Iran's Turn to the East?

The Role of Ideology in the Islamic Republic's Foreign Policy in Central Asia (1990-2001)

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Abstract

(299 words)

This thesis investigates the ways in which Iran's post-revolutionary ideology has contributed to shaping the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic towards Central Asia after the fall of the USSR (1990-2001). It asks to what extent ideology played a prominent role in shaping Iran's initial foreign policy strategy towards the newly independent Central Asian republics, and to what extent it remained a relevant factor in Tehran's policy shifts through the 1990s. This topic has been chosen with the aim of synthesising two unconnected schools of thought in the literature on Iranian foreign policy, where there has been a tendency to centre the study of Iran-Western relationship around ideology, while Iran-East relations are often seen through a political economy lens. This thesis advances a new theoretical model to study the interaction between Iran's post-revolutionary ideology and its foreign policy, the Four Pillar Model. This is a morphological model inspired by Gidden's structuration theory, which proposes Pan-Islamism, Pan-Iranism, Anti-Imperialism, and National Sovereignty as the four core elements of Iran's ideology. The model is tested against three case studies: the dissolution of the USSR (1990-1992), the Tajik Civil War (1992-1997), and the insurgency of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (1999-2001). This thesis claims that the internal contradictions in Iran's ideology determined the emergence of a 'dual-track policy' in Central Asia in the 1990s. Though Iran's foreign policy oscillated from Pan-Islamism to Pan-Iranism and back, both foreign policy approaches continued to co-exist, striving for primacy. This strife reflected the struggle between different interpretations of the identity of the Iranian regime, but it was also strongly influenced by geopolitical changes in the region. The increase in American involvement in Central Asia after 1995 and its effect on regional power alignments and energy markets were paramount in tilting the scales back in favour of Pan-Islamism.

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List of Acronyms

BP: British Petroleum

DPT: Democratic Party of Tajikistan

ECO: Economic Cooperation Organisation

IMU: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

IOC: Islamic Cooperation Organisation

IRGC: Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

IRI: Islamic Republic of Iran

IRP: Islamic Revival Party

IRPT: Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan

JPCOA: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

NIOC: National Iranian Oil Company

OPEC: Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

SCO: Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

SOCAR: State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,

UTO: United Tajikistan Opposition

Introduction

This thesis aims to investigate the ways in which the ideology that emerged in Iran after the 1979 Revolution has contributed to shaping the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards Central Asia in the years following the fall of the Soviet Union (1990-2001). It asks to what extent ideology played a prominent role in shaping Iran's initial foreign policy strategy towards the newly independent Central Asian republics, and to what extent it remained a relevant factor in Tehran's policy shifts through the 1990s. The choice of the region and the period on which this study will focus has been dictated by a gap in the literature on Iranian foreign policy that this thesis aims to address.

This thesis has identified a gap in the treatment of Iran-West and Iran-East relations in the literature. While there exist many nuanced works in both sub-fields of Iranian studies, there has been in the past a tendency to centre the study of Iran-Western relationship around the presumed ideological struggle of Iran against the US, while the study of Iran-East relations has often focused on the political economy of Eurasia. It is this thesis' contention that there is room for a synthesis. This will allow for a more complete understanding of the relationship between ideology and pragmatism in Iran's policy practices. The choice of Central Asia as a region of focus is thus driven by the intention of taking a hardest-case-scenario to apply the theoretical model that this thesis seeks to advance.

Central Asia is certainly not considered in the literature as a standard example for the study of Iran's ideology, on the contrary, it is often used as an example of the limits of an ideological interpretation of Iran's foreign policy and a testament to the Islamic Republic's reliance on realpolitik. I will argue that a study of Iran's foreign policy behaviour

in Central Asia, on the contrary, highlights the relationship between Iran's interests and ideology. By looking at how Iran has attempted to approach Central Asia after its independence, we can obtain a greater insight into the ways in which Tehran relies on switching between alternative iterations of its revolutionary ideology to reconcile its material interests, Central Asia's political climate, and its own complex identity as a revolutionary state.

The Four Pillar model and Iran's dual-track policy in Central Asia

The overarching aim of this thesis is to provide a new theoretical model to understand both the structure of Iran's ideology and its relationship to Iran's foreign policy through what I called the 'Four Pillar Model'. This is a morphological model providing a geometric representation of the different concepts that make up Iran's ideology and of their logical relation to each other. The Four Pillar Model is derived from a brief engagement with the post-1990s historiography on the origins of Iran's national identity, as well as from a study of two key trends from Iran's intellectual history: the legacy of the institutionalisation of religious power within the state apparatuses, and the cultural shock of the encounter with Western Powers. This model will highlight the interconnectedness between Iran's ideology and state interests. There are two sets of conflicting interests that correspond to two alternative foreign policy lines, one guided by what I call the Pan-Islamic interpretation of Iran's post-revolutionary ideology, and one guided by the Pan-Iranian one.

The competition between the Pan-Islamic and the Pan-Iranian interpretations gave rise to what I characterised as Tehran's dual-track policy in Central Asia.[1] This policy was

[1] The concept of a 'dual-track' policy had been used by US intelligence officials to describe Iran's foreign policy in 2002, especially in the context of Iran's public condemnation of terrorism and covert training of

dual-tracked in so far as Tehran appeared to be pursuing diplomatic engagement with both the post-Soviet Central Asian regimes and with their subversive political opposition movements. One of the most crucial factors in shifting the scale's needle between the two positions was the balance of power in the regional and international system. The balance of power in the region, as it will be argued in the concluding chapter, was determined by the echoes of the USSR dissolution, by competition between regional and extra regional states for the emerging hydrocarbon market, and by the US policy of containment against Iran. This ultimately resulted in the gradual isolation of Iran from regional arenas and in the intensification of the dual-track policy dilemma, whereby Iran had stakes in both regional stabilisation as well as in the subversion of regional regimes towards more friendly political systems.

This thesis will argue that Iran's strategy in Central Asia eventually failed because Tehran was unable to reconcile its Pan-Iranian identity with its diplomatic commitment to national sovereignty in Central Asia, and because neither its 'Pan-Iranian' nor its 'National Sovereignty' approach could fully overtake the underlying Pan-Islamic current in Iran's policy making. In the end, the historical trajectory on which Iran was travelling was irreconcilable with Central Asia. Iran had no chance for success outside from the minimal bilateral policy that it did end up pursuing because what Islam, Persianate culture, and anti-imperialism meant to Iran was not the same as what it meant to Central Asia.

The main empirical claim of this thesis is that throughout the 90s Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia became a dual-track policy due to the divergent evolution of the two main declinations of Iran's post-revolutionary ideology, the Pan-Islamic and the Pan-Iranian

fighters: 'Terrorists trained by Iran tracked from Uzbekistan'. *The Washington Times*, 8 Apr. 2022. In this analysis, however, I reject the explicit negative connotation of the term in favour of a neutral approach to Iran's foreign policy that aims to highlight the overall ideological consistency of a dual-track policy in spite of the practical contradictions it birthed.

one. The case studies will show that, while in the initial 1990-92 period we see a natural predisposition to follow a Pan-Islamic foreign policy in Central Asia, over the course of the 1990s Iran's policy in the region comes to be dominated by the Pan-Iranism. The decoupling of Pan-Islamism from Pan-Iranism engenders a shift in the meaning of Pan-Islamism itself: originally denoting the promotion of an international Islamic revolution, through the 90s it comes to signify the safeguard of the Islamic character of the post-revolutionary Iranian state from external threats through the establishment of a friendly neighbourhood. This shift in the meaning of Pan-Islamism brought about the emergence of a dual-track policy. The policy was a result of Iran's complex identity as both a revolutionary state on the global stage and a status quo power in the regional stage; it also reflected conflicting interests inside the Iranian state that leveraged different aspect of Iran's post-revolutionary ideology.

This thesis thus aims to contribute to the academic debate with the Four Pillar model, hoping it can provide a novel and clearer way of conceptualising the structure of Iran's ideology, as well as the way in which it partakes in the foreign policy making process. What this thesis is not doing is providing a universal theoretical model for understanding states' foreign policy, in as much as the shape of the model presented is uniquely deduced from Iran's political and intellectual history. However, it does hope that the heuristic process utilised here to arrive to the model, especially the in-depth engagement with the political history of the Iranian state and of the wider region, can serve as a model for other case studies.

The second theoretical contribution of this study is to shed light on a less studied area of Iranian foreign policy (Central Asia). In doing so, it aims to bridge the gap in the literature between studies of Iran's relations with the East and with the West. During this research, the paucity of books on Iranian foreign policy singly dedicated to Central Asia

struck me as both a glaring omission and an opportunity to advance academic debate parallel to the direction of current political trends. This study aspires to be of relevance for policy makers and practitioners. The topic of Iran's relations with Central Asia is of salience because of the present and future relevance of Eurasian geopolitics on the world stage. It is also of relevance for advancing an understanding of Iran that goes beyond its relationship with the West in a moment of stalemate in the relationship with Tehran. A better understanding of the role of Iran in Central Asia can also be useful to practitioners in the light of potential future developments in the region as well as in the wider Middle East, in which Iran remains a key player. Key questions surrounding the future role of Iran in a Middle East where the United States are not the major power broker anymore have already surrounded current debates in reputable think tanks such as Chatham House.[2] For this reason, a more nuanced understanding of the way in which the ideology of the Islamic Republic interplays with its foreign policy can be beneficial for diplomatic processes in Central Asia and beyond.

This thesis does not sit squarely within the fields of International Relations, Foreign Policy, or Area Study, but has developed organically by crossing over all three subjects. This is both due to the subject under investigation and to the theoretical bias of the author. Iran's policy in Central Asia, much like Tehran's Middle East strategy, is propelled by domestic concerns, applied to regional calculations, and constrained by global geopolitical equilibria. At the same time, it is my conviction that the study of foreign policy phenomena ought to be conducted by cutting vertically through the global, regional, and local level of analysis, rather than addressing any of the levels in isolation. This is because country's

[2] 'Middle East and Great Power Competition'. *Chatham House*, 28 Nov. 22, 12:00-13:00 BST.

foreign policy strategies are designed by practitioners with the aim of navigating these competing drives and cannot be understood by looking at one set of causes only.

It is, however, difficult to strike the balance between the international, the regional, and the domestic level of analysis expected from these three fields. The approach I have taken in this study is to utilise the regional level and the domestic level to 'feed up' data to the analysis of the international level. This is reflected in the structure of the empirical section of this study, where the chapters on the Tajikistan's Civil War (1992-1997) and the armed insurgency of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (1999-2001) are used to build the body of the argument towards the geopolitical analysis of the closing chapter on energy competition in Central Asia. The focus, however, will be mostly centred on the relationship between the regional and the international levels to the detriment of a complete analysis of the domestic factors influencing Iran's decisions at the time. This is true both due to the necessity for methodological clarity and abstraction from the complexity of real-life phenomena, but also, and most crucially, due to practical limitations imposed by sources and language barrier that I will address in the methods section of the next chapter.

Part of the dichotomy between ideologically oriented and interest-based accounts of Iran's foreign policy (Iran-West vs. Iran-East relationships) is to be attributed to the infrequent theoretical specification of the concept, structure, and function of ideology in the literature. The lack of synthesis between the literature focusing on the nature of ideology, and the literature focusing on the empirical study of ideology within the field of IR aggravates the likelihood of different authors talking at cross-purposes on the nature of Iran's behaviour. To overcome these difficulties, this thesis will advance a theoretical model for the study of Iran's foreign policy behaviour that is constructed deductively from Iranian intellectual history rather than inductively from Tehran's policy practices.

The theoretical framework underlying the model of Iran's ideology will start from a clear description of the role that ideology plays in foreign policy relations between countries. It will do so by advancing a socio-historical definition of 'state ideology' that allows for a dynamic understanding of the relationship between a country's ideology and the material conditions of the international system in which this state is operating. This dynamism highlights the relationship between ideology and material factors as a feedback loop: the application of a specific ideology to a given context may feed back into the formulation of the ideology itself, producing small but incremental changes of the meaning and scope of specific ideas that compose the ideological schema and, over time, of the ideology itself.

This feedback mechanism will also determine the methods of the empirical research. Although the three case studies are presented chronologically and each study is linked in the final chapter through an overarching narrative describing Iran's foreign policy evolution, each individual case has been approached as a snapshot of an event which has been singled out as a critical juncture in the evolution of Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia. By focusing on snapshot analyses, this thesis will be able to ascertain which iteration of the general Iranian ideological model, be it the Pan-Islamic or the Pan-Iranian, prevailed at each juncture. However, since the analysis of snapshots over time leads to understanding incremental changes over that period of time, by collating these different snapshot analyses it will also establish how ideology affected Iran's policy in Central Asia through time and, vice versa, the extent to which ideology was changed through its application in policymaking.

The literature on Iran's foreign policy: the ideology vs. pragmatism debate[3]

The debate in the literature on Iran's foreign policy has traditionally revolved around the question of the extent to which Tehran has behaved ideologically or pragmatically. While most of the literature has taken a nuanced approach to the blurred line between ideology and pragmatism, the question has remained fundamentally unanswered. This is because a great deal of the early debate in the literature of the 1990s and 2000s focused on providing a detailed periodisation of the evolution of Iran's foreign policy. Though it provided insightful empirics, the drawback of this approach is that with every major domestic political change and its consequent shift in foreign posture, real or perceived, the entire canon on the trajectory of Iran's foreign policy had to be re-evaluated and, more often than not, radically called into question. This happened first after the death of Khomeini with Rafsanjani's (1989-1997) perceived pragmatism. And again, after the rise to power of Khatami (1997-2005), when authors that emphasised the domestic conditions of his rise to power saw a return to idealism, whilst those that looked at his foreign policy of rapprochement with the West saw Khatami as bringing Rafsanjani's pragmatism to its logical conclusion. Finally, after the election of Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), some scholars claimed that Iran was reverting to a revolutionary phase in its foreign policy and that ideology had returned to the forefront.

Much of this early debate can thus be summed up as follows: is there more continuity or change in the foreign policy behaviour of the Islamic Republic? In the earlier literature, most of the scholarly contention revolved around providing a workable definition of what a 'revolutionary foreign policy' is.[4] Now many authors de-emphasise the revolutionary

[3] Part of the material used in this section has been readapted from the thesis I submitted as a thesis in partial fulfilment of the MPhil in International Relations in 2019.

[4] Mozaffari, Mehdi. 'Revolutionary, Thermidorian and Enigmatic Foreign Policy: President Khatami and the "Fear of the Wave".' *International Relations*, vol. 14, no. 5, 1999, p. 9.

origins of the Islamic Republic and treat Iran like an ordinary nation-state, albeit one that refuses to be fully socialised in the international system. Louise Fawcett takes a similar approach when analysing Iran's policy through the lens of regional securitisation: she highlights the foreign policy continuity between the Islamic Republic and the Shah regime, concluding that Iran's policy shifts are better understood as those of a revisionist rather than a revolutionary state.[5] But the question of continuity vs. change that has characterised the debate on the role of ideology in Tehran's foreign policy hides more insidious conceptual challenges. For one, to tackle this question it is necessary to provide a criterion defining the threshold of sameness in Iranian foreign policy, which is often absent from the literature. By this I mean that it is necessary to come to an expert consensus regarding the baseline of normalcy of Iran's policymaking. The empirical evaluation of changes in Iran's foreign policy also raises the question of the distinction between a country's tactic and grand strategy: to what extent can a country be said to have changed its foreign policy if it has changed its preferred means of implementation but not its goals?[6]

The bulk of the literature on Iran's foreign policy can be divided into three approaches, depending on how they conceive of change and continuity in Tehran's behaviour: the first maintains that significant change has taken place, the second argues from a neorealist perspective emphasising the structural constraint on Iran's foreign policy, and the third advances a historical reading of Iran's foreign policy emphasising continuity throughout and beyond the time of the Islamic Republic. The first approach sees a decisive change in Tehran's foreign policy in the 1990s, shifting from ideology to pragmatism. In its

[5] Fawcett, Louise. 'Iran and the Regionalization of (in)Security.' *International Politics*, vol. 52, no. 5, 2015, pp. 646–656.
[6] Nau, Henry R., et al. *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers: Domestic Foreign Policy Debates in China, India, Iran, Japan and Russi*a. Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 115: 'In identifying the opponents of idealism as pragmatism, a shift is made towards conduct and away from analysis of objectives. Hence very little is discussed about whether the so-called pragmatist share similar foreign policy objectives or simply disagree in terms of methods of achieving those objectives.'

earlier form, this argument looked at the French revolution. It stated that an irreversible exhaustion of revolutionary energy leads maverick states to international socialisation. For instance, Alam in one of his earlier works subscribes to the view that Khatami's presidency represents a fundamental and long-lasting shift in Iranian foreign policy, interpreting the trajectory from Khomeini to Khatami as the triumph of geopolitics over ideology, a view shared at the time by the majority of observers.[7] In a later piece however, while still maintaining that the core of Iran's policy remains the quest for security, he acknowledges that the underlying philosophy of the Islamic Revolution still plays a role in informing policymaking.[8]

Many more authors have identified the source of change in Iran's foreign policy in the process through which a revolutionary state learns to match its utopian ambitions to the requirements of geopolitics.[9] Hadzikadunic argues that Khatami's new style of foreign policy represented a genuine change insofar as it reflects the true national interest of Iran, and that Ahmadinejad's tougher rhetoric is best seen as the consequence of elevating nuclear technology to a matter of national security.[10] Barzegar and Divsallar argue that through the 1980s, Iran adapted to a hostile environment by blending ideology and pragmatism, a process that culminated in the policy shift under Rouhani.[11] This first approach also comes under a variant that emphasises the radical break in Tehran's foreign policy from Khatami to Ahmadinejad, highlighting the perceived parallels between the latter's foreign policy and the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic under Khomeini in the 1980s. Saedi argues that

[7] Alam, Shah. 'The Changing Paradigm of Iranian Foreign Policy under Khatami.' *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 24, no. 9, 2000, pp. 1629–1653.
[8] Alam, Shah. 'Nuclear and Foreign Policy Calculations of Iran.' *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 64, no. 2, 2008, pp. 109–141.
[9] Fawcett, 'Iran and the Regionalization of (in)Security.'
[10] Hadzikadunic, Emir. 'Understanding Iranian Foreign Policy: The Case of Iranian Nuclear Program.' *Epiphany (Sarajevo)*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2015, pp. 4–16.
[11] Barzegar, Kayhan, and Abdolrasool Divsallar. 'Political Rationality in Iranian Foreign Policy.' *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2017, pp. 39–53.

Ahmadinejad has opened a new ideological phase in Iran's international posture, which is manifested in Ahmadinejad's pivoting away from cooperation with European powers and towards an anti-American partnership with countries of the Global South.[12] Kazemzadeh also views Ahmadinejad's presidency as a major shift in Iran's posture,[13] while Berman argues that the radical break that Ahmadinejad's embodies from the previous conciliatory stance of Khatami is based on an ideology of 'self-styled messianic expansionism'.[14]

The second approach consists of authors that emphasise material factors over ideological factors in explaining Iran's foreign policy trajectory. Many of these have produced powerful explanations that can be combined with ideological ones; most of these authors argue within a realist or neorealist framework. While the authors cited so far tend to take the question of whether Iran's main strategic objectives have undergone significant change seriously, authors employing a realist framework usually assume that the interests of a state are exogenously given, and therefore that the change examined is in the means rather than in the substance of the policy. For instance, Waltz argues that Iran's desire to acquire nuclear capabilities can be explained by looking at the systemic constraints within which it operates in the Middle East.[15]

Authors that focus on military factors have explained Iran's 'tough' international stance within the framework of offensive realism, or as a product of the internal crises that exacerbate its threat perception. Chubin and Tripp argue, 'despite its use of Islamic vocabulary and imagery, revolutionary Iran has shown no tendency to forswear national

[12] Sabet-Saeidi, Shahriar. 'Iranian-European Relations: A Strategic Partnership?' in Ehteshami, Anoushiravan., and Mahjoob. Zweiri (ed). *Iran's Foreign Policy: from Khatami to Ahmadinejad*. 1st ed., Ithaca Press, 2008.
[13] Kazemzadeh, Masoud. 'Ahmadinejad's Foreign Policy.' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2007, pp. 423–449.
[14] Berman, Ilan. 'Understanding Ahmadinejad', *American Foreign Policy Council*, 31 May 2006.
[15] Waltz, Kenneth. 'Why Iran Should Get the Bomb: Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability.' *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 91, no. 4, 2012, pp. 2–5.

interests for Muslim solidarity.'[16] Lawson claims that the source of change in Iranian foreign policy is not domestic, but structural. [17] He argues that, as the volatile alliances in the region have shifted between 2001 and 2011, Iran has been faced with estrangement from historic allies and fear of encirclement due to Turkish and Israeli manoeuvres; however, he concludes, this has not changed its fundamental foreign policy objectives, which are stability and hegemony over the region. Lastly, Juneau's work, which conceptualises the ideology of the Islamic Republic within a neoclassical realist approach, is a great example of how the field of IR can contribute to the study of the subject from novel perspectives.[18] Juneau argues that when structural pressure is at its lowest, there is more room for domestic factors, such as ideology, to influence foreign policy; while insightful in its conclusion, I disagree with his characterisation of ideology as a 'domestic pathology' that distorts Iranian policies from its optimal outcome.[19]

Finally, the third approach comprises authors who, whilst not denying the evolution in Iran's foreign policy throughout the years, choose to emphasise the underlying continuity in the behaviour of the Islamic Republic of Iran combining systemic and ideological explanations. Most of these authors accept that there has been a permanent policy change in 1989 after the death of Khomeini and argue that Iran's foreign policy has been consistent in its objectives ever since; some of them, on the other hand, emphasise the strong intellectual and normative ties that still exist between present day and 1980s Iranian policy. Adib-Moghaddam argues that Iran still is a challenge for the international system because it is

[16] Chubin, Shahram, and Charles Tripp. *Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order: Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Balance of Power in the Gulf.* Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996, p. 64.
[17] Lawson, Fred H. 'Alliance Dynamics and the Turn toward Moderation in Iran's Relations with Surrounding States.' *International Politics*, vol. 52, no. 5, 2015, pp. 617–625.
[18] Juneau, Thomas. *Squandered Opportunity: Neoclassical Realism and Iranian Foreign Policy*. Stanford, 2015.
[19] Juneau, *Squandered Opportunity*, p. 10.

guided by an 'utopian-romantic metanarrative' that permeates its foreign policy culture.[20] In his view, this revolutionary fervour has been institutionalised into a worldview that prompts Iranian elites to take a defiant stance towards the established normative and political global order. Ramazani takes a long durée view of Iranian history.[21] He identifies the drive towards political and cultural independence as foundational for Iran, starting from the times of Cyrus the Great to Khomeini. While the notion of freedom and independence have been irreversibly transformed by the 19th century and 20th century anti-imperialist experiences of Iran, he argues, the role of independence as the chief driver of foreign policy has remained unchanged through history. Nuruzzaman provides an insightful analysis of how Rouhani's foreign policy is consistent with Khomeini's precepts.[22] He argues that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)[23] is in line with late-Khomeini pragmatism but adds that it nevertheless represents a significant ideological blow for the Islamic Republic, in as much as it amounts to an abandonment of an Islamic model of development and an embracement of capitalism. Ehteshami claims as well that a shift occurred in 1989 because the material conditions in which Iran found itself made it impossible for the regime to maintain a radical stance, leading to the prioritising of short-term strategic objectives over long term goals.[24] He argues, however, that there is a great degree of continuity between the policy orientation of the First and Second Republics in so far as they are both Islamic and Third-Worldist. He concludes that the fact that a reassessment of economic and strategic interest has taken place does not necessarily imply that ideology has been abandoned.[25]

[20] Adib-Moghaddam, Arshin. *Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic*. Hurst, 2007, p. 32.
[21] Ramazani, Rouhollah K. *Independence without Freedom: Iran's Foreign Policy*. 2013. p. 201-10.
[22] Nuruzzaman, Mohammed. 'Post-Nuclear Deal Iran: Back to the Fold of Imperialism?' *Insight Turkey*, vol. 18, no. 2, Spring 2016, pp. 51-61.
[23] The Hoint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was the agreement on restrictions on Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanction relief. It was signed in Vienna on 14 July 2015, between Iran and the P5+1 (France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States and Germany).
[24]Ehteshami, Anoushiravan. *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic*. Routledge, 1995.
[25] Ehteshami, Anoushiravan. 'Iran's New Order: Domestic Developments and Foreign Policy Outcomes.' *Global Dialogue*, vol. 3, no. 2/3, 2001, pp. 45–52.

This observation on the relationship between strategic reassessment and ideological continuity is crucial for the orientation of this study. It represents a potent challenge to authors arguing that a radical change in Iran's foreign policy has taken place since 1989. By encompassing a socio-historical approach in their analysis of Iran's foreign policy, the authors that I have grouped in the third approach highlight a fundamental weakness in the theoretical framework used by authors in the first two approaches, because they show that it is possible to empirically demonstrate links between the early stages of the Islamic Republic, and even pre-Revolutionary Iran, and the present-day policy of Iran. This highlights the analytical weakness of the first two approaches: because they lack a clear definition of ideology and, consequently, of pragmatism, they struggle to account for simultaneous evidence of changes and continuity in Iran's foreign policy.

Many of the accounts arguing that there has been a fundamental and irreversible change in Iran's foreign policy at some point in time share an unspoken assumption: that a move towards pragmatism is necessarily a move away from ideology. This shows the need for the formulation of a clear definition of ideology. This thesis will advance a more systematic model for the analysis of Iran's foreign policy that is also capable of historical analysis.

Recent trends in Iranian literature: the case for a historical analysis

In the last fifteen years, scholars have focused more on Iran's relations with specific regions, or on themes in Iranian foreign policy such as economic cooperation. This trend has had two main consequences. On one hand, it has provided a variety of nuanced, specific case studies on Iran's foreign policy behaviour; on the other hand, because of the compartmentalised nature of each argument, there has been an overarching tendency towards the analytical

disaggregation of the foreign policy of Iran into geographical subfields. This has brought about parallel discourses in the literature that have substituted the earlier all-consuming question of ideology vs. pragmatism. This new literature has also brought about a hyper-specialisation in the scholarship where the picture that one side depicts is fundamentally at odds with the image of Iran portrayed by another side.

One of these new research programmes looks at Iran as a rational nation-state engaged in interstate cooperation and competition on energy, military, and commercial interests; it has mostly developed by looking at Iran's relations with the wider Eurasia on matters of energy, trade, and regional security. While inspired by realist analyses of Iran, rather than denying the ideological dimension of Iran's foreign politics, it isolates areas in which Iran behaves according to the neorealist model and focuses on explaining these. This approach is often employed when considering Iran's involvement in the development of Eurasian pipelines,[32] as well as in China's Belt and Road Initiative and other transport corridor projects.[33] An example of this is Milani's paper where Iran's failure to become a regional power in Central Asia is explained jointly by US sanctions and the lack of a proactive strategy that goes beyond short-term tactics.[34] Iran's relationship with Central Asia is analysed within the paradigm of great power-middle power competition, where Iran's policies are a result of American international and regional attempts to isolate Tehran. Similarly, Svistunova has argued that 'pragmatism and rivalry in Turkish-Iranian relations are not alternatives but exist in parallel as a way of maintaining a regional balance of power

[32] Guo, Fei-fei, et al. 'Strategic Analysis on the Construction of New Energy Corridor China–Pakistan–Iran–Turkey'. *Energy Reports*, vol. 5, Nov. 2019, pp. 828–41.
[33] Pegolo, Valentina. 'The Suez Canal Blockage Activating the Iranian-Forgotten International North-South Transport Corridor'. *MEPEI*, 2 Apr. 2021.
[34] Milani, Mohsen M. and CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program. *Iran in a Reconnecting Eurasia: Foreign Economic and Security Interests*. 30 Apr. 2016.

between the two countries.'[35] Sariolghalam maintains that 'the basic principles of Iranian foreign policy are based on the country's political geography, its enormous energy resources, its sensitivity to independence and national sovereignty'.[36] These analyses are often applied to Iran-China relations, where, it is argued, the economic cooperation between the two states remains subordinate to each player's security agenda.[37]

But it is precisely in the sphere of China-Iran cooperation that this rationalist approach encounters its limits. Many authors have noticed how, despite of the clearly circumscribed nature of the Sino-Iranian partnership, which is based on a *quid pro quo* principle, the ideological affinity between two post-revolutionary regimes with a similar anti-American foreign policy plays a part in their relationship. Downs and Maloney have argued that the Iran-China relationship 'is grounded in a shared worldview that transcends obvious ideological differences [as] both Beijing and Tehran distrust Washington and find the West arrogant'.[38] Hong proposes a balanced overview of the issue; he maintains that although 'Chinese and Iranian people tend to share a similar deep sense of grievance and victimisation […] it is not ideology that binds these two countries, rather it is the primacy of strategic and economic considerations that drive the relationship**'.**[39] Nevertheless, these observations highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of the context in which Iran's relationship with other states has arisen, and point to the importance of the historical context in which mutual perceptions are created.

[35] Svistunova, I. A. 'Turkish-Iranian Relations in the Middle East: in Search of the Regional Balance'. *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, vol. 12, no. 4, Sept. 2019, pp. 130–44.
[36] Sariolghalam, Mahmood. *The Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Theoretical Revision and the Coalition Paradigm*. Tehran: Center for Strategic Research, CSR Press, 2005.
[37] Conduit, Dara, and Shahram Akbarzadeh. 'Great Power-Middle Power Dynamics: The Case of China and Iran'. *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 28, no. 117, Routledge, May 2019, pp. 468–81.
[38] Downs, Erica, and Suzanne Maloney. 'Getting China to Sanction Iran: The Chinese-Iranian Oil Connection'. *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 90, no. 2, Council on Foreign Relations, 2011, pp. 15–21.
[39] Hong, Zhao. 'China's Dilemma on Iran: Between Energy Security and a Responsible Rising Power'. *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 23, no. 87, Routledge, May 2014, pp. 408–24.

This thesis contends that the need for a framework that allows scholars to make sense at once of Iran's ideological and pragmatic aspects is best advanced by a historical approach. Some authors have already addressed the fallacy of assuming that ideology is incompatible with pragmatism. Shahvar argues that 'adopting a pragmatic approach in matters of foreign policy does not necessarily mean departing from Islamic postures or tactics',[40] pointing out that it is necessary to understand ideology and pragmatism as two complementary rather than mutually exclusive dimensions of Iran's behaviour. The need to reconceptualise the relationship between pragmatism and ideology is best presented by Akbarzadeh and Conduit:[41]

> Iran's foreign policy is not exclusively shaped within the context of Islamic discourse and ideology, fluctuating between revolutionary idealism and pragmatic realism. Pragmatism has always been an integral part of Iran's foreign directions and can be traced in hotly debated foreign policy issues like it's détente with the US or its support of specific forces in the Levant, neither of which have ideological links to Iran.

Recent scholarship has begun moving into this direction already. Using a constructivist approach, this literature has attempted to open the 'black box' of ideology; in doing so, it has provided a way forward to overcome the sterile 'pragmatic vs. ideological' definitional debate. Fijałkowski and Jarząbek take a critical constructivist approach to study the securitisation of Iran's military policy.[42] By looking at the internal competition between the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) and the Iranian military (Artesh), they hypothesise that the IRGC have successfully altered Iran's threat perception by associating the survival of the regime's institutions to the survival of the Iranian state per se. This, they contend, creates paradoxical situations where the interests of the IRGC and the interests of

[40] Shahvar, Soli. 'Iran's Global Reach: The Islamic Republic of Iran's Policy, Involvement, and Activity in Africa'. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1, May 2020, pp. 53–75.
[41] Akbarzadeh, Shahram, and Dara Conduit. *Iran in the World: President Rouhani's Foreign Policy*. 2016.
[42] Fijałkowski, Łukasz, and Jarosław Jarząbek. 'Between Emergency and Routine: Securitisation of Military Security in Iran and Indonesia'. *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 9, Routledge, Sept. 2019, pp. 1670–88.

the Iranian state are in conflict, such as the case of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that Iran signed and the IRGC fervently opposed. Sadri provides a compelling analysis of Iran's threat perception caused by US regional encirclement, showing how a systematic engagement with Iran's experience of the international system can generate rational explanations of what is often presented as revolutionary adventurism.[43]

The focus on the multifaceted and often contradictory nature of Iran's ideology has brought about some innovative scholarship in the field. This scholarship is heavily influenced by the eclectic and socio-historical approach of the third approach described in the previous section. This new literature emphasises continuity over change, although the continuity they describe may be more fragmented than what older scholarship depicted. For instance, Kozhanov and Bogacheva argue, 'the Iranian political elite has not only failed to find a single definition of its foreign policy selfhood but has produced several more formulas of its own identity, which often contradict each other, although they coexist.'[45] They conclude that this situation is due to the post-revolutionary leaders' attempt to combine the legacy of Islamism, 'Persianism' and nationalism. Golmohammadi similarly identifies numerous pillars sustaining Iran's foreign policy – Pan-Islamist, Pan-Shia, anti-Western, anti-Imperialist, and anti-Zionist.[46] Nau argues that the guiding role that ideology plays in Iran's foreign policy generates two internal tensions: the first is the one between what he claims to be Iran's 'rejection' of the existing international order and Tehran's attempt to improve its position within the same; the second is the one between the sense of inflated global importance and the perception of persistence threat and insecurity.[47]

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[43] Sadri, Houman A. 'Surrounded: Seeing the World from Iran's Point of View'. *Military Review*, vol. 87, no. 4, USArmy CGSC, 2007, pp. 12–31.
[45] Kozhanov, N. A., and A. S. Bogacheva. 'The Islamic Republic of Iran in Search of Its Foreign Policy Identity: Revolutionary Innovation or Continuity?' *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta*, vol. 13, no. 2, MGIMO University Press, Apr. 2020, pp. 141–62.
[46] Golmohammadi, Vali. 'The Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Prospects for Change and Continuity.' *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2019, pp. 93-102.
[47] Nau, Henry, op. cit., p. 118.

This thesis will follow the footstep of this new literature by integrating the historical legacy of Iran's relationship with Central Asia in an analysis of their post-Cold War relations, as well as by looking at the historico-sociological roots of the different faces that make up Iran's current ideology. This will integrate insights from sociology and history on the role of the past Iranian states in creating the institutional and ideational infrastructure that the Islamic Republic has inherited, which is, it will be argued, at the basis of the apparent incompatibility between the different aspects of its ideology.

Iran and Central Asia: a case study

In the previous two sections I have laid out the two steps through which Iran's ideological model will be created, emphasising how they build on existing trends and gaps in the literature on Iran's foreign policy in general. The guiding assumption of this research project is that ideology does play a role in all of Iran's foreign policy, but that, in doing so, it does not compete with but rather completes pragmatism. The re-conceptualisation of the relationship between ideology and pragmatism in the field of foreign policy will be left to Chapter 1. The explanation of what concrete ideas, practices, and institutions have gone into the make-up of the ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran will be left to Chapter 2. What is left to do here is explaining why Central Asia has been chosen as the case study for this research.

I highlighted how an implicit 'division of labour' in the analysis of Iran's relations with different geographical areas has taken place in the literature. This compartmentalisation has inevitably led to the revival of the ideology vs. pragmatism debate in areas such as China or the Middle East, leading to the need for studies such as the current one. Central Asia, however, provides a good, if neglected, example of the interaction between ideology and

pragmatism. The choice to focus on Central Asia is born out of a gap in the literature, where fewer accounts engage with the ideological aspects of Iran's relations with the ex-Soviet Republics compared to other geographical regions. This gap offers an ideal opportunity to test the main hypothesis of this thesis, namely that ideology does matter, in what on paper looks like a 'hardest case' scenario where Iran's policy is characterised as pragmatic. If this research succeeds in its intent, it will show that ideology operates in ways that are subtle and embedded in existing regional power structures.

There is a rich literature on Central Asia after the fall of the Soviet Union, which also looks at Iran's role in the region; however, this literature has been more prolific in the field of comparative government and historical sociology rather than in the field of foreign policy. In general, the literature on post-1990s Central Asia highlights the overlapping of centripetal and centrifugal forces with which the newly independent countries had to grapple. The consensus emerging from it is that Iran in the 1990s followed a cautious and pragmatic approach to the region. Mozaffari argues that this pragmatism should be ascribed to Iran's constrained military and economic capabilities, which were a poor match for its grand post-imperial political ambitions in Russia's sphere of interest.[48] Ehteshami highlights the importance of domestic issues on the development of Iran's Central Asian policy. He argues that, following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's policy 'has been guided by caution and underwritten by a growing economic, geopolitical and geostrategic cooperation'.[49] The fear of ethno-separatism has pushed Iran's regional interest to 'increasingly mirror those of the western countries'.[50]

[48] Mozaffari, Mehdi. *Security Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States: The Southern Belt*. Macmillan, 1997, p. 21.
[49] Ehteshami, A. 'Iran and Central Asia: Responding to Regional Change', p. 90. Ed Mozaffari, Mehdi. *Security Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States: The Southern Belt*. Macmillan, 1997.
[50] Ehteshami, op. cit., p. 92.

Other scholars, such as Haghayeghi,[51] focus on the domestic conditions of Central Asian Republics to argue that the post-independent era offered hostile conditions for the penetration of Iranian influence. He argues that the fact that Islam was spread slowly and mostly peacefully in Central Asia created hostile conditions for the establishment of an Islamic state, because Islam's penetration in Central Asia never fundamentally transformed indigenous social and political institutions, unlike in the case of Iran.[52] Menashri, too, looks at long durée historical patterns in Central Asia, arguing for the overarching role of the legacy of the past in the region.[53] He concludes that historical links make Central Asia and the Middle East a single, interconnected region, which makes Iran and Turkey's bid for influence less dependent on the ad hoc domestic conditions of the Republics, and more on the overall state of security in the region.[54] In spite of the difference in his explanatory variables, Menashri eventually agrees with the literature's assessment of Iran's pragmatism in the region. Osiewicz argues that Iran's strategy in Central Asia suffered from chronically low engagement, and that in spite of the new overtures initiated by President Rouhani, economic indicators have not risen along with diplomatic and cultural engagement, placing Iran in clear disadvantage compared to other external players like Turkey and China.[55] Peimani has looked at post-Soviet Central Asia as a security complex in which Russia, Iran, and Turkey have competed for influence. He agrees with the rest of the literature in characterising Iran's foreign policy in the region as 'restrained, secular, demonstrating no

[51] Haghayeghi, Mehrdad. *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*. Macmillan, 1995.
[52] Haghayeghi, op. cit., p. 73.
[53] Menashri, David. *Central Asia Meets the Middle East.* Frank Cass, 1998.
[54] Menashri, op. cit., p. 57.
[55] Osiewicz, Przemysław. *Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: between Ideology and Pragmatism*. 2021.

interest in the export of revolution'.[56] Akbarzadeh, too, takes a critical perspective on Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia:[57]

> The 'Look to the East' policy and Iran's calculated silence on the suppression of Muslim minorities in Russia and China raised serious questions about Iran's commitment to its own declared ideals of championing Muslim interests […] On the international scene, Iran behaves as a revolutionary actor to challenge the status quo, yet, at the regional level, it seeks to consolidate its position within the status quo. Has Iran been betraying its own ideology and state identity?

A significant exception to this trend is the seminal work of Hunter, who argues that there is more continuity than change in Iran's relation with Central Asia. She claims, 'Iran has not fully grasped the dimensions of the systemic change caused by the USSR's collapse, and it has not sufficiently adjusted its foreign policy objectives and practices to the new international reality.' [58] Highlighting the relationship between history, revolutionary ideology, and geopolitics, she concluded: [59]

> In [revolutionary countries], legitimacy and survival are, wholly or partly, dependent on the pursuit of ideological goals in the foreign policy arena, and ideology is closely linked to power balances within the system.

While Iran may have caught up with systemic transformations of the balance of power twenty years onwards, Hunter's insight on the relationship between geopolitics and ideology in Iran's foreign policy remains poignant. A first look at the literature produced by the Iranian policymaking establishment suggests that Hunter's claim is correct, and that there is indeed room for an analysis of the role that ideology plays in Iran's foreign policy to Central Asia. Two works published in the recent years by the *Centre for Strategic Research*, a think

[56] Peimani, Hooman. *Regional Security and the Future of Central Asia: The Competition of Iran, Turkey, and Russia*. Praeger, 1998, p. 32.
[57] Akbarzadeh, Shahram. 'Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Ideology and Realpolitik in Iranian Foreign Policy.' *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 69, no. 1, 2015, p. 98.
[58] Hunter, Shireen. *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order*. Praeger, 2010, p. XII.
[59] Hunter, op. cit., p. XIV.

tank affiliated to the influential Expediency Council,[60] highlight the fact that Iranian decisionmakers see ideology as one of component of soft power, which is considered a crucial tool in Iran's bid for regional influence. Kiani remarks that 'any perspective framework designed for [Central Asia] must consider Iran's cultural and civilisation components as the primary vehicle for furthering Iranian foreign policy in the region.'[61] Other authors confirm this perception from Tehran:[62]

> Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia and the Caucasus is composed of a combination of ideological, geopolitical, and cultural–civilization approaches, with geopolitical considerations of the area as top priority.

The rest of this thesis consists in an investigation into the meaning of these insights. The first part of this thesis constitutes a rigorous deductive exercise undertaken in Chapter 1 and 2. The result of this exercise is the Four Pillar model. The second part of this thesis consists in the application of this model to selected case studies in Central Asia between 1990 and 2001. Chapter 1 on *Theory & Methodology* provides a definition of state ideology based on Anthony Gidden's structuration theory. This definition will guide both the methodology for the empirical analysis of Iran's policy in Central Asia, and the methodology for the historical analysis of Iran's intellectual history that will build the Four Pillar model. Chapter 2 on *The Four Pillar Model* serves two primary functions. Firstly, it will orient the reader in the broader context of the empirical study by providing a baseline for the historical patterns in Iran-Central Asia relations; secondly, it will focus on crucial moments in the historical evolution of the Iranian state institutions which gave origin to the contrasting principles

[60] The Expediency Council is an administrative council appointed by the Supreme Leader created after the revision of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic in 1988. It was originally set up to resolve conflicts between the Majlis (Parliament) and the Guardian Council, but it serves as an advisory body to the Supreme Leader. See for instance: Ghiabi, Maziyar 2019. 'The Council of Expediency: Crisis and Statecraft in Iran and Beyond'. *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 55, no. 5, pp. 837–53.
[61] Kiani, Davood. 'Iran and Central Asia: A Cultural Perspective'. *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2014, pp. 113-138.
[62] Kooalee, Elaleh et al. 'Iran and Kazakhstan Relations: A Geopolitical Analysis' *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, pp. 89-112.

underlying Iran's post-revolutionary ideology. In doing so, this chapter will explain the origin of each of the four pillars of the ideological model advanced in the theory chapter.

The rest of the thesis comprises of four empirical chapters. Chapter 3 on the *USSR dissolution (1989-1992)* introduces the critical juncture of the end of the Cold War and its effect on Iran-Central Asia relations. It shows the abrupt shift from Tehran's initial Pan-Islamic appeal to the ex-Soviet republics to a more contained Pan-Iranian approach and identifies the schism between religious and cultural policies as the genesis of Tehran's dual-track policy. The pivotal points identified in this early phase were the USSR's attempt to stop the secession of the Baltic states on 7 January 1990, followed by President Karimov's move towards secession in October 1991. Chapter 4 on the *Tajikistan's Civil War (1992-1997)* showcases the relative success of Iran's Pan-Iranian approach in sponsoring the peace deal between President Rahmon and the United Tajikistan Opposition (UTO) front, as well as the limitations of this policy which set up the stage for Tehran's dual-track policy. The pivotal point identified in this stage is the 1993 Spring-Summer offensive by the United Tajikistan Opposition (UTO) across the Afghan-Tajik border, and in particular the UTO attack on a Russian garrison on 13 July 1993. Chapter 5 on the *Uzbekistan's IMU insurgency (1999-2001)* showcases the heights of Iran's dual-track policy, when different branches of the Iranian states were pursuing contradictory interests in the region. The pivotal point identified in this stage is the bombing of Uzbekistan's capital, Tashkent, that took place on 16 February 1999. Finally, Chapter 6 on the *Geopolitical analysis: Iran, Washington, and Central Asia's energy markets in the 1990s* aims to pull all three case studies together to identify the driving causes behind Iran's policy shifts and the emergence of the dual-track policy. It argues that Washington's policy of containment in the geopolitical and geoeconomics sphere, together with shifts in Russian commercial and security interests in the Caspian region, were crucial in shaping a regional environment that was significantly

more hostile to Tehran between 1995 and 1999. The conclusion will offer some insights into the implications of this study for present-day policymakers, focusing on the importance of understanding the extent to which Russia-Iran relations have evolved since 1999.

Chapter 1

Theory & Methodology

This chapter lays the foundations for the theoretical framework and the methodology guiding the empirical part of this study. It aims to advance a definition of the nature and function of ideology in foreign policy inspired by Gidden's structuration theory. This definition will ground the Four Pillar Model of Iran's post-revolutionary ideology, which will be presented in the next chapter.

This thesis is concerned with a specific phenomenon under the conceptual umbrella of ideology, namely what I refer to as 'state ideology'. State ideology is defined as the tool through which policymakers categorise information about the international system into a structured form, which is subsequently institutionalised within a state's organs and practices. State ideology is also a context-bound phenomenon contingent on the development of modern nation-states. In the case of Iran, the colonial encounter in the 19th and 20th century and the role of 20th century intellectuals in merging traditional Shi'a theology with modern state-building are some of the most significant processes that have determined the current makeup of the ideology of the Islamic Republic. The historical understanding of ideology advanced here will serve to ground the analysis of these two phenomena in the upcoming chapter. In this current chapter, the broader phenomenon of ideology will be addressed only as part of the literature review; outside of that, any reference to ideology should be understood as limited to state ideology.

The analytic definition advanced in this chapter aims to address the vagueness with which the concept of ideology is often treated in international relations. Its main objective is to explain the role that state ideology plays in interstate relations. It claims that state

ideology should neither be conceived as a static feature of the international system, nor an intermediary variable in the chain of foreign policy. Ontologically, state ideology is the structure through which material and ideational factors interact in the international system; phenomenologically, it is the conceptual matrix against which policymakers make sense of interstate relations. In this model, the policymakers' perception of events in the international system and the ideological system that they employ are bound together by a feedback mechanism: each one is mutually constitutive of the other. Through time, state ideology changes in response to changes in the external world and vice versa, giving rise to a dynamic model.

The claim that ideology necessarily informs the background of every foreign policy decision does not mean that it determines it. Iran's state ideology is complex and, at times, contradictory: at any given moment, Iranian decisionmakers can choose between two alternative ideological interpretations of the international system. These two alternative logics will be illustrated in the next chapter with two sub-models derived from the Four Pillar model, the Triangular models of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism. The empirical case studies will highlight the prevalence and impact of oscillations between these two principles of foreign policy.

The case studies aim to identify which logic, the Pan-Islamic or the Pan-Iranian, dominates Iran's foreign policy strategy at specific points in time, as well as determine what external factors may have affected the primacy of one ideological model over the other. This chapter will only provide a generalised model of the function of ideology in the foreign policy process, as well as the methodology underlying ideological analysis, the limitations of this research, and the case study selection. The next chapter will apply this analytical definition of ideology to the intellectual and institutional history of the Iranian state to

complete the model and sub-models illustrating the internal composition of Iran's state ideology.

A critical constructivist approach to ideology

The study of ideas in the field of International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis has been ubiquitous since the birth of the discipline itself.[63] So has been the debate surrounding its usefulness and its feasibility.[64] The study of ideas has been increasingly systematised since the constructivist turn in the last few decades, spurring an array of theoretical and methodological perspectives. Among the different ideational phenomena that have been a staple of IR analyses, ideology has been the one which perhaps has received less attention in this new wave of theorisation, and, in spite of its thematic salience, it is seldom codified into coherent theoretical frameworks.

The study of ideology has been a focal conceptual drive for IR scholarship during the height of the Cold War,[65] and, after falling out of fashion with détente, it rose to prominence again with of the decline of Soviet power in the 1980s.[66] Decreased interest in the study of ideology and ideas during détente was paralleled by the rise of structuralist theories in IR and political science. Political scientists attempted to codify the study of ideology within a behaviouralist approach.[67] Waltz's structural realism has been commonly

[63] For a classical perspective on the danger of idealism, see Carr, Edward Hallett, and Michael Cox. *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*.
[64] For a skeptical view on the explanatory power of ideology, see: Levi, Werner. 'Ideology, Interests, and Foreign Policy.' *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1970, pp. 1–31.
[65] See for instance: Schweitzer, Arthur. 'Ideological Strategy.' *Western Political Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1962, pp. 46–66.
[66] See for instance: Checkel, Jeff. 'Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution.*' World Politics*, vol. 45, no. 2, 1993, pp. 271–300.
[67] For examples of behaviouralist approached to the study of ideas, see: Mcclosky, Herbert. 'Consensus and Ideology in American Politics.' *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 58, no. 2, 1964, pp. 361–382; Converse, Philip E. 'The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics (1964).' *Critical Review* (New York, N.Y.), vol. 18, no. 1-3, 2006, pp. 1–74.

accused in the literature of discrediting the importance of ideational studies,[68] though he himself argued that he was explaining pattern in international relations. He was not explaining the determinants of state behaviour. Although the study of ideas and ideology has been an integral part of the realist school, after the rise structural realism it has more often been associated with liberal and constructivist schools of IR.[69] In reality, the study of ideas has never completely left realist analyses, remaining for instance an important component of Walt's theory of balance of threat.[70] Recently, the intersection of ideology and geopolitics has become again the object of study of realist-oriented scholars,[71] spurring debates on whether it constitutes a dilution of realism or a return to its origins.

Behaviouralist approaches pioneered by the likes of Philip Converse, on the other hand, have laid the foundation for the study of ideology in the field of conflict studies. This field has been extremely prolific in its rigorous empirical study of ideology, providing great insight in the merits and limits of ideological analysis, as well as innovative ways to operationalise ideology. Oppenheim and Weintraub distinguish between political ideology and doctrine to explain the lower incidence of violence against civilians in ideologically driven insurgent groups.[72] Kalyvas and Balcells also shed a light on the role of ideology in conflict analysis.[73] Scholars following this line of thought highlight both the instrumental and the intrinsic value of ideology for combatants, conceptually bridging the gap between rationalist and constructivist approaches to the study of ideas.[74] Beyond the field of conflict

[68] Wendt, Alexander. *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 1.
[69] Walker, R. B. J. 'Realism, Change, and International Political Theory.' *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1987, pp. 65–86.
[70] Walt, Stephen M. *The Origins of Alliances*. 2013.
[71] Brands, Hal. 'Democracy vs Authoritarianism: How Ideology Shapes Great-Power Conflict.' *Survival* (London), vol. 60, no. 5, 2018, pp. 61–114.
[72] Oppenheim, Ben, and Michael Weintraub. 'Doctrine and Violence: The Impact of Combatant Training on Civilian Killings.' *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 29, no. 6, 2017, pp. 1126–1148.
[73] Kalyvas, Stathis N. and Balcells, Laia, 'Did Marxism Make a Difference? Marxist Rebellions and National Liberation Movements', *APSA 2010 Annual Meeting Paper*, 2010.
[74] See for instance: Sanín, Francisco Gutiérrez, et al. 'Ideology in Civil War: Instrumental Adoption and Beyond.' *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2014, pp. 213–226.

studies, behaviouralist approaches continue to inform studies of the role of ideology and public opinion in policymaking.[75] This systematisation of the study of ideology is mostly absent from the field of Iranian foreign policy analysis, where ideology has often been loosely invoked but rarely systematically explained.

The development of behaviouralist approaches to the study of ideology and the neorealist shunning of ideational explanations are to a certain extent related. Two key premises of neorealist theories are that only the systemic level of analysis has explanatory value for understanding structural patterns in international relations, and that ideas are superfluous for this purpose. Most neorealist scholars do not reject the study of ideas out of rump materialism, though a number of authors does maintain that ideas are merely epiphenomenal on the underlying material structures of power;[76] rather, the objection is that ideas do not operate causally at the systemic level. Parallel to these assumptions, behaviouralist approaches study the effect of ideas only at the individual level: the presence or absence of ideology is taken as an independent variable whose effect over the selected dependent variable is measured usually through a combination of surveys techniques and statistical analysis

Behaviouralist approaches share a common perspective on the study of ideology with liberal approaches: they both conceive of ideologies as fixed set of ideas that are held by individuals more or less subconsciously, and of ideas as unchanging properties of the actor under study. The influence of classical microeconomic assumptions on these approaches is noticeable: in both frameworks, ideas are conceived as a binary variable whose presence explains variation in expected behaviour. The main difference between

[75] See for instance: Mirilovic, Nikola, and Myunghee Kim. 'Ideology and Threat Perceptions: American Public Opinion toward China and Iran.' *Political Studies*, vol. 65, no. 1, 2017, pp. 179–198.
[76] See for instance: Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. *Norton*, 2001.

these two approaches is that liberalism has been traditionally concerned not with single individuals but with the role that institutions play in the proliferation and codification of ideas in policymaking. Liberal scholars have also been less interested in the study of ideology per se, and more inclined towards the study of ideas in foreign policy and of norms in the international system.[77] Although there is substantial overlap between liberal studies of ideas and 'rationalist' or 'conventional' constructivist approaches, the difference between the two schools is found in the way in which each conceptualises the relationship of institutions and ideas. Classical liberalism is less interested in 'opening the black box' of ideas, and more concerned with the empirical mechanisms that allow, for example, ideas of peace and cooperation to become embedded in the international system and change it. Constructivism, on the other hand, does not assume that the ideas are static and is therefore interested in tracing the development of ideas over time.

The difference between liberal and conventional constructivist schools is often blurry. Examples of this scholarship are the works of Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane.[78] Keohane's seminal book co-edited with Judith Goldstein, *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, is often considered a staple of constructivist analysis.[79] Goldstein and Keohane argued in favour of idea's causal power in the policymaking process, contra neorealist accounts. They proposed a typology of ideas, hypothesising a different causal path for each type;[80] in doing so, they moved beyond the more mechanist accounts of early liberal accounts. Goldstein and Keohane, however, still held that ideational analysis only explains 'empirical anomalies that

[77] See for instance: Finnemore, Martha, and Sikkink, Kathryn. 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change.' International Organization, Vol. 52, no. 4, 1998, pp. 887–917.
[78] Nye, Joseph S. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. 1st ed., Public Affairs, 2004; Keohane, Robert O. *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. Princeton University Press, 1984.
[79] Goldstein, Judith, and Robert O. Keohane. *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*. 2019.
[80] Goldstein. *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, p. 12.

can be resolved only when ideas are taken into account';[81] this assumption informs their research agenda, which by design looks at the effect of ideas and not at their origins.[82] The research design of this thesis disagrees with both of these assumptions: it argues that ideas are not merely residual explanations to their material counterparts but integral parts of a model of the international system that makes the interrelation between ideational and material factors as its central analytical insight. In doing this, I am distancing myself from the conventional, positivist constructivist approach and aligning myself with critical, interpretivist constructivist accounts of international relations.

The constructivist school is characterised by a rich internal debate between the positivist and the interpretivist currents. There exist profound differences in many scholars' conception of what should be the goal of constructivism. Questions of the nature of the international system (ontology) and of the ways in which we can know about it (epistemology) are central to this debate. Ted Hopf identifies the epistemological divide between positivist and non-positivist approaches as one of the most salient fault lines within the constructivist school.[83] He argues that 'conventional' and 'critical' constructivism both accept that actors and structures are mutually constituted. They both share a research programme that asks whether the social institutions that realism and liberalism assume to be fixed components of the international system are in fact historically contingent or socially constructed. Where they differ, he claims, is the extent to which 'critical' constructivism is willing to follow through on the implementation of a more radical epistemology. This leads them to claim that certain things we take as given and knowable in the study of IR, such as

[81] Goldstein. *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, p. 6.
[82] Goldstein. *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, p. 6.
[83] Hopf, Ted. 'The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory.' *International Security*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1998, pp. 171–200.

state identity, are in fact not the unchangeable variables we think they are and cannot be trusted as the starting point of any empirical analysis.

Albert Yee goes as far as declaring that the controversies between the two schools' epistemologies are irresolvable.[84] He concludes that there remains an irreconcilable divide between positivist approaches claiming that ideas cause policy outcomes indirectly by shaping the conditions that make certain policy outcome acceptable or desirable, and interpretivist approaches that maintain that, beyond imposing linguistic constraints, ideas directly cause policy outcomes because they are inseparably embedded in the political practices they regulate.[85] This thesis is explicitly tilted towards the latter: it adopts an interpretivist, or 'reflectivist',[86] approach to the study of international relations, aiming to uncover ideology as the structure that give meaning to foreign policy. In doing so, it is committed to providing a coherent ontological model of the international system that answers the question of how material and ideational factors interact.

The observation of the theoretical necessity to bring ontology back on the table is best illustrated by David Dessler. He observes that 'a theory's ontology is both the basis of its explanatory power and the ultimate grounding of any claim to superiority over rival theories'.[87] He also explains that a theory whose ontology focuses on the systemic level does not necessarily discount the role of human agency, but rather seeks to investigate more deeply the circumstances that make it possible:

[84] Yee, Albert S. 'The Causal Effects of Ideas on Policies.' *International Organization*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1996, pp. 69-108.
[85] Yee. 'The Causal Effects of Ideas on Policies.' p. 98; see also: Singer, J. David. 'The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations.' *World Politics*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1961, pp.77-92
[86] For the distinction between rationalist and reflectivist approaches, see: Keohane, Robert O. 'International Institutions: Two Approaches.' *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1988, pp. 379–396.
[87] Dessler, David. 'What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?' *International Organization*, vol. 43, no. 3, 1989, p. 444.

> The job of structural theory is to explain the connections between the conditions of action and action itself. Structural theory 'brackets,' or sets aside, considerations of the agential powers underpinning action.[88]

One of the aims of this theoretical chapter is thus to provide a better account of the interplay between material and ideational factors to ground an analysis of the role that ideational factors, and ideology in particular, play in foreign policy making. It aims to do so by challenging the dualism between material and ideational factors. This will provide a general definition of the role that ideology plays in the international system and in foreign policy. As it was stated in the introduction to this chapter, the lack of such analytically rigorous definition in the study of the ideology of Iran and of ideology in general is one of the main academic issues underlying the stagnation of the debate surrounding Iran's foreign policy and its relations with Islamist ideologies.

The historical and the analytic approaches to the study of ideology

The fact that 'ideology' is an essentially contested concept is such a common starting point for many studies on the subject that it has become almost a truism. One of the main driving forces of this enduring ambiguity is the fact that within the study of ideology there are two fundamentally distinct approaches, which I shall call the historical and the analytic approaches. I am not the first one to highlight a perceived chasm within the study of ideology. Many eminent theorists, such as Thompson,[89] have pointed to the rivalry between 'exclusive', or 'reductive', and 'inclusive' conceptions of ideology as the main watershed

[88] Dessler, 'What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?', p. 443.
[89] Thompson, John B. *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*. 1984.

in the field.[90] Others, such as Bourdon, have talked of 'local' and 'general' ideologies.[91] A third explanation posits the 'pejorative' and the 'neutral' connotation of ideology as the driving divide.[92] All these accounts claim that the conceptual ambiguity of ideology is caused by definitional disputes. I argue that one of the main causes of the conceptual ambiguity of ideology is that there are two distinct questions that can guide a researcher in their study of ideology.

The two questions driving different approaches to the study of ideology are, respectively, 'how does ideology grip people?', and 'how has (this) ideology emerged?'. This framing of the issue of ideology constitutes a reformulation of the question of whether there is one ideology, or multiple ideologies.[93] The advantage of this perspective is that it shifts the locus of disagreement away from definitional parameters, and towards the aim of one's inquiry. The question of 'how does ideology grip people?' takes the individual as the unit of analysis. It asks through what mechanisms does ideology come to be accepted by a person, and how does it affect an individual's worldview and decision-making. The question may be scaled up from the individual to the societal level; however, it always presumes a micro-foundation of the phenomenon. I have called it the analytical approach to the question of ideology: by looking at the cognitive mechanisms through which ideology operates, it tends to de-emphasise the spatio-temporal dimension of the phenomenon in favour of its

[90] The exclusive conception of ideology sees only those political beliefs which enable structures of domination as being truly ideological; the inclusive conception of ideology sees all political beliefs as ideologies, irrespective of whether the beliefs guide action oriented towards preserving, destroying, or rebuilding the social order.

[91] Boudon, Raymond. 'Local vs General Ideologies: A Normal Ingredient of Modern Political Life.' *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1999, pp. 141–161. Here 'total' ideology denotates all-encompassing worldviews, while 'partial' ideology refers to a set of truth-claims and normative beliefs held about a discrete subject.

[92] Larraín, Jorge. *The Concept of Ideology*. Hutchinson, 1979. Pejorative conceptions, following the Marxian tradition, define ideology as false consciousness; neutral conceptions simply term that ideology is the expression of a given worldview, remaining agnostic about its truth-value and effect on society.

[93] For an overview of the distinction, see: Freeden, Michael. *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

logical relation to the subject. Approaches preoccupied with this question aim to uncover atemporal processes that explain the relationship between ideology and its subject. This approach may come into two variants: a critical-Marxist school, which looks at relations of power and of domination as ahistorical phenomena intrinsic to the human condition;[94] and a positivist school, which studies the cognitive mechanisms through which ideology influences people.[95] This approach is ill-suited to explain the role that ideology plays in foreign policy because its atemporality and its commitment to individual-level micro-foundation cannot produce a model that looks at a historically and socially contingent phenomenon like state ideology.

The second approach is the historical one. This assumes that ideology is a dynamic phenomenon bound to a specific spatio-temporal frame. It usually situates the historical beginning of ideology in the late 18th century; it sees the French Revolution and the broader processes of modernisation as pivotal to its emergence.[96] It locates ideology at the institutional level, defining the nation-state as its spatial framework.[97] The question that drives this approach is not what grips individuals, but how did political ideologies come to be.[98] This approach contends that it is not possible to understand ideology by looking only at its formal relation with the individual subject: there is something distinctively unique about the modern phenomenon of ideology that did not predate the rise of nation-states and

[94] See: Glynos, Jason. 'The Grip of Ideology: A Lacanian Approach to the Theory of Ideology.' *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2001, pp. 191–214.
[95] For examples in the field of political science, see: Prothro, James W, and Charles M Grigg. 'Fundamental Principles of Democracy: Bases of Agreement and Disagreement.' *The Journal of* Politics, vol 22, no. 2, 1960, pp. 276-94.
[96] For examples of historical accounts of ideology, see: Jahn, Beate, Ken Booth, and William Bain. 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice: Liberalism, Ideology, and Religion in World Politics.' *International Relations*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2019, pp. 322–337; Mello, Brian. 'The Islamic State: Violence and Ideology in a Post- colonial Revolutionary Regime.' *International Political Sociology*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2018, pp. 139–155; Miller, Manjari Chatterjee. *Wronged by Empire: Post-imperial Ideology and Foreign Policy in India and China*. 2013; Adraoui, Mohamed-Ali. *The Foreign Policy of Islamist Political Parties: Ideology in Practice. Edinburgh*, 2019.
[97] Cassels, Alan. *Ideology and International Relations in the Modern World*. Routledge, 1996.
[98] Halliday, Fred. *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*. Cambridge, 2005, pp. 196-198.

mass politics. This is the theoretical approach to the study of ideology from which I derived the concept of state ideology, and whence I shall ground my theoretical model.

This study aligns itself with the critical constructivist school of IR and, within it, with the historical approach to the study of ideology.[99] It claims that ideology is not a static phenomenon caused by unchanging cognitive or social mechanisms, but rather a dynamic one: it cannot be understood without referring to both its genealogy and the present context in which it is embedded. A clear example of this approach is the work of Adib-Moghaddam. Although he takes a critical constructivist and a historical approach to the study of Iran's foreign policy, he informs his study with a robust theoretical model. This includes a definition of foreign policy culture as 'the cultural expression of the dominant Weltanschauung carried by the elites', [100] as well as a four-step model of the production of foreign policy.

The everchanging nature of ideology determines that we can only explain the role of ideology in policymaking at a single point in time. A further implication of assuming that ideology is bound to its context is the admission of the existence of a multiplicity of ideologies, each bound to a specific spatio-temporal frame. This admission does not necessarily negate that there is a degree of universality to the phenomenon of ideology, as the analytical school maintains. In fact, while the analytical approach operates at a level of abstraction that is poorly suited to capture the granularity of a country-level study, the theoretical models it depicts are valuable. A historical analysis that is not grounded in a robust analytical understanding of the nature and role of ideology will inevitably devolve

[99] Stig Jarle. Hansen. *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012*. 2014; Cassels, Alan. *Ideology and International Relations in the Modern World*. Routledge, 1996. Haghayeghi, Mehrdad. 'Politics and Ideology in the Islamic Republic of Iran.' *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1, 1993, pp. 36–52; Posch, Walter. 'Ideology and Strategy in the Middle East: The Case of Iran.' *Survival* (London), vol. 59, no. 5, 2017, pp. 69–98.
[100] Adib-Moghaddam, Arshin. Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic. Hurst, 2007, p. 32.

into cherry picking and anecdotal evidencing. To avoid this, it is necessary to marry this definitional insight to the structural-level approach of the historical analyses of ideology. Historical accounts of ideology need precise definitions and clear ontologies as much as analytical accounts.[101] It is the purpose of this chapter to provide such a foundation for the study of Iran's foreign policy.

In an influential study, Gerring analyses various definitions of ideology with the intent to find a core minimal definition.[102] He maintains that coherence, contrast, and stability are the three key attributes present in almost all surveyed definitions. Similarly, Leader Maynard contends that the key attribute that distinguishes ideology from other ideational phenomena is coherence.[103] However, this kind of minimal definitions of ideology is largely uninformative for a researcher: they do not explain what ideology actually *does*. In fact, in a separate article Leader Maynard goes on to define ideology as 'what shapes actor's understanding of security, strategy and power politics'.[104] What this goes to show is that a working definition of ideology, and, in our case, of state ideology, ought to relate the nature of ideology to its function. In other words, it is not enough to say what ideology is made of, we need to establish what it does in relation to its nature.

After surveying the definitions of ideology used in the fields of international relations, foreign policy analysis, and political theory, I observed that there are four major types of definition employed. I have categorised these as the cultural, linguistic, functional, and institutional definition of ideology. Cultural definitions identify ideology as a subset of

[101] See for instance: Roy, Olivier. *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State*. 2017; Hunt, Michael H. *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*.
[102] Gerring, John. 'Ideology: A Definitional Analysis.' *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 4, 1997, pp. 957–994.
[103] Leader Maynard, Jonathan, and Matto Mildenberger. 'Convergence and Divergence in the Study of Ideology: A Critical Review'. *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2018, pp. 591–591.
[104] Leader Maynard, Jonathan. 'Ideology and Armed Conflict.' *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 56, no. 5, 2019, p. 637.

culture, after Geertz's influential analysis;[105] these tend to be neutral definitions emphasising that ideology operates at a collective level through structures of meaning.[106] The linguistic definition is closely related to the cultural definition, but the emphasis is on ideology as grammar rather than culture.[107] One of the clearest examples is Thompson's reformulation of Gouldner's definition of ideology as 'the linguistic legislature which defines what is available for public discussion and what is not'.[108] The third category is the miscellaneous one of functional definitions. This includes those works that define ideology in relation to its effect on society and politics.[109] Notable examples in this category are Haas's definition of ideology as 'a principle upon which a particular leadership group attempts to legitimate its claims to rule',[110] and Owens' definition of ideology as 'a belief system that explains and justifies a preferred political order in society'.[111] The fourth and last type of definitions is the institutional one. This is a subset of the functional type where the focus is placed on the political and social structures through which ideology operates rather than on its effect.[112] While this definition is most prevalent in sociology and political theory, an example within the discipline of IR is Halliday's definition of ideology as a 'set

[105] Geertz, Clifford, and Robert Darnton. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essa*ys. Third ed., 2017.
[106] Another example of theories of ideology based on cultural analysis is: Balkin, J. M. *Cultural Software: A Theory of Ideology*. Yale University Press, 1998. IR authors that use cultural definition include Hunt, Michael H. *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Yale University Press, 2009; Ross, Marc Howard. 'The Culture of Conflict and Conflict Management: Linking Societal and Dispute Level Theories.' *Zeitschrift Für Ethnologie*, vol. 115, 1990, pp. 91–109.
[107] An example of a theorists that employs this perspective is Feuer, Lewis S. *Ideology and the Ideologists*. Blackwell, 1975. IR Authors that use linguistic definitions include: Mandaville, Peter G., and Andrew J. Williams. *Meaning and International Relations*. Routledge, 2003; Mihaylov, Dimitar. 'The Lingering Ideology of Daesh: Views from the Salafi-Jihadi Inferno.' *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2017, pp. 179–190.
[108] Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*, p. 85.
[109] Freer, Courtney, and Freer, C. *Rentier Islamism: The Influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gulf Monarchies*. Oxford University Press, 2018. Knight, Kathleen; 'Transformations of the Concept of Ideology in the Twentieth Century.' *American Political Science Review*, vol. 100, no. 4, 2006, pp. 619–626; Mittelman, James H. *Whither Globalization? The Vortex of Knowledge and Ideology*. Routledge, 2004; Maynard, 'Ideology and Armed Conflict.'
[110] Haas, Mark L. *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989*. Cornell University Press, 2005, p. 5.
[111] Owen, John M. *Liberal Peace, Liberal War: American Politics and International Security*. 1997, p. 19.
[112] This definition is more common in the works of sociologists and political theorists; for an overview, see Larrain on Gramsci and Althusser. An example within the field of IR is Ayoob's work on political Islam.

of explicit, or systematic, beliefs about politics [that] are not emanations of collective psyche but […] are creations of modern states'.[113] Since this thesis embraces a historical approach to the study of ideology, it will adopt a functional/institutional definition of state ideology. The definition advanced by Eastwood is a great starting point:

> Ideology is reducible neither to beliefs held by subjects nor to material practices that instantiate those beliefs. It is a structural relationship between social practices and individuals who participate in them. [114]

This definition identifies ideology as a structural relationship, rather than a static collection of ideas. The irreducibility of ideology to its core components brings us to another theoretical puzzles that needs to be addressed before a working definition of state ideology can be presented. This is the relationship between ideational and material factors in the international system.

Halliday advances an answer to this problem which is of great relevance for my own approach.[115] He says that the study of ideology needs to be sociological, in the sense of looking at the relationship of ideas to political and social interests. It also needs to be historical, that is, it should start from the assumption that contemporary values may present themselves as grounded by the past but are in fact shaped primarily by their contemporary context. This, however, does not mean that past framing is insignificant: on the contrary, historical context makes up the building blocks through which ideology is re-modelled in the present context and should thus be carefully studied. This is the grounding assumption which will guide the historical analysis in the next chapter.

[113] Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations.*
[114] Eastwood, James, et al. 'Rethinking Militarism as Ideology: The Critique of Violence after Security.' *Security Dialogue*, vol. 49, no. 1-2, 2018, pp. 48.
[115] Halliday, Fred. *The Middle East in International Relations.*

This thesis will advance an integrated approach synthesising the analytical and historical schools. This will be done by borrowing the insight of Anthony Gidden's theory of structuration. Gidden's theory will be used exclusively as an analytical, and not a substantive tool.[116] This means that this thesis does intend to implement his solution to the agent-structure dilemma in its empirical work. Rather, it intends to use Gidden's explanation of agent-structure relations to reconceptualise the relationship between material and ideational factors in the international system. This will provide a better understanding of what role ideology plays in policymaking, while remaining compatible with the core dynamism of the historical approach advanced in this chapter.[117]

Gidden's theory of structuration: towards a definition of state ideology

The core of Gidden's theory of structuration is the attempt to overcome the agent-dilemma structure. He argues that it is necessary to accept at once that there are irreducible social structures that constrain agents, whilst also maintaining that actors have real agency over their decisions. This synthesis between structuralists and individualist ontologies, he claims, can be achieved by placing the individual and the structural level on equal footing: unlike structural theories (in IR, world theories for instance), structuration does not assume that structure is prior to and overdetermines individuals; and unlike individualist theories (in IR, neorealism or rational choice theories), structuration does not attempt to explain agents' decision abstracted from social structures. Agents and structures are, to use a constructivist

[116] Wendt, Alexander E. 'The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory'. *International Organization*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1987, pp. 335–70.
[117] Giddens, Anthony. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge: Polity, 1984, p. 3: 'An ontology of time-space as constitutive of social practices is basic to the conception of structuration, which begins from temporality and thus, in one sense, 'history''.

terms, mutually co-constituted, and yet ontologically independent- that is to say, they remain two distinct entities.

Gidden's conception of the interdependence between agent and structure is based on the premise that their dualism must be reconceptualised as a duality. Agent and structure are complementary rather than opposite: they both work in tandem to uphold the social system of which they are part.[118] Wendt noticed two important implications of structuration theory for the study of IR:

> Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the agents' conceptions of what they are doing in their activity, [meaning that they] have an inherently discursive dimension… Just as social structures are ontologically dependent upon and therefore constituted by the practices and self-understandings of agents, the causal powers and interests of those agents, in their own turn, are constituted and therefore explained by structures.[119]

Carlsnaes comes to a similar conclusion while discussing the potential of structuration theory in foreign policy analysis: 'A recognition of this discursive form of mutual constitution is thus both historically and analytically of crucial importance to the systematic study of foreign policy'. [120] He, however, eventually settles for its rival theory, the 'morphogenetic' model, because he maintains that the core insight of structuration theory, the duality of agency and structure, cannot inform an empirical research programme that is both actionable and original. Other scholars have raised similar doubts about the possibility of implementing structuration theory as anything more than a philosophical exercise.[121]

[118] Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, p. 2.
[119] Wendt, *op. cit.*, p. 359.
[120] Carlsnaes, Walter. 'The Agency-Structure Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis.' International Studies Quarterly, vol. 36, no. 3, 1992, pp. 245–270.
[121] Archer, Margaret S. 'Morphogenesis versus Structuration: On Combining Structure and Action.' The British Journal of Sociology, vol. 33, no. 4, 1982, pp. 455–483; Gregson, Nicky. 'On Duality and Dualism: The Case of Structuration and Time Geography'. *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 10, no. 2, June 1986, p. 197.

While I agree with these critiques, I think that the same rebuttal will be less compelling to the object to which I am applying Giddens's insights, the duality between ideational and material factors. This is because I am not attempting to bridge the gap between different levels of analysis in a single empirical analysis: on the contrary, I am claiming that ideational factors, just like material factors, are located at the systemic level and not at the individual level. Gidden's structuration is used here merely as a theoretical guideline for thinking about the nature and function of ideology and is thus assumed a priori. What this chapter is not aiming to do is demonstrating the empirical usefulness of Gidden's solution to the agent-structure dilemma. Giddens provides one crucial definition of structure:

> The rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction.[122]

When Giddens states that rules and resources are also means of reproduction, he is claiming that the mechanism through which the system operates and reproduces itself is contained in its building blocks. The conceptual innovation of Giddens' theory lays in the fact that he highlights the link between the categories of 'resources' and 'means': when looking at systems, the 'what' question (resources) and the 'how' question (means) cannot be thought of in isolation, because they are not functionally and ontologically separated. I will rely on Sewell's analysis to unpack Giddens's conceptual innovation.[123] He argues that employing Gidden's notion of structure allows one to build the possibility of change in the structure of the international system. Sewell's most important, and most needed, contribution is his re-definition of structure:

[122] Giddens, Anthony. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Polity, 1984, p. 96.
[123] Sewell, William. 'A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation.' The *American Journal of* Sociology, vol 98, no. 1, 1992, pp. 1-29.

> Structure is a set of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tends to be reproduced by that social action.[124]

When this is applied to the field of IR, I propose to think of schemas as corresponding to ideational factors and resources to material factors. The relationship between material and ideational factors is thus reconceptualised as a duality rather than dualism, where both are logically distinct from one another, but functionally inseparable in the way in which they co-constitute the structure of the international system. Both ideas and matter however would be effectively inert if not for the means of reproduction of the system. I define the means of reproduction of a system as a structure that is emergent on its schemas and resources, but irreducible to them.[125] State ideology is the structure through which the reproduction of the international system occurs, and which is supervenient on the ideational and material building blocks that make up the rules and resources of the international system. Material and ideational factors give rise to ideology in the international system, but functionally they also necessitate and presuppose ideology to operate within the system. Ideology on the other hand makes ideational and material factors causally active in the international system by translating them into political categories for the consumption of the political agent. The individual thus remains the ultimate and deeper category through which any theoretical modelling of cause and effect in international politics must pass; however, the individual level has been 'bracketed off' in the current study to focus exclusively on the systemic level.

We have thus arrived at a general definition of state ideology. Ideology is that structure through which material and ideational factors interact in the international system; this is only possible because ideology provides the conversion matrix that allows for the conceptual synthesis of matter and ideas towards actionable polices. In this model, ideology

[124] Sewell, 'A Theory of Structure', p. 19
[125] For a similar Althusserian approach to ideology, see: Eastwood, 'Rethinking Militarism as Ideology'.

is the mechanism through which different elements of the structure of the international system coalesce to make and sustain a social structure.[126] This general definition is structural, and thus it is ahistorical, because it theorises the nature of the international system, but does not describe accurately any concrete historical instantiation of the system. It is also a functional definition, in the sense that it defines ideology on the basis of the role it plays in this model of the international system, and not on the basis of its ontology. This general definition on its own is not adequate to ground the empirical study of this thesis, and, as it has been anticipated, it will need to be supplemented by the historical analysis in the next chapter to produce a viable model for Iran's state ideology.

This definition of ideology, however, does drive the dynamism of Giddens's theory to the forefront. Structures, such as ideology, are dynamic rather than fixed because their existence arises from the interaction of schema and resources, or, in our case, of matter and ideas. This means that outside of a given interaction located in time and space, ideology is only an inert analytical category. This suggests that historical analysis is the ideal candidate for the application of this theoretical approach in the field of IR. The duality of ideas and matter dictates that the relationship between a structure and its component isn't a linear one, where either one temporarily or logically precedes the other, but rather one where cause and effect are simultaneous. I shall refer to this as the 'synchronicity of cause and effect'. This key characteristic serves to qualify the type of historical analysis this study should employ. While a longue durée analysis will be useful to inform the premises that should guide the empirical analysis, it cannot be a substitute for it. The synchronicity of cause and effect means that this analysis of Iran's foreign policy will focus on unpacking the way in which

[126] For a similar account of how ideology orders domestic politics see Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics.*

historical legacies in the form of ideology mingle with material factors at a single point in time to affect state behaviour.

The synchronicity of cause and effect also dictated that this study must abandon the ambition to establish a clear, one-way causal link between ideology and policy outcome, because ideology shapes foreign policy behaviour just as much as foreign policy shapes ideology. The mutual causation of ideology and policy is thus built into the model, and not aimed to be proven empirically. The only question is whether this is a useful assumption that delivers new insights into state behaviour. Its objective instead is to prove that the Four Pillar model is a better tool to provide a richer interpretation of Iran's foreign policy, one that can better address the gap in the literature on Central Asia.

Methodology

The assumption of dynamism built into a Giddensian-inspired model of the international system makes it necessary to discount one common assumption guiding the study of ideology in foreign policy. This is the assumption of linearity. These assumptions are not necessarily un-helpful to understand foreign policy decision-making in general, however they do not fit the model of ideology advanced in this chapter. Linearity is to be discounted because, as the synchronicity of cause and effects dictates, it is incorrect to conceptualise ideology as intervening at one specific stage in the decision-making process. The interaction between ideology and policymaking is best conceptualised as a continuous background process.

The alternative is to build a model that is focused not on linearity but on synchronicity. The focus of the Four Pillar model will not be on chronologically ordered steps in the foreign policy decision making process, but rather on how the simultaneous

overlap of different processes through which ideology operates converge in shaping a country's foreign policy strategy at a particular point in time. This model will look at Iran's foreign policy strategy as snapshots in time. However, granular case studies of single snapshots can only show the prevailing foreign policy approach at one point in time and cannot tell us much about the usefulness of the theoretical model as a whole: the three main case studies (the dissolution of the USSR, Tajikistan's Civil War, and Uzbekistan's IMU insurgency) are primarily descriptive exercises through which I apply the Four Pillar model onto specific instances of Iran's foreign policy choices to prove its usefulness.

In order to make the jump from a simple snapshot analysis to a collated narrative analysis we need to assess what other exogenous factors, regional and international, have been playing in the background in between the snapshots. These factors will have set the constraints within which Iran chose its foreign policy strategy in Central Asia. This realisation precipitated a significant change in the criterion for case selection of this study. Originally, this thesis was meant to cover a period of thirty years, spanning from 1990 to 2017. The purpose was to observe long-term changes in Iran's foreign policy pattern after the revolution. However, I quickly realised that even if I were to find evidence of changes in Iran's ideology as well as in its foreign policy, I would not be able to say anything meaningful about this change. This is because of the limitations that using a method of analysis based on snapshots analysis imposes: too many variables could have precipitated the shift in between those two snapshots, especially if one was taken, for example, in 1992 and the latter in 2011.

After having run a preliminary analysis, I have come to the conclusion that by restricting the time period in which I will apply my ideological analysis, I can describe meaningfully change over time in policymaking *as well as* inferring the role that ideology

played at X time in a policy choice. The key is controlling the exogenous independent variables that may affect Iran's ideological outlook. One of the factors that is most likely to cause a radical shift in Iran's ideology is the level of hostility in the regional or international environment (see the Two Axis model, p. 77). For this reason, I have chosen to narrow the time frame for my empirical analysis between 1990-2001. In this way, two major exogenous shocks to Iran's foreign policy are cut out of the equation: the first is the Iran-Iraq war (1981-1988); the seconds are the UN-sanctioned invasion of Afghanistan (September 2001) and the US-led invasion of Iraq (2003). After considering some of the material I collected on the period 2002-2017, I concluded that a linear analysis encompassing the entire period 1990-2017 would be misleading. Iran's ideology has substantially evolved after the Afghanistan invasion, the 2003 Iraq war, and the nuclear negotiations, to the point where a meaningful analysis of the post 2001 period would require a separate re-calibration of the Four Pillar Model. By excluding these two confounding events from the scope of my research, I will be able to build a more solid case on the feedback-relationship between Iran's ideology and its foreign policy in Central Asia.

We have specified what are the general analytical constraints imposed by the theoretical framework developed in this chapter and the choice of compounding snapshot analyses to describe the feedback relationship between ideology and foreign policy. This section will expand on the country-specific assumptions that will guide the empirical analysis. The subject of this study, as stated above, is Iran's foreign policy strategy in Central Asia; a country's foreign policy strategy is defined as the sum of the goals it aims to achieve in a pre-defined regional or international arena, and the tools employed to pursue them. Iran's foreign policy strategy is often advanced through overt tactics, covert tactics, ambiguous tactics, or a combination of the above. The first approach comprises all economic, political, diplomatic, and military activity that is directly attributable to the Iranian state.

This includes both friendly and conflictual actions, and it can engage with a variety of actors, including nation states, regional and international organisation, and non-state actors. These may include both civil non-state actors (civil societies, NGOs, academic networks, etc.) and political or para-military non-state actors (outlawed political parties, armed opposition, etc.). An example of Iran's overt policymaking in Central Asia includes Iran's diplomatic spats with Azerbaijan over joint exploitation of Caspian oil, Iran's application for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, or Iran's cooperation with Turkmenistan in building new transport links.

Covert policies comprise the array of actions that can be classified as 'low attribution'; these include political, economic, financial, and military actions that are neither officially recognised by the Iranian state nor present clear linkages to Iranian state institutions. Much as the first category, they can engage with a variety of actors, though they tend to concern Iran's relations with non-state actors, especially subversive political or paramilitary organisations. Example of these include the suspected financial and political links between the Iranian security apparatus and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, as discussed in Chapter 5. Other examples include traditional espionage and foreign assistance policies, such as Iran's alleged spying in Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan[127] or the secret dispatch of weapons to foreign armed groups in Afghanistan.[128]

The third and last tactic falls in between covert and overt actions; ambiguous policies have nebulous attributions, whereby some links between the Iranian state and the principal actor are either officially acknowledged or out in the public domain, but the Iranian state

[127] BBC Monitoring. 'Kazakhstan to expel three Iranians accused of spying'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 215; BBC Monitoring. 'Tajikistan and Iran in tit-for -tat expulsion'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 140; BBC Monitoring. 'Azeris accuse Iranian embassy of spying'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 278.
[128] BBC Monitoring. 'Kyrgyzstan voices concern to Iran over secret arms shipment'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 245.

cannot be shown to be directly accountable for specific actions undertaken by these third parties. Iran has in the last few decades heavily relied on these tactics in its Middle Eastern policies. The most well-known examples are Hezbollah in Lebanon and Houthis in Yemen. In Central Asia, an example of this ambiguous policy is Iran's relationship with the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRP), which is discussed in Chapter 4.

Foreign policy goals are defined as the set of desired outcomes that Iran seeks to pursue. The three tactics (overt, covert, and ambiguous) may be used to advance the same goal, or to advance conflicting goals. How Iran has chosen to employ these three pathways constitutes its foreign policy strategy in the region. This study contends that Iran's dual-track policy in Central Asia evolved to comprise both the use of overt tactics to advance Pan-Iranian goals, and the use of ambiguous and covert tactics to advance Pan-Islamic goals; these two sets of goals often conflicted in the short term, reflecting the competing interests of different branches of the Iranian state. In spite of their clashes, within a long-term view of Iran's objectives as a revolutionary state these two sets of goals appeared to be perfectly compatible. For a revolutionary state in a hostile regional and international environment, it is rational to defuse short term existential threats through diplomatic engagement while building ties to revolutionary actors who aim to change the political landscape of the neighbourhood. In practice, however, what happened was that the Iranian Foreign Ministry wanted to build closer ties with the very same foreign governments that the security apparatuses were trying to undermine. To understand Iran's foreign policy strategy in Central Asia, thus, we need to answer three background questions that will provide our guiding assumptions in the empirical analysis. These are:

- How did Iran perceive its role in the region?
- What was Iran's perception of Central Asia?

- What other exogenous (extra-regional) actors/interests played a role in Iran's calculations?

The first two questions will be answered in the next chapter. They invite a reflection into the presumed uniqueness of Iran's post-revolutionary stance on Central Asia. If scholars often consider the 1979 Islamic Revolution a watershed moment in Iran's modern history, whether this holds the same for Tehran's relations with Central Asia is a question that needs empirical assessment. Iran's construction of its national identity after 1979 has been a delicate balancing exercise between an old millenary, multi-ethnic and multicultural identity, and a new identity as a revolutionary state. This means, as it will be seen in Chapter 4, that the fall of the Soviet Union and the re-establishment of direct diplomatic relations between Iran and Central Asia found Iran's identity and place in the international system already in flux. A core empirical question for this thesis is whether Tehran's encounter with Central Asia after 1990 was guided by an age-old pattern of historical interaction, or whether newer, post-revolutionary ideas took the central stage in the process of mutual re-acquaintance. It can be anticipated that the result will be a complex mixture of old patterns and new ideas: Iran and Central Asian relations did not develop in a historical vacuum; nevertheless, these patterns have shifted over time and in response to a variety of geopolitical factors. The empirical chapters showcase the importance that Iranian pre-conceptions of Central Asia had in compromising the (re-)establishment of diplomatic relationship after 1991. They also show how age-old questions of Russo-Persian rivalry for regional influence were subordinated to and re-interpreted through the post-cold war unilateral momentum, and incorporated within the new post-revolutionary ideological system.

The third question on the role of exogenous factors problematises the importance of Central Asian policies for Iran's broader international strategy. When focusing on a

particular region or case study, it is easy to unquestionably assume that the phenomenon we are looking at must have an ad hoc explanation. To address this implicit bias, this thesis asks whether Central Asia occupies an independent role in Iran's calculations, or whether Iran's political goals in the region are in fact subordinate to extra-regional objectives, and thus can only be understood in the context of exogenous calculations. This question will be answered in the closing chapter of this thesis, Chapter 6, where it will be argued that US and Russian policies in Central Asia between 1995 and 1999 had a decisive role in shaping the conditions that gave rise to Iran's dual-track policy.

The factors that contribute to the creation of a country's foreign policy strategy can be grouped into three levels: international, regional, and domestic. Ideology operates at each of these three levels, albeit with different scope. As it has been explained, although the theoretical model presented in the next chapter accounts for all three levels, the empirical analysis of this thesis will only focus on the interaction between the regional and the international level and Iran's ideology. Moreover, it will only investigate Iranian perceptions, decisions, and actions in Central Asia, and will not inquire into the causes behind the policies of Central Asian states. The focus of this thesis will be solely on the Iranian side for a matter of linguistic constraints. This means that the picture this thesis will present will be partial by design: it is interested in retracing how Iran's interpretation of its historical legacy with Central Asia and its new post-revolutionary ideology contributed to shape its foreign policy strategy in Central Asia after 1991.

This choice is not dictated by a methodological prioritisation of the international over the domestic, but rather by material, linguistic and logistical constraints in accessing and interpreting evidence that could speak meaningfully about the interrelation between Iran's domestic developments and its ideology. As a European scholar with partial

knowledge of Farsi and no pre-existing institutional or personal ties to Iranian scholarly circles, I am not best placed to contribute originally to the body of knowledge on how internal political and economic developments shaped Iran's foreign policy in the 1990s. I hope to contribute to a clearer understanding of the way in which Iranian policymakers both utilised and were bounded by ideology to navigate the constantly shifting regional landscape that followed the dissolution of the USSR. The fact that the domestic (and individual) level of analysis will be bracketed out of this study does not discount the importance that the internal evolution of Iranian state institutions after the end of the Iran-Iraq war had in creating sticky bureaucratic legacies and an enduring political culture. The choice to exclude the domestic level reflects the scarce accessibility of key decision makers' thoughts in Iran via archival research or in person interviews.[129] Whilst the choice to focus on the regional and international levels is born out of necessity, it is expedient for the present day circumstances of Iran-West relations: understanding the role that regional and international factors have on Iran's foreign policy allows policymakers to better understand the effect that their preferred policies will have on Iran's behaviour beyond the immediate arena of Iran-West relations.

Concerning case selection strategies, I had originally come up with a matrix defining a set case selection criteria aiming to analyse six different case studies spanning across the three levels of analysis; I quickly realised that such a case selection strategy was unrealistic both in breadth and in depth: I could not tackle six different cases with the level of granularity that the theoretical framework I had chosen required, nor could I talk meaningfully about the role of ideology across all three levels. After I concluded my data

[129] At the start of my MPhil in International Relations in 2017, I discussed at length the possibility of conducting either archival research or language exchanges in Iran; unfortunately, but rather wisely, the committee overseeing my scholarship deemed that the nature of my research could make me run into serious complications during fieldwork in Iran.

collection, I realised that I had to discard my attempts at building an *a priori* case selection strategy and embrace a heuristic process for my case selection by grasping the overall trajectory of Central Asia in the 1990s and Iran's role in it.

After a preliminary analysis, it emerged that Iran was in no condition in the 1990s to set a pro-active agenda in the region: most of its independent diplomatic and economic initiatives amounted to too little, too late to win over the ex-USSR countries. Tehran was limited to a reactive policy due to the structural reverberations of the decade-long war with Iraq on its economic and political capital. The USSR dissolution, Tajikistan's civil war, and Uzbekistan's insurgency were selected as case studies because they represented the most disrupting events for the regional equilibrium of Central Asia in the 1990s. These events radically reconfigured the landscape of the region, and left Iran facing a genuine choice to pursue different policy options in response to the security changes. The presence of genuine option is the key to the case selection I operated.

These three snapshots were selected because presents a fundamental change in Central Asia's political equilibrium; this can also be referred to as a critical juncture, from the empirical method typical of historical institutionalism.[130] The literature on critical juncture pursues the study of institutional change by identifying 'crucial founding moments of institutional formation that send countries along broadly different developmental paths'.[131] In this sense, the entire decade of 1990s following the fall of the USSR could be considered a critical juncture for Central Asia and for Iran' relations with the region. Capoccia and Kelemen, on the other hand, define critical junctures as 'brief phases of

[130] Pierson, Paul. 'Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics'. *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 94, no. 2, pp. 251–67.
[131] Thelen, Kathleen. 'Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics'. *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1999, p. 387.

institutional flux'.[132] This is the definition I will be using when referring to the dissolution of the USSR, the Tajik Civil War, and the IMU insurgency as critical junctures for Central Asia. These crucial moments for this thesis represent fundamental changes in the regional landscape of Central Asia rather than in the domestic institutions of the Islamic Republic. The threshold for what counts as a critical juncture was not posited *a priori*: the onus of the justification for the case selection thus falls onto the empirical analysis itself to make a compelling enough case for the significance of the selected phenomena (see Figure 1). The principal criteria guiding the selection of these critical junctures has been whether these phenomena engineered regional shakeups that presented the Islamic Republic with a set of options to change, recalibrate, or continue its current foreign policy strategy. The liminal status of these critical junctures allows for a meaningful analysis of the role ideology played in policymaking (see Fig. 1). Key to the study of critical junctures in the school of historical institutionalism is the concept of path dependency: 'Junctures are 'critical' because they place institutional arrangements on paths or trajectories, which are then very difficult to alter'.[133] My work diverges from the tradition of critical juncture analysis in its interests in the openness of the juncture itself rather than in the closeness of its output. The theoretical relationship between the methodology of this thesis and that of historical institutionalism should be considered limited to the borrowing of the terminology and concept of critical juncture, and no formal attempt to path dependency analysis will be provided in this thesis.

Critical junctures are complex political phenomena that may last over time. The dissolution of the USSR, the Tajik Civil War and the IMU insurgency are the three critical

[132] Capoccia, Giovanni, and Kelemen, R. Daniel. 'The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism.' *World Politics*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2007, pp. 341–369.
[133] Pierson, Paul. *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*. Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 13.

Figure 1: Criterion for pivotal point selection

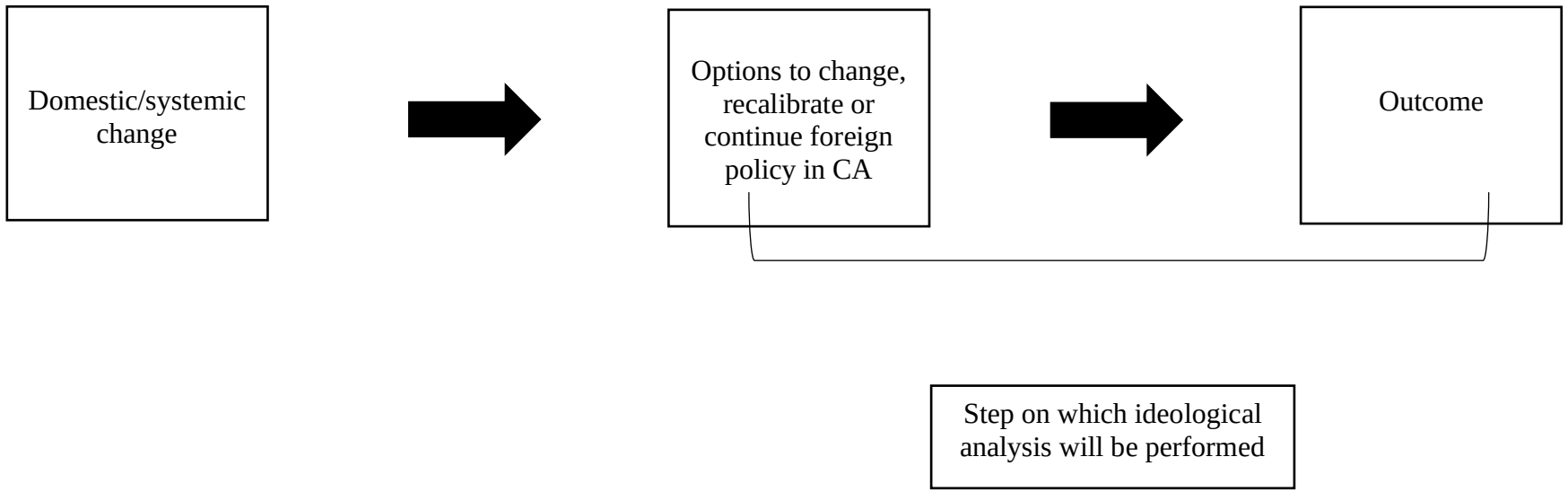


Figure 1: Diagram illustrating the general criterion guiding assessment of what constitutes a pivotal point The criterion requires that this data point is caused by an exogenous factor, engenders different possible reactions, and is followed by a choice to change or maintain current policies As illustrated above, the step from many options to one outcome is where I will apply the Four Pillar model to conduct ideological analysis.

junctures assessed; however, the duration of these phenomena makes them poorly suited for a snapshot analysis. Each case study has focused on the identification of what I call 'pivotal points'; unlike critical junctures, I define pivotal points not as phenomena but as single events that had significant disruptive effects onto the trajectory of a critical juncture. By focusing my analysis on events rather than phenomena, I can provide a more accurate temporal analysis of the way in which Iran reacted, or failed to react, to these critical changes in the regional balance of power.

As it was discussed in the introduction, there are few books solely dedicated to the study of Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia, and fewer with detailed empirics on the 1990s. Even though there exists extensive area study scholarship on Central Asia after the USSR dissolution, none of those studies focused extensively on the role of Iran. One of the biggest challenged I faced in my research was thus to build a chronology of Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia between 1990 and 2001. This chronology had to be detailed enough to allow me to make an informed and independent judgement on what phenomena to select as critical junctures and what events to elevate as pivotal points; it also had to include not only Iran's policies, but also Central Asian Republic's bilateral and regional relations, as well as Russian, Turkish, Chinese, and American policies in the region. I decided against relying on existing accounts of Iranian policy in the 1990s or in Central Asia to avoid relying on other scholars' selection of evidence.

Building a ten-year detailed chronology is a complex task. Due to my limited knowledge of Farsi and my lack of Russian knowledge, I was afraid to compromise the breadth and depth of my evidence by relying on English language sources. I have found, however, that the BBC Monitoring service provided excellent compounded summaries of translated original sources on their Central Asian weekly bulletin. *Inside Central Asia*

provided an invaluable source for military, diplomatic and economic development in Central Asia between 1994 and 2001. The service included regular monitoring of all official and major non-official news outlets from the ex-Soviet republics, Russia, and Iran, including occasional reports on radio broadcasts and television broadcasts. This resource allowed me to significantly increase my access to current news and to compensate, as much as possible, for my lack of language expertise. For the years 1989-1993, I relied on both BBC Monitoring reports and other English language archival sources (The Telegraph, The Times, The Guardian, The Independent, etc.) available online through *Lexis Nexus* portal, as well as consulting declassified British diplomatic cables from the National Archive. I have built the chronology with raw data extracted from these sources and stored in an Excel relational database. The database contains over 1700 entries, whereby each individual entry represents a separate event that took place in the Central Asian regional arena between 1989 and 2001. All entries are dated and referenced. These raw data were the basis for my case studies.

I have also collected textual information from a number of Iranian sources. I have primarily relied on two Iranian English language publications, *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs* and *AMU DARYA - The Iranian journal of Central Asian Studies*, although I have also consulted around 15 Persian language academic books written in the 1990s. The choice to focus on *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs* as the baseline for the ideological analysis of the three case studies is born both out of expediency as well as out of the consideration of the institutional positionality of the source. This journal was published by the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS). IPIS is a political think tank based in Tehran and affiliated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran. At the time, the editor in chief of the journal was Dr Abbas Maleki, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1988-1997), and Ali Akbar Velayati, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1981-1997) was a member of the journal's

editorial board. The appendix of this journal often includes original translation of conference speeches and bilateral round tables between the Iranian government and Russian or Central Asian envoys. Published in English by the *Centre for the Study of Central Asia and the Caucasus* (CSCAC), a research organisation under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' affiliated *Institute of Political and International Studies* (IPIS), *Amu Darya* was edited by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Seyyed Kamal Kharrazi, and, along with inviting foreign academic contributions, it often included speeches and short think pieces by elected officials, as well as official records of public conferences with neighbouring countries. These two primary sources have provided me with the material to conduct the ideological analysis of each case study.

Each case study will consist of three main analytical sections. The structure of each of the three case studies, as well as the role of the concluding chapter on geopolitics and geoenergy will be discussed at the end of next chapter because they are determined by the direct application of the Four Pillar model and of the theoretical assumptions discussed in this chapter.

The empirical chapters will make use of some analytical techniques I have acquired in my training as an analyst. These include: the use of time sequencing in Chapter 4 on the Tajik Civil War, and the use of link charting and spatial analysis in Chapter 5. In particular, Figure 15 (p. 211) shows an application of the technique called link charting. The diagram is the product of my manual analysis of all the single data points I collected concerning the IMU bombing of Tashkent in 1999 through archival research and literature review (see p. 210-12 for detailed explanation on the process). Link charting is a data analysis technique derived from network theory, especially social network analysis. Social network analysis is the process through which relationship and interactions between entities (whether

individuals, corporate, political parties or state apparatuses) are analyses with the purpose of discovering previously unknown links or unconnected thread to further study. This inductive process is typical of investigative settings. Network analysis is a staple in criminal analysis, as well as in related fields such as sanction investigation, human trafficking investigation, and financial crimes investigation. I have personally been trained in the principles of network analysis during a course on the principles of data analysis in international criminology. For the purpose of this thesis, I did not have the monetary, time, or software resources to construct and run a full network analysis of IMU on Analyst Notebook, as the proprietary software is notoriously expensive. Instead, I used a similar but more accessible software, Maltego, to manually map all the links. For this reason, I characterise this as a link mapping exercise rather than network analysis, in so far as I did not attempt to study the social network within which different non-state actors and state actors were interacting but limited myself at merely retracing the known points of interaction (links). Link and network analysis is crucial to most criminal and conflict related investigations, and I am currently working on a full network analysis for an on-going sanction report.

I use in this study link charting as a technique within the theoretical framework of Activity Based Intelligence (ABI). For the broader theoretical underpinning of these structured analytical techniques please refer to *Activity-Based Intelligence: Principles and Applications*. These techniques have been chosen because the principles of Activity Based Intelligence are compatible with the methodological principle of synchronicity of cause and effect imposed by a Giddensian definition of ideology. Among these, the principle of sequence neutrality, is especially well suited to the snapshot analyses of pivotal points around which the empirical chapters are based:

> The sequence in which events occur becomes fundamentally irrelevant—our only goal is to examine whether those data points can be correlated in space and time and only then begin to contextualize the meaning of those potential correlations. […] Sequence neutrality also has important implications for how we collect, store, and tag data. By positing that all data represents answers to certain questions, it implores us to collect and preserve the maximum amount of data as possible, limited only by storage space and cost. [..] Sequence neutrality, then, is not only an expression of the forensic mindset but a statement of warning to the analyst to consider the value of sequenced versus non-sequenced approaches to analysis. Humans have an intuitive bias to see causality when there is only correlation. [134]

This principle has guided the painstaking process of databasing, and the subsequent interpellation of the rich data collected. What emerged is that oftentimes answers to the questions of Iran's involvement in different critical events in Central Asia were more readily found by moving horizontally rather than vertically in the dataset and looking at what else was taking place in the region at that time. The principal example of this lateral movement is the geopolitical analysis presented in the concluding Chapter 6, whereby the changes in Iran's foreign policy observed in the preceding case studies are brought together by looking at parallel regional developments in the hydrocarbon market and at shifts in the global balance of power brought about by unipolarity.

[134] Biltgen, Patrick, and Stephen Ryan. *Activity-Based Intelligence: Principles and Applications*. 2016, p. 47-51.

Chapter 2

The Four Pillar Model: Looking at a Brief History of the Iranian Nation

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the theoretical model presenting the shape of Iran's post-revolutionary ideology and the mechanisms through which it affects the country's foreign policy. The Four Pillar Model is derived in this chapter from an engagement with modern Persian historiography and its debate on re-engaging with Iran's national identity as a modern political artifact. The Four Pillar model embodies the political ideology of Iran's decisionmakers, which also naturally embodies the historical orthodoxy that sees Iran as a millennia-old nation. For this reason, I will present a brief long-durée history of the Iranian nation from the perspective of this orthodoxy, highlighting the narrative of continuity, while providing context for its modern rebuttal or revision.

The Four-Pillar model of Iran's ideology and the Pan-Iranian and Pan-Islamic logics of foreign policy

In the last chapter, I defined ideology as the structure through which material and ideational factors interact in the international system, and, through the meanings they are assigned, they are finally codified into comprehensible value rankings. This general definition of ideology in the foreign policy decision process is however still too abstract to be of use in empirical research. It is the purpose of this chapter to contextualise this definition within the history of the Iranian state. In order to understand how a specific ideology influences the foreign policy decision making process of Iran, it is necessary to look at the historical

experiences that shape the specific configuration of this state's ideology. The Four Pillar model proposed here aims to capture the complexities of Iran's ideology in a way that highlights the conflicting pulls dictated by Iran's multifaceted identity as a post-revolutionary state (see Fig. 2). The identity of the Iranian state has been both changed and strengthened by the advent of European hegemony in the 19th century. This has begotten a double legacy that manifests itself in a strong sense of cultural pride, as well as a profoundly rooted distrust for foreign interference. These two tendencies have been codified in the model below as the Anti-Imperialism and Pan-Iranism pillars. Even though these two principles have emerged from the same historical experience and have at certain points in time worked in tandem, they nevertheless present some significant incompatibilities in modern times. In the twentieth century, anti-imperialism has been married to the cause of national sovereignty and independence, while Pan-Iranism necessarily looks beyond modern state boundaries to the memory of a historical Persianate nation, to the point of being perceived by non-Iranians as an attempt at imposing Tehran's cultural and political, hegemony.

The other two components of Iran's identity come from the process of state-building initiated under the Safavid empire (1501-1736 CE) and culminated during the late Qajar time and the Pahlavi regime. Through this process, both the conception of a modern nation-state coterminous with territorial control, as well as the institutionalisation of a state religion that becomes an integral part of the governing apparatus have been accomplished. These two trends have been captured in the model below as Pan-Islamism and National Sovereignty. Much like in the case of Pan-Iranism and Anti-imperialism, there exists a logical tension between these two concepts where Pan-Islamism in its Khomeinist variant pushes for a transnational concept of Iran's sphere of influence, while National Sovereignty is firmly derived from the Westphalian conception of 'island' nation-states.

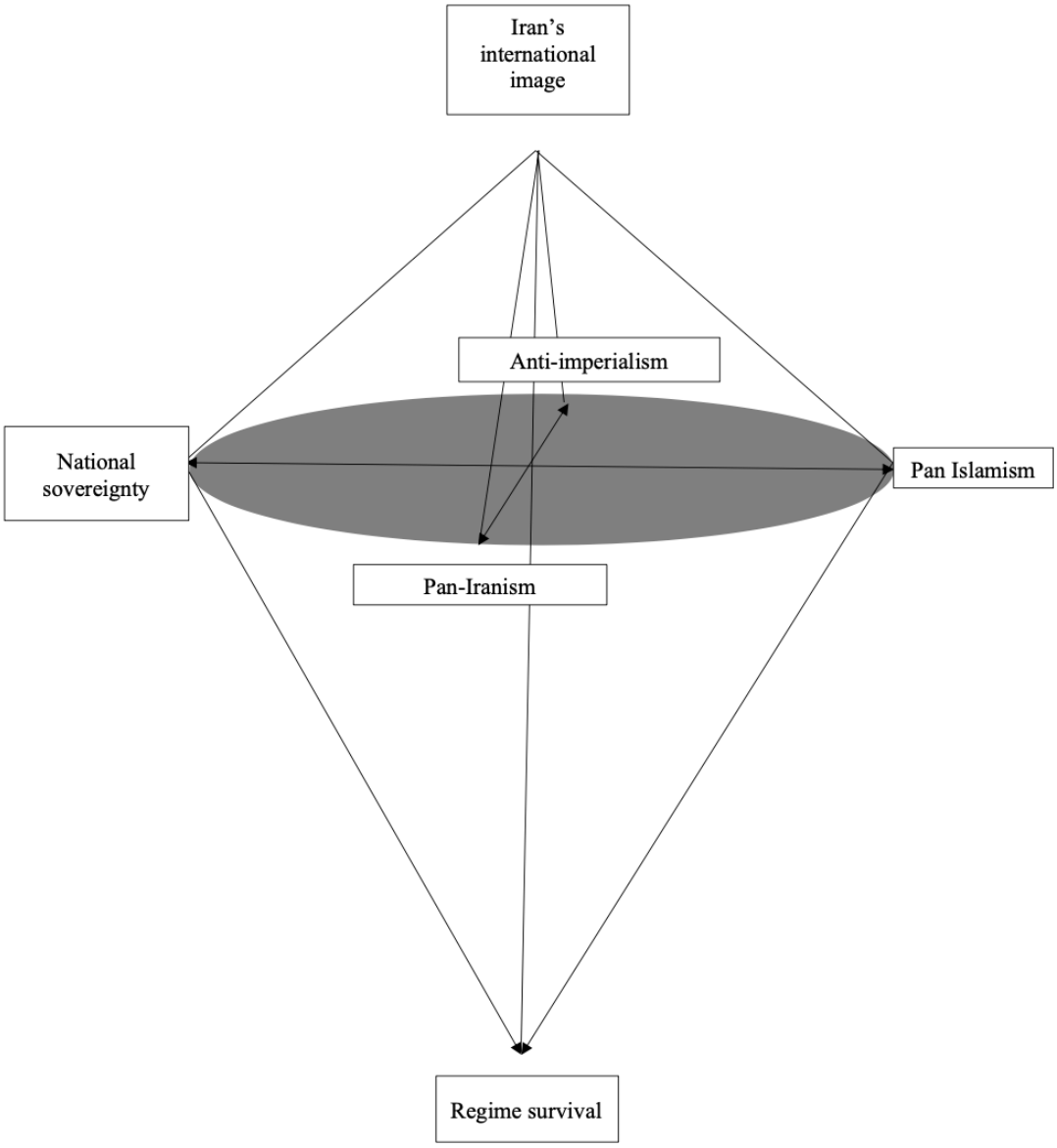


Figure 2: The Four Pillar model of Iran's ideology

A note on the choice of National Sovereignty as a pillar, as opposed to 'Nationalism' or 'National identity', concepts which will be touched upon in the next section. The intention behind the choice of National Sovereignty lied in the willingness to highlight the connection between territorial integrity, border security, and regime stability. This idea, though modern and novel in so far as it relies on a Westphalian idea of a nation-state defined as a territory and the people who live thereby, is also grounded on historical memories of Arab and Mongol conquests. National Sovereignty therefore represents what became since the

outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war the conglomerate of security concerns, mostly relating to external and internal threats to territorial integrity (separatism and interstate war) whose safeguard Iranian decisionmakers and security apparatuses came to see as a prerequisite for regime survival.

The proposed model sees Iran's ideology as grounded on these four pillars: Anti-imperialism, Pan-Islamism, National Sovereignty, and Pan-Iranism. This model is morphological, in the sense of Freeden's conception of ideology:[136] it serves to illustrate the shape of the ideological structure, and the potential logical relationship between its different four constituents. Contradicting pillars face one another creating two axes of conflict in the geometry of the model: Pan-Iranism vs. Anti-Imperialism, and Pan-Islamism vs. National Sovereignty (see Fig. 1). They are nevertheless all to be balanced for the core aim of the Islamic Republic of Iran to be achieved, namely regime survival. Regime survival here is not defined in minimalist terms as the continued existence of the Iranian state, but rather in maximalist terms as the persistence of the present institutional configuration of the Islamic Republic in the face of internal and external pressure for regime reformation. Balancing these four principles makes the projection of an international image especially challenging: what appears to be compatible on the domestic arena because of Iran's unique historical experiences may appear contradictory on the international scene. The difference in experiences of political independence and statehood between Central Asia and Iran make Iran's projection of its multiple identities particularly challenging in the region, heightening the inherent logical contradictions of the model.

Because of the inherent tension between the four pillars, an equilibrium can be reached in the model only when one of the pillars is cut out of the equation. This creates

[136] Freeden, Michael. *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.

four possible Triangular sub-models, each with one of the four pillars as their dominant vertex. Two of these sub models are relevant to Iran's policy in Central Asia: the first represents the main logic employed by Tehran's overt policy in the region, with Pan-Iranism as the dominant pillar; the second represents the secondary logic that emerges with the weakening of Iran's diplomatic position and the employment of overt and ambiguous policies, namely the one with Pan Islamism as the dominant pillar (see Fig. 3 and 4).

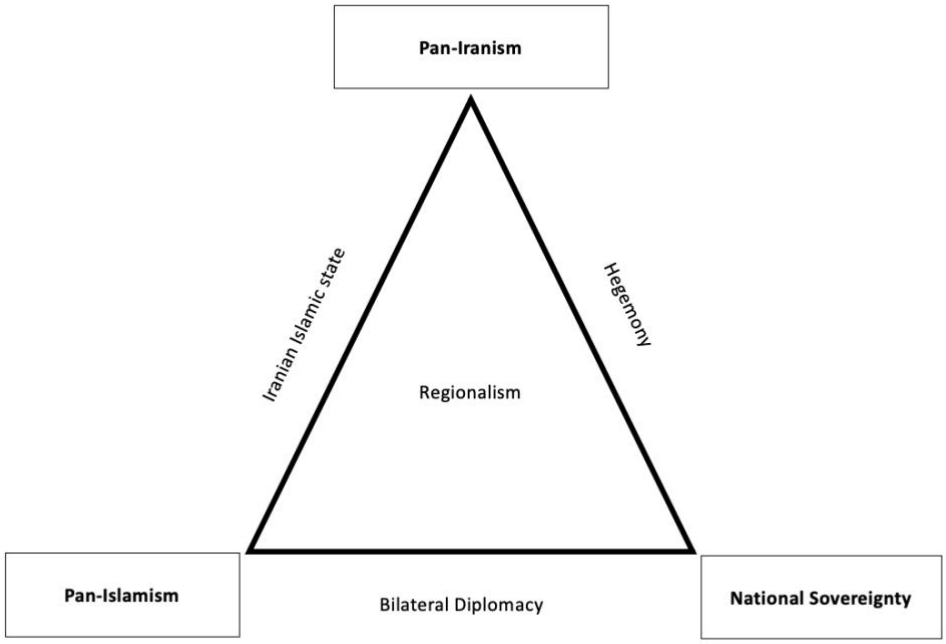


Figure 3: Triangular sub models of the Pan-Iranian logic of foreign policy

The centre of the Triangular model shows the logic guiding Iran's foreign policy in that specific ideological configuration. In this case, the first sub-model, dominated by the Pan-Iranian pillar, points to a foreign policy of regionalism that favours state-to-state bilateral diplomacy, whilst the second model, dominated by the pillar of Pan Islamism, has a natural affinity for a foreign policy that favours transnationalism through the cultivation of relations with non-state actors.

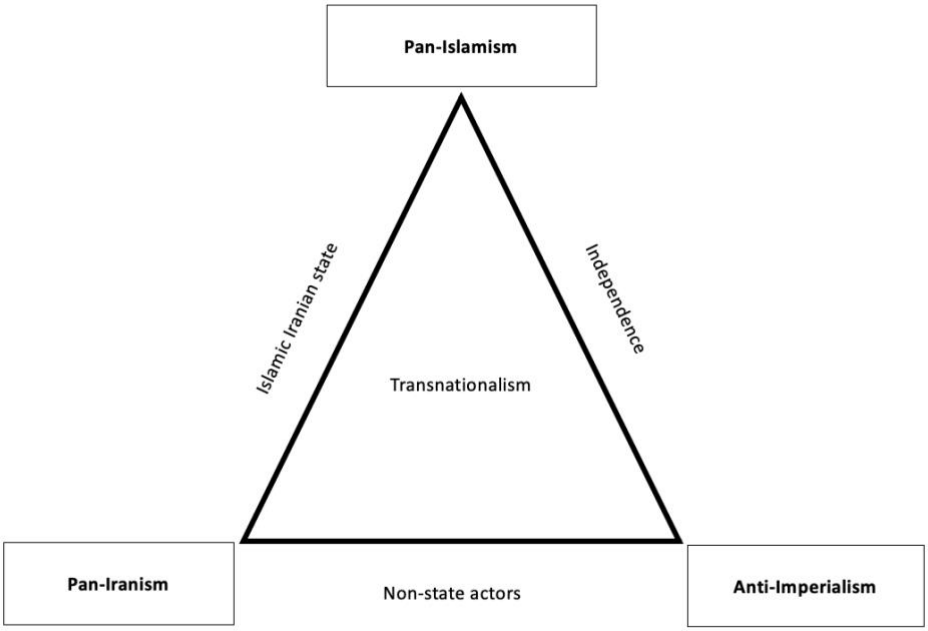
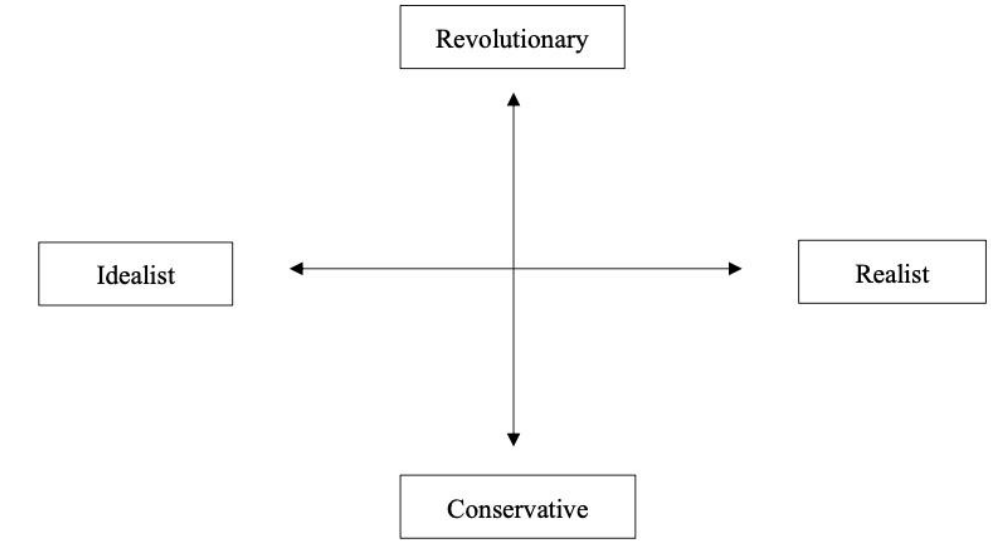


Figure 4: Triangular sub models of the Pan-Islamic logic of foreign policy

These models link the relationships between the three pillars, which are represented by the triangle's vertexes, to three foundational questions that underly a country's foreign policy. These are questions of identity (right side of the triangle), questions of purpose (left side of the triangle), and questions of strategy and means (base of the triangle). The core of Iran's identity represented by the left side remains very similar in both triangles (Iranian Islamic state and Islamic Iranian state respectively). This indicates that the underlying conflict amongst decisionmakers was not about what kind of state Iran was meant to be, but rather what goal should a revolutionary state such as Iran pursue. This is exemplified by the right side, where the Pan-Iranian approach seeks hegemony as the appropriate aspiration for Iran's policy in Central Asia, while the Pan-Islamic one sees the promotion of independence from both the East and the West as the rightful aspiration for Tehran. The discrepancy between the chosen means (bilateral diplomacy vs. building links with non-state actors) is the result of the divergent purposes established by the two foreign policy approaches.

The Triangular models are derived from a deductive exercise that takes the logical and geometric properties of the Four Pillar model as its starting point. The drawback of these sub-models, as for any model, is that they are abstractions of reality and cannot take into account the nuanced and hybrid shape in which Iran's ideology may in practice manifest itself, borrowing from several Triangular models at once and constantly switching between them. They are useful, however, as ideal representations of what Iran's state ideology would look like if one of the four pillars became dominant. In this regard, the most important aspect of the Triangular model is that they constitute a tool to visualise changes within the Four Pillar model: they are descriptive rather than explanatory in nature. They serve to identify patterns of seemingly contradictory behaviour in Iran's policy and single out the timing of the switch from the Pan-Iranian to the Pan-Islamic ideological approach to foreign policy. The last part of this tripartite model, the Two Axis model, will delve into the causes of the policy shifts described by the Triangular models.

The shift from one Triangular model to another reflects a change in the underlying assumptions of policymakers about the international system. In this sense, what changes is the perception of what sub-model (or a combination thereof) is most appropriate to navigate the state of the international system. This shift is best represented by a model that shows the descriptive and normative assumptions underlying Iranian decisionmakers' perceptions of the nature of the international system in which they operate (see Fig. 5).



Legend of Axes:

Idealist: holds that change in the international system is possible

Realist: holds that change in the international system is impossible

Revolutionary: holds that the current international system is unjust

Conservative: holds that the current international system is just / the lesser evil

Figure 5: Two-axis model; it specifies the mechanisms through which a shift in the Four Pillar model takes place.

Decision makers' perception of the international system they operate in ought to fall somewhere in the plane defined by the four axes above. A shift in the above Two Axis model represents a tilt in the Four Pillar model in favour of one of the four vertexes, generating a shift from Pan-Islamism to Pan-Iranism and vice versa. Post-Revolutionary Iran tends to fall almost exclusively in the top two quadrants, as the underlying normative assumption that justifies the very existence of the Islamic Republic is that the current international system is unjust. Most of the shifts in Iran's foreign policy should reflect a horizontal shift, that is to

say, a change in the descriptive assumption underlying decisionmakers' perception of the international system (see Fig. 5).

The horizontal axis reflects Iranian policymakers' perception of whether change is possible in the international system. In practice, 'change in the international system' is actually the same as the attainment of Iran's foreign policy objectives because the permissibility of the international system is measured by the advancement of the Islamic Revolution's goals. The most important shift taking place during the 1990s in Iran's foreign policy was one from the top left quadrant (change is desirable and possible) to the top right quadrant (change is desirable but difficult/impossible). The cause of this horizontal shift is to be found in factors exogenous to the Four Pillars. The ideological models above are agnostic about the nature of changes by design. This means that change can be engendered by domestic, regional, or international adjustments, or a combination of the above. The only pre-condition on the nature of these exogenous factors is that they must be able to affect Iranian policymakers' perception of what foreign policy is feasible at any given X point.

This condition reflects the methodology of the empirical pivotal point studies. The snapshot analyses in Chapter 3, 4, and 5 are constituted by three steps. The first step is identifying what Triangular sub-model best describes Iran's foreign policy on and after the pivotal point. This first step is in fact composed of two intermediate steps. It is necessary to first establish the facts of Iran's foreign policy at X time, and to assess which foreign policy logic, Pan-Iranism or Pan-Islamism, best describes them. Secondly, the potential links between these facts and existing domestic or intra-elite ideological discourse will be investigated to support the characterisation of Iran's foreign policy as Pan-Islamic or Pan-Iranian. The second step is proving that there was a genuine choice to make after the pivotal point. This involves analysing Iran's interests in Central Asia at the time of the pivotal event,

showing that Iran could have rationally pursued more than one course of action. The third, and last step, consists of identifying the underlying exogenous shift that gave rise to the change in the dominant ideological sub-model and, consequently, to Iran's policy reaction to the pivot point. This last step will not be present in each of the three case studies but will rather be separately developed in Chapter 6, which looks at the role of US-Iran relations and of the Central Asian hydrocarbon boom in determining Iran's shift from Pan-Iranism to Pan-Islamism.

Current trends in Iranian historiography

While, as the previous chapter explained in detail, the research project behind this thesis relies on the concept and the theorizing of ideology, it should undoubtfully be acknowledged that there is a great deal of overlap between the empirical study of ideology and the study of another phenomenon, namely that of national identity. While it is not within the scope of this study to explore the difference and the overlap between these two, it will suffice to say that I chose to regard them as two distinct theoretical lenses that can be applied to study the same set of phenomena from different perspectives. I will not be offering a definition of national identity at this point, in so far as, it being as much of a contested concept as ideology, the discussion would take away from the limited space available for this enquiry. Needless to say, because I do not intent to engage theoretically with the concept of national identity, its lack of definition will not be detrimental to this study, because what is crucial here is rather the study of how other scholars, Persian and Iranian scholars in particular but not only, have engaged with the concept of the national identity of modern Iran, how they have contributed to its creation, and how they have been problematizing the orthodox view since the 1990s.

This discussion is of crucial importance at this stage to justify the choice of the four pillars that make up the model proposed in this chapter. The engagement with Iranian histography then will serve two purposes: firstly, it will help identifying what the orthodox interpretation of Iran's history has been in Iran in the nineteenth and twentieth century; secondly, it will allow me to rely on the work of accomplished Iranian scholars to explain how some of the contradictions inherent into the Four Pillar model resonate with what academics interested in Iran's national identity have been observing for the two decades.

Zia-Ebrahimi's summary of the evolution of Iranian historiography since the 1990s is helpful in understanding the scope of the phenomenon and, thus, its relationship with my theoretical model.[137] Four works written since 1993 have been, in this account, particularly influential in launching a revisionist period in Iranian historiography. Vaziri's *Iran as Imagined Nation* (1993), [138] tapping on Anderson's model of 'imagined communities', was foundational to the field in questioning the authenticity of the orthodox interpretation of Iran's history prevalent in academic circles since the start of the twentieth century. The book argues that Iran's national identity, which had so far been built on a linear, uninterrupted conception of Iran as a 2500-year-old nation, was actually a social construction pioneered by European Orientalists before being adopted by Iranian nationalists. While Vaziri attributed the conceptual framework and narratives of Iranian nationalism to European orientalists alone, Tavakoli-Targhi,[139] though accepting the premise that Iran's national identity is a modern creation, challenged Vaziri's denial of Iranian authorship in it by arguing that the origin of many nationalist myths could be traced to local sources exclusively.

[137] Zia-Ebrahimi, Reza, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation,* New York, 2016, p. 13-15.
[138] Vaziri, Mostafa. *Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity,* New York, Paragon House, 1993.
[139] Tavakoli-Targhi, Mohamad, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography,* New York, 2001.

Zia-Ebrahimi sees himself as a bridge in this dichotomy, accepting both the importance that Iranian authors had in crafting and institutionalise the narrative of Iranian nationhood, as well as acknowledging the European origin of certain approaches and frameworks.

Following this debate, in 1999 Kashani-Sabet's *Frontier Fictions* brought to the forefront the need to reconceptualize the role that territory has in the construct of Iran's national identity.[140] This work contends that besides language, historiography, and religion, territory is a fundamental source of Iranian identity, one that had so far been ignored by scholars in their endeavour to understand the origins of Iranian nationalism. And finally, Marashi's *Nationalizing Iran* (2008)[141] was another pivotal moment for the field. Rather than focusing on the role of intellectuals, Marashi studies the underlying changing state–society relationship and modernizing transformations in Iran in the period 1870–1940, and of how this process affected or even shaped the modern definition of Iranian identity. This work reconnects the study of Iranian national identity with theories of modernization, looking at the ways in which changes in relations between of ruling authorities and subjects to those between citizens and the state generates a need for the top-down enforcement of a homogeneous identity which is, nevertheless grounded on organic, bottom-up processes of the rising political self-awareness the masses as a single entity. Amanat best describes the duality of this process:

> [T]he process of the state imposing a national identity is a 'dual phenomenon', which though constructed essentially from above, [it] cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings, and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist.[142]

[140] Kashani-Sabet, Firoozeh, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999.
[141] Marashi, Afshin, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 1870-1940*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2008.
[142] Amanat, Abbas. 'Iranian Identity Boundaries A Historical Overview', in Amanat, Abbas, and Farzin Vejdani. *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*. First ed., 2012, p. 3.

When referring to an Iranian orthodox view on the history of Iran, this new revisionist literature emphasises that the orthodoxy consists of at least two rival narratives, and that the orthodoxy itself was never solidified in a single, coherent view of the nation's past trajectory, even before contemporary academics called into questions the veracity of that narrativization of Iran's history. These two narratives are the ethnonationalist and the linguistic essentialist ones. Reza Zia-Ebrahimi focuses on one of these two narratives, namely the one that elevates pre-Islamic Iran as the authentic identity of the Iranian nation and 'ethnicises [..] the advent of Islam to Iran as an "Arab invasion," an event that seems to be about cultural imposition rather than territorial conquest'.[143] The book highlights three core tenets of this narrative: that Iran has maintained its identity as a nation uninterruptedly for the last 2500 years; that Iran's golden age predates the advent of Islam; and thirdly, that Iranians are part of the Aryan race, and are closer in kin to Europeans rather than Semitic Arabs.

The racialization of the Iranian identity is one of two common alternatives observed in the most common attempts to carve out an identity for Iran that excludes neighbouring countries. The second most common narrative is one that emphasizes culture as language and proposes it as the unchanged core of Iran's identity bridging the Sassanian empire and modern Iran. Amanat explains that this narrative is based on the resurgence of the Persian language from the 9th century after the Arab conquest. While it is true that the linguistic resurgence accompanied centuries of cultural revival which included writings such as that of the epic poem *Shahnameh*, it is also true that language itself could not be the sole criteria for Iranian-ness, as non-Iranian peoples spoke and still speak Farsi, and vice versa peoples inhabiting the territory of modern Iran do not speak Farsi:

[143] Zia-Ebrahimi, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

> Persophonia, however never was, and perhaps could not have been, synonymous with Iranian identity even in its amorphous premodern world of fluid identities. Many can be identified as Persianates who shared Persian language or memories from a common cultural repository.[144]

Boroujerdi similarly highlights the divide between the idea of Farsi as the mark of Iranian-ness and the reality on the ground:

> During the first half of the twentieth century when Iran underwent the transition from being an antiquated empire to a modern secular state, perhaps no more than 50 percent of Iranians actually spoke Persian.[145]

Both of these narratives are socially constructed through the process of re-imagining and re-telling Iranian history according to a European, post-Enlightenment conception of nationhood. Talking about the racialised narrative, Zia-Ebrahimi emphasises that 'Iran is imagined as Aryan and as foreign to its natural environment'.[146] The theory that Iranians belong to a pseudo-mythical Aryan ethnic group has clear roots in nineteenth century racial theories and will need no further debunking. Nevertheless, Zia-Ebrahimi's observation on the need to portray Iran as surrounded by alien enemies points to the fact that both of these two narratives of Iranian exceptionalism, whether racial or cultural-linguistic, are grounded in an unspoken premise that national identity must be predicated on a set of differences between the nation and the Others. Another author that eloquently exemplifies this phenomenon is Amanat:

> It goes without saying that identity formation has not taken shape, and perhaps could not, if it was not because of encounters with neighbouring communities and countries […] Historically Iranians became conscious of themselves in the face of the mythical

[144] Amanat, Abbas. 'Iranian Identity Boundaries A Historical Overview', in Amanat, Abbas, and Farzin Vejdani. *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*. First ed., 2012, p. 10.
[145] Boroujerdi, Mehrzad, 'Contested Nationalist Constructions of Iranian Identity', *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East*, Vol. 12, 1998, pp. 43–55.
[146] Zia-Ebrahimi, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

> Turanids and later the historic people they came into contact with: the Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, and others.[147]

The process of alienation of others in modern nation-state building, however, necessarily flattens and simplifies the diversities inherent in the peoples, histories, and cultures coexisting within the territory of a modern nation state. A clear example of how the process of modern nation-building artificially did away with diversity can be found in a recent study on nineteenth century classification of contemporary and classic Persian poetry between Iranian and foreigners.[148] This study explores two theses: first, by proving that being born in an Iranian city was an insufficient criteria for being considered an Iranian poet, it calls into question the historicity of the nexus between national identity and national territory; secondly, it highlighted the way in which academic, literary, and historical writing in the nineteenth century was not devoid of agendas, but actually was compounded with the intention of promoting different political visions for modern Iran.

Nevertheless, some authors have been reticent to discard completely the notion of an enduring Iranian identity. Some authors, such as Ahmadi,[149] appear to adopt a balanced approach to the problematization of Persian historiography, but essentially end up repackaging the idea of a core Iranian identity after the debates. For Ahmadi, Iran's national identity is neither based on shared ethnicity or on shared language, but rather on the enduring tendency of Iranian people to resist foreign conquerors and oppressors:

> The first manifestation of such 'national identity dynamic' in Islamic Iran was the cross-national resistance of Iranians to Arab dominance […] The same cross-national mobilization occurred during the occupation of Iran by the Ottomans and

[147] Amanat, Abbas. 'Iranian Identity Boundaries A Historical Overview', in Amanat, Abbas, and Farzin Vejdani. *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*. First ed., 2012, p. 3.
[148] Kia, Mana. 'Imagining Iran before Nationalism: Geocultural Meanings of Land in Azar's Atashkade', in Aghaei and Marashi, *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, pp. 3-24.
[149] Ahmadi, Hamid, 'Unity within Diversity: Foundations and Dynamics of National Identity in Iran', *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2005, pp. 127-147.

> the Russians after the fall of the Safavid dynasty in 1722. Also in 1856, when British naval forces invaded southern Iran at Bushihr to make Iran withdraw from Herat.[150]

This approach appears to reflect the trends represented in choosing the national sovereignty and anti-imperialism pillars for the Four Pillar model. While Ahmadi attempts to do justice to the ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity of Iran, his argument still suffers from the ontological flaws of the ethnonationalist and the linguistic essentialist approaches. This is because he observes the existence of a proto-political consciousness of belonging to a greater collective in events such as the Persian resistance to the Caliphate rule but fails to historicize them as discrete phenomenon. The assumption that the feeling of belonging experienced by rebelling subjects in the early Medieval times and the feeling of national identify that Iranian people experience today are in any way causally or ontologically related to one another is simply spurious. These are distinct and discrete historical events which should be understood as such. While it may well be true that the current awareness of this track record of political resistance strongly influences the current perception of some Iranians of belonging to a long lineage of nationhood, this does not constitute proof of the permanence of a core Iranian identity throughout the millennia.

Ahmadi insists that 'the participation of different groups in national movements […] indicates that […] in Iran there has been unity within diversity based on the foundation of Iranian national identity'.[151] The logic of this argument is, unfortunately, flawed: defining the core principle of Iranian nationhood as unity in diversity obfuscates the real underlying unifying principle. What is this unifying principle among linguistic, religious, and ethnic diversity? Ahmadi explains later in the article that the glue keeping the Iranian nation together was trifold: he singles out Iran's political heritage, Iran's cultural heritage, and the

[150] Ahmadi, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
[151] Ahmadi, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

omnipresent role of religion. When stripped down to its essentials, Ahmadi's assessment of Iran's national identity is thus much closer to a revised cultural essentialism than it may appear at first. There is one aspect of this narrative, however, that is worth noting. This is the claim that 'the Islamic faith and the pre-Islamic Iranian cultural and political heritage have not been in conflict with each other'.[152] This claim differs from both the ethnonationalist and the cultural essentialist views investigated so far, because they both construct Iran's identity in opposition to an Arab 'Other', whether on the basis of race or of culture and language.

Boroujerdi's argument brings some much-needed clarity to this apparent contradiction.[153] He explicitly treats national identity as a project in which historians actively partake with their scholarship, and points at the unreconcilable tension between those who see religion as the core of Iran's national identity, and the ones which look at language or culture. So far, the two narratives I have touched upon very explicitly regarded religion, as Islam, as part of a foreign imposition that muddled the purity of the Iranian nationhood. This hostility towards Islam is very much at odds with the current state of affairs in the Islamic Republic of Iran. One of the reasons for this incongruence is due to the fact that both of these racial and linguistic essentialist narratives were crafted between the end of the nineteenth century and the Pahlavi regime. The ideological and political rise of the 'ulama as legitimate arbiters of legal and political power following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and the popularity of Khomeini among the masses, were direct reactions to these extreme narratives that attempted to depict Islam as a force of corruption of the true Iranian spirit.

[152] Ahmadi, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
[153] Boroujerdi, *op. cit.*

Boroujerdi thus sees two contesting views of Iranian national identity existing after 1979:

> Protagonists of the politically triumphant view have offered Shi'i Islam as the main pillar of Iranians' collective identity. Meanwhile, an increasing number of Iranian secularists countered the Islamists' revisionist emphasis on religion with a conception of identity grounded in Iranians' ethnolinguistic heritage.[154]

Many Iranians who politically oppose the Islamic Republic, whether as monarchists or as republicans, may continue to subscribe to a racial or cultural essentialist view of Iran's national identity. On the other hand, the Islamic regime attempts to refashion Iran's identity around Shi'a Islam, which, though in itself a simplification of Iran's diverse religious past and present, retains a degree of instinctive authenticity to the lived experiences of many Iranians, especially those of older generations or from outside major urban sites, while at the same time alienating the younger, urbanized generations.

Siavoshi best describes this phenomenon.[155] Alongside with the cultural or ethnonationalist narrative of the monarchist and the religious essentialist one of the ruling elites, she identifies a third emerging paradigm for Iran's national identity, coming from the younger generations' experience of political resistance from the Green Movement (2009) to date:

> The ruling elites of both the Islamic Republic and the monarchist groups insist that their construction of Iranian identity is the authentic one. While the former emphasizes religion (Shi'ism) and the latter ethnicity (Persian identity), they both attempt to deny the other's marker as, at best, irrelevant, and, at worst, antithetical to true Iranian identity.[156]

> The discourse of the Green Movement on national identity is telling, due to its general lack of defining and limiting parameters. When there is a reference to national identity, it always has both Iranian and Islamic characteristics.[157]

[154] Boroujerdi, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
[155] Siavoshi, Susan. 'Construction of Iran's National Identity: Three Discourses', in Aghaei, Kamran Scott and Afshin Marashi (eds.), *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity,* Austin, University of Texas Press, 2014.
[156] Siavoshi, *op. cit.*, p. 255.
[157] Siavoshi, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

According to Siavoshi, the Green Movement's idea of national identity is defined by a lack of rigid determining parameters, and by the attempt to reconcile Islamic and Persian heritage. This is very similar to the position advanced by Ahmadi, and, in its current unstructured form, is less of a distinct position and more like the attempt to reject the prevailing orthodoxy that precedes the reformulation of a people's identity.

This overview of the prevailing narratives surrounding Iran's 'real' national identity brings me to the relationship between these historiographical debates and the Four Pillar model. This literature has identified the debate surrounding whether Iran's identity is Islamic or Persian as one of the visible manifestations of the ideological divide between supporters and opponents of the current regime. My model, while accepting this basic dichotomy, attempts to transcend it by taking into account the way in which any ruling regime needs to find a way to absorb back into its fold at least part of the ideological appeal of its defeated competitors to ensure its long term political and ideological stability. In this particular case, I argue that Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism have become equally important principles in Iran's state ideology. The sub-models I presented above, the Pan-Islamic and the Pan-Iranian triangles, will be one of the most important tools in analysing Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia in the following chapters.

While the Islamic Revolution in general, and Khomeini's political thought in particular, may have been born from a wholesome rejection of the Pahlavis' manufactured pre-Islamic Iranian identity, Khomeini himself soon realized that, in needing to rally the Iranian nation behind the troops to endure the brutal decade-long war with Iraq, he needed to tap into a sense of Iranian exceptionalism that differentiated them from their current enemies. Shi'a Islam was not going to suffice, due to the religious and familiar links between Iranian and Iraqi 'ulama and populations. It was inevitable thus, that some elements of Iran's

non-Islamic heritage had to be carefully selected, curated, and incorporated into the dominant ideology to infuse that sense of nationhood. My model shows that Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism are not in logical contradiction to each other within the Four Pillar model, as they respectively stand in opposition to National Sovereignty and Anti-Imperialism. This also explains why, beyond the historically bound context of the political enmity between monarchist and Islamists, there has been no difficulty for the Islamic Republic in attempting to appropriate certain aspects and narratives surrounding Persian cultural heritage and identity.

Nevertheless, as it will be examined in depth in the empirical chapters, the fragile balance that the regime may have struck domestically in its narrative of a nation that is both Persian and Islamic does not hold when applied to the outside interaction with Central Asia because of the diverging political experience that Iran and Central Asia have undergone since the late nineteenth century. For instance, by leaning too heavily on the Pan-Islamic element, Iran risks alienating the secular regimes of the post-Soviet Republics. On the other hand, by emphasising Pan-Iranism too much, Iran may sink into cultural imperialism and may replicate domestic hegemonic practices into its foreign policy.

So far, we have seen how trends in Persian historiography in the last three decades have shed a light on the extent to which modern Iran's national identity is in part the product of a reconceptualization of the region's history to fit the modern paradigm of Westphalian nation-states. We have also seen how some authors think that two of the prevailing paradigms developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, namely the one that sees ethnicity or language as the core tenet of Iran's identity, were a product of a modern attempt to strengthen Iran's national identity by depicting Arab and Turkic people as 'Others' against the Iranian self. Lastly, we saw how this nationalistic narrative was disrupted by the

reliance of the Iranian Revolution on Shi'a Islam as the core identity of the Iranian nation; yet, in my Four Pillar model I argue that the Islamic regime was not able to fully erase the pre-Islamic elements that had been used in the last 150 years to create such a strong Iranian identity. These elements re-emerged during the Iran-Iraq war due to the need to rally the people behind the national flag and are represented by the Pan-Iranian pillar. The tension between the Pan-Iranian and the Pan-Islamic Triangular models lies in the different political state project that underline the vision of the two camps.

Lastly, the debate on whether Iran's historical orthodoxy originated primarily from the thinking and writing of European Orientalists, or whether it was ideated by Iranian historians merely borrowing existing approaches from Europe, vindicates the choice of this chapter to focus on the exceptionality of the encounter with Europe in understanding Iran's modern political ideology, specifically the anti-Imperialist pillar. Within this debate, Zia-Ebrahim's conception of the dual authorship of the modern paradigm of Iran's history resonates the most with my inclinations as a scholar of critical theory, as well as with the underling approach behind my ideological model:

> Long before ideological nationalism took root through encounters with the world at large […] Iran had developed a coherent notion of itself. This was an experience somewhat distinct from constructed nationalisms of the new nation- states. The latter often emerged during and after a colonial experience […] Countries like Egypt, Iran, China, India, and Japan— despite political discontinuity, fragmentation, and ethnolinguistic divides— fell into a different category. They no doubt adopted integrated nationalism of Europe, be it romantic or authoritarian, yet they had a deeper sense of themselves prior to modern communication and technologies[158]

The following sections will constitute an exercise in trying to explain how the orthodox view of Iran as an ancient nation that has remained, through the centuries, unchanged in its

[158] Amanat, Abbas. 'Iranian Identity Boundaries A Historical Overview', in Amanat, Abbas, and Farzin Vejdani. *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*. First ed., 2012, p. 20.
[158] Zia-Ebrahimi, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

Persian and Islamic identity can be used to understand the choice of the Four Pillars. What follows will not claim to be an accurate or complete account of Iran's history, but rather it will be the carefully curated and, to some extent, mythicized account of Iran's history that has been crafted in the last century and has fed into the creation of the state ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran in its modern shape.

The following three sections, thus, investigate some of the common assumptions of this orthodoxy as highlighted in the literature review above. To understand how these will be structured, I want to go back to the three core tenants of this orthodox approach to Iranian nationalism and Iranian history, as highlighted by Zia-Ebrahim. These were:

1. that Iran has maintained its identity as a nation uninterruptedly for the last 2500 years;
2. that Iran's golden age predates the advent of Islam;
3. that Iranians are part of the Aryan race and are closer in kin to Europeans rather than Semitic Arabs.

Similarly, I want to look closely at three core principles that make up the glue in Ahmadi's interpretation of a 'unity in diversity' of Iran's nationhood. These are:

- **Iranian political heritage: '**The institutions of state and monarchy, Iran's political history, mythology and the land have played a very important role in maintaining Iranian independence and bringing together its different religious, linguistic, tribal and non-tribal groups under one political entity.'[159] This echoes, though in a more moderate form, the first criteria of Zia-Ebrahim, because it links the existence and persistence of an independent state within the territory of Iran with the persistence of a sense of national identity.

[159] Ahmadi, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

- **Iranian cultural heritage: '**The role of Iranian culture in the creation of a notion of national identity among different sections of Iranian society has been a unique and crucial factor of Iranian history. The Iranian culture, especially the Persian language and its rich literary heritage, enabled Iran to maintain its political independence, and prevented its assimilation.'[160] This is the cultural equivalent of Zia-Ebrahimi's second criteria, which is focused on race, because it is based on defining the parameters of Iranian exceptionalism in a way that elevates an attribute of Iran, in this case, the Persian language, to a causal force in the political fortunes of Iran, rather than recognizing its role as a modern tool of nation-building in the hands of political elites.
- **The omnipresent role of religion: '**The essential role of religion in Iran has not been restricted to the Islamic era. Religion has been central in Iranian history and politics for at least two millennia. The Achaemenian kings (fifth and sixth century BCE), for example, associated themselves with the Iranian God Ahura Mazda and with the gods of their numerous subject peoples. The Sassanians (second to sixth centuries CE) established Zoroastrianism as the state religion, and the Safavids (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries) did the same with Shi'i Islam.'[161] This principle is much more nuanced than the third one emphasized by Zia-Ebrahimi, that is to say the rejection of Islam in certain narratives on Iranian nationalism, because it transcends the debate on the particulars of Islam and looks at the role of religion as a tool of state-building in Iran's history.

The rest of the chapter will explore the way in which these premises are used to construct a narrative of Iran's history as a nation. The first section deals with the claim that Iran has

[160] Ahmadi, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
[161] Ahmadi, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

been a nation for 2500 years and thus has a millennia-old identity; this assumption is connected with both the Pan-Iranian pillar and the National Sovereignty pillar. The second section will focus on the 'ulama's claim that Iran's identity is to be found in its religion, explaining thus the choice of Pan-Islamism as a pillar. Lastly, the third section will delve into the Anti-Imperialist pillar, as anticipated in the last paragraph.

Pan-Iranism and National Sovereignty: the legacy of 2500 years of Iranian nationhood, or a slippery slope to Iranian Chauvinism?

The racial or cultural essentialist approaches to Iran's history explored above are grounded in a static conception of the relationship between Iran and its neighbours. This rigid 'us vs. them' mentality permits the claim that Iran has always been a separate entity with a distinct political identity since the dawn of time; in reality, this claim can be traced back to the need to other foreigners to establish an Iranian identity in the nineteenth century. According to this narrative, throughout the vast majority of its history, Central Asia has been to Iran either an imminent military threat in the form of nomadic incursions and foreign conquest, or the imaginary horizon for boundless imperial conquests. Imaginary it has remained, however, for Iran has rarely controlled Central Asia beyond Transoxiana.[162] In truth, Central Asia has acted throughout history as both a self-contained interstate system, and as the connective tissue in between the civilisations inhabiting its borderlands. The borders between Iran and Central Asia are very much a modern geographical determination and have a lot more to do with the greatest extension of the Russian Empire than with any persistence in Iran's territory. In tracing the political history of Iran and Central Asia from this perspective, I

[162] Transoxiana is the Latin name for a region located in Central Asia comprising parts of eastern Uzbekistan, western Tajikistan, southern Kazakhstan, parts of Turkmenistan and southern Kyrgyzstan. It lays between the rivers Amu Darya to its south and the Syr Darya to its north. The area was also historically known as Turan to the Parsi and Mā Warāʾ an-Nahr to the Arabs.

have relied primarily on two works of scholarship on the history of Central Asia, namely Golden's *Central Asia in World History* and Soucek's *A History of Inner Asia.*[163]

This chronology traces changes in the military and political balance of power in Central Asia between 500 BCE and 1979. The cut off points between the seven historical phases identified represent changes in the flow of military and economic power along two imaginary geographical axes. One is a longitudinal east-west axis running from Tehran to Beijing cutting through the Ferghana Valley and modern Xinjiang; the other is a latitudinal north-south axis connecting Moscow to Kabul, running past the Aral Sea and through historical Transoxiana.

The table below (see Fig. 6) summarises the geopolitical shifts in the balance of power in Central Asia. The criteria underlying the classification of this table can be found in *Appendix 1*. Blue shaded rows represent phases in which the state occupying the territory of modern Iran is considered, in this narrative, to be authentically Persian and also a Eurasian Great power. Orange shaded rows represent phases in which Iran was under direct or indirect foreign domination. The Iranian Eurasian empires are highlighted in red, while foreign powers ruling over Iranian territory are highlighted in blue. Iran is thus considered to have been a Eurasian Great Power in three different phases: during the first phase with the Achaemenid Empire; during the second phase with the Parthian and Sassanid empires; and during the fifth phase with the Safavid Empire. It has not regained this status since the fall of the Safavids at the start of the 18th century.

[163] Golden, Peter B. *Central Asia in World History*. Oxford University Press, 2011; Soucek, Svatopluk. *A History of Inner Asia*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Figure 6: Table summarising the chronology of Iran-Central Asia political development

	Dates	Direction of expansion	Eurasian Great Powers	Central Asia Regional Powers	States controlling Iran's Territory
Phase 1	500 BCE - 200 BCE	West to East	**Achaemenid Empire**; Macedonian Empire;	Scythian tribes; Graeco-Bactrian Kingdom	Achaemenid Empire; Macedonian Empire; Seleucid Empire
Phase 2	200 BCE - 650 CE	East to West	Xiongnu Empire; Han Empire; First Turk Qaghanate; **Parthian Empire; Sassanid Empire**	Kushan Empire; Hephthalite Kingdom	Parthian Empire; Sassanid Empire
Phase 3	650 - 1200 CE	West to East	**Umayyad/Abbasid Caliphate;** Tang Empire; Seljuq Empire	Second Turk Qaghanate; Uighur Qaghanate; Samanid Empire; Liao Dynasty; Qarakhanids; Qarakhitai	Umayyad/Abbasid Caliphate; Buyids dynasty; Samanid Empire; Ghaznavid Kingdom; Khwarezmid Empire
Phase 4	1200 - 1500 CE	East to West	**Mongol Empire**; Yuan Dynasty; Timurid Empire	Golden Horde; Great Horde	Mongol Empire; il-Khanate; Afrasiyab dynasty; Jalayirid Sultanate
Phase 5	1500 - 1800 CE	Periphery to centre	**Safavid Empire**; Tsarist Empire; Ottoman Empire; Qing Empire	Moghul Empire; Uzbeks; Emirates of Khiva, Kokand, and Bukhara	Safavid Empire; Afsharid Empire
Phase 6	1800 - 1990s	North to south	**Tsarist Empire; British Empire; Soviet Union**	Tsarist Empire; Soviet Union	Qajar Empire; Pahlavi dynasty; Islamic Republic of Iran
Phase 7	1991 CE-	?	People's Republic of China; Russia	Islamic Republic of Iran; Turkey; US	Islamic Republic of Iran

Phase 1-2 (500 BCE-650 CE): The first millennium BCE was dominated by the eastern push for political, commercial, and cultural expansion of Persian-speaking people, culminating in the Achaemenid Empire; this eastward push was continued by the Graeco-Macedonian invasion led by Alexander the Great, under whose successors the new Persian-Hellenic culture came to dominate the plains of Central Asia. The fall of the Graeco-Bactrian Kingdom (256-125 BCE) represents the start of a reversal in both the political fortunes of the Persian world, and the geographical direction of military and demographic movement in the Eurasian continent. The fall of the Kingdom was caused by a wave of migration throughout the Eurasian steps of nomadic peoples that were displaced from modern Mongolia and Manchuria by the expansion of the Han Empire. This westward migratory and expansionist drive continued for centuries and culminated with the rise of the first and second Turk Qaghanates (respectively, 552-630 CE, and 682-742 CE). The Ashina Turk Empire represented the first successful attempt to impose political unity across the Eurasian steppes, from the borders of China to those of Byzantium (See Fig. 7)



Figure 7: Map of First Turk Qaghanate (600 CE). The Ashina Turk's territorial expansion coincided with the decline of the Sui dynasty in China and the Sassanid Empire in Iran.[164]

[164] Source: https://www.reddit.com/r/imaginarymaps/comments/a8tp5g/alternate_map_of_the_gokturk_khaganate/

Phase 3-4 (650 CE – 1500 CE) This orthodox view of Iran's history would describe this westward wave of migration as the start of the Turkification of culturally and linguistically Persian peoples between the sixth and sixteenth century CE. Many historians nowadays would debate whether pre-Turkic Central Asian peoples were culturally and linguistically Persian. While they spoke languages belonging to the Eastern branch of the Iranian language family, there is no evidence to suggest that they identified as Persian, indicating that the desire to posthumously impose the Iranian identity onto these civilizations could be considered a form of cultural imperialism. This assumed process of Turkification was temporarily interrupted by the armies of the Umayyads (661-750 CE) and Abbasid Caliphates (750-1258 CE). These Islamic empires quickly established themselves as a new preponderant player in the geopolitics of Central Asia. However, this reversal in the east-west balance of power was not to last for long. The political fragmentation of both the Abbasid caliphate and the Chinese Empire after the fall of the Tang dynasty (618 – 907 CE) created a vacuum of power in the steppes of Central Asia. This was filled first by the Turkic Seljuq Empire, and then by the Mongol Empire. The Mongol conquest of Eurasia in the thirteenth century altered permanently the political structure of Central Asia. The fragmentation of the Mongol empire sparked two centuries of political instability, characterised by the rise and fall of reigning dynasties of Mongolic and Turkic origin, which attempted but failed to make the transition from nomadic to stable sedentary ruling regimes. During this time, Iran survived more as a linguistic and cultural entity than a distinct political state; nevertheless, it never lost its Persian identity.

Phase 5 (1500-1800 CE): The unity of Central Asia was temporarily restored under the reign of Temur (Tamerlane, 1370-1405). The fall of the Timurid Empire sanctioned the end of the political hegemony of nomadic empires across Central Asia in favour of three early-

modern Muslim empires: the Mughal in Northern India, the Safavid in Iran and the Middle East, and the Ottoman in Anatolia and the Near East. The consolidation of centralised bureaucracies built around urban centres in Iran and Northern India engendered the rapid decline in the political and military fortunes of Central Asia. Between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century, the borders of the Safavid and Mughal empires pushed into Central Asia from the south-west, as the territorial expansion of the Tsarist Russian Empire and the revived Chinese empire under the Qing dynasty encroached on traditional nomadic territories from the north-east, severely limiting the influence of the steppe empires (see Fig. 8).



Figure 8: Map of major Eurasian empires around 1700; this illustrates the inward pressure of territorial expansion that peripheral empires exercised in the sixteenth-eighteenth century towards Central Asia from both the east-west direction and the north-south direction.[165]

The expansion of the Russian Empire from the western edge of the Eurasian plane into Siberia represented a major geopolitical shift in the equilibria of Central Asia. It

[165] Source: *Philip's Atlas of World History*.

fundamentally altered the direction of the flow of trade, wars, and peoples in Central Asia. The Russian colonising push, coupled with the opening of maritime trading routes through the Indian Ocean and around Africa by the Portuguese, shifted the dominant axis of Eurasia from East-West to North-South. The route from India through Afghanistan to the Volga basin became the main trade route across Eurasia.

Phase 6-7: The new axis of North-South expansion from Russia to India came to prominence during the nineteenth century. As India became a British protectorate, Tsarist Russia started to chip away at the historical territory of Iran under the weakened Qajar dynasty (1789-1925), while the Qing dynasty experienced a sharp decline after the humiliation of the First and Second Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860). European powers had become the new masters of Central Asia. The Great Game for the control of Afghanistan and Central Asia embodies the primacy of the North-South axis in this period.

The twentieth century has seen the continuation of this longitudinal shift in the form of Soviet military and administrative control of its inherited imperial periphery. The division of Central Asia into modern Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan, the policy of russification, and the establishment of a still-enduring economic dependence between Central Asian republics and Russia are the manifestations of the political isolation that Central Asia suffered from its historic western and eastern links to Iran and China. The weakening of these links has been severe in the last century; but it may not have been permanent. As will be argued in the empirical chapters, after the fall of the USSR multiple, competing axes of commercial, political, and cultural influence re-emerged in Central Asia.

In spite of the spuriousness of the attribution of a clear continuity of political identity between the different nations that occupied the territory of Iran, there is a clear geopolitical

pattern emerging in the first five phases of this chronology: it would appear that a strong and stable Iran projected its political influence and territorial ambition over Transoxiana; a weakened Iran was forced to retreat relinquish territories conquered to the east and the west, but never truly relented on its eastern imperial ambitions. This changed during the last two phases: although Iran maintained its political independence, under the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties its presence in Central Asia was decisively cut off by the territorial advances of the Russian and British empires. Until the 18th century, there was a reoccurring balance of power in Central Asia established by the rivalry of an eastern empire and a western empire contending over independent states in Central Asia. This balance had been frequently reoccurring: the Han and the Parthians, the Abbasid and the Tang, the Yuan and the Seljuk, the Ming and Qing dynasties and the Safavid empire. Whenever the balance was broken, and the Chinese state would decline or fragment, Iran had to contend its claim over Central Asia with upcoming nomadic states: this was the case with the Xiongnu, the Kushan, and the Uzbek khanates. Whenever both Iran and China were in decline, a stronger power would emerge from the centre: this was the case with the Turk Qaghanates, the Mongol Empire, and the Timurid Empire. This cycle was broken in the nineteenth century, when the British and Russian Empires entered the power vacuum left by the geopolitical instability caused by Qing isolationism and Safavid decline.

Such a bird-eye overview condenses century-long changes into simple changes on the boundaries of different states on the map. What this analysis highlights, however, is the primacy of geographical determinants in the shaping of consecutive political regime and states in Iran and Central Asia. The appearance permanence of the boundary of Iran around the territory of Khorasan has more to do with the fact that rivers such as the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya, and mountain chains such as the Tamir Basin and the Himalaya, constituted fiercely obstinate obstacles to armies and administrations alike, than to any conscious

conception as to the relationship between a territory and its regime. In fact, the coupling of land and state is a modern conception that does not pre-date the emergence of nation-states. Amanat explains best how this ahistorical understanding of states can mar our understanding of pre-modern states:

> At least since the third century CE there was a well- defined political concept, an imperial entity with a centralized authority, called Iranshahr (Kingdom of Iran) and located it in Iranzamin (the land of Iran). Etymologically shahr from the Middle Persian Xshay literary means "where the authority of the shah (i.e., the state) is current." This is a concept different from the Greek polis for shahr gives primacy to the authority of an imperial state rather than defining the city- state.[166]

Going back to Figure 6, proponents of cultural or ethnic essentialist views of Iranian history would claim that Iran maintained its cultural, linguistic, and political identity even under foreign domination throughout the last 2500 years of its history. From the perspective of this narrative, Iran's position at the cusps of the Eurasian steppes has yielded the dual legacy of the fear of foreign domination and the ambition to attain hegemonic rules over territories that have historically been part of the Persianate cultural sphere. These two trends determined the choice of Pan-Iranism and National Sovereignty as part of the model. The legacy of realpolitik balancing in Eurasia has anchored Iran's search for political influence beyond its borders within the rules of the international system. Iran's regional ambitious therefore are not transformative in nature but are rather connected to its atavist fear of foreign invasions from the East and the West and the consequent need to control the borderlands surrounding the Iranian plateaux. Hegemony and independence are thus the two drives behind the Pan-Iranian and the National Sovereignty pillars; these logics underlines the regionalist logic of the Pan-Iranian Triangular model, and clash with the transnational, revolutionist logics of the Anti-imperialist and Pan-Islamic pillars.

[166] Amanat, Abbas. 'Iranian Identity Boundaries A Historical Overview', in Amanat, Abbas, and Farzin Vejdani. *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*. First ed., 2012, p. 3.

Nevertheless, it is important to remark the fictitiousness, or rather, the modernity of this conception of continuity in Iran's history. Firstly, just by looking at the table, it is hard to defend the claim of 'unbroken history' given the sheer number of states controlling Iran during Phase 3 and Phase 4, both in terms of different states successions, and in terms of contemporaneous partition of the territory of modern Iran among different states. Secondly, the prevailing narrative that cherry-picks only certain states and dynasties as authentically Persian and Iranian faces severe problems upon closer scrutiny. While I will not comment on the authenticity of the claim that the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid Empires were Persian *and* Iranian, as this falls far outside my field of expertise, I will point to the difficulty in singling out after the eighth century only the Safavid Empire as 'truly Iranian', and, for instance, excluding the Qajar Empire. It will be clear by now by looking at the summary above, that one of the reasons why Iranian intellectuals first, and political sympathizers of the Pahlavi regime later, may have tried to tie their national identity to the Safavid and not to the Qajar dynasty may have more to do with the Safavid's perceived political and cultural success as a great power, and the association between the Qajar rule and the political, economic, and territorial decline of Iran on the face of Russian and British encroachment in particular. Moreover, it is unclear how the Safavid are more deserving of the title of 'true Iranian rulers', other than due to a post-factum modern association of nationhood with the territory they administered:

> The Safavids (who were not Turks, but probably of Kurdish descent) were not exceptionally Persian in their dynastic character. They spoke Turkish in the household and emerged from the qizilbash milieu of Turkish tribal warriors. They did not make much of the idea of Iran in their propaganda or self-image. The Seljuqs were Turks, but their administrators were Persian speakers and they spread New Persian to West Iran. The Il-Khans were Mongols, but they were keen supporters of Persian letters (Shahnameh) and began the revival of the term Iran in a political sense.[167]

[167] This comment was related to me while reviewing a previous draft of this paper by Professor Edmund Herzig.

It is precisely because of this erasure of the way in which Persian culture shaped dynasties such as the Seljuqs and the Il-Khans, and the ways in which their courts in turn accelerated the spread and the evolution of the Persian language, literature, and culture, that the ideas embodied by the Pan-Iranian pillar have often turned into chauvinism and cultural exceptionalism into the international stage, causing Iranian diplomats many faux pas, as we shall see in the empirical chapters to follow.

The Pan-Islamic pillar: Khomeini's Pan-Islamic ambitions and the doctrine of the Rule of the Jurist

The crucial role that the Safavid dynasty played in moulding the political and social fabric of modern Iran cannot be understated. The Safavid's decision to make Shi'ite Islam the state religion in the 16th century had momentous political consequences on the makeup of Iran and of Central Asia. On one hand, Iran became the only Shi'a majority country in the world; on the other hand, this decision 'obstructed Sunni Central Asia's direct contact with the Ottoman Empire, the most powerful Sunni state'.[168] The isolation of Central Asian Muslims was accentuated by two other factors: first, the conversion of Mongol leaders to Tibetan Lamaistic Buddhism, and secondly, the establishment of recognised frontiers on the Chinese and Russian empire. This section expands on the trend highlighted in the historiographic discussion on the evolution of Iran's national identity. Namely, it will look at what authors like Ahmadi claim to be the 'omnipresence of religion' in Iran's history. I will argue instead for the uniqueness of the Islamic Republic's relationship between secular and religious authority, and I identify Khomeini's political thought as one of the major drivers of this.

[168] Golden, Peter B. *Central Asia in World History*. Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 105.

The Safavid shahs merged the pre-Islamic Iranian legacy and Islamic Shi'ite authority into a coherent state institution and a legitimising ideology. It is true that the Safavids were not alone in appealing to Sassanian ideas of kingship, as the Ottoman and the Moghul dynasties also co-opted imperial Iranian titles.[169] However, the Safavids instated a regime whose political structure resembled much more closely the Sassanian centralised rule. In spite of their reliance on religion, it should be noted that the relationship between the Safavid rulers and the clerical classes was not without friction:

> For the religious classes of Islamic scholars ('ulama) and jurists (fuqaha), such elevated notions of kingship were deemed as challenges to their self-ascribed role as interpreters of religious truth, and the medieval period has been dominated by this debate between juridical hierocrats and rationalist elements in Islamic society.[170]

In another work,[171] Mitchell argues that 'the Safavid state was not strictly committed to Shi'ite ideology but represented the religious, cultural, and ideological diversity that was the hallmark of the Iranian plateau in the medieval period'.[172] This is one way in which the parallel between the Islamic Republic and the Safavid empire falls short.

It would still be tempting to draw this historical parallel between the foundation of the Safavid state and the establishment of the Islamic Republic after the 1979, based solely on their shared religion. Both states capitalised on the effective implementation of Shi'ite Islam as an institutional and ideological tool of the centralised state. The two states, though, are separated by almost five centuries of domestic and global developments. This comparison would suggest that the genesis of the Islamic Republic is not exceptional in the

[169] Dale, Stephen Frederic. *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals*. Cambridge University Press, 2010, p 4.
[170] Mitchell, Colin P. New Perspectives on Safavid Iran. Vol. 8, Routledge, 2011.
[171] Mitchell, Colin Paul. *The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran: Power, Religion and Rhetoric*. Tauris Academic Studies, 2009.
[172] Noris, Evan. 'The Practice of Politics in Safavid Iran: Power, Religion and Rhetoric.*' The Middle East Journal*, vol. 64, no. 4, 2010, p. 683.

history of the Iranian state. The temptation of painting the political system of the Islamic Republic as an aberration often comes from the adoption of Iran's secularising and modernising momentum under the Pahlavi rule in the twentieth century as the baseline from which to judge the current Islamic Republic. While there is value in discarding the idea that the Pahlavi regime constitutes the yardstick against which to measure the current political system of Iran, the uniqueness of the Islamic Republic should not be understated, as never before had a regime been founded and controlled by the clerical class in Iranian history. There is a link between a strong centralised rule based on religious ideology and the endurance and stability of ruling regimes, though it is unclear why this link should be unique of Iran.

The emergence of the Islamic Republic may in one sense be consistent with broader patterns of centralisation of political and religious power, and it is undeniable that Shi'a Islam plays a significant part in the ordering of the current political regime. What remains to be explained is why Pan-Islamism has been chosen as one of the ideological pillars of the Islamic Republic if Shi'a identity is so deeply engraved in Iran's political culture. To answer this question, we need to turn at the attempts of twentieth century Iranian intellectuals to use Islam to build a model for anti-colonial, transnational solidarity, and in particular to the work of Ali Shariati and its impact on Khomeini's political thinking.

With Shari'ati (1933- 1977) there is a decisive move to position Islam as a political ideology in competition with the available Eastern and Western alternatives. He attacked both Western and Eastern political philosophy, as he argued they fell short of accounting for human dignity.[173] The capital offence of modern ideologies such as capitalism, Marxism,

[173] Shari'ati, Ali. *Marxism and other Western Fallacies*. Mizan Press, c1980, p.16.

and existentialism is that they are unable to ground morality, and thus an unsuitable basis for a human society:

> Today, a science developed without God has actually produced a civilized society, but not civilized people, whereas in the past, we had civilized people in a savage and backward society.[174]

Nevertheless, there is a tension between imitation and rejection of Western modernity in Shari'ati's writings. He argued that the Enlightenment principles of free and critical thinking merit to become pillars of a new Islamic philosophy. This same tension in Iran's love and hate for everything western will appear in the last section of this chapter in the writings of nineteenth century anti-imperialist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, and in the political thought of Iranian President Khatami.

Khomeini (1902-1989) brings this tension to a temporary halt in the 1960-80s by advocating for the path of confrontation and rejection of the Western model of civilisation. He inherited from Shari'ati the intuition of positing Islam in contrast to both capitalism and communism. He transformed this in a revolutionary foreign policy that saw Iran as a third pole against the two Cold War superpowers ('Neither East nor West'). He succeeded in sealing the tension between wholesale embrace and wholesale rejection of Western modernity away for as long as he was the head of the Islamic Republic.

In spite of the fact that a side-to-side comparison between the Islamic Republic and the Safavid Empire would be ahistorical, the doctrinal developments of Shia' Islam under the imperial rule of the Safavid are crucial in shaping the theological and intellectual milieu within which Khomeini developed his political theory. Khomeini was greatly successful in institutionalising his political thoughts in the Iranian constitution as the principle of *Velayat-*

[174] Shari'ati, *op. cit.,* p. 101.

e faqih (Guardianship of the Jurist). This principle was based on Khomeini's reformulation, or, as many would argue, distortion, of the Shi'ite doctrine of the Occultation of the Imam in the 12th century.[175] The original doctrine postulated that as long as the Imam (the rightful leader of the Muslim world by descent from Ali) was 'in occultation' (i.e., in hiding), no power on earth was legitimate. This disconnection between theology and politics had transformed the Shi'ite clergy into an impersonal, apolitical office whose authority did not depend on the graces of the ruler. It was this brand of Shi'ism that was imported in Iran by the Safavid emperors at the start of the 16th century.

For this reason, the Iranian 'ulama refused to partake in the daily business of politics until Khomeini's ideological marriage between revolutionary Islamism and religious traditionalism. Khomeini challenged the traditional quietist interpretation of the theory of Occultation.[176] He claimed that it was not only the person of the absconded Imam that possesses divine legitimacy to rule, but also his representatives on earth, the 'wise jurists'. By investing the 'ulama with political responsibility, he effectively transformed Iran's official clergy into a revolutionary vanguard. Since every revolutionary movement needs an enemy, Khomeini elected the forces of Western and Eastern imperialism as the archnemesis of the Islamic Republic: '[Islam is] the religion of those who desire freedom and independence. It is the school of those who struggle against imperialism'.[177] Mozaffari best explained how Khomeini's political and theological dualism bled into his anti-imperialism:

> For Khomeini, the structure of the current international system is unjust and repressive. Thus, the existing corrupt rule must be replaced by the true Islamic order which is just, fair and virtuous […] The Manichean picture that Khomeini had in

[175] Arjomand, Said Amir. *Sociology of Shi'ite Islam: Collected Essays*, 2016.
[176] Arjomand, *op. cit.* p. 115.
[177] Khomeini, Ruhollah., and Hamid. Algar. *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist.* Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Work, 2005, p. 30.

> mind is absolutely alien to any Westphalian model of the state as well as relations between states. His 'unit' is the Umma (Community) and not the nation-state.[178]

With Khomeini, the religious difference between Shi'ism and other branches of Islam is de-emphasised in favour of Pan-Islamism. Iran wants to be painted as a beacon of light for the oppressed Muslim world and the whole Global South, engaged in a righteous fight against the worldly oppressive powers of capitalism and communism. Khomeini's doctrine of the wise jurist becomes a theory of transnational political change, guiding the Global South and all the oppressed nations towards a new, fairer international system that transcends nation-states in favour of an enlightened unity under the guidance of the jurist. This shows that 'Khomeinism' as a political ideology is inescapably grounded in Iran's experience of the colonial encounter with the West. This transnational character determined the decision to elect Pan-Islamism as the second pillar of the model for Iran's post-revolutionary ideology; it also determines the ideational affinity between Pan-Islamism and Anti-imperialism, as well as its tension with the principles of National Sovereignty and Pan-Iranism, which, as we have seen in the previous section, are rooted in the geopolitical reality of Eurasia and are anchored within a Westphalian understanding of the international system.

It is necessary to place the phenomenon of Iran's Pan-Islamism within the wider phenomenon of Political Islam. In defining Iran's ideology as 'Islamist' I refer to the definition provided by the *Princeton readings in Islamic Thought*. Here Islamist movements are defined as 'contemporary movements that attempt to return to the scriptural foundation of the Muslim community, excavating and reinterpreting them for the application to the present day social and political world'.[179] This locates the incipit of modern Islamism during

[178] Mozaffari, Mehdi. 'Revolutionary, Thermidorian and Enigmatic Foreign Policy: President Khatami and the "Fear of the Wave".' *International Relations (London)*, vol. 14, no. 5, 1999, p. 11.
[179] Euben, Roxanne L., and Muhammad Qasim Zaman. *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought : Texts and Contexts from Al-Banna to Bin Laden*. 2021, p. 4.

the anti-colonial movements of the late nineteenth century in Iran and India, with the work of al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood and Sunni Muslim. The modern Islamist movement spanned both Shi'a and Sunni denominations because it emerged as a reaction to the confrontation with the West: in Iran, India, and Egypt, it was the reality of colonial and imperial domination that triggered it. Two major characteristics underline modern Islamism in the Muslim world. The first is the quest to return to an original, authentic Islam, often taken to be the mythical Golden Era of the reign of the Prophet. The second is an explicitly statist project that envisions the implementation of state-sanctioned policies to enforce religious norms.[180] The denial of the separation of church and state distinguishes Islamist reform movements from Western-inspired reformist movements in Muslim countries, often termed 'modernists', and confers to Islamist movements across the globe an anti-imperialist inclination. Islamist movement are not necessarily traditionalist and conservative: the major difference between modernist and Islamists lays in their conceptualization of the relation between state and religion, not in their rejection of modernity per se.

The *Princeton readings in Islamic Thought* identifies the 'ulama (or Islamic clergy), as the third source of political critique in Muslim societies alongside Islamist and modernist movements. Unlike these two groups, the 'ulama generally opposed the contamination of Muslim societies by Western knowledge, and the attempts of Islamists to reinterpret the meaning of the sacred texts. The 'ulama opposed Islamists movements due to the threat they posed to their privileges: by reclaiming the right to interpret the Qur'an, Islamist intellectuals questioned the authority and prestige of the 'ulama in Muslim societies.

The Islamist movement in Iran had one key characteristic that distinguished it from this general blueprint. This is the fact that many Islamists in Iran were part of the 'ulama.

[180] Euben, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-8.

Hence, the ideology of the Islamic Republic was coterminous with the ideology of that part of the 'ulama that defected away from the apolitical traditions and towards political engagement.[181] There is considerable academic debate on the nature of the teachings of Shi'a Islam on political power. However, I agree with Arjomand's claim that historically, Shi'a Islam has more often than not lead to acceptance of the political status quo rather than to its overturning through political revolutions.[182] It was thus the historical juncture in which Iran found itself in the 1970s, and not the cultural legacy of Shi'ism per se, that determined the way in which Iranian Islamism intertwined with the wider Muslim anti-imperialist quest for independence and eventually became the dominant political ideology.

By looking at the role of the 'ulama across Muslim societies, the uniqueness of the Iranian case is glaring. Mortimer states that, in past centuries, the 'ulama in Iran imposed strict limits on the reinterpretation of the Shari'a. This was an attempt to preserve their political autonomy:

> If successive generations of the ulama set tighter and tighter limits to their own power of interpreting the law, that was partly at least to protect themselves and the community from pressure by the ruler to reinterpret it to suit his interests.[183]

The 'ulama attempted to limit the temporal power of the sovereign by setting impossibly high standards for God-given political legitimacy. This created a tension between ideal political power and de facto political power. The discrepancy between the virtues necessary to be recognised as a legitimate political authority and the real character of Iran's political leaders made it such that 'the establishment of a Shi'ite state […] posed a doctrinal problem

[181] Abrahamian, Ervand. *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*. University of California Press, 1993, p. 58.
[182] Arjomand, Said Amir. *Sociology of Shi'ite Islam*: *Collected Essays*. 2016.
[183] Euben, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

of political authority which has never been fully resolved'.[184] This tension laid dormant for centuries, until Muslim societies entered a protracted period of internal crisis in the 17th century, subsequently exacerbated by the rise of European powers in the 18th century, and the imposition of colonial or semi-colonial rule in the nineteenth century.

The 'ulama in Iran was willing and able to take on the mantle of reform because of the theological restrictions it had imposed on legitimate political power. Because the power of the 'ulama in Iran did not emanate from the political regime, but from their religious authority, they were the only independent locus of power in Iran during the nineteenth century. An example of this power was the failure of the 1905 Constitutional Revolution. The liberal constitutionalists attempted to co-opt the influence of the clergy. In doing so, however, they underestimated the power of the Islamist faction of the 'ulama, who would not support secularism.[185] Up until the 1960s, the Iranian 'ulama still held aloof from political interference. What changed this was Khomeini's Islamist ideology. He challenged the quietist interpretation of the doctrine of the Imam's Occultation by claiming that it was not only the person of the absconded Imam to possess divine legitimacy, but also his representatives, namely the wise jurist (*Velayat-e faqih*). In the case of Iran, the political will to shake the yoke of Western domination found fertile terrain in the existing authority of the Shi'ite 'ulama. It was thus a combination of structural changes at the international level, the transnational and permeable nature of the institution of the Shi'ite 'ulama, and the perceived weakness and decadence of Muslim regimes that make up the landscape for the emergence of Iran's post-revolutionary ideology.

[184] Euben, *op. cit.*, p. 299.
[185] During the twentieth century, the Iranian 'ulama was divided in three factions: the traditionalists, who opposed any democratic reform; the Islamists, who supported the project of Political Islam; and the reformists, who supported secular democracy. The last faction was permanently silenced with the imposition of house arrests on its latest leader, Ayatollah Shariatmadari, in 1982.

Nevertheless, the ideological model used in this thesis takes Pan-Islamism rather than Shi'ism as one of the core pillars of Iran's post-Revolutionary ideology. While it is certainly true that Iran's Shi'ite identity is not inconsequential to its foreign policy, I argue that Shi'ism is much less important to Iran's relations with Central Asian countries for two reasons: firstly, Khomeini made an explicit effort to present himself as the leader of the Muslim world at large, and not only of Shi'a Muslims; secondly, Central Asian Muslims were mostly Hanafi Muslims rather than Salafi Muslims, and Sufism remained an important religious movement bridging Iran and Transoxiana. The choice of Pan-Islamism as a concept is driven by an ideological analysis of Khomeini's *Islamic Government* (1971). The book contains a detailed theological argumentation in favour of Khomeini's political interpretation of Islam. *Islamic Government* is aimed primarily at religious scholars and intellectuals, and it is written to persuade the intended audience of the validity and rationality of Khomeini's interpretation of the doctrine of the Occultation of the Imam, and of its political implications.

A preliminary analysis of Khomeini's political thought shows that there are three concepts that make up the bulk of his ideology: justice, freedom, and authority. Justice and freedom are clear examples of essentially contested concepts. Neither freedom nor justice have explicit definitions in Khomeini's thinking. Khomeini's discussion about justice is strongly rooted in the political context of Pahlavi Iran. The empirical premise underlying his discussion is that legal rights are not enough in the face of the Shah's arbitrary injustice and abuse of power, for there needs to be both substantial socio-economic equality and moral rectitude in a just society. On one hand, Khomeini emphasizes the connection between injustice and lack of freedom under the Shah regime.[186] On the other hand, he also stressed

[186] Khomeini, Ruhollah, and Hamid. Algar. *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist.* Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Work, 2005, p. 49: 'The Iranian people in reality no

the individualistic and spiritual dimension of justice, claiming that it is the duty of an Islamic society to actively extirpate vices.[187]

Khomeini claimed that only a free, that is, a politically, culturally, and morally emancipated Muslim government can create a just society by means of implementing the dictates of Islam. He believed that laxity in the observation of Islamic rules during the Pahlavi rule was not a sign of a just society allowing for freedom of consciousness and of religion, but of cultural imperialism. Personal and moral flourishing could be achieved only through stricter applications of the rules enforced by a Muslim government.[188] Much in the same fashion as with thinkers such as al-Afghani, the struggle for political independence became the pre-requisite for political and spiritual freedom, and for the establishment of a just, Islamic society:

> In order to attain the unity and freedom of the Muslim peoples, we must overthrow the oppressive governments installed by the imperialists and bring into existence an Islamic government of justice.[189]

Khomeini defines authority as 'the government, the administration of the country, and the implementation of the sacred laws of the sharī‗ah'.[190] If Islam is, according to him, the dictate and the formula for perfecting men spiritually and socially, human perfection is attained by being just, being free, and by submitting to the legitimate authority. Khomeini's concept of authority is centred on the seemingly contradictory ideas that legitimate political power is both republican and theocratic. A free and legitimate Muslim government must be

choice but to destroy those systems of government that are corrupt in themselves and also entail the corruption of others, and to overthrow all treacherous, corrupt, oppressive, and criminal regimes.'

[187] Khomeini, *op. cit.*, p. 36: 'The only way to prevent the emergence of anarchy and disorder and to protect society from corruption is to form a government and thus impart order to all the affairs of the country'.

[188] Khomeini, *op. cit.*, p. 42: 'A believing, pious, just individual cannot possibly exist in a socio-political environment of this nature, and still maintain his faith and righteous conduct.'

[189] Khomeini, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

[190] Khomeini, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

both republican[191] and Islamic[192] in nature. In lieu of this definition of authority, justice itself becomes the political implementation of Islamic doctrines, which presupposes the inseparability of religious and political matters:

> This slogan of the separation of religion from politics and the demand that Islamic scholars should not intervene in social and political affairs have been formulated and propagated by the imperialists; it is only the irreligious who repeat them. Were religion and politics separate in the time of the Prophet (s)? Did there exist, on one side, a group of clerics, and opposite it, a group of politicians and leaders?[193]

The emphasis on political emancipation as a prerequisite for constructing a just Islamic society makes freedom synonymous with cultural and intellectual authenticity. The achievement of political independence is not sufficient to free the Iranian people: what keeps Iran subjugated is not just the military rule of the Shah, but also the abandonment of Iranian and Islamic identities in favour of Western ones. For Khomeini, key to this process of identity loss is the discrediting of the teaching of Islam.

Finally, political and spiritual authority come to be represented by Khomeini's controversial doctrine of the governance of the jurist (*Velayat-e faqih*). From this argument, Khomeini derives his most contentious political doctrine: since political authority belongs to God alone, and God has provided all necessary laws in the sacred scriptures and through the example of the Prophet(s) and of the Imams, an Islamic government would have no use for legislation. Political power should be exercised by those who have the most perfect

[191] Khomeini, *op. cit.,* p. 23: 'Islam proclaims monarchy and hereditary succession wrong and invalid […] The imposition of foreign laws on our Islamic society has been the source of numerous problems and difficulties'.
[192] Khomeini, *op. cit.,* p. 84: ']Islam is] a ruling that makes Muslims refrain from having recourse to illegitimate powers and their appointed judges, so that non-Islamic and oppressive regimes may fall'.
[193] Khomeini, *op. cit.,* p. 26.

understanding of the divine laws, namely the jurists. Government, in his political thought, is thus nothing more than the correct interpretation of the sacred texts of Islam.[194]

The struggle against the imperialist powers then becomes the *raison d'être* of Khomeini's political ideology, as it provides an opposite model and an external threat against which to mobilise the Iranian society. Khomeini claimed that 'imperialists have imposed an unjust economic order, and thereby divided our people into two groups, oppressors and oppressed.'[195] This is a typical populist tactic, which divides the people in two classes, the righteous poor, and the vicious rich.[196] Khomeini's Islamism thus becomes inescapably anti-imperialist and Third-Worldist in its popular appeal:

> It is important to note here that [in 1979] the lay reformers finally joined [Khomeini's] ranks because of, and not despite, his rhetoric. In the early phase of the revolution Khomeini spoke their language, though more radically […] His message appealed to all types of revolutionaries […] He readily spoke of the right of the masses, the destitute, the workers, the oppressed at home and abroad.[197]

In defining one key pillar of Iran's post-revolutionary ideology as Pan-Islamic, therefore, it is not my intention to dismiss the clear doctrinal, intellectual, and theological derivation of Khomeini's Islamism from Shi'a doctrine dating back to the 10-12th century. While Khomeini's Islamism and, in my opinion, Iran's wider political ideology are Shi'a in their genealogy and in their content, they nevertheless aspire to be Pan-Islamic and non-sectarian in reach and influence. The singling out of this Pan-Islamic aspiration over the sectarian provenance of these ideas themselves is dictated by my intention to study the effect of the normative precepts of Iran's ideology on its foreign policy, rather than to appraise the

[194] Khomeini, *op. cit.*, p. 42: 'The fundamental difference between Islamic government, on the one hand, and constitutional monarchies and republics, on the other, is this: whereas the representatives of the people or the monarch in such regimes engage in legislation, in Islam the legislative power and competence to establish laws belongs exclusively to God Almighty'.
[195] Khomeini, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
[196] Khomeini, 'In Commemoration of the Martyrs of Tehran', *Islam and Revolution.*
[197] Bayat, Mangol. 'The Iranian Revolution of 1978-79: Fundamentalist or Modern?'. *The Middle East Journal,* vol. 37, no. 1, 1983, pp. 30–42.

constraints that its Shi'a derivation has imposed on its popularity abroad. The idea of 'exporting the revolution' (*sodūr-e enqelāb*), as well as Khomeini's own policy of 'Neither East, nor West' were key manifestations of the desire to transcend sectarianism.[198] The re-interpretation of Iran's ideology within the wider legacy of Pan-Islamism has been eloquently argued by Berry:

> Khomeini regularly disparaged nationalism in favor of the broader unity of the Islamic world against "global aggression" (estekbār-e jahānī) and sought rapprochement with the Sunnis through such actions as banning the disparagement of the first three Caliphs. Pan-Islamism and the pursuit of Islamic unity have been a consistent element of IRI ideology, though their implementation in policy has sometimes been problematic.[199]

Aghaie explores the relationship between nationalism and religion in the Islamic Republic by arguing for the need for a new framework, that of 'religious nationalism'. This approach would make sense of the attempted synthesis between the Persian and the Islamic components of Iran's identity in contemporary Iran:

> While nationalism has been widely condemned in Iran over the past few decades by most intellectuals, the use of various forms of the expression "Islamic-Iranian identity" has remained at the center of political discourse and has continued to be used in different ways by different people. These uses of the term have roots in the ideas and symbols that were debated before the Islamic Revolution, by such ideologues as Shariʾati, Al-e Ahmad, and Motahhari, who argued that Islam was the most important component of Iranianness, or that Iranians played critically important roles in the development of Islam.[200]

The distinction between 'Islamic-Iranian identity' and 'Iranian-Islamic identity' is captured in the two Triangular model (see Figure 3 and 4) by the left side of the triangle,

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[198] Massarrat, Mohssen. 'The Ideological Context of the Iran-Iraq War: Pan-Islamism versus PanArabism'. Ed. Amirahmadi, Hooshang, and Nader, Entessar. *Iran and the Arab World,* Macmillan, 1993; Tures, John A. 'Rattling the Hesam: International Distractions from Internal Problems in Iran'. *Asian Politics & Policy*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2009, pp. 50–78.

[199] Berry, Adam Jan. *From 'Exporting the Revolution' to 'Postmodern Pan-Islamism': a Discourse Analysis of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Ideology, 1979-2009.* DPhil (University of Oxford), 2012.

[200]Aghaei, Kamran Scot. 'Islamic-Iranian Nationalism and Its Implications for the Study of Political Islam and Religious Nationalism', in Aghaei and Marashi, *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, pp. 3-24.

which represents the balance between the Pan-Islamic and the Pan-Iranian pillars in the different approaches to foreign policy.

The Anti-Imperialist pillar: Iran and Central Asia under foreign domination in the 19th century

This section will place the paradigm of Iran's international revisionism within the context of the historical uniqueness of the Iran-West encounter. The legacy of Tehran's encounter with Western imperialism has begotten the Anti-Imperialist pillar. The three most important defeats in the history of Iran are the Arab conquest, the Mongol conquest, and the series of military and political losses of the Qajar dynasty against the Russian and the British empire in the nineteenth century. While, as we have seen in the discussion at the start of the chapter, there has been a tendency within secular Iranian nationalism in the last century to reinterpret the Arab invasion as a disruption to the continuity of Iran's Persian identity, I argue instead that the loss to European powers is foundational for modern Iranian nationalism and, in turns, for the ideology of the Islamic Republic, because it represented an unresolved challenge to the sense of identity and cultural superiority of Iran. In spite of the crushing military defeats and the wholesale occupation of Iran by foreign armies, both the Arab and the Mongol rule represented less of a threat to the ontological security of the Iranian state and society in the long term than its confrontation with European empires. The ethnonationalist or cultural essentialist narratives analysed above hold that the 'invaders' were quickly assimilated into the Iranian culture. Iranian cultural superiority, they contend, manifested in different ways: Persian was held as both a lingua franca and the language of the cultured elite; Persian literature continued to flourish and contributed to the establishment of Persian cities in Central Asia as international centres of art and culture. Both the Arab and the Mongol

conquerors soon realised their need to rely on the trained Persian bureaucratic establishment to be able to administer their newly acquired territories.[201] Historian nowadays content the assimilationist narrative and speak instead of a Turco-Persian synthesis that gave rise to new and hybrid culture, and within which the ethnicity of ruling dynasties became diluted.

Iran's encounter with the West is a different matter. Here the 'West' is defined from Iran's perspective as the 'other' against which it had to defend and define its identity, namely European powers, the United State and Russia. In the nineteenth century, western domination in Iran took the form of a series of territorial losses against Russia and the loss of control over the economy to British monopolies. In the twentieth century, this relationship of covert political subordination continued both in the form of economic exploitation and political interference. This culminated in 1953 with the US-UK supported the coup against the democratically elected government of Mosaddeq. Whilst the Mongol and Arab invaders adopted and fused with aspects of the Persian culture, in the 20th century the Iranian state and parts of the society attempted to westernise and secularise themselves. Aside from appealing to pre-Islamic Iran, the shah's White Revolution in the 1960-70s represented arguably the most abrupt and pervasive attempt of top-down transformation of Iranian society in the history of the country.[202]

This kind of reaction to European military preponderance is not exceptional within the story of global resistance and adaptation to European imperialism. The Shah's modernising project echoes Japan's Meiji restoration, as well as the Young Turks movement. Europe's self-proclaimed cultural superiority precipitated an identity crisis in Iran. Arguably,

[201] Katouzian, Homa. *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval, and Modern Iran*. Yale University Press, 2009. See also Dale, *op. cit.* The Mongolian rulers of the Il-khanate are perhaps the clearest example of this process.
[202]Katouzian, Homa. 'White Revolution'. *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval, and Modern Iran*. Yale University Press, 2009.

the question of how to relate to Western modernity is one of the underlying forces fuelling the depth of Iranian resentment and distrust for Western countries to date.

The most decisive military loss the Qajar empire endured was the one sanctioned by the treaty of Turkmenchai (1828); though humiliating, this was not a military defeat that jeopardised the political survival of the Qajar regime. Iran and the European empires cohabited Central Asia for a much longer period of time before the European states appeared to have an obvious military, political, and economic advantage on Iran; on the contrary, the encounter with both the Arab and the Mongol forces was sudden and decisive. The source of European superiority was attributed at that time to their superior science, in contrast with the slow decay and stagnation that the Iranian civilisation, and the Muslim states in general, had undergone since the heights of the 16th century.

Recent historiographic work has highlighted the crucial importance of these years for the formation of modern Iran. I argue that the confrontation with the West and its fundamental lack of resolution also underlines the structure of the current state ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran, or, as Marashi claims, that 'the history of Iran in the modern period stemmed from this basic dilemma over how to define the culture of Iran as a modern nation'.[203] In his work, he also focuses on the pioneering role of Iranian intellectuals in creating a sense of national identity based on foreign paradigms:

> Intellectuals carried out the work of constructing this sense of cultural and historical memory during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of their ideas were influenced by their discovery of nineteenth-century European historical and philological scholarship, an encounter that had a profound effect on Iranian national consciousness.[204]

[203] Marashi, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
[204] Marashi, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

Vaziri also focuses on how European Orientalist studies of Iran from the late 18th – early 19th century preceded the rise of modern Iranian historiography, and also pioneered some of the tropes we find in the construction of modern Iranian national identity, such as the racialisation of Iranian as 'Aryans'.[205] Two important trends about historic Iranian identity and self-representation are particularly crucial in driving home the extent of the influence of European Orientalist scholarship on the refashioning of 20th Iranian identity. Firstly, Davis explains in his article that historically there have been separate geographical conceptions of Iran, and that the loci of Iranian identity has shifted with the loci of political power:

> There are in reality three separate geographical "Irans," or centers of Iran, designated in the Shahnameh […] the Iran of the legendary Shahnameh is clearly located in the Parthian homeland, or close to it. That is, in northeastern Iran, and including the historical Khurasan as far north and east as the cities of Bokhara and Samarqand [...] With the appearance of the Sasanians, the center of interest becomes the west, beyond the western border of present- day Iran, in Mesopotamia.[206]

The second trend concerns the novelty of recounting the history of the Iranian plateaux as a single, uninterrupted narrative from the times of Cyrus the Great to the Qajar dynasty:

> Traditional Iranian histories never covered these three periods in one full narrative and that an uninterrupted history of Iran is a novelty of modern historiography. A pre-Islamic period stretched from antiquity to the advent of Islam in the seventh century AD. A second period of about 850 years follows the Islamic conquest when Iran ceases to exist as a unified political unit and when no state consistently refers to itself as "Iran," although Iran survives as a cultural and geographical idea. A third period starts with the re-creation of an Iranian state by the Safavids around 1500 and extends into modern times.[207]

If European scholarly paradigms profoundly shaped the modernist and secularist movements in Iran, they also caused the emerge of a plethora of socio-political movement that preached resistance against political and cultural imperialism. The writings of al-Afghani embody this

[205] Vaziri, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
[206] Davis, Dick. 'Iran and Aniran The Shaping of a Legend', in Amanat, Abbas, and Farzin Vejdani. *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*. First ed., 2012, p. 76-80.
[207] Zia-Ebrahim, *op. cit.*, chapter 2.

political tumult. Writing as one of the Iranian intellectuals organising the first anti-imperial resistance movements in India and Iran in the late nineteenth century, he placed the blame for the political decline on the ruling class of Iran. In his writing, it is not divine mandate that sanctions military and political superiority, but science (here used in its broader meaning of 'knowledge'). Once Iran had abandoned its pursuit of science, it abandoned its claim to political superiority, too:

> Thus I say: if someone looks deeply into the question, he will see that science rules the world. There was, is, and will be no ruler in the world but science… The Europeans have now put their hands on every part of the world… In reality this usurpation, aggression, and conquest has not come from the French or the English. Rather it is science that everywhere manifests its greatness and power…in reality, sovereignty has never left the abode of science. However, this true ruler, which is science, it has moved from East to West, and other times from West to East… thus it is evident that all wealth and riches are the result of science.[208]

The unresolvedness of Iran's confrontation with the West in the 19th-20th century has begotten an important legacy that still dominates Iran's relations with the West today; we have already touched upon this tension between imitation and rejection of Westernism in the section on Pan-Islamism. Mohammed Khatami (President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1997-2005) best explained in his own words the endurance of this legacy. He pointed at how it is impossible for Iran to either flatly reject all that is Western, or unreflectively accept a foreign and incompatible worldview. Khatami too envisions a cycle of rise and fall of civilisations. When a civilisation's world view is in contradiction with the lived experience of its people, he argues, society experiences a profound crisis.[209] This is the roots of the on-going crisis of identity in Iran, a crisis that is at its core ideological more than material.[210] The core of the struggle that Iran is going through, according to Khatami, is

[208] Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn 'al-Afghānī',* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 102-3.
[209] Khatami, Mohammad. *Islam, Liberty and Development.* Global Publications: SUNY Binghampton University, 1998, p. 51.
[210]Khatami, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

attempting to come to terms with the outdatedness of its worldview and discarding it, without throwing away with it its entire identity. It is a question of carefully choosing which intellectual precepts of Western modernity to adopt, and which ones to shun.[211]

This account of the genesis of Iranian anti-imperialism through the lenses of the uniqueness of Tehran's encounter with the West has provided the basis for the choice of Anti-Imperialism as the fourth and last pillar. Al-Afghani's anti-imperialism, which, as we saw in the previous section, reverberated through the writings of Khomeini, was transnational in nature because it was rooted in the intuition that national divisions were aiding European policies of *divide et impera*. Much like Pan-Islamism, Iran's Anti-Imperialism is not just transnational in the sense that it operates across borders, but in the sense that it rejects the legitimacy of modern borders and of the Westphalian nation-state system. Its politically transformative orientation stands at odds with the realist, security-oriented logic behind the Pan-Iranian and National Sovereignty pillars.

Central Asia has a complex relationship with its own indigenous anti-imperialist movement. If during the times of al-Afghani the Iranian Tobacco Protest of 1890 embodied the emergence of anti-imperialist spirit in Iran,[212] the Basmachi Revolt of 1918-28 represented the awakening of pro-independence sentiments in Central Asia. The Basmachi were 'the expression of a spontaneous revolt by the population against the atrocities committed against it and the violence perpetrated against Islam'.[213] The Basmachi movement was not just a spontaneous reaction to the Red Army massacre of Kokand in 1918, but rather the continuation of various forms of armed resistance on part of the indigenous

[211] Khatami, *op. cit.,* p. 96.
[212] The Persian Tobacco Protest was a revolt against an 1890 tobacco concession granted to the United Kingdom, which ceded to London control over the entire tobacco industry. The protest was held by Tehran merchants in solidarity with the clerics.
[213] De Lageard, Helene Aymen. 'The Revolt of the Basmachi According to Red Army Journals (1920-1922).' *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1987, p. 10.

population, started by the Andizhan uprising of 1896 and the great revolt of the nomad tribes (Kyrgyz and Kazakh) of 1916.[214]

In spite of its 'external appearance of brigandage' the Basmachi revolt was actually a reflection and representation of the thoughts and spirit of a wide segment of the populace'.[215] Many authors peg them as having had no political programme beyond generic slogans such as 'Defend Islam' and 'Russians go home',[216] though there are sources indicating that there was an attempt to transform the Basmachi movement into a genuinely anti-colonial liberation movement. Key to this reading is the account of the insurgency written by Zeki Velidi Togan, a Soviet party member of Turkic descent who defected from the Bolsheviks to join the cause of the rebels. In this account, we learn that prominent international figures, such as exiled Ottoman officer Enver Pasha, defected from the pro-Bolshevik side and joined the rebel cause. The Basmachi rebellion was eventually put out after ten years; its failure stemmed from the irredentist intelligentsia's inability to assert their authorities on the peasant class, who continued to regard their local 'ulama as the legitimate leaders of their community.[217]

Iran's relations with its Eastern neighbours have been informed by centuries of friendly and adversarial relations that have left an enduring legacy. Iran and Central Asia's destinies have been inescapably tangled throughout history except for the last 70 years of Soviet rule. As next chapter will show, the policy of deculturalisation and Sovietisation of Central Asia under the Tsarist and Soviet yoke has been one of the main drivers of this divergence. Their communal experience of foreign domination should leave room for

[214] Broxup, Marie. 'The Basmachi.' *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1983, pp. 57–81.
[215] Paksoy, H. B. 'The Basmachi Movement from Within: An Account of Zeki Velidi Togan.' *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1995, pp. 373–399.
[216] Broxup, Marie. 'The Basmachi.' *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1983, pp. 57–81; Roy, Olivier. The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations. Rev. ed., I. B. Tauris, 2007.
[217] Paksoy, *op. cit.*

common policies in the form of anti-imperial struggle. However, the demise of the Soviet Union has left a large ideological gap that has been filled only partially by the newly emerging national identities of the Central Asian Republics and by the resurgence of Islam. To understand the role that Iran has played, or failed to play, in Central Asia since 1991 we needed to understand what different shared political, cultural, and religious legacies Iran could have leveraged. This has been addressed in this chapter by showcasing the sociological and intellectual history behind each of the four pillars of Iran's ideology, which, at least on paper, represent four different facets of Iran's political identity, as well as four potential bridges between Iran and Central Asia.

The next chapter will demonstrate that this theoretical compatibility was complicated by the Soviet interlude. It will address how the Islamic resurgence that emerged in 1980s in Central Asia was very different from the Iranian Islamic Revolution due to the way in which Islam had adapted to survive Sovietisation in Central Asia and due to the influence of Wahabism through new diaspora ties to Saudi Arabia. Chapter 4 will showcase the limits of Pan-Iranism, in spite of it looking like the ideal vehicle for the establishment of bilateral and regional ties between the Islamic Republic and Central Asian states. On one hand, Persianate people had inhabited Central Asia since before the time of Cyrus the Great, and at times Central Asia overtook Iran as the cultural centre rather than the periphery of Persianate culture, for example, after the conquest of the Mongol empire. The main issue with Pan-Iranism as a foreign policy lies in Tehran's implementation: Iran has often approached Central Asian republics with an air of cultural superiority, refusing to recognise their independent contribution to Persianate culture, and at the same time ignoring the complexity of Central Asian state's multi-ethnic and multi-lingual demographics. In fact, only Tajikistan after its independence chose to emphasise its Persianate history in the construction of its new national identity; the other states all appealed to leaders of Turkish

or Mongol descent who were historical enemies of Iran. Chapter 5 will address the shortcoming of a Pan-Islamic and Anti-imperialist policy. While Anti-imperialism sounds like a good starting point on paper, Central Asian states did not undergo a political revolution to gain their own independence and, having been part of the USSR, did not partake in the Third Wordlist movement of the 1970s-80s. Iran's Pan-Islamist approach was also undermined by the fact that many post-Soviet regimes feared Islamic insurgencies more than they hated Russian attempts to bring them back into its sphere of influence.

By the start of the 21st century, Iran had to settle for a foreign policy based on the minimalist principle of National Sovereignty, rooted in the mutual appreciation for the need to remain free from foreign interference. This resulted in the failure of more ambitious Iranian policies of regional hegemony based on Pan-Iranism and policies of regional political transformation based on Pan-Islamism in favour of a policy of minimal bilateral relations. In the end, American systematic attempts to isolate Iran in Central Asia after 1995 succeeded because the instability created in the 1990s by the Tajik Civil War, the Taliban's rise to power, and the IMU insurgency convinced the ex-Soviet leaders that the proliferation of political Islam was directly contrary to their nation's interests and to their personal profits.

Chapter 3

Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia during the USSR dissolution (1990-92): from Pan-Islamism to Pan-Iranism

The title of this thesis refers to Khomeini's famous foreign policy slogan of 'Neither East nor West'. This was the principle by which he tried to guide Iran through the 1980s towards a transnational Islamic revolution. Several developments thwarted this vision. The internal power struggle that enveloped Iran in the years 1979-1984 was brutal and bloody, and Khomeini found himself entrenching his power and authority more and more in despised 'western' models of government. The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war sanctioned almost a decade of fighting and heightened international isolation for the revolutionary regime. By the end of it, Khomeini was forced to strike several diplomatic compromises that contradicted the very principles upon which the Islamic Republic was founded. After Khomeini's death, and with the ascension of Khamenei to the office of Supreme Leader, Iran underwent the painful process of institutionalising and codifying the political legacy of Khomeini into a bureaucratic and political structure that transcended individual charisma. The fall of the USSR came at a time when Iran has already started its policy re-orientation by declaring its neutrality in the First Gulf War and attempting a rapprochement with Saudi Arabia. It was during this transitional period in the history of the Islamic Republic that Central Asia gained its independence and became a chance for Iran to 'turn to the East' without compromising on Khomeini's Third-Worldism.

Iran's presence and influence in Central Asia has been far from constant in the last three decades. Given the enduring historical ties between Iran and Central Asia explored in

the last chapter, the lukewarm success of Tehran's overture to the region warrants an explanation. This thesis contends that Iran's inability to capitalise on its common linguistic, cultural, and historical heritage with Central Asia can be explained by a combination of ideological and geopolitical analysis: we should look both at the particular form which Iran's post-revolutionary ideology has assumed and at the preponderant role that the United States played in isolating Iran to make sense of Tehran's overall policy failure in Central Asia.

This case study will serve two purposes. Firstly, it will aid to orient the reader in the post-Cold War momentum after the longue durée view of Iran-Central Asian relations showcased in the last chapter. The first section will provide a background overview of the disintegration of the USSR, as well as of the literature surrounding it. It will also locate Iran's place in the world during the historical changes of the 1990s, underlining the importance of the end of the Iraq-Iran war, the death of Khomeini and the constitutional reforms Iran underwent at the time. Secondly, this case study will also serve as one of the three snapshot analyses of critical junctures in Iran's relations with Central Asia. The dissolution of the USSR represents the first critical juncture that Iran encountered after the death of Khomeini. While the process of breakaway of the Central Asian Republics was less violent and more gradual than that of the Baltic and Eastern European states, it still precipitated cataclysmic changes in the political landscape of the region, unleashing unresolved ethnic and political conflicts engendered by the Soviet partition of the 1920s.

I have identified two pivotal points in this first critical juncture. The first is 7 January 1990, when the USSR attempted to stop the secession of the Baltic states. Its failure to maintain control over its union republics through military force signed the end of an era of forced integration, started from the 1948 intervention in Czech-Slovakia, and continued with the 1953 military operation in Hungary. After this day, it became clear that Moscow would

not be able to stop the withdrawal of countries from the Warsaw Pact. The fate of the USSR's Republics, however, remained unclear. The second pivotal point marks the point of no return for the dissolution of the Soviet state, when Uzbekistan President Karimov publicly announced in October 1991 his decision to move towards secession from the USSR.

This case study will argue that Iran showcased a propensity for reading all developments in Central Asia within a Pan-Islamist perspective in 1989-91. This was dictated by Iran's projection of its own revolutionary experience onto other non-Arab Muslim peoples. Tehran rapidly pivoted away from a Pan-Islamic interpretation in favour of an emphasis on Iranian culture and identity by 1992. This pivot from Pan-Islamism to Pan-Iranism characterised the initial phase of Iran's approach to Central Asia.

The shift from Pan-Islamism to Pan-Iranism was paralleled by an internal shift in Iran's perspective of the region. Iran oscillated between culture and religion as a framework to understand and communicate with Central Asian states. This policy oscillation was paralleled by a rich academic discourse in Iranian journals that followed the same trajectory, as it will be explored in this chapter. The simultaneous development of policy and discourse expedited and crystalised the decoupling of the Pan-Islamist and the Pan-Iranian pillars. I suggest that this initial change in the internal structure of Iran's post-revolutionary ideology is partly responsible for the widespread perception of Iran's pragmatism in the 1990s. The encounter with Central Asia surfaced the implicit contradictions between the transnationalism of the Pan-Islamic and Anti-Imperialist pillars, and the realism of the Pan-Iranian and National Sovereignty pillars. This posed a practical challenge for a revolutionary regime wanting to interact peacefully with neighbours that bore little sympathy for its political ideology and institutions. Nonetheless, it did not precipitate an internal political

crisis, because these apparently contradictory pulls in Iran's ideology are but two faces of the same coin, two strategies for long-term and short-term regime survival.

The decoupling of Pan Islamism from Pan Iranism, of religion from culture, did not mean the *tout court* abandonment of Tehran's revolutionary goals, but rather the emergence of a dual track policy. Iran maintained both a policy rooted in the Pan Iranism and National Sovereignty through overt means, and a policy rooted in anti-Imperialism and Pan-Islamism through covert and ambiguous policies.[218] The first became the dominant policy that Iran deployed in Central Asia, while the latter became the secondary policy that Iran used when external circumstances were deemed favourable to the advancement of revolutionary goals.

Iran's dual-track policy is best understood as the difference between Tehran's short- and long-term expectations of the trajectory that Central Asian states would embark upon. The period 1990-92 was foundational for Iran's policy towards Central Asia in so far as it shaped Iranian understandings of their own political limits in the region when faced with the enduring necessity to cultivate amicable relations with the USSR first and Russia later. In this initial period, Iranian imaginaries of Central Asia remained permeated by the myth of a dormant revolution that would eventually awaken the Muslim people of the region and propel them to cast aside the shackles of a post-Soviet regime; Pan-Iranism was thus seen as a temporary remedy during the wait for Central Asia's true Islamic awakening.

Iran's interests in maintaining good relations with Russia played a significant role in softening Tehran's rhetoric towards the ex-Soviet Republics. This case study will highlight the temporal relation between Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati's tour of the USSR in 1991, right after the second pivotal point of Uzbekistan's declaration of independence, and the

[218] See 'Methodology: Guiding Assumptions for a Historically Informed Foreign Policy Analysis of Iran' in Chapter 1, p. 53-58.

shift in Iran's public and academic rhetoric surrounding Central Asia between 1991-1992. The simultaneous unfolding of policy and discourse will provide evidence in favour of the assumption of dynamism built into the Giddensian definition of ideology upon which the Four Pillar model is based.

Background: The USSR dissolution and Iran's post-war policy recalibration

Central Asia occupies a marginal role in most accounts of the fall of the Soviet Union. Ethnic irredentism east of the Urals is usually treated as a consequence of the disintegration of centralised power rather than one of its causes. There are two major camps in the literature on the USSR dissolution. One camp tends to emphasise the role that the Cold War rivalry with the US played in the USSR dissolution. This narrative tends to focus on the peaceful revolution of Eastern Europe. For instance, Lévesque argues that the 'Soviet acceptance of the collapse of East European Communist regimes in 1989 must be considered the single most significant event leading to the end of the Cold War'.[219] Other authors similarly emphasise how the increase in information and cultural penetration of Western European lifestyle into Eastern Europe in the 1980s accelerated the dissolution of the bloc.[220] Others still places the spotlight on the effective constraints that the Human Rights Basket of the 1975 Helsinki Protocol placed on Moscow.[221]

Authors belonging to the second camp maintain that domestic factors trump external factors in explaining the dissolution of the USSR: it was not the Cold War and its loss that

[219] Lévesque, Jacques. 'The East European revolutions of 1989'. Ed. Leffler, Melvyn P., and Odd Arne, Westad. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. III. Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 311-322.
[220] Haftendorn, Helga. 'The unification of Germany, 1985–1991'. Ed. Leffler, Melvyn P., and Odd Arne, Westad. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. III. Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 333-355.
[221] Roberts, Adam. 'An "incredibly swift transition": reflections on the end of the Cold War'. Ed. Leffler, Melvyn P., and Odd Arne, Westad. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. III. Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 513-534.

brought the Soviet Union to an end,[222] but rather it was the slow decay of the Soviet state that caused it to lose the battle for world influence with Washington. Authors belonging to this camp tend to look at two sets of factors: systemic explanations that look for the causes of the USSR decline in the structure of the Soviet state and economy, and individualistic explanations that put Gorbachev and his personality at the centre of the stage. Proponents of systemic explanations point at the contradictory relationship that the USSR had built with Western Europe in the 1980s, claiming it played a significant role in pressuring Gorbachev and his advisors not to employ military force on the Warsaw pact states.[223] Gaĭdar best elucidated the nature of this contradiction. He argued that by 1990, the USSR had become aware that it was incapable of retaining political and military control of its territory without the use of force; however, it was also severely dependent on Western European economic assistance to overcome the fatal blow that an unexpected crises in global oil prices and the decline in Soviet agricultural exports had dealt to its economy.[224] For this reason, the USSR was bound to accept Western demands of a peaceful democratic transition in Eastern Europe. Among the proponents of individualistic explanations, Zubok's work stands out for the thoroughness of his analysis. He rejected economic explanations of the collapse of the USSR, claiming that they fail to explain the timing for the demise of the Soviet Union. He argued that Gorbachev's decision to launch in 1988 a series of radical political reforms undermined the strength and authority of the state's institutions and precipitated the collapse of the federation.[225] Some authors advance explanations straddling the systemic and individualist lines of thinking. Pravda rejects essentialist takes on the inevitability of the Soviet economic

[222] For examples of this argument, see: Filitov, Aleksei. 'The End of the Cold War and the Dissolution of the USSR.' *Journal of Modern European History*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2011, pp. 298–307.
[223] See for instance: Young, John 'Western Europe and the end of the Cold War, 1979–1989'. Ed. Leffler, Melvyn P., and Odd Arne, Westad. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. III. Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 289-310.
[224] Gaĭdar, E. T. *Collapse of an Empire*: *Lessons for Modern Russia*. Brookings Institution Press, 2007.
[225] Zubok, V. M. 'Gorbachev and The End of Soviet Power, 1988–1991'. *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*. University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

collapse and looks at the complexity of the myriads of domestic factors that intermingled in the last decade of the USSR.[226]

The literature is further complicated by definitional debates on whether the USSR dissolution and the end of the Cold War are two distinct phenomena. Some argue that the end of the Cold War should not be regarded as a separate event from the end of the Soviet state; Brown, for instance, argues that the Cold War was over by 1989, when Eastern European states were allowed to become de facto independent without military repercussions.[227] Others, like Barnes, make a distinction between the end of the Communist regime in the USSR and the territorial disintegration of the Soviet state. [228] Regardless of the timeline adopted, it is safe to state that by the start of 1990, the Brezhnev Doctrine was over, and, arguably, with it the Cold War. In a series of referendums on independence in February 1990, '90 percent of the population of Lithuania, 77 percent of Latvia, and 90 percent of Estonia voted yes'.[229] In January 1990, Soviet officials made one last attempt to prevent the independence of the Baltic states by deploying paratroopers. The degree of internal resistance to the deployment of military force was unprecedented:

> The parliaments of Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, Kazakhstan, Mossovet, and Lensovet condemned the events in Lithuania. The strike committees in the Kuzbass demanded that Gorbachev resign, and the Congress of People's Deputies be disbanded.[230]

The facts shown above indicates that 7 January 1990 can be considered a significant pivotal point in the trajectory of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The collective response of the

[226] Pravda, Alex. 'The collapse of the Soviet Union, 1990–1991'. Ed. Leffler, Melvyn P., and Odd Arne, Westad. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. III. Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 356-377.
[227] Brown, Archie. 'The Gorbachev revolution and the end of the Cold War '. Ed. Leffler, Melvyn P., and Odd Arne, Westad. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. III. Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 244-266.
[228] Barnes, Andrew. 'Three in One.' *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 61, no. 5, 2014, pp. 3–13.
[229] Gaĭdar, op. *cit.*, p. 215.
[230] Gaĭdar, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

republics' parliaments to the attempt of the Politburo to maintain control of the union republics states by military force signalled the end of compliance by local elites to the dictates of the Soviet leaders. The presence of Kazakhstan among the rebel parliaments suggests that Central Asia was no stranger to these developments. By spring of 1991,

> It was clear to Gorbachev that he could not preserve the Union by force. On June 17, 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev signed the draft agreement "On the Union of Sovereign States" and sent it on to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Supreme Soviets of the republics. On September 5, the Congress of People's Deputies dissolved itself. .[231]

It can be argued thus that the 7 January 1990 represents the start of the political decline of the Soviet Union that culminated in the more well-known 19-21 August Putsch, where a number of the highest political, military, and intelligence officers of the Soviet Union led a coup d'état at the expense of both Gorbachev and Russian premier Yeltsin, only to be defeated by popular opposition. The emergence of such strong internal resistance from republican parliaments as early as January 1990 indicates that by that point the internal political hierarchy of Soviet state had already severely deteriorated, most likely, as Zubok argues, thanks to Gorbachev's own political reforms.

Central Asian republics did not move towards a declaration of independence until late 1991, unlike the Baltic states. This lag may explain the general disregard of the literature for the changes taking place in Central Asia during the 1980s. Non-European territories of the USSR are often treated as an afterthought because of their peripheral geography.[232] There has since been a significant push in the literature to retell the story of the fall of the

[231] Gaĭdar, *op. cit.*, p. 227.
[232] For example, see: Sell, Louis. *From Washington to Moscow: US-Soviet Relations and the Collapse of the USSR*. 2016, p. 322.

USSR from the perspective of Central Asian states;[233] a recent bibliometric survey has found that since the USSR breakup, publication on Central Asia has seen exponential growth.[234] This has led to new accounts of the end of the Soviet state: for instance, in his study of the collapse of the USSR, Marples acknowledges the political activity that swept Central Asia in the late 1980s, affirming that 'though Gorbachev did not create the dilemma of the Tatars or Russian settlement in Kazakhstan, he did bring about the conditions under which protests might take place'.[235]

While Eastern European and Central Asian states followed a different trajectory towards political independence, the different timing of this process does not on its own justify the presumption that Central Asian republics had been dormient up until 1991. The fact that local elites initiated the process of political independence much later and much more reluctantly than their European counterparts is a testament to the depth of the legacy of economic, military, and political dependence that had been enshrines by almost 150 years of Tsarist and Soviet colonialism in the region. It is also a reflection of the material difficulty that the Central Asian republics would have faced in fulfilling basic state functions such as border control, policing, and administrative management without Russia. And, crucially, it reflected the instability of the territorial and border demarcation of the region, especially when compared to several other states in the Warsaw pact. As we have seen in Chapter 2,[236] the territorial boundaries of Central Asia had remained unstable and volatile under different empires and principates up to their annexation under the Tsarist empire in mid-to-late 19th

[233] See for instance: Markedonov, Sergey. 'The Unrecognized States of Eurasia as a Phenomenon of the USSR's Dissolution.' *Demokratizatsiya (Washington, D.C.)*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2012, pp. 189–196; Incaltarau, Cristian, et al. 'Growth and Convergence in Eastern Partnership and Central Asian Countries since the Dissolution of the USSR—Embarking on Different Development Paths?' *Development Policy Review*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2022, p. n/a; Laruelle, M. *Central Peripheries: Nationhood in Central Asia*. UCL Press, 2021.
[234] Wang, Yanwen, et al. 'What Is the Difference in Global Research on Central Asia before and after the Collapse of the USSR: a Bibliometric Analysis.' *Scientometrics*, vol. 119, no. 2, 2019, pp. 909–930.
[235] Marples, David R. The Collapse of the Soviet Union, 1985-1991. Pearson Longman, 2004, p. 50.
[236] See Chapter 2, 'Pan-Iranism and National Sovereignty: the legacy of 2500 years of Iranian nationhood, or a slippery slope to Iranian Chauvinism?', p. 95.

century. What this lag does not prove, however, is the absence of political, social, and cultural change in Central Asia in the 1980s under Gorbachev's *perestroika*.

The 1980s in Central Asia has seen noticeable religious and cultural renaissance bubbling under the surface of stiff state and party control, much of which had been set in motion well before Gorbachev's *glasnost*. The Islamic Renaissance Party, which, as we shall see Chapter 4 and 5, played a fundamental role in the Islamic resurgence both in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, 'grew out of a clandestine youth organisation in the mid 1970s during the oppressive Soviet rule, which called itself Somon-i-Javon Azod or Liberated Youth Organisation (LYO)'.[237] In Uzbekistan, the first Salafists were reported to be active as early as the 1950s, though they remained few and isolated until the 1970s.[238] In the 1970s and 1980s, a relative relaxation of Soviet control over public and private life in the periphery of the empire also allowed a number of illegal madrasa to emerge in private households and in the countryside, contributing to a resurgence of Islamic practices.[239]

The literature often emphasises the emergence of centrifugal ethno-nationalist trends as a response to Gorbachev's political relaxation; the 1986 Alma-Ata protests by ethnic Kazakhs and the 1988 ethnic riots in Nagorno-Karabakh are often highlighted as examples of this trend.[240] However, between 1987 and 1989 several Islamist groups had also taken advantage of Gorbachev's *perestroika* to voice their political demands:

> Muslim leaders in Tajikistan, for instance, called for a holy war against the central authority, vowing to fight the oppressive rule of the Kremlin masters till victory. Consequently, in 1986-87 many Tajik Muslim leaders and followers were arrested by the KGB and tried. Another major development occurred in 1989 when Muslims of Uzbekistan launched a campaign to depose Shamsidin Babakhanov ibn Zeyudin,

[237] Adam Saud. 'Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan: Past, Present and Future.' *Pakistan Horizon*, vol. 63, no. 3, 2010, pp. 80.
[238] Naumkin, Vitaly V. 'Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan'. *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies*, 2003, p. 15.
[239] Naumkin, *op. cit.*, p. 15
[240] Putz, Catherine.' 1986: Kazakhstan's Other Independence Anniversary'. *The Diplomat*, 16 Dec. 2016; Pannier, Bruce. 'Kazakhstan: Zheltoqsan Protest Marked 20 Years Later'. Radio Free Europe, 14 Dec. 2004.

> the head Mufti of the Muslim Religious Board of Central Asia. […] Tajikistan's recent quest for cultural and religious revival began in the1986-87 period. By 1989 the Persian language had been declared the national language of the republic. Arabic, the language of the scripture, was also to be taught at schools.[241]

These reports challenge the prevailing image of a region that had been a passive spectator first, and victim later, of socio-political changes originating from Eastern Europe.

While the Soviet Union was experiencing a federal crisis in 1990-91, Iran was undergoing its own internal political shifts. Emerging from a decade-long war with Iraq, in 1990 the Islamic Republic was facing new domestic and international paradigms. Domestically, the death of Khomeini on 3 June 1989 represented the end of the first phase of the Iranian revolution, during which the Islamic Republic regime was struggling for survival against internal and external enemies. With the ascension to the position of Supreme Leader of Khamenei, and the election of President Rafsanjani, Iran entered a new phase in its post-revolutionary history: that of post-war reconstruction and of the resumption of peace-time state and civil activities. This process had already started under Khomeini in 1988 with the establishment of the influential Expediency Discernment Assembly (مجمع تشخیص مصلحت نظام Majma'-e Taškhīs-e Maslahat-e Nezām).[242] The legal authority of the Expediency Discernment Assembly was enshrined in the constitution upon its revision in 1989.[243] The authority of the Council derives from a fatwa issued by Khomeini allowing

[241] Haghayeghi, Mehrdad. 'Islamic revival in the central Asian Republics'. *Central Asian Survey*, 1994, vol. 13, no. 2, p. 258.

[242] The Council, originally consisting of 13 members, currently includes 38 members directly appointed by the Supreme Leader (Natural Personalities) and 9 office-holder members. These latter include: the President, the Speaker of the Parliament, the Chief of the Judiciary, the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, and four members of the Guardian Councils. The Assembly comprises several committees and ad-hoc commissions. The Expediency Discernment Assembly is the highest legislative body in Iran,[242] tasked with two fundamental roles. It is the final arbiter of any disagreement in matters of legislations between the Majles and the Guardian Councils; its judgement is unappealable. It also meets to deliberate on any issues forwarded to it by the Supreme Leader. For an overview of the hierarchical structure of the Council, see: Ghiabi, Maziyar. 'The Council of Expediency: Crisis and Statecraft in Iran and Beyond.' Middle Eastern Studies, vol. 55, no. 5, 2019, pp. 837–853. See also: Schirazi, Asghar, and John O'Kane. *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic*. Tauris, 1997, p. 97.

[243] Boroujerdi, Mehrzad, and Kourosh Rahimkhani. *Postrevolutionary Iran: A Political Handbook*. First ed., 2018, chapter 5.

raison d'état to trump secondary Shari'a principles,[244] which many observers interpreted as the sign of Iran's entering its revolutionary Thermidor.

The constitutional reforms sanctioned by Khomeini before his passing included the discontinuation of the office of the Prime Minister and consequential centralisation of the executive power in the hands of the elected President and of his Ministers.[245] The period of instability that followed these constitutional reforms compounded with the dire economic crisis that Iran was facing and contributed to a softening in Tehran's international standing. The start of the 1990s was characterised by a series of political overtures on the part of Tehran to old rivals, most noticeably the USSR and the Arab Gulf states.[246] 1990 was thus a transformational year for the foreign policy of post-revolutionary Iran. The sudden acceleration in the dissolution of the USSR in late 1990-1991 was a further catalyst for the readjustment of Tehran's regional policy, but not the trigger for it.[247]

A region on the cusp of a tectonic shift: Iran's Pan-Islamic aspirations for Central Asia and Velayati's turn to Pan-Iranism

The 7 of January 1990 is the first pivotal point selected for the analysis of Iran's foreign policy response to the critical juncture constituted by the dissolution of the USSR. I argue that Iran approached Central Asia in 1989-91 overwhelmingly within the paradigm of Pan-

[244] For a discussion of Khomeini's fatwa and its legal and political context, see: Nachman, Alexander. 'To Loosen and Bind: Khomeini, Rafsanjani, and Supplementary Governance in the Islamic Republic.' *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2020, pp. 482–496.
[245] Ehteshami, Anoushiravan. *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic*. Routledge, 1995, p. 37.
[246] Chubin, Shahram, and Charles Tripp. *Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order: Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Balance of Power in the Gulf.* Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996.
[247] Ehteshami, *op. cit.*, p. 126: 'The Islamic leaders were faced with a dual challenge: to provide immediate policies in reaction to events in Iran's regional environment and to develop long term foreign policy strategies to encompass relations with the world beyond the war […] since the war ended, however, the republic had been forced to come to grips with the need to formulate coherent and functional strategies for its foreign relations which enhance its domestic political and economic environment.'

Islamism. These three years can be considered in Iranian policymaking as the tail of the 1980s: Khomeini's militant revolutionism was still present in Tehran's approach to the world around them. Iran's revolutionary experience engendered strong expectations of rapid Islamisation in Central Asia after independence. This changed rapidly by 1992 in favour of a new policy dominated by appeals to cultural commonalities much more in line with the Pan-Iranian logic.

In 1990, several sources reported that alleged 'Basmachi' fighters were raiding in Central Asia again.[248] The raids started with an attack on a police post in Tajikistan. The Soviet authorities at first attributed them to Afghan guerrillas, presuming they had infiltrated across the border; only later they realised it was the work of local Tajik militants. Reports of the activity of Tajik militias followed a year of high ethnic tension in the Republic: the summer of 1989 saw a flare-up of hostility between different Muslim ethnicities, as Tajiks clashed with Kirghiz over land and water rights. Most Russian and international reports stated that the clashes of 1989 were ethnic in nature,[249] and that similar clashes in 1990 were caused by presence of Armenian refugees in Tajikistan.[250] Iranian commentaries of the event, on the other hand, insisted that these were the start of an Islamic insurgency:

> On the surface, the unrest and protests in Tajikistan indicate a nationalist uprising. But in view of the demands made by the region's people, who just like other Muslim settlements in Central Asia have suffered from oppression and discrimination, it can be said that the Tajiks, like the Azeri Muslims, are seeking to realise their rights, that is the rights which have been ignored during the 70-year reign of terror [251]

[248] 'Rebels' or 'bandits', refer to the anti-Tsarist and anti-Soviet resistance movement of the late 19th century and early 20th century. See p. 110.
[249] Treisman, Daniel. 'Rise of Muslim Millions Threatens Empire in Disarray'. *The Times*, 19 Jan. 1990.
[250] BBC Monitoring. 'Iranian Comment on Unrest in Tajikistan'. *Part 4 The Middle East, Africa and Latin America*, 16 Feb. 1990.
[251] BBC Monitoring. 'Iranian Comment on Unrest in Tajikistan'.

All Iranian commentaries I surveyed characterised the declaration of a state of emergency in Tajikistan to cope with rising protests as proof that Muslims were fighting for their 'Islamic identity'.[252] However, Russian, and European contemporary accounts reported that the main demand of the protesters concerned the retaining and redistribution of profits from cotton harvests inside Tajikistan, as well as the deportation of Armenian refugees out of the territory of the Republic. Neither of these demands directly concerned religious freedom.[253] Other reports at the time also highlighted that violent flareup had been inter-Muslim rather than directed against central Soviet representatives or enforcers.[254] This indicates that, although organised Islamist movements had been present in embryonic stages in the late 1980s in Central Asia, by 1990 they did not yet have sufficient political capital to guide the public discourse. This means that most mass protests and riots in 1989-1990 were likely not overseen and directed by Islamist organisations, nor were spontaneous protests overtly advancing religious demands at this time.

This did not dissuade Iran's parliament from publicly demanding that the Soviet listened to the 'legitimate demands of Muslim people'.[255] Iranian commentators, too, chose to adopt an uncompromising Islamist reading of all unrest in the region. This bias can be explained by looking at two major precedents in the Iranian media's attitude to Central Asia. The first is Khomeini's 1989 letter to Gorbachev, whereby he invited the Soviet leader to study Islam and to allow Central Asia to rekindle with Iran; the second is Khamenei's 1990 remark on unrest in Central Asia, where he attributed the tensions to 'Islamic zeal'.[256] I maintain that Iran was projecting its own experience into a region from which it had been

[252] BBC Monitoring. 'Iranian Comment on Unrest in Tajikistan'.
[253] Crawshaw, Steve. 'Flare-Up in Tajikistan Bodes Ill for Gorbachev; If Even the Tranquil Tajikistan Can Explode, No Muslim-Dominated Republic in the Soviet Union Looks Secure, writes Steve Crawshaw in Moscow'. *The Independent,* 17 Feb. 1990.
[254] Rashid, Ahmed. 'Islam rises, Moscow trembles; Muslims of Central Asia have their own revolution and it could topple Gorbachev, says Ahmed Rashid'. *The Independent,* 13 Jun. 1990.
[255] BBC Monitoring. 'Iran in Brief'. *Lexis Library News,* 16 Feb. 1990.
[256] Treisman, *op. cit.*

isolated for over 70 years, with the assumption that conditions had remained unchanged and that it still could correctly interpret developments without further context.

However, by June 1990 it was clear that not all Iranian policymakers shared Khamenei's revolutionary enthusiasm on Central Asia. Iran's executive branch showed itself to be much more cautious than the Supreme Leader and the parliament. As the Tajik delegation visited Tehran, the Iranian government called for cooperation 'in the spheres of science, culture, and art and for a regular exchange of delegations',[257] a very limited goal compared to the bombastic, revolutionary rhetoric of Khamenei. This cautious approach was inevitable because Tajikistan was still part of the Soviet federation at the time, and Tehran could not be seen as encouraging secession publicly or 'exporting' Islamism. This incident shows that even when the Pan-Islamic paradigm was dominating policy circles in Tehran, there was a divergence between the theory and praxis of Iran's foreign policy.

Velayati's pragmatism does not negate the fact that, overall, Iran adopted a revolutionary reading of the events unfolding in Central Asia. It does indicate, however, that the Iranian government correctly inferred that it held a relatively weak political position vis-à-vis the USSR at the time and could not afford to sour Russo-Iranian bilateral relations. Trade cooperation started off soon after the visit to Tehran of Central Asian representatives in June 1990,[258] setting off a pattern in Iran's interaction with the region that will hold for most of the decade. As we shall see by the end of this thesis, Iran failed to move past this initial stage of cordial relations and trade deals towards developing a substantial regional engagement. This is because Iran fundamentally misunderstood the nature of change and the complexity of the overlapping identities and interests in the region. Tehran presumed that

[257]BBC Monitoring. 'Iran in Brief: Visit by Tajik Delegation'. *Part 4 The Middle East, Africa and Latin America*, 16 Jun. 1990.
[258] BBC Monitoring. 'Trade Co-Operation Agreements with Soviet Central Asian Republics'. *Part 4 The Middle East, Africa and Latin America*, 24 Jul. 1990.

Central Asia's political transformation after independence would follow from a similar bottom-up push as the one Iran experienced in 1978-79, whilst political power remained tightly within the grasp of the ex-Soviet elites. Iran also did not anticipate that most of the vectors of political conflict would be interethnic and intra-elite, and that Central Asian people would not coalesce together as Muslims against 'the arrogance of Western powers'.

The role that the official clergy took in Central Asia was radically different compared to the one that the Iranian clergy played during the revolution. They acted as a counter revolutionary force both by curbing the legitimacy of Islamic parties and by undermining the rise of nationalist movements. Iranian expectations for the emergence of political Islam in Central Asia seemed to find initial confirmation in the autumn of 1990, when the Islamic Revival Party was allowed to publicly register as a political party in Tajikistan.[259] However, Tehran's policymakers failed to pay sufficient attention to the mood and political dispositions of the Central Asian clergy, and wrongly assumed that they would play the same vanguardist role that the pro-Khomeini 'ulama played in Iran after 1979. One interview is of particular importance to highlight the ideological and sociological difference between Iranian and Central Asian clergy leaders. The Central Asian mufti[260] explained to the media that there was no appetite for Political Islam among the official clergy as they considered Islam itself to be the party of God, and any attempt to establish a political party that acted in the name of God as blasphemy. He claimed that his resistance to the politicisation of Islam was driven by fear that religion could be co-opted by ambitious nationalist leaders, leading to the ethnicisation of Islam. He was concerned that this would further alienate people from

[259] BBC Monitoring. 'Islamic Revival Threatening Tajikistan'. *Part 1 The Ussr; The Central Asian Republics*, 19 Jul. 1991.
[260] The mufti was the official title of the appointed head of the Central Asian 'ulama, which was recognized by the Soviet state.

Islam, because they would blame Islam for the failings of the political class much like people blamed communism for the failing of the USSR:

> It is we who have dealt a substantial blow to nationalistically inclined groups. When they began operating, our support figured in their plans. But we acted contrary to this. We told them Islam is above all national sentiments. So do not think that Muslims will be a help to you.[261]

The Central Asian 'ulama would not support a Khomeini-like vision of a new Pan-Islamic state in Central Asia. They envisioned a secular path for their countries because they knew that people would not accept the imposition of Islamic law after 70 years of sovietisation and secularisation.[262]

By the time of the release of the Mufti's interview, Tehran's policy had begun showing a clear preference for a Pan-Iranian approach: the decoupling of culture and religion in Iran's policy to Central Asia had started to decisively take shape. Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati, commenting on Tehran's relations with the former Soviet Republics, said:

> The most important problem which the former Soviet republics, particularly the Muslim republics, are facing is the issue of identity. That is some of those republics have been denied their identity for around 170 years in some cases, and in other cases for around one century.[263]

This statement prioritised the issue of culture over religion and seemed to sanction the abandonment the Pan-Islamic approach in favour of the Pan-Iranian approach. The centrefold place occupied by the concept of identity indicates a softening of Iran's revolutionist tones. Tehran was realising that Central Asians' lived experience of Islam was not identical with the Iranian one. The claim that the most important issue faced was that of

[261] BBC Monitoring, 'Interview with Central Asian Mufti'. *Part 1 The Ussr; The Central Asian Republics*, 28 Nov. 1991.
[262] BBC Monitoring. 'Rise of Islam in Central Asian Republics'. *Part 1 The Ussr; The Central Asian Republics*, 9 Oct. 1991.
[263] Treisman, *op. cit.*

identity stood in stark contrast to the prior statement highlighting the 'Islamic zeal' of the Soviet Republics or the 'legitimate Muslim demands' allegedly advanced by Tajik protesters. In this statement, Velayati did not reduce the concept of identity to religious identity, although he insisted on characterising the states as 'Muslim Republics'. This rhetorical shift allowed Iran to focus on the perceived common cultural Persian ancestry and to craft a policy of cultural engagement that would be more palatable to both the newly independent states and to Russia.

Velayati's remarks followed his diplomatic visits to Russia and Central Asia in November-December 1991, which was precipitated by the second pivotal point identified in this chapter, namely Karimov's declaration that Uzbekistan was moving towards secession in October 1991. This represented a second turning point in the dissolution of the USSR: the events that had been put into motion on the 7 of January 1990 and had developed into an open-ended process on the fate of the Soviet Union became crystallised into a single possible outcome, the territorial disintegration of the federation. Velayati embarked in this diplomatic tour in response to this evident acceleration of centrifugal trends in the Soviet Union. He stressed Iran's will to maintain good relations with the USSR; Russia replied, 'Iran occupies a very sensible, well-balanced position in connection with the difficult events in our country and this could not be underestimated'.[264] This statement was an acknowledgement of how much Iran-Soviet ties had improved since Khomeini's infamous letter inviting Gorbachev to study Islam in 1989; it was also an admonishment for Velayati ahead of his visits in Central Asia. Velayati found himself in a precarious position with little room for

[264] BBC Monitoring. 'Soviet and Iranian Foreign Ministers Meet'. *Part 1 The Ussr; The Central Asian Republics*, 26 Nov. 1991; BBC Monitoring. 'Gorbachev and Shevardnadze Receive Velayati Tehran's Positive Attitude Welcomed'. *Part 1 The Ussr; The Central Asian Republics*, 28 Nov. 1991; BBC Monitoring. 'Iran Foreign Minister's Visit to Soviet Union; Relations with Muslim Republics'. *Part 4 The Middle East, Africa and Latin America,* 29 Nov. 1991.

manoeuvring while pursuing delicate task of promoting ties with the soon-to-be Central Asian independent Republics without stocking the fire of Russo-Iranian enmity.

There was a stark disconnect between Velayati's considerations for the importance of Moscow-Tehran's ties and the perception of what Iran was trying to do in Central Asia as portrayed in the domestic media. While the revolutionary zeal still permeated Iranian domestic debates on Central Asia in 1991,[265] Velayati was leading Iran towards a more moderate approach. On 10 December 1991, Velayati gave a speech upon returning from his USSR tour showing unequivocal signs that a shift from Pan-Islamism to Pan-Iranism had been entrenched in Iran's diplomatic posture to the region:

> Amongst the common factors clearly manifest in those republics was, firstly, the common wish of the people and the government or governments, which followed the wishes of the people, for autonomy and greater independence […] Another of the common factors is their desire to establish some kind of unity amongst themselves […] Another one of the common factors which is exclusively linked to us is that all these five Central Asian Republics unanimously agree that Iran must be one of the principal countries with which they must establish close relations.[266]

Velayati's emphasis on independence rather than religious freedom is consistent with the Westphalian worldview underlying the Pan-Iranian pillar, where national sovereignty is seen as a more essential pursuit than the establishment of an Islamic state. Nevertheless, Velayati's reference to an alleged desire to establish 'some kind of unity' supposes the existence of a dormant Central Asian identity; Velayati was implying that there was a will to turn such identity into the base for a political union. This is evidence that the decoupling of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism was a matter of strategy and did not represent a fundamental abandonment towards the goal of transnational revolution on the part of Tehran. The expectation that Central Asia would move towards political integration did not imply

[265] BBC Monitoring. 'Iran Foreign Minister's Visit to Soviet Union; Relations with Muslim Republics'.
[266] BBC Monitoring. 'Iran Velayati on Ussr Visit Wish to See Situation "Return to Normal"'. *Part 4 The Middle East, Africa and Latin America*, 10 Dec. 1991.

on its own that this union would be based on shared religion; however, the claim that the Republics shared a desire to establish special links with Iran suggested that the Velayati was not discounting the possibility that Islam would come to play a more substantial role in Central Asia.

It cannot be established whether, in switching from Pan-Islamism to Pan-Iranism, Iran really expected that a cultural approach would lead the Central Asian republics into its bosom, or whether it was simply buying its time, waiting for the appetite for Political Islam in Central Asia to mature. The evidence that emerges in Chapter 4 and 5 is mixed. It does appear that on an ideological level, during the 1990s Iranian policy makers never fully renounced the notion that the natural and inevitable evolution of Central Asian republics would be Political Islam, though the expected timeline for an Islamic revolution in the region kept being lengthened. On the other hand, there also seemed to be a stark policy division between different sections of the Iranian state, with some branches embracing realpolitik more than others. We cannot conclude that Iran's cooperation on energy and economic policies in Central Asia were disingenuous just because more aggressive policies of non-state actor support were implemented at times. It seems more likely, as the next two case studies will argues, that this apparent schizophrenia was caused by the fact that the authors of Iran's economic and energy policies thought that an Islamic revolution in Central Asia was far less likely than the authors of Iran's political and military policy.

Following Velayati's tour, Iran's cabinet approved the establishment of consulates in Central Asia,[267] and by the end of 1991 Iran recognised formally the independence of the Republics.[268] From this movement onwards, Iran established direct diplomatic ties with

[267] BBC Monitoring. 'Cabinet Approves Establishment of Consulates in Soviet Republics.' *Part 4 The Middle East, Africa and Latin America,* .20 Dec. 1991.
[268] BBC Monitoring. 'Foreign Ministry Statement Recognising Independence of Former Soviet Republics'. *Part 4 The Middle East, Africa and Latin America*, 28 Dec. 1991.

Central Asian states and gained the ability to craft a Central Asian policy that was independent from its Russian policy. It is to be seen whether Iran's Central Asian policy remained subordinated to its Russia policy and its regional security policy, or whether it diverted from it.

The decoupling of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism: a reckoning with the limitations of Central Asian Islamism

This section argues that a discourse analysis of contemporary elites and academic debates supports the claim that Iranian decisionmakers shifted from a Pan-Islamic to a Pan-Iranian policy towards Central Asia between 1990-1992. As explained in Chapter 1,[269] the main source considered below is the *Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, published by the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS).

The available material confirms that in 1989-1991 elite discourse was firmly within the paradigm of 'Khomeinism'.[270] The prevalence of references to Iran's duty to protect oppressed people is conclusive evidence of this:[271] as seen in Chapter 2,[272] the idea of a revolutionary moral duty to safeguard and liberate the oppressed in the Muslim world and beyond was a centrepiece of Khomeini's Third-Worldism.[273] Khomeini's influence on Iran's foreign policy was also still visible in the form of greater distaste at the prospect of US penetration in Central Asia compared to the prospect of continued Russia influence:

[269] See 'Methodology: Source Selection and Databasing', Chapter 1, pp. 63-64.
[270] For an in-depth study of Khomeini's ideology, see: Abrahamian, Ervand. *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*. Tauris, 1993.
[271] Shabestari, Mojtahed Mohammad. 'Muslim and Christians in Today's world'. *The Iranian Journal of International Affair, vol.* 1, no. 1, Spring 1989, pp. 14-25; Zarif-Khonsari, Mohammad-Javad. 'Anticipatory and Preventive Self-defence in international Law'. *The Iranian Journal of International Affair, vol.* 1, no. 1, Spring 1989, pp. 64-88.
[272] See 'The Pan-Islamic pillar: Islam in Iran from the Safavid to Khomeini', Chapter 2, pp. 84-90.
[273] Khomeini, Ruhollah., and Hamid. Algar. Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist. Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Work, 2005, p. 29, 56-59.

keeping the US out of Central Asia was already seen as a precondition for the advancement of Iranian interests in the region. This perspective will remain unchanged through 1990s, and will dictate much of Iran's policy towards Uzbekistan, as we shall see in Chapter 5. The journal's publications in 1989 show further evidence of the legacy of Khomeini's final discourse in promoting a doctrinaire approach to the formulation of foreign policy based on an uncompromising anti-Western position. Khomeini maintained that the unity of sight and mind in the Iranian political establishment was necessary for the survival of the revolution.[274] This revolutionary unity continued throughout 1990 and 1991. Iran's attention was diverted from Central Asia by the outbreak of the First Gulf War; this is reflected in the lack of focus on the USSR's internal developments in the journal's publications.[275] Iranian observers underestimated the systemic fallouts of Gorbachev's reforms.[276] The lack of attention to its northern flank left Iran unprepared for the rapidity of the dissolution of the Soviet state in 1991.

Between 1992 and 1993, the discourse on Central Asia developed mirroring the foreign policy shift from Pan-Islamism to Pan-Iranism. We will compare the Spring 1992 issue of *The Iranian Journal of International Affair* with later issues to highlight this change. The Spring 1992 issue was most likely written in the last two quarters of 1991, just before or during Velayati's diplomatic tour to the USSR in November 1991. The 1992 Spring volume presents three major themes linking it to Khomeinism. Firstly, there is a tendency to frame the unrest in Central Asia under an anti-imperialist, North-South paradigm;

[274] Khomeini, Ruhollah. 'Imam's Final Discourse'. *The Iranian Journal of International Affair, vol.* 1, no. 2-3, Summer-Fall 1989, pp. 312-335.
[275] Velayati, Ali-Akbar. 'The Persian Gulf: Problems of Security - Speech Delivered by H.E. Dr Ali-Akbar Velayati to the Third Conference on the Persian Gulf'. *The Iranian Journal of International Affair, vol.* 3, no. 1, Spring 1991, pp. 3-5; Maleki, Abbas. 'Prospects for the Future of the Middle East: Three Scenarios - Speech Delivered by Abbas Maleki at the Third Seminar on the Persian Gulf'. *The Iranian Journal of International Affair, vol.* 3, no. 1, Spring 1991, pp. 41-44.
[276] Bashiriyeh, Hossein. 'Totalitarianism, Pluralism and Political Development in the Soviet Union: A review of the Phases of the Russian Revolution'. *The Iranian Journal of International Affair, vol.* 2, no. 2-3, Spring 1991, pp. 65-89.

secondly, most analyses make an explicit assumption on the inevitability of an Islamic turn in Central Asian societies; and thirdly, they claim that middle power will in the short term dictate the geopolitics of Central Asia more than great powers. In comparison, the following three volumes present a shift towards a rhetoric consistent with Pan-Iranism. The shift in discourse from religion to culture took place after the 1992 Spring volume, following rather that preceding the actual shift in Tehran's foreign policy initiated by Velayati's diplomatic tour in November 1991.

Anti-imperialist rhetoric was used to predict the trajectory of Central Asia's independence. Its presence in this issue is emblematic of the inadequacy of Khomeinism in explaining the political transformations that Central Asia was undergoing. The paradigm of the North-South divide was thus summoned to explain the nature of the unrest as well as the demands advanced by Central Asian societies and governments. The quotes below show opinions of leading scholars at the time who were not Iranian, nor affiliated with the Iranian government. Their opinion was nevertheless published in the journal, and contributed to shaping the domestic debate in Iran surrounding American hegemony and strategies to resist unilateralism in the international space:

> It is possible to foresee that the North-South contradiction will be predominant in the coming century. The most acute problems of humanity will be centred around it.[277]
>
> As regards Third World public opinion, it is almost certain that deep-rooted, latent, long-standing anti-Americanism (or, to be more precise, resentment of US power and suspicion of American motives) has, if anything, increased as a result of the war.[278]
>
> Everything necessary for the revival of the old slogan 'the poor South against the rich North' will then be ready. Nationalism will raise its head on the global stage.[279]

[277] Krasin, Yurin. 'The USSR and the Third World: An Historical Perspective'. *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 4, no. 1, Spring 1992, p. 13.
[278] Mirsky, Georgi I. 'The End of History and the Third World: The relevance of ideology'. *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.4, no. 1, Spring 1992, p. 24.
[279] Mirsky, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

This anti-imperialist reading was swiftly abandoned by Iranian policymakers because it could not account for the mechanisms behind the USSR disintegration. The attempt to explain Central Asian unrest as an anti-imperialist liberation push parallels early Iranian media's readings of the unrest in Tajikistan as both anti-imperialist and Islamist in nature. It fundamentally mischaracterised a chain of reactions to the emerging political vacuum in Central Asia on part of political, ethnic, and religious factions as a 'war of liberation'. This first misunderstanding set the stage for a recurring theme in Iranian policy towards Central Asia in the 1990s: the inability to conceive that Central Asian cultural experiences and political aspirations could differ from Iran's.

A second, overarching theme is the belief in the inevitability of Islamic resurgence in Central Asia; the claim that Central Asian societies desired to recalibrate their identity around religion was central to this view. Authors argued that the common denominator of Islam would provide new political glue for the Central Asian regional ecosystem after the fall of the Soviet Union. Though most accounts were nuanced enough to recognise that political unity lay faraway beyond short term instabilities, the binding force of Islam was seen as a fait accompli:

> Presently dominating centrifugal trends must not prevent us from seeing the opposite, centripetal trends. In a broad historical sense, integrational factors are preserved at the level of extremely deep processes […] Those factors cannot help manifesting themselves, bringing about in some time centripetal processes. We can hardly expect that the integrating factors will work in full swing in the near future. But in a long-term perspective, they will necessarily manifest themselves.[280]

> The phenomenon of Islamic self-assertiveness in Central Asia and the Caucasus is inevitable, though the character of these emerging Islamic states is far from discernible at this preliminary and transitory stage.[281]

[280] Krasin, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
[281] Rubinstein, Alvin Z. 'The Dynamics of US-Russian Interactions in The Third World During the Gorbachev Era and Beyond'. *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.4, no. 1, Spring 1992, p. 52.

Scholars presented different opinions concerning the direction in which this Islamic resurgence would develop. The broad consensus was that the Iranian model was unlikely to be emulated due to historical and cultural divergences.[282]

The last theme is the predicted rise of middle powers' influence in Central Asia. On this matter, too, there seemed to be an almost concerted unanimity among the scholars writing in the journal:

> Probably all that can be said with some sense of optimism is that for the foreseeable future, at least, the politics and ambitions of small and medium states will overshadow those of great powers on the Central Asian-Middle Eastern heartland region.[283]
>
> The post-cold war era is likely to witness a decreased American intervention in the Third World. This is because after the disappearance of the Soviet attempt to achieve worldwide hegemony, and in the absence of any similar threat, American concern about the Third World is likely to be much less than it was previously.[284]
>
> The outlying republics are visibly turning to opening up their richer and more developed neighbours (or near neighbours) – Central Asia to Iran, Transcaucasia to Turkey, Kazakhstan to South Korea. For them it is a matter of plain economic expediency. But in the longer run it may turn on the issue of national identity as well.[285]

The presumption that some unstoppable historical force was moving Central Asian states towards civil and/or political Islamisation can explain the optimism that seemed to surround Iranian discourse on the possibilities that Central Asian held for Tehran in spite of the numerous security threats that disintegration could pose. Faith that the time of middle powers in the region was coming also explains Tehran's perception that its major rival in

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[282] Valkenier, Elizabeth Kridl. *'The collapse of the USSR and the Future of the Socialist Model'. The Iranian Journal of International Affairs, vol.4, no. 1,* Spring 1992, p. 83; Munavvarov, Z. I. 'Uzbekistan and the process of changes taking place in what used to be the Soviet Union'. *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.4, no. 1, Spring 1992, pp. 176-78.
[283] Rubinstein, *op. cit.*, p 52.
[284] Katz, Mark N. 'America's Post-Cold War Third World Military Policy'. *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.4, no. 1, Spring 1992, p. 68.
[285] Valkenier, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

Central Asia was the Turkish secularist model rather than the new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) or the Western liberal model.

This analysis has shown that at the end of 1991, the assumptions guiding discourse on Central Asia were three: that indigenous, anti-imperialistic tendencies were accelerating the disintegration of the USSR; that the Islamisation of Central Asia was inevitable; and that middle power competition would define the landscape of Central Asia moving forward. All of these assumptions turned out to be partly or fully incorrect, though Tehran stuck with some longer than with other. Iran had already dropped the anti-imperialist framework by 1992-1993, as it became evident that progressive and revolutionary forces in Central Asian republics were too feeble to challenge the established Soviet and pre-Soviet power structures. The expectation that middle powers would dominate Central Asia stuck around for longer because it appeared somewhat coherent with the political landscape in 1992-1993. In this period, Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran exerted significant diplomatic and economic capital to woo the ex-Soviet Republics. The expectation of an imminent rise of the middle powers was definitively abandoned in 1995 following increased US involvement in the region.

The assumption on the inevitability of Central Asian Islamisation was the stickiest one and permeated Iranian policy making towards the region for virtually the whole decade. Iranian elites who had lived through the Iranian Revolution could not abandon the belief in the transformative political potential of Islam and were blind to the lived experiences of other Muslims. It remained the most foundational and powerful policy-driving assumption for Tehran, insofar as it dictated the nature of the shift from a Pan-Islamic to a Pan-Iranian policy. This shift took place as a short-term strategic readjustment with the hope that the Islamic revolution would come, and prevented Iran from focusing on alternative policy

routes, such as the adoption of a minimalist policy centred around the National Sovereignty pillar.

By late 1992 and early 1993, we can observe a decisive shift in favour of a Pan-Iranian approach in Central Asia in the writings of the journal. Culture emerged as the single most important factor in Iran's relations with the ex-Soviet Republics. Cultural cooperation was often equated to the promotion of trade and infrastructure. The physical connection of Iran and Central Asia became the preferred policy instrument to promote Iran's cultural hegemony in the region:

> A few concluding remarks on Iran's north-eastern border from the Caspian to Sarakhs: This vast region has always been the cradle of Islamic and Iranian civilisations and sciences […] The symbol of Irano-Turkoman cooperation was crystallized in the Tajan-Mahshad railway […] We are on the verge of a new era of transparency of frontiers and expansion of communication means which foster understanding and cultural exchanges.[286]

Iranian officials' more sober cultural strategy was joined by the appearance of cautionary warnings on the nature of Islam in Central Asia, warning Iranian policymakers against projecting their experience on the post-Soviet Republics.[287] The link between cultural affinity and investment in infrastructure was taken one step further with the introduction of a strong energy and economic policy that looked at Iran as the crossroad of the region:

> However, one factor is undeniable: "the end of dependence comes not only with political independence but with economic independence". It is with this assumption in mind that the Islamic Republic of Iran aims to formulate its region intensive economic/energy policies towards Central Asia.[288]

[286] Maleki, Abbas. 'Iran's North-eastern Border: From Sarakhs to Khazar (The Caspian)'. *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.4, no. 3-4, Fall-Winter 1992, p. 625.
[287] Hussain, Seyyed Rifaat. 'The Political Economy of Pakistan's Relations with Central Asia with Special Reference to the ECO' *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.4, no. 3-4, Fall-Winter 1992, p. 628.
[288] Maleki, Abbas. 'COOPERATION: a new component of the Iranian foreign policy'. ECO' *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.1, no. 5, Spring 1993, p. 19.

This move towards a geo-energy approach was a tacit admission of the limits of Islam's revolutionary potential in the region. However, such an admission would have amounted to an insurmountable ideological blow to the domestic legitimacy of the revolutionary regime. In order to rationalise the focus on trade, energy and culture in Iran's Central Asian policy, Tehran relied on a creative reinterpretation of the meaning of the anti-imperialist pillar to avoid any logical inconsistencies with the rest of the official perspective on Central Asia. Iran's energy policy was presented not simply as a matter of national interest, but also as a policy in the best interest of the region, aiming to achieve real economic independence and escape the trap of neo-colonialism.[289]

The dogmatism of Iran's post-Revolutionary ideology revealed its structural limitations in understanding and connecting with Central Asian states. During the 'First International Congress on Scientific and Cultural Cooperation in Central Asia' held in Tehran in November 1992, Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati opened the conference with remarks on the importance of Iran's contribution to the historical and cultural heritage of Central Asia that, given its nominal commitment to treating the new states as equal partners, cannot come across as anything but paternalistic and condescending:

> This territory, constituting an organic totality, enjoys cultural homogeneity. The preservation of local, territorial and (at times) ethnic identities, before and in the aftermath of the advent of Islam, has contributed to this sense of conceptual, territorial, and cultural solidarity, which was indubitably affected by Iran. Even at this juncture, a thorough comprehension of these identities and the exhortation of their interactions would seem impossible without due reference to Iranian culture, the role of the Persian language, this country's rich tradition of mysticism and, not the least, the heritage of Islam.[290]

[289] Sarir, Mohammad. 'The Geopolitics of Oil and Gas in Central Asia'. *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.1, no. 5, Spring 1993, p. 56.
[290] 'Report November 15-18 1992: First International Congress on Scientific and Cultural Cooperation in Central Asia'. *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.1, no. 5, Spring 1993, p. 239.

After implying that Central Asian history and identities are essentially derivative of Iran's, Velayati proceeded to make a rather awkward remark painting the Iranian Safavid empire as the liberator of Central Asia from the rule of the Uzbek khanate in the presence of his Uzbek counterpart:

> At the turn of the 16th century, the Uzbeks brought portions of Central Asia under their control. Muhammad Khan Sheybani began to conquer Transoxiana, defeated Tamerlane's heirs, and after occupying Samarkand, founded the Sheybanid dynasty. He then proceeded to attack Kazakhstan. In 15th Century, Ismail Safavi attempted to free Khorasan and Transoxiana, he led Iran's army into a confrontation with the Sheybanid Khan. The battle took place in the vicinity of Merv and entailed the defeat of the Uzbeks. The Sheybanid Khan was killed.[291]

These remarks highlight the hidden risks that a policy of Pan-Iranism presented for Tehran. If Pan-Islamism had blinded the Islamic Republic to the ideological and sociological differences of the indigenous Islamist movements in the region, Pan-Iranism had led them to paint themselves as cultural hegemons.

However, the rationalisation of Iran's geo-energy policy as a continuation of the anti-imperialist struggle was at odds with Iran's adoption of Pan-Iranism. As we have seen in the illustrations of Chapter 3, the Pan-Iranian model is created through the exclusion of the Anti-Imperialist pillar and is supported by the National Sovereignty and the Pan-Islamic pillar. It is an approach that posits Iran as the hegemonic leader of the region in virtue of its historical and cultural claims. Through the use of bilateral relations, it aims to promote the shirt-term survival of the Islamic regime by emphasising its Iranian character over its Islamic character. But anti-imperialism is an ideology that rejects the legitimacy of any form of domination, including cultural domination. Iran's use of both Pan-Iranian and Anti-Imperialist logics in Central Asia during this period highlighted the internal contradictions of its ideology and

[291] 'Report November 15-18 1992', p. 241.

dealt a significant blow to the effectiveness of its diplomatic overture in Central Asia. This contradiction, as we have seen in Chapter 2, is due to the fact that Iran sees itself as a victim of US imperialism in the global stage and as a fallen empire on the regional stage of Central Asia: one cannot cry wolf while ignoring the times in which he himself has been the wolf to its neighbours.

This incongruence was overcome by the toning down of Iran's anti-imperialist appeals in the region. Its energy policy was soon reinterpreted within the National Sovereignty pillar. This allowed Iran to keep claiming that the ideological goal of the policy was the promotion of independence in the region; but the connotation of the concept of independence was subtly changed from independence from political and economic colonial legacies to economic autarchy as key to the survival of post-Soviet regimes.

Iran's ideology and its interests in Central Asia: a dynamic relationship

The following two case studies in Chapter 4 and 5 will show how a change in the conditions that favour the implementation of Iran's goals in the region underlies the shift from Pan-Islamism to Pan-Iranism and vice versa. Iran's foreign policy is not determined by ideas, as we have seen in Chapter 1; but the material force of geopolitics and state interests are interpreted and ranked only within the available ideological framework of the Four Pillars. This last section on state interest, paralleled in the next two chapters, prepares the terrain for the geopolitical analysis of Chapter 6. These sections will explain how Iran's perception of what policies best supported the attainment of its foreign policy goals in Central Asia changed throughout the 1990s.

These shifts concern the second, explanatory part of the ideological model formulated in Chapter 2, namely the Two Axis model. Shifts in this model, as we shall see

in Chapter 6, were caused by changes in American and Russian policies in Central Asia. These geopolitical shifts affected Iran's perception of the permissiveness of the international and regional environment in which it was operating. The entrance of the US as a key player in Central Asia in 1995, as we shall see, was the single most important cause underlying Iran's perception that bilateral diplomacy was unlikely to yield any more fruits in Central Asia. This perception, in turn, decreased the perceived opportunity costs of relying on riskier, more confrontational Pan-Islamic policies, as we shall see in Chapter 5. Changes in Iran's perception of the friendliness and permissiveness of Central Asia's political arena prompted changes in Iran's calculation of which basic tactical approach to the region was more expedient. Iran's fundamental tactical choice was between policies that promoted stability and those that promoted instability in the region.

Iran's interests in Central Asia can be ordered under two fundamental categories: stability and instability (see Fig. 9). Under the category of stability, we have interests such as expansion of economic ties, diplomatic normalisation, and political alliances. Under the category of instability, we have interests such as the projection of influence, the creation of a politically more friendly neighbourhood, and the advancement of Political Islam. The above diagram illustrates the competing nature of Iran's interests in Central Asia. Each box represents an interest that is to some extent incompatible with the one in the box opposite. For instance, promoting stability in Central Asia means expanding Iranian cultural influence by decoupling Persian culture from Political Islam, and thus reaching Sunni Persianate communities in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan without being perceived as politically subversive. On the other hand, the pursuit or tolerance of instability allows Iran to increase its political influence by using the old principle of *divide et impera* among opposite factions, much like it did during the Tajik civil war, and much like it was doing at the time in Afghanistan.

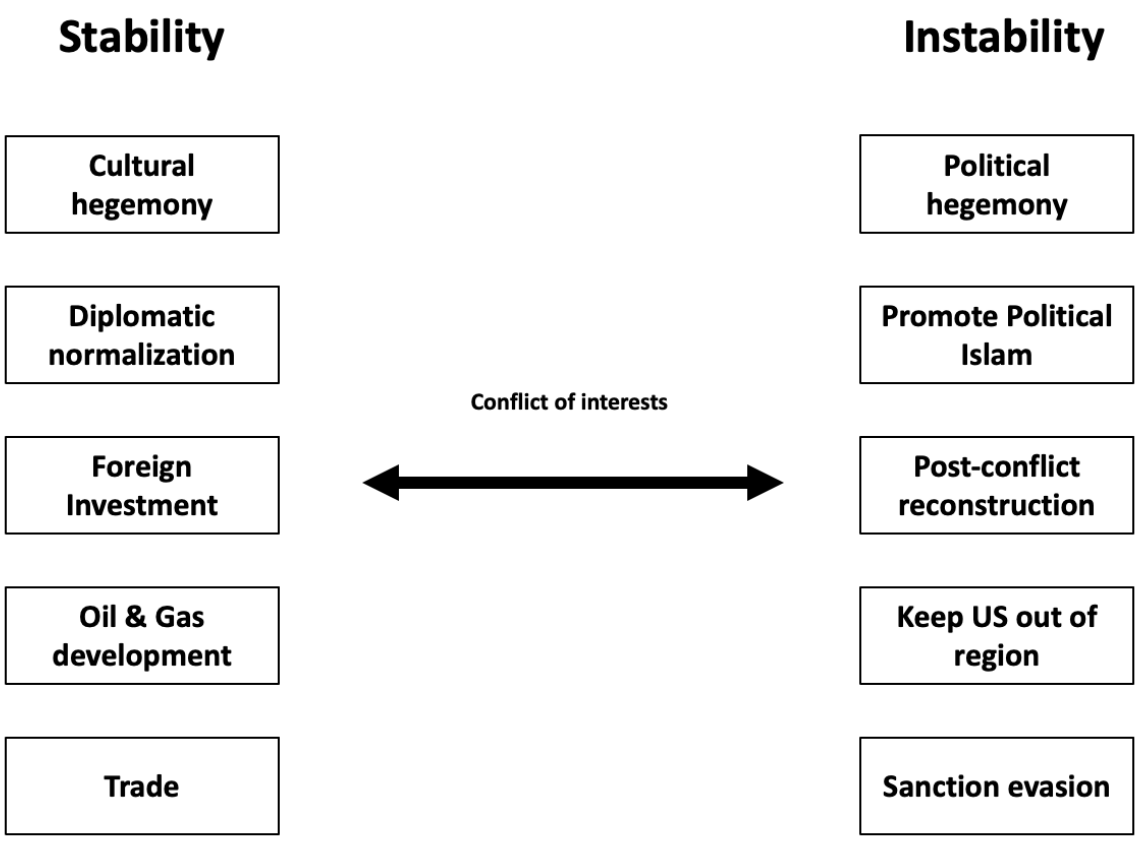

Figure 9: Diagram of Iran's interests in Central Asia: the division of Iran's state interests is split between those best promoted by regional stability and those best promoted by regional instability.

Next, by presenting itself as an agent of stability in the region, Iran could attain a higher degree of diplomatic normalisation in the region to counter still widespread international isolation. On the other hand, instability breeds opportunities for the promotion of Political Islam among oppressed and disgruntled Muslim populations.

Similarly, a stable Central Asia would attract greater foreign investment, potentially bringing much needed capital to Iran, who had yet to fully recover from the devastating impact of the Iran-Iraq war. On the other hand, an unstable and conflict-ridden Central Asia would potentially become more dependent on Iran's economic aid and investment given the lack of international investment; this pattern is apparent in Iran's bids for post-conflict reconstruction in Tajikistan. One of Tehran's major concerns was to ensure Iran would not be left out of the hydrocarbon boom of the Caspian and Central Asian region in the 1990s,

both as a producer and, perhaps even more crucially, as a transit country. But taking part in the oil and gas development risked increasing the political and economic leverage of Western countries both via corporate presence and via direct state presence in the region, contradicting Iran's security and political interest in keeping the US outside of its immediate neighbourhood. Lastly, Iran's weak economy in the 1990s would have benefitted from a more stable neighbourhood with whom to trade; however, an unstable neighbourhood with porous borders and active non-state actors was more conducive to sanction evasion and autarchic economic policies.

This breakdown of Iran's regional interests in between 'stability' and 'instability' corresponds roughly to the two logics underlying the Triangular sub-models presented in the earlier section of this extract – namely, the logic of interstate bilateralism (Pan-Iranism) and the logic of transnational revolution (Pan-Islamism). Pan-Iranism is associated with the promotion of regional stability and Pan-Islamism with the promotion of instability. This dichotomy is a re-formulation of the choice between dissidence or compliance with the international order that every revolutionary state faces. The uniqueness of this interest analysis lies in its claim that Iranian policies to its neighbourhood cannot be simply characterised as an alternation of neatly separate phases in which either stability or instability is pursued. Rather, both logics coexist at the same time, often in different branches of the Iranian states. The objectives pursued through these two different iterations of Iran's ideology may or may not be compatible, resulting at times in quasi-schizophrenic behaviours on part of the Iranian state apparatus. What changes through time is the prevalence and the preponderance of one logic over another; however, even when Pan-Iranism was dominant, as we shall see in Chapter 4, Pan-Islamism was never fully abandoned. It lay dormant waiting for the right regional geopolitical conditions to re-emerge, as we will see in Chapter 5.

The Four Pillar model provides an explanation for the simultaneous co-existence of Pan-Iranian policies promoting regional stability and Pan-Islamic policies promoting regional instability (see Fig. 2). The vertices of the model represent the two basic goals of the Iranian state apparatus: on one hand, the 'introspective' goal of regime survival, and on the other hand the 'extrospective' goal of a favourable international perception of Iran. The foundational, inward looking goal of regime survival requires a balance in between the logic of Pan-Iranism and Pan-Islamism insofar as the Iranian regime is, and sees itself as, at once a revolutionary vanguard for the advent of a pan-Islamic political community and a nation state bent on maximising its political and military power over its neighbourhood. This dual identity produces shifts in the configuration of the Four Pillar model in between different Triangular sub-models, which engender sudden oscillation in the image that Tehran projects on the international stage.

The different facets of Iran's international image are often addressed to very different audiences, creating confusion in between state and non-state actors. This means that the Iranian regime can on the same day talk about pragmatic economic cooperation with neighbouring government and about the necessity to uphold armed struggle against anti-Islamist regimes in the region. Pragmatism in the Iranian context should not be thought of as the abandonment of revisionists and revolutionary postures and policies, but rather as the balancing act in between the two facets that make up the identity of the Iranian state. It is thus best understood as the attempt to not be fully assimilated in the existing nation-state international system, while complying enough to ensure the bare minimum material survival of state institutions.

Chapter 4

Iran's foreign policy during the Tajik Civil War (1992-97): successes and limitations of Pan-Iranism

This case study takes the Tajik Civil War as the second critical juncture changing the security landscape of Central Asia, and the Spring-Summer offensive by the United Tajikistan Opposition (UTO) across the Afghan-Tajik border as the pivotal point in the war that put Tajikistan's opposition on the map as a real political and military threat to the security of the region. This critical juncture forced a recalibration in the foreign policy of all major parties involved, including Russia and Iran. I will look for changes in Iran's foreign policy towards Tajikistan during the civil war years, inquiring whether it changed in response to the pivotal point. I argue that the Four Pillar model can help us explain why Iran chose to remain within the constraints of a Pan-Iranian policy, refraining from shifting to the more militant tones of Pan-Islamism.

This case study highlights the resilience and persistence of Iran's Pan-Iranian approach in the 1990s. Tehran's response to the Tajik Civil War was characterised by a balance between the Pan-Islamist and the Pan-Iranian models, where the former was strictly subordinated to the latter. I argue that the primacy of Pan-Iranism in the years 1992-1995 was a consequence of the fact that Iranian policymakers saw regional stability as more conducive to the promotion of Iran's interests in the region. This led Tehran to craft a remarkably stable, clear, and effective foreign policy, which was instrumental in the facilitation of the peace process culminating with the 1997 cessation of hostilities.

Iran's role in the Tajik civil war is controversial. As it will be discussed, several scholarly accounts have an overall positive view of the impact that the Islamic Republic had on the negotiation process. However, the actors involved in the conflict did not share the academics' judgement on Iranian policy wisdom. To the Rahmonov-led Tajik regime, as well as to his regional allies, Uzbek President Karimov and Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev, Iran was a revolutionary agitator that had stoked the flames of Islamic resistance in Tajikistan. To the Tajik opposition's Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), Iran was a non-committal and half-hearted ally who was unwilling to go the extra mile to ensure the victory of the Islamist faction. In line with the prevailing academic paradigm, I argue that Iran maintained a balanced and tactical approach to the conflict in Tajikistan, measuring the extent of its covert and overt support for the Tajik opposition based on its potential to increase Iran's interest in the region.

On the surface, this pattern seems to fit a classical realist explanation. Iran could be seen as engaging in a balancing act against the declining influence of Russia in a bid to increase its regional hegemony. I argue that the Four Pillar model can enrich this explanation. The preservation of good Russo-Iranian relations ranked consistently at the top of Tehran's concerns in 1992-1997. Much like we have seen in the last chapter, far from running headfirst into Russia's old sphere of influence, Iran continued to perceive the political weakness of the local Islamist movements and decided to focus on traditional bilateral diplomatic relations by adopting a Pan-Iranian approach. This made Iran's policy during the civil war overall prudent; nevertheless, a strict adherence to the principle of bilateral diplomacy at the heart of the Pan-Iranian approach should have ruled out any support for the Tajik opposition, because associations with subversive non-state actors would harm Iran's regional reputation. Similarly, Iran's support for the Islamic opposition, though qualified, was bound to rub Moscow the wrong way.

A realist account would address this incongruence by arguing that Iran's conditional support for the IRPT as merely tactical. According to this logic, Iran chose to extend political and logistical aid to the UTO to gain leverage in the negotiation process and to establish its role as a powerbroker in the region. While it is doubtless that elevating its diplomatic status by brokering a cessation of hostility was one of Tehran's main goals during the Tajik civil war, this explanation presents two major drawbacks. Firstly, it exaggerates Iran's aid to the IRPT and its role in keeping the insurgency alive and threatening. All accounts unanimously point to the almost negligible role that Iran had in aiding UTO's field operations. This was not Iran's proxy war, consequently Iran's role in getting the opposition to the negotiation table should not be blown out of proportion. Secondly, if Iran was angling to be a powerbroker in the negotiations by supporting UTO, it must have had sufficient leverage to bring the rebels to the negotiation table and to convince the Tajik government and its supporters (Russia and Uzbekistan) to accept Iranian mediation. In fact, this chapter will show with empirical evidence that both of these assumptions are wrong. The most decisive factor in bringing UTO and the government to the negotiation table were the fighting conditions on the ground. Furthermore, it was Russia and Uzbekistan, and not Iran, who impeded the negotiation process between 1993 and 1995. Contrary to a realist painting of Iran as a powerbroker, Tehran presented a consistent policy, pushing for dialogue and diplomatic engagement between the two parties from 1992 to the eventual peace signing in 1997.

The realist account confuses Iran's aspirations and the reality of its role in the civil war. Many in Tehran would have liked to see themselves as capable of tipping the balance of the negotiation outcome; in reality, however, Tehran has very little say in what the UTO decided to do and was much more concerned with the potential spill overs of ethnic and religious civil strife for its domestic stability.

This underlying perception of the threat of the Tajik civil war posed to the regional and domestic order caused Iran to opt for a moderate foreign policy limiting the extent of its public association with the IRP. Tehran policymakers did not wish to be depicted as the source of Tajikistan's instability and discard three years of diplomatic engagement with the ex-Soviet Republics. In fact, through most of the civil war Iran attempted and then succeeded in mending relations with the post-Communist regime of Rahmonov. Given these trends towards neutrality and moderation, and the lack of an aggressive strategy of leveraging its IRPT connections to engender a diplomatic blockade, Iran's connections and support for the IRPT cannot be satisfactorily explained within a realist framework.

I argue that Iran's policy during the Tajik civil war is best explained as a delicate balancing act between the Pan-Islamist and the Pan-Iranian ideological approaches. Neither Iran's ambitions for greater influence in the region nor its claim to leadership of the Islamist and anti-imperialist struggle could be renounced without seriously undermining the tenets of Iran's post-revolutionary identity. Iran had two major objectives throughout the civil war: increasing its diplomatic and political prestige in the region and ensuring at least cordial relations with whomever ruled Tajikistan. The convergence of these two goals allowed Tehran to pursue a poised and consistent line in the negotiation process because both of these objectives are best promoted by maintaining regional stability, and thus by establishing the primacy of Pan-Iranism, and bilateral diplomacy, over Pan-Islamism, and transnational revolutionism.

The Four Pillar model accounts for the conflicts between different facets of Iran's ideology through the assumption of dynamism: Iran's foreign policy is seen as fluidly shifting between alternative combinations of the four pillars. In the case of the Tajik civil war, Tehran's moderate and prudent diplomacy is not in contradiction with its post-

revolutionary ideology, rather it is the result of a complex process of elite bargaining to reach an equilibrium between the internationalist and the transnationalist pulls in Iran's regional interactions. In this case, Iran's pragmatism is ideological, as much as its ideology becomes pragmatic.

The Tajik Civil War is an example of the smooth functioning of Iran's ideological system. The system seamlessly reached and maintained an equilibrium between diverging principles in the face of rapidly changing regional circumstances. This led the two policies of Pan-Iranism and Pan-Islamism to synchronise, to the point that their separate courses are often unobservable, leading to the overall impression that only Pan-Iranism was being implemented. In Chapter 5, we will see a decisive end to this harmony. The emergence of interests best pursued by promoting regional instability surfaced an unsurmountable contradiction between Pan-Iranism and Pan-Islamism, entrenching Iran's 'dual track policy' in the region.

Three factors aided the convergence of Iran's foreign policy approaches during the Tajik civil war and hindered them during the Uzbekistan uprising: firstly, the existence of a degree of consensus and unity among elites and different state apparatuses under the Rafsanjani administration that was lost with the election of Khatami (1997); secondly, the process of Russo-Iranian rapprochement; thirdly, the low level of political and military engagement of the United States in Central Asia during 1992-1995. This last factor, as we shall see in Chapter 6, was crucial to the creation of a stable external environment in which the opportunity costs of appearing too revolutionist was higher than that of playing by the rules of the international system.

Background: the IRPT and the outbreak of Tajikistan's Civil War (1992-1993)

Tajikistan is the only state among the ex-Soviet Republics who experienced a civil war upon gaining its independence. The *causa prima* of the Tajik civil war can be found in the process of Russia's military conquest and forced cultural assimilation of the different Iranian and Turkish speaking people inhabiting the territory of modern Tajikistan in the late 1800s. The core of the territory of modern Tajikistan came from the Emirate of Bukhara, which, though under the aegis of the Tsarist empire since the late 19th century, was formally annexed to the Soviet Union only in 1920. The Emirate had a political structure that bore the legacy of both the Iranian empires and the Turco-Mongol nomadic empires.[292] It had a Persianate civil administration on the model of the Safavid one, and a Turco-Mongol politico-military structure following the model of the Mongol and Timurid empires. The sociological legacies of this dual structure, though tamed by 70 years of Soviet rule, never fully disappeared. They can help us understand how regional rivalries and pro- and anti-Islamist camps both were driving forces behind the offset of hostilities and the trajectory of the war.

Much like in other territories whose foreign policy was falling under the control of Western powers, such as Iran, Japan, Thailand, and Turkey, in the late 19th century the Emirate of Bukhara, too, saw the rise of anti-imperialist intellectuals. This was embodied in the Jadid movement.[293] The Jadidists developed a modernist ideology that saw the teachings of Islam as compatible with the political principles of socialism,[294] and gave rise to more radical political demands in the youth.[295] This was the context from which the Basmachi

[292] Bashiri, Iraj. The History of the Civil War in Tajikistan. 2020. p. 56
[293] Roche, Sophie. *The Faceless Terrorist*. Springer International Publishing AG, 2019, p. 16 'The Jadids were linked to the Tatar reform movement under Ismail Bej Gasprinskij (1851–1914), which in turn drew influence from the new Turkish reformers, the Young Turks. The vast majority of Jadids did not survive the Stalinist purges of the 1930s'.
[294] Roche, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
[295] Bashiri, *op. cit.* See for instance his reference to the 'Young Bukharans' (Javonbukhorion).

movement emerged in the 1920s-30s.[296] The movement saw traditionalist Islamic forces joining hands with the modernist Jadidists. This alliance was brought to an abrupt end by the Soviet military intervention: the Tajik population became divided between the pro- and anti-Soviet camps, with the latter retreating to the countryside to maintain Muslim traditions alive.[297]

After the Basmachi revolt, Tajikistan initially was not granted the status of republic in the USSR, and was annexed to the territory of Uzbekistan.[298] The autonomous status of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic (TSSR) was recognised only in 1928.[299] The boundaries between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan completely ignored the demographic and geographic realities of the region: the historically Persianate cities of Bukhara and Samarkand in the Ferghana Valley were incorporated in the territory of Uzbekistan, while the Uzbek-majority region of Leninabad was added to the territory of Tajikistan to ensure the economic viability of the republic, which was otherwise devoid of industries.[300]

The 1930s represented the single greatest disruption in the cultural, religious, and political life of the different ethnic groups inhabiting Tajikistan. Stalinist purges targeted in equal manner Jadidists intellectuals and traditionalist 'ulama. The remaining pockets of Basmachi rebellion were finally crushed. The Sovietisation of the new generation of Tajik youth, who would then go on to become the new generation of Soviet cadres in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era, was sped up. The state started a forced relocation programme to ensure sufficient supply of labour to the new cotton fields of southern Tajikistan which

[296] See 'The Anti-Imperialist pillar: Iran and Central Asia under foreign domination from the Arab conquest to the British Empire', Chapter 2, pp. 96-7.
[297] Bashiri, *op. cit.*
[298] For a broader overview of Stalinist territorial and ethnographic policies, see: Thomas, Alun. *Nomads and Soviet Rule: Central Asia under Lenin and Stalin*. 2018.
[299] Siegel, David. 'The State and the Opposition: Change and Transformation in Tajikistan's Civil War.' *Current Politics and Economics of Northern and Western Asia*, vol. 28, no. 3/4, 2018, pp. 461-65.
[300] Siegel, David, *op. cit.* See also: Rubin, Barnett R. 'The Fragmentation of Tajikistan.' Survival (London), vol. 35, no. 4, 1993, pp. 71–91.

would have dramatic consequences for the demographic of Tajikistan on the onset of the civil war.[301] Following this destruction, it took almost six decades for the Tajik people to rebuild their national identity. Recent studies have shown that this was possible thanks to the resilience of underground religious networks in Tajikistan during the Stalinist era. [302]

WWII brought political changes to Central Asia. In order to ensure the collaboration of the local population, Soviet authorities decided to soften their approach to Islam, allowing the emergence of an official, tightly controlled clergy.[303] At the same time, the increase in industrial demand caused by the war significantly sped up the regionalisation of Tajikistan, with the northern region of Leninabad developing economically and gaining a monopoly on political power, while the southern region of Kulob and Kurgan-Tyube, and the eastern regions of Gharm and Gorno-Badakhshan (whose inhabitants are ethnic Pamirs) were confined to agricultural activities and excluded from party positions (see Fig. 10).[304] With the general amnesty following Stalin's death in 1953, Islam saw a period of tepid revival in the 1950s.[305] The 'ulama steered away from political contestation.[306]

The quiet work undertaken by 'ulama in the 1950s and 60s to safeguard the transmission of religious knowledge blossomed in the 1970s with the emergence of autochthonous Islamist movements that predate the Iranian Revolution and the Afghan-

[301] For further information, see: Dudoignon, Stephane A., and Christian Noack. *Allah's Kolkhozes: Migration, De-Stalinisation, Privatisation, and the New Muslim Congregations in the Soviet Realm (1950s-2000s).* 2020.
[302] See for instance Kemper, Michael., et al. *Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States*. Routledge, 2009.
[303] Bashiri, *op. cit.*
[304] Epkenhans, Tim. '*The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan: Nationalism, Islamism, and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Space*. Lanham, Maryland. 2016, Chapter 2: 'Narrating a House Divided Regionalism Revisited'.
[305] Epkenhans, *op. cit.*, Chapter 5. For more information on Khrushchev's policy on Islam, see Bashiri, *op. cit.*, p. 124. See also: Kalinovsky, Artemy M. *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan.* Ithaca, NY, 2018.
[306] Epkenhans, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

Soviet war.[307] While both of those events have been cited in academic works,[308] and by mujahedeen fighters such as IMU field commander Juma Namangani,[309] as triggers for the spiritual and political awakening of Central Asian people, Tajikistan had an indigenous Islamist intellectual movement that, with minimal if any contact with the greater Islamic

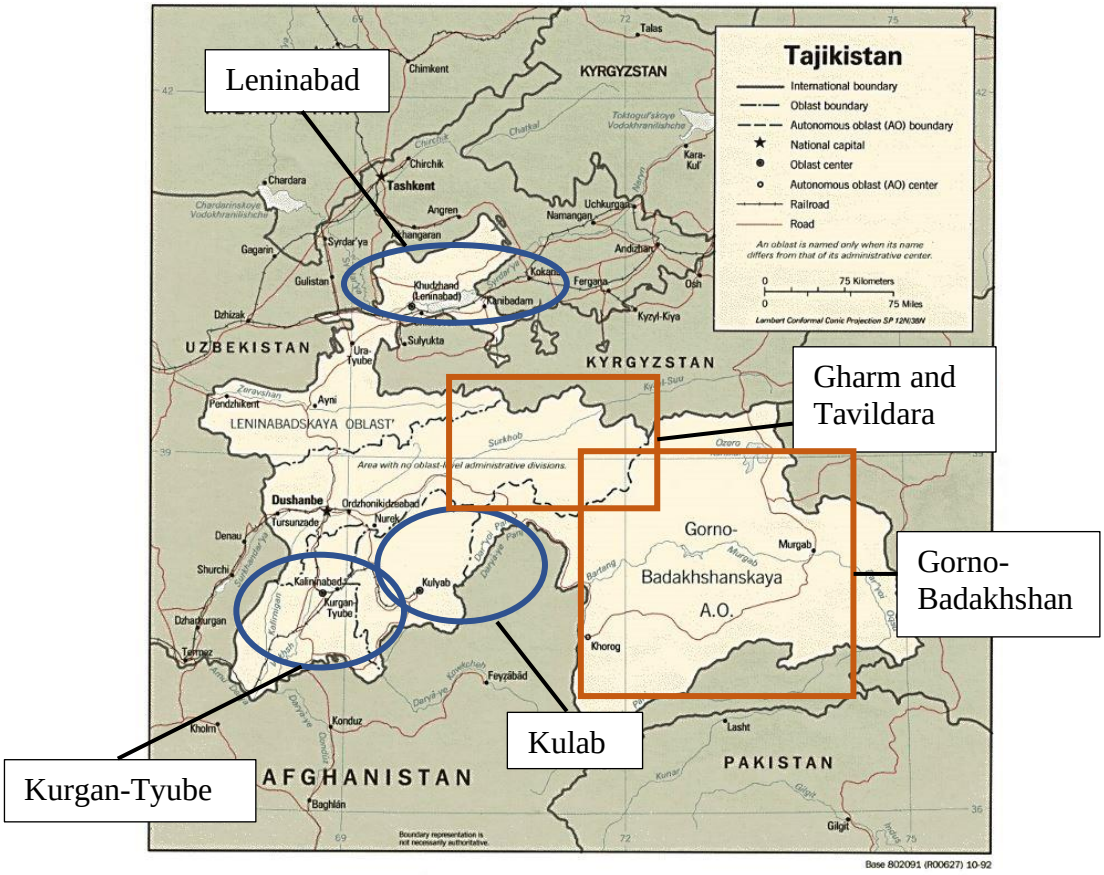

Figure 10: Map of Tajikistan's pre-1991 regional division. The blue circles highlight the key pro-Rahmonov regions of Leninabad, Kurgan-Tyube, and Kulab; the red squares highlight the rebel region of Gorno-Badakhshan, Gharm and Tavildara.[310]

[307] Epkenhans, *op. cit.*, Chapter 5.
[308] See for instance Roche, *op. cit.*
[309] See next chapter for further explanation.
[310] Source: https://www.mapsland.com/asia/tajikistan/detailed-political-and-administrative-map-of-tajikistan-with-roads-railroads-and-major-cities-1992

world,[311] had developed a political Islamist doctrine parallel to that of Khomeini and the Muslim Brotherhood, and which led to the formation of the IRPT, which already existed in its embryonic form in 1973 as a secretive network of likeminded religious scholars in the region of Kurgan-Tyube.[312] Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the IRPT, at the time still known as 'harakat' (movement), gained popularity among Tajik students, resulting in the arrest and imprisonment of its leader Abdulloh Nuri.[313]

It was during Gorbachev's *perestroika* that the IRPT took on the name and the form with which it was going to become one of the main opposition factions in the Tajik civil war. In 1990, Nuri decided to join the newly established 'Partiya Islamskovo Vozrozhdeniya' (Islamic Revival Party), which shortly after went on to found autonomous branches in all Central Asian Republics except for Kyrgyzstan.[314] Economic deprivation, political marginalisation, and religious and cultural suppression were all powerful drivers for the IRPT's recruitment.[315] At the time, the IRP envisioned a process of democratic change that

[311] Bashir argues that Saudi Wahhabi scholars had established contact in Tajikistan after the 1950s; See: Bashiri, *op. cit*., p.124. Nevertheless, Saudi-style Wahhabism had limited ideological influence on the IRPT movement. Bashiri also highlights the flow of financial and logistic aid coming from Saudi Arabia (1975) and Western countries (post-1973) to anti-Soviet Muslim movements. While certainly instrumental to the covert survival of the movement, this external aid does not take away from the indigenous nature of the movement. For further discussion of how Salafism took on a pro-Soviet character in Tajikistan, see: Roche, *op. cit.* I agree with Atkin's view on the subject: 'Much of the answer lies in domestic adaptation rather than external stimuli. Whatever encouragement Soviet Muslims received from the wave of Islamic re-assertiveness abroad since the late 1970s, the fact remains that such encouragement did not fall on barren ground. Islam never died out in the Soviet Union'. Atkin, Muriel. 'The Survival of Islam in Soviet Tajikistan'. *Middle East Journal*, Autumn 1989, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 605-618.

[312] Epkenhans, *op. cit.*, Chapter 5; Bashiri, *op. cit.*, p. 134; Roche, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

[313] Epkenhans, *op. cit.*, Chapter 5.

[314] Haghayeghi, Mehrdad. 'Islamic revival in the central Asian Republics'. *Central Asian Survey*, 1994, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 249-266. The Islamic Revival Party was founded by Tartar intellectuals in Astrakhan, Russia. See also: Saud, Adam. 'Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan: Past, Present and Future.' Pakistan Horizon, vol. 63, no. 3, 2010, pp. 77–91.

[315] Saud, Adam, *op. cit.* For further insights on the economic condition of Tajikistan at the end of the Soviet rule, see: Kalinovsky, *op. cit.*; Grogan, Louise. 'Civil War, Famine and the Persistence of Human Capital: Evidence from Tajikistan.' Comparative Economic Studies, vol. 63, no. 4, 2021, pp. 577–602; see also: Nourzhanov, Kirill, and Christian Bleuer. *Tajikistan: A Political and Social History*. 2013, especially chapter 6.

would eventually lead to the establishment of an Islamic state.[316] The disintegration of the USSR in 1990-1991 allowed existing underground political movements to enter the public arena. The Islamist opposition was not the only anti-Communist movement in Tajikistan at the time. Other significant organisation which went on to for the UTO together with the IRPT included the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT), 'Rastokhez' (Resurrection), and the ethnic Pamir party of 'Lali Badakhshon' (Ruby of Badakhshon).[317]

The onset of the Tajik civil war started after the failed August 1991 Putsch. In the same month, the newly formed DPT led the protest against the Leninabadi president of Tajikistan.[318] Over the following weeks, IRPT-led Pamiri and Gharmi protesters flooded the capital, leading to the resignation of President Makhkamov on 23 August and the scheduling of a new presidential election in November 1991. Interim communist President Nabiyev claimed victory in a round of elections deemed fraudulent by the Islamist and democratic opposition. The Soviet echelon represented by Nabiyev continued to be drawn mostly from the industrialised region of Leninabad. The northern elites' attempt to retain a firm grip on state power backfired when in March 1992 the Leninabadi speaker of the Parliament attempted to dismiss one of the only Pamiri members of the government.[319] The regional dimension of the political attack mobilised Pamiri forces; but the protests quickly escalated to a broader critique of the Soviet state lead by the IRPT. [320]

[316] Saud reports that the IRP unsuccessfully tried to register as a political party in 1990, and eventually succeeds in registering before the 1991 elections as part of an opposition coalition, before being finally outlawed by the Supreme Court in 1993 (Saud, *op. cit.*) Shirazi however argues that there existed an internal division in the IRPT cadres between gradualists and revolutionists (Shirazi, Habibollah Abolhassan. 'Political Forces and Their Structures in Tajikistan.*' Central Asian Survey*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1997, pp. 611–622). Epkenhans, also comments on the ambiguity of the IRP leadership's political vision (Epkenhans, *op. cit.*, Chapter 5).
[317] For a detailed breakdown of the relationship between political affiliation and regional and socio-economic identity, see: Shirazi, *op. cit.* For a detailed overview of the changing ethnic and regional composition of the anti-government opposition between 1992 and 1997, see: Siegel, *op. cit.*
[318] Siegel, *op. cit.*, p 466; Clark, Brenton. 'Iran and the Civil War in Tajikistan.' *Orta Asya Ve Kafkasya Araştırmaları*, no. 18, 2014, p. 85.
[319] Siegel, *op. cit.*, p. 467.
[320] Brenton, 'Iran and the Civil War in Tajikistan', p. 94.

The protests continued throughout the month of April and culminated with the seizure of the presidential palace and of the national television service by the opposition on 5 May.[321] Nabiyev responded by arming the southern Kulobi ethnic group and establishing a National Guard. This decision created the precondition for the entrenchment of regional identities in the conflict, aligning the political power of Leninabad and the military power of Kulob against the marginalised regions of Gharm and Gorno-Badakhshan.[322] Nabiyev's attempt to suppress protests with Kulobi aid backfired; resistance turned violent quickly. On 9 May, Nabiyev dismissed the communist government and accepted the creation of a Government of National Reconciliation (GNR) with the opposition.[323]

The formation of the GNR did not bring an end to the fighting. In May 1992, armed combatants clashed with Russian troops still deployed on the old Soviet border. In June 1992, Moscow authorised Russian troops to act, including by force, to protect themselves or their families.[324] This authorisation entrenched the presence of Russian troops in the Tajik conflict and set the stage for a wider Russian military intervention in 1993. By that point, the fighting had already spread outside of the capital Dushanbe to the southern region of Kurgan-Tyube.[325] The civil war had erupted. Amidst continuous fighting, Uzbekistan voiced concern about alleged arm transfer from Afghanistan and Iran to Tajikistan, raising the spectre of a potential internationalisation of the conflict.[326]

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[321] Siegel, *op. cit.*, p. 467.
[322] Gretsky, Sergei. 'Civil War in Tajikistan and Its International Repercussions.' *Critique* (Saint Paul, Minn.), vol. 4, no. 6, 1995, pp. 3–24.
[323] BBC Monitoring. 'Militia Reported to Be Losing Control in Dushanbe'. *Part 1 The USSR; Tajikistan,* 07 Apr. 1992.
[324] Atkin, Muriel. 'Iran, Russia and Tajikistan's civil war'. Ed. Cronin, Stephanie. *Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions since 1800*. 2013, p. 364. Russian troops' participation in the fighting 'kept Russian soldiers in harm's way and increased both Moscow's support for the new regime in Dushanbe and its hostility toward the Opposition'.
[325] BBC Monitoring. 'More killings reported in Tajikistan Nabiyev leaves for Iran'. *Part 1 The USSR; FORMER USSR,* 29 Jun. 1992.
[326] BBC Monitoring. 'Other Reports: Concern about Tajik conflict and growing Islamic fundamentalism'. *Part 1 The USSR; Uzbekistan,* 02 Sept. 1992.

The first phase of the civil war culminated with the kidnapping of President Nabiyev in August 1992 and his coerced resignation.[327] In September, the first credible reports of intentional targeting of ethnic groups emerged; the Gharmi and Pamiri opposition was accused of persecuting Russian, Uzbek, and Christian minorities,[328] and the Kulobi forces were accused of massacring Gharmis and Pamiris.[329] The Kulobi National Guard led by warlord Safarov joined forces with the pro-communist National Front to form the Popular Front (PF – from now on, pro-communist and pro-Rahmonov forces will be referred as PF).[330] Emomali Rahmonov, subsequently known as Rahmon, has been the third President of Tajikistan since December 1994; he was previously elected as a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Tajik in 1990.

The PF reconquered the capital on 10 December 1992.[331] Their rapid advance was aided by increasing Russian and CIS military presence on the ground, starting as early as September 1992. After securing most of the territory in the south and centre of Tajikistan, the PF launched an attack in January 1993 and secured control of the opposition stronghold of Gharm.[332] Only Gorno-Badakhshan remained under the control of the opposition.

The unfolding of the Tajik Civil War and Iran's role in it (1993-1997)

There is no consensus in the literature on the causes of the civil war. There are five major explanations: regionalism, state failure, elite competition, religious revival, and overdetermination. The most important divide, however, is between those authors that see

[327] Rubin, *op. cit*.
[328] BBC Monitoring. 'Fighting continues in Tajikistan government aims at creating secular state'. *Part 1 The USSR; 1. FORMER USSR,* 12 Sept. 1992.
[329] Siegel, *op.* cit. p. 468.
[330] Siegel, *op.* cit. p. 469.
[331] Siegel, *op.* cit. p. 469.
[332]Lieven, Anatol. 'Tajiks Seize Islamic Rebel Bases'. *The Times*, 02 Feb. 1993.

regionalism as a cause of the war,[333] and those that see it as being shaped by the conflict in a mutually constitutive relation. This latter group tends to emphasise the role of state failure and elite competition in the years 1991-1992, claiming that regionalism became a defining factors in the conduct of hostilities only after violence had already broken out.[334] Some of these authors take the role of Islam seriously, in as much as they see a real bottom-up yearning for greater religious freedom that exponentially increased the power of mobilisation of the IRPT in the early phase of the conflict.[335] Others still point to a set of complex and overdetermining causes that led to the outbreak of the civil war, including path dependency created by seventy years of Soviet administration.[336] Finally, some authors have employed neorealism and game theory to analyse the balance of power between the government and the opposition and explain the outbreak of hostilities.[337] Overall, most studies of the Tajik civil war focus on the years 1990-1992 to unearth the mechanism that led Tajikistan down a bloody path; fewer studies focus on the conduct of hostilities between 1993-1997 and on the negotiation process.[338]

Within the broader literature divide pitting proponents of a regionalist explanations and proponents of alternative explanations, there is a further issue at stake: that of the influence of external actors on the outbreak of the conflict in 1992. There is no established consensus on the truthfulness of allegations of Iranian sponsorship of the May 1992

[333] See: Siegel, *op. cit.*; Brenton, *op. cit.*
[334] See: Atkin, Muriel. 'Tajikistan's Civil War'. *Current History*, vol. 96, no. 612, October 1997, Russia and Eurasia, pp. 336-340; Gretsky, *op. cit.*; Shirazi, *op. cit.*; Kevlihan, Rob. 'Insurgency in Central Asia: A Case Study of Tajikistan.*' Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2016, pp. 417–439; Tunçer-Kilavuz, Idil. 'Understanding Civil War: A Comparison of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.' *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 63, no. 2, 2011, pp. 263–290.
[335] See: Olimov, Muzaffar. 'Civil War in Tajikistan.' *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2/3, 2016, p. 44-57; Atkin, 'Tajikistan's Civil War'; Bashiri, *op. cit.*
[336] See: Lynch, Dov. 'The Tajik Civil War and Peace Process.' Civil Wars, vol. 4, no. 4, 2001, pp. 49–72; Kerimov, Farhad. 'Power, Networks and Violent Conflict in Central Asia: A Comparison of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.' *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2017, pp. 171–173; Rubin, *op. cit.*; Epkenhans, *op. cit.*
[337] See: Splidsboel-Hansen, Flemming. 'The Outbreak and Settlement of Civil War: Neorealism and the Case of Tajikistan.' Civil Wars, vol. 2, no. 4, 1999, pp. 1–22; Tunçer-Kilavuz, *op. cit.*
[338] See: 'The Civil War in Tajikistan.' Strategic Comments, vol. 3, no. 6, 1997, pp. 1–2.

protests.[339] Most authors, however, tend to suggest that while Iran's material support for the IRPT cannot be disproven, there exists no conclusive evidence of significant arm transfer from Tehran to Dushanbe.[340] They conclude that whatever logistical, tactical, and perhaps financial aid was provided by Iran was limited in nature and in scope, making it likely inconsequential on the otherwise still inevitable descent of Tajikistan into civil war.

Painting the IRPT as an Iranian proxy agent is a fundamental mischaracterisation of the relationship between the two parties. I have already discussed the existence of an indigenous Islamist movement in Tajikistan predating the Iranian Revolution, which was embedded within Sunni circles and not Shi'a Iranian networks. Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev retrospectively admitted that he was not presented with any material evidence by Central Asian leaders accusing Iran of interference in the 1992 protests.[341] Epkenhans's translation of twenty-five autobiographical accounts of Tajik political actors confirms the widespread bias of local elites in favour of a disproportionate perception of external interference, in spite of the lack of evidence of any foreign funding reaching Tajikistan before the protests of 1992.[342]

Some have pointed to the appearance of pro-Islamic slogans in the 1992 as proof of the presence of Iranian agitators in the crowd. I agree with Mesbahi in rejecting the conclusiveness of this evidence. It is possible that these slogans reflected a grassroot-type

[339] Noticeable exceptions are Rashid, Ahmed. *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?* Oxford University Press: Zed Books, 1994; Kuzmin A. I. 'The Causes and Lessons of the Civil War'. Ed. Vassiliev, Alexei. *Central Asia: Political and Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era.* London: Saqi Books, 2001; Khaidarov, G. and Inomov, M. *Tajikistan, Tragedy and Anguish of a Nation*. Linko: St. Petersburg, 1993.
[340] See: Gretsky, *op. cit.,* p. 17; Roy, Oliver. *The Civil War in Tajikistan: Causes and Implications*. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1993; Hunter, Shireen. 'Iran's Pragmatic Regional Policy'. *Journal of International Affairs*, Spring 2003, vol. 56, no. 2, Central Asia: The Road Ahead (Spring 2003), pp. 133-147; Akiner, Shirin. *Tajikistan: Disintegration or Reconciliation?* Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001.
[341] Atkin, 'Iran, Russia and Tajikistan's civil war', p. 366.
[342] Epkenhans, *op. cit.*

of radicalisation in the face of greater Russian and Uzbek interference; the emulation of 1979 revolutionary slogans does not prove that the movement was orchestrated or directed by Iran.[343] In fact, this argument seems to have been blown out of proportion from a single invocation of the well-known 'Death to America' slogan made by the deputy leader of the opposition.[344] The single most convincing piece of evidence concerning the limits of Iran's involvement in 1992 are reports concerning Iran's alleged refusal to ship weapons to the Tajik opposition during the 1992 summer offensive.[345]

The difficulties in ascertaining the true extent of Iranian involvement in 1992, as Brenton claims, may be due existing divisions within Iranian elites:

> […] Even within Iran's government itself there were divergent interests and forces at play when it came to Tajikistan. In discussions with a former Iranian Foreign Ministry official, an interesting anecdote relating to the complexity and dual tracks of Iran's foreign policy was made. According to this official, Iran's Foreign Ministry placed its support behind all opposition elements, however at the same time Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and National Security (MOIS) was also providing its own backing and support solely to the Islamist elements of the opposition in the hope they would eventually gain power over the secular, democratic, and nationalist opposition elements.[346]

Brenton's emphasis on Iran's 'dual track policy' is consistent with my argument. Different branches of the Iranian state presented a greater institutional affinity for the Pan-Islamic or the Pan-Iranian approach to foreign policy; consequently, they held diverging interpretations on the nature of developments in Tajikistan and on their effect on Iranian interests, which resulted in sometimes conflicting policies being enacted simultaneously by different state apparatuses. These contradictory pulls will mostly be kept under control in 1992-1997, but

[343] Mesbahi, Mohiaddin. 'Tajikistan, Iran, and the International Politics of the "Islamic Factor".' *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1997, p. 143.
[344] Epkenhans, *op. cit.*, p. 286.
[345] ''Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Mahmud Va'ezi informed the Russian ambassador in Iran, Vladimir Gudev, that Iran had refused to accept the requests for arms of several opposition groups in Tajikistan'. *ITAR-TASS*, 28 October 1992. *FB1S-SOV*, 30 October 1992, p 11.
[346] Brenton, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

will re-emerge after 1999, giving the impression that Iran's policy in Central Asia had become schizophrenic.

The Spring-Summer 1993 offensive: the inability of regional powers to end the conflict

The overview of the outbreak of the war left newly appointed interim President Rahmonov in control of roughly all of Tajikistan's territory except for rebel-enclave Gorno-Badakhshan; thanks to the military support of Kulabi-led PF forces, it seemed like the pre-1992 status quo had been reinstated. Pamir forces were essentially blockaded in the mountainous region of Gorno-Badakhshan. [347] The remaining rebel forces had been pushed into northern Afghanistan, where the rebel coalition found a valuable ally and material support to continue their insurgency. Afghan field commander Ahmad Shah Masood (an ethnic Tajik Afghan) provided materiel and logistical support for the UTO's regrouping;[348] Masood is said to have personally trained some of the UTO field commanders.[349]

The UTO Spring-Summer 1993 offensive had been chosen as the pivotal point because it proved that the civil war was not over, and that the UTO had sufficient military power to pose a real security threat to the Russian-backed Rahmonov regime, and to the wider region. During the month of July, Russian troops had increasingly found themselves caught in border scuffles with UTO fighters crossing over from Afghanistan. Moscow's rushed decision to back Rahmonov in 1992 left them overexposed to IRPT cross-border

[347] Kevlihan, *op. cit.*, p. 423. Grogan, *op. cit.*, p. 579.
[348] Kevlihan, *op. cit.*, p. 427. The Northern Alliance was a coalition of Afghan field commanders who fought against the Soviet invasion; after 1992 he fought against Pashtun commander Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as part of the Rabbani government; after the Taliban takeover of 1996, he continued to lead the military opposition known as the Norther Alliance until his death in 2001.
[349] Siegel, *op. cit.*, p. 472.

incursions. The Yeltsin administration had severely underestimated the depth of popular grievances driving the conflict, as well as the difficulty of controlling and governing a territory as hostile as Tajikistan.[350]

The 13 July 1993 saw an accident that shocked Russian policymakers into the realisation that the war was not going to be over soon, and that supporting Rahmonov would come at a high price. [351] A Russian army post on the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan with 50 lightly armed troops was surrounded by 200 UTO fighters; at least 26 Russian troops died during the siege. Their manoeuvres were aided by the mobilisation of sleeper cells inside Tajikistan's border.[352] This prompted Russia's parliament to give the go-ahead to use 'all necessary measures' to protect border troops.[353] CIS troops retaliated by shelling Afghan territory, which allegedly killed or wounded about 400 people and displaced about 6000.[354] Tensions were running so high that President Yeltsin reportedly had to deny authorisation to conduct ground manoeuvres inside Afghanistan's territory.[355] The risk of an internationalisation of the conflict was high.

The autumn and winter 1993 saw a seasonal reduction in the level of conflict, with UTO fighters retreating to their Afghan bases after having been unable to make significant gains on Tajik territory. The conflict resumed the following summer, proving that the war had already become entrenched in local socio-economic patterns of life. The PF responded by renewing its attack on rebel region Gorno-Badakhshan with the aid of Russian troops.[356]

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[350] Clark, Bruce. 'Russian Forces Go on Offensive as Fighting Flares in Borderlands'. *The Times,* 03 Jul. 1993.
[351] Brenton highlights the importance of this event as a turning point (*op. cit.,* p. 107).
[352] Hearts, David. 'Rebels Surround Russian Post'. *The Guardian,* 14 Jul. 1993.
[353] Hearts, David. 'Troops Rush To Border' *The Guardian,* 15 Jul. 1993; McElvoy, Anne. 'Moscow Gives Border Guards Go-Ahead for Afghan Attacks'. *The Times,* 21 Jul 1993.
[354] 'Tajik Rebels Kill Border Guards'. *The Heralds,* 22 Jul. 1993; Womack, Helen. 'Russia Accused of Afghan Attack'. *The Independent,* 16 Jul. 1993.
[355] Mc Elvoy, Anne. 'Yeltsin Forced to Save Discredited Tajikistan Bosses'. *The Times,* 23 Jul. 1993.
[356] BBC Monitoring. 'Upsurge in Violence in Tajikistan'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 30; BBC Monitoring. 'Major Rebel Stronghold Captured in Tajikistan'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 24.

Fighting escalated in September 1994 when rebel forces succeeded in opening a new front in the region of Tavildara and seized control of the district.[357] The rebel advances forced the government to the negotiation table for the first time. A ceasefire was signed on 18 September 1994,[358] but not before the PF reclaimed control of Tavildara after a bitterly fought battle.[359]

By the start of 1995, it was clear that the Rahmonov's government was incapable of either guarding its own borders or maintaining control over its own territory without Russian assistance.[360] But Russia would not risk embarking on a new Afghan war. CIS troops were unable to definitively defeat UTO troops. The cost of protecting Tajikistan's territorial integrity continued to escalate for CIS military personnel. This led to a spiral of increasingly violent retaliation that brutalised the Afghan civilian population living near the border and invertedly solidified the UTO-Masood alliance.[361] The risk of regional spill over of the conflict into Afghanistan was at its highest in 1995; the contradiction between the military necessity to conduct ground operation inside Afghanistan to definitively crush the UTO insurgency, and the political necessity to avoid any new embroilment in Afghanistan weighed heavily on Moscow, especially while dealing with its own insurgency in Chechnya. A journalist at the time wrote:

> The spring offensive launched by Afghan-based Tajik Islamic rebels is designed to bog down Russian border guard forces, to establish a bridgehead in the rebel-held area of Gorno-Badakhshan and into central Tajikistan. If they succeed, they will threaten all Russian interests in central Asia and the stability of Uzbekistan, and will stretch Russian forces embroiled in Chechenia.[362]

[357] BBC Monitoring. 'Fighting escalates in Tajikistan'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 30.
[358] 'Tajik Ceasefire'. *The Independent,* 19 Sept. 1994.
[359] 'Tajik Government Troops Seize Tavildara'. *The Guardian,* 19 Sept. 1994.
[360] BBC Monitoring. 'Rahmonov appeals to Yeltsin for military assistance'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 64.
[361] Lieven, Anatol. 'Russians Killed in Tajik Attacks'. *The Times,* 10 Apr. 1995; Kushko, Yuri. 'Russian Helicopters Launch Attack on Tajik Rebels, Killing 47, in Clashes on Afghanistan Border'. *The Guardian,* 12 Apr. 1995.
[362] Kushko, *op. cit.*

The longer Russian and CIS troops remained in Tajikistan, the more men and materiel their government committed to propping up Rahmonov, the quicker regional security seemed to deteriorate, with looming consequences for domestic instability. It had been clear already in 1993-1994 that the civil war could not be won on the battlefield, but there had been no immediate pressure to end the conflict. By 1995, speeding up the negotiation process had become a priority for Moscow and other countries in the region. Under Russian pressure, Rahmonov agreed to meet face to face with the leader of UTO, Abdulloh Nuri.

His decision was precipitated also by a sudden worsening in the internal security situation of Tajikistan, as rebel commanders from Kurgan-Tyube mutinied over domestic power sharing agreements.[363] This opened up a second axis of pressure on the Rahmonov's regime, who was already under considerable pressure from rebel advances.[364] This dual pressure resulted in the signing of a document outlining the precondition for peace.[365] It was clear at this point that both parties to the war accepted that neither could achieve an overwhelming victory on the battlefield. Yet, the next two years leading up to the final peace agreement signed in June 1997 were characterised by an intensification of conflict. This trend is likely due to two phenomena: on one hand, both PF and UTO, having accepted the inevitability of a negotiated settlement, tried to secure greater leverage by controlling more territory; on the other hand, both Rahmonov and Nuri struggled to contain splinter factions who did not want to negotiate or attempted to gain more power within their coalition. The conflict trends observed in the summer 1995 continued until late 1996, where a new military

[363] BBC Monitoring. 'Official Taken Hostage in Tajik Regional Centre'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 76.
[364] BBC Monitoring. 'Tajik fighting shifts to interior, opposition accuses government of cease fire violation'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 77; BBC Monitoring. 'Tajikistan government accuses opposition of stepping up terrorist activities inside Tajikistan'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 78.
[365] BBC Monitoring. 'Tajik Opposition and Dushanbe Agree on Basis for Peace'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 83.

equilibrium favouring UTO was achieved on the battlefield.[366] Between May and December 1996, the opposition (in purple) gained control of three key geographical areas: the central province of Tavildara,[367] the Jirgatal district on the border with Kyrgyzstan,[368] and the central Gharm district, while rebel commanders (in green) maintained control of Kurgan-Tyube (see Fig. 11).[369] As a direct consequence of this change in territorial control, in December 1996 Rahmonov and Nuri signed a key protocol outlining powers and function of National reconciliation commission, starting the process of political pacification of the country.[370]

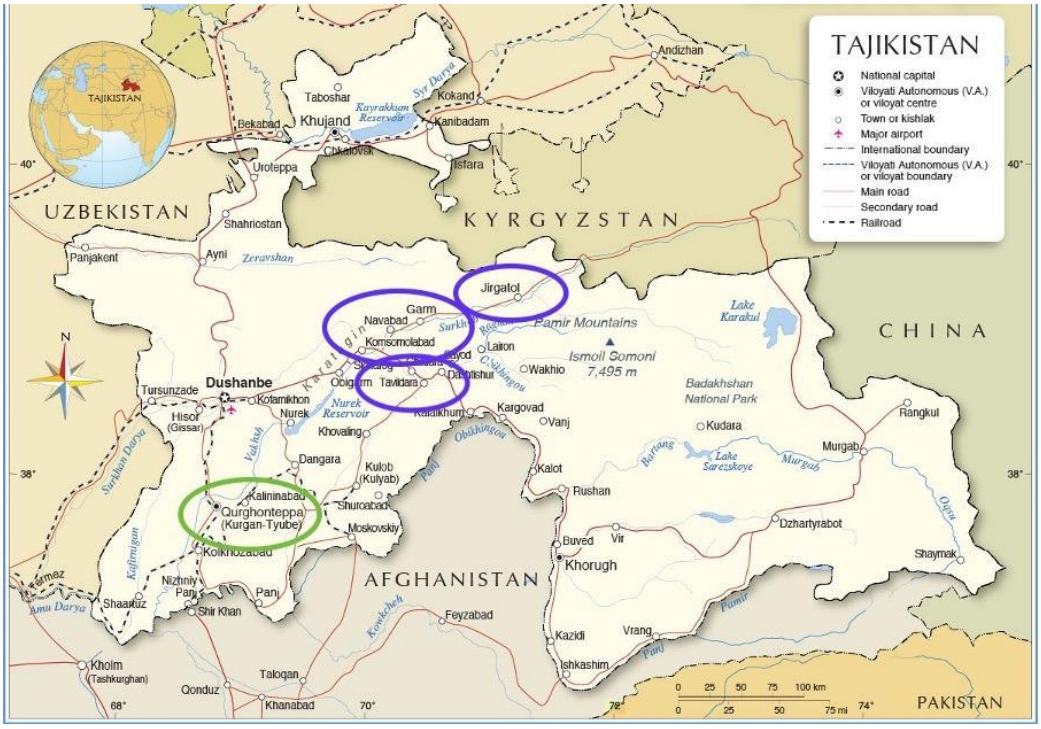

Figure 11: Map of territorial conquests by UTO forces in the 1996 offensive. Purple circles show newly rebel-held regions of Jirgatol, Gharm, and Tavildara; the green circle shows the location of the commander mutiny in Kurgan-Tyube.[371]

[366] BBC Monitoring. 'CIS Commander Condemns Rebel "Terrorism"'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 85; BBC Monitoring. 'Tajik government forces clash with Islamist in eastern district'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 106; BBC Monitoring. 'Islamic Rebel Forces Push Back Government Troops'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 107; 'Warlords Advance'. *The Guardian*, 02 Feb. 1996; 'Tajik Army Halts 'Coup Attempt' by Rebel Troops'. *The Guardian*, 03 Feb. 1996; 'Tajik Warlords Gain Ground'. *The Guardian*, 05 Feb. 1996.
[367] BBC Monitoring. 'Tajik Rebels Take Control of Tavildara'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 120.
[368] BBC Monitoring. 'Tajik Rebels Capture Town Close to Kyrgyz Border'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 137.
[369] BBC Monitoring. 'Rebels Take Key Town in Central Tajikistan'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 147; BBC Monitoring. 'Rebel attack Signals Fall of Strategic Valley in Central Tajikistan'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 149.
[370] BBC Monitoring. 'Tajik President and rebel leader sign ceasefire accord'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 151.
[371] Source: https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/tajikistan-administrative-map.htm

The map below (see Fig. 12) shows the geographical squeeze that the dual advance of UTO rebels and ex-PF commanders had on the government between May and December 1996. With UTO fighters (purple) taking control of Gharm, Tavildara, and Jirgatal, and PF rebels (green) pushing towards Dushanbe from Kurgan-Tyube in the south, Rahmonov had lost control of all ingress routes into Tajikistan except from the ones passing through Uzbek territory (orange). Some of the most prominent PF rebel generals from Kurgan-Tyube, however, were ethnically Uzbek and tacitly backed by Tashkent. Rahmonov was thus faced with a situation where Tajikistan's already collapsed economy could be essentially blackmailed by the Uzbek-Russian coalition, which now controlled all roads to Dushanbe that were not under rebel control.

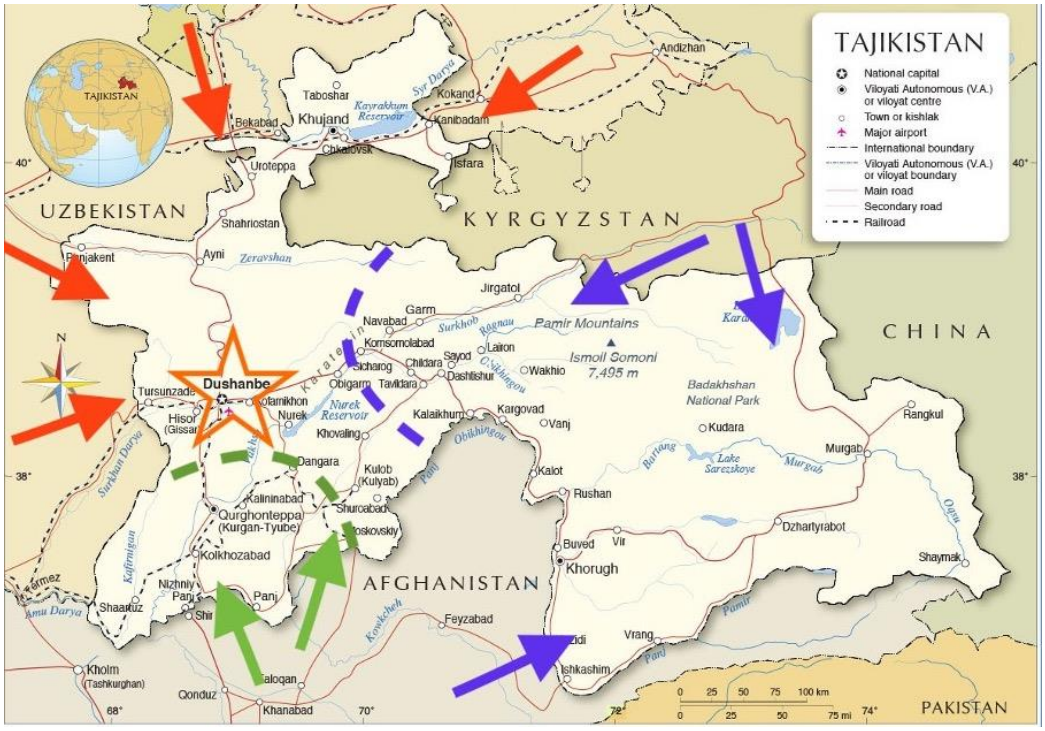

Figure 12: Map showing the direction of the dual assault on PF forces: by UTO rebels (purple),) and by mutinied commanders (green). Dotted semicircles show the approximate location of contact lines; Arrows show the border crossings into Tajikistan: Purple arrows show UTO controlled border crossing; green arrows show border crossings controlled by mutinied commanders; and orange arrows shows border crossings available to government PF forces.[372]

[372] Source: https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/tajikistan-administrative-map.htm

This change in the balance of power on the battlefield in favour of UTO and Uzbek renegade commanders was essential to dictating the timing of the peace settlement. A military analysis of the conflict cannot, however, explain to us why UTO and PF accepted the inevitability of a political solution in 1995, two years before the actual peace settlement was reached, and what changed between 1993 and 1995. To understand the whole trajectory of the conflict we need a political analysis of the role that regional power played.

Russian policymakers had been acutely aware of the need for a political settlement as early as August 1993. However, political strife between the three key regional players, Russia, Iran, and Uzbekistan, delayed the negotiation process. It was only when these three powers enjoyed a rapprochement in their diplomatic relationship in 1995 that they came to an agreement on the need to push government and opposition to sit on the negotiation table. This means that while the political outcome of the war was as good as decided in 1993-1994, the conditions for a political settlement didn't come about until the end of 1996.

Tehran, Dushanbe and Moscow: Iran's triangular diplomacy and the choice of Pan-Iranism

Iran's policy in the crucial years 1993-1995 of the conflict is central to understanding the interplay between power politics and post-revolutionary ideology. Did Iran ever change its official position on the Tajik civil war? Did Iran pursue any policies at the time that were in contradiction with its official stance? What were Iran's main objectives in engaging with Dushanbe and the opposition? And, most importantly, can the ideological model advanced in this thesis help us better understand the facts? In order to answer these questions, this section will shed light on Iran's relation with both of Tajikistan's parties to the war, as well as on the ups and downs of Russo-Iranian relations during the war. The extent of the stability

and consistency of Iran's policy on the Tajik Civil War will be a strong indicator of Tehran's primary objectives in the conflict, of the nature of Iran's conditional support for the IRPT, and of whether the evidence is consistent with the primacy of Pan-Iranism over Pan-Islamism.

Iran had established courteous relationship with Nabiyev's communist regime in 1990-1992. Numerous official visits were paid by both parties in 1990-91 with an emphasis on bilateral cooperation; in this initial phase, there were few mentions of culture and no mention of religion. The tone changed with Iran's official visit in December 1991,[373] where Iranian foreign minister Velayati explicitly addressed the religious factor for first time. This did not sour Dushanbe-Tehran relations: at the start of January 1992, Iran opened its embassy in Tajikistan.[374] In the same month, Tajikistan announced its plan to re-adopt the Persian alphabet.[375] Cordial relations continued between January and March 1992.[376] In March 1992, Nabiyev announced the pursuit of an 'active neutrality policy';[377] this signalled the start of a readjustment in Dushanbe's regional posture away from its overreliance on Iran. Nabiyev stated that he would not overlook Russia in favour of regional or Muslim countries. The fall of the Nabiyev's government brought no significant change in the foreign policy posture of Dushanbe, as the GNR rejected the possibility of establishing an Islamic state at the time.

If the GNR did not seem overly enthusiastic to boost ties with Tehran, Iran also appeared to be teetering in 1992. In June, Iran's ambassador to Russia described the IRPT

[373] See Chapter 3.
[374] BBC Monitoring. 'Cabinet Approves Establishment of Consulates in Soviet Republics'. *Part 4 The Middle East,* 20 Dec. 1991.
[375] BBC Monitoring. 'Tajikistan to Replace Cyrillic Alphabet with Persian One'. *Part 1 The USSR,* 14 Jan. 1992.
[376] Rugman, Jonathan. 'Muslim Economies Realign'. *The Guardian*, 07 Jan. 1992.
[377] BBC Monitoring. 'Nabiyev Says Tajikistan Opts for Neutrality'. *Part 1 The USSR,* 13 Feb. 1992.

as Tajikistan's 'internal affair'.[378] Iran's official pro-mediation stance was established at the very start of the unrest.[379] As seen in Chapter 4, by 1992 the Iranian policymaking establishment had made the transition from a Pan-Islamist approach to Central Asia to the strategic adoption of Pan-Iranism. Pan-Iranism was crucial in shaping Iran's relations with Nabiyev and can explain Iran's teetering in between support and caution on the IRPT issue. The reorientation of the Iranian political establishment in favour of Pan-Iranism after Velayati's visit to the USSR in December 1991 was instrumental in preventing Tehran from embarking on too ambitious a revolutionary policy that would have drastically increased its isolation in the region.

As we have seen in Chapter 3, Pan-Iranism was not a panacea for Iranian political dilemmas in Central Asia, but a double-edged sword: it could either shine a light on Iran's moderation and pragmatism or highlight Tehran's cultural imperialism and patronising attitude. Mesbahi sees the danger of the duality of Pan-Iranism in contradiction in the policies Tehran pursued with states and non-state actors.[380] Clear evidence of this danger is shown in the tone adopted by Iran's first ambassador to Tajikistan:

> ʿAli Shabistari depicted [the Tajiks] condescendingly as the powerless subjects of foreign conquerors for a thousand years. As a result, he said, millions of Tajiks had lost their cultural heritage, although, paradoxically, he depicted Tajiks as defending that heritage from 'infidel' influence.[381]

Nevertheless, Iran's reliance on the Pan-Iranian ideological model prevented its relationship with Nabiyev from souring during the early phases of the unrest. Brenton reports that in this period Nabiyev 'displayed an overt enthusiasm for the development of ties with Iran, and

[378] BBC Monitoring. 'Iranian Ambassador Interviewed on Ties with Cis and Russia'. *Part 1 The USSR,* 18 Jun. 1992.
[379] Brenton, *op cit.,* p. 101.
[380] Mesbahi, Mohiaddin. 'Iran and Central Asia: Paradigm and Policy.' *Central Asian Survey,* vol. 23, no. 2, 2004, p. 116.
[381] Atkin, 'Iran, Russia and Tajikistan's civil war', p. 363.

consistently declared his admiration of Iran's political, cultural and economic development'.[382] Mesbahi argues that Nabiyev's emphasis on common cultural heritage was a purposeful strategy to 'manage the Iranian factor in a less threatening way by channelling it into the less politicised contingencies of the Iranian model'.[383] Pro-Iranian sentiment was prevalent at the time, and Nabiyev's official visit to Iran in June 1992 was criticised by the GNR for not going far enough with establishing ties with the Islamic Republic.[384] Yet despite this clear pro-Iranian sentiment expressed politically by the GNR, Tehran refrained from adopting a strong pro-GNR stance, hesitation which 'further signified the general belief in Tehran that the clash in Tajikistan, while couched in ideological terms, reflected tribal, regional, and ethnic differences'.[385]

Iran was remarkably silent in 1993 after the rise to power of Rahmonov. Tehran's official statements addressing the new administration were few and far in between, showing a visible cooling of relations under the new regime. Another significant factor explaining Iran's public silence on the Tajik issue was the incompatibility of Russia and Iran's policies in the country.[386] While there was not an overall cooling in Russo-Iranian relations, commentators at the time highlighted Tehran's divergence from Moscow on Tajikistan and on Bosnia. The juxtaposition of these two issues suggests that Iran's support for Muslim Bosnia and Tajikistan was playing a role in the policy dispute. From early 1993, it became evident that Russo-Iranian relations were to be a major drive in the process of mediation between PF and UTO. Early mediation efforts in 1993 involved pro-Rahmonov Uzbekistan to the exclusion of Iran.[387] Atkin claims that although by 1993 Russia and Iran agreed on

[382] Brenton, *op cit.,* p. 94.
[383] Mesbahi, 'Tajikistan, Iran, and the International Politics of the "Islamic Factor"', p. 145-146.
[384] Brenton *op cit.,* p. 101
[385] Meshabi, Tajikistan, Iran, and the International Politics of the "Islamic Factor"', p. 149.
[386] BBC Monitoring. 'Middle East: Commentary Says Moscow and Tehran Agree on Gulf Issues but not on Tajikistan'. *Part 1 The USSR,* 02 Feb. 1993.
[387] Steele, Jonathan. 'Slim Hopes for an End to Civil War in Tajikistan'. *The Guardian,* 06 Aug. 1993; McElvoy, Anne. 'Presidents Try to Halt Tajikistan Violence'. *The Times*, 09 Aug. 1993.

the need for a political solution to the conflict, 'each, at least initially, wanted to use negotiations to serve its own interests in ways that worked at cross purposes to the interests of the other country'.[388] The misalignment in Tehran and Moscow's main foreign policy objectives in Tajikistan determined Tehran's diplomatic isolation in 1993.

In January 1994, Iran abandoned its coolness towards Rahmonov to again presents itself as a mediator.[389] At the same time, and not coincidentally, Russo-Iranian cooperation on Tajikistan saw an upturn.[390] Greater harmony between Moscow and Tehran brought the opposition sitting face to face with the government for the first time in March 1994. This convergence in policy in early 1994 signalled the end of a period of lower public Iranian involvement in conflict mediation.

This period between December 1992 and January 1994 masked a covert shift in favour of Pan-Islamic policies supporting IRPT and UTO. Even accounting for the difference between Iran's statements addressed at the international community and those meant for domestic consumption, the focus on Russia's complicity in the 'slaughter of Muslims' is a stark change from 1991-1992 Russo-Iranian rapprochement. There seems to be a temporal correlation between Rahmonov's political crackdown at the start of 1993, Iran's temporary disengagement from the mediation efforts, and the re-emergence of anti-Russian rhetoric following a cooling of Iran-Russian relations in the first half of 1993. This suggests the existence of a triangular relationship between Iran, Russia, and Tajikistan, where changes in Iran's relationship with one of the two countries will also affect Tehran's disposition towards the other country.

[388]Atkin, 'Iran, Russia and Tajikistan's civil war', p. 371.
[389] BBC Monitoring. 'Iranians mediating in Tajikistan conflict'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 1.
[390] BBC Monitoring. 'Russia Joins Iran in Tajikistan Mediation' *Inside Central Asia*, no. 8.

The literature supports this chronology. Brenton reports that in 1992-93 Iran proposed joint Russo-Iranian peace initiative on numerous occasions, only to be rejected by Yeltsin and Rahmonov, who believed the conflict to be over.[391] Lynch also identifies Primakov's meeting with Nuri as the end of Russia's unconditional support for Rahmonov.[392] This also indicates that part of the Iranian establishment, most likely the president and the foreign ministry, had continued to work through diplomatic channels to salvage Iran's Pan-Iranian approach even during the surge of Pan-Islamic and anti-imperialist sentiment in 1993. Brenton continues:

> The key turning point of 1993 was the visit of the director of the Russian Intelligence Services Yevgenii Primakov to Kabul and Tehran in July and August 1993 as Yeltsin's special envoy to the Tajik crisis. Meeting with [IRPT] chief Nuri in Kabul, Primakov was given a number of encouraging signs relating to the opposition's willingness to negotiate.[393]

Primakov's diplomatic mission in July-August 1993 took place just after what I have argued was the pivotal point in the military and political trajectory of the conflict, namely the UTO attack on a Russian garrison on 13 July 1993. Following Russia's realisation of their own vulnerability on the battlefield, between July 1993 and January 1994 Russia and Iran re-aligned their foreign policies on the Tajik issue, agreeing that a military settlement was impossible. The impossibility of a military resolution to the conflict was mostly due to the scale of Russian involvement on the ground. Russia was unwilling to allow a coalition of democratic, nationalist, and Islamic parties to win, therefore it continued to prop up Rahmonov. But after 13 July, Russia had to come to terms with the fact that the government's military and economic weakness was so deep, and the opposition was sufficiently well armed and motivated that it was doubtful whether Rahmonov could survive

[391] Brenton, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
[392] Lynch, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
[393] Lynch, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

the withdrawal of CIS troops. The Tajik government could neither win not lose against the opposition: Rahmonov was too weak to win, but too important for Moscow to lose. Political compromise was the only way out the war.

Even though Russia may had already come around to the idea of a negotiated settlement between July and August 1993, both Tehran and Moscow had their work cut out in convincing UTO and Rahmonov to sit at the table. Following Primakov's talks with Nuri, Yeltsin publicly reprimanded Rahmonov, pressuring him to start talks with the opposition.[394] Russian pressure was eventually successful, and in December 1993 Rahmonov declared his openness to talks with the opposition 'at any level and in any form'.[395] But during 1994, just as the joined effect of Moscow's intimations and the danger of UTO incursions seemed to have forced Rahmonov to the negotiation table, Uzbekistan's hostility to UTO and to the joint Russo-Iranian plan,[396] and a series of internal disputes in the opposition coalition,[397] allowed Rahmonov enough time to reconsolidate his domestic power base and postpone the settlement.[398]

During this low time for the opposition, Iran continued to ostensibly promote itself as chief negotiator. But much like during the early months of 1993, when Pan-Islamist sentiments had ignited again following the intensification of the conflict, there is evidence pointing at the emergence of domestic political competition between the Pan-Iranian and the Pan-Islamic ideologies. This is evident in the events following the DPT split from the UTO: the democratic party decided in 1995 to relocate to Moscow from Tehran after alleging that

[394] Steele, Jonathan. 'Russia Gets Tough with Tajik Ruler'. *The Guardian*, 09 Aug. 1993.
[395] BBC Monitoring. 'Rahmonov declared he would negotiate with the opposition at any level and in any form'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 1.
[396] This will be discussed in detail in the latter section of this chapter.
[397] BBC Monitoring. 'Tajik Democratic Party Splits from Islamic Opposition'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 36.
[398] BBC Monitoring. 'Rahmonov Wins Presidential Polls with 60% of Vote'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 43.

Iranian officials had pressured its leadership to continue the armed struggle.[399] The DPT leader claimed:

> The attitude of the Iranian authorities to the Democratic Party had changed since its announcement to split from Islamic opposition. "Once the new stand was proclaimed, the Iranian authorities changed their attitude to the DPT and persecuted some of the party members".[400]

This hints to the persistence of a divide between regional foreign policy and regional security policy. It is possible that the pressure coming from Iran was due to the fact that the DPT blamed the IRP for holding up the peace process rather than because they renounced armed struggle per se.

Nevertheless, it is likely that in late 1994-1995, part of the Iranian state considered it expedient for the fight to continue. It is unlikely that they expected the UTO to take over Dushanbe militarily; however, as we saw in the chronology above, after the breakthrough of the summer 1993 campaign, the UTO lost significant ground to CIS forces in 1994. This means that at the start of 1995, the Tajik opposition was in a comparatively weak position and would not be able to extract a favourable settlement. Iran's covert insistence with DPT leaders for the continuation of hostilities should therefore not be seen as an outright contradiction of its official bid for mediation: while political compromise remained the preferred outcome, the timing for it in 1994 was considered wrong. This points again to a divergence of priorities, if not a rivalry, existing between the foreign ministry and the security apparatuses in Tehran. As it was discussed at the start of this chapter, Brenton identifies this as the locus of the domestic conflict on policymaking within the Iranian state. Iran's 'dual-track policy' is thus the result of the foreign ministry's propensity for a Pan-

[399] BBC Monitoring. 'The Democratic Party of Tajikistan Gains Official Recognition'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 79.
[400] BBC Monitoring. 'Tajik Democratic Party to Move from Tehran to Moscow'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 79.

Iranian approach to Central Asia, and the security forces' predilection for a Pan-Islamic interpretation of the events in the region.

This leaves us with a combined timeframe for the potential surge in Pan-Islamic sentiment among Iranian policymakers between December 1992 and mid-1995. UTO weakness gave rise to the permissive condition necessary for a switch from Pan-Iranism to Pan-Islamism, in so far as Iran's interests would be better advanced through the continuation of regional instability. This second phase of diplomatic isolation was broken after May 1995. If August 1993 represented the start of a Russo-Iranian dialogue based on the premise that the war could not be won on the battlefield, May 1995 represented the second turn in the diplomatic process, as Iran and Russia accept the need to come to a compromise on the desired outcome of the political process.

The combination of UTO's internal dispute and Russian heavy military deployment in 1994 had allowed Rahmonov enough time to consolidate its position: it was impossible to go back to the 1992 GNR coalition. The Tajik democratic transition of 1991-1992 had failed, and a post-Soviet regime with strong ties to the old elites was taking form. Rebel forces seemed to acknowledge this as a point of no return.[401] But Nuri and the UTO were looking beyond Iran to find the right backer for the long negotiating process. The year of 1995 showed the tenuousness of Iran's grip on the IRP. Not only did Nuri meet with US representatives, but he also stated that the joint Islamic opposition would pursue a policy of neutrality.[402] This shows that Nuri was willing to put his relations with Iran to the test in favour of acquiring international legitimacy, and that his foreign policy was not dissimilar

[401] BBC Monitoring. 'Tajik Opposition Offers 12 Point Programme to Settled Tajik Conflict'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 57.
[402] For an in-depth analysis of Tajikistan's neutrality, see: Nourzhanov, Kirill. 'Omnibalancing in Tajikistan's Foreign Policy: Security-Driven Discourses of Alignment with Iran.' *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2012, pp. 363–381; Miller, Eric A., and Toritsyn, Arkady. 'Bringing the Leader Back In: Internal Threats and Alignment Theory in the Commonwealth of Independent States.' *Security Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2005, pp. 325–363.

to that of Nabiyev. This should not come as a surprise: we have seen in the background section of this chapter that there was little ideological overlap between Iran's political Islam and Nuri's Islamism. Atkin remarked, '[Nuri] rejected [Iran's] claim to be Islamic and faulted the ruling elite for failing to reflect the evolution in Iranians' views in the years since the revolution'.[403]

This cooling in Iran-UTO relations was accompanied by a warming in Iran-Rahmonov ties in 1995. In March, the Tajik president set his eyes on importing Iranian gas.[404] By May, Iranian officials paid a diplomatic visit to Dushanbe, the first since the December 1992 coup.[405] In July 1995 Iran-Rahmonov ties are solidified by bilateral meetings.[406] By autumn 1995, relations between the two countries had normalised.[407] By this point, Rahmonov is convinced that Iran does not constitute a military threat to its regime. This rapprochement followed a renewed convergence of views between Russia and Iran on the Tajik issue. During his meeting with Rahmonov in May, Iranian diplomat Vaezi said that 'preconditions had recently appeared for fruitful cooperation between Iran and Russia for solving the region's problems'. UTO leader Nuri also pointed to the role that Russo-Iranian rapprochement played in determining the opposition's willingness to sit at the table with the government.[408]

Moscow-Tehran cooperation in 1995 was broadening beyond security cooperation to areas such as trade and technology transfers. Russia's decision to ship a nuclear reactor to Iran while Washington was preparing to issue the second round of comprehensive

[403] Atkin, 'Iran, Russia and Tajikistan's civil war', pp. 369-70.
[404] BBC Monitoring. 'Tajik Premier seeks to import gas from Iran'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 63.
[405] BBC Monitoring. 'Iranian minister meets Rahmonov in Dushanbe'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 69.
[406] BBC Monitoring. 'Rahmonov begins 3-day visit to Iran'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 78.
[407] BBC Monitoring. 'Regular Flights Are Inaugurated Between Tajikistan and Iran'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 84; BBC Monitoring. 'Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mostafa Mirsalim Visits Dushanbe'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 86; BBC Monitoring. 'New Private TV Station Opened in Tajikistan with Iranian Aid'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 87.
[408] BBC Monitoring. 'Tajik Rebel Leader Nuri Makes Overture to Russia'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 116.

economic sanctions in May 1995 underscores the depth of their strategic cooperation to prevent American influence in Central Asia. A senior Russian source in the foreign ministry was quoted commenting on this strategic partnership:

> Iran can have both a stabilising and a destabilising role on the Muslim regions of Russia. We need a broad spectrum of co-operation with Tehran. The broader the co -operation, the narrower is the possibility of anti-Russian actions from extremist forces in Iran.[409]

The importance of Russo-Iranian relations is underscored in the literature. Therme argues that 'the risk of an intensification of the conflict and the destabilisation of the Tajik–Afghan border drove the two partners to seek a compromise solution'.[410] Gretsky also sees Iran subordinating its policy in Tajikistan to its ties with Moscow.[411]

The improvement in Moscow-Tehran relation showed that by 1995 regional and international factors had mostly aligned in favour of peace; domestic factors, however, still stood in the way of a settlement. Conditions inside of Tajikistan, as we have seen in the section above, did not align in favour of peace until in 1996 Rahmonov came under the dual pressure from rebellious commanders and UTO advances. By 1996, the change in the opposition's mindset is evident by the IRPT's accepted Russian mediation in May.[412] The fact that Nuri ensured they would safeguard Russia' security interests is further proof of their sincerity towards the negotiation process at this stage. By this point, the IRPT had fully renounced armed struggle as a means to military victory.

[409] Hearst, David. 'Russia Sees Rich Reward in Iranian Links'. *The Guardian*, 31 May 1995.
[410] Therme, Clément. 'Iran and Russia A tactical entente'. Ed. Cronin, Stephanie. *Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions since 1800*. 2013, p. 383.
[411] Gretsky, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[412] BBC Monitoring. 'Iranian Daily Comments on Tajik's Rebel Acceptance of Russia's Role'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 123.

UTO's unspoken renunciation of the armed struggle is poignant, especially given the military advances they made in late 1996. We have seen that 1994-1995 saw an escalation of military operations by Russia and other CIS countries, especially Uzbekistan, targeting the Afghan-Tajik border. UTO's acceptance of Russia's mediation in 1996 was no coincidence, as their patron, warlord Massoud, was overthrown by the Taliban offensive. By October 1996, UTO fighters did not have a safe haven in Afghanistan anymore,[413] and were forced to conduct one more desperate attempt to penetrate Tajikistan's territory, which, fortunately for them, left them in control of most major road networks and forced Rahmonov to the negotiation table. Lynch highlights both the role of UTO's military advancements and Russian pressure on the peace settlement.[414]

The analysis of Russo-Iran-Tajik relations during the 1992-1997 Tajik civil war has shown that, overall, Iran maintained a remarkably consistent and coherent policy of mediation, in spite of the occasional emergence of clues pointing to the persistence of a Pan-Islamic, pro-UTO streak in Iran's security apparatus. During two time periods, December 1992 – March 1993 and June 1994 – March 1995, Iran presented a relatively low-intensity public-facing diplomatic effort in Tajikistan. These timeframes were dictated by the military fortune of UTO, as well as by swings in Russia's commitment to a negotiated settlement. These periods are candidates for investigating the persistence of dissenting voices within the Iranian policymaking apparatus that did not embrace the Rafsanjani's shift to Pan-Iranism in 1992. The next section will test this hypothesis, looking for persistence of a Pan-Islamic vs. Pan-Iranian debate in the Iranian literature of 1992-1997.

[413] BBC Monitoring. 'Afghan Commander Says He May Move Against Tajik Rebels' *Inside Central Asia*, no. 119.
[414] Lynch, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

Overall, this chapter had shown that Pan-Iranism remained the main paradigm guiding Iran's foreign policy in Tajikistan. Several authors agree with this conclusion.[415] Anderson explicitly argues so:

> In contrast to the Middle East, Iranian cultural diplomacy in Tajikistan prioritizes a Persian identity as the basis for economic, scientific, cultural, and political integration in the region.[416]

At the same time, he recognises that the rhetoric that Tehran uses with Dushanbe represents multiple identities: 'devout Shi'a', 'devout non-Sectarian Muslim', 'non-Sectarian political Islamist', 'Transnational Persian culturalist', and 'Pan-sectarian Anti-Zionist Muslim'. The first three correspond to declinations of my Pan-Islamist principle. His 'Transnational Persian culturalism' clearly corresponds to my Pan-Iranian model, while the 'Pan-sectarian Anti-Zionist Muslim' is a combination of Anti-Imperialism and Pan-Islamism. Anderson's five identities point to the existence of rival Pan-Islamic and Pan-Iranian logics in Iran's relations with Tajikistan. What is missing from Anderson's account is the equivalent of the National Sovereignty pillar. This was the deciding factors in Iran's diplomatic conduct, as it brought Tehran to prioritise Russo-Iranian relations over revolutionism. The ideological model I outlined in this thesis can account for this policy change, because the Four Pillar model postulates that the Pan-Islamist pillar is in contradiction with the National Sovereignty one due to its commitment to transnationalism over Westphalian nationhood.

Meshabi's observations give credit to my claim of the coexistence of alternative and sometimes conflicting ideological paradigms in Iran's foreign policy.[417] His description of

[415] Clark, Brenton. 'Ahmadinejad, Iran, and Foreign Policy Dysfunction in Tajikistan.' *Asian Politics & Policy*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2015, pp. 213–244; Tabassum Firdaus. 'Deepening Iran-Tajik Relations.' *دراسات أقليمية*, vol. 8, no. 23, 2011, pp. 401–406.
[416] Anderson, Lukas. 'Iran's New Cultural Nationalism: Iranian Cultural Diplomacy in Tajikistan.' *Central Asian Affairs*, vol. 2019, no. 1, 2019, p. 21.
[417] Meshabi, 'Iran and Central Asia', p. 127.

Iran's post-revolutionary identity as both fixed and fluid resonates with the structural characteristics of my ideological model. Meshabi's four factors shaping Iran's policy in Central Asia can also be seen as concrete iterations of the Four Pillars: Iran-Russian relations are part of the National Sovereignty pillar; the 'geopolitics and geocultural role of Islam' is akin to my Pan-Islamic pillar; the 'global factor and US ever presence' can be seen as an instantiation of the Anti-Imperialist pillar; and, finally, his 'vision of Iran's centrality in shaping Central Asia' represents my Pan-Iranian pillar.

We have seen how some authors point to the existence of a 'dual track' in Iran's foreign policy in the region, as well as others commenting on the rivalry between the Iranian foreign minister and the Iranian security apparatuses. Ahmadi is the only author to explicitly correlate the dualism within the Iranian state structure and the competition between Pan-Iranian and Pan-Islamist logics:

> The dualism embedded in the power structure of the I.R.I. reinforced the impact of politics. While the modern power structures manifested in the presidency and the governmental institutions, opted to rely on a relative cultural and civilizational approach toward Tajikistan and emphasized more on economic cooperation, the traditional power structure manifested in the institution of Velāyat-e Fāq'īh, the Supreme Leader and his personal and institutional entourage, followed a more religious approach not welcoming by Tajik political ruling elites.[418]

This analysis has shown the limitations of Iran's political and diplomatic influence in the Tajik mediation process. While I agree with the literature in seeing Tehran's consistent mediation efforts as instrumental to the eventual settlement of the conflict,[419] Iran did not have the leverage to dictate the timing of the negotiation process and was often at the mercy

[418] Ahmadi, Hamid. 'Iran and Tajikistan: How Culture and Civilization Fade in the Shadow of Politics and the Political.' *Iran & the Caucasus*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2019, pp. 105–119.
[419] Brenton, *op. cit.*, p. 119: 'It is clear that under Rafsanjani's leadership Iran played a crucial role in bringing peace to Tajiks'; Meshabi, 'Iran and Central Asia', p. 117: 'Iran's policy toward the role of Islam or Islamic movements in Central Asia is fundamentally pragmatic.' Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 139: 'Unlike other aspects of its foreign policy, Iran's approach toward Central Asia and the Caucasus is remarkably free of ideological influences'.

of Moscow, Dushanbe and the IRPT's whims. While agreement between regional powers (Iran, Russia, and, as we shall see in the last section, Uzbekistan) was a necessary condition for the peace agreement, the timing of the end of the civil war was solely dependent on internal conditions on the ground. The Tajik civil war came to an end only when each party believed it to be more expedient to settle the conflict rather than continue the fighting. At the start of 1997, Rahmonov had a lot to lose from facing off against both the renegade generals and UTO, while UTO risked losing its military breakthrough and its advantageous position from continued campaign without having a secure fallback in Afghanistan due to the Taliban takeover.

The persistency of Pan-Islamist discourse under the Pan-Iranian policy aegis

The previous section has shown that Iran maintained overall a Pan-Iranian posture, and that there are two periods of lower diplomatic engagement that may be consistent with the presence of intra-elite debates surrounding a potential switch to Pan-Islamism. These periods are December 1992 – March 1993 and June 1994 – March 1995. There seem to be some indicators in favour of this hypothesis in the re-emergence of anti-imperialist and Pan-Islamic rhetoric in April 1993 Friday sermons:

> Yeltsin, that evil criminal of Russia, has picked up his begging bowl and is knocking on the doors of Europe and America while Russia is suffering under the burden of thousands of problems. He thinks he has been successful; they have promised to give one hundredth of what he had asked for. But he is busy killing Muslims in Soviet Azerbaijan, in Tajikistan and in Bosnia-Hercegovina.[420]

[420] BBC Monitoring. 'Iran; Musavi-Ardebili Friday Prayer Sermon on Plight of Muslims Throughout the World'. *Part 4 The Middle East*, 12 Apr. 1994.

During the years 1992-1997, Iran's cultural legacy was emphasised in an attempt to appeal to the common identity of the Central Asian republics and garner more influence. As it was anticipated in Chapter 3, Tehran could not appeal coherently to both its Persian cultural superiority and to its common history of colonial oppression with Central Asia, because the transnational solidarity of the Anti-Imperialist pillar is in contradiction with the bid for cultural hegemony of the Pan-Iranian pillar. Iran failed to apply the Anti-imperialist pillar to its own imperial past; instead, its political and military dominance was diluted under the guise of cultural enlightenment. The only way in which Iran could use Anti-imperialism in the region was by limiting it to anti-Americanism. Anti-imperialism, which is the pillar excluded from the Pan-Iranian Triangular model, becomes the criterion for the identification of who, according to Tehran, should be the political adversary of the regional states, namely the US. The three other pillars, Pan-Islamism, Pan-Iranism, and National Sovereignty, become the criteria with which Iran hopes to create a common in-group regional identity. The redefinition of Anti-Imperialism as Anti-Americanism gave internal consistency to Iran's Pan-Iranism and created the conditions for the harmony between the Pan-Islamic and the Pan-Iranian approach that characterised this period.

Looking at the main two sources again, the *Iranian Journal of International Affairs* and *Amu Darya*, we can see traces of the persistence of Pan-Islamism. This approach survived by being linked with the new conception of Anti-Imperialism as Anti-Americanism. The Fall-Winter 1994-1995 issue featured a double issue on 'the process of development In Central Asia and the Caucasus', highlighting the salience of Tajikistan's civil war for Iran. The publishing of this volume corresponds with one of the two periods of thawing in Russo-Iranian relations concerning the outcome and timing of the political settlement of the civil war. Much like in the case of the first period, we can see evidence that, alongside the

dominant Pan-Iranian approach, the Pan-Islamic rhetoric remained alive in the work of Iranian authors

Vice-President Abbas Maleki, as a proponent of Pan-Iranism, was emphasizing that 'access to a proper developmental path holds the key to regional prosperity and political stability'.[421] Maleki argued that Central Asia was facing three sets of issues:

> National identity and nation-building; process of development (economic centralization, environmental destruction, lack of economic diversification…) and political instability.[422]

This approach is in line with the emphasis on culture and economic development promoted by Velayati after his tour of the USSR in November 1991. Other authors reflected the concern for spill overs from the Tajik Civil War which underlined the concern with the promotion of regional stability that we see in this period:

> In addition to internally generated crises, the other danger is that various ethnic minorities residing in neighbouring republics will probably be used as pressure levers. Evidence suggests that at this point Uzbekistan is using the Uzbek minority in Tajikistan to enhance its regional position.[423]

At the same time, the issue is rife with authors appealing to the Pan-Islamic and the Anti-Imperialist logic:

> Initially, the region became the scene of rivalry among different groups which inclined towards pan-Turkish, pan-Islamism, Pan-Iranism. The Western powers, especially the US, were dissatisfied with the new set-up. In addition, they found a new arena for exerting economic and cultural influence. They came to the region

[421] Maleki, Abbas. 'Editor's Note'. *Iranian Journal of International Affairs, vol.*6, no. 3 & 4, 'The process of development in Central Asia and the Caucasus' Fall/Winter 1994-1995, pp. 1-3.
[422] Maleki, *op. cit.,* p. 2.
[423] Seif-Zadeh, Hossein S. 'National Identity Crisis in Central Asia and the Caucasus'. *Iranian Journal of International Affairs,* vol. 6, no. 3 & 4, 'The process of development in Central Asia and the Caucasus' Fall/Winter 1994-1995, p. 408.

> apparently to provide financial and technical aid. The ulterior motive, however, was to expel the competitors from the region.[424]
>
> In the far past, and during the domination of Communism over the region of Central Asia and the Caucasus, the superior power of Russia, its desires, politics and interests influenced everything […] The understood cynicism towards the aggressive policies of the northern neighbour throughout the history of Iranian foreign relations reflects the unfair and inequitable interactions and agreements, which, despite a legal façade of equality, always benefitted the stronger.[425]

The focus on 'extra-regional powers' and their attempt to influence Central Asian republics anticipates the forthcoming isolation of Iran after 1995, as we shall see in Chapter 6:

> At this juncture, there are some expansionist governments abroad which endeavour to remove the republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus from the fold of the CIS and to wield influence over them.[426]

By 1996, the contradiction between these two rhetorical pushes to Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism became even more accentuated. The clash is highlighted by the two paragraphs below:

> The militancy of Muslims is ultimately neither anti-West not mindless rebellion for the sake of rebellion. It is a jihad, a struggle, foremost by an individual Muslim against himself, in recognition of his own unworthiness when measured against the history of past greatness of Islam and Muslims.[427]
>
> As mentioned earlier, Iran's geopolitical situation, economic potentials, human resources, and its role in the Middle East, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Persian Gulf necessitates the establishment of constructive relations with neighbouring states in order to maintain peace, stability and to attain economic development. Even though one active policy now pursued in the region vis-à-vis Iran is dual containment and the use of sanctions is aimed to weaken Iran's role, the actual result of these

[424] Mirheydar, Dorreh. 'A Spatial-Locational Analysis of the Current Crises in Central Asia'. *Iranian Journal of International Affairs,* vol.6, no. 3 & 4, 'The process of development in Central Asia and the Caucasus' Fall/Winter 1994-1995, p. 474.
[425] Kazemi, Ali Ashgar. 'Development and the Question of Transit in Central Asia and the Caucasus'. *Iranian Journal of International Affairs,* vol.6, no. 3 & 4, 'The process of development in Central Asia and the Caucasus' Fall/Winter 1994-1995, pp. 478-9.
[426] Reza, Enayatullah. 'Obstacles to Development in Central Asia' *Iranian Journal of International Affairs,* vol. 6, no. 3 & 4, 'The process of development in Central Asia and the Caucasus' Fall/Winter 1994-1995, p. 502.
[427] Mansur, Salim. 'The West, Muslims, and Muslim's Self Perception.' *Iranian Journal of International Affair,* vol. 8, no. 1, Spring 1996, pp. 95-6.

> policies can only distort regional cooperation and create tensions among the nations. [428]

This is in line with the analysis in the next chapter, highlighting the resurgence of Pan-Islamism under Khatami's disinterest for Central Asia and its change to Anti-Americanism. As we shall see in Chapter 6, Iran's anti-Americanism in Central Asia was part of Iran's continued response to the rise of unipolarity and the renewal of US-Iran enmity in the wake of the 1995 US sanctions.[429] When the Pan-Iranian approach is applied to the Central Asian context, Anti-Americanism becomes the common denominator between the three pillars of Pan-Iranism, Pan-Islamism and National Sovereignty. National Sovereignty is thus taken to mean the end of US interference in domestic affairs of regional countries. Iran particularly emphasised in this period Turkmenistan's change of heart on its commitment to building a pipeline transiting through Iran after President Niyazov visited Washington as an example of US interference.[430] In this new interpretation, Pan-Iranism and Pan-Islamism become the celebration of Persian-Islamic culture as a bastion of resistance to 'westoxification'.[431] Examples of Iran's application of this principle to its foreign policy include accords for cultural cooperation between Iran and Tajikistan in 1998.[432]

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[428] Maleki, Abbas. 'Remarks by Abbas Maleki, Deputy Foreign Minister for Education and Research on "Iran's View on The Developments in the Middle East" at the 10th Annual Aps Conference on "Middle East Strategy to the Year 2009"*'. Iranian Journal of International Affair*, vol. 8, no. 4, Winter 1996, p. 836.

[429] The Clinton administration imposed trade restriction on Iranian oil imports in March 1995 with the Executive Orders 12957 and followed up in May 1995 to extend the prohibition to several other economic sectors, banning virtually all Iranian-made goods from the US market under the Executive Order 12959 (see: 'Executive Orders 12957: Prohibiting Certain Transactions with Respect to the Development of Iranian Petroleum Resources'. *Federal Register*, 17 Mar. 1995. 'Executive Order 12959: Prohibiting Certain Transactions with Respect to Iran'. *Federal Register*, 9 May 1995). The belief that the world was moving beyond unipolarity, as well as the normative imperative to push against US unipolarity, are themes that frequently appear in Iranian decision makers' speeches in the years 1995-2000.

[430] See following chapter on pipelines.

[431] Gharbzadegi (غرب‌زدگی), loosely translated as 'Westoxification', 'Occidentosis', or 'Westernstruck', is the title of a book by Jalal Al-e-Ahmad published in 1962. In the book, the author decries the indiscriminate borrowing of Western lifestyle and culture by Iran during the 20th century, focusing on how the import-export balance was recreating neo-colonial dynamics (see: Āl Aḥmad, Jalāl., et al. *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*. Mizan Press, 1984.)

[432] BBC Monitoring. 'Iranian and Tajik President Sign Cooperation Agreement'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 254.

The logical leap from Anti-Imperialism to Anti-Americanism was unfortunately bound to fail in Central Asia. As we have seen in Chapter 2 and 3, Iran and Russia had been historically the imperial powers in Central Asia in the last four centuries. While ascribing the label of 'imperial power' to the United States was in line with Iran's stance on the unfairness of the international system and a reflection of American continued efforts to isolate Tehran from the region, it was a significant historical mischaracterisation from the perspective of Central Asian countries who were just exiting over a century of Tsarist and Soviet colonisation. This insistence on the need to deny access to regional resources and institutions to the US and other Western powers was bound to create the most friction in Iran's relations with Central Asian Republics.

What constitutes a coherent set of ideas from within the unique experience of Iran as a post-revolutionary country often comes across as an assemblage of conflicting and often contradicting precepts to countries that do not share Iran's political idiosyncrasies. Iran's attempt to adjust its foreign policy to the mood of Central Asia in the 1990s was bound to fail because there was no way for Tehran to reformulate its ideology in a way that was both palatable to Central Asian countries and still distinctly Iranian. During the 1990s, Iran was facing competition for regional influence by the secular Turkish regime and the Sunni Saudi regime; it was also unable to mobilise nearly as much financial capital to compete with its two rivals in infrastructure investment in the region. Given that the majority of Central Asians were Sunni, and that by 1995 all Central Asian regimes had all demonstrated some degree of distrust for Islamist institutions and Islam in general due to fears that such organisations may channel popular discontent into organised political opposition, Iran was unable to distinguish itself from its rivals by advancing a foreign policy based on the Pan-Islamist Triangular Model, lest it wanted to further the suspicions of Central Asian states that it was supporting subversive elements. Similarly, given the fact that the political and

economic model of secular, pan-Turkist Istanbul appeared at the time more successful and appealing to Central Asian states, also because of western pressure in favour of a secular transition, Iran could not compete with a foreign policy approach based singularly on a generic Westphalian model and unwittingly encourage Central Asian states to integrate into the US-led international system. Meshkini illustrated Iran's regional limitations with extreme clarity:

> Five factors greatly inhibit Iran's active participation in regional schemes. These are: the American policy of containment, the zero-sum rivalries of regional actors, endemic crisis in Central Asia and the Caucasus, Iran's own economic inability in participating in regional projects, and Iran's specific dilemmas in the Caucasus. The overall conclusion is that unfortunately, politics assume priority over economic considerations.[433]

Iran's economic and political weakness: vested interests in regional stability

This section looks at how Iran's Pan-Iranian policy during the Tajik Civil war is correlated with an increase in the ratio of Tehran's interest best served by the promotion of regional stability. In other words, the primacy of Pan-Iranism was aided by the convergence between its emphasis on bilateral state relations and Iran's economic weakness at the time. Iran had more to lose from further destabilisations in Central Asia because it was not in a position to take advantage of it: it lacked the economic dynamism, the financial capital, and the internal political stability that some of its rivals had, such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The fact that Iran would not come under sanctions until 1995 aided Tehran's political calculus in favour of regional stability, with the hope that investment in bilateral commercial and economic relations with its neighbours would help to restart its battered economy.

[433] Meshkini, Qadir Nasri. 'Challenges and Imperatives of The Iranian Policy in Central Asia and The Caucasus'. *Amu Darya*, *vol.* 4, no. 4-5, p. 73.

This schema shows that between 1992 and 1995, the balance of Iran's interests was heavily tilted towards regional stability. At the end of Chapter 3, I have explained the relationship between regional stability and Pan-Iranism. The clear presence of more interests in the field of regional stability (see Fig. 13) explains the primacy of Pan-Iranism in this period, but it does not explain the persistence of a domestic debate between the Pan-Iranian and the Pan-Islamic approach, nor does it take into account the competition between the Rafsanjani government and the security apparatuses under the direct control of Supreme Leader Khamenei.

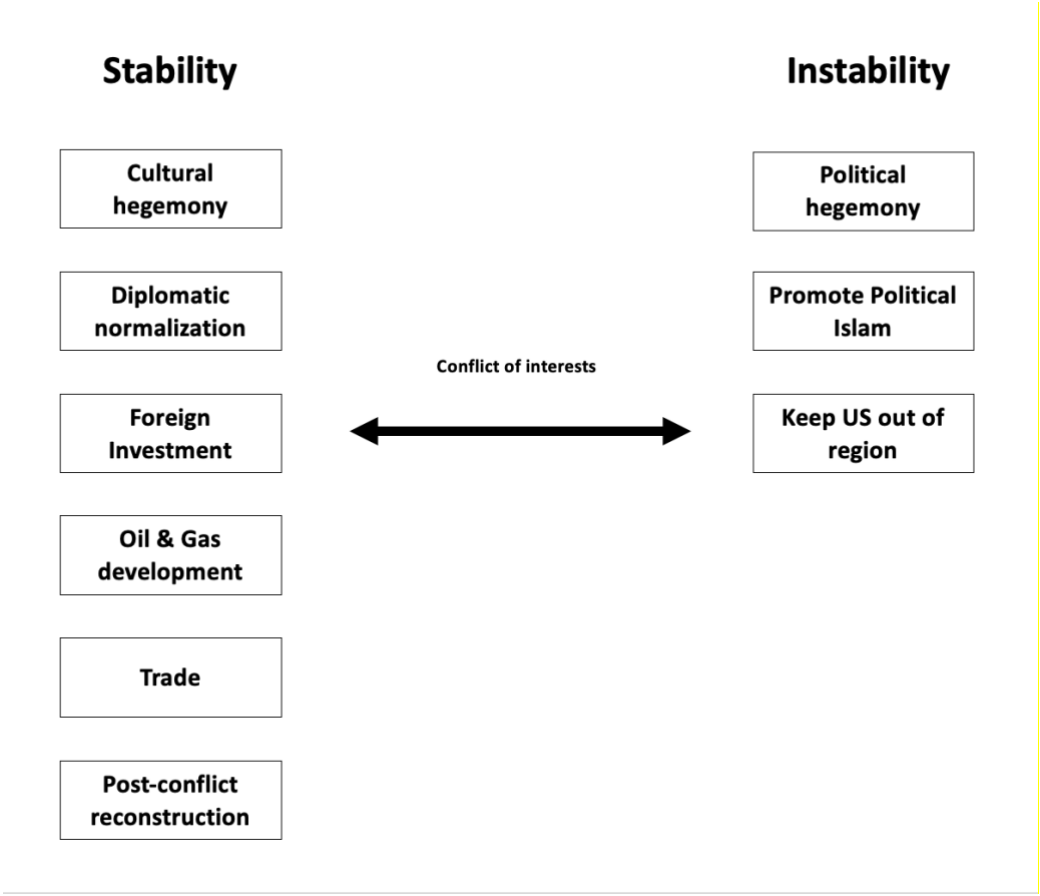

Figure 13: Diagram of Iran's interests in Central Asia (1992-95): the diagram above shows a comparative shift (see Figure 9) in the position of several of Iran's interests from the field of regional instability to that of stability

During the 1992-1995 phase of the Tajik civil war, Iran's foreign policy was influenced by the shifts in regional power that followed the USSR dissolution and the independence of the Central Asian Republics. Three key players affected Iran's perception of the hostility or

friendliness of the regional environment: Russia, the US, and Uzbekistan. We have already seen in the last section how Russia's relationship with Dushanbe affected the timing of the success of Iran's push for mediation. Other aspects of Russo-Iranian relations also weighed on the cycle of cooling and warming of Tehran's ties with Tajikistan. These involved the bid for regional influence in post-Soviet Central Asia, as well as the fallouts of Russia's post-Cold War global rebalancing. Some of the factors spoiling Iran-Russia relations in this period included disputes over the exploitation of Caspian hydrocarbon resources and Russia's pulling out from the sale of a nuclear reactor to Iran. Other factors contributed to Moscow-Tehran's rapprochement in the post-Cold War era. These included a shared fear of NATO expansion in the region, their need for cooperation in energy exports, Iran's need to import military material after the Iraq-Iran war, and the common goal to contrast the expansion of terrorism and drug trafficking in Central Asia.

Some authors argue that beyond realpolitik, Russia and Iran in the 1990s shared an underlying ideological affinity. Therme claims that Tehran-Moscow's relations is both geopolitical and ideological, 'based on mutual short-term interests, reciprocal hostility between Iran and the United States, and persistent American–Russian tensions in the post-Cold War period'.[434] I agree with this assessment in so far as Russia and Iran's relations with the US had a strong influence in their closeness or coolness in the mid-90s. The importance of shared anti-Americanism, however, should not be overstated in this dynamic. Firstly, the post-Cold War era saw an intense domestic debate in Russia between those who looked at the West for a new socio-political model and those who looked at Eurasia for Russia's new start. In the early 1990s, occidentalist forces were more prominent in the Yeltsin administrations, though this enthusiasm was severely curbed in the latter part of the

[434] Therme, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

decade due to the perception that the West had abandoned Russia to its own economic woes. Secondly, we should not forget that Iran-Russian relations have been marred by distrust and imperial rivalry for more than two centuries, dating back to the wars between the Tsarist and the Qajar empires. Therefore, although their shared anti-Americanism may have made them allied on the global stage, on the regional stage geopolitical and historical conditions made Iran and Russia natural rivals and occasional bedfellows. Matters of border and energy security, as well as bids for regional hegemony by other Central Asian Republics, have remained the only issues to mobilise Tehran and Moscow as a united front. Nevertheless, their shared, deep dislike for external interference in Central Asia proved a powerful force in shaping Russo-Iranian cycles of rapprochement:

> Their common objective of maintaining regional stability and preventing foreign powers from involvement in regional affairs became the framework through which Tehran and Moscow built their partnership in the beginning of the 1990s.[435]

Although the US did not play a major role in shaping the trajectory of the Tajik civil war, nor did it affect the unfolding of the peace process nearly as deeply as Iran and Russia, its presence in the region did not go unnoticed by either regional power. Washington had signalled its worry about the possibility of increased Iran influence in the hydrocarbon market in Central Asia from the start of 1992. The Clinton administration had called 'on the IMF and the World Bank to postpone financial and technical assistance to Iran for the exploration of natural gas resources.'[436] In response, Iranian media described the concurrent Central Asian Summit as 'a counter to hegemonistic American policy'.[437]

[435] Therme, *op. cit.*, p. 379.
[436] BBC Monitoring. 'Commentary on Us "Concern" Over Iranian Influence in Central Asian States'. *Part 1 The USSR*, 02 Mar. 1992.
[437] BBC Monitoring. 'Iranian Radio Says Central Asia Summit a Counter to Hegemonistic American Policy'. *Part 4 The Middle East*, 12 May 1992.

There was, however, one instance in the Tajik Civil War where a potential US-Russia entente almost blocked Iran's participation in the mediation process. This took place during the cooling in Russo-Iranian relations in 1993; as one commentator put it at the time: 'It is as though Russia is playing the role of the West's policeman against Islamic fundamentalism, and Washington is happy to let it.'[438] Tehran also greatly resented what it perceived as Washington's promotion of anti-Islamic attitudes in the region:

> The regional 'anti-Islamic' consensus has been riding on a significant US-led international post-Cold War trend that perceives political Islam as a significant challenge to international security. While US policy in Central Asia has other dimensions, including economic interests and concerns over nuclear proliferation, containment of the Islamic threat and Iranian influence is the cornerstone of its policy.[439]

Washington's interest in the Tajikistan civil war increased in 1994. In January, the Clinton administration officially included Tajikistan in the debate on the growth of Islamism in the region and accused Iran of supporting 'terrorism' in Tajikistan.[440] US and Russia cooperation on Tajikistan increased in the following months, as Washington unofficially accepted Russia's peacekeeping role in Tajikistan at the start of 1994.[441] America's presence made itself felt with greater intensity in 1996, as it became apparent that the war was to be settled at the negotiating table. Washington appeared to play a spoiler role to Tehran's mediation. Tehran lamented US interference in the regional dynamics, as Kamal Kharrazi, Iran's UN envoy, wrote in the Washington Post: 'Whether in Afghanistan, Tajikistan or in Azerbaijan and Armenia, Iran's efforts at conciliation for political settlement of disputes invariably have faced overt and covert US sabotage'.[442]

[438] Steele, Jonathan. 'US-Russian Alliance Bolsters Hardline Tajik Regime'. *The Guardian,*13 Nov. 1993.
[439] Mesbahi. 'Tajikistan, Iran, and the International Politics of the "Islamic Factor"', p. 146.
[440] Mesbahi. 'Tajikistan, Iran, and the International Politics of the "Islamic Factor"', p. 148.
[441] Adams, James. 'Moscow Wins Right to Police its Neighbours'. *The Sunday Times*, 29 Apr. 1993.
[442] Black, Ian. 'Iran Tells US not to Hinder Peace'. *The Guardian*, 07 Nov. 1996.

These geopolitical dynamics are addressed in depth in Chapter 6. The means that Washington and Tehran leveraged in their international and regional enmity are explored in depth. Russia's spoiler role in US-Iran rivalries in the late 90s is also addressed. If Russia was the third wheel in Tehran's relationship with Dushanbe, Chapter 6 will show that the basic dynamic of the triangular diplomacy traced between Moscow, Tehran, and Dushanbe in this chapter is replicated in Russo-Iranian relations and Uzbek-Iranian relations, with the US as the third pole affecting the trajectory of both relations.

This chapter has shed light on the nature of Iran's policy in Tajikistan, showcasing a case of successful harmony between the Pan-Iranian and the Pan-Islamic approaches rooted in the preponderance of Pan-Iranism. It has also shown, however, that contrary to the literature's expectations, Iran's moderate policy in Tajikistan was not the result of an underlying change in its political ideology, but rather the result of temporary changes in its preference for regional stability over instability, dictated by its own economic and political weakness. In the next chapter, we will see how changes in the regional environment precipitate a conflict between the bilateral logic of Pan-Iranism and the transnational logic of Pan-Islamism.

Chapter 5

Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia during the IMU insurgency (1999-2001): Contradictions in Iran's dual-track policy

For the third case study, we turn to the 1999-2001 insurgency of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) as the last critical juncture that changed the security and political landscape of Central Asia. The selected pivotal point will be the February 1999 bombing of Tashkent as the trigger event for the two-years unrest. The IMU insurgency was a catalyst for regional powers to refocus on the threat of transnational non-state actors and it accelerated the process leading to the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. At the same time, rising concerns for the appeal and reach of Islamist movements in Central Asia further precipitated Iran's alienation from Central Asia's political and military coordination to eradicate international terrorist networks. Iran's flirting with Pan-Islamism during the IMU insurgency was a dangerous choice that resulted in a rapid erosion of the political capital it had earned through its policy of mediation during the Tajik Civil War.

This case study illustrates the necessity of analysing not only actions, but also omission of actions, to understand Iran's foreign policy towards Central Asia. In this case, it is the absence of action on the part of Tehran that becomes the puzzle: why did Iran decide not to take any strong diplomatic or political action, even if merely symbolic, in the wake of IMU's destabilisation of Central Asia in 1999-2000? How does Tehran's silence, and its covert sympathy for the insurgents, fit within the supposedly pragmatic foreign policy of Iran under the Khatami presidency (1997-2002)?

The evidence suggests that Tehran didn't do enough to keep up with the shifting political mood in Central Asia. This policy failure is even the more puzzling given the fact that Iran was frequently accused (often with good reason) by neighbouring countries of harbouring, training, and sponsoring foreign fighters. Given the extensive efforts to build its political and diplomatic capital that Iran had expended between 1991 and 1998, this lag in policy response appears counterproductive. Iran's silence precipitated the return of Central Asian republics within the sphere of influence of a re-emerging Russia, who, concerned for its own domestic stability, did not shy away from tackling the issue of counterterrorism. The reliance on the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)[443] as a regional political forum to address the problem of transnational terrorism furthered the political marginalisation of Iran, who was only elected as a member state in 2021.[444]

I argue that the Four Pillar model can improve our understanding of Iran's policy choices between February 1999 and September 2001. Iran may have not perceived the instability in the Ferghana Valley as a threat to its own national security because historically the more stable Central Asia has been, the less influential has Iran been. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the emergence of a strong regional power in Central Asia has been associated with the political and military decline of Iran. In the 1990s, Uzbekistan was emerging as a potential regional hegemon, thanks to its role as the United States' lynchpin in the region. Iran's silence on the turmoil of Central Asia in 1999-2000 thus is partially explained as an opportunistic attempt to weaken a powerful regional rival.

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[443] On 02/11/1999, the Shanghai Five (China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan) agreed to set up the Bishkek group, comprising of chiefs of law enforcement agencies, to meet at least once a year to discuss urgent issues and coordinate activities: BBC Monitoring. 'Shanghai Five agree on cooperation to fight terrorism'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 303, 29 Nov. – 05 Dec.1999. For further discussion on the evolution of the Shanghai Five, see: Flake, Levin S. 'Central Asian Cooperation: The Origin and Evolution of the Shanghai Five'. *University of Oxford*, 2003.

[444] 'Iran becomes full member of Shanghai Cooperation Organization'. *Tehran Times*, 17 Sept. 2021. For comments on the geopolitical implications of Iran's admission to SCO, see: Nicole Grajewski. 'Iranian Membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Motivations and Implications'. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 15 Sept. 2021.

Nevertheless, this geopolitical account still leaves much unexplained. This supposed attempt to increase regional instability and maximise its influence projection is at odds with the foreign policy conducted by Rafsanjani and Khatami in the region until 1998. As we have seen in Chapter 3 and 4, Iran's approach to the region had been dominated by the Pan-Iranian model since 1992, resulting in the prioritisation of pragmatic, state-to-state bilateral relations aimed at building economic, socio-political ties that could help Tehran to break out of its international isolation. What prompted the re-emergence of Pan-Islamism in Central Asia under Khatami's presidency, which is often characterised as the culmination of Iran's journey from a revolutionary to a pragmatic state?

As it was anticipated in the last chapter, I argue that Tehran's policy choices after the 1999 Tashkent bombing were driven by the breakdown of the harmony between the Pan-Islamist and the Pan-Iranian approaches that had characterised Iranian policy during the Tajik Civil War. With the IMU insurgency, Tehran's dual-track policy ceases to be invisible, as its contradictory pulls result in incompatible and schizophrenic foreign policy choices. While Iran was still building bilateral relations with other regional countries, its defiant and almost openly sympathetic stance on IMU was openly contradicting its claim to political moderation and pragmatism. Khatami's emphasis of the principle of National Sovereignty in his rendition of Pan-Iranism heightened the contradiction between the Pan-Iranian emphasis on bilateral relations and the Pan-Islamic push towards transnationalism.

While Tehran's policy change in 1999 cannot be understood only through classical balancing and band-wagoning explanations, state interests matter a great deal. Contradictory national interests provide the necessary condition for the two logics underlying the dual-track policy to exist, but not the sufficient condition to explain the timing of the policy shifts. Since Iran's multiple and contradictory interests pre-dated the pivotal point under

examination, their existence per se is not enough of an explanation. The increased hostility of the regional environment towards Iran after 1995 caused Iran's interest to be best pursued in a climate of regional instability. This fundamental change explains why the harmony we saw in the last chapter broke down. The causes underlying this regional shift will be explored in depth in Chapter 6.

As we have seen in Chapter 1 and 2, the Four Pillar model is a descriptive, morphological model that does not posit ideology per se as the underlying cause of the shift in Iran's policy. The Two Axis model, on the other hand, states that geopolitical factors affect Iran's perception of the international system in which it operates. Changes in the perception of policymakers explain why a Pan-Iranian or a Pan-Islamic approach is preferred at a given point in time. The underlying cause for Iran's choice of Pan-Islamism after the Tashkent bombing is to be found in the increased role of Uzbekistan as the United States' lynchpin in Central Asia. Increased American involvement in Tashkent and in the broader region was seen by Iranian policymakers as a fundamental threat to the political, military, and economic security of the Islamic Republic in the region. American involvement changed the nature of Iran's policies in Central Asia from the arena of regional rivalry to global confrontation. This caused Iranian policymakers to shift from the dominant logic of Pan-Iranism to the dormant logic of Pan-Islamism.

This explanation shows how an ideological analysis based on the Four Pillar model can supplement a realist analysis of Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia. The pivotal point analysis in the rest of this chapter will prove that Iran had a genuine policy choice in 1999 and that both courses of action – silence vs. taking a stance on terrorism – could have been rational given Iran's interests in the region and its past policies. This will show that the pivot to Islamism was affected by elites' changing perception of what the source of threat to the

ontological security of the Iranian state. While during the Tajik Civil War, the uncontrolled spread of Islamist movements across borders was seen as a potential threat due to the mingling of ethnic politics and religion in the Tajik context, the US regional marginalisation of Iran between 1995 and 1998 cast the IMU insurgency as a chance for Tehran to see a less politically hostile neighbourhood emerge.

Background: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Resurgence of Islam in Central Asia

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) received comparatively little contemporary scholarly attention. Even during the heydays of its cross-border incursions, the nature and goal of the movement was obfuscated by poor media coverage and intentional deception on part of local security apparatuses, who had vested interests in conflating secular, democratic and Islamist opposition groups.[445] It was only after the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan that scholars started to pay attention to IMU as the prototype for a new highly mobile, transnational terrorist network in Central Asia. However, the focus on the link between criminal and terrorist networks that characterised the post-9/11 justification for continued military presence in the region obscured rather than enlightened the facts surrounding the IMU's operations in 1999-2000.[446]

[445] President Karimov accused ex-Presidential candidate and exiled secular opposition leader of Erk Party Muhammad Solih of having masterminded the explosion in conjunction with IMU. Shortly afterwards, Karimov will launch a witch-hunt against members of the non-violent Islamist network Hizb ut-Tahrir (see: Karagiannis, Emmanuel. 'Political Islam in Uzbekistan: Hizb ut-Tahrir alIslami'. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2006,vol. 58, no. 2, pp. 261-280).

[446] For examples of this literature, see: Makarenko, Tamara, and Mesquita, Michael. 'Categorising the Crime-Terror Nexus in the European Union.' *Global Crime*, vol. 15, no. 3-4, 2014, pp. 259–274; Cornell, Svante E. 'Narcotics, Radicalism, and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.' *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2005, pp. 619–639. Other scholars have since focused instead on the state-crime network in Central Asia, challenging the universal validity of the terror-crime model in the region. See: Kupatadze, Alexander. 'Organized Crime before and after the Tulip Revolution: The Changing Dynamics of Upperworld-Underworld Networks.' *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 27, no. 3-4, 2008, pp. 279–299.

As Lewis argued, scholars identified IMU as an example 'of a new hybrid type of organisation, mixing terrorist activity with organised crime'.[447] He argues, however, that such a characterisation is highly reductive and ignores the group's development through the years. Lewis contends that IMU evolved from a small, locally embedded clique in 1990-1992, to a hybrid organisation with both local allegiance and transnational support in the years 1992-2000,[448] to a fully deterritorialised network after the loss of their safe haven in Afghanistan in 2001.[449]

Understanding IMU's transnational links with Sunni Islamist movements and armed actors will allow us to comprehend the political and ideological limits of Iran's influence in the region. It is necessary thus to look at IMU's development through the 1990s to understand the sources of its local and international support. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the late 1980s and early 1990s were extremely chaotic times where Central Asian states were riddled with societal upheaval, including proto-Islamist movements. Understanding from where these Islamist movements draw political inspiration and financial support will provide a better understanding of Iran's limited leverage on Central Asia's Islamic resurgence.[450]

The IMU emerged at the intersection of three different political developments which were unleashed by Gorbachev's *perestroika* first, and by the independence of Central Asian Republics later. These were: the need to fill in the vacuum left by the collapse of the Soviet bureaucratic apparatus; the attempt to reinvent and reappropriate pre-Soviet identities and

[447] Lewis, David. 'Crime, Terror and the State in Central Asia'. *Global Crime*, vol. 15, no. 3-4, 2014, p. 338.
[448] For a contemporary commentary on this shift, see: Rashid, Ahmed. 'IMU Gradually Developing into Pan-Central Asian Movement'. *EurasiaNet*, 3 Apr. 2001.
[449] For recent appraisals of IMU's status, see: Azamy, Hekmatullah. 'Will the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) Trade the Taliban for ISIS?'. *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, vol. 7, no. 6, 2015, pp. 30–35.
[450] For a scholarly account of Iran's marginality withing Central Asian Islam, see: Balci, Bayram. 'Iran: A Minor Religious Actor in Central Asia and the Caucasus'. *Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus Since the Fall of the Soviet Union*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

cultural practices; and the exertion of political and ideological influence by external powers who rushed in after the USSR's demise.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan was founded as both a political movement and a subversive organisation. It aimed to establish an Islamic state in Uzbekistan; to this end, it prescribed the use of political violence to overthrow Karimov's regime. The commitment to armed struggle is what set IMU apart from other Islamist groups operating in the area. Hizb ut-Tahrir, for instance, was a local Islamist network (and, at the same time, an international network) which promoted the advent of a new Caliphate but rejected, and has continued to reject, the use of violence in words as well as in deeds.[451] During the 1990s, IMU was strongly influenced by the thoughts and leadership of two men, Tohir Yoldash and Jumaboy Khojayev, later known by as Juma Namangani. While IMU was founded between 1996 and 1998,[452] both Yoldash and Namangani had been active in Islamist circles since the early 1990s. Yoldash and Namangani first found their political voice within the newly established Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP). As we saw in Chapter 4,[453] this was a Pan-Soviet political movement founded in 1990 by Tartar intellectuals with the objective of connecting and empowering Muslim activists in the USSR, whose most successful branch, the IRP of Tajikistan, went on to lead the rebel front in the civil war.

After splitting from the Uzbek wing of the IRP,[454] Yoldash and Namangani founded the Islamic Party of *Adolat* (Justice) in the Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley. The early

[451] Wolf, Irina. 'Uneasy Communication in the Authoritarian State'. *Totalitarian Communication*, Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2019, pp. 275–300.
[452] Weitz claims IMU was officially founded in Kabul in 1998 (see: Weitz, Richard. 'Storm Clouds over Central Asia: Revival of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)?' S*tudies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 27, no. 6, 2004, pp. 505–530.) Naumkin claims the foundation of IMU was announced in 1996 when the group was still stationed in Tajikistan (see: Naumkin, Vitaly V. 'Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan'. *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies*, 2003.)
[453] See Chapter 4, pp. 138-9.
[454] According to multiple sources, *Adolat* was an IRP splinter group founded in late 1990 or early 1991 (see: Cornell, Svante E. 'Narcotics, Radicalism, and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of

activities of *Adolat* shine a light on the role of socio-economic grievances in the emergence of Islamist movements, as much as the reason why the literature tends to overemphasise the network between Islamic terrorism and organised crime. While it is true that early members of *Adolat* were recruited amongst martial artists, athletes and various violence specialists,[455] they transcended the racket-protection model by promoting public observance of Islamic customs.[456] The group's rapid evolution from a racket-protection model to what some authors describe as an 'Islamic police force' may have been accelerated by increased extra-regional contacts, especially with Saudi missionaries and financers.[457] *Adolat*'s activities soon transcended the boundaries of community policing into political activism: in December 1991, *Adolat* members occupied the local headquarters of the Communist Party, forcing newly-elected President Karimov to show up in person to placate the crowd's demands for greater Islamic observance.[458]

In 1992, Karimov strengthened his hold on the administrative and coercive resources of the state and proceeded to outlaw a number of opposition parties, including *Adolat.* The party's short-lived activity between 1990 and 1992 already contained all the elements that make IMU unique: a strong local support embedded in economic grievances and traditional patronage networks; an autochthonous, regional push towards identity (re)creation; and ideological and financial ties with Wahhabi movements from Saudi Arabia.

The contrast between the centripetal push towards the local and the centrifugal pull towards the transnational that enveloped Central Asia Republics as they became independent

Uzbekistan.' *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2005, pp. 619–639; and: Sanderson, Thomas M. 'From the Ferghana Valley to South Waziristan: The Evolving Threat of Central Asian Jihadists'. *Center For Strategic & International Studies*, 2010.) Lewis claims A*dolat* was founded in 1989 independently from IRP (see: Lewis, *op. cit.*).

[455] Naumkin, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

[456] Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 343; Cornell, *op. cit.*, 626.

[457] Cornell, *op. cit.*, 626; Lewis, *po. Cit.*, p. 341.

[458] Sanderson, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

was perfectly embodied in IMU's dual leadership. Namangani was IMU's field commander. He had been deployed as a Soviet paratrooper in the Soviet-Afghan war; some sources claim that contact with Afghan mujaheddins caused him to reconnect with his Islamic heritage.[459] Yoldash, on the other hand, was a self-taught mullah and played the part of IMU's ideologue and emissary. After IMU was banned in 1992, most of the fighters relocated to Tavildara (Tajikistan), where they joined the Tajik civil war on the side of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) under the military guide of Namangani. Yoldash relocated to Afghanistan, where he made contact with both the political wing of the IRPT and the Taliban cadre. Sources report that in the years 1992-1998 Yoldash visited several Islamic countries attempting to make contact with like-minded Islamist networks, as well as state security services.[460]

From this brief overview of the origins of the IMU, we can already see ideological and sociological incompatibilities between Iran's revolutionary and post-revolutionary experience and the Uzbek context. Ideologically, a movement like IMU shares only two of the four pillars of Iran's ideology, namely the Pan-Islamist and the Anti-Imperialist pillar. Being committed to the eventual reinstatement of an Islamic Caliphate, IMU is transnational by nature and rejects national boundaries both in words and in deeds. Similarly, IMU is Turkic ethnically and linguistically, and rejects Iran's bid for cultural supremacy in the region. Even the concepts of Pan-Islamism that underly IMU's political programme and military campaigns are substantially different from the ones guiding Iran's foreign policy. While Khomeini's original vision for the implementation of political Islam was the creation of a polity that, while inevitably rooted in the Twelver Shi'a tradition, would aim to

[459] Sanderson, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
[460] Cornel claims Yoldash visited Chechnya, Turkey, and Pakistan (Cornell, *op. cit.*, 626), while Naumkin mentions Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Turkey (Naumkin, *op. cit.*, p. 25).

overcome the Sunni-Shi'a divide,[461] IMU embraced a conception of political Islam borrowed through contacts with Saudi Wahabism and Taliban Salafism. Saudi's influence in the beginning of Central Asian Islamic resurgence, as well as in the IMU's inception as *Adolat*, has been facilitated by the presence of a well-established Uzbek diaspora communities who, after fleeing Stalinist purges in the 1930s, integrated into Saudi society.[462]

Sociologically, the Iranian Revolution took place in a country that had maintained its political independence, while IMU's rise took place during the post-colonial transition after the dissolution of the USSR. Khomeini's Islamic Republican Party relied on a highly structured and functional state administration and repressive apparatus and was able to take control of key institutions to consolidate its power. The IMU on the other hand emerged in an institutional vacuum where local state structures had collapsed. Secondly, as it has been discussed in the Chapter 2,[463] Iran's revolutionary experience was uniquely shaped by the long-established institution of the formal clergy and its continuous participation in the country's political transformation. Central Asia, on the other hand, had undergone seventy years of secularisation and Russification that had pushed institutionalised clergy to be little more than a mouthpiece for Soviet policies, while rural and local communities relied on self-taught mullahs who were able to blend into the local population to avoid persecution. Given these differences, we can expect a low degree of contact and cooperation between Iran's state apparatuses and IMU. As the next section will show, Iran did not play a significant role in the unfolding of the 1999-2001 insurgency in Uzbekistan.

[461] Khomeini stressed in his political manifesto *Islamic Government* that the fight (*jihad*) he was calling for was between all Muslims and the forces of Westerner Materialism (see: Khomeini, Ruhollah., and Hamid. Algar. *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist.* Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Work, 2005, pp. 103-114).
[462] Balchi, Bayram. 'Central Asian Refugees in Saudi Arabia: Religious Evolution and Contributing to The Reislamization of Their Motherland'. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, vol.26, no. 2, 2007, p. 12.
[463] See 'The Pan-Islamic pillar: Islam in Iran from the Safavid to Khomeini', Chapter 2, p. 84-90.

IMU's transnational insurgence: a real threat to regional security that prompted Iran's shift to Pan-Islamism

The chosen pivotal point for this empirical case study is the bombing of the Uzbek capital, Tashkent, that took place on 16 February 1999. The attack was caused by the explosion of six car bombs, resulting in the death of 15 people.[464] Uzbek President Karimov blamed the explosion on 'religious extremists'. Two days after the attack, Tajik border guards alerted Uzbek authorities that Uzbek rebels were amassing on the Tajik side of the border, ready for an incursion.[465] This alert remained unverified, and the identity of these fighters and their affiliation remains unknown. On 23 February 1999, Uzbek media announced the arrest of thirty suspects near the capital; reports alleged that all of them had undergone 'training in sabotage' in Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan.[466] Other reports speculated on links between the men detained and 'various terrorist groups, such as Hezbollah'.[467] The arrests continued during the months of March and April 1999 across the territories of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan; some of the suspects were caught in possession of fake passports enroute to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates.[468] Naumkin has researched conflicting accounts of the 1999 Tashkent bombing. After extensive fieldwork, he has concluded that no single account on the culprits, whether they be pinned as the IMU, as other oppositions, or as the state's security forces, can be assessed to be true beyond reasonable doubt.[469]

[464] BBC Monitoring, '15 Killed as Bomb Blasts Uzbek Capital'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 262.
[465] BBC Monitoring, 'Warning of new attack from Uzbek territory to Tajikistan'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 262.
[466] Naumkin, *op. cit.*, p. 32
[467] BBC Monitoring, 'Thirty Arrested Following Tashkent Bomb Blast'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 263.
[468] BBC Monitoring. 'Thirty more arrested in Kazakhstan for Tashkent bombing' *Inside Central Asia*, no. 266.
[469] Naumkin, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

Whether the IMU's hand was truly behind the blast, the security threat they posed to Uzbekistan and neighbouring countries manifested itself over the coming months. The media coverage of the attack sparked a wave of concern on the infiltration of the region by hostile actors who aimed to destabilise the post-Soviet Republics.[470] It was only a month after the attack, on 19 March 1999, that the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) released a statement calling for the removal of President Karimov in favour of the establishment of an Islamic regime.[471] IMU accused Karimov of 'carrying out in Uzbekistan the policy of the American enemies of Islam'. This declaration was immediately followed by allegations in the Uzbek media against Iran's purported links with IMU. Some outlets went as far as claiming that the 1979 Iranian Revolution was conducted by terrorists, prompting the Iranian Ambassador to Uzbekistan to demand formal apologies, which were never delivered.[472]

The spring of 1999 saw political escalation on both sides. Arrests continued across the region,[473] and the IMU widened its operations to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan,[474] with allegations of IMU bases on Tajik soil.[475] The summer of 1999 brought about military escalation of the confrontation between the IMU and the Uzbek government. On the 13th of August 1999, a group of rebel fighters of unclear affiliation took hostages in Southern Kyrgyzstan.[476] The government of Uzbekistan and of Kyrgyzstan conducted airstrikes against them, but unduly targeted Tajiki territory without permission.[477] Uzbekistan's harsh

[470] BBC Monitoring. 'Russian Republic Joins Uzbek Fight Against "Wahhabis".' *Inside Central Asia*, no. 265; BBC Monitoring. 'Dushanbe Offers to Cooperate with Tashkent on "Terrorist Camps".' *Inside Central* Asia, no. 264.
[471] BBC Monitoring. 'Uzbek Islamists Call for Removal of Government'. *Inside Central Asia*, issue n. 266.
[472] BBC Monitoring. 'Uzbek Newspaper Suggests Iranian Revolution Was Conducted by Terrorists'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 269.
[473] BBC Monitoring. 'Karimov Promises Upcoming Trial for Bombers'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 271.
[474] BBC Monitoring. 'Islamist Threaten to Widen Actions in Uzbekistan'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 273; BBC Monitoring. 'Bomb Attempt Suspects Arrested in Kyrgyzstan'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 273; BBC Monitoring. 'Uzbek Bus Hijack Linked to Islamic Extremism'. *Inside Central* Asia, no. 275.
[475] BBC Monitoring. 'Uzbek Media Accuse Tajik Opposition of Plotting with Uzbek Bombers'. *Inside Central* Asia, no. 277.
[476] BBC Monitoring. 'Armed Group in South Kyrgyzstan Takes Hostages'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 287.
[477] BBC Monitoring. 'Dushanbe Protests at Bombing of Tajik Territory by Uzbekistan'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 288.

retaliation caused renewed pressure on part of the rebels: on 28 August 1999, hundreds of militiamen reportedly seized villages and hostages in Southern Kyrgyzstan. According to the reports, they took control of a cluster of villages located approximately 12km from the border with Tajikistan in the south, and 30km from the border with the Uzbek enclave of Sokh District to the north, likely with the aim of crossing into Uzbekistan's main territory and connecting with sleeping cells in the Fergana Valley (See Fig. 14)[478]

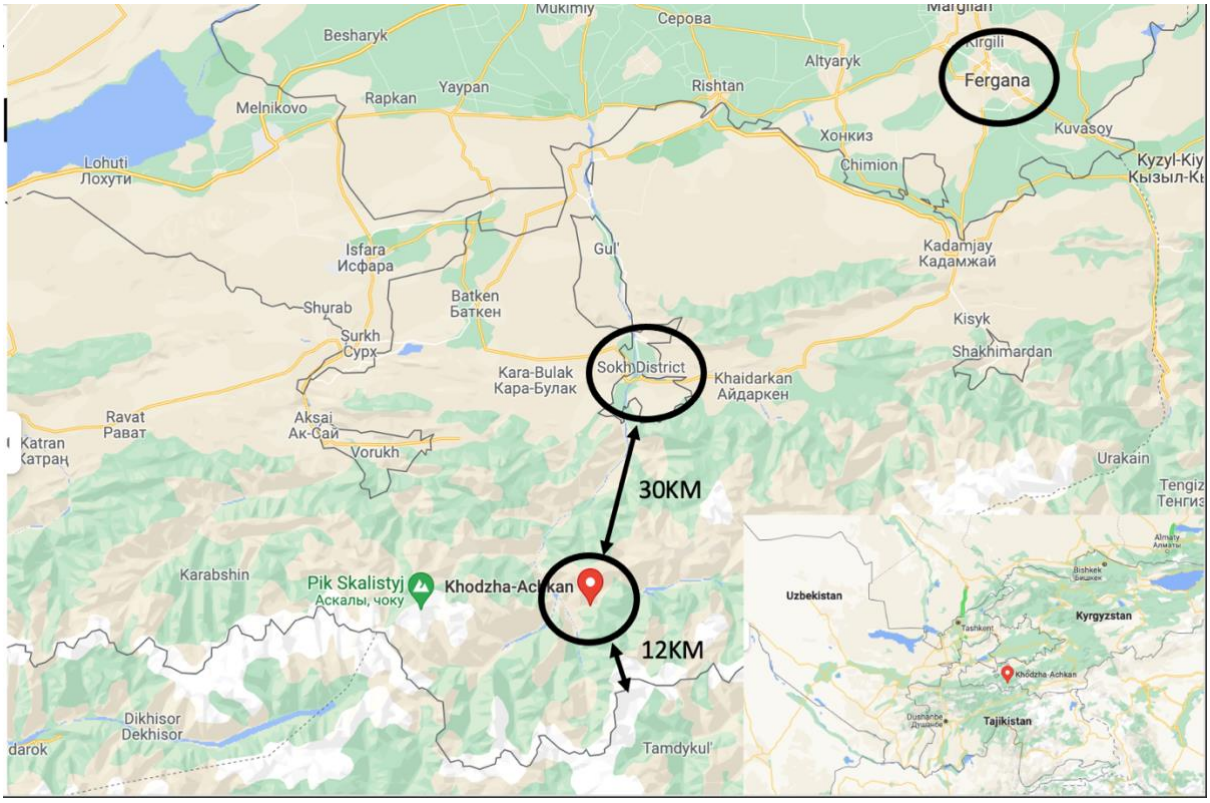

Figure 14: Map of IMU advances in Kyrgyzstan (Sept. 1999)[479]

Clashes continued throughout September and October 1999. The rebel fighters were reportedly equipped with advance military systems such as satellite phones and night-visors, explaining their successful resistance to joint Uzbek and Kyrgyz military operations.[480] The

[478] BBC Monitoring. 'Central Asian States Pledge to Help Bishkek Crush Islamists'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 289.
[479] Source: Google Maps.
[480] BBC Monitoring. 'Kyrgyz Stadoff with Islamists Militants Enters Another Week'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 290.

rugged nature of the terrain made airstrikes and mechanised attacks impracticable, further explaining why the group managed to hold out for over three months though faced with conventional armies.[481] The stand-off was eventually resolved in November 1999, when Tajikistan announced that the rebel fighters had been deported to a Taliban-controlled area of Afghanistan.[482] Nevertheless, the seizing of the Sokh enclave sparked fear concerning the potential presence of sleeper cells on Uzbek soil. IMU's advance through Sokh constituted a real threat to the territorial integrity of Uzbekistan; media also reported that Uzbek authorities were preparing for the possibility of civil war.[483]

The cessation of hostility did not last long.[484] By March 2000, Kyrgyz media reported that rebels were scaling up their capabilities, employing tactics similar to the ones used by the Islamic opposition during the Tajik civil war (1992-1997). Tajik involvement could no longer be concealed after IMU field commander Juma Namangani was spotted in the Tajik region of Tavildara.[485] Tajiki authorities were reluctant to use force or attempt to disarm IMU fighters,[486] though they eventually left for Afghanistan after tense negotiations.[487] This incident sparked speculations on potential links between Namangani and UTO leader Abdulloh Nuri.[488] It is highly likely that UTO was granting IMU fighters safe passage to attack Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan's territory. Tavildara region, where Namangani was spotted, used to be the Islamist stronghold during the Tajik civil war where

[481] BBC Monitoring. 'Kyrgyz Hostage Situation Fails to Be Resolved'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 292.
[482] BBC Monitoring. 'Dushanbe Says Islamist Militants Deported'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 300.
[483] BBC Monitoring. 'Kyrgyzstan Gears up to Repulse New Armed Incursion'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 314.
[484] BBC Monitoring. 'Kyrgyzstan Steps up Security to Repel Future Islamic Attacks'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 311.
[485] BBC Monitoring. 'Dushanbe Says Islamist Militants Deported'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 322.
[486] BBC Monitoring. 'Uzbek Militant Leader Surfaces in Central Tajikistan'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 322.
[487] BBC Monitoring. 'Uzbek Militants Are Said to Have Crossed over to Afghanistan'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 323.
[488] BBC Monitoring. 'Uzbek Militants Are Said to Have Crossed over to Afghanistan'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 323; BBC Monitoring. 'Tajik Islamic Chief Gives Pledge on Uzbek Rebel'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 329.

Namangani himself fought alongside UTO in 1992-97 during the Tajik Civil War.[489] We now know that IMU fighters secured informal permission to cross Tajiki territory due to the domestic circumstances Dushanbe was facing. Tajikistan was in the middle of negotiating the terms of the implementation of the 1997 peace agreement and did not want to risk an escalation of tension on its territory that could precipitate a return to civil war.[490] This shows the reality of the risk of regional destabilisation and state disintegration that the IMU insurgency posed to Uzbekistan and, to a lesser extent, to Tajikistan. The IMU insurgency was the greatest threat to the security and stability of the post-Soviet republics after the Tajik civil war.

However, there is some dissent in the literature on the real military threat posed by the IMU incursions. Cornell argues that 'the IMU incursions were in both cases too small to pose a serious long-term threat to the governments or territories of Central Asian states'.[491] He claims that IMU was not operating with the aim of overthrowing the government of Uzbekistan and establishing an Islamic state, but rather to secure drug trafficking routes through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, perhaps at the orders of the Taliban. Other accounts disagree with this downplaying of the military prowess of the IMU. Lefebvre and McDermott, in reviewing the state of security services in Central Asia after 1991, repeatedly stress the existential nature of the IMU threat to disorganised and under-resourced security forces in the area.[492] Gleason also reports that IMU fighters had advanced within 60 miles of Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent in August 2000 before being repelled by security forces,

[489] Weitz, *op. cit.*, p. 514; Saud, Adam. 'Terrorism and Transnational Groups in Pakistan: A Case Study of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan'. *Strategic Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2018, p. 43; Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 344.
[490] Cornell, *op. cit.*, p. 627.
[491] Cornell, *op. cit.*, p. 628; Lefebvre, Stéphane and McDermott, Roger N. 'Russia and the Intelligence Services of Central Asia'. *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, no. 21,vol. 2, pp. 251-301.
[492] Lefebvre, Stéphane and McDermott, Roger N. 'Russia and the Intelligence Services of Central Asia'. *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, no. 21, vol. 2, pp. 251-301.

further supporting the reality of IMU's military threat.[493] Contemporary reports seems to support their analysis.[494]

I disagree with those authors, such as Cornell, that see Namangani as merely another warlord challenging the state's monopoly of violence for financial gain. I agree with Naumkin, who claims that resort to opportunistic violence does not it itself negate the political and ideological motivation of the IMU:

> For certain nationalist and radical Islamic movements, opportunistic violence is so common that observers describe them as business operations. Such is the case with part of the Chechen separatist movement, as well as with the IMU. Involvement in hostage taking, however, does not necessarily mean that the participating parties are merely criminal gangs. It may be that it is a business on the side that is particularly attractive because of the huge inequalities in post-Soviet societies.[495]

Since we have now established the gravity of the events narrated above, it is also reasonable to expect that Iran, given its prior political and diplomatic investment in the region, would formulate a policy to respond to these security changes. It is thus necessary to ascertain what exactly was Iran's role in the events, and whether Tehran was at all connected to them. These connections are illustrated in the link chart below. The screenshot below (see Fig. 15) shows the map linking together the events surrounding the IMU insurgency of 1999-2000. This link analysis (see p. 68 for methodology) is the visualization of a manual data analysis exercise I computed according to the parameters of social network theory. I manually reviewed each of the 1700+ data entries in the database I collected from archival research and disaggregated every event report into the basic principles of link analysis (disaggregating link between entities and locations, entities and other entities, and entities

[493] Gleason, Gregory. 'The Politics of Counterinsurgency in Central Asia'. *Problems of Post-Communism,* vol. 49, no. 2, p. 10.
[494] BBC Monitoring. 'Kyrgyzstan Gears up to Repulse New Armed Incursion'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 314.
[495] Naumkin, *op. cit*., p. 13. Elsewhere (p. 26) Naumkin asserts that the closest source to the characterisation of IMU as a narco-trafficking gang came from a local British observer preoccupied with the volume of drugs being shipped to Europe.

and the events they were partaking in). This means that a single entry in the database could contain multiple links that needed to be disaggregated and mapped individually. As I was reviewing every piece of information I gathered, I manually mapped all these links around the starting point, the central node, the 16 February bombing of Tashkent. The nodes in this link chart are of three types: entities, events, and locations. The different colours in the links indicate the type of relationship between the nodes (green for affiliation, orange for relation, blue for action, purple for location, red for identity). The solid arrows indicate links that are explicitly stated in the text material, while dashed arrows indicate links that are alleged or implicated by the source material. Finally, dotted lines indicate links that are speculated by the researcher. This link chart is a tool to visualise the events narrated above. Its purpose is analytical and explorative: by mapping out known events connected to the pivotal point, we can figure out what is unknown and, consequently, with how much certainty can we assess Iran's involvement in the insurgency using publicly available information. This is an illustration of the analytical work that goes on in translating the data collected into actionable sub-research questions and hypotheses.

Every link represented in the chart below has not only been added manually, but also has its reference to original source from which I extracted the information in the database I constructed. When reading a link chart, one moves, much like in a spider web, from the centre to ward the periphery. Icons that are connected with many links have more weight in the link chart, in as much as they have more connections to other entities. Icons lying at the periphery tend to have lesser weight due to the low number of links reaching them. Weight, however, is not a measure of analytical or investigative importance, as oftentimes new leads are developed from the peripherical branches of the chart. It is a measure of involvement in the network, though not a measure of the social rank held in the network.

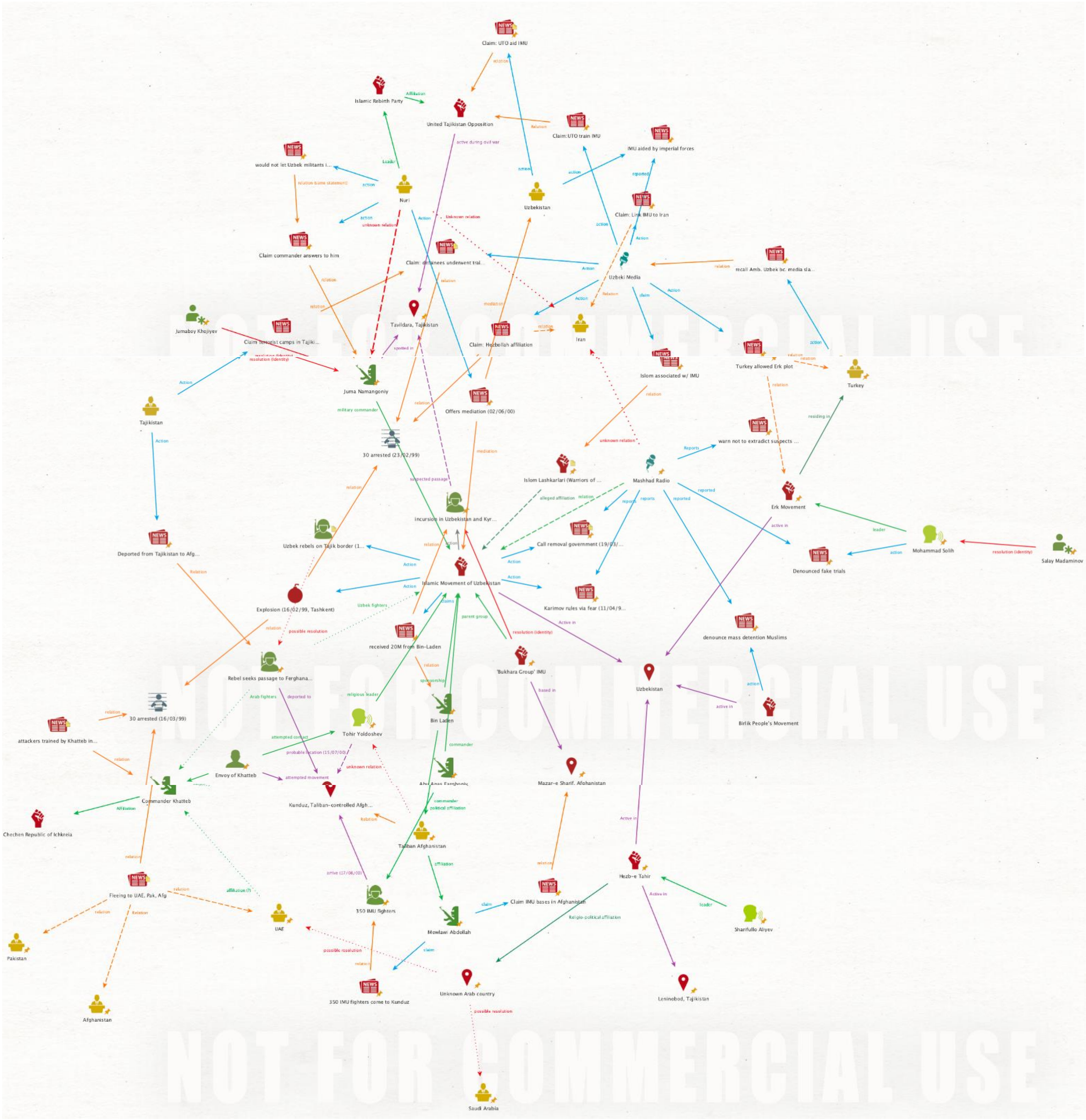

Figure 15: Link chart of Iran's role in the IMU insurgency. Collated screenshot of preliminary research link chart showing the knowns and unknowns on Iran's role in the 1999-2000 IMU insurgency

The charts below (see Fig. 16 and 17) highlight the complicated relationship between Iran and the parties supporting IMU. The state of Iranian-Saudi relations in 1999 is crucial to understand the low likelihood of Iranian direct involvement in IMU operations. 1998 saw a strong push towards better official bilateral relations when Rafsanjani, now head of the influential Expediency Council, embarked on a two-week diplomatic mission to Saudi Arabia. This temporary warming of ties was made possible by the shared economic burden of a slump in oil prices.[496] Despite the Iranian-Saudi rapprochement of 1997-1999 heralded by President Khatami's oil diplomacy and cemented by his visit to the Kingdom in 1998, Tehran and Riyadh failed to find common ground in their bid for influence in Central Asia.[497]

Iranian-Saudi rivalry remained particularly persistent in Central Asia at large and in Afghanistan in particular,[498] where Riyadh supported the Taliban forces, while Iran backed Shi'a Hazara forces. By 1996, Saudi Arabia had become the Taliban's greater sponsor, while Iran was the principal sponsor of the anti-Taliban United Front. Some of the literature claims that Iran was still hosting armed Saudi opposition in 1997.[499] Several authors, commenting on Iranian-Saudi relations, have remarked that a thaw in official bilateral relation would not

[496] Marschall, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
[497] Alam, Shah. 'The Changing Paradigm of Iranian Foreign Policy under Khatami.' *Strategic Analysis*, 2000,vol. 2, no. .9, p. 1642: 'both Iran and Saudi Arabia are still rivals at an ideological level, but their national interests have compelled them to come closer and serve national interests with mutual, cooperation and understanding'. See also: 'Iran's Foreign-policy Agenda.' *Strategic Comments*, 1997, vol. 3, no. 6, pp. 1-2.
[498] Alam, *op. cit.*, p. 1644: 'Iran's help to the factions was motivated by intentions to block-the factions and parties supported by the US, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan from coming to power. Saudi Arabia's policy towards Afghanistan had been based on. two basic objectives: to counter Iran ideologically-and strategically.' For an in-depth view, see: Anwar-ul Haq Ahady, 'Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Conflict in Afghanistan'. Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*. Hurst & Company, 1998.
[499] Marschall, Christin. *Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: From Khomeini to Khatami*. London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003, p. 33: 'Press reports in 1997 claimed that two Saudi movements, the 'Organisation of the Islamic Revolution of the Arabian Peninsula' (OIRAP) and the 'Hizballah of the Hijaz', were based in Tehran and used the Imam Ali training camp in East Tehran'.

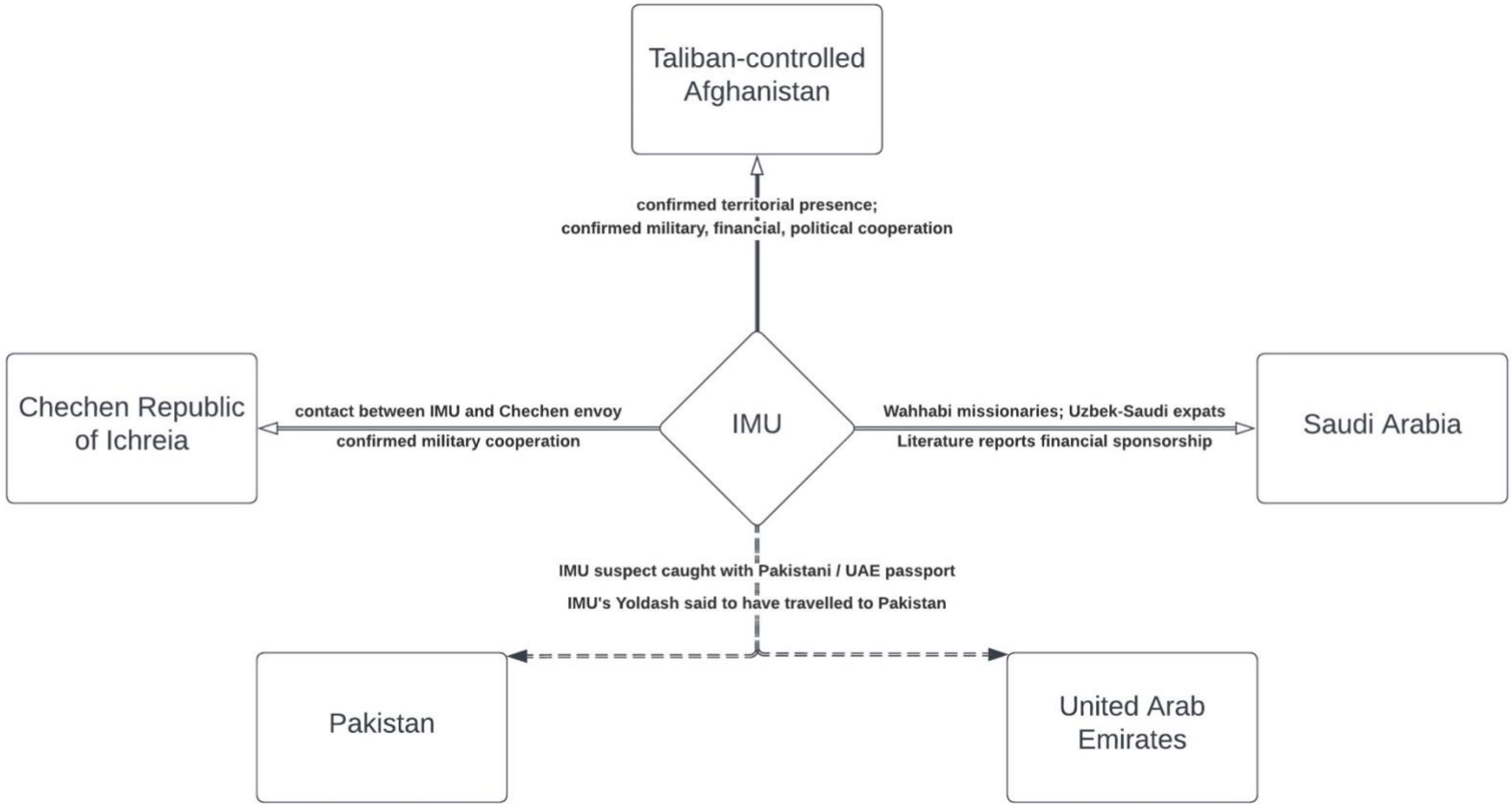

Figure 16: Diagram of the relationship between IMU and Sunni Islamic governments

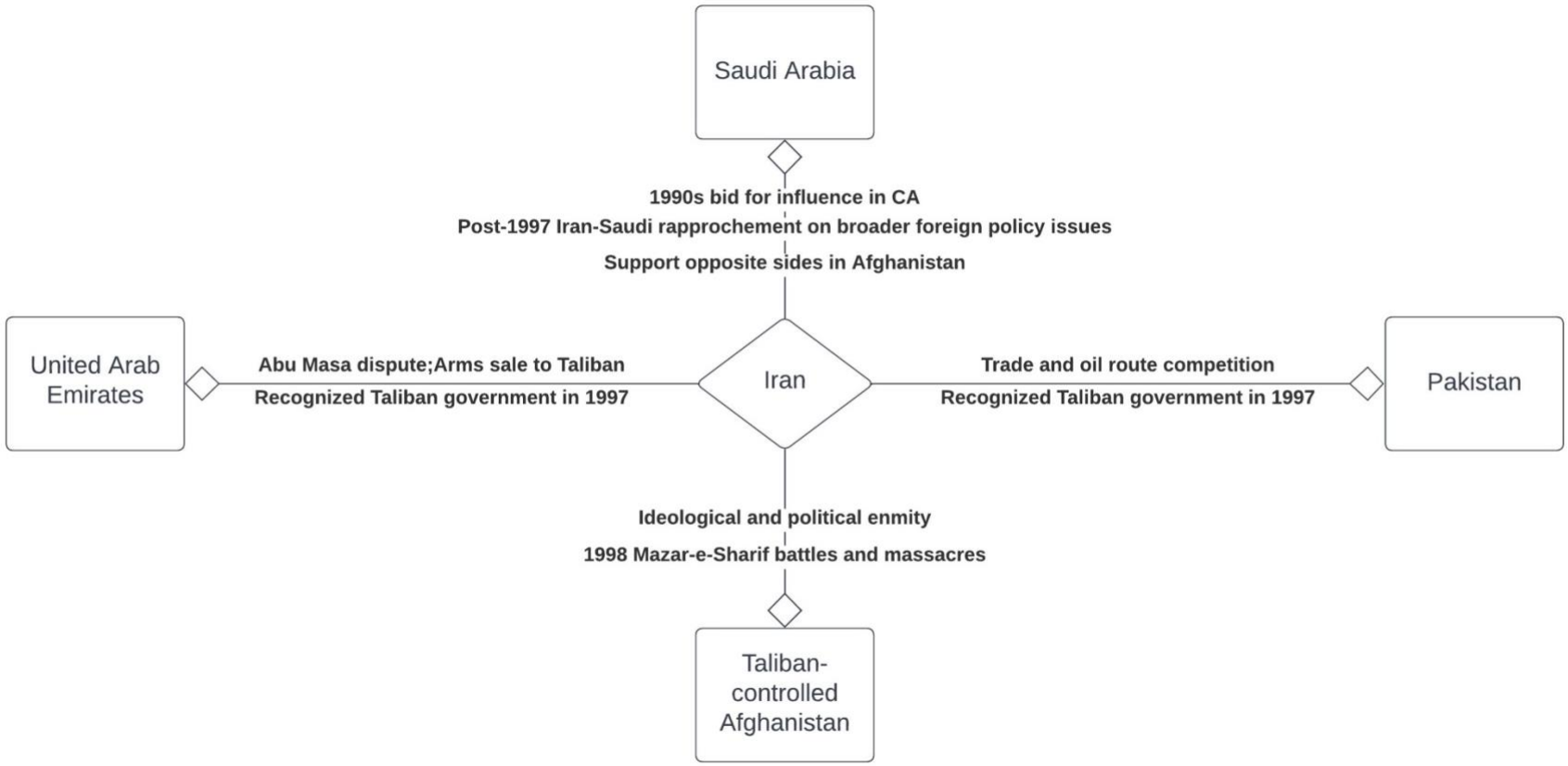

Figure 17: Diagram of the relationship between Iran and Sunni Islamic governments

have necessarily translated in military and political cooperation on the ground between Iran and Saudi-affiliate actors:

> Iran's relationship with Saudi Arabia had two sides. On the one hand, it was a relationship of power politics, hence it was Iran's interest to try to establish good relations with its neighbour. On the other hand, due to their rivalry for Islamic leadership, it was dominated by ideology.[500]

Iran-UAE relations remained equally tense in the 1990s. As Iran took control of the disputed Abu Masa islands in 1992, UAE and Pakistan officially recognised the Taliban government in 1997 following the Taliban's victory in the Mazar-e Sharif battle on Iran-backed United Front.[501] Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the UAE were the only three countries who officially recognised the Taliban's government. Iranian-Pakistani relations in Central Asia were complicated not only by the scale of Pakistan's support for the Taliban,[502] but also due to the competition in trade and infrastructure between the two countries. Iranian-Pakistani relations had already soured in 1996 to the point that Pakistani officials declined to attend Tehran's conference on Afghanistan.[503] Pakistan had also been trying to gain access to the landlocked Central Asian Republic and to market itself as a preferrable ocean access route to Iran.[504] The bad state of Iran's relationship with the four countries who harboured or

[500] Marschall, *op. cit.*, p. 58. For a similar view on the dual nature of Iran-Saudi rivalry, see: Chubin, Shahram, and Tripp, Charles. 'Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order'. *Adelphi Papers,* 1996,vol. 36, no. 304, pp. 3-8.
[501] Sheridan, Michael. 'No Mercy: Men, Women and Children Were Murdered in Their Homes as Taliban Gunmen Took over Mazar-e-Sharif.' *The Sunday Times,* 1 Nov. 1998; 'Crisis of Impunity: The Role of Pakistan, Russia, and Iran in Fueling the Civil War'. *Human Rights Watch,* July 2001,*vol.* 13, no. 3, pp. 16-17.
[502] 'Crisis of Impunity', p. 23.
[503] Reddaway, D.N. *Iran: Annual Review for 1996*. Foreign and Commonwealth Office Middle East Department (FCO 160/357), 5 Jan. 1997, National Archives.
[504] BBC Monitoring. 'Chinese, Pakistani, Kyrgyz and Kazakh ministers to meet in Alamata to discuss trade routes.' *Inside Central Asia*, no. 76; BBC Monitoring. 'Pakistan PM Bhutto visits Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 84; BBC Monitoring. 'Niyazov wants US, Russia to take part in pipeline project'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 112; BBC Monitoring. 'Afghan Taliban approve railway and gas pipeline'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 151.

sponsored the IMU insurgency suggests that, as the literature has found, the likelihood of significant Iranian logistical, financial, or military involvement with IMU is very low.

There are, however, other indirect links between the Iranian state and IMU that emerge from this mapping exercise (see Fig. 16). Two of these links are crucial to fully understand Iran's policy response to the IMU insurgency crisis. The first one is the link between the IMU and the Iranian radio station, 'Mashhad Radio'. As the link chart shows, in multiple occasions, according to the BBC monitoring translation, Mashhad Radio reported official statements of the IMU leadership, including calls to overthrow the Uzbek government and allegations of fake trials and mass arrests of Muslims. Since the IMU in the l990s did not have an autonomous broadcasting outlet, Mashhad Radio must have had a direct or indirect communication channel with the IMU leadership. Mashhad Radio did not broadcast only IMU anti-government statements but gave voice to at least two other banned Uzbek political parties, the Erk Movement and the Birlik People's movement. This suggests a consistent policy on the part of the radio of showcasing dissident Islamic voices inside Uzbekistan that encompassed a wide variety of political orientations, from democratic reformist to Islamic revolutionary.

The link between Mashhad Radio and IMU has been highlighted in one other source. Weitz reports that IMU commanders have been able to broadcast their messages over Iranian radio stations, suggesting that IMU enjoys a degree of tacit support from part of the Iranian establishment.[505] Further research has shown that what BBC Monitoring labelled as 'Mashhad Radio' is likely Iranian Radio International Broadcast (IRIB) Radio Razavi Khorasan, aka Radio Mashhad (Farsi: رادیو مشهد).[506] IRIB is the official broadcasting network of the Islamic Republic; its international branch is known as the Voice of Islamic Republic

[505] Weitz, *op. cit.*, p. 510.
[506] See: http://mashhad.irib.ir/radio

of Iran. Since the BBC Monitoring service does make a distinction between the English broadcasting and the local broadcasting services when reporting its sources, we can assume that the statements attributable to IMU were broadcasted only at a local or national level in Farsi and not at the international network level in English. This means that the Iranian government was broadcasting IMU messages to a domestic audience, rather than using them as part of its foreign policy posture. It is likely that the IMU's desire to establish an Islamic republic in Uzbekistan would be viewed favourably in the city of Mashhad, because it is an important spiritual centre in Iran, as well as being the site of Imam Reza Shrine.

Nevertheless, broadcasting foreign dissident voices can have an impact on foreign policy decisions. It is unlikely that in Iran, a radio station affiliated with official state tele-networks could have decided to promote messages calling for the overthrowing of a foreign government without prior authorisation. These facts seem to strongly indicate that Tehran permitted, or encouraged, Mashhad Radio to broadcast IMU's messages because it would allow a continued spotlighting on Muslim oppression in Uzbekistan without exposing Iran to further allegations of having aided regional terrorist networks. While these messages may have been targeted at domestic audiences to promote the image of Iran as a revolutionary state, it still shows a degree of official sympathy, if not approval, for the prospect of an Islamised Uzbekistan.

The second clue concerning Iran's indirect link to the IMU is the role that UTO's leader Nuri had in mediating IMU fighters' withdrawal to Afghanistan in the summer of 2000. Nuri's role, as well as the fact that IMU operated from Tavildara region, a historical UTO stronghold, suggests that there were at least cordial relations, if not outright support, between IMU and UTO. As we have seen, Namangani had fought alongside UTO between 1992 and 1997 from his base in the Tavildara valley. IMU's field commander and UTO had

parted ways between 1996 and 1997 when it became clear Nuri was willing to enter a political settlement with Rahmonov. Nuri's abandonment of the armed struggle prompted Namangani and Yoldash to found IMU.

Nuri's personal clout with IMU establishes an indirect link between the Iranian authorities, who had politically and diplomatically supported Nuri during the Tajik civil war, and IMU. However, it cannot be assumed that just because Nuri may have had the political support of Tehran during the civil war, that he had no space to make autonomous political decisions that may have departed from Iran's official line. Hence, the Nuri-IMU link on its own does not shed any light on Iran's policy response to the Tashkent bombing. However, they do highlight the fact that even before 1999, when Iran was pursuing a Pan-Iranian policy in Central Asia, Tehran still cultivated a network of relationship with non-state actors, ready to be mobilised when a switch to Pan-Islamism was deemed necessary.

Naumkin reports an extract of an original Uzbek dossier compiled which listed Iran among the countries that had hosted meetings of the political cadres of IMU, alongside Pakistan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.[507] The document claims a meeting between UTO leader Nuri and IMU leader Yoldash was held in Tehran in May 1999 to discuss further plans to destabilise Central Asia. Uzbekistan had political interests in portraying Iran as an unreliable agitator in the region, mostly due to the fear of uprising in Persianate cities of the Ferghana Valley. Therefore, the validity of the fragment should not be taken at face value just because the report was classified. Nevertheless, claims of Iranian complicity and sympathy with IMU's political programme are consistent with prior reports. Yoldash had reportedly included Iran among his travel destinations in the years 1996-1998; it is likely he had been able to establish contact with Iranian security services via Nuri. But even if the IMU meeting

[507] Naumkin, *op. cit.*, p. 39

did take place in Tehran, as claimed by the Uzbek source, this is not conclusive evidence of Iran's material involvement in the bombing or subsequent insurgency. It would, however, provide further evidence that part of the Iranian state and security apparatus held a favourable view of IMU, confirming the nexus between ideological sympathy and Radio Mashhad's IMU broadcasting. This finding reinforces the overall argument of this thesis that Iran's policy in Central Asia in the 1990s remained determined by the persistence of a dual-track policy comprised of both Pan-Iranian and Pan-Islamic pulls, and that the underlying arrangement of Iran's interests in the region determined whether these two approached complemented or contradicted each other.[508]

Two alternative explanations for Iran's political flirting with IMU could be advanced. A purely ideological explanation of Iran's tacit support for the IMU would point at its concern for the religious oppression of Muslims and its sympathy for the IMU's vision of an Islamic state; a purely geopolitical explanation, on the other hand, would see Iran's actions as an opportunistic policy aimed at undermining Uzbekistan's claim to regional hegemony. While the first hypothesis is not wholly unfounded, it fails to explain the limited

[508] Later evidence emerged linking IMU fighters to Iranian training camps (see: Weitz, *op. cit.* p. 509. The only two primary sources that could be publicly accessed reporting on this matter were two new articles, one by the *Sunday Times*, and one by the *Washington Times* (see: Swain, Jon, and Allen-Mills, Tony. 'Fanatics move on to training camps in Iran'. *Sunday Times*, 14 Apr. 2002; 'Terrorists trained by Iran tracked from Uzbekistan'. *The Washington Times*, 8 Apr. 2022.) The first one cites western security sources reporting on terrorists training camps in Iran, amongst which many members of IMU were spotted. The details on the training programme seem to match earlier known facts about Iran's links with non-state actors in the region; the camp in which IMU fighters were reportedly training, Imam Ali garrison, has appeared in the literature as the main basis of Iran-sponsored Saudi armed opposition. The second source, citing intelligence gathered from the US Central Command, reported that Yuldash and other IMU fighters have a collaborative relationship with Iran's Revolutionary Guards. The information concerning IMU presence in Iranian training camps was released to the public in 2002; no prior record of such allegations being confirmed has been found on the public record. IMU underwent a radical transformation after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, also due to the death of its field commander Namangani. It is thus not implausible that surviving members and fighters of IMU would have tried to find haven in Iran between November 2001 and April 2002. However, the presence of IMU fighters in Iran in 2002 raises the question of potential prior military cooperation between the two parties. While it is impossible to categorically exclude any and all military cooperation, the available evidence suggests that Iran did not have an established military and logistical relation with IMU before 2002. Iranian military cooperation with IMU was possible in 2002 because IMU was no longer conducting field operation for the Taliban, likely engaging with Iranian-backed armed factions. That being said, IMU's re-grouping inside Iranian territory was possible only thanks to the established links between IMU and Iranian security apparatus.

nature of Iran's response. It is true that Iran often highlighted the plague of Muslim persecution in Central Asia. Nevertheless, its action amounted to little more than lip service. On the other hand, the main problem with the second hypothesis is that, given the regional climate at the time, Iran's lack of condemnation and perceived sympathy for the IMU actually diminished Tehran's political capital, especially with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and with President Rahmonov's faction in Tajikistan. If this had merely been an attempt to increase Iran's influence in the region, it was doomed to backfire, as it did, because of the increased hostility of the regional environment to Islamism since 1995.

I argue is that there is no mismatch between Iran's policy expectations and regional realities, because in choosing to herald a pan-Islamist cause, Iran temporarily abandoned the Pan-Iranian logic of interstate bilateral relations in favour to the Pan-Islamic logic of transnational revolution. This is the result of the breakdown in the harmony between Pan-Iranism and Pan-Islamism in the mid-1990s and the rise to prominence once again of Pan-Islamism as the dominant logic guiding Iran's policy in Central Asia. The analysis presented in this section shows that Iran responded to the Tashkent bombing by mobilising the dormant non-state actor connections it had cultivated and switching to a Pan-Islamic approach to the unrest, contrary to what it did during the Tajik Civil War. It did so by choosing to escalate the existing media war between Radio Mashhad and Uzbek media, as well as by allowing Yoldash to hold meetings with Nuri on Iranian soil. Nevertheless, the change to Pan-Islamism was timid, limited, and non-committal. This is due to the fact that the change in Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia took place not because of a broader change in Iran's international policy, but in spite of it. As the next section will argue, Khatami's focus on Transatlantic relations created a policy vacuum in Iran's official preoccupation with its neighbourhood, which allowed proponents of Pan-Islamism the space to implement

autonomous political decisions on a region that had become marginalised in Iran's global power calculations.

Khatami's Dialogue of Civilisation: a focus on the US in the global arena allowed the return of Pan-Islamism in Central Asia

The analysis above suggests that Iran's foreign policy response to the 1999 Tashkent bombing and the subsequent IMU insurgency was characterised by a selective switch from a logic dominated by Pan-Iranism to a logic dominated by Pan-Islamism. This switch was selective in so far as it only applied to the single issue of Iran-Uzbek relations, rather than being part of a wholesale readjustment in Iran's overall foreign policy posture. In fact, it can actually be argued that on the contrary, the logic of national sovereignty overall was being further enshrined in Tehran's foreign policy during this period through Khatami's policy of Dialogue among the Civilisations.

To understand the general direction in which Iran's foreign policy was moving after 1997, we need to turn to the political philosophy of the new president. Khatami's political thought in his seminal work *Islam, Liberty and Development* is an introspective reflection on the relationship of the Islamic Republic of Iran within its own history. Unlike the earlier intellectual tendency under the late Khomeini era and under Rafsanjani's presidency to focus on Iran's position within the contemporary international system, Khatami's worldview is much closer to Ramazani's reflections in *Independence without Freedom.* The focus switched from Iran's political and ideological struggle against the colonising powers to Tehran's own political and civilisational struggle throughout history against a tendency to despotism. Khatami held that the factors that inhibit Iran's growth are not just exogenous, but also endogenous:

> centuries of our history have been governed not by the efforts and thoughtfulness of the people of this land, but by autocratic and whimsical rulers, and because of the existence of authoritarianism and its central role in our society, our people have not had the opportunity to be active in their own society. Freedom of thought, which is the highest emblem of being and the key condition of our presence on the stage of destiny, as well as the main impetus for growth and dynamism in life, has not been respected.[509]
>
> Here we face a paradox. On the one hand growth and progress are not possible without freedom, and on the other hand freedom will not materialize and last unless society is mature and progressive. What is to be done? […] Freedom has priority over growth.[510]

Khatami argued that a tendency to despotism in Iran's statism has stifled its social and political development. The focus on development signals greater attention on domestic issues. The West was not portrayed as the archetypical evil against which the Islamic Republic had to fight, but rather as a nuanced collection of histories, thinking, and traditions, some of which may be beneficial for Iran's own development:

> The reformist rests on two fundamentals: one, a return to the self and reviving our historico-cultural identity, and two, a positive encounter with the achievements of human civilization, while being aware of the hegemonic and colonial legacy of the West.[511]

Khatami's concept of 'Dialogue among Civilisations' was rooted in his theoretical understanding of the life and death cycle of civilisations. He argued that the post-revolutionary crisis that Iran had been experiencing during the 1990s was in fact a crisis of identity brought about by the persistence of old worldviews during the fast-paced evolution of social and political institutions that Iran had faced in the prior two decades.[512] The

[509] Khatami, Mohammad. *Islam, Liberty and Development.* Global Publications: SUNY Binghampton University, 1998, p. 5.
[510] Khatami, *op. cit.,* p. 15.
[511] Khatami, *op. cit.,* p. 26.
[512] Khatami, *op. cit.,* p. 51: 'every civilization is based on a specific world view which is itself shaped by a people's idiosyncratic historical experience. For as long as the existing world view successfully addresses the fundamental questions and needs of a community, it remains intact. But when the collective consciousness

solution was careful introspection that would give birth to a new identity. Such an identity would incorporate only the good parts of Western intellectual thought and reject the tenets of colonialist thinking. Unlike some of 1980s and early 1990s anti-imperialist discourse in Iran, Khatami's theory of the Dialogue among Civilisations was recentring Iran as the pivot of its own worldview and relegating the West to a peripheral role. The emphasis was shifting away from Khomeini's division of the world between oppressors and oppressed and towards a more traditional Pan-Iranian understanding of international relations. Pan-Iranism allows Iranian intellectuals to reclaim their own agency rather than being mere victims of colonial oppressions; but by proclaiming that the Iranian people are the makers of their own destiny, Pan-Iranism also forces them to reckon with Iran's own shortcomings.

However, even under Khatami's Pan-Iranian developmentalist thinking Iran's political landscape was unable to escape the comparison with the West. The 'us vs. them' tenet of Iran's worldview that had been seemingly tamed by the push to promote domestic economic and political progress assumed a greater all-encompassing role in Iran's foreign policy when Khatami's Dialogue of Civilisation was applied to Tehran's foreign policy. By looking at contemporary academic writing and political speeches, this section will explore how Khatami's Dialogue of Civilisation ended up increasing the focus on Irano-American enmity, causing Iran's Central Asian policy to turn to Pan-Islamism following increased American interference. The filtering of all regional dynamics through the lens of Irano-American rivalry gave space to proponents of more purist Pan-Islamic approaches to influence single-issue policies such as the IMU insurgency.

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and soul of a people outgrows the limitations of the existing civilization, the search for new ideals begins in earnest, often taking the form of turning to other civilizations for clues'; p. 57: 'our revolution proposed the creation of a religiously based system, and our society accepted it with enthusiasm and took steps to reach this great goal. The crisis that we experience today can only be remedied if we shed the vestiges of our borrowed identity and don a new garb. Our current crisis is the crisis of birth which I referred to earlier. Our new civilization is on the verge of emergence.'

Khatami's policy was particularly suitable on paper to Iran's relations with Central Asia. As we have seen in Chapter 3, in 1992 Iran underwent a gradual shift away from Pan-Islamism and towards a Pan-Iranian posture. The push for a foreign policy based on the respect of the inviolability of national sovereignty and territoriality of states can be seen very clearly when looking at the recurring themes and ideas being put forward in *Amu Darya* around the time of the Tashkent bombing. *Amu Darya* was one of Iran's most important academic journals on Central Asia. Published in English by the *Centre for the Study of Central Asia and the Caucasus* (CSCAC), a research organisation under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' affiliated *Institute of Political and International Studies* (IPIS), *Amu Darya* was edited by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Seyyed Kamal Kharrazi, and, along with inviting foreign academic contributions, it often included speeches and short think pieces by elected officials, as well as official records of public conferences with neighbouring countries.

The editor's note in the fourth volume of *Amu Darya* sets the tone for the approach the journal was endorsing during the time of the IMU insurgency. The emphasis on the primacy of culture as a bond between Iran and the Central Asian Republics is paired with considerations on the endogenous geopolitical equilibrium of the area.[513] The joined themes of cultural commonality and geopolitical constraints run through most of the articles published in *Amu Darya* through the 1999-2001 period. Culture politics and realpolitik are not seen as mutually exclusive under Khatami's Dialogue of Civilisation, but rather as the two supporting pillars of Iran's foreign policy. This is exemplified by Kharrazi's words:

> The priority areas of this policy [Dialogue of Civilisations] include expansion of relations with all countries on the basis of mutual respect, common interests, and non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign countries […] Another priority area in the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy is the shape and trend of

[513] Ameri, Nasser Saghafi. 'Editor's Note'. *Amu Darya*, 1999, vol. 4 no. 1, pp. 1-7.

> relations with the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus […] The vast region of Central Asia has been historically influenced by great civilisations along its periphery. The region has been at the crossroads of Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity … The depth of Iran's cultural influence in Central Asia is profound indeed. It was in this context that HE Fererido Mayor, UNESCO's Director General pointed out: "it is very difficult to separate the Iranian motherland civilisation from that of Central Asia".[514]

From the extract above, we can already see a crucial contradiction emerging in this logic: the idea of sovereign equality is a poor match for Iran's historical and cultural hegemony in the region. After emphasising the importance of mutual respect and non-interference, Kharrazi goes on to highlight the cultural primacy of Iran in the region. This shows that Iran did not see itself on equal footing with the ex-Soviet Republics, but rather as a *primus inter pares*. Iran's history and culture granted Tehran a right to influence Central Asia that other states should naturally acknowledge. Kharrazi goes on to define Iran's primary aim in the region as 'the containment and possibly the seclusion of the influence of extra regional powers'. This shows that the reconciliatory tone of Khatami's Dialogue among Civilisation with the West did not translate into regional policies. Rather, the same principle of mutual equality based on territorial sovereignty ended up reinforcing the 'us vs. them' dynamic of the West vs. the Rest in Iran's Central Asian policy. This was fostered by the conviction that Iran was an insider to Central Asia while the US and European countries were outsiders whose presence was hindering regional development.

The Four Pillar model can account for the divergence between the international and regional effect of Khatami's Dialogue among Civilisations. Kharrazi's speech highlights the importance of the National Sovereignty pillar and the Pan-Iranian pillar. But the Triangular Model calls for a third pillar to complete the specific ideological configuration, and, in the Pan-Iranian model, that is the Anti-Imperialist pillar. In the international arena, the Anti-

[514] Kharrazi, Kamal. 'Role of Regional Powers in Conflict Resolution and Economic Development'. *Amu Darya*, 1999,vol. 4 no. 1, pp. 8-12.

Imperialist identity and the Pan-Iranian identity do not clash. On the stage of global history, Iran can construe itself as having always been the victim of Western arrogance.[515] In the regional arena of Central Asia, however, Iran's anti-imperialism and its Pan-Iranian legacy are in direct contradiction, as some Central Asian states see Iran's influence as both culturally patronising and politically destabilising. We have seen in Chapter 4's discourse analysis that Iran's Pan-Iranian foreign policy approach is used to create a common identity with Central Asian states and a criterion to exclude all non-regional powers from the in-group dynamic.[516]

Khatami's Dialogue among Civilisation, on the other hand, pushed forward a pragmatic emphasis on bilateral relations that prompted Iran to focus more on great power competition between the US and Russia that on fostering the fragile relations with Central Asian countries that had just blossomed under Rafsanjani. From further analysis of the material published in the *Amu Darya* journal, it appears that the re-emergence of Russia as a player in the region between 1999 and 2000 captured Iran's attention at the time of the IMU insurgency and strongly influenced its policy choices in regard to Uzbekistan. The ascension of Putin as a President brought about a rapprochement in Iran-Russia relations based on the common wish to see the US excluded from regional politics, as well as fear of the potential uncontrolled spread of Sunni terrorist networks that could threaten the security of both states. This is apparent from the editor's note on the Summer 2000 volume of *Amu Darya:*

> Despite the harsh historical memories lingering from the Tsarist and Soviet periods, Iran-Russia relations have flourished in the post-Soviet ear. Bilateral relations have

[515] For a theoretical explanation of the relationship between victimhood and national identity in post-colonial societies, see: Miller, Manjari Chatterjee. *Wronged by Empire: Post-imperial Ideology and Foreign Policy in India and China*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2013.
[516] See Chapter 4.

> extended to such an extent that a number of statesmen refer to them as "the strategic relations" of the two countries.[517]

Mentions of IMU activities appear two times in the official translations of bilateral round tables included in the journal series. During the Iran-Kyrgyzstan roundtable held on 7 December 1999, Kyrgyzstan's Deputy Foreign Minister Abdollayev, without naming it directly, linked the IMU threat with the increased reach of terrorist, drug smuggling and arm smuggling networks based in Afghanistan.[518] During the Sixth Iran-Russia roundtable held on 15 February 2000, participants alluded to the shared aspiration of creating a multipolar order, and highlighted the vulnerability of Russia's southern flank to emerging terrorist threats as a further reason for an Russo-Iranian partnership.[519]

From these extracts, Iran appears to be advancing an approach dominated by the National Sovereignty pillar on the matter of terrorism, firmly taking the side of affected states against subversive non-state actors. However, the evidence presented in the first part of this case study shows that the rhetoric displayed in these official meetings is in sharp contrast with the policy of allowing IMU to broadcast on Radio Mashhad. What shall we make of this contradiction?

The answer to this question is to be sought within the intellectual debate happening in Iran around that time. One source is particularly illuminating on the link between domestic debates and the Tashkent bombing in particular. In his book titled *Hidden governors in Iran & the world*,[520] Tehran University Professor Muhammad Javad Javid discussed the transition that Iran was undergoing. A central tenet of his argument focuses on unpacking

[517] Ameri, Nasser Saghafi. 'Editor's Note'. *Amu Darya*, 2000, vol. 4 no. 4-5, pp. 1-3.
[518] 'Reports: The Iran-Kyrgyz Roundtable 07/12/1999'. *Amu Darya*, vol. 4, no. 4-5, p. 141.
[519] 'Reports: The Sixth Iran-Russia Roundtable 15-16/02/2000'. *Amu Darya*, vol. 4, no. 4-5, p. 153.
[520] Javid, Muhammad Javad. *مکنونی پنهان در ایران وجهان*. Tehran: سازمان صیدا و سیما یی جمهوری اسلامی ایرانی ایرانی, 2000.

the delicate relationship between ‘'principles and interests’ in Iran’s foreign policy. He defines Iran’s foreign policy as being unusually cohesive and therefore, in a sense, principled. He contends that the subtle balancing act between principles and interests is what determines fluctuations in Iran’s foreign policy. As we have seen at the end of Chapter 4, Iran’s internal debate on the direction of its foreign policy remains primarily an ontological one. Contrary to the scholars perceiving a Thermidorian cooling of the revolutionary spirit in Tehran’s behaviour in the 1990s, Javad’s reflection about his peers and his environment highlights the degree to which Iran remained firmly anchored in what Arshin described as the ‘utopian romantic meta-narrative permeating the Iranian foreign policy culture’.[521] Javid claims that there is an underlying compatibility between principles and interests that allows Iran to continue on its path.

Javad spends most of his book presenting a common Iranian perspective on the nature of the US-Iran enmity, focusing on the uneven political and economic development of the US in the last century. His explanatory variable is an alleged separation between rulers and ruled in America, with ‘hidden rulers’ influencing politics from the shadow. Once he postulated his argument, which is draped in 1980s anti-imperialist overtones, Javad proceeds to illustrate what is to be done about the US-Iran rivalry. He saw the rivalry as born from geopolitics but entrenched by ideology. He describes three factions inside Iran’s policymakers and public intellectuals: those who believe negotiating, or compromising, is the natural and logical course of action that bears no contradiction with Iran’s revolution; those who accept negotiation in principle, but reject the current conditions under which the US is trying to get Iran to the table; and those who believe that the very concept of negotiating with the US is contradictory to the essence of the revolution. The first camp sees

[521] Adib-Moghaddam, Arshin. Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic. Hurst, 2007, p. 32.

negotiations with Washington as a practical necessity. They do not reject the moral superiority of the Iranian revolution and its utopic promise of liberation from the oppressive international order, but rather argue that the timing for engaging in the struggle is wrong. Now it is the time, they argue, to recognise that the power imbalance in a unipolar world is tilted in favour of the US and that Iran needs to accept an economic relationship with the superpower, even if it means political compromise. They see negotiations and political concessions as preferable to open war with the US, as it is to them the only option to preserve the Islamic Republic in its current form.

The second camp concedes that negotiations are not per se in contradiction with the spirit of the revolution but stresses the need of a set of pre-conditions aimed at saving the dignity of the revolution and at preventing a total capitulation on Iran's national interests. This approach has been seen quite prominently during the negotiations leading up to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between President Rouhani and President Obama. Both the first and the second camp are compatible with Khatami's Dialogue of Civilisation, and consequently with the logic of Pan-Iranism. The first camp puts the emphasis on building equal partnerships with Central Asian states based on the principle of Westphalian sovereignty, while the second camp portrays Iran as a *primus inter pares* bringing back the light of Islam and Persianate culture to Central Asia after Soviet colonialism.

The third group favours principles over short-term interests. They consider negotiations to be worse than the complete isolation of the Iranian regime. They consider America's behaviour and track record towards Iran to be an insurmountable obstacle to political compromise. Moreover, they claim that Iran has nothing to gain from joining the negotiation table as its current weakened position would prevent it from extracting

meaningful economic concessions from the United States. And most importantly, they argue that the act of engaging in negotiation with the US would deal a fatal blow to Iran's standing in the international arena and to its anti-establishment reputation. This approach has resurfaced in parts of the new Iranian political establishment after Raezi's election to presidency in 2021 and the election of a new Expediency Council and has caused severe disruption to the attempt to renegotiate the JCPOA. This approach is also compatible with the Pan-Islamist foreign policy that, as we have seen in this chapter, has guided Iran's response to the Tashkent bombing.

What emerges from looking at Iranian writing and speeches in 1999-2000, is that paradoxically, Khatami's Dialogue brought about domestically an even greater focus on the US-Iran strife. This is due to the fact that cooperation with the US was made into a de facto red line beyond which Khatami's policy overture to the West was unable to push. In drawing this line, Khatami's Dialogue among Civilisations revamped domestic anti-Americanism and eventually resulted in the continuation, if not the escalation, of a confrontational policy between Iran and the US. This confrontational overtone in US-Iran relations significantly affected Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia at the time, as it will be argued in the next and last section of this case study.

One last source helps us to understand the degree to which Central Asia became subordinate to the greater Iran-US power play under the Khatami government. This is an article on counterterrorism published in a collection of papers on Iran's presidency of the Islamic Cooperation Organisation (ICO). The book, whose title translates to *Articles on the seminar on the evolution of the first two years of the Islamic Republic of Iran's chairmanship*

of OIC,[522] is the result of a one-day conference held in the presence of the Office of Political and International Studies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The call for papers was initiated by the Secretariat of the Conference at the Centre for Legal and International Studies. These two circumstances suggest that the vetting of the material presented must be highly consistent with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' views on international politics at the time. Among all the articles selected for publishing, only one concerned Central Asia as a region, indicating that in June 1999 Iran's political priorities were looking elsewhere. This article deals with terrorism and counter-terrorist efforts. The paper published takes great pains to premise the review of the performance of the ICO on counterterrorism with a five-page long discussion on the contested nature of the definition of terrorism. This discussion contraposes the 'Western' definition of terrorism against the 'Global south' definition of terrorism, which makes a distinction between terrorism on one hand and liberation struggle on the other.

This piece of evidence supports the claim that at the time of the Tashkent bombing there was a resurgent ideological discourse consistent with the Triangular sub-model of Pan Islamism within Iranian policy circles. As it has been argued in the analysis of *Hidden Governors*, the resurgence of Pan Islamism in Iran's response to the Tashkent bombing was possible because of the persistence of an on-going debate between Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism. The debate focused on the extent to which it was permissible to compromise on the principles of the Islamic Revolution for the sake of state survival. The sudden rise to prominence of moderates and pro-détente political voices with the election to presidency of Khatami in 1997 set in motion an even stronger reaction from principalist voices who objected to any and all compromises. By 1999-2000, this intellectual counterwave to

[522] Heidar, *Ali. Majmūʿah-ʾi maqālāt-i Hamāyish-i arzyābī-i nīmah-i avval-i dawrah-i riyāsat-i Jumhūrī-i Islāmī-i Īrān bar Sāzmān-i Kunfirāns-i Islāmī.* Daftar-i Muṭālaʿāt-i Siyāsī va Bayn al-Milalī, Tehran, 1999.

Khatami's Dialogue among Civilisations was spreading across intellectual milieus and made its way into selected foreign policy issues. It is likely that the lack of attention that Khatami's administration paid to Central Asia and its focus on global-level power struggle with the US had left a decisional vacuum, which principalist elites exploited, like the IMU insurgency.

Iran's return to Pan-Islamism and the interests in regional instability

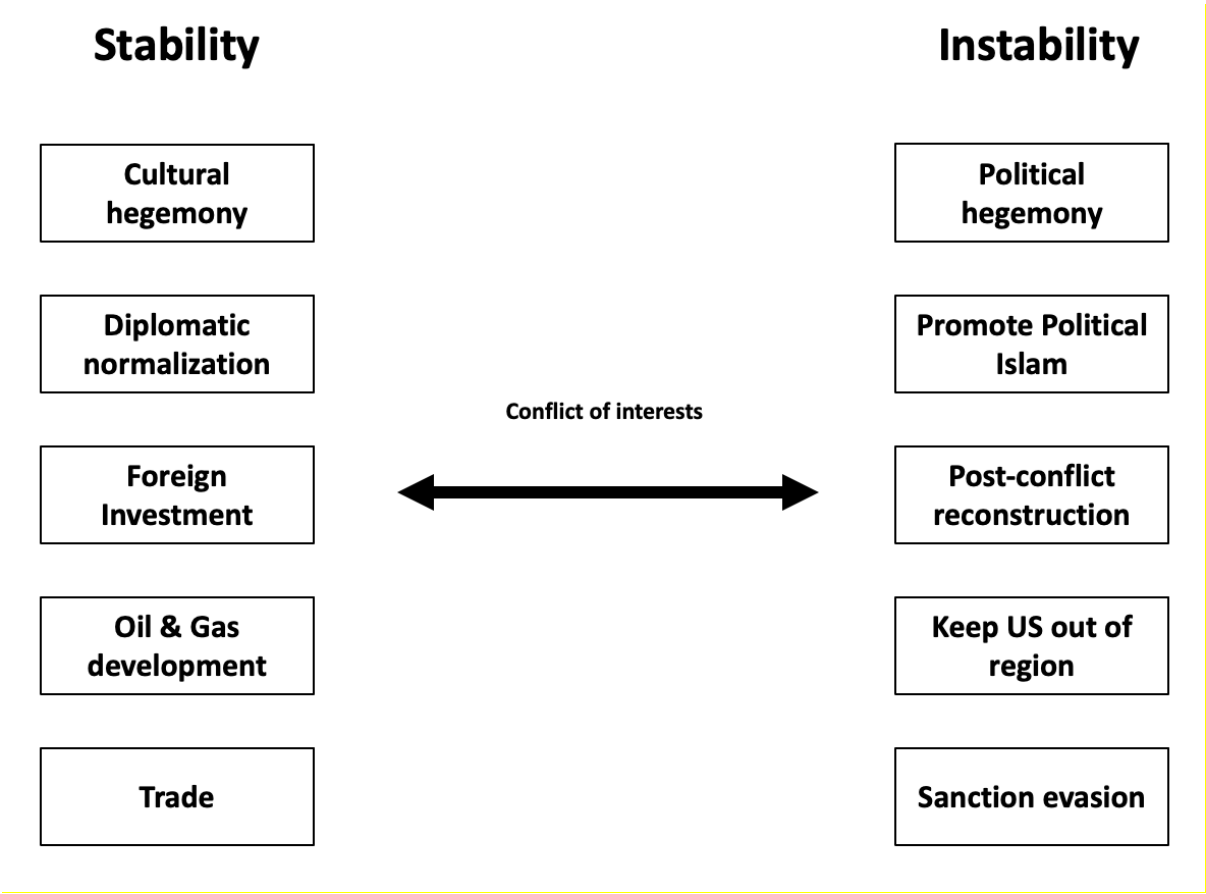


Figure 18: Diagram of Iran's interests in Central Asia (1995-97)

In Chapter 4, we have seen that a shift in Iran's interests best served by the promotion of regional stability aided the primacy of Pan-Iranism over Pan-Islamism during the Tajik Civil War. The diagram above shows a return to the balance between Iran's vested interests in regional stability and instability similar to the one we saw in Chapter 3 during the USSR dissolution (see Fig. 18). This underlying shift in Iran's state interests partially explains why

proponents of a Pan-Islamic approach to the IMU issue found more leverage in 1999 than they may have had with the UTO in 1992-1995.

Since 1995, Russia's military and political influence in the region had seen a continued decline, leading to the emergence of Uzbekistan as a key regional player and a contender for the role of regional hegemon. Uzbekistan had attempted to organise parallel economic and political fora that cut rivals out of the picture, namely Russia, Iran, and Turkey. These new frameworks for regional cooperation involved mostly Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan. Beyond challenging the political mandate of CIS, Uzbekistan's rivalry with Russia extended also to the handling of the Tajik civil war. The importance of Uzbek-Russo and Uzbek-Iranian rivalry will be explored more in Chapter 6.

Uzbekistan had also adopted a strongly anti-Iranian attitude, frequently warning against Iran's perceived religious and cultural propaganda. This may have originated both from President Karimov's attempt to curb Iran's influence in the region, and from a genuine concern for the potential of subversive action of oppressed Muslim and Persianate demographics inside Uzbekistan itself. Uzbekistan played for some time the spoiler role in the Tajik civil conflict on opposite side to Iran, arming and aiding ethnic Uzbek political factions in Leninabad and Kurgan-Tyube.[523] At the same time, Uzbekistan remained the most populous country in Central Asia, and held a degree of sway on Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan's positions on Iran. Therefore, Tehran was faced with a choice: biting its tongue pursing a friendly policy and putting economic and diplomatic interests ahead or continuing a policy of rhetorical hostility towards the Uzbek regime and prioritising political and military objectives over economic and diplomatic ones. The choice was one between a

[523] See Chapter 4.

policy promoting regional stability and the logic of interstate bilateralism, and one promoting regional instability and the logic of transnational revolution.

While in the period between 1995 to 1999 Iran did not fully commit to either, it did continue to voice concern on Uzbekistan's treatment of Muslims, as well as attempt to co-opt Uzbekistan into closer cooperation on the issue of the Tajik civil war.[524] The Tashkent bombing in 1999 presented Iran with a perfect opportunity to rectify its position in either direction. There was a genuine choice in Tehran's policy response because of the key role that Uzbekistan had been playing in gate-keeping Iran from greater participation in political and economic regional structures.

As we have seen in the previous section, in 1999 Khatami's 'Dialogue among Civilisations' was already well underway, raising the expectation that Iran could have used the Tashkent bombing to change Central Asian perceptions of its 'meddling'. Even a symbolic stance condemning the attack and offering support to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan during the conflict would have gone a long way to decouple Iran's international image from that of the likes of the IMU and the Taliban. Instead, Tehran opted for an official policy of neutrality and disengagement, and for a covert policy of aggressive media war, choosing to signal its solidarity to Islamist groups across the region.

The US political involvement in Central Asia between 1995 and 1999 created the preconditions for Iran's policy reaction to the Tashkent bombing. I contend that it was the exogenous factor that facilitated the shift from Pan-Iranism back to Pan-Islamism. American involvement radically changed Iran's calculations on the nature of the regional environment, drastically reducing Iran's perception of the feasibility of change through bilateral relations. As we shall see in Chapter 6, several developments taking place after 1995 created an

[524] See Chapter 4.

environment conducive to this shift. These included American vetoing of Iran's involvement in regional hydrocarbon development and the development of a special relation between Uzbekistan and the USA, starting with Uzbekistan's lone support of US anti-Iranian sanctions in 1995, and culminating with President Karimov's visit to the states in 1996.

It is also important to consider Iran's overall international posture at the time. It has already emerged from the last section that Central Asia was of secondary importance in Khatami's foreign policy strategy. In 1999, political attention was diverted to two other important global processes: Iran's presidency of the Islamic Cooperation Organisation (ICO) and Khatami's overture to Europe. Militarily, Iran was also highly engaged in containing both Iraqi and Afghani security threats to its borders. Therefore, there were no spare political or military resources to devote to developments in Central Asia that did not directly threaten Iran's security. The next, and final, chapter will explore in depth the effect that US presence in Central Asia and the regional competition over hydrocarbon exploitation and transit had in changing the trajectory of Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia from Pan-Iranism back to Pan-Islamism.

Chapter 6

Geoenergy and geopolitics: US, Russia, and Iran's struggle for influence in Central Asia

This chapter will argue that the regional and international balance of power mattered a great deal in influencing Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia in 1990-2001. Firstly, it shaped the perception of the permissibility of the international environment in which Iran was operating. The increasing regional isolation and outright hostility from a number of regional actors shifted Iranian perceptions of the region's openness to its political and economic integration from one of cautious optimism in the early nineties to one of pessimistic frustration in the second half of the decade. Changes in the perceived nature of the regional and international environment correlate to shifts in the dominant foreign policy logic between the Pan-Islamic and the Pan-Iranian line. Regional and international power shifts also lowered the relative opportunity cost for Tehran to promote revolutionism in the region.

This chapter aims to re-anchor the ideological analysis of this thesis within the field of international relations. While a solid grasp of history and area knowledge are necessary to implement such granular analysis of specific foreign policy fluctuations, the case studies above stop at the descriptive level derived from implementing the Four Pillar model and do not yet reach a deeper understanding of the mechanism underlying these policy shifts. I have introduced some of the geopolitical shifts underlying Iran's policy shifts in the concluding sections of chapter 3, 4, and 5. These included a discussion of the changes in Iran's vested interest from promoting regional stability to promoting instability. Understanding what drives Iran's choice between the Pan-Islamic and the Pan-Iranian policy line is the task of

second part of the ideological model, the Two-Axis Model. As it has been explained in the theory section, this is the explanatory part of the model.

One of the fundamental axioms deriving from reconceptualising the relationship between matter and ideas in the international system as a duality is what I called the 'synchronicity of cause and effect'.[525] This means that the shifts in the balance of power in Central Asia do not simply cause Iran's shift from Pan-Iranism to Pan-Islamism. Iran's shifts between Pan-Iranism and Pan-Islamism are as much caused by US and Russian hydrocarbon policies, as they in turn affect these actors' regional calculations, creating a feedback loop. If the previous three chapters have shown that the Four Pillar model provides a better description of Iran's behaviour, demystifying the contradictory pulls in Tehran's foreign policy, this chapter aims to show that the Two Axes model provides a convincing explanation for the mechanisms behind shifts in state ideology.

The three case studies presented above followed the same structure. They identified a critical juncture and its associated pivotal points. Firstly, they investigated in detail the causes and trajectory of the critical juncture and Iran's policy response to it, assessing whether Iran's reaction conformed more to the Pan-Iranian or the Pan-Islamic logic. They then checked this empirical assessment by conducting a discourse analysis to find clues in the contemporary academic and political discourse on the unfolding of the debate between Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism. Lastly, they looked at Iran's national interests at the time to show how they correlated to Iran's policy shifts from Pan-Islamism to Pan-Iranism.

It is not the existence of contradictory state interests per se that drives Iran's policy shifts. Rather, the existence of contradictory Pan-Islamist and Pan-Iranian logics on its own prompts Iran to be faced with two genuinely different foreign policy strategies. At the same

[525] See Chapter 1, 'Methodology: theoretical implications of a Giddensian theory of ideology'.

time, shifts in Iran's ideology are the result of underlying shifts in the regional and international environment that allow the proponents of the Pan-Iranian or Pan-Islamic logics to argue in favour of their preferred approach. Since in the 1990s Iran was transitioning from a state of revolutionary war to a state of revolutionary peace, it was faced with a genuine choice concerning whether or not it should integrate in the regional system of Central Asia, while maintaining a defiant stance in the international arena. In Chapter 4, I have argued the scale was clearly titled in favour of the Pan-Iranian approach because most of Iran's national interests at the time were better served by preserving the stability of the region rather than by unsettling it. These three case studies have demonstrated that Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism are not just rhetorical alternatives, nor are they merely the projection of domestic interest groups, though they are often promoted by rival factions. Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism are foreign policy strategies that are firmly anchored in Iran's intellectual and institutional history. In Chapter 5, I presented the case against the overdetermination of Iran's foreign policy by its national interests. I showed that there was a balance in between interests served by stability and interests served by instability that does not on its own explain Iran's choice in favour of Pan-Islamism. The factor titling the scale, as this chapter will argue, is Iran's changing perception of its regional and international environment following the US's policies aimed at isolating Iran. In this chapter, I explore how these Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism are in turn shaped by the systemic level of international relations through their link with Iran's national interests. This concluding chapter thus recentres the ideological analysis of Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia within the field of international relations by showing how changes in the balance of power are mediated through the lens of ideology into recalibration of Iran's foreign policy.

Overview of the findings of the case studies

When we collate the pivotal point analyses of the three case studies presented in Chapter 3, 4, and 5, a pattern emerges: Iran moved from Pan-Islamism to Pan-Iranism, to the decoupling of its international and regional policy, where the first remained guided by Pan-Iranism and the latter veered towards Pan-Islamism again. I have argued throughout these empirical chapters that while domestic factors are important to understand the context of the shifts in intra-elite preferences for Pan-Islamism or Pan-Iranism, they cannot on their own explain these shifts. There is an exogenous dimension to Iran's foreign policy changes, which is captured in the Two-Axis model.

This chapter will piece together the narrative explaining Iran's changing national interests in Central Asia, as it has been hinted in the last section of each empirical chapter. I argue that elite preferences on their own cannot fully explain Iran's foreign policy shifts by looking at the discrepancy between the personal ideology of the Presidents of the Islamic Republic and the dominant foreign policy logic in Central Asia at the time. Rafsanjani is considered a more conservative president than Khatami, as one of the key political figures during Iran's war with Iraq. However, under his leadership Iran followed a strict adherence to the Pan-Iranian model during the Tajik Civil War. On the other hand, Khatami is considered to be a pragmatic president due to his policy of overture with the West, as we have seen in the last chapter. Yet under his leadership, the foreign policy vacuum in Central Asia was overtaken by proponents of the Pan-Islamic approach. This implies that the degree to which executive had their main foreign policy focus on the east rather than the west mattered to some degree, in as much as it meant less competition between foreign ministry and security apparatus. What mattered a great deal, on the other hand, was the weakened state of Iran's domestic economy and its internal political fragility in the 1990s (see Fig. 19).



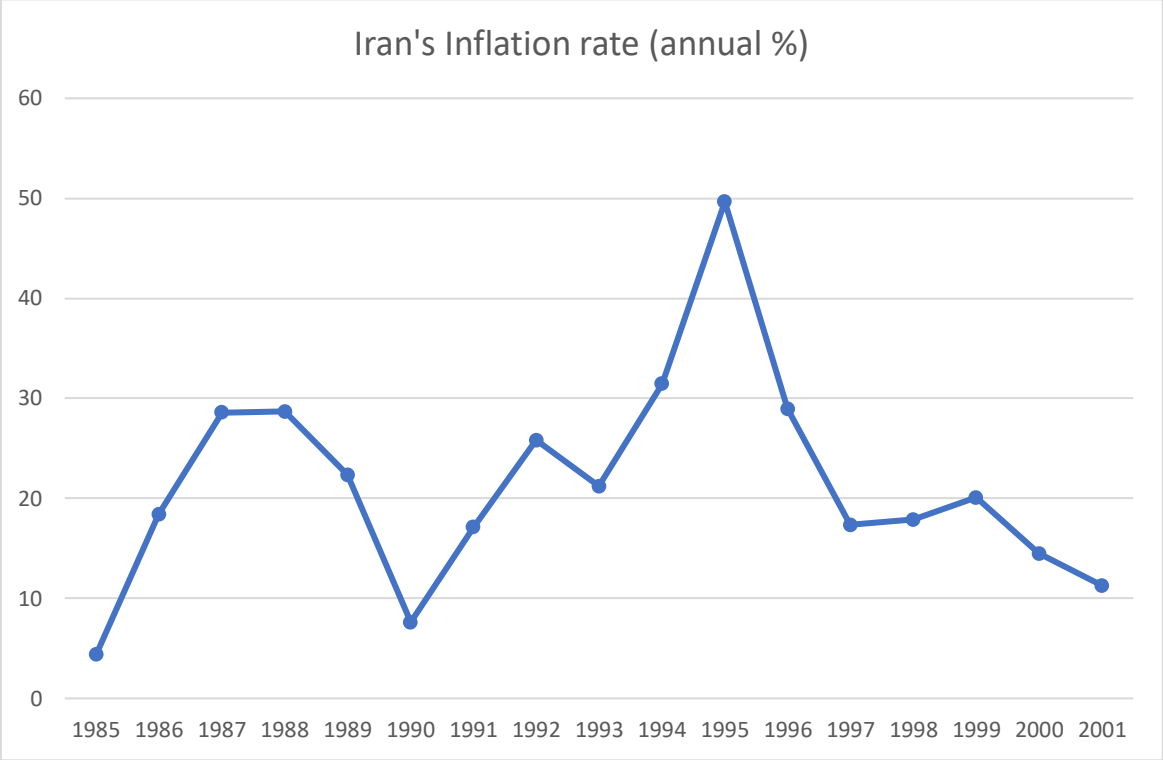


Figure 19: Graph of Iran's annual GDP growth percentage and Iran's annual inflation rate percentage[526]

[526] Source: World bank database, https://data.worldbank.org/country/iran-islamic-rep

The graph above shows that Iran had seen a rebound in annual GDP growth with the end of the Iraq-Iran war in 1989, but soon became to suffer from negative growth rate under Rafsanjani in 1992-1994. The economy seemed to show signs of growth in 1995-1996, likely from a combination of Iran's improved reputation during the Tajik civil war mediation, and from joint Iran-Azeri oil consortium deals. Yet the inflation rate shows that GDP growth was not resulting in improved economic conditions on the ground, with a peak of 50% inflation rate in 1995. The impact of sanctions and the lack of real domestic economic growth strategies caught up with Tehran in 1996-1998, where the nation was experiencing stagnant 2-3% growth rates, a far cry from what was needed to relaunch the economy after a decade of war. Nevertheless, most of Iran's economic ills were self-made and were not fundamentally caused by external interference.[527] For an in-depth analysis of the macro-economic drivers of Iran's economic stagnation in the 1980s and 1990s, see Parvin's *The Economy of Iran: Dilemmas of an Islamic State*.[528]

However, weak economic performance does not explain much on their own, as Iran's economic and political post-war transition was driven by political developments, domestic and international, rather than vice versa. What mattered was the conjunction of Iran's limited political, military, and economic resources with the changing political and economic conditions of Central Asia. The key to understand the shift from Pan-Islamism to Pan-Iranism and back lays in deciphering what changed in the region after 1995, and what caused this change.

The return of the Pan-Islamic approach in the late 90s coincided with a shift in the meaning of Pan-Islamism itself. From a Khomeinist understanding of transnational

[527] Amuzegar, Jahangir. 'Iran's Economy and the US Sanctions'. *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 51, no. 2, 1997, pp. 185–199.
[528] Alizadeh, Parvin. *The Economy of Iran : Dilemmas of an Islamic State*. I.B. Tauris, 2000.

revolutionism that had as its ultimate aim the dissolution of the nation-state system, by the late 1990s Pan-Islamism became synonymous with the imperial transnationalism of the IRGC. The imperative of defending the revolution became the preservation of the Islamic regime in Iran at any cost, including through the export of instability in the neighbouring regions, as we have seen with the case of the IMU insurgency.

Through the 1990s, policymakers had to accept that Iran is a nation state in a world of nation states, and that no world Islamic revolution is forthcoming. This means that Iran's revolutionary duty stops being the export of revolution and becomes the preservation of the purity of its own domestic revolution. For the security apparatuses, the protection of the Iranian state had already became a precondition to the preservation of the revolution in the 1980s under the threat of the Iran-Iraq war. Through the nineties, we see a definite shift in the preference of security apparatus to protect the Iranian regime even if it means disregarding the national interests of the Iranian state. At times, protecting the regime meant weakening economically and politically the state and creating more instability in the region. This evolution in the meaning of Pan-Islamism, as we shall see in this chapter, is coterminous with changes in the US foreign policy Central Asia, particularly of Washington's oil and gas policy and its sanctions against Iran. US unipolarity in the 1990s meant that it had the power to singlehandedly reshape the international and regional balance of power singularly to the disadvantage of Iran. This policy had the effect of shaping Iran's perception of the nature of the environment in which it operated, and, consequently, it engendered the switch from Pan-Iranism back to Pan-Islamism, as well as the evolution in the meaning of Pan-Islamism.

As it was explained in the methodology section of Chapter 1, the case studies in Chapter 3, 4, and 5 are limited to the in-depth analysis of snapshots and were thus mostly

descriptive in nature. The focus on the descriptive aspect of the Four Pillar model was dictated by the of the granularity needed to tease out the complexity of Iran's foreign policy behaviour; it was also determined by the fact that state ideology is defined Chapter 1 as historically and context bounded. Although I tried to capture the moment in which Iran shifted from one ideological approach to another in the case studies, and I tried to emphasise the fluidity of the connotation of the four pillars through the analysis of elite's discourse, the three pivotal point analyses were still static analysis by definition, because they were a single point analysis. I have also explained in Chapter 1 how the advantage of a Giddensian-inspired ideological approach is its dynamism. This chapter will hold true to this promise, showcasing this dynamism.

The analysis at the end of this chapter will prove the corollary premise of the Four Pillar model elaborated in Chapter 2, stating that ideology and foreign policy practice are connected by a two-way feedback loop, where each affect and is in turn affected by the other. This is deduced from the ontological assumption in Chapter 1 stating that ideology is the structure bridging ideational and material factors in the international system. In the previous chapters, we have shown the way in which Iran's ideology influences policymakers' interpretations of and responses to the pivotal events. In this chapter, we will focus on the second direction of the loop, the one that specifies how material factors change the connotation and structure of the concepts making up the Four Pillar model.

Central Asia's geopolitical and geoenergetic importance in the 1990s

In order to understand US policy in Central Asia, as well as its effects on the regional and international balance of power, we need to understand what role the region was playing globally and in Washington's foreign policy in the 1990s. The US had five main interests in

Central Asia. Firstly, US oil and gas companies had lucrative economic interests in penetrating the Central Asian hydrocarbon market after the fall of the Soviet Union. Though this process started in the 1980s, it significantly increased in volume only after 1994, due to both regional political instability and the slow pace at which ex-Soviet regimes opened their national resources to foreign exploitation, by 1998 it was clear that the margin of profit for foreign companies warranted the expansion and maintenance of US influence in the region:

> It is little surprise then that Central Asia has become a hive of activity in recent years, with international oil companies scrambling for a piece of the action. This may be one of the last major fossil fuel reserves on Earth, and while much of the Persian Gulf oil is off limits to Western companies (noticeably Iran and Iraq), the Caspian Sea's riches are available to the largest bidder.[529]

Secondly, Washington intended to promote the establishment of liberal democracy in the newly independent states. With the fall of the USSR and the loss of the mission to 'end communism', US policymakers turned to crafting a truly global liberal international order. Showing that ex-communist states would thrive in an open market, liberal democracy was key to the ideological effort behind the 1990s 'end of history' rhetoric. Thirdly, and related to the above, Washington wanted to establish Central Asian states as a bastion against the spread of 'Islamic fundamentalism' and a *cordon sanitaire* to contain the Islamic Republic of Iran. Central Asia became relevant both to the state-building mission of the liberal internationalists and to the balancing mission of the 'new cold warriors' who saw the fault line between Western and Islamic civilisation as the new dividing imperative of a post-Cold War order:

> Accompanying the battle for oil is an implicit battle for ideological influence in Central Asia. These are crucial formative years for the new Central Asian states as they try to cement their newfound independence […] for the West especially, Central Asia is

[529] 'Pipe Dreams'. *Geographical*, October 1998,vol. LXX, no. 10, pp. 14-23.

> strategically important as a buffer both against renewed Russian expansionism and Islamic fundamentalism.[530]

Fourthly, the Unites States never ceased to have an interest in containing Russia and ensuring it would not become a superpower to the same level as it was before. Though there were factions who were sympathetic to Russia's attempt to fully integrate in the western international community under Yeltsin, ultimately there remained strong advocates of a power-politics approach to the potential threat of a resurgent Russia in Eurasia. And, lastly, perception of the threat of a bellicose, anti-Western Russia dictated the need to secure the oil supplies to Western Europe through more favourable routes in the Caspian region.

The rise in American influence in Central Asia from 1994 onwards was abetted by OPEC's short-sightedness of the potential role that Central Asia could play in the global oil market due to its geography. Even as late as 1995, OPEC's official journal found Central Asia's weight in the oil market to be irrelevant, though recognising its potential for future output:

> The overriding concern of the FSU oil industry at present is its substantial loss of output […] Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan still account for a limited amount of the global output […] The FSU, despite being only a small exporter on a global scale, is nevertheless playing an important role, since the marginal amounts are what is determining the final equilibrium of the market. The absolute level of oil production is not the only criterion, but it should be borne in mind that, despite its current limited output and exports, the potential of the FSU in terms of oils production is there.[531]

OPEC's short-sightedness in identifying the present geopolitical relevance rather than the future economic importance of Central Asia allowed the US, Europe, and Russia to control oil production and oil transport in the region. This meant that OPEC countries effectively lost a potential Global South alliance to constrain Russia and US influence in the market.

[530] Pipe Dreams'. *Geographical*, October 1998,vol. LXX, no. 10, p. 20.
[531] Ghanem, Shokri. 'The future relationship between OPEC and the countries of the Former Soviet Union'. *OPEC Bulletin,* February 1995, pp. 6-7.

Although, as we shall see, Iran was very active diplomatically in the Central Asian hydrocarbon market, it lacked the capital to commit to developing other country's industry and could not rival the influx of foreign capital coming from European and American companies. OPEC's focus on output missed the crucial importance of the geography of Central Asian pipelines. At the heart of this dispute was the legal status of Caspian Sea, which would determine both rights for the exploration of seabed resources and for the passage of pipelines.

Another key trend was Uzbekistan's bid for regional hegemony. Strong with US backing, Tashkent was bound to clash with Russia's claims over its near abroad, as well as with Iran's diplomatic courting of the ex-Soviet Republics. 1995 was a turning point for Uzbekistan's bid for regional influence. In May 1995, Karimov was the only Central Asian leader to publicly express support for Washington's imposition of a trade embargo on Iran.[532] The following day, Karimov called for the creation of a political federation in the region.[533] Uzbekistan's bid for influence also involved a focus on soft power competition with Iran.[534] In November 1995, Karimov promoted the idea of greater economic integration while visiting Kazakhstan.[535] In December 1995, Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Kazakh leaders agreed to seek the creation of a new regional UN peacekeeping force, effectively bypassing Russia.[536] In March 1997, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan signed a number of agreements aimed at boosting economic integration,[537] and proceeded in October to sign a treaty of eternal friendship.[538] Uzbek-Russian's rivalry was ubiquitous, with Karimov's

[532] BBC Monitoring. 'Uzbek president backs US embargo on Iran'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 68
[533] BBC Monitoring. 'Karimov calls for creation of common Turkestan'. *Inside Central Asia,* vol. 68.
[534] BBC Monitoring. 'Central Asia research institute set up in Samarkand'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 77; BBC Monitoring. 'First Central Asian games to be held in Uzbekistan'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 76.
[535] BBC Monitoring. 'Karimov calls for economic integration'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 94.
[536] BBC Monitoring, 'Central Asian leaders seek creation of new peacekeeping force'. Inside Central Asia, no. 318.
[537] BBC Monitoring. 'Trilateral union receives boost'. Inside Central Asia, no. 163.
[538] BBC Monitoring. 'Central Asian leaders pledge eternal friendship', Inside Central Asia, no. 154.

public criticism of Russia's attempts to establish new regional political, economic and military structures aimed at keeping ex-USSR states within its orbit.[539] This affected Central Asian political future, too. A row between Moscow and Tashkent on the Tajik issue was already visible in September 1995.[540] After Uzbekistan agreed to being one of the guarantors of the 1997 peace deal,[541] Dushanbe accused Tashkent of sponsoring the armed rebellion of ethnic Uzbek elements in the Tajik army.[542] Uzbek-Iranian relations, on the other hand, had already reportedly deteriorated in 1995 after Karimov's favourable comment on American sanctions.[543] Iran had repeatedly highlighted Uzbekistan's treatment of Muslims.[544] In response, Tashkent accused Iran of meddling in internal affairs and training terrorist groups.[545] After Tashkent established relations with the Taliban regime in 1998,[546] relations between the two countries took a nose dive. Uzbek-Iranian and Uzbek-Russian rivalry was one of the other factors at play in driving the entente between Moscow and Tehran between 1994 and 1997. The breakdown of Moscow-Tehran relations over the Caspian Sea dispute, as we will see shortly, corresponded with the cultivation of closer ties between Karimov and Russia, culminating in their common line on the 1999 IMU insurgency. The fear of growing Islamic extremism pulled together Moscow and Tashkent in a way that furthered Iran's status as the regional pariah.

[539] BBC Monitoring. 'Uzbekistan takes firm line against proposed Russia-Belarusian union'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 114; BBC Monitoring. 'Karimov condemns CIS integration accords.' *Inside Central Asia,* no. 116.
[540] BBC Monitoring. 'Russian FM Andrey Kozyrev visits Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, denies visit shows differences over peace process'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 80.
[541] BBC Monitoring. 'Uzbek president agrees to underwrite Tajik peace accords'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 187.
[542] BBC Monitoring. 'Moscow daily sees Uzbek link in west Tajikistan uprising'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 198.
[543] BBC Monitoring. 'Uzbek - Iranian relations deteriorate'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 69.
[544] BBC Monitoring. 'Iran and Kyrgyzstan voice concern at Uzbekistan's wave of repression' *Inside Central Asia,* no. 204; BBC Monitoring. 'Iranian radio condemns suppression of Muslims in Uzbekistan'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 222.
[545]BBC Monitoring. 'Iran denies training Uzbek extremists'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 213; BBC Monitoring. 'Iran denies financing Uzbek opposition'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 215.
[546]BBC Monitoring. 'Tashkent establishes first contact with Afghan Taleban'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 251.

Pipeline zero sum game: Iran, Russia, and Turkey vying for control of Central Asian hydrocarbon flows

According to a research paper from 1994,[547] this was the state of the most important proposed pipeline routes at the start of the 'black gold' rush in Central Asia (see Fig. 20):

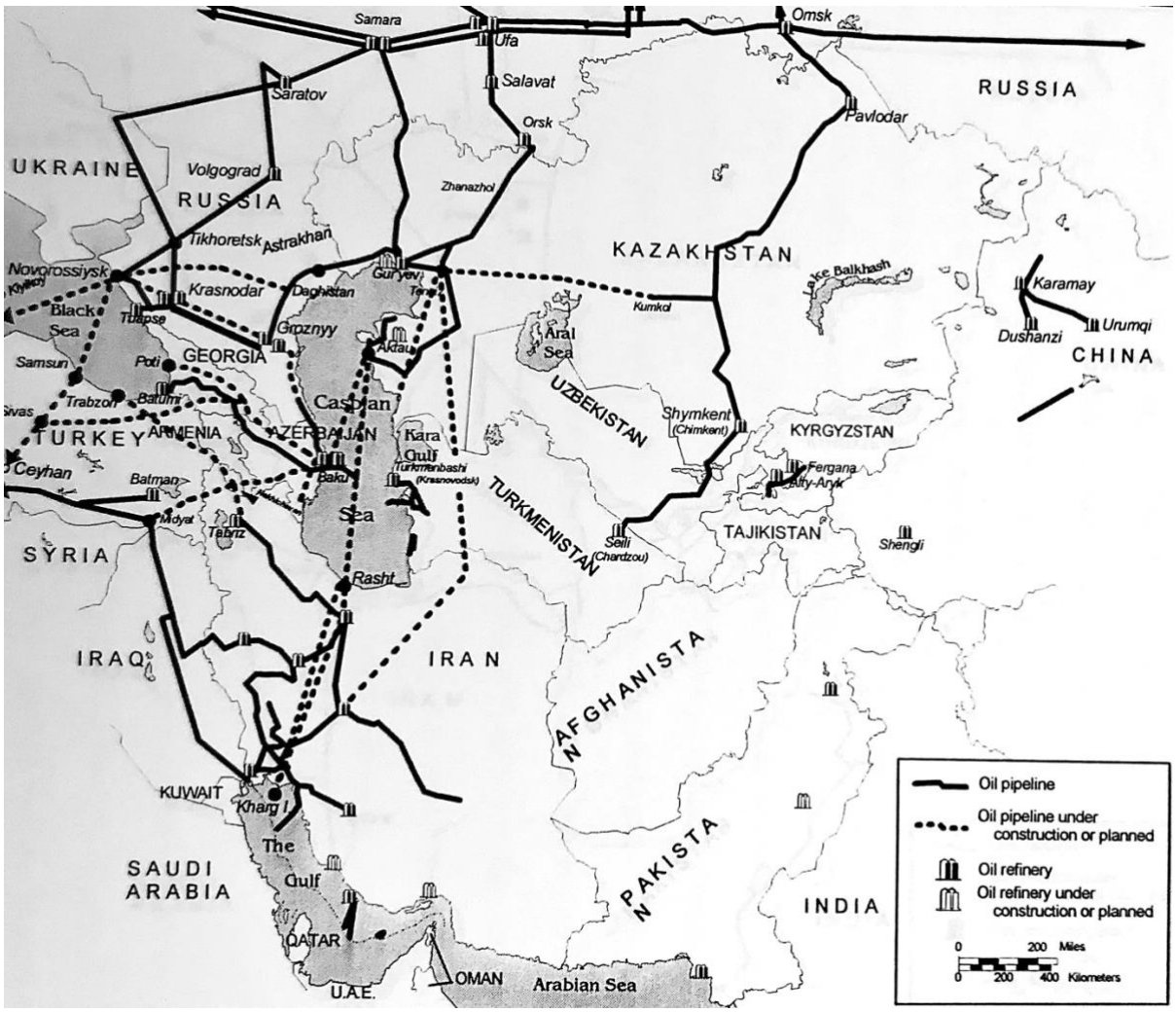


Figure 20: Map of existing and planned pipelines in Central Asia as of 1994.[548]

[547] Dorian, P. James, et al. 'Central Asia's Oil and Gas Pipeline Network: Current and Future Flows'. *East-West Center Working Papers: Energy and Mineral Series*, 9 Nov. 1994.
[548] Dorian, P. James, et al. 'Central Asia's Oil and Gas Pipeline Network: Current and Future Flows'. *East-West Center Working Papers: Energy and Mineral Series*, 9 Nov. 1994, p. 8.

Caspian Pipeline Consortium (Oman, Russia, Kazakhstan)

- Tengiz Black Sea pipeline: proposed rehabilitation of existing pipeline and construction of new ones connecting Kazakhstan's Tengiz field with the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk via Russian territory north of the Caspian Sea.
- Tengiz Kazakhstan-Georgia: proposed 2000km pipeline from Kazakhstan's Tengiz field through Turkmenistan and the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan and the Black Sea coast of Georgia.
- Kazakhstan-Turkey: proposed 1600km pipeline from Kazakhstan through Russian territory north of the Caspian Sea to Georgia and Turkey.
- Kazakhstan-Iran: proposed construction of 800km from Kazakhstan through the Caspian Sea and through Azerbaijan to Iran.

Kazakhstan Pipeline Company

- Tengiz Kazakhstan-Iran: proposed construction of 2300km from Kazakhstan through Turkmenistan to Iranian ports on the Gulf.

Tefken Holding A.S. (Turkey)

- Tengiz Kazakhstan-Turkey: proposed 1900km pipeline from Kazakhstan's Tengiz field through the Caspian Sea to the coast of Iran and Azerbaijan to the Mediterranean coast of Turkey.

Amoco, Pennzoil, Unocal (US), BP (UK), Azerbaijan

- Azerbaijan-Turkey: preliminary plans to export new Azeri crude via new pipeline Turkey-Europe.

BOTAS (Turkey) - SOCAR (Azerbaijan)

- Azerbaijan-Iran-Turkey**:** proposed 1000km pipeline from Baku through Iranian territory to Turkey's Mediterranean coast.

Issues at stake

- **Tengiz oilfield**: four of the total eight pipeline projects listed above aimed to connect the Tengiz oilfield to the European market. The Tengiz field was discovered in 1979 and amounts to one of the biggest hydrocarbon discoveries in recent history. Its reserves are estimated at between six billion and nine billion barrels. The field started being developed in 1993, with US company Chevron Texaco holding fifty percent of its shares. Controlling its route to the market meant controlling a great portion of the total flow of oil from Central Asia
- **Azeri oil**: in the early 1990s, Baku had opened up its national industry to foreign capital; substantial reserves had been found in the littoral waters claimed by Azerbaijan. Baku's oil was appealing to Western companies because its export did not require the delicate task of building a trans-Caspian pipeline route.
- **Iran's role as a transport hub**: as it was widely recognised by politicians and experts in the oil sector, Iran was the most economical and sensible transport route for several oil fields in Central Asia. Transport through Iranian territory would not require the construction of expensive and environmentally dangerous pipelines on the Caspian seabed; once in Iranian territory, Central Asian oil could be diverted either southward to warm water ports on the Persian Gulf, or westwards through an existing pipeline network connecting Iran and Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea.
- **Caspian Sea Status**: from the above issues, we can deduce the overarching importance that the legal status of the Caspian Sea assumed in the mid 1990s. It mattered in settling countries' claims to the right to develop newly found reserves; it also mattered to decide ownership of the seabed, and therefore control over the potential pipeline routes crossing the Sea; lastly, it mattered for players like Iran and

Russia who were to be side-lined by the trans-Caspian routes and, depending on the result of the legal dispute, could claim veto powers on any seabed construction.

Mayor Players

- **Russia**: Moscow favoured an array of pipeline projects that for the most part circumvented the Caspian Sea and transited through its territory, whether to its own Black Sea ports or southward to Georgia and Azerbaijan. Both Turkey and Iran are featured in Russia's pipeline project as endpoints of Central Asian oil routes, whether as consumers or as exporters towards the extra-regional market. This allowed Russia to maintain a close control on intra-regional oil flows without completely alienating and cutting off important neighbours such as Ankara and Tehran.
- **Kazakhstan**: Kazakhstan was part of all of Russia's proposed pipeline project as a member of the Caspian Consortium. At the same time, it was also proposing its own alternative routes southwards through Turkmenistan to Iran. It was also featured in Turkey's proposed trans-Caspian pipeline linking Tengiz to Iran and then to Turkey. It was to Kazakhstan's advantage to support as many alternative projects as possible to be able to export its oil through several routes and avoid being dependent on a single transport route, especially Russia. At the same time, Kazakhstan could not deny its powerful neighbour a share in the oil flow from Tengiz.
- **Turkey**: Ankara's main objective was securing its unrivalled position as the sole transport hub for Central Asian oil towards Europe. In this regard, Turkey was agnostic towards the internal route, whether northwards through Russia and Georgia, across the Caspian or southward through Iran. The major route that Turkey opposed was the Tengiz Black Sea pipeline which would have cut Turkey off from European

markets in favour of Russia. Environmental worries concerning increased oil tank traffic in the Bosporus Sea were also a concern.

- **Azerbaijan**: Baku, much like Kazakhstan, had to play a two-minded game of both looking after its commercial interests and appeasing a powerful neighbour, namely Iran. It favoured the construction of at least two routes, one that passed through Iran and one that bypassed its territory. Azerbaijan's other objective was preventing any pipeline from crossing Armenian or Karabakh territory, to further Yerevan's international isolation even after the 1994 truce in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- **Iran**: Tehran's major goal was to become the crossroad for as many oil pipelines as possible, connecting the eastern shore of the Caspian with the western shores, and Central Asia with the Persian Gulf. For this reason, Iran's interests were in conflict with Russia's geo-energy calculations, but not necessarily with Turkey's.
- **United States**: The main goal of the Unites States was to secure the oil supply from Central Asia to western Europe through countries it considered stable and politically allied. Preventing any of the proposed pipelines from passing through Iran's territory, which was deemed a political enemy of Washington and Europe, was the paramount goal. The United States' second goal was preventing Russia from monopolising the oil and gas market by opening a second direct route Baku-Ceyhan-Europe.[549]

As we have been able to see from the breakdown above, most regional states were not uniquely opposed to pipeline routes through Iran; countries such as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan considered them a safeguard against Russia's monopoly and a way to break through the USSR legacy of infrastructure dependency on Moscow.[550] Baku, Ankara, and Moscow were also not strongly objected to allowing oil passage through Iranian territory,

[549] BBC Monitoring. 'US does not rule out construction of two pipelines supplying Europe'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 67.
[550] BBC Monitoring. 'New Pipeline to Carry Turkmen gas to Iran'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 4.

but aimed to confine Iran to a peripheral role in the new regional infrastructure grid rather than elevating it to the transport hub it aspired to be. It was only Washington who was uniquely opposed to any new construction of oil or gas pipelines crossing Iranian territory and waters, even if this implied giving up on the warm water access for Central Asian oil indefinitely given the deterioration of the political situation in Afghanistan.

Two examples showcase the above-mentioned conflict of interests that furthered Iran's regional isolation in the hydrocarbon and infrastructure market. Turkmenistan's gas export plan is a clear example of the effectiveness of American interference in the market to disadvantage Iran. The ups and downs surrounding Azerbaijan's oil highlights both the centrality of the Caspian dispute, as well as regional states' inclination towards partnering with Iran, which was opposed by political and diplomatic means by Washington;[551] it also provides an overview of the politicisation of the Central Asia-Europe pipeline route. Regional rivalry between Turkey, Iran, and Russia was such that it was possible for the US to completely exclude Iran without becoming too dependent in the short-term on either Turkey or Russia as a regional partner. The wholesale exclusion of Iran despite the wishes of regional states and against the principles of economising the hydrocarbon market brewed in the long term further political instability in the region and deepened European reliance on Russian gas.

In 1994, Iran, Turkey, and Turkmenistan were cooperating on establishing new links for the existing Iran-Turkey gas pipeline that would have streamlined export of Turkmen

[551] The US embassy declared in Jan 1995 that the US government was opposed to Iranian participation in consortium (BBC Monitoring. 'Iran accuses US of interference over Azeri oil deal'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 54). Following the incident, Iranian officials claimed that pressure from US officials caused Azerbaijan to pull out of the deal (BBC Monitoring. 'US opposes Iranian membership of Azeri oil deal, says official'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 59). This was followed by the announcement two month later that US and Turkish companies had been officially awarded a share of the new Azeri consortium, and Iran had been definitively excluded (BBC Monitoring. 'US and Turkey set to gain oil shares in Azeri consortium'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 64).

gas to Europe.[552] However, as early as May 1994, Iranian officials raised concerns surrounding US interference in the construction progress, claiming that the Turkmen president's 'orders to proceed with construction were ignored by lower chain of command due to obstacles created by Washington'.[553] This, however, did not deter Turkmenistan from proceeding with the deal,[554] nor did it deter Russia and Kazakhstan from acquiring a share in the project.[555] At the start of 1995, Turkey still maintained its interest in aiding exports of Turkmen gas via Iran,[556] highlighting the continued good disposition of regional powers towards Tehran's participation in the regional energy market. The situation rapidly changed in the second half of 1995, when Moscow's perception of Iran's accrued influence on regional energy turned sour. One Russian newspaper reported that the Turkmen-Iranian friendship was seen as a threat to Moscow's grip on the near abroad, claiming: 'the Turkmen-Iranian plans to transport natural gas to Europe via Iran seriously infringe on the interests of Russia'.[557] Nevertheless, in September 1995 the two countries signed an accord for the financing of 140km of gas pipeline linking the Korpedzhe gas deposit with the Iranian town of Kord Kuy.[558] It should be noted that the scale of the project (140km of pipelines compared to the thousands km of the proposed pipelines reviewed in the list above) and the cost of the project (190m against estimated billions for the other proposals) indicate that the US and Russia were not prepared to tolerate any inroads by Iran in the regional energy market, no matter how modest. In 1997, Turkmenistan 'welcomed US decisions not to block Iranian pipeline' as 'American authorities claim have found no ground to oppose pipeline

[552] BBC Monitoring. 'Ministers gives green light to gas pipeline to Europe'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 13.
[553] BBC Monitoring. 'Turkmenistan says gas pipeline on course'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 148.
[554] BBC Monitoring. 'Turkmenistan and Iran sign natural gas pipeline deal'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 33.
[555] BBC Monitoring. 'Agreement signed on financing Turkmen gas project'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 53.
[556] BBC Monitoring. 'Turkish Foreign Minister stressed interest in Turkmen gas'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 78.
[557] BBC Monitoring. 'Russian newspaper sees Moscow link with Ashkhabad protest rally'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 80.
[558] BBC Monitoring. 'Turkmen-Iranian pipeline accord signed'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 86.

project under 1996 sanction act'.[559] This shows how the 1995-1996 US sanctions tilted the playing field in favour of the US, further reducing Iran's prospects for economic partnerships in the region. Part of the reason for Washington's lenience may be found in the limited scale of the project, as well as in the news of forthcoming Shell participation in the construction of the 200km pipeline,[560] which fast-tracked the final completion of the project in December 1997.[561] However, this remained the only significant pipeline project connecting Iran with Central Asian states to be completed during the decade. American antagonism towards further Iranian participation in the market became even more pronounced by 1999. US officials reportedly told Uzbek counterparts that 'Washington supported Tashkent's efforts to export through Russia and the Caucasus but opposes the use of Iran as a transit route'.[562] US and Russian interests post-1995 thus converged overall towards the wholesale opposition of the Iranian route in favour of the costlier northern route through Russia, in spite of Russia's continued opposition for the US-backed pipeline passing through Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan.

If Turkey was initially optimistic towards Iran's participation in the energy market in 1994, a look at the evolution of Iran-Turkey cooperation and rivalry on the Azerbaijani oil market will show a different outlook. Much like the case of Turkmenistan, Iran and Azerbaijan were set to conduct a joint oil exploration programme in 1994.[563] After closing a lucrative deal with Western companies,[564] Azerbaijani State Oil Company (SOCAR) resorted to give a five percent share out of its twenty percent share in the Chirag field project

[559] BBC Monitoring. 'Turkmenistan welcomes US decisions not to block Iranian pipeline'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 183.
[560] BBC Monitoring. 'Shell se to head consortium to build Turkmen gas pipeline'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 201.
[561] BBC Monitoring. 'Turkmen-Iranian gas pipeline completed'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 203.
[562] BBC Monitoring. 'USA opposed Uzbek oil exports through Iran'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 275.
[563] BBC Monitoring. 'Joint oil exploration programme with Iran'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 22.
[564] BBC Monitoring. 'Final agreement on Caspian oil deal said to be close'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 27.

to Iran due to shortages in national finances,[565] underscoring Baku's willingness to include its cumbersome neighbour in the oil bonanza. However, by 1995 Iran's participation in the consortium was rescinded.[566] Tehran protested as the US embassy in Baku , claiming that the US government was opposed to Iranian participation in consortium and had put pressure on American and non-American companies to pull out.[567] This did not deter Baku from attempting to continue a partnership with Iran on other Caspian developments. [568] Nevertheless, by then Washington started to significantly increase its pressure on regional partners to exclude Iran from the market. Much like the case with Turkmenistan, Washington tilted the scale by offering Turkish authorities equal, if not higher, returns on their investments by excluding Tehran. Yet Washington's warnings were not enough to fully dissuade Azerbaijan from the expediency of keeping Tehran appeased. In July 1995, Baku proposed a five to ten percent share participation to the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) in a new development (Shah Deniz field),[569] although Iran did not formally accept the joint venture until March 1996.[570] Iran was also dealing with its own internal conflicts; it was rumoured that the delay on the Shah Deniz field exploration was the result of a deep conflict between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Oil, where the latter favoured a profit-maximising approach to the question of oil exploration in the Caspian, while the former maintained that Iran should abstain from partaking in any joint venture lest it undermined its principled position on resolving the issue of the division of the Caspian Sea.[571] This rumour was supported by the allegations concerning such a split on an Iranian

[565] BBC Monitoring. 'Baku gives Iran 5% stake in Caspian oil deal'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 44.
[566] BBC Monitoring. 'Azerbaijan oil consortium fails to endorse share for Iran'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 58.
[567] BBC Monitoring. 'Iran accuses US of interference over Azeri oil deal'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 54; BBC Monitoring. 'US opposes Iranian membership of Azeri oil deal, says official'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 59.
[568] BBC Monitoring. 'Azeri oil company to launch Caspian survey for Iran'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 59.
[569] BBC Monitoring. 'Iran considers new Azeri oil project'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 77.
[570] BBC Monitoring. 'Baku says Iran is to join the Shahdeniz consortium'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 111.
[571] BBC Monitoring. 'Iran and Azerbaijan set up jointed drilling venture'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 104.

paper in 1996 concerning Iran's politically questionable decision to enter in a consortium with Azerbaijan.[572]

By late 1995, it was clear that Baku was under immense pressure from both the US-Turkish side and the Russian side; in October, the consortium approved two pipeline routes, one through Georgia and one through Chechnya (Russia), furthering the isolation of Iran.[573] In 1996, Washington took a firmer stance on oil export routes, publicly backing the Turkish route over the Russian one.[574] Russia's position was further weakened in 1997 when breakaway rebel republic of Chechnya attempted to cut a direct deal with Baku on establishing a new pipeline disconnected from the Russian network.[575] Due to the on-going conflict in Chechnya, however, the viability of the northern route came under scrutiny. President Aliev declared its backing for the Turkish-American initiative, which was met with outrage from Tehran.[576] By 1998, most regional were in favour of the Turkish route: Georgia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and, crucially, Turkmenistan all expressed their support for Washington's favoured route.[577] This route planned to bypass Iranian and Russian territory, as we have seen above, via a proposed underwater pipeline connecting Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan's oilfields directly with Baku. In 1998, Russia and Iran found themselves suddenly on the same losing side of the pipeline equation: their warnings that 'economic considerations should prevail' and that 'pipelines should not be politicised' fell on deaf ears,[578] partially due to Russia's earlier efforts to marginalise Iran

[572] BBC Monitoring. 'Iranian paper questions wisdom of joining oil project'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 126.
[573] BBC Monitoring. 'Azeri Consortium compromises on Azeri oil route'. *Inside Central Asia*., no. 91.
[574] BBC Monitoring. 'Turkey gains US backing on issues of Caspian oil transport'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 122.
[575] BBC Monitoring. 'Chechnya set to cut Russia out of Azeri oil export deal'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 158.
[576] BBC Monitoring. 'Iran accuses Aliyev of 'historic error''. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 167; BBC Monitoring. 'Azeri President opts for oil export via Turkey'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 171.
[577] BBC Monitoring. 'Five regional nations support oil export via Turkey'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 213; BBC Monitoring. 'Nazarbayev's visit to the US culminates with oil pipeline accord'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 306.
[578] BBC Monitoring. 'Turkish oil route wins the backing of five regional powers'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 247.

instead of forming a united front with Tehran against Washington's extra-regional interference.

The Caspian Sea dispute: Moscow's abandonment of the Russo-Iranian entente

The Caspian Sea Dispute was foundational to the development of regional politics in Central Asia from 1994 onwards because, for many of the countries involved, it was a matter of economic survival. The dispute involved the five littoral countries – Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. The crux of the matter revolved around whether the Caspian Sea should be considered an enclosed sea or a lake, and thus whether countries on its shores should divide its waters into national sectors delimitated by the projection of land borders, or in equal sectors. Iran and Russia had the most to lose by a division into national sectors, as some of the richest deposits known at the time would fall within the national sectors of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. As it was hinted in the discussion above, each country's position on the division of sea waters shifted between 1994 and 1999 to reflect their changing, and sometimes conflicting, political, and economic interests in hydrocarbon exploitation and export. The inability of regional countries to reach an agreement was caused by the geographical distribution of the major reserves of hydrocarbons in the territorial waters claimed by the less politically influent states – Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and, to a lesser extent, Turkmenistan – leaving Iran and Russia out of the oil bonanza. This changed in the late 1990s, with new discoveries of deposits in the Russian section. Russia and Iran's drive to capitalise on the sudden windfall of profits was driven by the dire state of the national finances of the ex-USSR states, as well as of post-war Iran. The short-sightedness of regional leaders, blinded by the prospect of easy monetisation, allowed the market to be taken over by European and American energy companies, and, with that, opened the region

to increasing US political influence. This process was key to shaping the region for the decades to come, as the liberal internationalist policy that the United States were pursuing in the 1990s empowered neo-communist regimes and aggravated the divide between them and the people they were ruling. Washington's fear of fundamentalism found an echo-chamber in people such as Uzbek President Karimov, precipitating the regional isolation of Tehran after 1995.

But the increasing geopolitical weight of the United States had the most effect in the delicate balance of Russo-Iranian relations. After the Russo-Iranian rapprochement of 1993-1994 on a shared solution to the Tajik Civil War seen in Chapter, the 1995-6 US sanctions, as well as the changing landscape of the energy prospects in Central Asia drove a new wedge between the two tentative regional partners. The Clinton administration-imposed trade restrictions on Iranian oil imports in March 1995 with the Executive Orders 12957 and followed up in May 1995 to extend the prohibition to several other economic sectors, banning virtually all Iranian-made goods from the US market under the Executive Order 12959.[579]

While Russia's cooling towards Iran can be for the most part explained by domestic and regional factors, the forceful entrance of the United States in Central Asia after 1995 contributed to reshape decisively Russia's opportunity costs in favour of ditching its new-found Iranian partner. 1995 thus represents a watershed year in the political development of Central Asia because Washington stepped up its economic and political involvement in the region to contain Iran. The effect that American influence had in changing the regional ecosystem between 1994 and 1999 are fundamental to understanding why Iran's foreign

[579]': Prohibiting Certain Transactions with Respect to the Development of Iranian Petroleum Resources'. Federal Register, 17 Mar. 1995. 'Executive Order 12959: Prohibiting Certain Transactions with Respect to Iran'. Federal Register, 9 May 1995.

policy shifted back from Pan-Iranism during the Tajik civil war to Pan-Islamism during the IMU insurgency.

If in the previous section we have traced the active involvement of Washington in excluding Iran from profitable hydrocarbon explorations and energy transport routes by leveraging the conflicting economic interests of Tehran, Ankara, and Moscow, an overview of the Caspian dispute will highlight the endogenous regional drives that brought to an abrupt end the Russo-Iranian partnership that had been established during the last years of the Tajik civil war (1994-1997). Russia was faced by a very similar dilemma as the one facing Iran's executives. Its foreign policy imperatives were in direct conflict with the course of action that would have maximised its earnings in a time of dire need. Russia wanted to get the ex-USSR Republics to acknowledge its claim to dominance in the near abroad by imposing its preferred division of the sea Caspian, one that in the long term would have economically benefitted both Moscow and Tehran.[580] However, by stalling on the demarcation of territorial waters, Russian companies were losing out on profits that Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan were already extracting with the aid of western companies.[581] In 1994, this conflict of interest caused a public disagreement between Russia's Energy and Foreign Minister, where the former backed Russian company LUKoil's participation in the Chirag field in Azerbaijan, while the latter opposed it on the basis that it contradicted Russia's official position that no exploration should be conducted until the legal status of the Caspian Sea was settled.[582] Yeltsin eventually ruled in favour of LUKoil's participation, undermining Russia's legal position.[583]

[580] BBC Monitoring. 'Russia opposes unilateral Caspian oil deals'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 21.
[581] BBC Monitoring. 'Russian oil officials concerned at Caspian developments'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 26.
[582] BBC Monitoring. 'Russian minister proposes new Caspian oil committee'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 38.
[583] BBC Monitoring. 'Yeltsin said to have ruled in favour of Caspian oil deal'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 45.

This decision was also a testament to the degree of political influence that business tycoons had in the political process in Russia at the time. It soon became evident, however, that Russia was willing to forego legal procedures only when it guaranteed a direct return in profits: in 1995, Moscow vocally opposed Baku's unilateral decision to invite a foreign consortium in the Caspian Sea, deeming it a 'threat to Russia's interests'.[584] This was referring to Azerbaijan's consortium which, as we saw in the last section, granted a total of eighty percent shares to Turkish, European, and American companies, and eventually excluded Iran under US pressure. Azerbaijan's move solidified the division among the littoral countries, with Russia, Iran, and Turkmenistan arguing for legal settlement before exploitation, and Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan aiming to extract as much revenue as possible during the legal stalemate.

One would expect that the sudden convergence in Russia and Iran's interests in keeping western companies out of the Caspian would solidify Tehran-Moscow relation. However, there were continuous signals that Moscow's line would keep on faltering at the prospect of immediate profits. In August 1995, officials gave conflicting statements on Russia's dedication to the shared Russo-Iranian line on the Caspian.[585] One official went as far as to offer a revision to the 1940s Soviet-Iranian treaty, the legal basis for Moscow and Tehran's claims to equal shares in the sea, in exchange for routing Azerbaijan's oil through the proposed northern pipeline via Russian territory.[586] This incident highlights the extent to which the geopolitical fight for export routes underlined every other aspect of the energy market in Central Asia at the time. Russia attempted to keep a foot in two shoes by signing

[584] BBC Monitoring. 'Russia believes that Azerbaijan's unilateral decision to invite a foreign consortium to develop some of the offshore oilfields in its region of the Caspian Sea represents a threat to Russia's interests'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 79.
[585] BBC Monitoring. 'Russia struggles with dual role in the Caspian'. *Inside Central Asia*, no 93.
[586] BBC Monitoring. 'Moscow gives conflicting signals on Soviet Iranian treaty'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 85.

a joint communique on the Caspian status with Iran while denying it ran contrary to LUKoil's actions;[587] less than a month later, a Russian diplomate publicly contradicted this stance by arguing that Russia was entitled to explore the Caspian.[588] It was only after Baku's exclusion of LUKoil from a new Caspian project in 1996,[589] that Russia started to close ranks with Turkmenistan and Iran again,[590] and by mid-1997 it had withdrawn from Azerbaijan's projects.[591] But this return to a principled foreign policy did not last: by 1998, Russia had taken the crucial decision of agreeing to a division of the Caspian Sea into national sectors: Russia settled with Kazakhstan on their sector delimitation,[592] as Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan agreed on theirs,[593] while Tehran rejected the settlement.[594] This revision in Moscow's stance was a fatal blow to the frail Moscow-Tehran partnership:

> Iran News claims that changes in the Caspian policy correspond with the strengthening of 'rightists' in Kremlin, accused to favour economic benefits over foreign policy. A Moscow-based paper claims that this change of heart may be motivated by a possible discovery of large oil deposits of water in country's territorial water.[595]

Hence, by 1999 when the IMU insurgency took place, not only had Iran been cut out of the export route for Turkmen gas and Kazakh oil to Europe, but it had also been diplomatically abandoned by Russia on the Caspian dispute. This was the heights of Iran's regional isolation. Though Iran and Russia did start converging again in 2000-2001,[596] this took place

[587] BBC Monitoring. 'Iran and Russia sign joint communique on Caspian status'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 93.
[588] BBC Monitoring. 'Russia entitled to explore Caspian, says diplomat'. *Inside central Asia*, no. 95.
[589] BBC Monitoring, 'Baku refuses Russian oil company stake in new Caspian project'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 149.
[590] BBC Monitoring. 'Caspian meeting fails to produce agreement on legal status'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 147.
[591] BBC Monitoring. 'Turkmen and Russian leaders see eye to eye on Caspian' *Inside Central Asia*, no. 184.
[592] BBC Monitoring. 'Russia and Kazakhstan agree to divide Caspian seabed'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 218.
[593] BBC Monitoring. 'Baku and Ashkhabad move to settle row of Caspian Sea'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 157.
[594] BBC Monitoring. 'Russia opts for division of Caspian into national sectors'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 210.
[595] BBC Monitoring. 'Iranian daily slams Russia over move to resolve Caspian status'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 234.
[596] BBC Monitoring. 'Russia modifies its position on division of Caspian Sea'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 333; BBC Monitoring. 'Russia, Iran move closer on Caspian status issue'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 366.

after Putin's election to the presidency, highlighting just how devastating the profit maximising policy pursued by the Yeltsin administration in 1995-1999 had been for Iran's stance in the region.

What emerges from this analysis of the geoenergy and geopolitics of Central Asia between 1994-1999 is the extreme diplomatic and economic weakness of Iran. In spite of Tehran's concerted efforts to build lasting economic, cultural, and diplomatic partnerships with Central Asian states, as we have seen in Chapter 3 and 4, the account presented above shows the increasing isolation of the Islamic Republic from the regional energy developments. Tehran failed to turn the momentum of Russia's unpopularity in the early 1990s in its favour. Instead, its rivalry with Uzbekistan over regional hegemony spoiled Iran's relationship with the other republics, leading them back to into the fold of Moscow's influence following the rise of politically subversive Islamist movements in the region after 1995.

Iran and Russia's entente in the early 1990s follows the old power politics logic of 19th century imperial conquests. Russia was temporary weakened on the eve of the dissolution of the USSR, and there was a real possibility at the time that its influence on the 'near abroad' might be replaced by to new regional security arrangements marginalising Russia. For these reasons, Moscow attempted to find common ground with Tehran, hoping that by getting the Iranian regime on board with the regional status quo its chances of maintaining the existing power arrangements would increase. However, from the analysis of the unfolding of the Caspian littoral dispute, it also emerged that Russia did not have the power to coerce other littoral states to adopt its preferred policy line. Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan's decision to proceed with oilfield exploitations despite Russian complaints and threats is a clear image of the sway of direct foreign investments in the region at the time.

Russia eventually decided to abandon Iran when it contradicted the joint Tehran-Moscow policy line on the legal status of the Caspian Sea. As we have seen in the section above, Moscow was facing the same choices as Tehran: the choice between a principled foreign policy and the immediate acquisition of much needed liquidity coming from participation in the new oilfields. While both wavered, by 1997-98 Russia made a decisive turn in favour of the logic of profit maximisation. Moscow's choice showed that economics trumped foreign policy. This is to be expected in a post-revolutionary regime that had essentially lost the ideological battle against capitalism and had paid with the disintegration of its previous political regime. Iran took a different approach to the choice between profit and principles. Overall, the line of the Foreign Ministry trumped over the line of the Ministry of Oil. Iran maintained an ideologically driven foreign policy line on the Caspian. On the other hand, Tehran was faced with a much higher opportunity cost in abandoning its principles because it was a revolutionary regime whose ideological zeal had not yet peaked. Moreover, while Russia was being slowly co-opted into the anti-Iranian coalition by Washington's manoeuvres, Iran's ostracization from the evolving energy market meant that it was faced with no financial incentive to abandon its principled position.

The fallout of the Russo-Iranian entente at the end of the 1990s reflects two compounding factors: Central Asian leaders' distrust for Iran's brand of Islamism, and immutable geographical constraints determined by Iran's position at the cusp of Eurasia. As we have seen in Chapter 2, Iran's position as the highway of Central Asia to the Mediterranean meant that the relative strength and weakness of the Iranian state would determine whether it took an expansionary stance vis-à-vis Central Asia, or whether it would be swept by raids of nomadic kingdoms. Tehran's policymakers insisted on the geographical advantage of Iran's geography in Eurasia. History, on the other hand, tells us that being the

central junction of three different regions is a defensively weak position and one from which Iran cannot exercise any leverage unless it trespasses into other states' territories.

The increase in Tehran's isolation after 1995 and its exclusion from the gains of the oil bonanza decreased the opportunity cost of the adoption of a forward defence strategy that could counter Tehran's rising insecurity. Due to the history and the geography of the Iranian state, the best forward defence strategy was the projection of influence in the historic region of Transoxiana (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan). Tehran's attempt to leverage its soft power through the policy of Pan-Iranism failed to create enough regional support to counter Washington's anti-Iranian campaign. This created the conditions for the underlying shift in Iran's interests from the promotion of regional stability to the promotion of regional instability. We have seen this shift in the last two sections of Chapter 4 and chapter 5. In the mid 90s, Tehran's policy to Central Asia was dominated by Pan-Iranism because the logic of bilateral relations it promoted was best suited to promote regional stability and insulate Iran from the potential spill overs of political and ethnic strife in the neighbourhood. This policy failed to increase Iran's political and economic security in the region because it failed to grow its influence beyond its borders. With increasing intrusions of Washington in the balance of power of Central Asia through careful manipulation of the region's energy market, Iran switched to a more aggressive version of the forward defence strategy, facilitated by the adoption of the readily available Pan-Islamic logic.

This new phase saw Iran's continued verbal commitment to reining in the security threats in the region in its high-level diplomatic interactions with key players such as Russia; this was contradicted by covert and overt sympathy for the indigenous Islamist insurrections in the region, such as IMU. Iran did not completely turn to the promotion of instability in the region in this period because it had neither the political will nor the means to establish

proxies in neighbouring countries. We saw it did not have the means, as its own military resources were depleted by ten years of war against Iraq; it did not have the will because Iran's global posture was dominated by Khatami's attempt to reconcile with Europe through his Dialogue among Civilisations (see Chapter 5). Nevertheless, the resurgence of Pan-Islamic policies on minor issues such as IMU's insurgency confirms its correlation with a tilt in Iran's regional interests in favour of instability and political change, as we saw in 1989-1991. What is key in the resurgence of Pan-Islamism in the late 90s is the change in the underlying understanding of Iran's ontological security that accompanied it.

Pan-Islamism in 1989 was the transnational promotion of Islamic revolution. By 1999, the sum of Iran's political developments and its increasing regional isolation had changed its meaning to the proliferation of transnational threats. These threats have the dual purpose of drawing attention away from Iran's domestic conflicts and increasing Iran's political influence beyond its borders. Understanding this conceptual shift is incredibly important to understand the way in which the Iranian security apparatuses deconflict the ideological contradiction between its anti-imperialism and Pan-Islamic call and the neo-imperial political and military dynamics that the establishment of proxies creates. The reconceptualization of Pan-Islamism in the late 90s blurs the line between offence and defence and between imperial and anti-imperial policy.

This shift in the meaning Pan-Islamism raises questions on the possibility of conducting truly anti-imperialist policies in a post-imperial nation that never reckoned with its imperial past. Where does the line between 'liberation' and 'influence' end for the IRGC? The zero-sum mentality precipitated by Iran's regional isolation and thus its increased vulnerability to external and internal threats made the most ideological faction also the hardest proponents of realpolitik, and turned Khatami's pragmatism into the most liberal

and, in a sense, the most principled one. What does this mean for this thesis's intention to reconcile the ideology vs. pragmatism debate? What is an ideological foreign policy, and what is a pragmatic one?

Pragmatism and ideology are not mutually exclusive, nor they do lay on opposite sides of the same spectrum. This thesis's claim that all foreign policy is ideological by definition matters. This is postulated in Chapter 1 by the definition of state ideology as the structure that mediates between ideational and material factors and enabled their causal effects on foreign policy making. The statement that any foreign policy choice is ideological becomes a tautology because no information can be conceptualised outside of a pre-existing ideology. A foreign policy decision can be both ideological and pragmatic; the opposite of pragmatic is not ideological but idealistic. Ideological means necessarily mediating the raw information coming from the external world through a set of normative principles ordered in a well-defined conceptual architecture. Idealistic, on the other hand, indicates a decision based on a partial, distorted, or misconstrued understanding of the state of affairs. A decision, thus, can be either ideological and pragmatic or ideological and idealistic.

There can be no absolute transcendence of ideology in politics: the abandonment of one ideology just means the substation with another one, and, if no new ideology is readily available, then it means that decisionmakers are relying only on their gut instinct and on pure chance to make sense of potentially contradicting information. Some may claim that ideology necessarily distorts the facts in so far as it mediates between them and the policy outcome. To this I reply that ideology distorts the facts in the same way as the human intellect necessarily distorts the raw sensory inputs that make up our only way to understand the outside world, insofar as it mediates outer perception. There is thus an important distinction between idiosyncrasies and distortion: distortion leads to a wrong descriptive

judgement; idiosyncrasy leads to diverging normative judgements. Idealism is the subjugation of the material to the ideational which leads to the improper assessments of the balance of power in the international system, and to dangerous choices on part of decisionmakers. Ideology, on the other hand, is akin to the categorical imperative of human cognition. It provides states with a guiding set of normative premises to decipher the totality of the international system.

Closing the loop: how geopolitical factors affect ideology

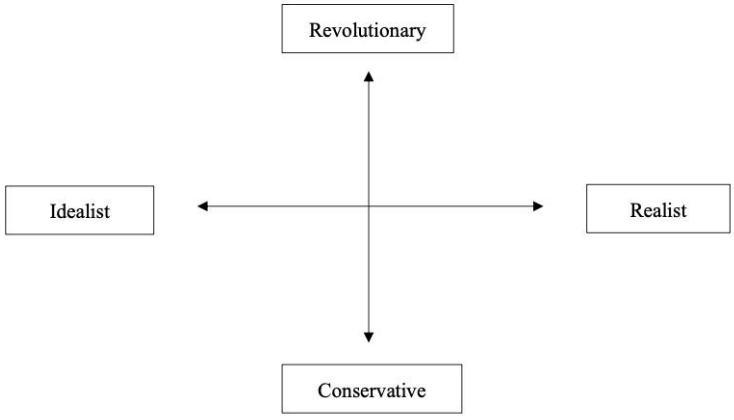
The section above summarized the temporal correlation between Iran's increasing isolation and its shift from Pan-Iranism to Pan-Islamism. It teased out the key insight of this last chapter, namely the underlying role that geopolitical factors play in attuning and sometimes radically changing parts of Iran's state ideology. The previous three case studies focused on the causal relationship between ideology and policy outcomes. They highlighted the greater accuracy of the Four Pillar model in describing Iran's foreign policy during key pivotal points. They also emphasised the relationship between pre-existing ideological models and the choices available to policymakers.

This section will explain why these shifts took place in the first place. It will focus on the way in which geopolitics causes changes in the structure of state ideology, which then allow a state to break away from restrictive policy choices presented by previous ideological commitments. To understand this, we need to go back to the theoretical models presented in Chapter 2. The balance between the four pillars (see Fig. 2) affects the upper vertex of the model, namely the image of Iran in the international system. The way in which other actors perceive the Islamic Republic is thus determined by the domestic balancing act between the contradictory pulls of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism. Geometrically, the four pillars are

themselves balancing on the lower vertex, regime survival. This means that at its roots, shifts between Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism reflect the conflict between alternative conceptions of the ontological security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The persistence of the Pan-Iranian vs. Pan-Islamic debate in foreign policy during the Tajik Civil War even as Iran's regional interests were clearly aligned in favour of the bilateralism of Pan-Iranism is evidence of a more foundational debate on the survival of the revolutionary regime. The misalignment between different state apparatuses that was hinted at in the literature is the most visible effect this debate. The two camps disagree on whether the survival of the Iranian state should have priority over the survival of the Islamic Republic, and vice-versa. This conflict is captured in the two Triangular models of Pan-Iranism and Pan-Islamism (see Fig. 3 and 4). In the Pan-Islamic model, the objective is the survival of the *Islamic* state of Iran, while in the Pan-Iranian model the objective is the survival of the *Iranian* Islamic state. In the first case, the preservation of the character of the regime is equated with the survival of the Iranian state; in the second case, the ability of the Iranian state to govern independently, both in terms of political independence and in terms of economic self-sufficiency is posed as a pre-condition for the existence of an Islamic Republic.

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the second part of the model, the Two Axis model (see Fig. 5, reproposed below) accounts for the external causes that govern the shift between different triangular models, and thus the shift between alternative strategies to safeguard the Iranian regime. One of the most important factors in the competition between Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism is the identification of imminent threats to the Islamic Republic. This process is contained in the Two Axis model: changes in Iranian decisionmakers' perception of the hostility of the international environment to the Islamic Republic can be determined by a shift on the horizontal axis (representing Iran's perception of the permeability of the regional environment to revolutionism) or a shift on the vertical axis (representing Iran's

perception of how closely the regional environment aligns with the ideals of the revolution). Using this model, we can explain the nature of the competition between the foreign ministry and the security apparatuses as promoting alternative visions of regime stability. During the 80s, Khomeini's revolutionism posed Iran squarely in the top left quadrant, dominated by the assumption that the international system is unjust, but change is possible. After the end of the Cold War and the fall of the USSR, Iran started to move from the top left quadrant towards the top right quadrant, as it realised that it had been unable to export its model of Islamic Revolution elsewhere. The foreign ministry, answering to President Rafsanjani, and the security apparatuses, answering to Supreme Leader Khamenei, differed in their expectations of the effect that further changes and destabilisations in Central Asia could have for the political and military security of Iran, and for the likelihood of the spread of revolutions.



Legend of Axes:

Idealist: holds that change in the international system is possible

Realist: holds that change in the international system is impossible

Revolutionary: holds that the current international system is unjust

Conservative: holds that the current international system is just / the lesser evil

Figure 5: Two-axis model; it specifies the mechanisms through which a shift in the Four Pillar model takes place

Though it is difficult to provide definitive proof for the hypothesis of a rift between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the security apparatuses, there are several clues that support this claim. Firstly, the first-hand account of the fact that the MFA and the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and National Security (MOIS) pursued opposite foreign policies during the Tajik civil war:

> Even within Iran's government itself there were divergent interests and forces at play when it came to Tajikistan. In discussions with a former Iranian Foreign Ministry official, an interesting anecdote relating to the complexity and dual tracks of Iran's foreign policy was made. According to this official, Iran's Foreign Ministry placed its support behind all opposition elements, however at the same time Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and National Security (MOIS) was also providing its own backing and support solely to the Islamist elements of the opposition in the hope they would eventually gain power over the secular, democratic, and nationalist opposition elements.[597]

Traces of the strife between the MFA and the MOIS were visible after 1996 in various settings in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Reports of the use of spies in diplomatic rows between Iran and Azerbaijan increase in frequency after 1996.[598] The timing of the use of such covert policy instruments often conflicted with, and at times outright sabotages, Iran's commercial and diplomatic efforts in the region. One key example of this discord includes the case of three Iranian businessmen discovered spying on Kazakhstan on the verge of a summit on the status of the Caspian Sea.[599]

Beyond the circumstantial evidence of the employment of covert political strategies to the detriment of the pragmatic image that Rafsanjani had attempted to cultivate in Central Asia, two western intelligence reports indicate that Iran's covert manoeuvres in the region remained high, such as attempts to seize military and nuclear technology, even in 1992, a

[597] Brenton, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
[598] 'Tajikistan and Iran in tit-for -tat expulsion'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 140; BBC Monitoring. 'Azeris accuse Iranian embassy of spying'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 278. BBC Monitoring. 'Kyrgyzstan voices concern to Iran over secret arms shipment'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 245.
[599] BBC Monitoring. 'Kazakhstan to expel three Iranians accused of spying'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 215; BBC Monitoring' BBC Monitoring. 'Caspian status and Iranian spy cases top agenda and talks in Tehran'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 214.

year which, according to my previous analysis, was characterized by a strong official turn in favour of Pan-Iranism:

> The US secretary of state, James Baker, is preparing a new Islamic strategy to counter growing Iranian influence in the southern Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union, after intelligence reports of big arms transfers to Iran from ex-Soviet stocks […] the latest Soviet military equipment had been shipped to Iran […] "There is now a struggle for the soul of central Asia, and Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the US will all play a part," Graham Fuller, the CIA's former senior analyst for Middle Eastern affairs, told the New York Times this week. [600]

> British intelligence experts are seriously concerned at the possibility of the creation of an Islamic union of Near Eastern states and states of the former USSR's Central Asian republics […] The IAEA has already obtained data - as yet unconfirmed - that recruiters have appeared in Tajikistan offering major contracts to local [nuclear] scientists. According to the information from British sources, Iran is currently offering many goods in exchange for Soviet nuclear technology and equipment.[601]

The competition between MFA and MOIS should be seen as part of a wider struggle for the control of state apparatuses between reformist (which I also refer to as moderate) and conservative (which I also refer to as principalist) faction of the Iranian policymaking establishment. This started with the constitutional amendments of 1989 and the establishment of the Second Republic, where Presidential executive powers were reinforced with the abolishment of the position of Prime Minister. This gave rise to the tension between the Iranian Presidential post and the clerical and diplomatic establishment, as Roshandel argues:

> After Ayatollah Khomeini came a period of change in which factional views between conservatives and reformists were expressed directly and indirectly on foreign policy issues. The constitution was changed to give Hashemi Rafsanjani a completely different package of power and authority as the president of the Islamic Republic, putting him at the centre of decision-making […] However, even if Rafsanjani was personally willing to exploit the opportunities he had created, factors beyond his control affected the decision-making process. Iran's diplomatic apparatus was not

[600] Savill, Anna. 'Baker plans new Islamic Strategy'. *The Independent*, 07 Feb. 1992.
[601] BBC Monitoring '"British intelligence" Fear of nuclear Islamic union of Near Eastern states' *Part 1 The USSR: A. International Affairs; 4. The Middle East*, 07 Jan. 1992. Original Broadcast on *Russian Television* 18:00 GMT, 05 Jan. 1992.

> capable of displaying a moderate image or even that of an Iran willing or wishing to play according to international norms and rules.[602]

The establishment of the Second Khordad before Khatami's election sanctioned this rift. Gasiorowski best described the political composition of this alliance as a mix of centrists and Islamic leftists.[603] Centrists included former proteges of Rafsanjani, especially those who created the association *Servants of Construction*, while the Islamic leftists were part of a variety of groups, including *Islamic Iran Participation Front* and the *Militant Clerics' Association*. Leaders of the Second Khordad, such as Mehdi Karrubi and Abdollah Nouri, remained prominent reformist figures for decades to come. During this period, some fringes of the hardliner conservative faction, including *Ansar-e Hezbollah*'s vigilante group, cells connected to the IRGC, and prominent public leaders such as Ayatollahs Jannati and Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, advocated openly encourage the hardliners and provide theological support for their actions.

Roshandel also highlights the importance of press freedom in Iran under Khatami in allowing the growth of public discourse between conservatives and reformist branches of the clergy and the state, but puts little emphasis on the existing structural dichotomy of the Foreign Ministry, which was aligned with the President, and the security apparatus, which was under the direct command of Khamenei. A brief overview of the history of the MOIS during the 1990s will reveal that it was the very loci of the institutional competition between republicanism and theocracy. During the establishment of the MOIS in the late 1980s, there were heated debates on which branch of the state should oversee and supervise the critical ministry. Eventually, a compromise was struck with the consent of Khomeini, whereby the MOIS would be a ministry responding to the President like any other, with the caveat that

[602] Roshandel, Jalil. 'Iran's Foreign and Security Policies: How the Decisionmaking Process Evolved.' *Security Dialogue*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2000, p. 109.
[603] Gasiorowski, Mark J. 'The Power Struggle in Iran.' *Middle East Policy*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2000, pp. 22–40.

only mujtahid (doctors of Islam) approved by the Supreme Leader could be qualified to hold the position of minister.[604] This was key in ensuring the clerical aegis over this critical apparatus. All three heads of MOIS during the 1990s had strong ties to the Khomeinist faction and remained loyal to Khamenei in his attempt to thwart Rafsanjani and Khatami's reformist inputs. Ali Fallahian (1989-1997) was previously the chief prosecutor of the Special Court for the Clergy (1987-1989), and also served as a member of the 3rd Assembly of Experts. Fallahian's senior deputy, Saeed Emami, was implicated in the 'chain of murders'[605] scandal. Fallahian subsequently moved to work under the office of the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. Ghorbanali Dorri-Najafabadi (1997-1999), under whose mandate the 'chain of murders' took place,[606] is a current member of the Assembly of Experts and of the Expediency Discernment Council. Finally, Ali Younesi (1999-2005) had been the head of the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Tehran during the 1980s and subsequently headed the IRGC. Since the appointment of Younesi, Khatami's reformist faction had been more successful in purging hardliners from the MOIS.[607] Tensions between the two factions ran particularly high between 1997 and 1999. Apart from the infamous 'chain of murders', political tension ran high when prominent Islamic leader Grand Ayatollah Montazeri called for curbs to the powers of the Supreme Leader who, in his interpretation of the constitution, should oversee and not rule. The row was finally settled in April 2000 with a decisive split in the state apparatus that shielded branches controlled by the conservatives from any scrutiny from elected officials:

[604] Golkar, Saeid. 'Iran's Intelligence Organizations and Transnational Suppression'. *Washington Institute*, 5 Aug. 2021.
[605] The 'chain of murders' was a series of murders and disappearances of Iranian dissident intellectuals in 1988–98. In mid-1999, senior deputy of MOIS Saeed Emami was declared to have led 'rogue elements' of Iran's intelligence in the killings. Emami died of alleged suicide while in detention.
[606] 'Ganji named Fallahian as the "master key" for the chain murders'. *Iran Press Service*, Dec. 2000; Sahebi, Sima 'You will answer, one day'. *The Iranian*, 12 Dec. 2002.
[607] Gasiorowski, *op. cit.,* p. 27.

> The Expediency Council ruled on April 10 that parliament had no authority to investigate state agencies controlled by the leader, putting the security forces, the judicial system, the state-controlled media, the parastatal business foundations and other powerful bodies beyond public scrutiny.[608]

This split continues to vex Iranian elected officials to this day.[609]

This evidence supports the use of the Two Axis model to understand the underlying tension between MFA and MOIS. The foreign ministry was operating in the top right quadrant. Potential changes in the regional environment were seen as increasing chaos and entropy in the region. Iran's weakened economic and military sector could have been unable to protect the regime's stability if more Central Asian states descended into civil war. The security apparatuses, on the other hand, were still operating in the top left quadrant. They saw opportunities for the spread of friendly Islamist regimes in the upheavals of Central Asia. The difference between these two interpretations of the systemic changes taking place in the region can be explained by looking at the way the different apparatuses conceptualised regime survival differently, and thus in how they identified different immediate threats. For the foreign ministry, what was at stake was the survival of the Iranian nation-state from the threat of secession and of economic collapse. They saw the nationalistic and ethnic upheaval of the region as a potential threat to the territorial integrity of Iran, and the general instability of the region as hampering Iran's post-war recovery. On the other hand, security apparatuses under Khamenei's aegis were concerned first and foremost with the survival of the Islamic Republic in its Khomeinist incarnation. They were not overly concerned with domino effects of regional instability on the viability of Iran as a nation-state, but rather with the potential corruption of the purity of the revolutionary ideals, which they sought to preserve by remaining true to Khomeini's transnational anti-imperialism and pan-Islamism.

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[608] Gasiorowski, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
[609] Behravesh, Maysam. 'Iran's Spies Are at War With Each Other'. *Foreign Policy*, 9 Aug. 2019.

The foreign ministry and the security apparatuses thus held two divergent, though not contradicting, core conceptions of what was essential to Iran as a state, whether its viability as a nation state or its ideological identity and transnational ties. During most of the 1990s, as we have seen here, the foreign ministry line prevailed; Iran's structural economic, military, and diplomatic fragility were significant enough to dictate a cautious regional foreign policy by necessity, which naturally led to a predilection for the Pan-Iranian ideological approach. Nevertheless, the Pan-Islamic ideological streak, favoured by those who feared that pragmatism would bring about too drastic a change in the Islamic and revolutionist character of Iran, never completely disappeared, and reared its head oftentimes when regional sentiment towards Iran became particularly hostile.

This highlights a crucial source of conflict between the two visions of Iranian state security. There was a fundamental disagreement on the gravity of Iran's diplomatic isolation, regionally and globally, between the two apparatuses. For the foreign ministry, diplomatic and political isolation in the neighbourhood was a plague to be avoided by any means necessary, as it would severely restrict Iran's access to resources needed to rebuild and consolidate, ensuring the longevity and sustainability of Iran as a functional state. For the security apparatuses, diplomatic integration that came at the cost of ideological purity was an insidious threat that would lead down the slippery slope of integration in the international community and, eventually, to the end of the Islamic Republic as such. This battle for the identity of the Islamic Republic was very finely attuned to any change in the international mood towards Iran. Shifts in regional balance of power and changes in other key players' behaviour played a crucial role in determining which vision of regime survival, and therefore which ideological approach, the Pan-Iranian or the Pan-Islamist, would come out on top.

The security apparatuses, directly under Khomeini's political and ideological guidance, were operating in the top left quadrant. They saw opportunities for the spread of friendly Islamist regimes in the upheavals of Central Asia. The difference in the two state branches' interpretation of the systemic changes taking place in the region can be explained by looking at the way they conceptualised regime survival differently, and thus in how they identified different immediate threats to the Islamic Republic. For the Foreign Ministry, what was at stake was the survival of the Iranian nation-state from the threat of secession and of economic collapse. They saw the nationalistic and ethnic upheaval of the region as a potential threat to the territorial integrity of Iran, and the general instability of the region as hampering Iran's post-war recovery. On the other hand, security apparatuses under Khamenei's aegis were concerned first and foremost with the survival of the Islamic Republic in its Khomeinist incarnation. They were not merely concerned with domino effects of regional instability on the viability of Iran as a nation-state, but rather they were concerned with the potential corruption of the purity of the revolutionary ideals, which they sought to preserve by remaining true to Khomeini's transnational anti-imperialism and pan-Islamism. The foreign ministry and the security apparatuses thus held two divergent, though not contradicting, core conceptions of what essential to Iran as a state, whether its viability as a nation state or its ideological identity and transnational ties. During most of the 1990s, as we have seen here, the foreign ministry line prevailed; Iran's structural economic, military, and diplomatic fragility were significant enough to impose a cautious regional foreign policy by necessity, which naturally led to a predilection for the Pan-Iranian ideological approach. The Pan-Islamic ideological streak, favoured by those who feared that pragmatism would bring about too drastic a change in the Islamic, revolutionist character of Iran, never completely disappeared, and reared its head again and again whenever regional sentiment towards Iran became particularly hostile. This battle for the identity of the Islamic Republic

was very finely attuned to any change in the political mood towards Iran. Shifts in regional balance of power and changes in other key players' behaviour played a crucial role in determining which vision of regime survival, and therefore which ideological approach, the Pan-Iranian or the Pan-Islamist, would come out on top.

This conflict between rival perceptions of regime security was set off by the adoption on the part of the Clinton administration of an active policy of containment after 1995. The battle to limit Iran's influence took place in the regional geoenergy market. Washington pursued Iran's isolation through two main tools: sanctions and vetoing of energy corridors passing through Iran. American escalation in 1995-1999 eventually had a toll on Russia's relationship with Iran, as Washington manoeuvred so that Tehran's loss in geoenergy was potentially Moscow's win. This culminated with Moscow's departure from the common Russo-Iranian line on the dispute surrounding the territorial division of the Caspian Sea (the Caspian Sea Dispute). This was a significant blow to a decade of diplomatic engagement for Tehran, and strongly influenced the rise of more militant, Pan-Islamist sentiments during the IMU insurgency. The Caspian Sea Dispute was foundational to the development of regional politics in Central Asia from 1994 onwards because, for many of the countries involved, it was a matter of survival.

If, as we have seen in the previous analysis, Uzbekistan became Washington's lynchpin in their political and military regional policy, with Tashkent's support for the Iranian sanction and its disruptive role during the Russo-Iranian mediation of the Tajik civil war, Azerbaijan became the kernel of America's geoenergy game in Central Asia. Due to its geographical position, Baku constituted the only possible route for the export of hydrocarbons to Europe that excluded Iran. By allowing Azerbaijan to export via both Turkey and Russia, American policymakers were able to weaken the political link between

Moscow and Tehran.[610] The prospect of enormous profits from increased participation in the global hydrocarbon market did eventually sway Russia's position on the Caspian Dispute, too. While in the early part of the decade Iran and Russia had presented a united front against Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan's demands,[611] unfavourable economic conditions and rising cronyism were tilting the scale in favour of profits over foreign policy interests.[612] Although Russia and Iran managed to maintain a degree of cooperation on geoenergy between 1995 and 1997, the internal pressure culminated when Moscow decided to abandon the joint Russo-Iranian line on the equal division of the Caspian in favour of national sector delimitation in 1998.[613] Moscow's policy change undermined the cooperative spirit that had characterised Russo-Iranian relations since the dissolution of the USSR; this severance of the shared vision for Central Asia meant that Iran had little left to lose by pursuing a pan-Islamist foreign policy in Uzbekistan.

[610] BBC Monitoring. 'Azeri Consortium compromises on Azeri oil route'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 91.
[611] BBC Monitoring, 'Russia opposes unilateral Caspian oil deals'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 21.
[612] BBC Monitoring. 'Moscow gives conflicting signals on Soviet Iranian treaty'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 85; BBC Monitoring. 'Russia struggles with dual role in the Caspian'. *Inside Central Asia*, no. 93.
[613] BBC Monitoring. 'Russia opts for division of Caspian into national sectors'. *Inside Central Asia,* no. 210.

Conclusion

This thesis started from the observation that there is a divergence between ideologically oriented and interest-based accounts of Iran's foreign policy, which usually is accompanied by the higher incidence of ideological explanations for Iran-West relations, and of pragmatic explanations for Iran-East relations. I retraced the origins of this dichotomy to the literature's debate on Iranian foreign policy in the 90s; during this time, many authors were under the assumption that Iran was undergoing its own Thermidorian transition from a revolutionary to a post-revolutionary regime. Scholars became overly preoccupied with tracing the timing of this transition, giving rise to competing interpretation of the chronology of Iran's supposed turn to pragmatism. I have argued that the application of my Four Pillar model to Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia in the 1990s contradicts this Thermidorian assumption: Iran did not decisively move away from the principles of the 1979 revolution.

I identified three approaches to the early debate on the nature of Iran's foreign policy: the first argued that Iran was becoming more pragmatic, the second argued from a neorealist perspective that Iran's interests, and thus, policy objectives, had remained unchanged by the revolution, and the third emphasised the historical continuity of Iran's geopolitical situation, while allowing for incremental change. I have aligned my thesis with this last field, arguing that continuity and change, ideology and pragmatism can coexist in Iran's foreign policy theory and praxis. Recent trends in the literature on Iran's foreign policy have failed to bridge the debate, resorting instead to a geographic and thematic hyper-specialisation in the study of the Islamic Republic, resulting in studies that, though rigorous and insightful, remain fragmented and conflicting. I identified the source of the disagreement on the ideology vs. pragmatism debate in the infrequent theoretical specification of the concept, structure, and function of ideology in international relations. For this reason, I have

advanced a new, ideological model to guide the empirical analysis of Iran's foreign policy through the lens of its post-revolutionary ideology. I have chosen Central Asia as the case study to test this new model to challenge the ideology-pragmatism divide in the study of Iran's foreign policy through what can be considered a hardest-case scenario. Central Asia is seldom considered as a viable case study for Iran's revolutionary policies; yet, in the empirical chapters I have shown that the choices Iran made in the years 1990-2001 in its relations with the ex-Soviet Republics can only be explained by marrying geopolitical and ideological analysis.

In Chapter 1, I explained why this thesis argues that ideology and pragmatism, and thus ideational and geopolitical analysis, are not contradictory but complementary. After reviewing the treatment of the study of ideology in the field of international relations, I situated this study within the tradition of critical constructivism. Within this tradition, I distinguished between two approaches: the analytical and the historical approach. These were distinguished by the question they tried to answer. Historical approaches look at the structural and societal level and ask, 'how has (this) ideology emerged?', while analytical approaches take the individual as the unit of analysis and ask, 'how does ideology grip people?'. While the subject of this study makes it a natural fit for the historical approach, I have argued for the need to synthetise the systemic-level analysis of the historical approach with the theoretical rigour of the analytical approach. I have attempted to do this by explicitly addressing the ontological premises upon which I built a new theory of the role of ideology in the international system. In building this theoretical ontology, I have applied the critical constructivist insight of the mutual constitution of agent and structure to the relationship between matter and ideas in the structure of the international system by borrowing the ontology of Giddens' theory of structuration.

I applied Giddens' conception of the interdependence between agent and structure as a duality to the relationship between material and ideational factors in the international system. Giddens argues that agent and structure are complementary rather than opposite: they both work in tandem to uphold the social system of which they are part. Similarly, I argue that matter and ideas are logically distinct from one another, but functionally inseparable in the way in which they co-constitute the structure of the international system. Yet material and ideational factors remain causally inert on their own: state ideology becomes the key concept to explain the way in which ideas and material facts causally determine political actions. I defined state ideology as the structure through which the reproduction of the international system occurs, and which is supervenient on the ideational and material building blocks that make up the rules and resources of the international system. Material and ideational factors give rise to ideology in the international system, but functionally they also necessitate and presuppose ideology to operate within the system. Ideology on the other hand makes ideational and material factors causally active in the international system by translating them into political categories for the consumption of the political agent.

This Giddensian definition of state ideology as the structure through which ideational and material factors interact and become causally active in the international system allows me to marry ideological and geopolitical analysis in a more comprehensive assessment of Iran's contradicting foreign policy drivers. It also, as discussed at the end of Chapter 1, provides the parameters for the methodology of the empirical case studies. The most important methodological insight derived from the definition of state ideology is the concept of the synchronicity of cause and effect. This oriented this thesis towards the choice of three critical junctures in Iran's relationship with Central Asia in the 1990s, and towards the application of snapshot pivotal point analysis to these three case studies, supported by the discourse analysis of elites' debates at the time of Iran's pivotal policy choices.

Chapter 2 focused on translating the ontological and theoretical insights of Chapter 1 into a workable model of Iran's post-revolutionary foreign policy and of the mechanism through which it interacts with its foreign policy. This model had to be historical, as it was established in the introduction. I have advanced the Four Pillar model as a comprehensive geometrical representation of the competing principles guiding Iran's post-revolutionary foreign policy. The four concepts upon which the model rests are Pan-Islamism, Pan-Iranism, National Sovereignty, and Anti-Imperialism. The model identifies regime survival as the primary and necessary objective of Iran's ideology, and the projection of a good international image for the Islamic Republic as the secondary objective. The model is vertically oriented because intra-elite debates surrounding the meaning of regime survival and the best ways to ensure the ontological security of the Islamic Republic affect the balance between the four pillars, which in turn shapes the image of itself that Iran projects abroad.

Chapter 2 also explains the conflict between the pillars, which see Anti-Imperialism as incompatible with Pan-Iranism and National Sovereignty as incompatible with Pan-Islamism. This tension, together with the underlying shifts in the conception of Iran's ontological security, determines changes in the dominant foreign policy logic of Iran. These shifts happen when one of the two contradictions is resolved in favour of the exclusion of one of the four pillars. From this exclusion, a more stable, Triangular model emerges. Two Triangular sub-models are relevant to the analysis of Iran's relationship with Central Asia: the Pan-Islamic and the Pan-Iranian logics. Chapter 3, 4, and 5 are essentially an exercise in re-tracing and evidence-based narrative of the shifts in Tehran's posture from Pan-Islamism to Pan-Iranism and back. The second part of the model, the Two Axis model, goes beyond describing Iran's policy shifts and complements the Four Pillars model's morphological analysis with an explanation of the mechanism underlying the shifts from Pan-Iranism to

Pan-Islamism. It reconceptualises the intra-elite debate on the best way to secure regime survival as a Cartesian plane that captures underlying shifts in policymakers' perception of the permissiveness of the international system they operate in. As we have seen in the chapters above, the perception of a decrease in the permissiveness of the international system in Central Asia caused Iran to reintroduce the transnationalist push of Pan-Islamism in conflict with the promotion of bilateral relations dictated by Pan-Iranism, which had dominated Tehran's policy in Central Asia and continued to dominate Iran's overture to the West.

The rest of Chapter 2 is devoted to the justification of the choice of the four pillars through an engagement with recent Iranian and Persian scholarship questioning the role of Orientalist studies in the emergence of the modern national identity of Iran. This included a brief overview of geopolitical changes in Central Asia and Iran throughout the rise and fall of empires. This provided the empirical case studies with sufficient contextual knowledge of Iranian expectations at the eve of the USSR dissolution, as well as with an understanding of the incompatibility between the uniqueness of Iran's revolutionary experience and Central Asian understanding of the relationship between Anti-Imperialism and Pan-Iranism.

In Chapter 3, we have seen that Iran was waiting for the independence of Central Asia with trepidation because it assumed the ex-Soviet Republics would be swept by a wave of Islamisation. For this reason, Tehran's posture in 1989-91 was overwhelmingly dominated by the Pan-Islamic logic. With the gathering of new, first-hand evidence that their assumption on the strength of political Islam in Central Asia were wrong, Velayati introduced the idea of cultural diplomacy as the dominant approach to the re-building of Iran's ties with the Central Asian Republics after 70 years of Sovietisation.

Chapter 4 showed the persistence of Velayati's turn to Pan-Iranism. With the successful decoupling of the Pan-Iranian and the Pan-Islamic logic early on in Iran's interaction with Central Asia, Iran was free to selectively present only the aspects of its revolutionary ideology which it thought Central Asian leaders would find appealing. These were the shared Persianate culture, and the preference for the exclusion of extra-regional powers from the construction of a new regional order. What Iran did not foresee was that to the ex-Soviet Republics, its promotion of Persian culture came across as condescending and hegemonic, and its insistence on the exclusion of extra-regional powers, especially the US, was not only contrary to the economic interest of the newly independent republics, but also hypocritical given its own status as an external player to the region. Thus, while the study of Iran's push for mediation in the Tajik Civil War shows us the successful balancing of Iran's dual-track policy, it also highlights the limited appeal of the Iranian model in the region.

Chapter 5 shows the breakdown of the harmony between Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism, with the renewed use of covert Pan-Islamic policies during the IMU insurgency. The decoupling that started during Velayati's attempt to square Iran's revolutionist worldview with the reality on the ground in Central Asia evolved into the coexistence of schizophrenic approaches in Iran's foreign policy between its objectives at the international level and its aims at the regional level. After 1995, the conflict of visions on regime stability that existed between the Presidency and the Office of the Supreme Leader, with its subordinated paramilitary apparatuses, became irreconcilable. This prompted Iran to pursue both policies aimed at the long-term survival of the Islamic Republic in an Islamised neighbourhood and policies aimed at the short-term survival of the Iranian state in a hostile international environment dominated by US exclusionist policies.

Finally, Chapter 6 tied the argument together by reviewing the way in which geopolitical factors cause the shift from one ideological logic to another. It pieced together the analysis of Iran's state interests that was presented at the end of each case study. It looked first at the geopolitical importance of Central Asia after the fall of the USSR; it then considered in depth the state of pipeline developments and new oil and gas field exploitation in the region in the 1990s; finally, it turned to the Caspian Sea dispute. It concluded that three major factors underlined Iran's shift from Pan-Iranism to Pan-Islamism after 1995: first, the increasing distrust of regional states towards the Iranian Islamic model, spearheaded by Uzbekistan's bid for regional hegemony; secondly, the end of the Russo-Iranian entente on the Caspian Sea dispute provoked by the discovery of new oilfields in Russian waters; and finally, and most crucially, US vetoing of Iran's participation in Central Asian energy markets. The Chapter concluded by illustrating the connection between these geopolitical events and the shift in Iran's ideology by looking at the Two Axis model. It identified the shift in the meaning of Pan-Islamism from transnational revolution to export of insecurity as one of the key effects of greater American presence in Central Asia. The change in the meaning of Pan-Islamism represents evidence of the fact that ideas are shaped by geopolitics just as much as they, in turn, shape policy outcomes. With this conclusion, this study has achieved its purported aim of reconciling the ideology vs. pragmatism debate by proving the two-way feedback loop of the Four Pillar model.

What now? An ideological analysis of the impact of changes in US presence in West and Central Asia on Tehran's regional policy[614]

As it was mentioned in the introduction, Iran's conduct in Central Asia in the 1990s can shed a light on the current prospect for regional relations due to some important structural similarities. These are: the relatively limited presence of the US in the region compared with the 2001-2021 Afghan occupation; the renewed convergence in Russian and Iranian interests in regional energy and politics; and the rising geographical importance of Central Asia in a time of structural upheaval in the international system. The withdrawal of western troops from Afghanistan in 2021 has been hailed by Iran as a victory over the imperialist policy pursued by Washington, a testament to the resilience of the Iranian revolution, and thus to the truthfulness of its ideology. Iran's attitude towards the Taliban regime has also radically changed since 1996. Since June 2021, Iran had signalled their willingness to pursue a more pragmatic approach in Afghanistan,[615] and to date Tehran is still employing a wait-and-see strategy, although marred by some wariness about the diplomatic flakiness displayed by the Taliban leaders.[616] The departure of US troops from its neighbouring country, as well as the reset in diplomatic relations between the IRI and the Taliban, present a geopolitical scenario akin to 1995. Of particular importance is lower footprint of US air force in Central Asia. For instance, Uzbekistan had allowed American forces to use the Kharshi-Khanabad (K2) airbase to conduct military operation in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2005. In September 2022, media alleged that US officials were working on a deal to secure greater hands-on cooperation from

[614] This section is taken from my upcoming article, currently under review for publication, 'Iran's Triangular Diplomacy in Central Asia: An ideological Analysis of the Impact of US Retrenchment on Tehran's Regional Policy'.
[615] Pegolo, Valentina. 'Will the Raisi administration reinforce Iranian pragmatism in Afghanistan?'. *Al Sharq Forum*, 16 Jul. 2021.
[616] 'دست‌های پنهان آمریکا و انگلیس در تفرقه میان تهران – کابل' (The hidden hands of America and England in the division between Tehran and Kabul). *IRIBNEWS*, 10 Apr. 2022.

Tajik and Uzbek security forces in monitoring the Afghan border in exchange for about fifty military aircraft that used to be stationed in Afghanistan.[617]

The trilateral meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran in September 2022 has also been hailed as a reset in regional relations,[618] and is comparable with the height of Russia's diplomatic cooperation with Iran on the Tajik Civil war in 1995-1997. With NATO's announced pivot to East Asia to contrast the emergent military might of China, Central Asia is once again at the centre of a new geopolitical game, even more so due to the current energy supply crisis driven by Russia's weaponization of its gas supply to Europe over the Ukrainian war. The combination of the fluidity of the balance of power in Central Asia with its increased geopolitical relevance is once again akin to the 1990s. Recent fallouts from the Ukraine war are further re-shaping the geopolitical balance in Eurasia, with new developments in Russo-Chinese relations and Russo-Iranian relations that will have long lasting implications for Central Asian countries. The latest rise in tensions between Washington and Beijing[619] has prompted China to narrow its political distance with Moscow, with rumours of Beijing's political willingness to supply weapons to Russia causing grave concern in western policy circles.[620] China's stronger position in favour of Moscow comes at the same time as President Xi Jinping renewed calls for the lifting of Iran's sanctions during President Raisi's visit and announced an imminent reciprocal state visit, indicating a strong temporal correlation in Beijing's decision to close ranks with Russia and Iran against

[617] Bisht, Singh. 'US Negotiating Aircraft Deal With Central Asian Countries for Afghanistan Leverage: Report'. *The Defence Post,* 20 Sept. 2022.
[618] 'نظم جدید منطقه با سفر پوتین و اردوغان به تهران' (The new order of the region with the visit of Putin and Erdogan to Tehran). *Javanonline.ir,* 18 Jul. 2022.
[619] Wong, Tessa. 'Tense US-China meeting deepens balloon row'. *BBC News*, 19 Feb. 2023.
[620] Lyn, Berry. 'US warns China not to send weapons to Russia for Ukraine war'. *ABC News*, 19 Feb. 2023; 'Chinese company discusses selling drones to Russia, Der Spiegel reports'. *Reuters*, 24 Feb. 2023.

what they portray as 'Western aggression'.[621] Nevertheless, Tehran-Beijing ties remain underdeveloped in the economic sector, causing great discontent among Tehran's policymakers, and showcasing the limits of their strategic partnership.[622] Russo-Iranian military cooperation has been much closer during the Ukrainian war, with Iran supplying unmanned drones to Russian forces operating inside Ukraine, as well as allegedly providing technical and logistical support for the operation of the drones from Russian and Belarus territory.[623] While there have been some signs of willingness on part of the three states to extend their cooperation beyond diplomacy,[624] analysts argues that China's half-hearted commitment to the trilateral partnership is dooming the efforts of Iran and Russia,[625] who, being under much greater international isolation and economic strain than China,[626] have little to gain from the current geopolitical status quo and much to gain from taking more radical action to upset the global balance of power. These recent events have motivated US Secretary Antony Blinken to engage in a diplomatic tour in Central Asia.[627] Sanction compliance was at the forefront of the talks, but many speculate Blinken was testing the degree to which Central Asian regimes were willing and able to detach themselves from Russia's influence among the fallouts of the Ukraine war. Signs of weaking Russian hegemony in the region include the public repudiation on part of Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of Russia's territorial claims over Ukraine's Donbas region.[628] Similarly,

[621] 'China, Iran call for Iran sanctions to be lifted; Xi to visit'. *Reuters*, 16 Feb. 2023.
[622] Motamedi, Maziar. 'How will Raisi's Beijing visit affect Iran-China ties?'. *Al Jazeera*, 18 Feb. 2023: 'Raisi's speech set the tone for the trip as he clearly stated his dissatisfaction with Beijing-Tehran ties "seriously falling behind" especially in terms of economic cooperation'.
[623] 'Russia has depleted its stock of Iranian suicide drones, MOD says'. *Forces.net*, 01 Mar. 2023.
[624] 'EXCLUSIVE: Iran, China help Russia in Volga River dredging'. *Dredgingtoday.com*, 26 Feb. 2023.
[625] Avdaliani, Emil. 'An Emerging Eurasian Axis?'. *Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA)*, 27 Feb. 2023.
[626] Motamedi, Maziar. 'Iran's currency hits all-time low as EU prepares more sanctions'. *Al Jazeera*, 20 Feb. 2022; Aleksashenko, Sergey. 'Russia after a year of sanctions'. *Al Jazeera*, 28 Feb. 2023.
[627] Lewis, Simon. 'Blinken holds talks with Central Asian leaders amid "spillover" from Ukraine war'. *Reuters*, 28 Feb. 2023.
[628] Auyezov, Olzhas. 'Analysis: Shocked by Ukraine war, Russian neighbour Kazakhstan looks west'. *Reuters*, 17 Nov. 2022.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan raised more assertive political demands in October 2022 on the eve of 6th summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia (CICA).[629] The emergence of a closer Russo-Iranian entente at the same time as Central Asian Republics seem to be willing to distance themselves from Moscow's influence bears strong parallels with the 1990s, and to the analysis produced in this thesis.

Much like we saw during 1995 in the above case study, Iran's political and media establishment is exhibiting a propensity to frame the current predicament under a Pan-Iranian framework. Themes of power politics and state interests prevail around Iranian discourse both surrounding the Middle East and Central Asia, typical of the bilateralism inherent in the Pan-Iranian approach.[630] Several commentators have speculated about the emergence of a new regional or global order.[631] Commentators disagree, however, on two fronts. Firstly, they disagree on whether America's alleged withdrawal from the Middle East represents a net gain in Iran's regional security, because traditional US allies such as Saudi Arabia, disappointed in Washington's abandonment, can now be engaged diplomatically;[632] or whether threats to the IRI have merely been 'outsourced' to other regional players.[633] Secondly, they disagree on the causes of American withdrawal. Some see an inherent weakness at the heart of American domestic politics driving a regional and perhaps global decline of the superpower.[634] But the majority of experts maintain that the US has merely completed the transition from the Gulf War's 'boots on the ground' warfare to modern

[629] Auyezov, Olzhas. 'We want respect': Putin's authority tested in Central Asia'. *Reuters*, 18 Oct. 2022.
[630] علیزاده: بایدن می‌خواست در سفر به منطقه قدرت‌نمایی کند اما شکست خورد/ رونمایی ایران از ناو پهپادبر نشان داد دست آمریکا ، بسته است' (Alizadeh: Biden wanted to show his strength during his trip to the region, but failed/ Iran's unveiling of the UAV carrier showed that America's hands are tied). *Tasmin* News, 17 Jul. 2022.
[631] 'سفر بایدن به غرب آسیا؛ تلاش برای جبران شکست آمریکا پس از خروج از منطقه' (Biden's trip to West Asia; Trying to make up for America's failure after leaving the region). *Tasmin News*, 11 Jul. 2022.
[632] 'Alizadeh: Biden wanted to show his strength during his trip to the region, but failed', *op. cit.*; 'سعدالله زارعی: جهان اسلام روسیه را دشمن نمی داند' (Saadullah Zarei: The Islamic world does not consider Russia to be an enemy). *Jamar News*, 8 mar. 2022.
[633] 'آینده سیاست خارجی آمریکا در خاورمیانه' (Where is the area going? The future of American foreign policy in the Middle East). *IR Diplomacy*, 21 Oct. 2021.
[634] 'Alizadeh: Biden wanted to show his strength during his trip to the region, but failed', *op. cit.*

'remote warfare'.[635] There is a general agreement in seeing the renewed Russia-Iran cooperation as the kernel of the new post-US regional order in Central Asia, and as the core strategic alliance to contrast Washington's new 'regional pillars' strategy. Yet, much like in 1995, there is also weariness about the limits of Moscow-Tehran cooperation.[636]

In spite of the similarities, there are also some significant differences between Central Asia in 1995 and the present picture. The US military and political withdrawal in Central Asia is in fact not nearly as comprehensive as the disengagement in the Middle East, partly due to the need to maintain a foothold 'behind China's back'. Firstly, it could be argued that from the perspective of Iran and Russia, America's withdrawal from Afghanistan does not guarantee that the US would not in the near future relocate to Tajikistan.[637] And, although not having US troops deployed beyond their border anymore is surely a relief for Iranian policymakers, the stark contrast between the pro-Iranian attitude of Tajikistan in the 1990s and the pro-Western attitude of present-day Dushanbe is a source of concern in Tehran. Tajikistan had been the lynchpin of Iran's efforts to expand its influence in Central Asia; in the last ten years, the Rahmonov regime had intensified its war on domestic Islamists, solidifying its strategic partnership in combating regional non-state actors with the US, and furthering Iran's global isolation.[638] In 2022, Tajikistan took part in military exercises for regional cooperation that involved the United States, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Mongolia and Pakistan.[639]

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[635] Fathi, Mohammad Javad, et al. 'چشمانداز خروج آمریکا از غرب آسیا در پرتو سیاست راهبردي منطقهاي' (The prospect of America's exit from West Asia in the light of strategic policy). فصلنامه ژئوپلیتیک ت سال هجدهم, no. 2, Summer 2022, pp. 174-224.

[636] 'سازوکارهای منطقه‌ای و بین‌المللی همکاری تهران - مسکو' (Regional and Interregional Cooperation Mechanisms between Tehran and Moscow). *IRNA*, 2 Mar. 2022.

[637] Das, Dipaneeta. 'US Asks Tajikistan, Uzbekistan to Allow Military Bases for Special Ops in Afghanistan'. *Republicworld.com*, 12 Jan. 2022.

[638] Ahmadi, Hamid. 'Iran and Tajikistan: How Culture and Civilization Fade in the Shadow of Politics and the Political.' Iran & the Caucasus, vol. 23, no. 1, 2019, pp. 105–119.

[639] Gatti, Terra. 'National Guard Trains with Partner Nations in Tajikistan'. *Army.mil.*, 29 Aug. 2022.

Secondly, it can be argued that the balance of power in Tehran-Moscow relations has changed, too. As it has been shown in this case study, during the 1990s Moscow shifted its policy on security and energy several times with little regard for Iran's interests. This was the case both during the Tajik civil war and the Caspian Sea Dispute. At the time, Iran was also dependent on Moscow for weapon and technology transfer, therefore there was little Tehran could do but protest at Russia's inconsistencies and begun rebuilding its diplomatic position. Tehran's economic position has changed since then. After more than two decades under American sanctions, Iran is not nearly as dependent on Russia's support for extracting revenues from its hydrocarbon industry; and, in spite of the devastating human and economic cost of COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021, Iran's economy has not yet collapsed, showing remarkable resilience. The perception in Iran certainly seems to be one of strength: the fact that the trilateral meeting took place in Tehran has cemented the equal status of Iran as Russia's strategic partner.[640] Lastly, the geopolitical relevance of Central Asia today is also driven by the global power status of China, and the increasing scale of its economic engagement with the region through projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative. Beijing's willingness to engage politically and militarily with Central Asia, as well as the Middle East, may change radically the playing field for Iran, Russia, and the US in these two regions. The twenty-five years cooperation agreement signed between China and Iran in 2021 could as well give further economic leverages in Tehran's increasing assertiveness in its relationship with Russia.[641]

Even though Iran seems to be inclined to pursue a Pan-Iranian foreign policy in Central Asia which, as we have seen, has been historically associated with relatively low levels of military engagement and higher levels of diplomatic engagement, the unresolved

[640] 'اهمیت سفر پوتین به تهران در پیوند با وزن ژئوپلتیک ایران' (The importance of Putin's visit to Tehran in connection with Iran's geopolitical weight*). Javadonline.ir* , 18 Jul. 2022.
[641] Motamedi, Maziar. 'Iran and China sign 25-year cooperation agreement'. *Aljazeera,* 27 Mar. 2021.

situation in Tajikistan bears the potential for future conflict. All three regional powers consider Tajikistan to be their rightful foothold in the region: Iran due to the claim of cultural and religious affinity with Dushanbe, Russia due both its wider claim of influence in the Near Abroad and to its historical role in propping up the Rahmonov government, and the US due to the role of security provider they have played in the past 20 years on the Afghan border. The current deliberation on part of US Central Command (CENTCOM) over whether or not to let Tajikistan hold on to the Afghan air fleet that withdrew from Kabul last year is raising significant concern amongst Iranian observers over the aerial capability of a new potential 'US proxy' in Iran's backyard.[642] At the same time, the US has effectively substituted itself as the new security provider of the Tajik-Afghan border in what otherwise looks like a repeat of the 1995-1996 regional instability caused by the Taliban takeover, with still rising border tensions on the same Gorno-Badashkhan region that was used by UTO as a bridge into Tajikistan during the civil war.[643] Moscow has not turned a blind eye to these developments, and during the last official visit to Central Asia in July 2022 Putin discussed changing security concerns with the Tajik leaders. The timing of Putin's trip, following that of General Michael Erik Kurilla, Head of the US Central Command, can be taken as a sign of the seriousness of the competition.[644]

Iranian commentators have raised the possibility of a joint Russo-Iranian effort to manage insecurity in Central Asia and create a new regional framework for dispute resolution.[645] Whether Russia is willing to share its historically exclusive claim to hegemony in the region

[642] Schantz, Marianna. 'U.S. May Let Tajikistan Hold on To Fleeing Afghan Aircraft'. *The Organization for World Peace*, 20 Jul. 2022.
[643] Ahmadi, Mumin, Tolibov, Sirojiddin, and Fazliddin, Nigorai. 'Tajikistan Concerned by Provocative Taliban Watchtower on Border'. *Radio Free Europe*, 12 Jul. 2022.
[644] Wani, Ayjaz. 'Vladimir Putin visits Central Asia amid Russia–Ukraine War'. *Observer Research Foundation*, 13 Jul. 2022.
[645] 'صاحبنظران فرصت‌ها و چالش‌های همکاری تهران-مسکو را چه می‌دانند؟' (What do experts think of the opportunities and challenges of Tehran-Moscow cooperation?). *IRNA*, 01 Mar. 2022.

with Tehran remains to be seen, though talks of projects for a new US bases in Tajikistan may tilt Moscow's calculations. Here again, several commentators appeal to the Pan-Iranian logic of boosting bilateral diplomacy as a panacea against US interference:

> The fundamental improvement of Iran's relations with the countries of Central Asia is of serious importance, and membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and strengthening bilateral relations with these countries with the aim of countering the influence of America and NATO in the east of Iran is a suitable solution.[646]

But there is also weariness for the potential of conflict escalation in a fragmented Tajikistan, where unrest calling for secession has rocked Gorno-Badashkhan for a decade, tensions with the new Taliban regime on the southern border are rising, and the potential for a water war with Kyrgyzstan is never too far away. The presence of US CENTCOM in Tajikistan is significantly aggravating Iranian (and Russian) perceptions of security threats and represents the single most significant difference between the 1995 scenario and the present-day predicament. While the Raisi administration has shown a propensity for a diplomatic refocus on Central Asia after President Rouhani's disengagement, therefore keeping true to the 1990s Pan-Iranian approach, Washington's presence and capabilities in Tajikistan bears a destabilizing potential that could quickly tilt the scale of Iranian security calculations in the region.

In the last chapter we saw how the timing of the policy oscillation between Pan-Islamism and Pan-Iranism was for the great part dictated by changes in the balance of power in Central Asia. We have also seen, however, that Iran's adoption of a dual track policy meant that both Pan-Islamic and Pan-Iranian approaches continued to have their proponents throughout the 1990s, regardless of which one achieved primacy at a given time. In particular,

[646] 'روابط آمریکا و تاجیکستان؛ ضرورت تغییر نگاه ایران به کشورهای آسیای میانه' (Notes US-Tajikistan relations; The necessity of changing Iran's view of Central Asian countries). *IS News*, 18 Jul. 2022.

we have focused how the political reformist movement of the Second Khordad which accompanied Khatami's election in 1997 brought to the surface the underlying domestic dimension of the ideological struggle between Pan-Islamists and Pan-Iranian proponents. The ideological conflict between reformists, who believed that the survival of the Iranian state lay in compromise and assimilation in the international system, and conservatives, who believed that the preservation of the political purity of the Islamic Revolution should trump other political and economic objectives, prevented the creation of a coherent synthesis between Iran's contradictory ideological pillars. And, much like in the mid-1990s, today we are not seeing only rapid and unpredictable geopolitical changes across Eurasia, fuelled once again by Russo-American and Sino-American military and political rivalry, but we are also seen one of the most important pushes towards domestic political reforms in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Much like the Second Khordad Movement in 1997 defined the 1990s and early 2000s in Iran, and the Green Movement in 2009 defined the 2010s, the current protest movement in Iran taking place in waves between 2021 and 2023 has once again challenged the principalists' preferred political vision for the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is my hope that the ideological model I have proposed in this thesis can be of aid to analysts, scholars, and policymakers alike in navigating the complexities of simultaneous changes in both the material world in which Iran is operating, and in the ideational struggle for the identity of the Islamic Republic, through a greater appreciation of the fact that pragmatism and ideology are not competing, but necessarily complementing tenets of Iran's foreign policy.

Appendix 1: Criteria for Fig. 6

- **Eurasian Great Power criteria:**
  1. Size: Controlled vast territory across different Eurasian geographical regions.
  2. Strength: EITHER achieved hegemony through military victory against other great powers; OR achieved hegemony through overwhelming display of military power in the absence of an obvious rival.
  3. Impact: Its rise and fall had a significant long-term influence on the political and demographic trajectory of Eurasia.

- **Central Asia Regional Powers criteria:**
  1. Size: EITHER directly controlled a significant stretch of territory in historical Central Asia (here defined as the territory between Khorasan and the Tamir Basin); OR acted as a regional hegemon influencing the nominally independent but weaker states occupying historical Central Asia.
  2. Strength: EITHER at apogee was in a relationship of diplomatic equality; OR in spite of military inferiority to Great Power, was out of the geographical reach of Great Powers' sphere of influence.
  3. Impact: Its rise and fall had little to no long-term influence on the political and demographic trajectory of Eurasia but may have had significant short-term influence on the political configuration of the region.

- **State controlling Iran's territory**: This column functions as a baseline against which Iran's influence in Central Asia wider Eurasia can be assessed

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