast/iran-fights-drug-smuggling-at-borders.html?_r=0> (Accessed on 15.02.2014).

In 2003, "the former US Coast Guard Cutter Point Brower was officially turned over to Azerbaijan."[1] This was "the third patrol boat of its type that the US government has given Azerbaijan….. Two smaller US Coast Guard cutters were given to Azerbaijan in 2000."(ibid) In 2005, a budget of $100 million was allocated "for Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan to build a comprehensive maritime surveillance, command and control and quick reaction capability in the Caspian". (Blank 2005) This was in obvious contradiction of Ilham Aliyev's 2004 call for demilitarisation of the Caspian Sea which was backed and hailed by Iranian Officials.[2] An overhaul of its Caspian naval fleet has been an important part of Azerbaijan's explosive military expenditure in recent years. This includes "a series of new vessels, including two new submarines and the country's first destroyer."(Rimmer 2013) Moreover, Azerbaijan "inaugurated a new base for its navy on the Caspian Sea, which it calls "the largest and most modern military object in the Caspian basin" in late June 2015 and has planned to carry out the first ever joint naval exercise with Russia in September 2015. (Kucera 2015)

While Russia's Caspian Flotilla is also set to be equipped with new shore-based supersonic antiship missiles, as well as two more missile ships and 3 landing ships as the first stage of receiving 16 ships by the end of 2020; Iran, the second major power in the Caspian; announced in 2011 that it intends to "add another 75 missile ships to its fleet." The present fleet contains 90 vessels at sea. (Aryan 2011)

Although to this date no US or NATO bases has been established in Azerbaijan; "experts do not exclude that at least two naval bases of the USA can occur in the Caspian region – in Aktau and Baku."[3] The two airports are already quietly in use by the US as "transit hubs for military material for its forces in Afghanistan."(ibid) Moreover, "in 2005 the United States signed an agreement on operating two radars in Azerbaijan which are likely to be used for monitoring Iran."(IISS 2006:193)

When in mid March 2007 Azerbaijan granted NATO "the permission to use two of its military bases and an airport 'to back up its peace-keeping operation in Afghanistan' including support for NATO's "supply route to Afghanistan"; US Undersecretary of

[1] Global Security. *Caspian Guard*. Available at : <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/caspian-guard.htm> (Accessed on 19.02.2014)

[2] Radio Free Europe. (2004) *Iran Backs Azerbaijani Caspian Proposal***.** Available at: <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1143095.html> (Accessed on 14.01.2014)

[3] Pulitzer Centre. (2012) *Militarizing the Caspian*. (2012) Available at: <http://pulitzercenter.org/projects/caucasus-caspian-azerbaijan-kazakhstan-turkmenistan-militarization-oil-russia-united-states-iran> (Accessed on 10.02.2014)

State Matthew Bryza, indicated at a press conference in Georgia (March 30) that "the United States hopes for permission to use airfields in Azerbaijan for military purposes."(Chossudovsky 2007) In response, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defence released a statement emphasizing that "Azerbaijan's territory will not be at the disposal of any country for hostile acts against neighbours." (Chossudovsky 2007) Nonetheless, Iran deployed "troops and military hardware along the Iranian-Azerbaijani border" in early April just to warn Azerbaijan of the consequences of such developments.[1] This was, however, not the last time that the utilisation of Azeri airbases for attacking Iran was probed. In March 2012, in the heat of risen tensions between Israel and Iran over the latter's nuclear programme; an article published by the Foreign Policy magazine contemplated Azerbaijan's airbases and airspace as the 'secret staging ground' for Israel's attack on Iran. The analysis was based on a US cable released by Wikileaks titled as 'Azerbaijan's discreet symbiosis with Israel'. (Perry, 2012) While Azerbaijan's Defence Minister was quick to dismiss the contemplations;[2] they still left a mark on Iranians' psyche.

Azerbaijan's arms deal with Israel has added yet another dimension to Baku's potential military threats for Iran. In 2012 "Azerbaijan purchased a variety of weaponry, including aerial drones and an advanced anti-missile capable radar, from Israel under a $1.6 bln contract signed in 2011."[3](Rianovosti 27.03.2012) "At the end of February, the Iranian Foreign Ministry summoned Azerbaijan's ambassador to Tehran Javanshir Akhundov to explain the arms deal with Israel and to provide assurances that the Israeli weaponry would not be used against Iran. Akhundov reportedly said the weapons were bought "to liberate occupied Azerbaijani land….."(ibid) Nonetheless, some purchased items make Akhundov's claim hard to believe. "According to the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Baku bought an unknown number of Gabriel anti-ship missiles."(ibid) Since Azerbaijan has no maritime borders with Armenia, and Armenia has no body of water

[1] "Military experts think that the deployment of troops and hardware pursue defence ends. This means that the troops are being pushed forward to repel attacks… The start of an information [propaganda] war is obvious. An intelligence expert has told Turan that recent publications in the media saying that Iran has drawn up a list of facilities in Azerbaijan that will be bombed in case of a US attack [on Iran] are a glaring example of this. Most likely, the reports were prepared and passed to the mass media by the Iranian secret services to exert psychological pressure on Baku. The goal is to deter Baku from supporting Washington in a military conflict with Tehran. (Turan as quoted by ibid Available at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-iran-war-theater-s-northern-front-azerbaijan-and-the-us-sponsored-war-on-iran/5322> (Accessed on 5.12.2013).

[2] "The Republic of Azerbaijan, like always in the past, will never permit any country to take advantage of its land, or air, against the Islamic Republic of Iran, which we consider our brother and friend country". Source: ibid.

[3] Sputnik. (2012) *Azerbaijan Spent $1.6 Bln on Israeli Arms in 2011*. Available at: <http://www.sputniknews.com/military/20120327/172423044.html> (Accesed on 08.09.2015)

suitable for shipping, it is only logical to wonder what use anti ship missiles could have in Baku's war with Armenia. Moreover, if the above statement is the exact words of Akhundove, then it must add to Iran's concerns rather than reducing it; as many Azerbaijani politicians have the discreet ambition what they perceive 'liberating' Iran's Azeri provinces to make the Greater Azerbaijan a reality.

Moreover, there were 10 Hermes-450 drones equipped with GPS among Azerbaijan's military purchases from Israel. This means "they can also provide an outside observer with satellite images sent by the drone."[1] In late 2012, these drones were reported to conduct spy mission flights along the Iranian borders. (ibid) Moreover, in August 2014, Iran's media reported that an Israeli stealth drone flying towards Natanz nuclear facilities have been targeted down by the Revolutionary Guard.[2]Since the limited range of the device made it unlikely to have been launched from Israel; the head of the Guard's Airspace Division concluded that it was launched from a neighbouring country. (Crone 2014) Meanwhile providing an analysis of past and present reports and evidence from Azerbaijani forces parade; the professional aviation journalist, David Cenciotti (2014) concluded in his weblog that the drone was possibly launched from Azerbaijan. In Dec 2012, Press TV quoted a report claiming that "following a rise in the US radar activities in the Astara Rayon region of Azerbaijan as well as the presence of Israeli military advisors in the country, Azerbaijan has been using Orbiter ultra-light drones assembled with the help of Israeli experts to carry out operations along the border with Iran and Karabakh."[3] Furthermore, Israel has reportedly set up a drone construction plant in Azerbaijan in 2013..... "Both local and Israeli staff is in charge of maintenance."[4]

Despite the existence of a non aggression pact between the two neighbours since 2005, based on which the two countries are committed to not let their territory to be used by a third country for an attack against the other; as Azerbaijan has already caved in under

[1] Press TV (2012) *Israeli-Azeri Drones Conduct Spy Missions along Iran Border: Report*. Available at: <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2012/12/08/276935/israeliazeri-drones-spying-over-iran/> (Accessed on 27.01.2014)

[2] Guardian. (2014) *Israeli Stealth Drone Downed at Nuclear Facility, Iran Claims.* Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/24/israeli-stealth-drone-nuclear-facility-iran-natanz> (Accessed on 15.05.2014):

[3] Press TV. (2012) *Israeli-Azeri Drones Conduct Spy Missions Along Iran Border: Report*. Available at: <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2012/12/08/276935/israeliazeri-drones-spying-over-iran/> (Accessed on 10.12.2013)

[4] *Deutsche Welle.* (2012) *Arms Race on The Caspian Sea Heat Up*. Available at :< http://www.dw.de/arms-race-on-the-caspian-sea-heats-up/a-16246863> (Accessed on 15.02.2014)

the US pressures for isolating Iran in the region and due to Baku's increasingly close relations with Tel Aviv, Tehran with its siege mentality and years of pre-war status cannot ignore the potential threats arising from its northern neighbour.

On the other hand, like other neighbours, Azerbaijan has serious concerns with regard to Iran's nuclear programme. While Baku apparently supports Iran's right for developing civil nuclear technology[1]; it has been concerned about the consequences of a war against Iran both for the region and the country, knowing in the event of any attack by Israel or Western governments, as their closest ally in the region, it would likely get caught in the crossfire.

Recent International developments have resulted in the emergence of new forms of threat which have not yet been decisively determined by theorists as to which security sector they can fit into. As "cyberspace has become a new international battlefield" (Adamas as quoted by Pettalides 2012) Hansen and Nissenbaum (2009) have argued that cyber security can be considered as a new sector in security theories. However, they have also discussed difficulties in drawing a clear line between cyber security and other security sectors. Despite the aforementioned uncertainties; this study discusses cyber security under the military sector, as the cases discussed are normally undertaken by military and intelligence agencies.

On January 2012, twenty five Azerbaijani state related websites including the website of Azerbaijan's ruling party, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, Ministry of Education, Customs Committee, were hacked. Hackers who called themselves Azerbaijani Cyber Army left photos and comments regarding Hijab ban, Israel and its relations with Azerbaijan on these websites. According to Azerbaijan's Minister of Communications 24 cases of these attacks were carried out from inside Iran. (Menshu 2011) While the media pointed the finger at Iran, Azerbaijan's minister explained that Iran might have been used as a transit country and these attacks might have been carried out by a third country; expressing hopes that the Iranian government have not been involved in these attacks. Iran's embassy in Baku also denied allegations of Iran's involvement. (Valiyev 2012) In another incident on February 2012, Azerbaijan's state TV website was reportedly

[1] Tehran Times. *Azerbaijan's Supports Iran's Nuclear Program*. Available at: <http://tehrantimes.com/politics/105907-azerbaijan-supports-irans-nuclear-program> (Accessed on 20.02.2014)

hacked by Iran's cyber army with messages about Baku's close relations with Tel Aviv.[1]

Iran claims to have the world's 4th most powerful cyber army.[2] Israel's Institute for National Security Studies has also confirmed Iran as a major cyber power. (ibid) One can assume that while Iran has avoided direct military conflict with its northern neighbour, it is willing to engage in cyber war at least as a warning or punishment for cooperating with Iran's enemies or applying domestic policies which may affects Iran's interest.

Terrorism and espionage are two other controversial topics with regard to the security sector under which they should be categorised. One can argue that as terrorism is mostly used to pressure states to change their behaviour, it is, therefore, a political threat. However, it can also be argued that state sponsored acts of terrorism should be categorised under the military sector. The same argument could be made with regard to espionage. While the referent subject of espionage could be in any security sector; the fact that it is mostly undertaken by states' intelligence agencies makes it logical to be categorised under the military sector.

Both Iran and Azerbaijan have frequently accused each other of supporting or carrying out acts of espionage and terrorism in the other's territory. The first instance which brought the bilateral relations under the spotlight was the 2007 trial and "ultimate conviction of 15 Azerbaijani men found guilty of passing information on Western embassies and companies operating in Azerbaijan to Iranian intelligence…… The defendants, all members of Nima, a small Islamist group, were found guilty of cooperating with Iranian special services in plotting a coup against the government of President Ilham Aliyev. The group's leader …... staunchly denied any ties to Iranian intelligence…… Iran expressed deep anger over the verdict and the accusations, by extension, that it sought to destabilize the Azerbaijani government. Officials in Tehran summoned Azerbaijan's ambassador to the Foreign Ministry and called the court proceedings a comedy." (Allnutt 2007) In 2011-2012 Azerbaijan arrested around 40

[1] BBC Farsi (2012) *Hamleye arteshe cyberie Iran be site televeisione dowlatie Azerbaijan.* Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2012/02/120223_008-iran-azerbaijan.shtml> (Accessed on 10.01.2014)

[2] Hackread (2012) Israeli Think Tank Acknowledges Iran as Major Cyber Power, Iran Claims its 4th Biggest Cyber Army in World. Available at: <http://hackread.com/iran-biggest-cyber-army-israel/> (Accessed on 20.02.2014)

people suspected of cooperating with Iran's intelligence services and IRGC. (Khatin Ughlu: 2012) An Azerbaijani state broadcaster reported in February 2012 that "Azerbaijan's National Security Ministry has claimed that it has uncovered a terrorist group with links to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps Sepah and Lebanon's Hezbollah."[1] According to AZTV "the group was planning to stage attacks against the Israeli embassy and a Jewish cultural centre in the Azeri capital Baku…. the group had been collecting intelligence and stocking up on weapons and explosives."(ibid)

Based on similar evidence, some analysts have accused Iran of trying to destabilise its northern neighbour. Looking more realistically, considering the exacerbated instabilities in other neighbouring countries which in turn affect Iran's security and stability, it has never been in the best interest of Iran to have yet another instable country on its doorstep. Time and again, Iranian officials, as well as experts, have emphasised on the importance of Azerbaijan's stability for both the region and Iran.

Assuming that Baku's accusations are true, a more reasonable explanation for increased intelligence and security activities of IRGC or other Iranian quasi governmental agencies in Azerbaijan could be found in Baku's extended relations with Israel. While other aspects of these relations have already been discussed, Iran's more immediate and real concern is the opportunity that Baku has provided for Tel Aviv for close espionage on Iran and carrying out terrorist attacks inside Iran. "Israel cooperates with Azerbaijan through exchanges of intelligence information, analysis of data and other activities. Israel even trains Azerbaijan's intelligence and security forces, a factor that may lead to the increased influence of Israel over Azerbaijan's security mechanism and strategies."(Souleimanov, Ehrmann, Aliyev 2014:12) According to a report by Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Azerbaijan's intelligence cooperation with Israel dates back to 1997, following Netanyahu's visit from Baku. (Javdanfar 2010)

Despite suspicions about Baku's intelligence cooperation with Tehran's adversaries, nobody initially talked about it openly. In his interview with an Iranian think tank, Afshar Soleimani, Iran's former ambassador to Baku had pointed out in 2011, that undercover of an agricultural project in southern parts of the country near the cities of Lankoran, Masali, and in Nakhjavan; Azerbaijan has provided the opportunity for

[1] Rianovosti (2012) *Azerbaijan says it Uncovered Iran-linked Terrorist Group*. Available at: <http://en.ria.ru/world/20120222/171452245.html> (Accessed on 20.01.2014)

Israel's intelligence activities. He explained that installing surveillance equipments in these areas has enabled Israeli agents to eavesdrop on mobile and military wireless communications in Iran. However, it was a report by the Times London on 11th February 2012 that gave a clearer picture of intelligence activities in Azerbaijan as a 'gateway to Iran'. "Many point to the Gabala mission defence complex in the north of the country, on the Russian-Azerbaijani border, as a hub for intelligence work. It is here that Russia, and increasingly the US and Europe, use advanced surveillance equipment and radio networks to monitor Iran. It was originally built during the Soviet era, but Dr. Orujlu said that its equipment was now lent out to other agencies."[1] The paper also discussed further details about Israeli agents' activities in Azerbaijan for keeping tabs on Iran.

On February 17th, Tehran accused Baku of aiding "a terrorist element, involved in the killing of Iranian nuclear scientists, who belongs to the Israeli spy agency of Mossad…… According to the report, Azeri secret service helped Mossad agents in terrorist attacks against Iranians by providing technical and logistical support." [2] Azeri envoy to Tehran was summoned to receive Iran's objection for "granting asylum to the Mossad-trained assassins of Iranian nuclear scientists."(ibid) Nonetheless, "The Azerbaijani foreign ministry condemned a protest note given to its ambassador in Tehran which complained about the alleged collaboration." Baku considered the note as "a reaction to a formal protest last month from Baku to Tehran after two men with alleged links to Iranian intelligence were arrested on suspicion of plotting to kill prominent Israelis in neighbouring Azerbaijan."[3]

Dr. Ahmadi Roshan was the last in the series of Iran's nuclear related assassinations which had started since 2007. Just two months after his death; Iran's Ministry of Intelligence announced "that it has uncovered a large and sophisticated Israeli-backed terrorist network that was planning attacks inside Iran."(Tovro 2012) The discovery was reportedly the results of several months' efforts and surveillance of an Israeli command centre "in one of the regional countries and discovering the identity of the

[1] The Times. (2012)*Spy vs Spy: the Secret Wars Waged in New Spooks' Playground*. Available at: <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/europe/article3316643.ecee> (Accessed on 10.01.2014)

[2] Press TV. (2012) *Azerbaijan Safe Haven for Mossad Terrorists: Report.* <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/227343.html> (Accessed on 6.1.2014)

[3] Hurriyet Daily News. (2012) *Iran's Baku-Israel Spy Claim 'Slander,' Azerbaijan Says*. Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/irans-baku-israel-spy-claim-slander-azerbaijan-says.aspx?pageID=238&nID=13666&NewsCatID=355> (ACCESSED ON 27.01.2014)

agents active in that command centre."(ibid) According to Raviv, who is co-writing a book on the history of Israel's intelligence agency "although Israel has never acknowledged it, the country's famed espionage agency - the Mossad - ran an assassination campaign for several years aimed at Iran's top nuclear scientists. The purpose was to slow the progress made by Iran, which Israel feels certain is aimed at developing nuclear weapons; and to deter trained and educated Iranians from joining their country's nuclear program."[1] In a 2014 article, he claimed that according to his sources who are close to Israel's intelligence services they are pressured by Obama's administration to stop their assassination campaigns inside Iran. (ibid)

Just a few days after the above discovery and siege; the Azerbaijan Minister of National security announced the arrest of 22 Azerbaijani nationals who have been hired and trained by Iran "to carry out terrorist attacks against the US and Israeli embassies as well as Western-linked groups and companies."[2] Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately issued a rebuttal and protested the actions of the Azerbaijani authorities. Azerbaijan's ambassador to Tehran was summoned once again and was told about Israeli machinations "to discredit Iran", resulting in "brotherly and friendly government of the Republic of Azerbaijan taking part in this game". Tehran stressed that the incident virtually cancels the agreement signed at the trilateral meeting of foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey on March 7th, as well as the arrangements entered into by the defence ministers of the two countries a week earlier.[3]

Even if the above developments are taken with a pinch of salt, one can obviously recognize an ongoing intelligence war between Iran and Israel in Azerbaijan. In other words while Azerbaijan has avoided direct conflict with Iran, it has provided its much stronger allies, particularly Israel with the opportunity to pose a direct threat on Iran's security. This, in fact, means that Azerbaijan has neutralised Iran's efforts to manage indirect conflict with Israel through proxies and within Israel's neighbourhood by

[1] CBSNews. (2014) *US Pushes Israel to Stop Assassinating Iran's Nuclear Scientists*. Available at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-pushing-israel-to-stop-assassinating-iranian-nuclear-scientists/?fb_action_ids=10151974837476027&fb_action_types=og.likes&fb_source=other_multiline&action_object_map=%5B1376715885935697%5D&action_type_map=%5B%22og.likes%22%5D&action_ref_map=%5B%5D> (Accessed on 02.03.2014)

[2] The Telegraph. (2012) *Azerbaijan Arrests '22 Iranian spies'*. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/azerbaijan/9144424/Azerbaijan-arrests-22-Iranian-spies.html> (Accessed on 25.01.2014)

[3] Pravda. (2012) *Spy Scandal between Azerbaijan and Iran Turns Epic*. Available at: <http://english.pravda.ru/world/asia/21-03-2012/120843-spy_scandal_azerbaijan_iran-0/> (Accessed in 15.12.2013)

permitting Israel to bring crucial military and intelligence apparatus to Iran's neighbourhood. Israeli president's admiration of Azerbaijan for its role in countering Iran's influence in the Middle East[1] shows the importance of Baku's cooperation against Iran. With such picture in mind, it is perfectly natural and justifiable for Tehran to take measures to combat the shadow war run by Baku's allies within Azerbaijan's territory against Iran's security.

5.3.4.3. Societal Sector

The referent object in the societal sector is "large scale collective identities that can function independently of the state, such as nations and religions….. Given the conservative nature of identity, it is always possible to paint challenges and changes as threats to identity." (Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde 1997:22-23) The societal sector, therefore, focuses not only on cultural factors but also on ethnicity related issues.

There is little doubt about tremendous effects of their shared cultural heritage and similar societies on Iran-Azerbaijan's bilateral relations. Bahrami, Iran's former ambassador to Baku emphasizes that "there are no other two countries in the world with such degree of common history and culture."[2] The two nations share many costumes and traditions like Nawruz and Yalda, many foods, music, dance, and other cultural components. While these factors have been the focal point of Iran's soft power in Azerbaijan and have always been emphasised by both countries' officials as a basis for closer political and economic relations; it has become increasingly a source of tensions in bilateral relations. One of the reasons which had turned these shared cultural factors to a bone of contention is Azerbaijan's efforts to confiscate them as its own cultural heritage. This trend has become more obvious and serious since 2008 when the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Program was established. In a politically motivated bid for creating an internationally recognised identity; the 20 years old Republic of Azerbaijan has registered some shared cultural heritage originated from the ancient

[1] This Day Live. (2014) *Israel Praises Azerbaijan's Stance in Iran Crisis*. Available at: <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/israel-praises-azerbaijans-stand-in-iran-crisis/145633/> (Accessed on 20.11.2013)
[2] Interview held on August 2013

Persian culture under its own name.[1] While Iran's government has just taken official steps to avert UNESCO's decisions, both the media and the public were deeply irritated by Baku's actions which were perceived as an attack on their identity and civilisation.

There are also many popular Persian public figures in different areas of politics, literature, science, etc. who were born in those Persian cities that later became part of the present day Republic of Azerbaijan. Baku has taken the same approach towards these shared public figures that it has towards other shared heritages. Perhaps the most significant example is the case of the famous poet Nizami Ganjavi, who was born and died in Ganja when this city was still part of Persia and all his poems are in Persian language. However, to introduce him and his works as Azeri heritage, Baku has translated his works into Azeri, deleting from the translations any parts of his poems that admire Persia and its rich civilisation. In 2013, tiled calligraphies in Nezami's tomb which contained his Persian poems were removed, to be replaced by Azeri translations, according to Azerbaijan's ministry of foreign affairs' spokesperson.[2] Iran consequently lodged a complaint to UNESCO.[3]

A more recent example is the book[4] written by the Head of Azerbaijan's Presidential Organisation, Ramiz Mehdiov, in which he has claimed that the Republic of Azerbajan is the heir to the Afshari government and that Nadir has been Azerbaijan's king, not Persia's. (Maleki 2015)

As it was explained in the political dimension; the two countries' shared ethnicity which could have been a valuable asset for development of relations, has been exploited by Baku for inciting irredentism among Iranian Azeri population and, therefore, has become a threat for Iran. However, shared language and ethnicity with at least 16% of Iran's population is an incentive for Azerbaijani people to visit Iran, communicate and bond with Iranians not only in northern provinces but even in the capital and further beyond. This and waiving the visa requirements for Azerbaijani civilians by the Iranian government since early 2010 has facilitated the closer social interaction between

[1] In 2012 "TĀR" which has been one of Iran's famous traditional music instruments for centuries was registered as Azerbaijan's intangible heritage. In 2013, Chogān, a traditional sport of centuries was registered as Azerbaijan's national heritage.
[2] Alef. (2013) *Talāshe keshvare Azerbaijan baraye tasāhobe Nezāmie Ganjavi*. Available at : <http://www.alef.ir/vdcexv8zwjh8oei.b9bj.html?198432> (Accessed on 20.11.2013)
[3] Voice of America. (2013) *Nezāmi Ganjavi va monāghesheye Iran va Azerbaijan*. Available at : <http://www.darivoa.com/content/nezami-ganjavi-and-iran-azerbaijan-dispute/1768716.html> (Accessed on 27.02.2014)
[4] Nader Shah Afshar: Diplomatic Correspondences.

Azerbaijani nationals and Iranians. According to Iran's Tourism Organisation, the monthly average of Azerbaijani tourists visiting Iran were over 60,000 in 2012.[1]While many Azerbaijanis travel for the acquisition of basic commodities which are much cheaper in Iran; many others are pilgrim tourists, religious Shiites who travel for the pilgrimage of Iran's holy places. Also, better quality and lower cost of health services in Iran has been an attraction for many Azerbaijanis who are disappointed with such services in their own country.[2] Azerbaijan is also a popular tourist destination for many Iranians, more due to its social liberties that allow Iranian tourists to have access to many entertainments which are banned in their own country.

While the above options provide direct channels of social interactions between the two nations; media is however, a more accessible and widespread channel of communications. While Iranians in northern provinces can watch Azerbaijan's TV channels; Iran broadcasts its Azeri language programmes through Sahar network. "Today, Iranian TV stations are reported to attract more and more rural Azeris that do not benefit from the economic progress so far."(NewYork Times as quoted by Mazziotti, Sauerborn, and Scianna 2013:9)

For many years governments in both countries have resented broadcasts by the other's media. There is a general concern in Iran that Westernised entertainment programmes in other countries' media including Azerbaijan might corrupt the public moral. Broadcast of programmes with irredentist dimensions by some Azerbaijani channels such as AZTV and ITV have been a more worrying concern for Iranian officials. On the other hand Sahar TV news and political analysis in which Aliyev's government was criticised heavily were antagonising Baku officials for years. Azeri authorities repeatedly criticised Sahar TV programmes. In 2009, Azerbaijan's deputy foreign minister sent an objection note to Iran's ambassador in Baku for 'distortion of Azerbaijan's policies and insult towards Azerbaijan's national flag'.[3] According to Iran's ambassador 'broadcast of political programmes from Sahar network had convinced Azerbaijani leaders that it is instigating a coup in the country'. Consequently,

[1] Fararru. (2013) *Āmāre gardeshgarāne vorudi be Iran e`lām shod*. Available at : <http://fararu.com/fa/news/144764/آمار-گردشگران-ورودی-به-ایران-اعلام-شد> (Accessed on 10.10.2013)

[2] For further details please see: Morāj'eye Bish az 49% Atbā'e Jomhuri Azerbaijan be marākeze darmānie Azarbaijan. Available at: <http://www.ccsi.ir/vdcj.veafuqeatsfzu.html> (Accessed in 10.02.2014) Also see: *Cherā bimārāne Azerbaijani barāye moāleje be Iran safar mikonand?* Available at: <http://qafqaz.ir/fa/?p=3698> (Accessed on 05.02.2014)

[3] Rianovosti. (2012) *Azarbaijan az gozāreshe Shabakeye Sahar rasman be Safire Iran e'terāz kard.* Available at: <http://pe.rian.ru/foreign/internatinal/20091007/123385715.html> (Accessed on 01.02.2014)

Iran's National Security Council ordered Sahar TV on November 2012 to limit its broadcasts to social and cultural programmes. The TV channel is also banned from interviewing people whose remarks are damaging to Iran-Azerbaijan relations.[1] The new policy set on Sahar TV for undertaking socio-cultural approach has reportedly helped in reducing tensions.[2] The media war has been contained since Rouhani's administration came to power. While Azeri TV broadcasted some positive programmes about Ayatollah Khomeini on the anniversary of his death; Iran issued a licence for ANS broadcasting network to work in Iran.[3]

There is no doubt that the most distinctive and influential cultural commonality between the two countries is 'Shiism'. While Shiites are scattered across the country, with the exception of Shiravan and Azerbaijan's Northern provinces, they make the majority of the population in various parts of the country, particularly in Baku, Nakhjavan Republic and other important areas. (Jabbari 2010:66) As Souleimanov (2011) has put it, in the aftermath of Azerbaijan's independence "the two nations were bound by a feeling of Islamic (Shi'i) solidarity, especially in the case of the Azerbaijani people who, following 70 years of Soviet domination and state atheism, were overcome by a desire to return to their spiritual roots."Iran found this fact as its greatest asset which could be invested in establishing closer ties and exerting more influence in Azerbaijan. As Calabrese (1994:83) explains, while "Iranian diplomatic activities in the Soviet successor states have generally resembled those of any other government", it was distinctive in that Iranian diplomacy was interrelated with "the promotion of Persian culture and the propagation of Islam. An important aspect performed by Iranians posted to diplomatic missions in the Soviet successor states has been the transmission of Persian culture." However, due to the interwoven nature of the Persian culture with Islam and Shiism; promoting Persian culture was in a way promoting political Islam. While not denying an underlying political purpose of their religious- cultural activities; Iranian officials insisted that the aim of such activities was not to interfere in the internal affairs of the newly independent countries but to foster closer ties.

[1] RIANOVOSTI (2012) *Pakhshe barnāmehāye zede Azerbaijani dar Shabake Sahare 2 mamnu shod.* Available at: <http://persian.ruvr.ru/2012_10_07/90448307/> (Accessed on 10.02.2014)

[2] Quoted from the TREND Newsagaency: Site Khabari Tahlilie Haghāyeghe Ghfghāz. (2013) *Arzyābie mosbate Safire Iran dar Baku az taghviate ruykarde farhangie Shabake Sahar.* Available at: http://qafqaz.ir/fa/?p=2065 (Accessed on 01.02.2014)

[3] Pāygāhe Khabarie Aftāb. (2014) *Sodure mojavveze avvalin shabakeye Jomhūrie Azerbaijan dar Iran.* Available at: <http://khabarfarsi.com/ext/8959847> (Accessed on 19/11/2014)

Since the people of newly independent countries including Azerbaijan which was "by far the most secularized of the republics of the former Soviet Union" (Dragadze as quoted by Bedford 2009) demonstrated considerable interest in learning more about their Islamic background; important Muslim countries from Iran and Turkey to Arab countries particularly Saudi Arabia used the opportunity to educate their Muslim brothers by their own version and interpretation of Islam. In the chaotic post independence political atmosphere, a considerable number of clergies, religious scholarly resources and funding got their way to Azerbaijan while many young people travelled to neighbouring countries particularly Iran for seminary education.

As the country stabilised gradually, the authorities took notice of the role and influence of such considerable number of religious missionaries as a source of threat to their secular establishment. Therefore, several steps were taken to eliminate this threat including "an amendment to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Freedom of Religious Belief in 1996 banning the activities of 'foreigners and persons without citizenship' from conducting religious propaganda."(Bedford 2009:142) Numerous Iranian clergies who were leading local mosques and religious centres across the country were expelled. The 1997 official announcement requiring all religious communities to renew their official registration restricted further practice of Iranian backed organisations. While the 2001 establishment of the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations (SCWRA) was another step in further supervision of foreign missionaries; as Bedford (ibid:168) explains its prime object is the control of books and other published materials coming from Iran.

This antagonism towards Iran and its religious influence in the country has made life difficult for "religious communities that, in reality or in theory, have links to Iran" (ibid) including those who have educated in Iran. Azerbaijani students who were studying in Iran's seminary schools have been warned that upon their return they shall not be appointed to any posts in any governmental organisation. (Kaleji 2011)

Despite the fact that for more than one decade Wahhabi extremism has been the main source of threat internationally; Baku officials perceive Iranian Shiite activism a more dangerous threat to their establishment. "One of the reasons often given by the authorities for their strong wish to keep religion out of politics is the concern they feel about Azerbaijan becoming an Islamic Republic *a la* Iran."(ibid: 160) "Concern that

secular Azerbaijan has regarding Iranian relations with its co-religionists is best illustrated by Baku's belief that Iran is directly funding, and actively providing ideological direction to the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan (IPA)." (Shanahan 2013:23) Founded in 1991, IPA was accused of operating against the state and banned in 1995. Although the party was never considered as a mass movement since it represented Iranian Shiite activism for Azerbaijan authorities, it was dealt with harshly. "In 2011, the chairman of the IPA Movsum Samadov was sentenced, along with six other party members to lengthy jail terms on charges of attempting to overthrow the state." (ibid)

The accelerated process of further secularisation of the country since the late 2000s has created further tensions between the two countries. In 2009 female students were banned from wearing hijab in schools, a rule which in the following year was applied to teachers and in 2011 was extended to university students as well. Despite widespread demonstrations across the country, the law was not abolished; instead demonstrators were arrested. Women with hijab are barred from entering government buildings and no identification document would be issued if the photo is taken with hijab. The hijab ban not only aroused "the ire of the religious Islamic community in Azerbaijan with their periodic demonstrations since the end of 2010" (Raufouglu 2012); but also brought about yet another round of warnings and accusations from both countries. Initially, the Iranian Armed Forces Chief of Staff, Major General Firouzabadi called on President Aliyev to "strengthen his government by respecting Islamic rules and people's demands… Otherwise he will face a dark future since people's awakening cannot be suppressed." (ibid) Fiercely reacting; Baku summoned Iran's ambassador to the Foreign Ministry, resulting in Tehran renouncing Firouzabadi's remarks.

A 2010 Wikileaks revelation demonstrates Aliyev's serious concerns over religious ceremonies sponsored by Iran, particularly Ashura.[1] To overcome these concerns heavy restrictions have been applied on religious rituals and ceremonies. Upon a new government order, all religious signs including the name of Allah were removed from all offices and government buildings as of 2010. There is an official ban on the broadcast of Azan,[2] and students and young people are prevented from entering

[1] "Aliyev said that Iranian provocations in Azerbaijan were on the rise. He specifically cited not only the financing of radical Islamic groups and Hezbollah terrorists, but also: -- the Iranian financing of violent Ashura ceremonies in Nakhchivan, -- the organization of demonstrations in front of the Azeri consulates in Tabriz and Istanbul, -- a violent religious procession recently in Baku"; in: *US embassy cables: Azerbaijan leader in the soup*. Available at :< http://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/250649> (Accessed on 20.10.2013)

[2] Call for prayers

mosques to attend jamaat prayers. Holding jamaat prayers in the urban mosques particularly in Ganja became restricted and many mosques were clamped down or completely destroyed with various excuses. The closure of all seminary and religious schools across the country and deprivation of seminary students from social privileges and applying strict limitations on Ashura processions are among numerous anti religious policies undertaken by Baku officials in recent years. (Kaleji 2011)

The above policies, as well as the arrest of Islamist activists, created a wave of opposition, also encouraged by the Arab spring. While Iran's diplomatic apparatus did not show any official reaction; objections came from various other platforms particularly grand ayatollahs whose Azerbaijani followers were under pressure from these developments. Their request to stop such treatment of their followers was faced by Baku's accusation of Iran's interference in its domestic affairs.

The manifestation of Azerbaijan's increasing secularisation and Westernisation did not stop at this; neither did Iran's unofficial objections, coming mostly from the media and clergies. Each occasion of similar nature mounted the tensions in bilateral relations, getting the two countries on the verge of undeniable enmity. The 2012 Eurovision song contest instigated yet another round of objections and accusations from Iranian clergies and official broadcasting network. Baku again accused Iran of interfering in its domestic affairs, oblivious to the fact that for several reasons Iran's clerical establishment cannot see the above developments simply as Azerbaijan's internal affairs.

The first and most obvious reason is exactly the social and cultural closeness of the two countries, as well as their geographical proximity, which has consequently resulted in close interactions of the two nations. While Azerbaijan is worried that radical Shiite ideologies exported by its southern neighbour would radicalize its public and ultimately undermine the secular nature of the state; Iran's religious establishment is concerned that pervasive Westernisation and social freedom in Azerbaijan might derail Iranians from the straight and narrow path of virtue. Moreover, "religious identification usually corresponds to some official or semi official leaders who claim to be able to speak on behalf of religious community." (Buzan, Waever and de Vilde 1997:124) Iran's clerical establishment recognizes itself as the guardian of all Muslims particularly Shiites and, therefore, entitle to speak on behalf of Azerbaijan Shiite community to object repression

of fellow brothers and demonstrate concern over their destiny. More importantly, by further secularisation and Westernisation of Azerbaijan; Iran would effectively lose its most valuable asset for influence in that country. To put it briefly, dynamics of secularizing a Shiite community in the neighbourhood of a theocratic Shiite state has increased tensions to an unprecedented degree.

5.3.4.4. Economic Sector

As Buzan and colleagues (1991:20) have put it, the economic sector focuses on "access to resources, finance and markets". The most important economic relation between the two countries, prior to Azerbaijan's independence goes back to the second decade of the twentieth century during which, the import of Azerbaijan's oil had a particular importance for Iran. Due to lack of suitable transport networks and vehicles, transfer of oil from the south of Iran to its northern parts was neither easy nor cost effective. Therefore, the oil demand of the northern provinces was met by imports of Baku's oil, which in turn had helped the development of Baku's oil industry, as well as the Soviet Union's economy. The Soviet's Ministry of Foreign Trade, therefore, decided in 1923 for the Baku to become the main base for trade with Iran. Branches of important Soviet trade corporations and active Trusts which had traded with Iran were based in this city; resulting in the increased importance of both the city and the trade with Iran became. (Amir Ahmadian 2005:118) Another important factor in Tehran-Baku economic cooperation was Azerbaijan's Shipping Office (CASPAR) which in 1924 had equipped the port of Baku to railway, warehouses, industrial cranes etc. and opened its representative office in the Iranian port of Anzali, in order to facilitate shipping of Iranian goods. (ibid: 120) The 1941 launch of Baku- Astara railway was an important step in further development of trade relations between the two countries. The railway is not connected to Iran's rail network though and its future connection has been an important topic frequently discussed between the two countries' officials.

Tehran-Baku's close direct economic and trade relations which had ended in 1945 following the fall of the Iron Curtain; were resumed immediately after the independence of the latter.

During the initial post independence years, many transit routes to Azerbaijan were blocked due to the Karabakh conflict. This had consequently turned Iran into Azerbaijan's prime trading partner. As Mamadov has explained, "in the 1990s, Iran was one of Azerbaijan's top trade partners but has lost this position over the past decade."[1] From 2010, as a consequence of increased tensions between the two countries, trade rate plumetted considerably getting to $300 million in 2011. Tens of Iranian companies with years of successful business in Azerbaijan went bankrupt within a year. (Khatin Ughlu 2013) Some Iranian famous factories like Iran Khodro and Darya detergent production were closed down. The situation was worsened by the absence of any Iranian insurance company to insure Iranian businesses in Azerbaijan after license revocation of Azer-Asia insurance company in 2008. (Khatin Ughlu 2012) Table 1 which offers a brief report of bilateral trade in the non oil sector since the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan shows that the relations have reportedly picked up again since late 2012.

In addition to food stuck, ferrous products obtained fom iron ore, tar, petrochemical products and construction materials have been the most demanded items by Azerbaijan to be exported by Iran over the years; while mineral fuels, iron and steel have been on top of the import list from Azerbaijan to Iran.

Iran has also facilitates and regulates border markets and free zones in order to create jobs for local small traders and provide frontiersmen with more source of income. It also provides the opportunity for people from the Republic of Azerbaijan to buy their food stock and basic necessities more conveniently, as these commodities are much cheaper in Iran than in Azerbaijan. (AmirAhmadian & PourGholi 2012:276)

Over the years, Iran- Azerbaijan Economic Cooperation Commission has been the main platform for regulating trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. The first meeting of the Commission was held in November 1992. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed to confirm agreements on various issues including import and export of goods. The commission has held several bilateral meetings over the years. The 8th meeting was held in 2011, during which the two sides emphasised

[1] Centre for Strategic & International Studies (2013) *Iran-Azerbaijan Relations and Strategic Competition in the Caucasus.* Available at:< http://csis.org/event/iran-azerbaijan-relations-and-strategic-competition-caucasus> (Accessed on 05.09.2015)

on planning for further cooperation and removing obstacles for doing so.[1] A review of the follow up reports submitted by the same commission in the early years demonstrates numerous occasions in which Iran's positive approach for expanding economic cooperation and trade relations with Azerbaijan have been faced with Azeri's 'reluctance', 'unreliability' and 'non adherence to commitments'.[2]

Dr. Bahrami, Iran's former ambassador to Baku explains that "Iran has always shown a great interest in expanding relations, particularly in trade and economy with Azerbaijan. Baku officials have also been apparently keen on expanding these relations. In practice, however, we do not see as many developments as it has been discussed and mutually agreed by the two side's officials. There are people in the middle and lower levels of Azerbaijan's bureaucratic system who do not want these relations to develop due to their political views. Such people halt the process of materializing agreements when it gets to them."[3]

According to Pak Aeein, Iran's present ambassador to Baku; the most important areas in which the two countries can develop their bilateral relations are transit, trade and energy. Bilateral trade between the two countries in the non oil sector reached to 500 million Euros in 2015.There is of course a potential to increase this volume to 1 billion Euros.[4]

However, further development of economic and trade relations are faced with two major challenges: infrastructure deficiencies and political barriers. An important infrastructure which can strengthen economic cooperation between the two countries is the banking system. Iran's Melli Bank branch in Baku was established in 1993, but was not so active for a host of reasons, and became even more restricted by severing

[1] Hashtomin Ejlāse Commissione Moshtarake Iran va Jomhurie Azerbaijan (The 8th Meeting of Iran's Common Commission with the Republic of Azerbaijan). Retrieved on 01.02.2014 From The website of Iran's Commercial and Trade Attache' in Baku: <http://www.aztpo.com/Azerbaijan/faraj7.asp?k=198>

[2] During the fourth meeting of the commission, a deadline of 3 months was agreed by both sides to make practical preparations for achieving the set goals in issues such as trade and investment, reopening of border markets, etc. However, despite preparation and insistence from the Iranian side to act upon the agreement, the Azeri side was showing reluctance by installing and refraining from a clear response. One stark example of 'unreliability' is the case of 'Refah chain store branch in Baku, known as 'East Market'. According to the report of the company's managing director with cooperation of some corrupt Azeri authorities, the Azeri partner has illegally seized the store land and with the help of Baku municipality has rent out the land to mobile vendors; undermining Refah Company's investments and his own commitments.

[3] Interview in August 2013.

[4] Vābasteye Bāzargānie Jomhurie Eslamie Iran dar Baku. *Hajme mobādelāte tejāri beyne Iran va Jomhurie Azerbaijan tā do barābar ghābele afzāyesh ast.* Available at : <http://www.aztpo.com/news-persian/Desc.asp?id=2463&id2=101&id53> (Accessed on 30.04.2016)

sanctions. Moreover, Iran's Export Development Bank has sponsored and invested in several projects that improve economic cooperation, including $80 million for construction projects in early 2000s[1], 80% of the required credit for exporting the Iranian manufactured Samand car to Azerbaijan and in 2006[2], and financing 37 million Euros for building a 25 story twin tower in Baku in 2009[3] [4].

Table 5.1: Iran and Azerbaijan Trade Trend 2001-2013[5]

Trade Balance	Export to Azerbaijan	Import From Azerbaijan	Trade Balance
1993	68961	411184	-342223
1994	201714	394525	-192811
1995	163241	209574	-46333
1996	189494	251843	-62349
1997	193688	119245	+74473
1998	120333	38842	+81491
1999	119245	25992	+93253
2000	248848	24165	+224683
2001	313574	20847	+292727
2002	250144	25259	+224885

[1] Bonyāde Motāleāte Ghafghāz. Ta`mine mālie projehā dar Azerbaijan tavasote Banke Toseēye Sāderāt. Available at: <http://www.ccsi.ir/prtg.n9xrak9wnpr4a.html> (Accessed on 03.05.2016)

[2] Vezārate San`t M`adan va Tejārat (2006) Tashilāte Banke Tose`eye Sāderāte Iran barāye sāderāte 2500 Khodroye Samand be Azerbaijan. Available at: <http://mimt.gov.ir/news/55980-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%DA%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-2500-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%88-%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86.html?t=%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1> (accessed on 03.05.2016)

[3] It was initially estimated that the construction would take 36 months and the loan would be repaid with 4% interests after 2 years of project completion.

[4] Hozūre borje do gholuye Banke Toseēye Sāderāt dar Baku. Available at: <http://www.poolnews.ir/fa/news/10405/%D8%AD%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AC-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%82%D9%84%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%DA%A9-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83%D9%88> (Accessed on03.05.2016)

[5] The source for 1993-2010 data is Iran's Costumes Annual Calendar quoted by AmirAhmadian, B. and Pour Gholi, and the rest is available at: Iran's Commercial & Trade Attaché's Website on: <http://www.aztpo.com/Azerbaijan/faraj7.asp?k=151> (Accessed on 20.06.2014)

Trade Balance	Export to Azerbaijan	Import From Azerbaijan	Trade Balance
2003	307378	96468	+210910
2004	256162	128766	+127396
2005	330763	163930	+166833
2006	281699.8	371267.2	-89567.4
2007	322157.9	349979.8	-27821.9
2008	240045	368867.3	-128722.3
2009	171657.5	373791.4	-202133.9
2010	111502.2	375464	-263961.8
2011	503000	37000	+466000
2012	548000	45000	+503000
2013/6	285000	110000	+274000

Prior to increased severity of the sanctions and the mounting pressure on various countries to comply with relevant regulations; Azerbaijan was one of the loop holes through which Iranian companies could circumvent sanctions. At least one Azerbaijani private Bank, the Royal Bank of Azerbaijn, was providing services for Iranians particularly for circumventing the sanctions, i.e. issuing debit and credit cards for Iranian citizens who were otherwise deserted from such services due to international sanctions. However, the bank went bankrupt as its license was revoked in 2012 by Azerbaijan's Central Bank following the US embassy report of its money laundering and sanction busting activities.[1]

Despite the 2010 negotiations for increasing Iran Bank Meli activities in Azerbaijan and proposals for establishsing a joint bank with Azerbaijani nationality and Iranian capital, such activities became increasingly impossible due to international sanctions

[1] Wikileaks Public Library of US Diplomacy. *IRAN'S MONEY LAUNDERERS, SANCTIONS-BUSTERS, AND REVOLUTIONARY GUARD MONEY MAKERS: A BAKU SAMPLER.* Available at: <https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAKU175_a.html> (Accsessed on 05.05.2016)

and Iran- Azerbaijan mounting tension prior to 2014-5 developments, resulting in the blockade of $200 million of Iran's money in Azerbaijan[1].

Following the improvement of bilateral relations, several rounds of negotiations for resolving banking problems and increased cooperations were held between the head of Azerbaijan's Central Bank and his Iranian counterpart as well as Mahmoud Vaezi, Iran's Minister of Communications and Information Technology who informed the media of the agreement to establish a joint bank with branches in both countries and proposals for using the $200 million blocked money as the initial capital required for this bank.[2] Moreover, it was announced in 2014 that the status of Iran's Melli Bank branch in Baku is going to be promoted from a secondary branch to a main one in near future.[3]

Lack of appropriate transport system has been another important infrastructure deficiency. As Iran's foreign minister explained in 2011; due to numerous problems in both countries' transport systems; they are forced to acquire their needs from farther countries with higher cost despite their proximity. (Quoted by AmirAhmadian & Pourgholi 2012:315)

"Iran can provide the shortest transit route for Azerbaijan to access Asia, Persian Gulf and from there to Africa. Therefore, shared investment and bilateral cooperation for development of transit routes is in the interest of both countries."[4] One of the most important projects in this field is Iran-Azerbaijan rail network connection. The first post independence agreement for connecting the two countries' rail network was reached in December 1993 (IPIS 2010:240). A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in Sep 2015 which would help in revivng the North-South corridor. Based on this document signed in Astara, Azerbaijan rail network would extend to the shared border,

[1] Financial Tribune. (2015) *Iran, Azerbaijan Plan Joint Bank.* Available at: <http://financialtribune.com/articles/economy-business-and-markets/24131/iran-azerbaijan-plan-joint-bank> (Accessed on 05.05.2016)

[2] Ibid.

[3] IRNA. (2014) Ehtemāle ijāde komiteye bankie moshtarak miāne Iran va Azerbaijan. (2014) Available at : <http://www.irna.ir/fa/News/81266516/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%DA%A9_-_%D8%A8%DB%8C%D9%85%D9%87_-_%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%B3/%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84_%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AF_%DA%A9%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA%D9%87_%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%DA%A9%DB%8C_%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%B1%DA%A9_%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86_%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86_%D9%88_%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86> (Accessed on 03.04.2016)

[4] Vābasteye Bāzargānie Sefārate Jomhurie Eslamie Iran dar Baku. Available at : <http://aztpo.com/Azerbaijan/Desc.asp?id=2690&id2=101000&id5=2> (Accessed on 26.04.2016)

where a terminal with the volume of 5 million tones would be developed. At the same time Iran, will also complete the Qazvin- Rasht-Astara railway. The whole project is planned to be completed within one year.

The second part of the same document is regarding the joint construction of a bridge[1] on the border river. According to AmirAhmadian (2008:169) the construction of a pedestrian bridge over the border river in Astara has been proposed by Iran's Transportaion and Terminals Organisation. However, despite verbal agreements Azerbaijan has shown no interest to fullfill the proposal, apparently due to security concerns. Nonetheless, Baku has been willing to cover half the cost of construction for bridges in 'Jolfa' and 'Poldasht-Shah Takhti', as there is an annual traffic of more than one hundred thousand trucks and buses between the two countries and there is an urgent demand for such bridges.

The complete and successful fulfilment of these projects can increase Iran- Azerbaijan trade relations up to 4 times and connect the Russia and Caucasus to Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf countries, on the one hand and Iran to east European countries through Azerbaijan on the other.[2]

Moreover, by completion of the large terminal in Bile Savar Customs, the provision of services to travellers and traders would be doubled.[3]The two countries also agreed in 2015 that both Astara and Bile Savar Customs work 24hr/day. Moreover, Azerbaijan has issued 20.000 traffic permits for Iran's Ministry of Roads and Transport, which would relieve some exports from custom duties.[4]

Energy is another important aspect of Iran-Azerbaijan economic cooperation. Baku announced in 2006 that it has reached an agreement with Tehran over electricity

[1] Rail, pedestrian and car bridges.

[2] Sefārate Jomhurie Eslamie Iran- Baku (2015) *Iran- Jomhurie Azerbaijan, mehvarhāye haml o naghle Jādde`i*. Available at: http://www.baku.mfa.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=193&pageid=8413&newsview=361789 (Accessed on 27.04.2016)

[3] There has been 75% progress in development of this terminal by now. Vābasteye Bāzargānie Sefārate Jomhurie Eslamie Iran dar Baku. Available at : http://aztpo.com/Azerbaijan/Desc.asp?id=2690&id2=101000&id5=2 (Accessed on 26.04.2016)

[4] Bourse 24. (2015) *Rāhandāzie banke moshtarake Iran va Jomhurie Azerbaijan dar Tehran.* Available at : https://bourse24.ir/news/110794/%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B2%DB%8C%20%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%DA%A9%20%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%B1%DA%A9%20%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%20%D9%88%20%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%20%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86%20%D8%AF%D8%B1%20%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86 (Accessed on 01.05.2016)

supplies. Based on this agreement; an energy clearing would be undertaken during alternating peak seasons of consumption in each country. This arrangement has continued successfully ever since. The two countries also agreed on building two hydropower stations on each side of the Aras River.

Tehran and Baku have also invested heavily for the joint construction of ParsAbad-Imishli transmission line. By completion of this project, the bilateral power exchange could potentially increase by 600 MgW[1]. However, the completion of the project remains to be seen as "it was initially planned to be completed by 2002". (AmirAhmadian 2008: 169)

Iran has been been supplying electricity to Nakhjavan since 1991. An agreement was reached in 2002 following negotiations between Iran's Tavanir Company and Azer Energy reached that the local electricity company in Azerbaijan would increase the potential for transmission of up to 50 MgW through Jolfa's 132 KV post, as well as constructing the Jolfa-Urdubad 132 KV transmission line. The plan was completed and launched by August 2004.[2]

According to Iran's ambassador, the joint construction of KhodaAfarin- Ghizghalasi dam is an example of successful bilateral cooperation in producing hydro electric energy.[3]The two countries also signed a joint plan for the establishment of Marazad-Ordubad hydropower station during Aliyev's 2014 visit of Tehran.[4]

With regard to hydrocarbon based energy resources, Iran has a 10% share both in Shah Deniz Consortium and in Lankoran- Talesh-Deniz. Azerbaijan used to supply Iran's north and North West provinces with refined fuel products. This however has reduced as Baku found other markets particularly in Mediterranean countries.

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[1] Pāygāhe Ettelā Resānie Vezārate Nirū. (2014) *Tose`eye ravābete barghie Iran va Azerbaijan*. Available at: http://news.moe.gov.ir/Detail.aspx?anwid=12962. (Accessed on 29.04.2016)

[2] Petro Energy Information Network. (2004) *Terānsite bargh az Jolfa be Nakhjavān āghāz mishavad*. Available at :<http://www.shana.ir/fa/newsagency/28514/%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AC%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%AC%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A2%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%AF> (Accessed on 28.04.2016)

[3] Sefārate Jomhurie Eslamie Iran- Baku. *Ravābete eghtesādie Jomhurie Eslamie Iran va Jomhurie Azerbaijan*. Available at : <http://baku.mfa.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=193&pageid=8429> (Accessed on 25.04.2016)

[4] Khabar Online. (2014) Arzyābie ravābete Iran va Jomhurie Azerbaijan dar Sāle 2014. Availabel at : <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/392115/weblog/paakaein> (Accessed on 01.04.2016)

The two countries signed a 25 years gas swap contract in 2005. Based on this contract Iran will swap an annual volume of one million two hundred thousand cubic meter of Azer gas at Astara- Nakhjavan border.[1] A new round of gas negotiations were held in 2010 which resulted in Iran increasing the import of gas from Azerbaijan by 2 million cub meter/day.[2]Following Iran's Minister of Petrolume's visit in 2011, it was agreed to develop the existing infrastructure in order to increase the daily swap initially to 2.5 million, and reach to 5 million in the second stage.[3] A new gas pipeline for transport of Iran's gas to Nakhjavan was launched in 2015. However, again under the strategy of reducing dependency on Iran, a contract with Turkey had been signed in July 2010 to annually transport 500 million cubic meters of Azerbaijan gas to Nakhjavan free of Transit charge, as opposed to Iran's 15% transit charge. (Abbasov 2010)

SOCAR and Iran's Research Institute of Petrolume Industry signed a MoU for the joint exploration of Caspian hydrocarbon resources in 2014[4], which for Iran is more with the hope of discovering further gas reserves, than oil.

The same year Iranian Gas Export Company (IGEC) and SOCAR also negotiated over the possibility of storing Iran's gas in the underground gas storages of Azerbaijan to be used during Iran's peak times of use.[5]

Iran's location between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf has provided it with the advantage of petrolum swap between these two regions. In this method, the Caspian Sea petroleum producers deliver their products to Iran's port of Neka in the north. The same amount of petroleum (weight wise) woud then is delivered to other countries by

[1] Naftema. (2015) *Joz`iāte mozākerāte jadide gazie Iran va Azerbaijan*. Available at : <http://naftema.com/news/27933/%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B0%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF-%DA%AF%D8%A7%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86 > (Accessed on 28.04.2016)

[2] Iran Ministry of Petrolume. (2010) *Emzāye tafāhomnāmeye jadide gazi beyne Iran va Azerbaijan*. Available at: <http://www.mop.ir/Portal/Home/ShowPage.aspx?Object=News&ID=1ec5294a-e037-46b1-9806-8ca8dc409ce6&LayoutID=26881592-6ec1-4678-9a88-f9e4c3dc0212&CategoryID=b37c877a-1ec5-4ae5-90a0-a36ed666ca3c&SearchKey=> (Accessed on 29.04.2016)

[3] Vezārate Naft. (2012) *Tose`eye hamkārihāye Iran va Azerbaijan dar zamineye energy.* Available at : <http://mop.ir/Portal/Home/ShowPage.aspx?Object=NEWS&ID=1daf66a2-4f06-4e25-affe-e369bbe122ab&WebPartID=4ec6c46d-9f05-4498-905f-9a78a747c1b8&CategoryID=b37c877a-1ec5-4ae5-90a0-a36ed666ca3c> (Accessed on 01.02.2012)

[4] Neconews. (2014) *Gharārdāde naftie Iran va Jomhurie Azerbaijan*. Available at : <http://www.neconews.com/vdcdsj0s.yt09o6a22y.html> (Accessed on 26.04.2016)

[5] ABC.AZ (2014) *SOCAR offers Iran to Store Gas in Azerbaijan Underground Storages for Winter Needs.* Available at: <http://www.abc.az/eng/news_18_09_2015_90896.html> (Accessed on 20.04.2016)

Iran through the Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf. The petroleum bought from northern borders would be delivered to Tehran and Tabriz refineries for domestic use. The petroleum swap project was initiated in 1997. Based on its contract with 4 international corporations, Iran would receive $1 for per barrel of crude oil received by customers in the Persian Gulf. At its peak the petroleum swap reached 130,000 barrels per day resulting in significant development of infrastructure in the port of Neka.[1] Despite its considerable income the project was stopped in 2010 by MirKazemi, Iran's the Minister of Petrolum who believed the project is a rip off.[2]

However, Rouhani's administration took serious steps to revive the project and return to the swap market by 2015. Significant increase in the capacity and infrastructure of the Naka port from 150,000 to 500,000 barrel/day is an attractive opportunity to bring back swap customers including Azerbaijan, to Iran's market once again.

Despite the aforementioned cooperations, the bilateral relation with regard to hydrocarbons has been also shaped by rivalry over resources, transport routes and markets.

The late 2012 witnessed yet another round of Caspian related raw between the two countries as Iran announced the discovery of a new Caspian gas field with the potential capacity of up to 42 trillion cubic feet.[3] Baku's initial welcoming reaction was later replaced with claims of the field being located in Azerbaijan's common maritime border with Turkmenistan, accusing Tehran of confiscating a field which belongs to Baku; while Iran's Minister of Oil insisted that the field belongs to Iran and is located within its maritime borders.[4]

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[1] Fararu. (2015) *Bāzgoshāeie parvandeye Swap, 5 sāl pas az tavaghof.* Available at : <http://fararu.com/fa/news/231068/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%DA%AF%D8%B4%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-%D9%BE%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%A2%D9%BE-5%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%BE%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81> (Accessed on 24.04.2016)

[2] In addition to losing the swap income, Iran had to pay a hefty penalty of more than $5 million for unilateral withdrawal from the contract, not to mention being deserted from high quality, light weight crude oil of its northern neighbours.

[3] Jomhūrie Eslāmi. (2011) *Vākoneshe Jomhurie Azerbaijan be kashfe meydāne gāzi*. (2011), Available at: http://www.jomhourieslami.com/1390/13900930/13900930_18_jomhori_islami_eghtesadi_0005.html (Accessed on 15.01.2014) Also Tābnāk. (2011) *Afzāyeshe naghshe Iran Dar Daryāye Khazar*. Available at: <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/210551/%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B2%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B4-%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B4-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D8%B2%D8%B1> (Accessed on 20.10.2013)

[4] Information on rivalry and tensions over energy transport networks is covered in chapter 1 and 3 and earlier part of this chapter.

One example of market competition between the two countries is Iran-Turkey gas deal of the late 2000s. While negotiations were under way to find a deal which is beneficial for both countries; "the initiative stalled both for political reasons, but also because of concerns that Iranian natural gas was more expensive than its competitors in Azerbaijan (USD 330 per thousand cubic meters) and Russia (USD 400). Iran by contrast charged USD 550 per thousand cubic meters." (Zasztowt as quoted by Shanahan 2013:24)

Another example is the 2012 cancellation of Iran's gas contract by a Swiss company, only to be replaced by Azerbaijan. A 25 years long contract was signed in 2008 between Swiss EGL and Iran's NIGEC for the annual purchase of 5.5 billion cubic meters of gas. However, the sanctions prevented the start of devlivery. AXPO on the other hand became 100 percent share owner of EGL shares, and bought 5% share of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) Project which is expected to start delivery of Azerbaijan gas to Europe by 2020. Consequently Axpo spoksman announced that "Axpo has gas contracts with the Shah Deniz Consortium for the whole gas capacities required, that is why we currently do not need any gas from Iran."(Kosolapova 2015)

With hundreds of kilometres of shared borders, and their common membership in regional and international organisations such as ECO and the Organisation of Islamic Conference; there is such great potential for further trade and economic cooperation that the present volume seems 'unconvincing', as Iran's former ambassador has pointed out.[1] Confirming Bahrami's belief, Baku's ambassador claims that there is a potential for the two countries to reach their annual trade volume to $10 billion.[2]

Meanwhile, domestic and international developments of both countries and their political relations have affected trade and economic ties as well. As Azerbaijan's economy grew stronger and established closer relations with Western countries, it found more supplier options and became less dependent on its trade with Iran. On the other hand increased sanctions on Iran and isolation of the country, limited its trade opportunities with other countries significantly.

With the prospect of laxing sanctions, Azerbaijan economic delegation was one of the first to visit Iran in the immediate weeks after finalisation of Iran's nuclear deal.

[1] Quote from <http://fa.arannews.com/mobile/?m_t=news&Type=News&TypeID=17&id=25749> (Accessed on 25.01.2014)
[2] ibid

5.3.4.5. Environment Sector

"The environment sector concerns the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend." (Buzan 1991:20) While their shared long borders have provided Iran and Azerbaijan with various common environmental resources; Caspian Sea is the most important subject in their bilateral environmental relations. Located on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, Iran's agriculture, fishery, forestry and tourism is very much affected by this Sea. Therefore, while other countries are more interested in the exploitation of resources; Caspian environment protection is of special importance for Iran, particularly because the slope and water flow drive most of the pollutions towards the Iranian shores.

The emergence of three new countries with their thirst for the Caspian hydrocarbon reserves initiated an increasing trend of pollution both for the Caspian and for the surrounding environment. The situation has become critical as a result of the undetermined legal status of the Sea. As long as the Sea is exploited under no binding legal regime, the countries are hesitant to undertake the cost and responsibility for pollution control and dredging. Consequently Caspian has become "one of the most polluted seas." (Kostianoy & Kosarev 2010: 227)

Caspian aquatic resources are of general importance for the neighbouring countries. Up until the late 2000s, the average annual fishing volume used to be around 600,000 tones. "Poaching is a serious problem that must be resolved with joint efforts of the Caspian states. The problem of over-fishing affects other species. Thus, in Iran over-fishing of Caspian trout, bream, zander, along with the damage of their habitats and spawning grounds, resulted in complete loss of these species. Zander disappeared due to massive catches in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan." (Aladin & Polotnicov 2003:14) Overfishing and increased pollutions in the Caspian Sea have resulted in the considerable demise of fishing resources particularly Sturgeon and Kilka fish reserves. Caspian littoral states eventually agreed to stop sturgeon fishing from 2014 for 5 years. The remaining reserves are polluted with chemical materials in their cells which are harmful to human

health.[1] Speculations suggest that the mass mortality of the Caspian Seal which has endangered this species is due to the Sea pollution, as well as overfishing of some breeds of fish that are food to the seals.[2]

According to Head of Caspian Ecology Research, there are three main sources for the Caspian pollution.[3]

1- Petrochemical pollutions: Baku shores are filled with oil pollutions from oil tankers, entry and exit points, and oil rigs with outdated technology. There are 16 carcinogenic oil derivatives in more than 122,000 tons of oil pollutions that enter the Caspian each year. While Caspian pollution is mostly oil related;[4] Azerbaijan is reported to be the first producer of oil pollutions. In 2013, Iran threatened that it "would lodge a complaint if British oil and gas giant, BP, continues polluting the Caspian Sea. BP simply dumps waste oil into the Caspian Sea waters instead of injecting it into the depth of 6,000 meters below the surface."[5]
2- Industrial and agricultural pollutions: These pollutions are the most dangerous polluting factors in the Caspian Sea with serious health consequences for humans as well as other species. According to Iran's Environment Agency's deputy, most of such pollutions are originated from Russia.[6]However, according to Deputy Marine Environment of Iran's Department of Environment, the post-mortem carried out on dead Caspian Sea seals has revealed a high level of DDT in their

[1] Tasnim News (2013) *Tavāfoghe keshvarhāye sāhelie Khazar barāye tavaghofe 5 sāleye saide māhiāne Khāviāri*. Available at: <http://www.tasnimnews.com/Home/Single/233057> (Accessed on 20.02.2014)
[2] Seal Conservation Society. (2011), Available at: <http://www.pinnipeds.org/seal-information/species-information-pages/the-phocid-seals/caspian-seal> (Accessed on 31.08.2015)
[3] Mashregh News. (2011) *Vorude 122,000 tons aludegie Nafti be Daryāye Khazar.* Available at : <http://www.mashreghnews.ir/fa/news/45012/%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AF-122%D9%87%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D9%86-%D8%A2%D9%84%D9%88%D8%AF%DA%AF%D9%8A-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%8A-%D8%AE%D8%B2%D8%B1> (Accessed on 20.02.2014)
[4] Khabar Online. (2012) *Iran Daryāye Khazar rā microbi aludeh mikonad keshvarhāye digar nafti.* Available at: <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/187506/> (Accessed on 20.02.2012)
[5] Press TV. (2013) Iran to Sue Azerbaijan over Oil Pollution in Caspian Sea. Available at: http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/01/27/285888/iran-to-sue-baku-over-caspian-pollution/ (Accessed on 24.02.2014) Also: Guardian (2013) Iran Threatens to Sue BP over Pollution Claims from Caspian Sea Oil Platforms. Available at:< http://www.theguardian.com/business/2013/jan/29/iran-threatens-sue-bp-pollution-oil> (Accessed on 24.02.2014)
[6] Zistnews. (2013) *Sahme Iran dar* ā*ludegie Khazar faghat ensānist/Rusie somume keshavarzi varede Khazar mikonad*. Available at: <http://zistnews.com/News.aspx?ID=5835> (Accessed on 19.02.2014).

bodies, resulted from the use of outdated and forbidden chemicals by the local farmers which are dangerous for both human and animals' life.[1]

3- Anthropogenic impact: "As the Caspian is an inland water body, anthropogenic (man-caused) impacts on catchment area (about 3.5 million km) accumulate here." (Aladin & Polotnicov 2003:11). With a coastal population of over 7 million, Iran is the main producer of anthropogenic pollution in the Caspian Sea.[2] To control such pollution, Iran's Ministry of Energy has been obliged to install refineries and filters for coastal cities that have a population over 30,000. While this obligation has been effective in reducing human waste entering the Caspian, but it has not been enough, and not all such coastal cities have received the required technology. According to Iran's Environment Agency's deputy "around 400 million cubic meters per year of this waste is produced in the Caspian provinces of Iran, only 40 percent of which is filtrated, and the remaining part is released into the sea without any filtration."[3] While per capita pollution created by Iran is less than other littoral states, due to high population density in coastal areas, the accumulative volume of human swage polluting Caspian by Iran is more than the other four countries.[4] The rise of Caspian water level has been an important factor in increasing anthropogenic pollution, as it washes away many residential areas and mixes up the Sea with water swages. (Mostaghimi 2005:144)

Concerns over environmental damages inflicted on the Caspian Sea encouraged the littoral states to start joint efforts for saving its environment since 1998. In 2003 the littoral states signed the Caspian Sea Convention known as Tehran Convention. The Convention came into force as of 12 August 2006 and since then the day is celebrated as the Caspian day among these states. Four complementary protocols were ratified during subsequent years which have provided the ground for pollution control and

[1] Department of Environment. (2015) Estefāde az somuūme keshāvarzie mansukh shodeye donyā dar hāshieye Daryāye Khazar. Available at: <http://www.doe.ir/Portal/Home/ShowPage.aspx?Object=News&ID=adcb61cd-90b2-461c-b4e3-f6b17dfc3e92&LayoutID=318502d2-49a1-4838-b2dd-a58c6d22a884&CategoryID=7fb271f5-f2fe-4a98-a24a-83889b582c66&SearchKey=> (Accessed on 05.05.2016)

[2] ECO News (2012) *Sahme Iran dar* āludegie *Daryaye Khazar 12% ast.* Available at: <http://www.econews.ir/fa/NewsContent.aspx?id=195838> (Accessed on 20.02.2014)

[3] AZERNEWS. (2013) *Iran Warns Over Caspian Sea Pollution.* Available at : <http://www.azernews.az/region/57240.htm>l (Accessed on 24.02.2014)

[4] Khabar Online. (2012) *Iran Daryāye Khazar rā Microbi Aludeh Mikonad Keshvarhāye Digar Nafti.* Available at: <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/187506/> (Accessed on 20.02.2012)

protection of biodiversity.[1] However, despite the existence of these protocols the level of cooperation for environment protection has not been proportionate to the level of existing challenges particularly the ever increasing pollutions. Moreover, the issue has become another source of controversy between Iran and Azerbaijan, with Iran threatening to sue Azerbaijan for petroleum pollutions and Azerbaijan accusing Iran of creating more damage to the Sea through human swages.[2]

5.4. Conclusions

This chapter has initially provided a historical background on the inception and developments of the Republic of Azerbaijan as well as its general post independence foreign policy. It has then reviewed Iran-Azerbaijan relations, from a general point of view, providing a background on regional and international geopolitical environment in which these relations have been shaped. The last part of the chapter has offered detailed analysis on various sectors of bilateral relations particularly in the post Cold War era through the adaptation of Buzan and his colleagues' security framework. By employing this framework, the review has analysed existing opportunities and threats, cooperation and rivalry between the two countries in each sector.

The political sector has demonstrated how Baku is posing a threat to Iran's ethno territorial integrity by promoting the myths of 'Southern Azerbaijan' and the 'Greater Azerbaijan'. The aforementioned myth has had the most damaging effects on bilateral relations. One can imagine that if the Republic of Azerbaijan had any other name which was not the same as Iran's northern provinces; and Baku could not easily be posing such threat to Iran's territorial integrity by instigating irredentism among the large Azeri population in these provinces; the relations could have benefitted from a relative trust and be based on a much friendlier terms. Another important issue which also affects Iran's territorial integrity is the dispute over Caspian Sea demarcation. Moreover, while

[1] Sāzmāne Hefāzate Mohite Zist. (2014) 21 Mordād rūze Daryāye Khazar. Available at: <http://www.doe.ir/Portal/Home/ShowPage.aspx?Object=News&ID=c34a5a09-b091-4aae-899e-b30a84ad4ff5&LayoutID=2c358b27-c014-4445-b9b2-12970163bf98&CategoryID=b21cd579-acbc-4fb4-83ce-a064c5d61bf6&SearchKey=> (Accessed on 06.05.2016)

[2] Pāygāhe Khabari Tahlilie ZistBoom. (2012) *Ettehāme moteghābele Iran va Baku darbāreye mansha`e ālūdegie Daryāye Khazar*. Available at : <http://zistboom.com/fa/news/5814/-اتهام-متقابل-باکو-و-تهران-درباره-منشا-آلودگی-دریای-خزر (Accessed on 24.02.2014)

the opposing nature of states has resulted in the perception of political imposition; contending patterns of amity and enmity and regional alignments has created more security threats and tensions in Tehran-Baku relations.

Over the years, there has been limited military cooperation between Iran and Azerbaijan. However as the chapter has demonstrated in details, the two countries bear threat to one another in several ways, including the militarisation of the Caspian Sea, the possibility of exploitation of Azerbaijan's air and land space for attacking Iran, Azerbaijan's arms deal with Israel and its military and intelligence cooperation with this country against Iran is on one hand and Tehran's efforts in countering these threats including cyber attacks on state related websites and other possible intelligence activities is on the other.

The societal sector covers a diverse range of crucial issues in the two countries bilateral relations. Complex cultural and ethnic ties are the most significant characteristics of Iran-Azerbaijan social relations. In addition to the shared ethnicity which has provided Baku with a precedent for irredentist sentiments and promoting the myth of Greater Azerbaijan; shared cultural heritages have become another bone of contention and extended the scope of rivalry to cultural issues. On the other hand, adherence of the majority of both countries' population to a common sectarian confession is considered by Iran as an asset for further influence, while Baku perceives it as an element of threat for Azerbaijan's secular state.

The economic sector has looked at areas of cooperation such as trade and energy, discussing barriers to the further expansion of cooperation which are mainly either infrastructure deficiencies or political barriers, such as sanctions. The section also explains that despite their trade and economic co operations, the two countries compete over hydrocarbon resources, transport routs and markets. Moreover, the economic interdependence is not deep enough to result in closer political relations or at least not be affected by political tensions.

The main environmental issue between the two countries is the Caspian pollution, resulting from exploitation of undersea resources, poaching and over fishing, household swages, shipping and transport. The chapter has argued that undetermined legal status of the Caspian Sea has resulted in littoral countries failure to accept responsibility for the environmental protection of the Sea.

As demonstrated by this analysis, while there certainly is room for improvement of bilateral relations through confidence building and détente; the existence of geopolitical imperatives and conflicting interests such as territorial disputes, resource and market rivalries, incompatible nature of states, as well as transregional interferences which has securitised the bilateral atmosphere, makes partnership between the two countries an unlikely development. Although emphasising particularly on their shared heritage, officials in both countries, try to play down heated disputes and pursue a degree of cooperation; but the existence of the aforementioned factors can potentially tarnish bilateral relations between any given two countries. In such circumstances, even a potential asset such as shared heritage has become an added threat. Therefore while both countries try to avoid an outright conflict and save face by emphasising on existing strong links between the two nations, as long as the above factors remain unchanged, the likelihood of enmity is much more than amity.

The following conclusions can also be drawn trough the application of theories with the analysis provided in this chapter:

1- Iran has failed to articulate and adopt a clear and consistent proactive policy towards the Republic of Azerbaijan since the independence of the latter. This failure is mainly rooted in Tehran's continuous misconception and miscalculations about Azerbaijan, which has deserted Iran of effective policy initiatives and resulted in a generally reactive policy towards this neighbour. The main source of such deficiency could be found in excessive reliance on constructive analysis of the existing circumstances both at regional and state level; which has resulted in Iran's overestimation of the role and influence of its common heritage with Azerbaijan and the '*Shiite*' factor on the one hand, and underestimation of the implications of Azerbaijan's 'secular' state and its Western orientated foreign policy on the other. The combination of these factors has created a security atmosphere much deeper and more complicated than what Iran had initially anticipated.

2- Nonetheless, as demonstrated by the review of bilateral relations under various administrations in both countries, the attitude and approach of both countries administrative leaders have had crucial effects in exacerbating or diminution of tensions and subsequent increase or decrease of opportunities and threats.

3- Through the picture provided by this study, Iran-Azerbaijan relations can be explained with defensive realism theory of international relations. Talaiferro has defined some auxiliary assumptions from which defensive realism proceeds. These assumptions specify "how structural variables translate into international outcomes and state's foreign policies."(2001:131) He believes that "structural modifiers such as the offense-defense balance, geographic proximity and access to raw materials- influence the severity of the security dilemma between particular states."(ibid) The geographical proximity of Iran and Azerbaijan, as well as their rivalry over hydrocarbon resources, has increased the severity of security dilemma between the two countries. He also emphasises on the role of leader's calculations and perceptions in translating material power into foreign policy. As already explained, there was an initial miscalculation on the part of Iran, overestimating social and historical bonds in Azerbaijan's approach towards Iran, which has resulted in Tehran's rather passive and reactionary position with respect to Baku.

Taliaferro has further argued that "domestic politics can limit the efficiency of a state's response to the external environment."(ibid) The existence of a large Azeri population in provinces bordering with the Republic of Azerbaijan has been an important determining factor in shaping bilateral relations. However, they are not the only domestic factor limiting Iran's efficiency in response to Azerbaijan. As demonstrated by several cases in this chapter, media, clergies, quasi government organisations, etc. play an important role in shaping these relations.

As explained by defensive realism "pairs of states may pursue purely security-seeking strategies, but inadvertently generate spirals of mutual hostility or conflict."(Taliaferro 2001:129) Throughout this chapter, it was demonstrated how Iran and Azerbaijan are seeking strategies to galvanise their security against existing regional and international threats. However, due to conflicting interests and policies this has generated spirals of mutual hostility. Defensive realism also explains instances where the two countries have cooperation on issues such as trade and economy or environmental protection; "under certain conditions states can engage in mutually beneficial cooperation." (ibid: 130)

The next chapter will examine Iran's bilateral relations with the Republic of Armenia, using the same structure and theoretical concepts as the present chapter.

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9%86%DA%A9%20%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%B1%DA%A9%20%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%20%D9%88%20%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%20%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86%20%D8%AF%D8%B1%20%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86> (Accessed on 01.05.2016)

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CHAPTER SIX

IRAN'S RELATIONS WITH THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

6.1. Introduction

Armenia, the smallest and the least economically developed country in the South Caucasus, with approximately 40 kms of shared borders is Iran's closest ally in the region. As it would be demonstrated in this chapter, there is a long historical precedent to Iran-Armenia friendship extending over the millennia. This historical precedent has been an important factor in setting the tune in bilateral relations.

Regional developments, as well as both countries' foreign relations, are among other factors that set the context in which their relations are formed. This chapter will briefly discuss Armenia's foreign policy and its relations with important regional and external actors, as well as the effects of the Karabakh conflict on these policies and relations.

It will then move on to analyse Iran's bilateral relations with Armenia in the same sectoral model used for analysing its relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan. The analysis will demonstrate a consistent pattern of behaviour between the two countries based on mutual trust and respect, cemented by shared historical and cultural heritage, and close social relations enhanced by the presence of respected Armenian ethnic minority in Iran.

The chapter will argue that while trade and economic relations, particularly bartering energy has been the cornerstone of bilateral relations, some other strategic drives namely; shared regional challenges and grievances such as sanctions and isolation, converging patterns of alliance and rivalry, as well as incentives such as the positive role that the Armenian lobbies in the West can play in favour of Iran have been among various factors directing development of bilateral relations from cordial and friendly into alliance and partnership.

6.2. Armenia's Shared History with Iran

Armenia's particular geography has probably been the most important factor affecting its history. Geographically situated on a high mountainous plateau, "Armenia has been called the 'Armenian Fortress' and the 'Armenian Island'." (Masih & Kirkorian 1991: xix) From a strategic point of view, this mountainous terrestrial characteristic has provided the country with natural frontiers which could help in securing the boundaries of any Empire located in it.

As a consequence of situating at the crossroad of rival powers, Armenia has been frequently fought over "either to provide a buffer against neighbouring states and tribal confederations or as means to achieve greater strategic goals." (ibid: xx) Despite centuries of statehood, "throughout much of its history, Armenia has rarely been united in a single political entity." (ibid) Development and flourishing of Armenia have been dependent on the equilibrium of surrounding powers. In the absence of equilibrium, "the stronger power filled the vacuum and turned Armenia into battlefield." (Garsoian as quoted by ibid)

The first Armenian dynasty, Yervandunis, was established under the auspices of powerful Medes in the 6th century B.C. "Later, the Persians who replaced the Medes in 550 and ruled until 331 B.C. kept this dynasty in power." (Sadri 2007: 67) According to Xenophon, the famous Greek historian, there existed close relations between Tikran Yervandian, the Armenian king and Cyrus the Great, the founder of Achaemenians. Armenians fought alongside Cyrus against Azhdahak and Medians and supported the establishment of the Achaemedian dynasty. Armenians were serving as commanders in the Persian army. (Pasdermajian as quoted by Melkomian

Maps 6.1: Armenia at the Crossroad of Rival Powers[1]

2010:23) "The Yerevandunis dynasty continued to rule Armenia with a fair degree of autonomy even after Alexander the great brought an end to the Persian Empire." (ibid) As a result of this political autonomy together with their geographical isolation, Armenians grew into a cohesive and distinct group of people. (ibid)

[1] Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caucasus And http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/europe/am.htm (Accessed on 05.09.2014)

Map 6.2: Armenia and the Roman Client States in Eastern Asia Minor ca. 50 AD[1]

Based on Tacitus historiography, Melkomian (2010:24) writes that Armenians were culturally and traditionally very close to Parthians and fought Romans together, eventually breaking Romans through Persian-Armenian alliance in 61-2 B.C. Armenians continued to have close relations and respectable positions in Parthians courts. However, according to Sadri (2007: 68), they eventually allied themselves with Rome and converted to Christianity in 314-5 A.C. This development which coincided with Sassanid era is recognised as the root of Western orientation among Armenians and the "foundation that would separate Armenians from the Muslim Arabs, Turks and Persians who later became dominant forces in the region." Then in 387 A.C Armenians were divided between Persia and Rome. The larger eastern part went under the Sasanid rule and the Western part under the Romans. (Melkomian 2010:25) However, the demise of Byzantine Empire completely cut off Armenia from the Christian West, leading the country to the "dark centuries". (Panossian as quoted by ibid)

"After the fall of the last Armenian kingdom in historic Armenia, in the eleventh century, many Armenians …. settled in Cilicia, on the Mediterranean Sea. An

[1] Available at:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Armenia_(antiquity)#mediaviewer/File:Roman_East_50-en.svg>
(Accessed on 05.09.2014)

Armenian kingdom was eventually established and played a vital role in near Eastern affairs until it was conquered by the Mamlukes in 1375. This marked the end of the last Armenian political entity until the establishment of the Republic of Armenia in 1918, almost 550 years later."(Masih & Kirkorian 1991: xxi)

Following the occupation of both Persia and Armenia by Arabs; political, economic and cultural relations between these two countries increased and entered into a new phase with the aim of preventing further penetration of Arabs. Through natural alliances shaped for resisting against Seljuks, Mongols and other Turkish tribes; friendship and cooperation between the two nations and their governments flourished.

In later centuries, Armenia once again became a buffer zone between two warring Empires, the Ottoman Turks and the Safavid Persians. In trying to avoid getting caught between the two Muslim Empires, Armenians appealed to their Christian brothers, Europe and Russia. However, as the might of Muslim Empires did not crack till late 1800's, Armenians remained isolated from Europe. (Sadri 2007:69)

The 15th century rivalry of Ottomans and Safavids resulted in the ultimate partition of Armenia between regional powers. Ottomans occupied most parts of Western Armenia and the remaining parts went under the Persians' suzerainty. In the early 17th century, Armenians on the northern side of the Aras and the Ararat Plain were forcefully migrated to different parts of Persia. They established the new city of Jolfa around Isfahan, which later become an important hub of domestic and foreign trade. Considering their political and economic influence, Safavid shahs bestowed privileges on Armenians who had settled in Iran. They enjoyed the same privileges under the Qajar dynasty too. (Melkomian 2010:25)

The rise of Russia in the late 18th and early 19th century as a new regional power challenged the hegemony of both ancient powers in the Caucasus and transformed the geopolitical dynamics of the region. (Masih & Kirkorian 1991: xxi) As a consequence of Turkamanchai Treaty, based on which Armenia was ceded to the Russian Empire; the political destiny of Armenia slipped out of Persia's hands and went under the control of Ottomans and Russians. "When the Ottoman Empire initiated a war against Russia in the fall of 1914, the fate of the Ottoman Armenians was all but sealed." (ibid: xxv) Perceived as traitors, the Armenian population of Western Armenia became the subject of extermination. Although the exact number of Armenians killed during the event may

never be determined, it has been estimated that 1.5 million Armenians lives were spared between 1915 and 1923. (ibid) Following these horrid events, Persia warmly welcomed the Armenians who had to leave their country and helped them rebuild their lives. (Sarkissian as quoted by Melkomian 2010:26)

Iran's relation with Armenia entered a new phase after the end of the World War I and the latter's independence in 1918. The first independent Armenian state after more than 5 centuries was struggling with numerous external challenges such as conflicts with Georgia over Akhal Kalk and Lori, and Azerbaijan over Karabakh and Zangezur. The unresolved issue of Western Armenia, domestic problems including refugees and non existing economy, in addition to Bolsheviks efforts to overthrow the Republic were among other challenges. Therefore, the only safe side appeared to be on Armenia's southern border with Iran. The appointment of Prince Arghutian as Armenia's ambassador in Iran was an evidence of the importance which was attached to relations with Iran. Unfortunately, due to the tension-ridden domestic scene; exploiting such opportunities was not a priority for Iranian officials. Although a delegation was appointed to establish relations between Iran and the three republics of the Caucasus, but the mission did not bear any fruits due to the fast regional developments and the collapse of three Caucasian republics. (IPIS 2009:164)

The situation was not any better in Armenia. A contract that was drafted for establishing Batumi-Ghares-Yerevan-Tabriz road in Yerevan never got to the negotiation step due to the collapse of the Armenian Republic, which was eventually annexed to the Soviet Union in 1920-192. (ibid)

The importance of Armenia in regional dynamics was not reduced even after the end of the World War II. To counter the possible invasion of NATO through Turkey, hundreds of Eastern Bloc military units were stationed in Armenia. (ibid: 27) Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the creation of CIS, the strategic importance of Armenia was not reduced, as Armenia-Turkish border remained one of the main crossroads of the world's greatest nuclear powers, NATO and the CIS.

On the other hand, although Armenia's territorial conflicts with its neighbours were frozen under the Soviets, they were by no means resolved. "One of the major legacies of Soviet nationality policy was territorialisation of ethnicity." (Masih & Kirkorian 1991: xxvii) Based on this policy, which was devised and executed by Stalin, each

nationality must have a corresponding territorial unit. "The impact of Soviet nationality policies on Armenia is difficult to overestimate. ... Armenia lost land and population to almost all of its neighbours. The predominantly Armenian populated regions of present day southern Georgia, Akhalkalak, and Akhalteshke were given over to Georgian administration, as well as half of the Lori district. The historically Armenian district of Nakhichevan became an autonomous formation within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, while Karabagh, with its overwhelming Armenian majority, was turned into an autonomous region under jurisdiction of Baku." (ibid)

As the most ethnically homogenous Republic of the former Soviet Union, Armenia was a fertile ground for the rise of nationalist sentiments during Perestroika. Following some heated domestic developments, "in late summer of 1991, the Armenian Communist Party Congress decided to dissolve the party, and Armenia was proclaimed an independent and sovereign republic on September 23, 1991." (Nuriyev 2007: 57)

6.3. Armenia's Foreign Policy

According to Armenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs; "the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia is aimed at strengthening the country's external security, maintaining external favourable conditions for the development of the country, presenting the positions of Armenia on the international scene, raising efficiency of protecting the interests of Armenia and its citizens abroad, deepening engagement in the international organisations and processes, strengthening cooperation with the friendly and partner states, as well as resolving regional problems and creating an atmosphere of cooperation."[1] Armenia's National Security Strategy document has outlined the country's foreign and security policies more comprehensively. The document has considered two concepts of 'complementarity' and 'engagement' as the main principles of the country's foreign policy.

Although it was Kocharyan's administration that widely promoted the concept of complementarity in 1998; as German (2012:36) explains "the principle of

[1] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia. *Foreign Policy.* Available at: <http://mfa.am/en/foreign-policy/> (Accessed on 30.04.2014)

complementarism has defined Armenian foreign policy since independence". According to Poghosyan (2011: 196) complementarity means that "Armenia would promote its national interests on the international scene while 'refraining from competition and antagonism' and through reliance on 'the potential of partnership and balance' among regional and global powers. Resisting "polarization of geopolitical interests in the region", is the assumed purpose of such policy. German (2012:36) believes that complementarity "stresses the importance of pursuing Armenia's national interest through a balance of policies that do not favour any one country or bloc, a strategy that has become more significant as the West began to take a more direct interest in the South Caucasus at the beginning of the 21st century". The concept of engagement on the other hand, emphasises the importance of participation in regional and international processes and initiatives that are beneficial to Armenia's national interests.

However, the above principles have been in sharp contrast to the realities of Armenian foreign relations and the geopolitical environment since the independence of this republic more than two decades ago. In addition to regional geopolitical developments; the Karabakh conflict has played as a major impediment in comprehensive implementation of the above principles.

The Karabakh Conflict: While chapter 5 of this study has provided some background on the Karabakh issue, the effects of this protracted conflict on Armenia cannot be overestimated and needs further discussion. Armenia would have been struggling for survival with a collapsed economy, insufficient infrastructure, and other security threats to its sovereignty even without any war. Yet, the Republic entered its latest period of independence handicapped by the Karabakh conflict and its consequences.

The fact that Nagorno Karabakh's secession from the Republic of Azerbaijan has continuously been a priority in Armenia's post-independence agenda shows the importance of the issue in domestic politics. However, any attempt to integrate the Nagorno Karabakh into Armenia directly, would have been in breach of international law and left Yerevan open to international condemnations. In order to avoid such pressure and not to risk its regional relations; "instead of trying immediate unification with Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia recognized Nagorno-Karabakh's 1991 declaration of independence. In this way, Yerevan could frame the conflict as a civil war in

Azerbaijan and not a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan."(de Waal as quoted by Sadri 2007:71) However, due to the saliency of the issue, President Ter Petrosian's clever policy did not work long and "Armenia was soon undeniably engaged in the war for Nagorno-Karabakh." (Sadri 2007: 72)

Armenia's further military success in Karabakh brought about more economic and diplomatic challenges for the country. "Under the Soviet Union 80% of Armenia's rail traffic passed through Azerbaijan." (de waal as quoted by Sadri 2007:74) The immediate consequence of the war was the loss of major trade routes and transport infrastructure resulting in an acute shortage of food and fuel supplies due to the blockade imposed by Azerbaijan, which consequently left Turkey as the main appropriate channel for essential commodities. Therefore, despite the dark history of the so called Armenian genocide, and the pressure of Diasporas; "Armenia's foreign policy in 1991-2 emphasised the establishment of normal relations with Ankara. Economic necessity and re establishing the old east-west trade link outweighed nationalist priorities." (Herzig 1999:96) The policy was fruitful for a while and Turkey permitted the use of its territory for transfer of humanitarian assistance to Armenia through its airspace, railroads, and ports. "The possibility that this kind of good will would grow into a more meaningful relationship led to talks in which Armenian-Turkish representatives operating with the tacit approval of authorities in Yerevan began negotiations over the expansion of port facilities in the Turkish city of Trabzon on the Black Sea. This port would be used to accommodate increased Armenian trade with Europe." (Masih & Krikorian 1999: 98)

However, as Armenia became more explicitly involved in the Karabakh conflict and Azerbaijan suffered more defeats, Yerevan's hopes to keep relations with Turkey as a separate issue from its conflict with Azerbaijan proved wrong. Armenian offensive continued irrespective of increasing international condemnation, resulting in the occupation of 20% of the Azerbaijan territory, which provided a connection rout between Armenia and Karabakh, as well as a buffer zone between Karabakh and Azerbaijan against any Azerbaijani offensive. Yerevan-Ankara relations that had already become tense following the 1992 occupation of Shusha and Lachin turned hostile as Armenian forces seized the Azeri province of Kalbajar. Turkey cut diplomatic relations with Armenia and imposed border blockade which has continued ever since.

The above developments created a new environment in which, Armenia was deprived of two of its main trade and transport routes and caught between two adversaries. While the immediate consequence of this situation was sever energy and food shortages, Armenia has been faced with longer term and more serious consequences particularly in its foreign and security policy during the last decades.

The country's isolation has provided Russia with the opportunity to exert more influence on Armenia, and has resulted in Yerevan's subservient status towrads Moscow. As already discussed in chapter two; Yerevan's dire economic circumstances has drowned the country in heavy debts to Russia. To redeem some of its ever increasing debts, Yerevan was forced to involve Russian public and private companies in Armenia's economic infrastructure through Russia's 'equity for debt relieve programme'. This heavy Russian involvement is not only in sharp contrast to the policy of 'not favour(ing) any one country or bloc', but has practically undermined Armenia's sovereignty, which in turn has limited the country's engagement with the international community to a level that does not contradict Moscow's interests in the region.

While Armenia's relations with major regional players would be discussed further in this section, the above details suffice to demonstrate how the Karabakh conflict has been an impediment for the realisation of a 'balanced foreign policy' branded as 'complimentarity'.

Although the geopolitical shift resulting from direct Western involvement in the region could have provided Armenia with greater development opportunities, failure to settle its conflict with Azerbaijan has left Yerevan in a disadvantaged position. It has resulted in Armenia's exclusion from major international projects, particularly energy pipelines, which could have brought a great boost to the country's ailing economy.

6.3.1. Historical Review of Armenia's Post-Independence Foreign Policy

Armenia's post-independence foreign policy has been relatively stable. By reviewing this policy, one can see general continuity and consistency in direction, principles and priorities; though the depth and intensity of its relations or focus on a particular subject may have varied at times.

Close relations with Russia has been an important aspect of Armenia's foreign policy. According to 2007 Armenia's national security strategy, "the importance of Russia's role for the security of Armenia, the traditional friendly links between the two nations, the level of trade and economic relations, Russia's role in the Nagorno Karabakh mediation effort, as well as the presence of a significant Armenian community in Russia, all contribute to a strategic partnership." This benevolence towards Russia is to a large degree "premised upon shared Christian heritage and juxtaposition of the images of barbaric Asiatic Turk and enlightened Europeanized Russian". (Mirzoyan 2007:37) Russian military and economic assistance which played an important role in the survival of the country in the early post-independence years and "provided a basic security umbrella that had become absent immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union" has also been a strong foundation for such trust among Armenia's politicians towards Russia. (ibid: 55)

The two countries signed a bilateral Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in 1991. However, two important factors encouraged Armenia to forge an even closer relationship and to realign with Russia. The first was anxiety over "the military threat posed by Turkey and Azerbaijan." (Herzig 1999:96) Russia's strenuous relation with Azerbaijan in this period became an advantage to Armenia's efforts. The other was "the realization that Russia had remained a far more important power in the region than had initially appeared to be the case." (ibid)

Over the years, the pattern of close cooperation which was established in 1992-3 developed asymmetrically in a way that kept Armenia extremely dependant on its relations with Moscow. The consolidation of links between the two countries' defence and military sectors was essential in Armenia's progress in Karabakh war and also "enabled Armenia to build what is, according to the country's leaders, the strongest army in the south Caucasus."(Wolfson 2002:3) Economically, "credit from Russia's Central Bank was vital to support Armenia's budget in this period." (Herzig 1999:97)

The March 1995 signing of yet another treaty "allowed Moscow to establish the 102nd Russian military base in the city of Gyumri, which is located close to the border with Turkey. Yerevan also hosts Russian border troops which guard Armenia's border with Iran and Turkey."(ibid) Russia's base in Armenia is "the only such facility outside of the Russian Federation where the host country receives neither rent nor reimbursement. Armenia pays for the totality of its costs and expenses." (Hovansiannisian 2010)

This process was continued with the signing of a critically important military agreements and further developments in bilateral relations which eventually culminated to the signing of 1997 Armenian-Russian Agreement on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance. The significance of this treaty is that it "envisages mutual military support if either side is attacked or considers itself threatened by a third party. The two parties further pledged not to join any alliance or defence treaty directed against Russia or Armenia. For Armenia, the treaty ensured Russian support in the case of the Azerbaijani attempt at a military revenge, while for Russia Armenia was the only base from which it could secure its Southern flank and project influence over the region."(Mirzoyan 2007:63) Another agreement on deepening military cooperation by the two countries' Defence Ministers in November 2003, which coincided with the Georgian political crisis, was heralded by Russia's Foreign Minister Igor Ivano calling Armenia, "Russia's only ally in the south." (Iskyan 2004) Following the 2014 Ukraine developments and growing tension between Russia and Western countries, The Russian Air force started upgrading "the Soviet-era Erebuni airbase in Armenia, which houses the Russian 3624th Air Base and currently hosts a squadron of MiG-29 fighters and Mi-24 attack helicopters."(Daley 2014)

Another important development was the 2003 transfer of the management of Armenian energy sector to Russia as part of the 'debt for equity' programme. Also in 2008 based on an "agreement between the Russian and Armenian governments transferred Armenian Railways to Russian Railways' subsidiary, South Caucasus Railways for 30 years. The agreement committed the Russians to investing $230 million in Armenia during the first five years of operations and subsequently an additional $240 million."(ibid)

"The predominance of Russian capital in strategic sectors of Armenia's economy (such as the energy, transport and telecommunications sectors), the country's dependence on Russian loans, and remittances from Armenian expatriate workers employed in Russia (over 10% of the country's yearly GDP)" (Ananics 2014); as well as Armenia's security reliance has provided Moscow with leverage to isolate Yerevan from constructive interaction with the West. This in turn has given a more free hand to Russia to exert more influence in the South Caucasus through subordinating Yerevan to Moscow's will. The existing relations were significantly strengthened in 2010, with the signing of an extension to the 1995 agreement on the 102nd Russian military base at Gyumri, extending the operation of the base until 2044. (German 2012:37)

Armenia's 2014 decision to withdraw from EU's trade association and join the Russian led Eurasian Economic Community Custom's Union, is a stark example of the above analysis. Developments came after years of negotiations between Armenia and EU.[1] Cleverly manipulating Armenia's weaknesses to maximise its own interests; Russia increased the price of energy supply to Armenia by 50% as of July 2013 following a practical warning through the sale of $1bn armament to Azerbaijan in spring; forcing Yerevan to eventually interrupt its negotiations with the EU. "Soon after President Sargsyan's decision to join the Customs Union, another expansive phase of Russia's military presence in Armenia began."(Grigoryan 2014) According to the Polish OSW think tank, "the process of integration with the CU has reduced the Armenian government's room for manoeuvre on the domestic political scene and has made this scene subordinate to the Kremlin's interests. As a consequence, the president, who was dominant in domestic politics until recently, is losing his power to Moscow, and the oligarchic government system is becoming entrenched."(Ananic 2014)

"Turkey was among the first countries to recognize Armenia's independence after the collapse of the USSR." (Poghosyan 2011:204) However, as already explained, Armenia's strategy to keep the Karabakh conflict separate from its regional relations did not work with regards to Turkey. The diplomatic relations broke out and Ankara imposed land and air border blockade following Armenian's advances into Azerbaijan's territory in 1993, as a symbol of Turkish brotherly alliance with the latter. "The airspace was opened in 1995, but for the opening of the land border and

[1] Armenia's negotiations with the EU had started in 2009.

establishment of diplomatic relations Turkey put forward a number of preconditions, particularly, return to Azerbaijan of the areas currently under the control of NKR and abandonment of the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide."[1]

As a result of a negotiation process facilitated by Switzerland, a 'Protocol on Establishment of Diplomatic Relations' and 'Protocol on Development of Relations' were signed between Turkey and Armenia, and sent to relevant authorities in each country for ratification. However, under both domestic and Azerbaijan's pressure, "after the protocols were signed, Turkey abruptly changed its position and refused to implement agreements on the normalisation of the relations within a reasonable timeframe and without any preconditions, linking the ratification of the Protocols in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey to the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh issues."[2] On the Armenian side, the protocol was first sent to the Constitutional Court for approval. "The court found the protocols to be commensurate with the Armenian Constitution with its reasoned statement, which contained contradictory elements to the latter and the spirit of the Protocols."[3] Eventually on April 2010, in a televised message, Sargsyan suspended the ratification process of the protocols. Armenia, categorically denies accepting any preconditions for opening the borders and establishing diplomatic relations.

Relations with the West have been an important aspect of Armenia's foreign policy since the early post-independence days, initially through OSCE's mediation efforts. Two important factors have acted as major catalysts for developing Armenia's relations with the West. First is the shared Christian heritage, which is the basis for Armenian's argument for their belonging to the European civilisation. The other is Armenia's active Diaspora, which have a crucial role in pursuing their vision of Armenian nation's interests in Western countries. (Mirzoyan 2007:261)

While integration with the European structures was initially a strategic vision for Armenia (Oskanian as quoted by Mirzoyan 2007:260) it has been impeded by the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, as the resolution of the conflict along with democratic reforms were initially set as prerequisites for the country's accession and membership

[1] The Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Republic of Armenia, Available at: <http://www.mfa.am/en/country-by-country/tr/> (Accessed on 13.05.2014)
[2] ibid
[3] Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Relations between Turkey and Armenia.* Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-armenia.en.mfa> (Accessed on 13.05.2014)

to the Council of Europe. This dilemma was resolved in June 2000 when the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly decided to admit both Armenia and Azerbaijan. (Mirzoyan 2007:261-263). Efforts have been made by Yerevan to strengthen relations with the EU and NATO through participation in cooperation and development programmes such as IPAP and the European Neighbourhood Program. However, "in 2006 Robert Kocharian emphasised that Armenia would not join EU or NATO, as 'membership of Collective Security Organisation and the high level of military-technical cooperation with Russia solve the task of ensuring the country's security." (German 2012: 37) Armenia's relations with NATO and EU would only develop to a degree that Russia seems fit. Any attempt of closer relations would be torpedoed by Moscow as it would contradict Russia's regional interests.

According to Armenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The United States of America is the most important partner for Armenia."[1] This statement which seems ignorant of the impact of Russia's place in Armenia's foreign policy demonstrates the importance that Yerevan attaches to its relationship with the United States, as well as the fact that "The USA is the biggest humanitarian and technical aid provider to Armenia."[2]

Armenia's well organised, highly educated, and influential Diaspora in the US has played a quintessential role in putting this small faraway republic on the US radar long before its independence. "The PR campaign for Armenia on the US domestic political scene have guided and informed the US position towards Yerevan and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict until 1996 when America's own geostrategic objectives in the region became clarified and crystallized."(Mirzoyan 2007:222) While effective factors in the success of Armenian lobbies are outside the scope of this research, providing some examples is important in demonstrating their influence in the US, particularly in the Congress. Implementation and maintenance of Section 907 of the Freedom of Support Act, which prevents the US government aids to Azerbaijan[3], as well as securing an annual aid of roughly about $90 million for Armenia are among their most considerable achievements. Armenia's selection as a country eligible to apply for the Millennium Challenge Account -a five year account aimed at reducing poverty around the world-

[1] Available at: <http://www.mfa.am/en/country-by-country/us/> (Accessed on 15.05.2014)
[2] ibid
[3] The practice of the Act by US government was suspended in 2002 as a result of Azerbaijan's provision of support for US war on terror.

in 2006 was another accomplishment of the Diaspora. Through this programme Armenia received $236 million of grants in 2010.

Poghosyan (2011:202) considers three main dimensions for US-Armenia relations. The first is US position as the co-chair of the OSCE Minsk group mediating for the peaceful resolution of the Karabakh conflict. The second dimension is fostering Armenia's engagement with Euro Atlantic organisations and encouraging Turkish-Armenian reconciliation though it remained futile. The third is monitoring Iran-Armenia relations in order to make sure that it is limited and in the context of providing Armenia with its essential needs particularly with regard to energy supplies.

While deep down Armenia has always been interested in developing its relations with the United States; the geopolitical realities of the region have limited the opportunities for this aspiration. The first and foremost is the fact that Armenia cannot afford increased relations with the United States at the expense of antagonising Russia. The United States also has been cautious about Russia's sensitivities in its relations with Armenia. The other geopolitical reality is that Armenia has less importance for the US compared to its regional adversaries; Azerbaijan with its valuable energy resources and Turkey as a NATO partner, and the potential hob of energy. As explained above, the main factor which has kept Armenia on Washington's radar despite these geopolitical factors is the effective Armenian Diaspora in the US and Yerevan's relations with Iran.

6.4. Iran-Armenia Post-Independence Relations

"The Islamic Republic of Iran officially recognised the independence of Armenia on 25th of December, 1991."[1] Iran's embassy in Yerevan was opened in April 1992 and Armenia opened its Tehran embassy in December the same year. "Since then, the two countries had neither border or economical disputes nor ethnical or religious rivalries. Moreover, their successive leaders welcomed strengthening of their relationship on many occasions and committed themselves to realize numerous flagship projects." (Moniquit & Racimora 2013:3) Starting from a cordial stage, the relations have dynamically developed into a strategic partnership, according to Iran's ambassador in

[1] Available at: <http://www.mfa.am/en/country-by-country/ir/> (Accessed on 25.06.2014).

Yerevan.[1] According to Armenia's National Security Strategy document (2007:19); "development of traditional neighbourly relations between Armenia and Iran is based on a number of shared realities: shared borders, historic and cultural ties, and mutual economic interests."The same document also indicates further development of neighborly relations by implementing diversified programs of cooperation with Iran, as an important element in the regional directions of the Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia.

The first stage of Iran-Armenia engagement was rocky to some degree, with the two countries "grappling with new geopolitical realities forced upon them through …extraordinary changes."(Mirzoyan 2007:191) As Mirzoyan (2007:192-3) has correctly pointed out "Iran demonstrated good will that was not shaken either by the Armenian military audacity at times even undermining Iran's mediation efforts, nor even the shooting down of an Iranian C-130 in the environs of Stepanakert by the Armenian forces resulting in the death of thirty-four people."

Each of the above mentioned incidents had the potential to spoil bilateral relations. As explained in previous chapters, Iran's mediation efforts in which Tehran had invested tremendous amount of time and credit was undermined by Armenia's capture of Shusha exactly when delegations from both belligerent sides were signing a ceasefire agreement in Tehran. Papazian, then the advisor to Ter Petrosian explains "undoubtedly we put Iranians in a difficult position. Frankly speaking the perception was that Armenians and Iranians have conspired against Azeris. There was a setback in bilateral relations for a few months, but then Ter Petrosian sent me as special envoy to Tehran to hand in his letter to Rafsanjani. I was received by Iran's deputy president, Habibi who took the letter. After that meeting the relations started to warm up again."(Hacoupian 2010)

The second event was the shooting down of the C-130 Iranian cargo plane by Armenian anti aircraft missiles. The plane was carrying students and families of diplomats who

[1] Contact. (2013) *Iranian Ambassador to Armenia: Armenia's Interests are the Interests of Iran and vice versa.* Available at: <http://www.contact.az/docs/2013/Politics/021200028176en.htm#.VeiLWvlViko> (Accessed on 30.08.2015)

were returning home for Nowruz celebrations. The incident was put to rest with the official apology of the Armenian government.[1]

Nonetheless, the most significant evidence of Iran's goodwill was the provision of fuel and basic commodities during the difficult winter of 1991-1992 despite considerable pressure from public opinion particularly Azerbaijani population of Iran, against Armenia.

Iran's official neutral position on Karabakh conflict and its mediation efforts, as well as its considerable tolerance towards Armenia in testing times (such as the above examples) and provision of essential commodities at times of crisis, laid the foundation of stable positive relations for years to come. Close relations with Iran has been the subject of general consensus and support among all Armenian parties, politicians and public.

Iran's stable relations with Armenia mean that one cannot find significant highs and lows, or major turning points. However, there are milestones at which the relations have been stepped up through the signing of major agreements and contracts. These occasions would be further discussed under the 'economic sector'.

Although the economy is the cornerstone of Iran-Armenia relations; there are obviously other aspects to consider. This section will discuss these aspects applying the same pattern used in evaluating Iran-Azerbaijan relations.

6.4.1. Political Sector

As many analysts have pointed out, judged hastily, Islamic Iran's relations with Christian Armenia initially seemed an unlikely develpment. However, their sustained cordial and close relations have been exemplary in proving the importance of mutual rationality, understanding, and positive approach in bilateral relations. Unlike many regional and international countries which viewed Iran's religious state as an

[1] According to a former Iranian diplomat wishing to remain anonymous, based on the acquired evidence, the plane was instructed towards the Karabakh zone's dangerous corridor by Azeris. Further persuasion of the issue would have only created more regional tensions. (interview in Summer 2013)

impediment to bilateral relations and invested on using the 'anti Iran' card in their bargain with great powers; Armenia views Iran as a bridge for its relations with other Islamic countries particularly in the Middle East. Iran, on the other hand, looks at Armenia as a bridge to the CIS[1] and the European markets. Neither saw the ideological difference as an impediment, but as a part of the context in which their relation is shaped.

Each side has shown considerable caution in issues sensitive to the other. One example is with regard to stationing peacekeeping forces in the region. As the 'Agenda for Armenia Foreign Policy' document emphasises, "Armenia should inform the international community and OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs that as soon as the issue of deploying peacekeeping troops to the zone of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would be discussed, Iran's opinion should be considered, since Iran has common border with the conflict zone." (2010:22) This is in sharp contrast with the policy undertaken by regional and external players for isolating Iran and keeping it out of regional equations.

Nonetheless, while under present circumstances no threat and vulnerability of the borders is felt from the Armenian side, the potential threat that powerful radical nationalist political parties pose with their view of Iranian border provinces may not be ignored. These parties consider portions of Iran's Eastern and Western Azerbaijan provinces as part of the 'Greatest Armenia'. This approach is manifested in books and maps written by such groups and also in the practice of Armenian frontiersmen who demonstrate such sentiments in their national and religious occasions when they attend Iranian border churches such as St. Stepanous. Since the Armenian government has never showed any corrective actions towards the above mentality, it can pose a threat to Iran's territorial integrity in a distant future. (TISRI 2007:410)

Some common interests, as well as shared concerns and grievances that play important role in bringing the two countries closer together, include;

Balancing Turkey: The rivalry among regional players for filling the vacuum was intensified in the post Soviet space. While Turkey was presented as an ideal model in which 'Islam' and 'Western values' are blended in nicely, there were radical pan

[1] Armenpress. (2010) *Armenia May become Bridge between Iran and CIS.* Available at: <http://armenpress.am/eng/news/801244/armenia-may-become-a-bridge-towards-the-iranian-market-for-lithuanialithuanian-press.html> (Accessed on 30.04.2012)

Turanists who promoted the idea of uniting all post Soviet Republics with Turkic background from China to Balkans and further, into one great federation. Turkey's membership of NATO and its alliance with the West was an asset for gaining support towards such ideas. Though farfetched, but if realised it would have resulted in the establishment of a great Turkic Empire in Eurasia which would diminish all strategic equations in the region and endanger the national security of regional countries. (IPIS 2008:28) Some Iranian analysts and politicians believe that Western countries were eager to support Turkey in its expansionist aspirations. According to these analysts, the corridor swap proposal also known as the Goble Plan, suggested for resolving the Karabakh conflict was meant to essentially kill two birds with one stone. First to solve the Karabakh conflict, second to create a direct link between Turkey and the rest of the Turkic world.

In 1992, as a way out of the Karabakh conflict, Goble proposed that "various participants need to begin to consider the possibility of a territorial swap including the following concessions: sending part of the NKAO to Armenia, with the area controlling the headwaters of the river flowing to Baku and areas of Azerbaijani population remaining in Azerbaijani hands; and transferring the Armenian-controlled land bridge between Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan to Azerbaijani control."[1]Tehran has categorically opposed the plan, due to major threats that such plan would entail for Iran's security. Regardless of any hidden agenda for the Plan or any other Western initiative for realising Turkey's expansionist aspirations, Armenia is the main geographical barrier between Turkey and the rest of the Turkic world.

With the so called Armenian genocide in mind, Turkey has an adversarial status on the Armenian's psyche exacerbated by Ankara's alliance with Baku and the long term blockade of the country. From this perspective, Iran has been perceived in Armenia's post-independence history as "another power that can counter-balance Turkey's activity in the region". (Novikova 2000:62) Armenia's 2001 Foreign Ministry's guidelines clearly states that "Iran plays a role of balancer vis-à-vis Turkey".

[1] Reliefweb. (2000) *How the "Goble Plan" was Born and How it Remains a Political Factor.* Available at: <http://reliefweb.int/report/armenia/how-goble-plan-was-born-and-how-it-remains-political-factor> (Accessed on 30.04.2014)

Summing up, one can see how "Armenia and Iran therefore consider their role once again as a fence against the growing influence of Turkey in the Caucasus and even in Central Asia."(Moniquet & Racimora 2013: 31)

Azerbaijan's Expansionist Aspirations: As explained in chapter 5, despite ongoing military conflict with Armenia, and Iran's vocal support of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity; Baku officials have continuously promoted the 'Greater Azerbaijan' aspiration, threatening Iran's territorial integrity. "It therefore made sense for the authorities in Tehran to seek to preserve the integrity of Iranian territory by supporting Armenia in its war against Baku over the Nagorno-Karabakh question."(Therme 2008:2) While the term 'support Armenia war against Baku' is an overestimation, one can see how Armenia's survival has been a balancing factor for Iran's geopolitical interests and leverage for containing Azerbaijan's ambitions.

North-South V East-West Axis: As explained in chapter 5, Azerbaijan's antagonistic postures particularly Baku's irredentist approach and territorial claims over Iran's northern provinces, as well as its alliance with the West resulted in the polarization of regional alliances. Hence the diplomatic landscape witnessed the formation of "a pro-western horizontal axis linking Baku, Tbilisi and Ankara by drawing a geopolitical East-West line, and …. a vertical axis linking Moscow, Yerevan and Tehran by drawing a geopolitical North-South line." (Minassian as quoted by ibid)

US refusal to include Iran in the pipeline network projects, and Baku's insistence on bypassing Armenia, despite the fact that these countries could have offered the most economic routes, and the fact that these networks have reduced Russia's monopoly over energy transport routs have reinforced this polarisation and diverging alliances.

Together alone: Exacerbated by its challenging geography (landlocked, no energy resources, etc.) the imposed blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey, which accounted to 80% of the country's borders effectively isolated Armenia to the point of suffocation. The country has no common borders with Russia. Armenia's immediate neighbour to the north, Georgia was struggling with its own security and post independence challenges as well as state building processes during the initial years of Armenia's independence. "Moreover, Armeno-Georgian relations were complicated by Armenian claims to the territory of Javakhk belonging to Tbilisi."(Therme 2008:2) The two countries had no official diplomatic relations till summer 1993. Therefore, the only

stable immediate neighbour which its friendly relation could help Armenia's survival was Iran. Relations with Iran provided the much urgent lifeline for Armenia. The importance of Iran's role in Armenia's survival is demonstrated by Ter Petrosian admitting that "without Iran, Armenia would suffocate in a few days"[1] and Azerbaijan's deputy prime minister's remark that "if Tehran breaks ties with Armenia, Yerevan will starve."[2]

Iran, on the other hand, has been faced with increasing international isolation mounted over the geopolitical isolation which was explained in chapter 3. Relation with Armenia has been Iran's way of circumventing its isolation and playing an effective role in regional equations. The importance that Armenia attaches to its relations with Iran has prevented marginalisation of Iran in regional interactions particularly regarding various initiatives for resolving the Karabakh conflict. According to its national security strategy document (2007:20) "Armenia appreciates the balanced position which Iran, as a major actor both in the region and within the Islamic world, has adopted regarding the Nagorno Karabakh conflict…. Armenia also values Iran's engagement in various processes in the South Caucasus region and regards it a factor contributing to maintaining balance and stability in the region."

Therefore, the shared sense of "acute insecurity and isolation in the region" (Mirzoyan 2007: 186) has been one of the most important factors in drawing the two countries together. Each country finds a path out of isolation and regional marginalisation in the other one which brings with itself "a similar language of balance and mediation." (ibid: 173)

In addition to the above factors, the role and influence of the Armenian lobby in Western countries is an important incentive for Iran. According to Brzezinski (2006:63), the Armenian-American lobby is among "the most effective in their assertiveness". With a population of around 1 million in the United States, the success of this lobby particularly in the Congress is as Gregg (2002:2) has put it 'surprising' and disproportionate to their voting impact. Some examples of Armenian lobby's achievements in the US have already been discussed in this chapter.

[1] Today's Zaman. *Iran-Armenia Ties Strengthening to Counter Turkey-Azerbaijan Alliance*, (2013) Available at: <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-311218-iran-armenia-ties-strengthening-to-counter-turkey-azerbaijan-alliance.html> (Accessed on 29.06.2014)
[2] ibid

The population of around 400,000 Armenian descents in France has become more politically active since the late 1980s, to a degree that some have even become prominent figures in France's political system. "Édouard Balladur, who was born in İzmir in 1929 and was the French Prime Minister during 1993 and 1995, and Patrick Devedjiyan, whose roots go back to Elazığ and who was a minister in Sarkozy's cabinet from 2008 to 2010, are two figures who stand out."(Sahilyol 2012:3) The most significant achievement of this lobby is the "Armenian Genocide Denial Law, which was adopted by the French National Assembly in December 2011 and further approved on January 23rd, 2012 in the French Senate." (ibid: 2) Though the French Supreme Court later found the Law unconstitutional, its adaptation by the Assembly and its approval by the Senate and the support it received from the French government despite its negative effects on France-Turkey relations proves the strength and influence of this pressure group. Armenians also have successful lobbies in other European countries such as Spain, Norway, Greece, etc.

Using powerful Armenian lobbies in various Western countries to pursue Iran's interests has been contemplated in some Iranian political circles for years. This is particularly true in the case of the United States where lack of any diplomatic relations and powerful lobby to look after Iran's interests on the one hand and the existence of influential hostile lobbies such as AIPAC on the other, have often exacerbated the negative atmosphere against Iran. The best evidence for such view has come from President Rouhani in his meeting with religious minorities' MPs; when he said "problems would be overcome with the efforts of all Iranians. There is no difference between Muslims and religious minorities. Like the Armenian lobby, their lobbies can be effective in foreign policy."[1]

6.4.2. Military Sector

Iran's military relation with Armenia is arguably the least developed dimension of their bilateral relations which has received less attention and practical steps.

[1] *President's Meeting with Religious Minorities MPs (2013).* Available at: <http://www.president.ir/fa/72699> (Accessed on 30.06.2014)

On May 1992, Armenian and Iranian presidents signed a joint statement on development of friendly and good neighbourly relations which included cooperating in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking, smuggling, air piracy and the illegal export of historic documents; cooperating against mass murder, nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, etc.

In 1997, Iran, Armenia and Greece, signed a Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation that included an agreement of military cooperation observed by many as an anti NATO alliance. "Within Athens-Tehran-Yerevan trilateral cooperation format, there was much speculation although all parties stressed that the cooperation was not directed against anyone."(Mirzoyan 2007:199)

With development of defence and security cooperation in mind, over the years retrospective visits undertaken by both countries' officials have been under the United State's 'suspicious eyes particularly as the existence of exceptional concentration of plants specializing in military radio electronics and electrical engineering in Armenia had left room for speculations about the potential foreign investors with interests "in purchasing components and half-finished equipment and know-how for Soviet-model aviation and rocket technology."(Wolfson 2002:2)

In March 2002 Iran's Minister of Defence paid a two days visit to Armenia, declaring that "we now want to develop relations in the area of defence and security", adding that this cooperation will not be directed against third countries.[1] A memorandum on defence and security cooperation was signed during this visit.[2] Just a few weeks later, on May 2002, two Armenian companies were sanctioned by the US State Department due to breach of Section 3 of the Iran Non Proliferation Act of 2000, which applies penalties on entities for the transfer to Iran of equipment and technology controlled under multilateral export control lists.[3] Both the companies and the Armenian Customs Chief denied the accusations[4], as well as Iran's ambassador to Armenia who not only

[1] Asbarez. (2002) *Iran's Defense Chief Hopes for Closer Ties with Armenia*. Available at : <http://asbarez.com/46483/irans-defense-chief-hopes-for-closer-ties-with-armenia/> (Accessed on 02.07.2014)
[2] Asbarez. (2002) *Iran Armenia Sign Accords*. Available at: <http://asbarez.com/46492/iran-armenia-sign-accords/> (Accessed on 02.07.2014)
[3] *Notices Published In The Federal Register During 2002 Department Of State, Office OF Trade Controls International Traffic In Armas Regulations.* (22 CFR Part 120 et seq.) Available at: <http://t-b.com/files/2002state.htm> (Accessed on 02.07.2014)
[4] RadioFree (Armenian). (2002) *Armenian Customs Chief Denies Sensitive Equipment Sales To Iran*. Available at: <http://www.armenialiberty.org/content/article/1567844.html> (Accessed on 25.06.2014)

rejected the accusations, but also accused US of "trying to control Armenia's relation with Iran by exerting psychological pressure."[1]

While such developments made both sides more cautious in their military relations, it certainly did not deter Iran from using Armenia in its efforts to access military equipment, at least not until the early 2000s. According to a US cables released by Wikileaks, the United States confronted Serge Sargsian for transfer of weaponaries bought in 2003 when he was Armenia's Defence Minister.[2] Some of the anti-tank rockets and heavy machine guns purchased from Bulgaria found their way to Iran and then Iraq where they were used in attacks against US forces.

The most important among series of retrospective official defence and security visits was the July 2012 security agreement signed "in the presence of Iran Interior Minister Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar and Head of Armenian Police Force Lt. Gen. Vladimir Gasparyan."[3] Cooperation in fighting organised crimes, drug smuggling, security-disciplinary issues and border affairs are among items of this agreement.

However, aside from the above controversial cases and despite releasing several joint statements and memorandums of understanding on defence and military cooperation, as well as retrospective visits by high ranking defence and military figures, there is not much news or evidence of any practical steps even on less significant issues of trainings or joint military exercises.

This situation however, is quite understandable given the balancing act that each side has to undertake with regard to its relations with other regional and international players, i.e. Iran with Azerbaijan and Armenia with NATO and US, and the fact that any considerable military cooperation would raise the alarm among Armenian lobbies in Western countries.

5.4.3. Societal Sector

[1] RaidoFree (Armenian). (2002) *Iran Denies Sensitive Equipment Transfer From Armenia.* Available at: <http://www.armenialiberty.org/content/article/1567859.html> (Accessed on 25.06.2014)

[2] The Guardian (2010) *US Embassy Cables: Armenian Defence Minister Rebuked over Arms Sales to Iran*. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/187156> (Accessed on 20.06.2014)

[3] Press TV. (2012) *Iran, Armenia Sign Agreement to Boost Security Cooperation*. Available at : <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2012/07/11/250362/iran-armenia-sign-security-pact/> (Accessed on 03.07.2014)

The shared historical background which was briefly discussed in previous sections is the main asset in Iran-Armenia social relations. According to Prof. Asatryan who chairs the Centre of Iranian Studies at Yerevan State University (quoted by Mirzoyan 2007:176-177), "the link between Armenia and Iran is founded not only on the common genetic heritage, historical and cultural traditions, common worldview and philosophical perceptions but is intimately connected to the idea of monotheism."Adding to aforementioned factors Mirzoyan emphasizes on the ancientness and belonging to the Aryan civilisation axis as the focal point of social connection between Iran and Armenia. Interestingly, Iran's former ambassador to Armenia also points to the 'shared ancient civilisation' as the main factor in the warm rapport between Iran and Armenia.[1] Mirzoyan (2007: 177) believes that all the aforementioned factors build "a solid social and intellectual foundation for cooperation, but also facilitates the formation of a well-trained diplomatic staff that is largely exposed to Iranian culture and mode of thinking."

The ethnic Armenian community in Iran has been a valuable asset in developing bilateral relations both before and after the 1979 revolution. With a population around 300,000 they constitute the largest non Muslim community in Iran with over 200 churches across the country and two representatives in the Parliament (Majlis).

Armenians' assimilation in the Iranian society since their settlement in various parts of Iran in recent centuries have left positive impact by proving that they have become an integral part of the Iranian society and its development. Although active in many different sectors, the more significant influence of the Iranian-Armenian community perhaps could be considered on the Iranian art and culture. They made efforts in founding schools, playhouses, music centres and film industry. The first European teachers who served in Iranian schools were invited to the country by prominent Armenian figures. The first Armenian schools in Iran started their activities as early as the first half of the 17th century.

Armenians have also played an important role in transfer of technology from other countries to Iran since the Qajar era and have been among prominent founders of industry in Iran. This particularly applies to the art and technology of jewellery which

[1] Interview with Dr. Koleini, August 2013.

was initially established in Tabriz and then promoted in Isfahan and Tehran through training courses ran by Armenians. (Melkomian 2010:32-34)

The Iranian history has witnessed the influential roles played by prominent Armenian political figures such as Mirza Melkom Khan Nazemuddoleh and Yepram Khan Davutian who made considerable efforts in developing the constitution and establishing the constitutional government.

Armenians supported their Iranian compatriots during the Islamic revolution of 1979 and the eight years war with Iraq, with several martyrs in both events. This in itself has provided the Armenian minority in Iran with a more respectable social status.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Republic of Armenia provided the opportunity for Iranian Armenians to facilitate the relations between their country of origin and their country of residence, an opportunity well appreciated by both countries.

"Meanwhile in the Armenian capital Yerevan there is a growing Iranian/Persian community, which contributes to the close ties between the countries through various business, university and cultural exchanges. Iranians constitute the largest Muslim community in Armenia, estimated at roughly 2,000 people in 2002."(Zarifian 2008:138)

The newly independent Republic of Armenia did not try in any ways to distance itself from the shared cultural and historical background with Iran. Instead, it used the legacy as an invaluable capital which can bring both sides closer together. The inclusion of the 'Blue Mosque' in the list of UNESCO world heritage sites[1] is among the most recent steps, demonstrating Armenia's appreciation of its Iranian heritage.[2] So is the sisterhood of the two cities of Isfahan and Yerevan.

Over the years, social and cultural ties between the two nations have grown in parallel with political and economic relations. Armenia has become a popular destination for Iranian tourists and more than 1500 Iranian students are studying in Armenian universities. (Girgosyan 2012) On the other hand, "there is a genuine interest in the

[1] ArmenNews Press. (2013) *Iran Welcomes Involvement of Blue Mosque in UNESCO List*. Available at : <http://armenpress.am/eng/news/706749/> (Accessed on 01.07.2014)
[2] The Blue Mosque in Yerevan is the only remnant of the 18th century Iranian architecture in Armenia.

Persian culture and language among ordinary Armenians." (Mirzoyan 2007: 176) At present, Persian language is taught in 12 schools and 5 universities. Armenia has the highest ranking in learning the Persian language among non Persian CIS countries. The Iranian embassy has provided interested academic organisations with equipments and resources necessary for learning the language. (Melkomian 2010:69)

The 2001-2004 joint programme for cooperation between the Armenian Department for Preservation of Historical and Cultural Monuments and the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organisation was "of particular importance and significance for Armenia. More recently, the Iranian proposal to inscribe the Armenian Church of Saint Thaddeus to U.N.E.S.C.O. was welcomed by Armenia and the Armenians. It is assumed that this church along with a few others (namely St. Stephanus, Corcor, Chupan, and Blessed Virgin) will be accepted by the U.N.E.S.C.O. Meanwhile, it is noteworthy that these efforts are being done by Islamic Iran while the laic Turkey refuses to propose any of its hundreds of Armenian monuments to the U.N.E.S.C.O."(Zarifian 2008:137)

The two countries signed a pact on media cooperation in 2007. Based on the pact Iran's broadcasting services and Armenia's Public Television will each open an office in Yerevan and Tehran, retrospectively.[1] Agreements were also reached for making joint TV series. "The Armenian Deputy Director of Public Television and Radio, Levon Galstian, stated that the joint TV series would familiarize the two nations with each others' culture and lifestyle."[2]

Moreover, in 2014, the Assembly of Muslims of Armenia created the position of mufti for the republic and appointed Arsen Safaryan, a graduate of an Iranian seminary in Qum, as the head of muftiate. The move, on the one hand, challenges the Baku-based Muslim Spiritual Directorate (MSD) of the Caucasus with supervision claims over Shiite Muslims throughout the post Soviet space. On the other hand it provides Iran with "an opening to expand its influence among Shia not only in the post-Soviet space, also a direct challenge to Azerbaijan, but also among the nearly 400,000 Armenian Muslims (the Hemshins) living in the Middle East and Europe and also among the Yezidis who vastly outnumber the Shia in Armenia."(Goble 2015)

[1] Press TV. (2007) *Iran, Armenia Sign Media Cooperation Pact*. Available at: <http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/6772.html> (Accessed on 04.07.2014)
[2] Press TV. (2007) *Iran, Armenia to Make TV Series*. Available at:< http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/21234.html> (Accessed on 02.07.2014)

The 2014 establishment of 'Iran-Armenia Friendship Society' was another step in developing relations in various arenas.

While general reciprocal cordiality in the societal relations has provided a positive context in which other aspects of Iran-Armenia bilateral relations are shaped, it is important to keep in mind that the situation in border cities are different than in capitals. Armenia's southern cities are bordering Iran's Azerbaijani cities. According to TISRI (2007: 409-411), the historical grudge that Armenians hold against Turkic people, in general, affects the way they treat Iranian Azerbaijanis. While they have positive relations with other Iranian ethnicities, Armenians treat Turkish Iranians unfavourably and with 'hidden contempt'. Although official statements emphasize on totaly friendly relations between the two nations, concerned about the immediate consequences of such feelings from the Armenian side, Iranian authorities treat issues of social effects with more reservations. For example, Iran's Ministry of Health has ignored Yerevan's repeated requests for employment of Armenian heart surgeons and other medical specialists in Iran's Eastern Azerbaijan's hospitals, out of concern for the aforementioned societal factors. (ibid)

6.4.4. Economic Sector

Economy has been the cornerstone of bilateral relations since the independence of Armenia particularly as the blockade by both Azerbaijan and Turkey had left the country struggling for survival in the freezing winter of 1991-1992, and has effectively deprived the country out of potential benfits of 80% of its borders, ever since.

In February 1992, Tehran was the first destination for Armenia's Foreign Minister Hovansian official visits, concluding with the signature of several agreements which guaranteed the transit of Iranian goods through the Armenian territory; construction of a gas pipeline to supply Iranian natural gas to Armenia, which started 12 years later[1];

[1] BBC World. (2007) *Iran, Armenia Open Gas Pipeline*. Available at : <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/6466869.stm> (Accessed on 06.07.2014)

and the construction of a temporary bridge over the Aras River, which was launched a few months later.

To find a solution for the most pressing issue of survival in that winter, Armenia's Energy Minister, Tashjian, travelled to Tehran to strike an immediate deal for the delivery of 550,000 tons/year of fuel oil to his country. The fuel oil was seen as an immediate relief which could dramatically change the circumstances before the construction of a gas pipeline. However, as the only railway connecting the two countries passed through the Azerbaijan territory of Nakhjavan, "the newly constructed bridge over the Aras river became the only physical but most importantly, functional and reliable link with the outside world and allowed for some deliveries of fuel oil to Armenia's southern regions and of cheap Iranian consumer goods that were in great demand." (Mirzoyan 2007:173) The psychological importance of the first delivery of fuel oil to Armenia might have been even more than its material value, as it gave a moral boost to the "Armenian society that had been virtually cut off from the outside world and left with no power in the midst of freezing winter temperatures" (ibid) leaving a deep note of appreciation towards Iran among Armenians.

Following the establishment of a lasting ceasefire in 1994 which helped in stabilizing the South Caucasus, Iran mounted its efforts in developing its economic outreach in the region. Bilateral economic relations reached another milestone in 1996 with the launch of various joint ventures; branch opening of the Iranian Mellat Bank in Yerevan to facilitate trade activities of numerous Iranians in Armenia; and most important of all a multimillion dollar contract for development of the gas pipeline.

Following the exclusion of both Iran and Armenia from major pipeline projects and transport networks in the region, Armenia's acute need for the Iranian energy, as well as Iran's geopolitical objectives shaped the context of Tehran-Yerevan energy cooperation in a "multiple levels of power play between various regional states". (ibid: 193) At the time of initial negotiations, the plan was for this pipeline to become part of a much larger network with the participation of Turkmenistan. However, to discourage Ashgabat from cooperating with Tehran in pipeline network projects, US offered a considerable budget "to finance a feasibility study of an alternative gas pipeline that would be laid beneath the Caspian Sea, via Baku-Tbilisi-Erzerum line, parallel to Baku-

Ceyhan oil pipeline in order to avoid transiting through either Russia or Iran". (Lippman as quoted by Mirzoyan 2007:201)

To fulfil the aspiration for a gas pipeline network which could transfer Iran's gas initially to the region and eventually to Europe, there were also considerable deliberations for Iran-Armenia-Georgia-Crimea-Europe route. "The Ukrainians openly stated their interest in the project because a transit pipeline from Armenia would provide the shortest route from Iran to Ukraine."(Mirzoyan 2007:202) While US sanctions were obviously a major impediment for the realisation of such aspirations, Russia's intolerance of any rival for its gas market has been another major obstacle which has left the above plans futile. According to a wikileaks published cable, under Russia's pressure the size of the Iran- Armenia pipeline was reduced by half (from a standard 1500 millimeter diameter to about 730 millimeters) -- effectively limiting Iran's pumping capacity and Armenia's ambitions to become a conduit for Iranian exports to other parts of the Caucasus[1]. The pipeline was eventually sold to Russia for $30 million[2]rubbing Armenia off any future transit income.

Since lack of financial resources on the Armenian side had hindered the progress of the aforementioned project, the pipeline, which allows for the export of 1.1 billion cubic m/year of gas, became operative only in 2007. According to a 2004 leaked cable from the US embassy in Yerevan, following President Khatami's visit to Armenia, it was agreed for Iran Export Development Bank to finance the pipeline which extend 41 km into Armenia, to Kajaran. "The Armenian Ministry of Energy will pay back the loan over 7 years at 5 percent annual interest."[3] Exported gas is bartered with Armenia's electricity based on a 20 years contract signed in 2004 and launched in 2009.[4]

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[1] Armeninfo (2015) Newspaper: WikiLeaks data shows helplessness of **Armenia's**authorities. Available at: <https://www-nexis-com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/results/enhdocview.do?docLinkInd=true&ersKey=23_T24029962424&format=GNBFI&startDocNo=76&resultsUrlKey=0_T24030037666&backKey=20_T24030037667&csi=272947&docNo=91> (Accessed on14.05.2016)

[2] Ibid.

[3] Public Library of US Diplomacy (2004) Available at : <https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/04YEREVAN2019_a.html> (Accessed on 10.07.2014)

[4] IROGNA. (2013) *Tahātore gaze Iran bā barghe Armanestan gharārdādi bist sāle ast,*Available at: <http://www.irogna.com/fa/news/4570/%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%B1-%DA%AF%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C-20-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA> (Accessed on 12.08.2014)

The second half of the 2000s witnessed yet another round of developments in trade and economic relations. In 2006, Armenia joined the Eurasia North-South transport corridor which can potentially link Russia to India through Armenia and Iran and act as a trade catalyst. "The envisioned route would consist of goods travelling from Mumbai, India to Bandar Abbas, Iran by sea, and then through Iran and the Caucasus to Russia by road and rail."(Almasyan 2014)

Following President Kocharyan's trip to Tehran in July 2006, agreements were reached for new projects. The construction of a third power transmission line that would connect the Armenian and Iranian power grids was the most important project among them. "The 312-kilometer-long line is meant to allow for a substantial increase in Armenian electricity supplies to Iran."(Danielyan 2006) The Armenian government was simultaneously completing "a second, bigger highway leading to the Iranian border in the hope of boosting trade with Iran."(ibid)

The same year, Iran signed a trilateral agreement to export electricity to Georgia through Armenia in a power exchange bid. According to Fattah, Iran's Energy Minister of the time "Iran will transfer some 50mw of electricity to Georgia within the next two to three months while Georgia would transfer the same amount in spring."[1]

Armenian Energy and Natural Resources Minister, Armen Movsisian's trip to Iran in 2008, resulted in confirmed agreements for the construction of joint hydropower plants, Meghri's[2] 130 MW in the Armenian territory and the Ghare-chilar plant in the Iranian territory.[3] The project which is agreed to work on a Built Operation Transfer basis and was symbolically launched on October 2012 has not had much progress due to

[1] Global Energy Network Institute. *Iran, Armenia, Georgia, Sign MoU on Supply of Electricity*. Available at: <http://www.geni.org/globalenergy/library/technical-articles/transmission/armenian-diaspora-news-forum/iran-armenia-georgia-sign-mou-on-supply-of-electricity/index.shtml> (Accessed on 18.05.2016)

[2] According to TISRI (2007:369-372) Meghri is a small city on the Armenia's border with Iran, with a population of about 4000 Armenians with no minority among them. Despite its small size, Meghri has a geographically strategic location, significant for the country's territorial integrity. Hence, there is a significant attention towards this city from political/economic Armenian nationalist circles. For the last two decades, Armenia's strategy has been to turn this small city to trade and economic feedig channel of Armenia and as such has great importance in Armenian politics. Yerevan's government effectively considers Meghri as the friendship bridge with Iran and encourages any investment in this area.

[3] Asre Iran. (2010) *Āmadegie Iran barāye ejrāye projehhaye jadide Āb O bargh bā Armanestān*, Available at: <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/109066/%D8%A2%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AF%DA%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%BE%D8%B1%D9%88%DA%98%D9%87-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AC%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A2%D8%A8-%D9%88-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86> (Accessed on 25.07.2014)

Armenia's financial problems. Following some pull and push between the two governments; Iran eventually agreed to fund the completion of the power plant[1]estimated to be more than $500 millions[2].

The two countries signed another contract in summer 2015 for the construction of third power transmission line which would increase the capacity for electricity transfer.[3] According to the managing director of Iran's Export Development Bank which is going to provide 80% of the required finance for the construction of the line, the total cost of the project would be around 107 million Euros. The remaining 20% would be financed by Armenia[4].

The construction of the Meghri-Tabriz gas pipeline was completed in December 2008. The 142 kilometre pipeline has a delivery capacity of 2.3 billion cubic meters per year. However, in order to contain Iran's aspirations of connecting Armenia's gas pipeline to the European market and to maintain its monopoly over the gas market, Russia became involved in the construction of this pipeline from the very start by Gazprom investing $200 million and later on by purchasing the share of the part of the pipeline that runs in the Armenian territory via the ArmRosGaz Company (45% owned by by Gazprom, 10% by Itera and the remainder by the Armenian Energy Ministry). Gas deliveries were expanded after the April 2010 completion of the Yerevan Thermal Power Plant."(Moniquet & Racimora 2013: 12-13)

In his 2008 address to the parliament Serzh Sargsyan promised the construction of an ambitious 470 km Iran- Armenia railway project which had already been proposed since the late 1990s. However, like any other important infrastructure project, it was faced with financial challenges on the Armenian side. While Iran has confirmed its commitment to invest $400 million to build a railroad link to the Armenian border, the problem has been the railway construction within the Armenian, as according to Grigoryan (2015) the total cost of the project would be "on a level comparable to Armenia's annual budget". According to an Auguet 2014 memorandum from Armenia's

[1] Interview with Dr. Mohammad Riahi, Former Managing Director for Water Research Centre. Iran's Ministry of Energy. May 2014

[2] Pāygahe Ettelā` Resānie Vezārate Niru (2012) Aghāze amaliāte sākhte nirugāhe Megri. Available at: <http://news.moe.gov.ir/Detail.aspx?anwid=2548> (Accessed on 10.05.2016)

[3] Iran Daily. (2015) *Iran, Armenia Sign 3rd Power Transmission Line Contract.* (2015) Available at: <http://www.iran-daily.com/News/124223.html> (Accessed on 30.08.2015)

[4] Ibid.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs "the Export-Import Bank of China could provide a loan for about 60 percent of the construction costs, with a 3.5-percent annual interest rate". (As quoted by ibid) According to a statement published by the Chinese investors who would provide up to 60% of the required finance,[1] the railway mainly passing through the Armenian territory would be a key part of the International North-South Transport Corridor, creating "a major commodities transit corridor between Europe and the Persian Gulf region, with conservative long-term traffic volume forecasts of 18.3 million tons per annum."[2] The manager of the Russian company operating existing Armenia railroads announced in 2014 that the South Caucasus Railroad Stock Company will be operating the Iran-Armenia link, when the project which is envisaged to start in 2016 be completed in 2022[3]. There has been no indication whether the same company is going to solve the investment problem or not. According to the Armenian government this railroad would be the shortest transit root from the Black sea ports to the ports in the Persian Gulf and would create an important transit corridor between Europe and the Persian Gulf[4].

If fully implemented, the railway will have significant economic achievements as well as security outcomes for Armenia. The most immediate achievement would be breaking away the blocked imposed by Azerbaijan and Turkey and better facilitated access to Iranian market. Connecting to Iranian railway network would also improve trade access to Central Asia and the Persian Gulf markets. Moreover, "in case of the restoration of the Abkhazian railway (which does not work because of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict), Armenia will obtain not only regional, but also international transit status, unifying the Black sea basin with Iran and the Persian Gulf." (Davtyan 2015)

[1] ArmenInfo. (2014) *Transport Ministry of Armenia: Armenia May Become a Transit Country with Implementation of the Railway Project with Iran*. Available at: <http://www.arminfo.info/index.cfm?objectid=833AD6B0-7EA1-11DF-8F54001EE5A5ED9C > (Accessed on 20.01.2015)

[2] Asbarez. (2014) *Chinese Investors Show Interest in Armenia-Iran Railway*, Available at: http://asbarez.com/119740/chinese-investors-show-interest-in-armenia-iran-railway/ (Accessed on 23.7.2014)

[3] Marznews (2014) *Yek sherkate Rusi masūle ehdāse rāhāhane Iran-Armanestān shod*. Available at <http://marznews.com/%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%B4%D8%B1%DA%A9%D8%AA-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A6%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A2%D9%87%D9%86-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7/> (Accessed on 20.05.2016)

[4] Ibid.

There was an agreement in the same year for the construction of a highway for connecting Iran's city of Tabriz to Armenia. The project was launched in 2010, but due to financial problems it has only had 25% progress till 2014[1].

Another development in 2010 was the start of construction of a 300 kilometre oil pipeline from Iran to Armenia. "The pipeline will transport oil from Tabriz refinery in Iran's northwest to Armenia's Ararat province via the border city of Meghri."[2] The second oil pipeline was reportedly scheduled to be completed in 2014 and is supposed to pump 1.5m litters of petrol to Armenia on a daily basis (440,000 t annually).

Furthermore, the same year, a "Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Trade of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Regime Definition of Free Trade"3 was signed.

Iran's friendly relations with Armenia have also been a blessing for Armenia's tourism industry. Since 2008, there has been a surge in the number of Iranian tourists visiting Armenia. While 2011 witnessed the highest rate of Iranian tourists, there was a decrease afterwards due to economic difficulties within Iran. According to Armenia's Head of Tourism in the Ministry of Economy, more than 100,000 Iranians visited Armenia in 2013.[4] Estimating that each tourist spends around $700 to $1000 in Armenia, the average annual income from Iranian tourists is around $20 million[5]. According to Iran's Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organisation Agency, Armenia's economy has become so dependent on Iranian tourists that the reduction of their numbers in the last three years has cost many jobs in Armenia. Quoting TREND News agency, the above source

[1] Jolfaras (2016) *Ākharin vazizte bozorgrāhe Tabriz- Armanestān*. Available at : <http://jolfaras.ir/1393/11/10/%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%B9%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%B2%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86/> (Accessed on 18.05.2015)

[2] Pipeline & Gas Journal. (2009) *Construction begins on Iran to Armenia Pipeline*. Available at : <http://www.pipelineandgasjournal.com/construction-begins-iran-armenia-pipeline> (Accessed on 10.08.2014)

[3] *Bilateral Relations*. Available at: <http://www.mfa.am/en/country-by-country/ir/> (Accessed on 30.05. 2015)

[4] *Bāzdide Bish az Sad Hezār Gardeshgare Irani az Armanestan dar Sāle Gozashte*.(2013) <http://www.iras.ir/vdcjv8et.uqexyzsffu.html > (Accessed on 10.06.2014)

[5] Hooys. (2011) Nawruz: *Jahāngardāne Irani dar Armanestān, Raeis Jomhure Armanestan dar Iran.* Available at : <http://oldfarsi.hooys.com/Iran-Armanestan/F_95_Jahangardane_Irani_Dar_Armanestan_Raees_Jomhoore_Armanestan_Dar_Iran.htm (Accessed on 15.05.2016)

has pointed out that thanks to the increasing number of Iranian tourists, the rate of Armenian currency's devaluation has slowed down considerably.[1]

Establishment of a visa free regime between the two countries which has been under negotiations by successive Armenian administrations would certainly increase the volume of Iranian's trade and tourism with Armenia. According to Tehran Times, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Civil Aviation Organization of Iran and the Ministry of Finance and Economy of Armenia in May 2014 for improving aviation services and expanding transportation infrastructure. Moreover, "The memorandum is intended to eliminate the restrictions on frequency of flights, directions and capacity in the field of air communication between two countries."[2] If materialised, increased flights with competitive prices and services would also increase trade and tourism opportunities between the two countries. It does worth mentioning that there were unconfirmed reports of an Armenian firm helping Iranian airlines to skirt sanctions.[3]

With regard to small over the border trade, Nordouz-Meghri border market is the main channel of connection between the two countries. Interestingly, Iran's Eastern Azerbaijan merchants have a considerable weight among Iran-Armenia active merchants. More than 80% of the members of Iran-Armenia Business Association are Iranian Azerbaijanis. (TISRI 2007: 405-407)

Economic relations with Armenia found a strategic dimension following the application of extensive sanctions on the Iranian banking system, as Iran reportedly used Armenian banks to circumvent Western imposed banking sanctions. According to a report by the Brussels based think tank, "European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center (ESISC)", the special relationship between Tehran and Yerevan has offered Iran the chance to "evade international sanctions and pursue its nuclear ambitions…. The potential sanction-busting alliance between the two neighbours also allow Armenian

[1] *Gardeshgarāne Irani fereshteye nejāte pule Armanestan shodand*.(2013) Available at: <http://dornews.com/NewsDetails.aspx?News=1991686> (Accessed on 05.06.2014).
[2] *Armenia and Iran to Increase Weekly Flight*. (2014), Available at: <http://www.nexis.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/search/newssubmitForm.do> (Accessed on 20.01.2015)
[3] *US Says Armenian Firm Helped Iranian Airline Skirt Sanctions.* (2013) Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/12/us-usa-iran-mahan-idUSBRE9BA1CZ20131212> (Accessed on 01.07.2014)

goods and services 'to open up to warm seas routes' while permitting Iran to benefit from access to the Black Sea and to circumvent international sanctions."[1]

Table 6.1: Iran-Armenia Trade Report

Year	Import from Iran ($)	Export To Iran ($)	Trade Balance ($)
1997	69,464,744	42,395,156	-27,069,588
1999	78,404,551	34,154,192	-44,250,359
2000	73,190,079	30,025,021	-43,165,058
2001	72,843,332	31,454,875	-41,388,457
2002	58,035,579	29,298,051	-28,737,528
2003	66,920,973	21,653,644	-45,267,329
2004	75,485,684	30,212,276	-45,273,408
2005	100,950,978	24,909,296	-76,041,682
2006	113,013,907	29,064,699	-83,949,208
2007	141,010,352	37,396,662	-103,613,690
2008	200,856,340	24,467,762	-176,388,578
2009	133,901,354	14,018,724	-119,882,630
2010	217,711,254	39,642,100	-178,069,154
2011	216,998,069	94,301,438	-122,696,631
2012	219,485,837	94,211,602	-125,274,235
2013	187,570,186	85,869,686	-101,700,500
2014	206,373, 195	83, 738, 362	-122,634, 833

Source: Available at: http://cometrade.un.org (Accessed on 17.05.2016)

Moreover, Armenia has used the leverage of its powerful lobbies to voice its opposition to further sanctions on Iran, arguing that it would ultimately put further pressure on and damage Armenia's vulnerable economy.[2]

Following the election of President Rouhani in 2013, negotiations were undertaken for further development of relations through reviving financially troubled projects or new initiatives like the establishment of free economic zones on Iran-Armenia border.[3]For example in 2015, Torkan, the President's Chief Advisor and the Head of Supreme

[1] PR NEWSWIRE. (2013) *Brussels Think-Tank Says Emerging Alliance Between Iran and Armenia Could Circumvent Western Sanctions*. Available at: <http://www.prnewswire.co.uk/news-releases/brussels-think-tank-says-emerging-alliance-between-iran-and-armenia-could-circumvent-western-sanctions-187449231.html> (Accessed on 08.09.2015)

[2] Tehran Times. (2012) *Anti-Iran Sanctions Damaging Armenia Economy: Armenian PM*. Available at: <http://www.tehrantimes.com/component/content/article/103590> (Accessed on 1.08.2014)

[3] Arka News Agency. (2014) *New Free Economic Zone on Armenia-Iran border to be focused on joint enterprise work.* Available at: <http://arka.am/en/news/economy/free_economic_zone_on_armenia_iran_border_to_be_focused_on_joint_enterprises_work/ > (Accessed on 20.01.2015)

Council of Iran's Free Trade, Industrial and Special Economic Zones announced that Aras industrial site on Iran's border with Armenia will be expanded.[1]Moreover, in June 2015 it was announced that the two countries will start the building of the third electricity transmission network within the next 18 weeks, to be fully operational by 2018.[2]

According to an Iran-Armenia Chamber of Commerce board member, Iran's trade development centre will soon be opened in Armenia to facilitate export of Iranian products to countries like Russia and Georgia.[3]

Table 6.1 provides a summarised picture of Iran-Armenia trade relations since 1997.[4] According to reports, the total trade turn over between the two countries in 2013 reached $293 million, with Iran's positive balance of $103 million.[5]

[1] IRNA. (2015) *Aras Industrial Site in Iran-Armenia border to be expanded*. Available at: <http://www3.irna.ir/en/News/81469187/> (Accessed on 30.05 2015).

[2] gulf in the media (2015) I*ran-Armenia to start building 3rd power transmission line.* Available at: <http://www.gulfinthemedia.com/index.php?id=754717&news_type=Economy&lang=en> (Accessed on 14.06.2015)

[3] Customs Today. (2015) *Iran to open trade center in Armenia to trigger exports*. Available at: <http://www.customstoday.com.pk/iran-to-open-trade-center-in-armenia-to-trigger-exports/>(Accessed on 30.05.2015)

[4] As Armenia has been the source of the data, the export is from Armenia and the import is to Armenia. The negative balance is therefore for Armenia's trade.

[5] Islamic Invitation Turkey (2014) *Official: Value of Iran-Armenia Trade Balance Hits $293 mln.* Available at : <http://www.islamicinvitationturkey.com/2014/05/09/official-value-of-iran-armenia-trade-balance-hits-293mln/> (Accessed on 30.05.2015)

6.4.5. Environmental Sector

Due to the very short length of the shared borders, the two countries naturally have very limited space for environmental relations and interactions. An important environmental concern has been the pollution of the Aras River by Armenian factories. Aras River joins the Kura River in Sabirabad village and then pours into the Caspian Sea. According to Azerbaijan's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, an annual volume of over 350 million cubic meters chemically and biologically polluted waters are injected into the Kura River without any neutralisation. Samples taken from the Kura River also contain heavy metals, phenols, and oil extractions, radioactive and other harmful materials. Armenian Zangezur Copper Molybdenum Combine is reportedly the main source of the Aras pollution. Despite establishing wastewater recycling facilities beside this factory, the plant apparently has not worked continuously.[1] The issue was discussed extensively in a meeting held between the two countries' Energy Ministers in Tehran in February 2014. A firm agreement to step up joint efforts in monitoring and reducing water pollution in the Aras River was an outcome of this meeting.

Another highlight of bilateral environmental relations is the ongoing plans and negotiations for "establishment of a Peace and Friendship Park at their joint border area in northwest of Iran….. The park will cover 160,000 acres of land straddling the Aras River…. The project would not only protect wildlife and flora but also promote ecotourism."[2]

6.5. Conclusions

Following a review of the historical context which has resulted in the formation of the present state of Armenia and the foundation for Armenia's regional amities and enmities, the chapter has examined Armenia's foreign policy and relations. It

[1] TREND (2013) *Iran Gets Armenia to Halt Araz River Pollution*. Available at: <http://en.trend.az/regions/iran/2241761.html> (Accessed on 01.07.2014).

[2] ARMENPRESS (2014) *Iran- Armenia Hold Final Talks on Building Peace Park on Joint Border Area*. Available at: <http://armenpress.am/eng/news/750041/iran-armenia-hold-final-talks-on-building-peace-park-in-joint-border-area.html> (Accessed on 01.07.2014)

demonstrated how the Karabakh conflict has resulted in Armenia's regional isolation and undermined its foreign policy of complementarity. Armenia's blockade and isolation which has further weakened its impoverished economy has created a vicious circle in combination with Russia's leverage and influence over Armenia's domestic and foreign affairs to a degree that has undermined the country's sovereignty. Russia's leverage has become a defining factor for the level of Armenia's relations with other regional and international players.

The chapter has then examined Iran's relations with the Republic of Armenia using the sectoral model described in chapter five. Various political factors in drawing the two counties together such as isolation, mutual concerns with regard to expansionist aspirations of Turkey and Azerbaijan, development of an alliance involving Russia, Armenia and Iran against US, Azerbaijan and Turkey; as well as the importance of Armenian lobby for Iran has been discussed under the political dimension. It also argued that unlike many other countries, Armenia has neither considered Iran's theocratic government as an impediment for its relations nor has tried to use anti Iran sentiments as its bargaining chip with great powers. Rather, it has seen Islamic Iran as a bridge for expanding relations with the Muslim countries of the Middle East. Iran, on the other hand, considers Armenia as a bridge to the CIS and the European markets.

The chapter carries on reviewing the military dimension of relations, which aside from a couple of controversial cases of violation of imposed sanctions on Iran, has arguably been the least advanced dimension of Iran-Armenia rapport.

In the societal dimension, elements of shared heritage which have brought the two societies closer and more interested in each other's culture, and the role that these societal factors play in bilateral relations have been discussed along with the role of ethnic Iranian Armenians in development of these relations. The section has argued that mutual respect and practical appreciation has turned shared heritages to an invaluable asset in developing social relations between the two nations.

Economy has been the most important aspect of Iran-Armenia rapport since the independence of Armenia, with the energy as the main element of the trade. Providing Armenia with the much needed essential supplies, particularly delivering fuel oil in the first post-independence cold winter was a fundamental step from Iran's side for building a long lasting economic relation that became even stronger through bartering Iran's gas

with Armenia's electricity. While energy has been the centrepiece of Iran-Armenia relations, there have been various joint economic projects between Tehran and Yerevan, including an ambitious 470 kilometre railway which would make Armenia as a key part of the International North-South Transport Corridor, connecting South Caucasus to India through Iran. Tourism is also another important aspect of Iran's economic relations with Armenia.

While relation with Iran has helped Armenia to survive the imposed blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey, Yerevan has allegedly helped Tehran to circumvent extensive sanctions imposed on Tehran, and has vocally objected extending these sanctions on the grounds that it would affect Armenia's economy.

Due to the short length of shared borders, there are limited environmental issues between the two countries. The most important one has been the pollution of Aras River by Armenian industries which was comprehensively discussed between the two countries' Energy Ministers in February 2014 and a firm agreement to step up joint efforts in monitoring and reducing water pollution has been reached. There has also been a proposal and relevant discussion in establishing a Peace and Friendship park around the joint border.

By examining Iran-Armenia post Cold War relations, this chapter demonstrated that although Iran has always perceived shared religion as an important catalyst in its relations with other countries, but the absence of this factor does not necessarily impede its cordial relations. Iran's pragmatic regional policy in the South Caucasus manifested in its official neutral stance towards the Karabakh conflict, together with converging interests, shared grievances and common regional challenges has resulted in progressive development of Iran's friendly relations with its smallest neighbour in this region to a strategic alliance level in recent years.

As demonstrated in this review, while many factors contributed in developing such stable relations, an overarching factor has been mutual respect and understanding towards each other's priorities and limitations resulting from a realistic evaluation of regional geopolitics. This approach has prevented the two countries' relations turning sour at testing times described in this chapter.

The following chapter will wrap up this study, offering conclusions based on the findings of this research.

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CONCLUSIONS

This study was an attempt to provide a comprehensive understanding of the application of Iran's foreign policy and behaviour, roots of continuity and factors of change in a regional context, using the case studies of its relations with two neighbouring countries; the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The novelty of the study is in its focus on an aspect of Iran's relations that has not been systematically studied to this extent, which is Iran's relation with a region in the post-Soviet space. Though the South Caucasus was part of the Soviet Union for seven decades; but as explained throughout the chapters, prior to 19th century Russia- Persia wars, it was part of the Persian Empire. The study has discussed systemic changes resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union at regional and international level, as well as reviewing the importance of the South Caucasus, together with goals and policies of important players in this tiny part of the world.

What makes the research more interesting is the choice of case study countries. Both Azerbaijan and Armenia are Iran's immediate neighbours on the north, they both tried to break away from Russia at the first chance they got in the early 20th century, but neither did last long and both were integrated into the Soviet Union. However, Azerbaijan is a Muslim Shiite majority country, while Armenia is a Christian country; both involved in a smouldering conflict over the Nagorno Karabakh. Contrary to the

popular assumption that Iran would stand by Azerbaijan in its struggle against Armenia, Tehran has continuously taken an official neutral stand towards the conflict. Moreover, as a consequence of several factors which have been discussed extensively; while Iran's relation with Christian Armenia is at the partnership and alliance level, its relation with Muslim Azerbaijan is moving round a grey area between détente and outright animosity.

To provide a comprehensive picture the study has reviewed Iran's foreign policy from the Pahlavi era (briefly) till present. Borrowing from the Constructivist theory of international relations; two sets of ideational factors shaping Iran's foreign policy have been introduced.

The first set is rooted in Iran's geostrategic location straddled between two important waterways of the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf which house two energy hubs of the world; and the role that Iran plays as a land bridge providing the only link between South Asia and the Mediterranean Sea. This important geostrategic location has been one of the main factors which has turned the country into the battlefield of rival tribes and dynasties in ancient times, and occupation or outright interference of great powers in the more recent history. This in turn has created a multidimensional collective identity and shared mentality among Iranians, with one dimension rooted in the glorious legacy of the Persian Empire with its rich civilisation, who ruled considerable parts of Asia for several centuries, and the other rooted in the long history of subjection to outside conquerors and dominant powers. Iranians ambition to be major regional power and their particular sensitivity to any forms of external intervention and the extreme measures they are willing to take with such concern are the manifestation of this complex identity.

The second set constitutes those ideational factors resulting from Iran's post revolution state transformation. This does not mean such norms and identities did not exist within the Iranian society, but that they came to fore as factors shaping the state policy as the republic was established based on particular interpretation of Islamic values. The combination of both sets of factors, gave Iran's foreign policy a 'neither East, nor West' direction which swiftly took a sharp anti Western turn, and inspired the anti hegemonic principle which encompasses defending the right of all Muslims and supporting the

rightful struggle of oppressed against oppressors. These principles have put Iran on the course of frequent collision with great powers specially the United States.

However, as argued in the introduction, due to its complex nature, theoretical analysis of Iran's foreign policy in its entirety requires more than one single paradigm or theory. The study has therefore employed more than one theory for analysing the subject.

A review of developments in different post revolution periods has provided an account of foreign policy evolvement from strictly ideological to a more rational pragmatic approach. Iran's departure from revisionist confrontation to détente and cooperation, return to confrontation and revisiting détente again, is an evidence of continuous evaluation and adjustment in Iran's foreign policy approach in response to regional and international developments and in reaction to the behaviour of other players with security and influence in mind; meaning that Tehran has constantly taken measures to increase its security in the face of perceived imminent threats.

Further analysis of Iran's post Cold War regional policy both in the Middle East and the South Caucasus provides an account of various threats that Iran has been facing, particularly in the post September 11th era. Despite the importance of Central Asia, particularly Pakistan and Afghanistan for Iran's security, this study has not examined Tehran's foreign policy in this region. Iran has kept a distance with this region particularly following the presence of US in Afghanistan and its close involvement wit Pakistan since the start of the war on terror. Hence, the study has only focused on the two regions that Iran is closely involved with.

To put it briefly, the initial revolutionary zeal manifested in the quest for the export of the revolution and challenging great powers created a sense of threat particularly for Iran's neighbours which consequently isolated the country and provided Iraq with the opportunity to attack Iran. As the hardships of 8 years war proved the grave costs of relentless hostility, late 1982 witnessed a fundamental shift in Iran's foreign policy strategies and approach reflected in the 'open door' policy which sought a 'rational, sound and healthy relations with all countries'. This policy was further developed by the end of the war and throughout the construction era.

As securing economic development became the Islamic Republic's prime goal, the need for foreign investment and know how, encouraged the state to take further steps for

rapprochement with the world particularly with neighbours. Iran's neutral stand towards the first Gulf War enhanced its status among Arab countries of the Middle East. Nonetheless, Tehran's pragmatic policy and its rapprochement efforts did not achieve the results that it had aspired for. Iran's hopes and proposals for a regional security arrangement based on cooperation among the Persian Gulf countries was perished and replaced with serious security concerns when some GCC countries signed a security pact with the United States. Hence, GCC countries' increased sense of security came at the expense of Iran's decreased security.

The collapse of the Soviet Union exacerbated Iran's security concerns due to several factors including the absence of 'another superpower' to counterweight Tehran's archenemy; the emergence of several unstable and conflict ridden new republics on the vicinity of Iran's northern borders which also draw the attention and later involvement of great powers in that region particularly due to the Caspian energy resources; and shifting alignments both in the Middle East and the South Caucasus which left Iran in a disadvantaged position *vis a vis* any country which received US support.

As the need for investment and technology to develop infrastructure for exploiting rich Caspian carbohydrate resources provided Western countries with justifications for active involvement in the South Caucasus, a new Great Game emerged in the region which involved geopolitical rivalry among regional and trans-regional players. The outcome of these rivalries and alliances for Iran was isolation out of energy transport networks and many other developments in its northern neighbourhood despite its pragmatic, generally non ideological approach towards the region since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Nonetheless, and despite the above negative developments, Iran continued to make positive efforts hoping to build the confidence which could facilitate further cooperation and integration both at regional and international level. While the efforts paid off to some degree, and Tehran's détente policy and rapprochement efforts continued throughout Khatami's administration, the post Sep.11th developments resulted in such toxic atmosphere that even Iran's direct cooperation with the US in Afghanistan, could not reduce the hostility towards Tehran.

To have a better understanding of Iran's evaluation of international atmosphere and its sense of threat in the post Sep.11th era, two parallel trends should be kept in perspective.

The first trend is the gradual shift from overtly ideological rejectionist foreign policy towards the prevalence of pragmatism based on the country's security and national interests. The other trend is the pervasive US presence all around the country and increased hostility which undermined Iran's confidence building and rapprochement measures. The combination of these two exacerbated Tehran's siege mentality which in turn facilitated the securitisation of Iran's politics. It also gave rise to domestic players who believed that the Islamic Republic's rivals and adversaries have been emboldened by Tehran's 'appeasement policy' and urged for a non compromising approach which resulted in the adoption of confrontational strategies during Ahmadinejad.

However, the confrontational approach resulted in further securitisation of the international atmosphere against Iran. While Iran's nuclear dossier was at the epicentre of international concerns, regional countries had a more serious sense of threat arising from Iran's ascending power and influence in the region as a consequence of post 2003 regional geopolitical shifts. To deal with the resulting security dilemma, regional countries joined forces with great powers to mount pressure on Iran by further isolation and punitive sanctions. As the sanctions hit the cords of the economy and the military threat became increasingly imminent, the perils of a confrontational approach became so evident that the next president won the election on the platform of 'moderation' and 'prudence', returning to a foreign policy of 'rapprochement' and 'détente', with particular focus on solving the nuclear dilemma, which consequently moderated the hostile international atmosphere that had created imminent threats.

As demonstrated by the above brief review, while Iran's foreign policy principles have remained the same in the post 1979 revolution era, the approach has frequently changed to cope with developments and threats which has challenged the security and survival of the state; a typical behaviour of security maximising states. This behaviour particularly fits the protocol when considering the fact that by putting its weight behind Iran's rivals, US has continuously tipped the balance against the Islamic Republic, which consequently resulted in the state facing security dilemma in both regions. Hence, Tehran has constantly had to adapt strategies which would resolve the dilemma.

Important conclusions which can be drawn from the review of Iran's regional policy include;

- One of the strategies that Iran has adopted in both regions is making alliances with different players regardless of their ideological backgrounds. As such, neither the secular nature of Asad's government excluded it from becoming an integral part of the axis of resistance, nor has the Christian character of Armenia deserted Yerevan from Tehran's warm rapport. The crucial element has been the support each could provide in Iran's quest for security and regional influence.
- The constant threat posed by the presence of external players and their effort to isolate Iran in its own neighbourhood has contained Iran's influence, particularly in the South Caucasus.
- To limit its isolation and to have a powerful ally, Iran has continuously observed Russia's sensitivities and concerns in the region and made great efforts in keeping Moscow on its side, sometimes even at the expense of undermining its other policies and strategies. It can be argued that Iran has effectively accepted the South Caucasus as Russia's back yard and attached a secondary status for itself in that region. Tehran has and would advance its involvement and influence in the South Caucasus only to the level that would not be considered by Moscow as trespassing.
- While Iran attaches a different degree of importance to South Caucasus in comparison to the Middle East;[1] it has pragmatically taken a non ideological, accommodating and constructive approach towards this small region. Tehran's official neutral stand regarding the Karabakh conflict and its mediation efforts are among examples of such policy.
- Unlike the Middle East, Iran's involvement in the South Caucasus has been mainly focused on economic and socio-cultural projects since the collapse of the Soviet Union.
- Iran's pragmatic policy in the South Caucasus has been undermined by the consequences of its general foreign policy and the subsequent Middle East policy, particularly its stance *vis a vis* Israel. Hence, the outcome of its South Caucasus policy has been considerably different from potential optimal outcomes.

[1] Reflecting the status that Tehran considers for itself in each of these two regions.

The empirical chapters of the study have provided detailed analysis of Iran's relations with its two northern neighbours by adapting the sectoral model suggested by Buzan and his colleagues.

The first case study is focused on relations with Azerbaijan, initially providing a historical background which explains that the territories which constitute the present day Republic of Azerbaijan were part of the Aran Khanate of the Persian Empire. The khanates were ceded to Russia following Persia's defeat in two wars with Tsars in the 19th century. The review has emphasised on the fact that prior to 1918, no political or territorial entity named Azerbaijan existed in the north of the Aras River. Therefore calling the new country which was established by the Musavat Party, as the 'Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan' was faced with objection from Iranian elites to no avail.

This name selection was conveniently adopted by the Bolsheviks after they integrated the young republic into the Soviet Union as it served their expansionist purposes. Furthermore, efforts were made to cut the South Caucasus off from its Persian background, including the closure of Persian education and cultural centres, forced deportation of Persian inhabitants of the region, etc. The above strategies together with the onslaught of cultural and political elites as well as the second round of alphabet change within ten years which left the majority of the population illiterate; provided a fertile ground for indoctrinating the people of the region with a distorted version of history that included the myth of the '*Great Azerbaijan'* which was divided into two parts, with the '*Southern Azerbaijan*' (which is the original ancient Azerbaijan, constituting northern provinces of Iran) occupied by the Persian Empire, who was portrayed as an external hegemon. The study has demonstrated how the 1918 peculiar name selection together with the promotion of distorted version of history by Bolsheviks, became an important stumbling blocks of the future bilateral relations with Iran.

In reviewing the Republic of Azerbaijan's foreign policy since its independence, the study has argued that during the two short lived administrations of Mutalibov and Elçibey, the country's interactions with the world, particularly regional countries was mostly a reflection of these leaders' ideologies rather than an outcome of a carefully defined policy based on accurate evaluation of threats and opportunities or national interests. As a result, Elçibey's radical nationalist approach left a damaging effect on

relations with Iran, as his open promotion of the 'Greater Azerbaijan' myth and encouragement of secessionist movements was alarming for Iran. Due to their shared historical and cultural legacy particularly the religious sect, Tehran had up to that point viewed Baku with such brotherly feelings that despite its official neutral stand regarding the Karabakh conflict, it had provided Azerbaijan with supply of arms and training of irregular forces and had let its civilians fight alongside Azerbaijani forces. This was in addition to the provision of humanitarian relief for refugees and supplies for the Nakhjavan Republic. Elçibey's radical nationalism and irredentist approach put an end to Iran's delusion in seeing Azerbaijan as a united ally; forcing Iran to see the potential threat in that country.

Through adapting a flexible, multi vector foreign policy, Heidar Aliyev seek to maintain positive relations with regional powers, while establishing a strong link with the EU and US that would guarantee their technological support and investment in developing Azerbaijan's infrastructure, particularly with regard to energy. This in turn opened the doors to further involvement of the West in the region to much dismay of Russia and Iran, whose security and interests were at risk with such development. Particular efforts were made by the US to isolate Iran out of important regional developments including transport networks, despite the fact that Iran could have provided the shortest, most economic rout. While Iran's exclusion from such projects soured the bilateral relations which were just warming up, and despite disputes over several issues including the legal status of the Caspian Sea, the two countries kept on the path of détente while ran by Heydar Aliyev and Khatami.

As Ahmadinejad's confrontational approach created more tensions with the West; and Iran's nuclear crisis resulted in further international sanctions and isolation; Baku's relations with Tehran which normally benchmarks Western relations with Iran, deteriorated to a degree that Azerbaijan was considered more as a 'threat' rather than a 'friend'. Later on when Iran's international status and its relations with the West was improved with Rouhani's détente and dialogue approach; so did its relations with Baku.

The study has then evaluated Iran- Azerbaijan relations in 5 sectors, based on definitions provided by Buzan and his colleagues. The political sector has provided an account of issues which have resulted in increasing political tension between the two countries. Azerbaijan's claims over Iran's northern provinces and its overt and covert

efforts in promoting the myth of the 'Greater Azerbaijan', dispute over the Caspian Sea demarcation, opposing states' ideologies which has resulted in the perception of political imposition and diverging patterns of geopolitical alignments; are the main factors through which the two countries pose political threats for one another. Expanding on the latter factor it should be explained that Azerbaijan's Western oriented foreign policy and its efforts to gain maximum benefit from these relations has placed Baku's policies on the course of collision with Iran's general foreign policy. Against the back drop of Azerbaijan's alliance with the West, Iran has formed an alliance with Armenia and Russia. Contrary to another myth that Baku has been promoting over the years; this alliance does not constitute Iran's support of Armenia against Azerbaijan in their conflict over the Nagorno Karabakh. While the alliance has prevented Yerevan's suffocation between Baku and Ankara; Tehran has continuously maintained a clear position on the sanctity of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity over the years.

With over 600 km shared borders, the two countries, inherently have shared security concerns and some degree of cooperation. However, although political disputes have never degenerated to border clashes; there is a mutual perception of military threat between the two countries. While dispute over the Caspian Sea demarcation has been a factor in arms race among territorial states, Iran's most serious concern arise from Azerbaijan's increased cooperation with Israel and its mutual understanding with the latter in perceiving Iran as an existential threat. To counter Iran's perceived threat, Azerbaijan has facilitated Israel's eavesdropping and espionage against Iran. Tehran has also accused Baku of providing Tel Aviv's agents with access and intelligence for the assassination of Iran's nuclear scientists. These developments mean that while Iran was trying for years to keep the conflict away from its borders; Baku has paved the way for Tehran's adversary to move the threat right on Iran's borders. Azerbaijan's heavy purchase of Israeli arms which included at least one item with no use in any perspective war with Armenia has been another cause of concern for Iran. Contemplations about the use of Azerbaijan's military bases in any future attacks against Iran has been an added concern, though Baku has repeatedly emphasised that it would never let its territory be used in any attacks against neighbouring countries. On the other hand, in addition to existing evidence of cyber attacks by Iran against Azerbaijan's websites; Baku has accused Tehran of facilitating intelligence and terrorist operatives in Azerbaijan.

While shared history and cultural heritage are potentially valuable assets for developing bilateral relations; they have been more the source of tensions than cooperation in the case of Tehran-Baku relations. On the positive side, the kinship with Iranian Azerbaijanis is a strong bond which has been strengthened with the provision of visa free regime for Azerbaijani nationals since 2010 by Iran. The aforementioned regime has also resulted in a considerable flow of tourism between the two nations, who share religious sect of Shiism. The kinship has however been exploited by Baku for instigating secessionism and dissent among Iranian Azeris, not always through government channels, but more frequently by other official agents such as parliament, media, etc. Iran has retaliated at times by inciting secessionism among Talysh minorities of Azerbaijan who have close ties with Iran.

On the other hand the societal bond based on Shiism is faced with Baku's antagonism as is perceived as Iran's instrument for expanding its influence in that country and to undermine Azerbaijan's secular state. Iran's considerable sensitivity towards Azerbaijan's accelerated process of secularisation and social Westernisation in recent years has been used as evidence to the above perception and created more frictions between the two countries.

Another societal bone of contention has been the confiscation of shared cultural heritage by Baku, in an attempt to promote a valuable identity for Azerbaijan. Many Persian dignitaries such as poets, scholars, etc. have been introduced as Azeris. Furthermore, since 2008 that the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Program was established, Baku has been quick to introduce shared cultural heritages for Azerbaijan, a move which was faced by public dismay in Iran.

In the immediate aftermath of the independence and throughout the 1990s Iran was Azerbaijan's main supplier of essential goods as the economy of the newly independent republic was in ruins and the roads were blocked due to the ongoing war; with the Republic of Nakhjavan being on the verge of humanitarian crisis due to its separate location from the mainland Azerbaijan. Iran played a quintessential role in preventing such crisis. However, Baku's expanding relations with other countries offered the diversity of suppliers who could offer better quality and lower price and, therefore, were better positioned to replace Iran in the Azerbaijan's market. Since the late 1990s Iran-Azerbaijan economic relation has not been strong enough to strengthen the political

relations while deterioration of political relations has negatively affected trade and economic relations. Although energy swap is an important part of the economic relations, the two countries continuous dispute over the Caspian Sea energy resources and rivalry over markets have been a source of economic threats.

Although the two countries share a considerable space of environment due to their long common borders; the most important environmental issue is regarding the Caspian Sea. The unresolved status of the Caspian Sea legal regime has been an impediment for the full establishment of regulations and accepting responsibility for the protection of the Caspian environment, hence while the Sea has become increasingly polluted by exploitation and transport of carbohydrate resources as well as domestic swage; littoral countries have been reluctant to shoulder the costs and troubles of dredging. Accusations about who is most responsible for the pollution have become another instance for Baku and Tehran to point fingers at each other.

As briefly demonstrated, in all five sectors under examination, Iran and Azerbaijan are either rivals or source of threat for one another. The security seeking strategies of these two states have generated spirals of mutual hostility. While some positive steps may reduce the tensions, there is no realistic outlook for any future alliance or even close friendship between the two countries. Promotion of two myths of "Greater Azerbaijan" and "Iran's support of Armenian occupation of Azerbaijan territories" among all levels of Azerbaijan's society from school students to elites which would ultimately foster deep seated grudge against Iran among generations, does not particularly promise any rosy future in bilateral relations.

Through the examination of Iran's relations with Azerbaijan, the study has established that excessive reliance on evaluation of the circumstances based on constructivist theories, particularly during initial post independence years, resulted in underestimation of the threats that Baku can pose for Iran. Consequently, Iran has failed to have a long term realistic foreign policy towards Azerbaijan and has generally taken short term measures and reactive policies.

The research has then focused on studying Iran's relations with the smallest and the least economically developed country in the South Caucasus, the Republic of Armenia. Through a brief historical review, it has initially established the long precedent of friendly relations and alliance between the two countries, continuing in the post

independence era, despite some rocky start. The main hiccup was Armenia's violation of ceasefire with Azerbaijan, mediated by Iran.

The study has then examined Armenia's foreign policy, arguing that Armenia's aggression of the Azerbaijan territories and smouldering Karabakh conflict have undermined Armenia's foreign policy principles of 'complimentarity' and 'engagement'. As of 1993, Turkey has cut all diplomatic ties with Armenia in support of Azerbaijan. Moreover, the country's blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey has resulted in Armenia's isolation that has consequently prevented the country's development, which in turn has resulted in Yerevan's excessive dependence in Moscow to a degree that at times undermines the country's sovereignty. Such deep seated dependence means that Yerevan can only develop its relations with other players to a degree that its subordinate status *vis-a-vis* Moscow would allow. Therefore, over the years, Armenia had to give up on its initial strategic vision for integration with Western structures.

Taking the same sectoral pattern and relevant definitions, the study has examined Iran's relations with Armenia. As it has been explained in the political section; several shared interests and concerns have drawn Iran closer to Armenia. While Karabakh's smouldering conflict is an important factor preventing Baku from further efforts in realising the 'Greater Azerbaijan' dream; Armenia's location and lack of diplomatic relations with Turkey has prevented the realisation of Ankara's dream of establishing a Turkic Empire in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Iran, on the other hand has provided Armenia with a counter balance against pressures coming from this important regional player. Moreover, as a result of geopolitical developments which have been discussed in details throughout various chapters, Tehran together with Yerevan and Moscow has formed a counter balancing alliance against the pro-Western Baku, Tbilisi and Ankara axis. The shared sense of acute insecurity and isolation in the region has been one of the most important factors in drawing the two countries together. Each country finds a path out of isolation and regional marginalisation in the other.

The role of Armenian powerful lobbies in Western countries has been an important incentive for Iran considering various international challenges that it is faced with.

Iran's military relation with Armenia is arguably the least developed dimension of their bilateral relations. Despite some controversies in early 2000's about Iran's provision of restricted military equipments through Armenia; there has been no significant

development in this dimension ever since. Given the sensitive balancing acts that each side has to undertake with regard to its relations with other regional and international players; the situation is quite understandable.

Examination of Iran-Armenia societal relations demonstrates the extent of positive interaction between the two countries based on shared history and cultural heritage, and facilitated particularly by Armenian Diaspora in Iran.

The study has introduced economic cooperation as the main pillar of Tehran's warm rapport with Yerevan. While the main aspect of the two countries economic relations has been in the energy sector, the friendly relations and societal links have been a blessing for Armenia's tourism industry in recent years. On the other hand, Iran's economic relations with Armenia found a strategic aspect following the imposition of extensive sanctions on the Iranian banking system, as Iran has reportedly used Armenian banks to circumvent Western imposed banking sanctions. Moreover, Armenia has used the leverage of its powerful lobbies to voice its opposition to further sanctions on Iran, arguing that it would ultimately put further pressure and damage Armenia's vulnerable economy.

Due to very short shared borders, the two countries have not had many issues in the environmental arena. Concerns over the pollution of the Kura River caused by an Armenian factory were discussed in a meeting Energy Ministers of the two countries.

Through historical review of Iran-Armenia relations and analysis in the five sectors; the study has established the long historical precedent for such positive relations, as well as the importance of mutual rationality, understanding, and positive approach in bilateral relations.

The chapter has demonstrated that although Iran has always perceived shared religion as an important catalyst in its relations with other countries, but the absence of this factor does not necessarily mean lack of cordial relations. This in itself is another evidence of Iran's pragmatic approach in its South Caucasus policy. Armenia, on the other hand, has not perceived Iran's religious state as an impediment for friendly relations and unlike many neighbouring countries, including Russia and Azerbaijan, has avoided using the *Iran card* in bargaining with great powers.

As demonstrated by this research, while Azerbaijan poses threat for Iran's interests and security in each and every one of the five examined sectors; Armenia not only does not pose any threats for Iran but also has a complementary role for different sectors of Iran's security. Hence, it is only natural for a realist, security seeking state like Iran to forge closer ties with Armenia, regardless of the latter's different religion or its longstanding occupation of a 'Muslim land'.

Further Studies: This study can be the basis or inspiration for several other research projects. The most immediate one can be the extension of the same framework to study Iran's relation with Georgia which together with present study would provide a comprehensive picture of Iran's relations with all three neighbours in the South Caucasus.

Buzan and his colleagues have introduced South Caucasus as an integral part of the 'post Soviet space' in their study of regional security complexes. Using the same framework to study Iran's relations with other countries in this security complex; would provide us with a comprehensive picture of Iran's relations with this RSC and factors shaping these relations and Tehran's policies in the post Soviet space. Such study would be more interesting particularly with regard to Caspian littoral states, since Caspian resources have been the source of tension between Iran and other littoral states as well as the main reason for attracting outside players to this region.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1.1

Durham University School of Government and International Affairs Research Ethics Policy Principles

The School's research ethics policy is guided by the following principles:

1. All research, by undergraduates, postgraduates and members of staff that involves living subjects must involve the understanding and application of relevant ethical considerations.
2. It is ethically appropriate that research should be competently and suitably conducted, but this does not imply favouring any particular method.
3. Stricter ethical procedures apply where participants are vulnerable or are unable to give informed consent, such as social services users or people legally deemed noncompetent.
4. Other circumstances where particular attention to ethical issues is necessary include when participants would take part in a study without their knowledge or consent at the time (but see 6 (a)), when the study would involve discussion of sensitive topics, when the study could cause discomfort or harm beyond the risks encountered in normal life, and when financial inducements are to be used.
5. Please refer to the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Research Ethics Framework (REF)
6. Informed consent must always be obtained at a level which is appropriate for the research process concerned. Thus: (a) Consent is not required for ethnographic and related observational studies conducted in locales where people would normally expect their behaviour and actions to be observable by others. (b) Consent in relation to interview research, including interviews conducted as part of a social survey or participation in focus groups, should be based on simple agreement to participate in the interview process with the right to withdraw at any point.

7. Where a guarantee of anonymity is given as part of the process of obtaining consent, this must be strictly observed at all parts of the research process and in written outputs.
8. Research involving deception on the part of the researcher raises particular ethical issues. It is not automatically unethical but research involving deception must always be based on a specific justification of the use of deception.
9. There should be provision for feedback on the results of the research to be given to participants if they request it, unless a justification for withholding it is provided.

Procedures:

1. All research done under the auspices of the School, including independent or semi-independent research by undergraduates in projects or dissertations must be done in compliance with the principles stated above. To this end all proposed research should be evaluated, if necessary modified, and approved with respect to its ethical implications.
2. Specifically, all research proposals should be accompanied by a completed Ethical Implications form. This will be received and evaluated in the first instance as follows: Researcher category Form received by: Staff Chairman or Chairwoman of the Ethics Committee (or another member of the Ethics Committee) Postgraduates: Research students Director of Postgraduate Studies Taught MA Dissertations Dissertation Supervisor Undergraduates: Dissertations Supervisor Projects Module Convenor or other full-time staff teaching module
3. In the case of modules in which semi-independent research takes place in a structured series of steps, provision must be made for the submission of the Ethical Implications form at an early stage, alongside initial research proposals, at a date indicated in the module booklet.
4. In the case of undergraduate and taught MA dissertations, the Ethical Implications form must be submitted to the prospective supervisor alongside the form specifying the topic and supervisor.

5. In the case of research students, the Ethical Implications form must be submitted in advance of the student being admitted and preferably alongside the student's application.
6. In cases where there are no ethical implications or when ethical implications have been satisfactorily addressed in the proposal, the initial recipient of the completed form will endorse it to that effect and pass it on to the School office for record keeping.
7. In cases where ethical implications have not been satisfactorily addressed in the proposal, or external evaluation is required, the initial recipient of the completed form will endorse it to that effect and pass it on to the Ethics Committee for further consideration.
8. The Ethics Committee will be responsible for monitoring the submission of forms, resolving problematic cases by modifying the research proposal, and reporting annually to the Board of Studies and the relevant Faculty committee.
9. Prospective recipients of the Ethical Implications form are encouraged to discuss and resolve ethical problems with the prospective researcher in advance of submission of a proposal.

SW Amended Research Committee October 2008

APPENDIX 4.1

STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN, RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND TURKMENISTAN[1][2]

Presidents of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, Russian Federation and Turkmenistan on behalf of their states, hereinafter referred to as the Parties,

In the fourth Caspian summit, held in Astrakhan at the invitation Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin, in accordance with the understanding reached at the summit of the Caspian littoral states in Baku in November 2010, up to the outcome of the Caspian summits in Ashgabat (2002), Tehran (2007) and Baku (2010), based on the norms and principles of the United Nations Charter and international law,

taking into account the geopolitical changes in the region, a climate of cooperation, good neighborly relations and mutual understanding between the Parties,

guided by the desire to deepen and expand good-neighborly relations between the Parties,

based on the fact that the Caspian Sea is of vital importance to the Parties, and only they have sovereign rights in the Caspian Sea and of its resources,

emphasizing that the solution of the key issues of the Caspian agenda is the exclusive responsibility of the Parties,

acknowledging the political, economic, social and cultural importance of the Caspian Sea,

conscious of its responsibility towards present and future generations for the conservation of the Caspian Sea, the sustainable development of the region,

reaffirming the need for the early development and the conclusion of the Convention on legal status of the Caspian Sea, which will be the basic international treaty regulating the activities of the Parties in the Caspian Sea,

declare that the activities of the Parties in the Caspian Sea will be carried out on the basis of agreed principles, including:

[1] Available at: http://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/turkmenistan-int-en/2044-statement-of-the-presidents-of-the-republic-of-azerbaijan-islamic-republic-of-iran-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-russian-federation-and-turkmenistan (Accessed on 13.05.2016)

[2] Both the text and the format are copied exactly from the website of Turkmenistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

1) respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, sovereign equality of States, non-use or threat of force, mutual respect, cooperation and non-interference in the internal affairs of one another;

2) the use of the Caspian Sea for peaceful purposes, turning it into a zone of peace, good-neighborliness, friendship and cooperation, resolution of all issues related to the Caspian Sea by peaceful means;

3) ensuring security and stability in the Caspian region;

4) ensure a stable balance of arms of the Parties in the Caspian Sea, the implementation of military construction within reasonable adequacy taking into account interests of all Parties, undiminished security for each other;

5) compliance with the agreed confidence-building measures in the field of military activities in the spirit of predictability and transparency in accordance with the common efforts to strengthening regional security and stability;

6) is not the presence of the armed forces not belonging to the Parties in the Caspian Sea;

7) the national sovereignty of each Party over coastal sea space within 15 nautical miles and exclusive rights of each Party to the extraction of water biological resources within the adjacent 10 nautical miles, followed by the total water space, with the understanding that the question of the application of techniques in establishing baselines will be the subject of further consultations of the Parties;

8) freedom of navigation outside the sea space under the national sovereignty of each Party, subject to the sovereign and exclusive rights of coastal States and the rules in respect of certain activities by the Parties laid by them in this regard;

9) to ensure the safety of navigation;

10) of the navigation in the Caspian Sea, the passage to / from it only vessels flying under the flag of each of the Parties;

11) the right of free access from the Caspian Sea to other seas, oceans and back on the basis of universally recognized norms and principles of international law and agreements of the Parties concerned, taking into account the legitimate interests of a Party of transit in order to promote international trade and economic development;

12) delimitation of the seabed and depths of the Caspian Sea on the basis of universally recognized principles and norms of international law in order to implement the sovereign rights of the Parties on the subsurface use and other legitimate economic, business activities related to the development of the seabed and subsoil resources, by agreement of the Parties;

13) the application of agreed standards and rules on reproduction and regulation of the use of biological resources;

14) protection of the Caspian Sea environment, conservation, restoration and rational use of its biological resources;

15) responsibility of a Party that allow contamination, and for damage to the ecological system of the Caspian Sea;

16) To promote scientific research in the field of ecology, conservation and use of biological resources of the Caspian Sea;

17) to create favorable conditions for the development of mutually beneficial economic cooperation in the Caspian Sea;

18) conducting marine scientific research outside the sea area under the national sovereignty of each Party in accordance with the rules of law agreed by the Parties, subject to the sovereign and of exclusive rights of coastal States and the rules for certain types of research, laid by them in this regard;

19) Freedom of flights of civil aircrafts in accordance with ICAO regulations.

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev

President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hasan Rouhani

President of the Republic of Kazakhstan NursultanNazarbayev

President of the Russian Federation VladimirPutin

President of Turkmenistan GurbangulyBerdimuhamedov

Astrakhan, "29" September

APPENDIX 5.1

List of Iran- Republic of Azerbaijan High Rank Visits

To Iran

August 1991	Ayaz Mutalibov the President of RAz
July 1994	Heydar Aliyev the President of RAz
May 1996	Heydar Aliyev the President of RAz
December 1997	Heydar Aliyev the President of RAz
March 2000	Vilayat Guliyev Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz
June 2000	Heydar Aliyev the President of RAz
May 2002	Heydar Aliyev the President of RAz
July/August 2004	Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz
January 2005	Elham Aliyev the President of RAz
June 2007	Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz
October 2007	Elham Aliyev the President of RAz
March 2009	Elham Aliyev the President of RAz
December 2009	Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz
March 2010	Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz
March 2011	Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz
August 2012	Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz
April 2014	Elham Aliyev the President of RAz
November 2013	Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz

To Iran

August 1991	Ayaz Mutalibov the President of RAz
February 1992	Ayaz Mutalibov the President of RAz
July 1994	Heydar Aliyev the President of RAz
May 1996	Heydar Aliyev the President of RAz
December 1997	Heydar Aliyev the President of RAz
March 2000	Vilayat Guliyev Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz
June 2000	Heydar Aliyev the President of RAz
May 2002	Heydar Aliyev the President of RAz
July/August 2004	Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz
January 2005	Elham Aliyev the President of RAz
June 2007	Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz
October 2007	Elham Aliyev the President of RAz
March 2009	Elham Aliyev the President of RAz
December 2009	Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz
March 2010	Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz
March 2011	Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz
August 2012	Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz
August 2013	Ozay Asadov Head of RAz National Parliament
April 2014	Elham Aliyev the President of RAz
November 2013	Elmar Mammadyarov Minister of Foreign Affairs of RAz

To Azerbaijan

December 1991	Ali Akbar Velayati, the Foreign Minister of IRI
August 1993	Ali Akbar Velayati, the Foreign Minister of IRI
October 1993	Hasehmi Rafsanjani the President of IRI
March 1996	Ali Akbar Velayati, the Foreign Minister of IRI
April 1997	Ali Akbar Velayati, the Foreign Minister of IRI
August 1998	Kamal Kharrazi, the Foreign Minister of IRI
October 1996	Hassan Habibi, First Vice President of IRI
April 2002	Kamal Kharrazi, the Foreign Minister of IRI
August 2004	Seyyed Mohammad Khatami the President of Iran
November 2005	Manuchehr Mottaki, the Foreign Minister of IRI
December 2005	Mahmood Ahmedi Nejad the President of IRI
May 2006	Mahmood Ahmedi Nejad the President of IRI
June 2006	Manuchehr Mottaki, the Foreign Minister of IRI
August 2007	Mahmood Ahmedi Nejad the President of IRI
September 2008	Manuchehr Mottaki, the Foreign Minister of IRI
Febreuary 2009	Manuchehr Mottaki, the Foreign Minister of IRI
November 2010	Mahmood Ahmedi Nejad the President of IRI
March 2012	Ali Akbar Salehi, the Foreign Minister of IRI
April 2012	Mostafa Najar, IRI Interior Minister
October 2012	Ali Akbar Salehi, the Foreign Minister of IRI

October 2012	Mahmood Ahmedi Nejad the President of IRI
November 2014	Hassan Rouhani, the President of IRI
February 2015	Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Foreign Minister of IRI

APPENDIX 6.1

List of Iran- Republic of Armenia High Rank Visits

To Iran

February 1992	Raffi Hovhannisian the Foreign Minister of RA
May 1992	Levon Ter-Petrosyan the President of RA
1994	Levon Ter-Petrosyan the President of RA
1995	Levon Ter-Petrosyan the President of RA
April 1995	Vahan Papazyan the Foreign Minister of RA
May 1995	Hrant Bagratyan the Prime Minister of RA
January 1996	Vahan Papazyan the Foreign Minister of RA
1997	Babken Ararktsyan the Chairman of the National Assembly of RA
January 1997	Alexandr Arzumanyan the Foreign Minister of RA
June 1997	Alexandr Arzumanyan the Foreign Minister of RA
August 1998	Vardan Oskanyan the Foreign Minister of RA
September 1998	Vardan Oskanyan the Foreign Minister of RA
December 1999	Vardan Oskanyan the Foreign Minister of RA
February 2001	Vardan Oskanyan the Foreign Minister of RA
December 2001	Robert Kocharyan the President of RA
April 2004	Vardan Oskanyan the Foreign Minister of RA
July 2006	Robert Kocharyan the President of RA
December 2006	Vardan Oskanyan the Foreign Minister of RA
September 2008	Edward Nalbandyan the Foreign Minister of RA
April 2009	Serzh Sargsyan the President of RA

September 2009	Hovik Abrahamyan the Chairman of the National Assembly of RA
September 2010	Edward Nalbandyan the Foreign Minister of RA
Octobet 2010	Tigran Sargsyan the Prime Minister of RA
March 2011	Serzh Sargsyan the President of RA
September 2011	Edward Nalbandyan the Foreign Minister of RA
April 2012	Edward Nalbandyan the Foreign Minister of RA
August 2012	Edward Nalbandyan the Foreign Minister of RA
July 2013	Armen Mosisian the Minister of Energy & Natural resources of RA
August 2013	Serzh Sargsyan the President of RA
March 2014	Edward Nalbandyan the Foreign Minister of RA
October 2014	Hovic Abrahamyan, the Prime Minister of RA

To Armenia

February 1992	Ali Akbar Velayati the Foreign Minister of IRI
1994	Ali Akbar Velayati the Foreign Minister of IRI
September 1995	Ali Akbar Velayati the Foreign Minister of IRI
December 1996	Hasan Habibi the First Vice President of IRI
April 1997	Ali Akbar Velayati the Foreign Minister of IRI
August 1999	Kamal Kharazi the Foreign Minister of IRI
April 2003	Kamal Kharazi the Foreign Minister of IRI
September 2004	Mohammad Khatami the President of IRI
February 2006	Manuchehr Mottaki the Foreign Minister of IRI
September 2006	Haddad Adel the Speaker of IRI Majlis
March 2007	Mahmoud Ahmadinajad the President of IRI
July 2007	Manuchehr Mottaki the Foreign Minister of IRI
October 2007	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad the President of IRI
March 2009	Manuchehr Mottaki the Foreign Minister of IRI
January 2010	Manuchehr Mottaki the Foreign Minister of IRI
October 2010	Ali Larijani the Speaker of IRI Majlis
November 2011	Ali Akbar Salehi the Foreign Minister of IRI
December 2011	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad the President of IRI
March 2013	Ali Akbar Salehi the Foreign Minister of IRI
November 2014	Javad Zarif the Foreign Minister of IRI

APPENDIX 6.2

List of Iran- Armenia Signed Documents[1]

Signed documents

1992

- Declaration on Establishing Diplomatic Relations Between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Agreement on Consular Cooperation between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Agreement on Trade and Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Agreement on Cultural and Scientific Cooperation between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran for 1992-1994
- Banking Agreement between the Central Bank of the Republic of Armenia and the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Joint Declaration on Cooperation and Good-neighbourhood between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran

1993

- Trade Agreement between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Agreement between the Ministry of Communication of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Post, Telegraph and Telephone of the Islamic Republic of Iran

1994

- Agreement on Border Trade between Meghri Region of the Republic of Armenia and Marand Region of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Agreement between the Goverment of the Republic of Armenia and the Goverment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the areas of Culture, Science, Education, Sport, Tourism and Mass Media

1995

- Protocol of the 1st Joint Session of Coordination Committee of Iran-Armenia Relations

[1] Available at: <http://www.mfa.am/en/country-by-country/ir/> (Accessed on 12.05.2016)

- Memorandum of Understanding between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the area of Agriculture
- Agreement between the Goverment of the Republic of Armenia and the Goverment of the Islamic Republic of Iran on International Transportation of Goods
- Cooperation Agreement between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran for 1995
- Agreement on Construction of Iran-Armenia Gas Pipeline
- Agreement on Construction of Joint Run-of-River Power Plant on Araks River
- Agreement on Construction of Iran-Armenia High Voltage Transmission Line

1996

- Memorandum of Understanding between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the area of Healthcare
- Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation between the Customs Department of the Republic of Armenia and the Customs Agency of the Islamic Republic of Iran

1998

- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the Field of Agriculture

2001

- Memorandum of Understanding of the 3rd Joint Session of Intergovernmental Commission of RA and IRI
- Joint Declaration of Presidents of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Agreement on Meghri-Kajaran automobile tunnel
- Agreement ûn Cooperation in the Area of Protection of Monuments
- Agreement on Cooperation in the Area of Ecology
- Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Academic Degrees and Higher Education
- Agreement between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran on Customs Cooperation
- Agreement on Cooperation in the Area of Certification and Standardization
- Agreement on Quotas and Privileges

2002

- Memorandum of Understanding of the 4th Session of Intergovernmental Joint Economic Commission of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran

2003

- Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Energy of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the Area of Electricity

2004

- Memorandum of Understanding of the 5th session of Intergovernmental Commission on Coordination of Economic Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Treaty on Construction of Iran-Armenia Gas Pipeline
- Memorandum on Cooperation in the Area of Agriculture with Ardebil Province

2005

- Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Healthcare of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Healthcare and Medical Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the area of Healthcare and Treatment
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the area of Education in 2005-2008

2006

- Memorandum of Understanding of the 6th session of the Intergovernmental Commission of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Establishment and Activity Conditions of Educational and Cultural Centers
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Territorial Administration of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the area of Archive Matters
- Agreement between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran on Legal Cooperation of Civil and Criminal Matters
- Agreement on Extradition between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran

- Joint Declaration of the Presidents of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran

2007

- Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation between the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Energy of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in Construction and Operation of Run-of-River Power Plants on Araks River
- Executive Plan for Media Cooperation between the Council of Public TV and Radio Company of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting
- Memorandum of Understanding of the 7th session of Intergovernmental Joint Commission of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Utilization of Development Assistance
- Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the area of Sport between Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs of the Republic of Armenia and the Physical Education Organisation of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Joint Declaration of H.E. Robert Kocharyan the President of the Republic of Armenia and H.E. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Central Bank of the Republic of Armenia and the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the area of Banking Supervision
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia and the the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Establishing Consulates General

2008

- Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Energy of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in Construction of Araks Run-of-River Power Plant and on Regulation of Technical Issues
- Memorandum of Understanding of the 8th session of Intergovernmental Joint Commission of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran

2009

- Agreement between the Central Bank of the Republic of Armenia and the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in the area of Banking Supervision
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Transport and Communication of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Roads and Transportation of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Railway Cooperation and on Building a Direct Railway between the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Trade of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Regime Definition of Free Trade

2010

- Memorandum of Understanding of the 9th session of Intergovernmental Joint Commission of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Executive Program on Co-operation in the Fields of Culture and Artistic between the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the Years 2010-2012

2011

- Memorandum of Understanding of the 10th session of Intergovernmental Joint Commission of the Republic of Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Memorandum of Understanding on Islamic Republic of Iran's Development Assistance to the Republic of Armenia,(December 2011)
- Protocol between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on amendments in the Agreement on Cooperation for Construction and Operation of Hydro Power Plant on the Araks River, (December 2011)
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on cooperation in the field of Labour and Social Issues(December 2011)
- Action Plan for the Implementation of MoU on Environmental Cooperation between the Department of Environment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Ministry of Nature Protection of the Republic of Armenia for the Years 2012-2013. (December 2011)