

Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan (2001-2014)

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Abstract (English)

The present Ph.D. dissertation deals with the analysis of Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014. The main purpose is to understand and explain the motives for Iran's contradictory behavior and actions with regard to its neighbouring country Afghanistan. The main research question is: "What is the nature of Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014?" Conceptually, Iran's foreign policy is interpreted in the study from the realism (Hans Morgenthau; John Mearsheimer) perspective. This is done in a format that provides an overview of the history of Iran-Afghanistan relations, presents an in-depth analysis of the formal power structure of Iran, singles out four main visions of Iran's government which help to interpret the interplay of the three major foreign policy interests Iran has: security, political and economic interests. This is a qualitative study which makes use of historical reconstruction, content analysis, and the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, conducted in Iran and in Afghanistan as part of the field trip research. The analysis of the primary and secondary sources has enabled the answer of the research question on the nature of Iran's FP towards Afghanistan and revealed the contradictory policies of Iran vis-à-vis Afghanistan. The realism approach was assessed as an appropriate approach that adequately addressed Iran's three major foreign policy interests: security, political and economic and it provided explanations for the contradictory character of Iran's foreign policy. Nevertheless, realism was not able to fully unfold the peculiarities of the Iranian government's geographical and cultural vision (the Shia factor). Towards this end, the suggestion for further studies would be to focus on this area in order to elucidate the cultural factor in Iran's FP towards Afghanistan.

Keywords: *Iran, Afghanistan, foreign policy, realism, national interests, pragmatism, Sunni-Shia divide, Iran-U.S. competition, Taliban, Islamic revolution, domestic sources of foreign policy.*

Abstract (German)

Die vorliegende Dissertation befasst sich mit der Analyse der iranischen Außenpolitik gegenüber Afghanistan von 2001 bis 2014 mit dem Ziel, die Motive für das widersprüchliche Verhalten und Handeln des Iran in Bezug auf sein Nachbarland Afghanistan zu verstehen und zu erklären. Die hauptsächliche Forschungsfrage lautet: „Was ist das Wesen der iranischen Außenpolitik gegenüber Afghanistan von 2001 bis 2014?“ Konzeptionell wird Irans Außenpolitik aus der Perspektive des Realismus (Hans Morgenthau; John Mearsheimer) interpretiert. Die Dissertation umfasst einen Überblick über die Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen Iran und Afghanistan und eine detaillierte Analyse der formellen Machtstruktur des Iran. Sie identifiziert vier langfristige Strategien der iranischen Regierung, die das Wechselspiel der drei wichtigsten außenpolitischen Interessen Irans erklären können: Sicherheit, politische und wirtschaftliche Interessen. Dies ist eine qualitative Studie, die historische Rekonstruktion, Inhaltsanalyse und die Analyse semi-strukturierter Interviews, durchgeführt im Rahmen der Feldforschung im Iran und in Afghanistan, nutzt. Die Analyse der Primär- und Sekundärquellen hat die Beantwortung der Forschungsfrage zum Wesen der iranischen Außenpolitik gegenüber Afghanistan ermöglicht und die widersprüchliche Politik des Iran gegenüber Afghanistan aufgezeigt. Der Ansatz des Realismus hat sich als angemessener Ansatz erwiesen, um die drei wichtigsten außenpolitischen Interessen des Iran (Sicherheit, politische und wirtschaftliche Aspekte) angemessen zu analysieren und den widersprüchlichen Charakter der iranischen Außenpolitik zu erklären. Dennoch konnte der Realismus die Besonderheiten der geographischen und kulturellen Strategie der iranischen Regierung (schiitischer Faktor) nicht vollständig erfassen. Zukünftige Forschungen könnten sich auf diesen Bereich konzentrieren, um den kulturellen Faktor in Irans Außenpolitik gegenüber Afghanistan aufzuzeigen.

Schlüsselwörter: *Iran, Afghanistan, Außenpolitik, Realismus, nationale Interessen, Pragmatismus, sunnitisch-schiitische Teilung, Iran-USA Konkurrenz, Taliban, islamische Revolution, innenpolitische Faktoren der Außenpolitik.*

Preface

This work I lay before you today is a result of many interesting and enriching meetings with excellent people in very contrasting environments. It is my attempt to contribute to the body of academic research, whereby I can make use of my previous knowledge but at the same time distance myself from what I have experienced in the past, being born and raised in the country called Afghanistan.

There are distinct advantages and disadvantages in writing about the country of your origin. On the one hand, it equips you with the tools the foreigners might never get a chance to use: the first-hand knowledge about events, proficiency in the local languages (Dari, Farsi, Pashto), and most importantly, the inner emotional urge to write something that may someday make the lives of the people in your homeland better. On the other hand, though, it requires the constant effort of remaining impartial about the context and ensuring your judgments are free from the influences of your past. In the particular case of Afghanistan and Iran, such research was also coupled with sensitive field research in life-endangering areas, where there were real risks for personal security.

I am very grateful that despite all these hurdles and obstacles on the way, this research was completed and represents the first research done by the local researchers from the region of the study on the Foreign Policy of Iran towards Afghanistan.

I am grateful to so many people who made this academic endeavour and my personal growth as a researcher both in Afghanistan and in Germany a reality.

I thank my extended family in different countries, for without their moral support, I would never be able to fulfil all the plans and steps necessary for completion of this project.

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Thank you to all, whom I could not mention here for the scarcity of space or for other reasons, but who know I value them and imply them here.

The thoughts presented herein are the product of my own analysis, the ideas of others that influenced the study were properly referenced. I hope that this work will be interesting to read not only for those coming from the political science background but also for the general public interested in the affairs of the region.

Farid Muttaqi,

Bremen, October 15, 2018

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List of Abbreviations

ACCI	Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries
ANDSF	Afghan National Defense and Security Forces
CA	Central Asia
CAS	The Caucasus and the Central Asia States
CPEC	China Pakistan Economic Corridor
CVI	Iran Veterinary Organization
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FP	Foreign Policy
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HS	Harmonized System
ICRO	Islamic Culture and Relations Organization
IKRC	Imam Khomeini Relief Committee
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPI	Iran-Pakistan-India
IR	International Relations
IRGC	Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
ISIL/ ISIS/ IS	The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
LON	League of Nation
MOIS	Ministry of Intelligence and Security
NA	Northern Alliance
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSC	National Security Council

OEC	Observatory of Economic Complexity
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
TAPI	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
USA/ U.S.	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Glossary

<i>Artesh</i>	Army
<i>Faqih</i>	The term describing the religious role of the Supreme Leader as an individual
<i>Imam</i>	The spiritual and political successors to the Islamic prophet Muhammad
<i>Imam Joma</i>	Friday Prayer Leaders
<i>Imamat</i>	The Leadership of the Worshipers
<i>Madrassa</i>	Islamic School
<i>Majles</i>	Parliament
<i>Mazhab</i>	School of thought within Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence)
<i>Muhajireen</i>	Muslim immigrant
<i>Mujahideen</i>	People who are involved in Jihad
<i>Rahbar</i>	Leader
<i>Sayed</i>	Successor of the Prophet Muhammad in Islam
<i>Sepah-e Pasdaran</i> (also <i>Sepah</i>)	Army of Guardians of the Islamic Revolution
<i>Sunni</i>	A branch of Islam
<i>Ummah</i>	Community of Believers
<i>Velayat-e faqih</i>	Guardianship of the jurist

Political Map of Afghanistan



Source: One World - Nations Online Project, (n.d.a).

Political Map of Iran



Source: One World - Nations Online Project, (n.d.b).

Chapter 1. Introduction and Research outline

This section pertains to the focus, relevance and the underlying objectives of the present study on Iran's Afghanistan Policy. It also profiles the theoretical narrative and its application to the subject on the basis of historical and empirical studies. In addition, it gives a brief account of different chapters and the methodology used.

1.1 Research Statement

The relationship between Iran and Afghanistan has always been very dynamic and interdependent since time immemorial. Apart from an adjacent geographical proximity, the two countries share a lot in common dominated by culture and language, and a large part of common but porous border alongside the western provinces of Afghanistan (Herat, Farah and Nimroz). Any threat or vulnerability to either country creates a predicament for the other, especially the threat posed by Afghanistan in contemporary times, since it is the weaker and more vulnerable of the two states in terms of security. Iran's role in the state of affairs of Afghanistan has always been inevitable, especially during the times of crisis of the latter, be it the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan when Iran provided active assistance in the form of monetary and other logistic help to the erstwhile Mujahideen, or be it the mediator role played by Iran in the Afghan–Pakistan relations (Centre for Strategic and Regional Studies, 2017). Referring to the dynamism of the relations between the two, there has been a paradigm shift since 2001 and the relationship has become increasingly interdependent especially from the point of view of Iranian national interests. Firstly, a massive number of Afghan refugees have fled Afghanistan to Iran (as per the reports of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, UNHCR, there are almost nine hundred thousand registered Afghan refugees as of 2016, add to that non-registered refugees as well, and the number was unsurprisingly higher when the civil war in Afghanistan was at its peak). Secondly, the increased presence of both military and diplomatic intervention by the west in Afghanistan, especially the USA, has interested Iran more in both the domestic as well as the foreign policy of Afghanistan which advertently or not seems to be dominated by the western diktat. Thirdly, the economic dimension also has a very significant role to play in the interdependence of the two countries; Iran is an indispensable transit as well as a trade route for Afghanistan and

similarly, Afghanistan is also a part of some of the economically significant projects like the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline. The development and sophistication of the famous Chabahar port in south-eastern Iran which serves as Iran's only oceanic port, and is thus an important element of the economic development of Iran, also depends a lot on the security environment in Afghanistan.

This study focuses on Iran's Afghanistan policy after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, as that was the time that marked a new beginning in the modern history of Afghanistan vis-à-vis restructuring and re-establishment of the political and economic structures across Afghanistan. The study's main focus is the period from 2001 to 2014, but in some instances - beyond, if the events after 2014 are particularly relevant to the study period. The historical, cultural and economic influence within the political sphere of Afghanistan always characterized Iran as a significant player in Afghanistan's state of affairs. The aim of the study, therefore, is to view Iran's Afghanistan policy through political, economic, and security paradigms not only in connection with a highly interdependent nature of the bilateral relationship between the two but also their mutual association and its importance for the regional political, security and economic network that also reflects a high level of interdependence. The relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan have been more interactive since 2001, not only on the basis of certain positive and mutually interested fronts, like the economic development of both in general and Afghanistan in particular (given the moral obligation of international as well as regional actors to rebuild a post-conflict Afghanistan), but also on the basis of antagonistic stands and discourses on certain issues like the hydro-political issue pertaining to the Helmand river.

The study reflects the significance of various internal aspects of the religious-political factor vis-à-vis the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan, which is predominated by the consolidation and proliferation of the Shia school of thought not only across Afghanistan but through the whole of South Asia and the Middle East. Subsequently, the foreign policy of Iran has over the period of time both overtly and covertly focused on both the diplomatic and non-diplomatic assistance to the minority Shia ethnicity especially Hazaras. This support was done across the parliamentary and other economic institutions within Afghanistan. The idea behind that was to strengthen both their quantitative as well as qualitative representation within the socio-political as well as the socio-economic sphere of Afghanistan. As already mentioned, U.S.

involvement in Afghanistan both militarily as well as diplomatically has been another instigating factor to diversify the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan, due to decades-long US-Iran rivalry, which, despite some instances (e.g. Iran nuclear deal during the Obama administration that softened the US-Iran relations) seems to be getting ever more deeply entrenched. Even if the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan looks convincing and explicit from an outside perspective there are, nonetheless, certain dimensions that not only confuse regional commentators and analysts but also create a sense of ambiguity across certain fronts. For example, the intermittent Iranian assistance to Taliban factions has emanated over a period of time, irrespective of concrete evidence that the Taliban have committed atrocities on more than several occasions on ethnic minorities, more specifically the Hazaras (Shia ethnic minority).

The overall central argument this study intends to convey, based on the thorough study of the literature and on the empirical study is that: Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan in the time frame from 2001 to 2014 is contradictory. It is influenced by various factors of security, political and economic nature. All these factors are of course inseparable, but in order to analyze them, this study defines their characteristics for the sake of convenience. Thus, under security and political factors, I imply the political internal changes in Afghanistan, such as the presence of the U.S. in this country and the unstable security situation there manifested, among others, in insurgency and drug trafficking. Under the economic factors, I understand Iran's rather regional approach towards the economic issues, whereby it does not center its attention solely and exclusively on Afghanistan. Notwithstanding this, Iran does use economic moves as a tool to be involved in Afghanistan, and as leverage for the influence over the political situation in its neighbor-state. Although historical patterns of relations between the two countries (chapter 2) must be taken into account for understanding the way Iran makes use of cultural affinity and Shia factor for implementation of its foreign policy towards Afghanistan, it is not the most important element in its external policy shaping. This study, thus, considers the pragmatic realist approach in Iran's foreign policy to be significantly more important than its ideological considerations. It is equally important to understand what contributes to the implementation of its often-contradictory policies towards Afghanistan. Towards this end, the study provides a thorough analysis of the main motivators of Iran's FP: the paradoxical institutional structure: both formal and informal (chapter 3), pragmatic aspects, with ingrained ideological moves, contained in

Iran's policy objectives and the complexities of Iran's foreign policy (chapter 4), Iranian national interest in Afghanistan in consideration of Iran-Taliban nexus and Shia factor (chapter 5), political and security interests as observed in implementation of the foreign policy by various Iranian institutions (chapter 6) and economic interests, as can be better observed in Iran-Afghanistan trade relations and Iran's economic involvement in Afghanistan (chapter 7).

1.2 Literature review on Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan

For the purpose of explaining the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014, this study operationalizes assumptions of the Realism school of thought in international relations. While the theoretical underpinning of this dissertation is elaborated in the subchapter 1.9 (theoretical framework of the present study), here I review the existing corpus of publications (in the time frame between 2001 and 2017) relevant to the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan.

There is a wide range of literature on the Iran-Afghanistan relations in general and on Iran's foreign policy with respect to certain countries. However, there has been, so far, no thorough foreign policy analysis of what constitutes the power politics (*Realpolitik*¹) of Iran in its foreign relations with its neighboring country – Afghanistan - that would consider all domestic factors in Iran and assess their role vis-à-vis Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, there are excellent studies one has to consider as relevant for the current analysis, as there have been scientific attempts to understand the nature of the regime in Iran, which is crucial for explaining its foreign policy in general. There are authors who have highlighted the fact that despite the theocratic political regime in Iran, its foreign policy is far from being sectarian (Byman *et al.*, 2001; Milani, 2006; 2009; Toscano, 2012; and Ostovar, 2016), i.e. resulting from the differences between different religions (particularly analyzed in Ostovar, 2016), but on the contrary, is based on the arguments of *Realpolitik* (namely national security interests and economic interests). Some scholars, like Posch (2013) believe that ideology and pragmatism in Iranian foreign policy are inseparable and should be analyzed in their interplay. Wastnidge (2014) also analyzes Iran's pragmatism combined with ideological instruments, the cultural initiatives

¹ The term *Realpolitik* was coined by Ludwig von Rochau and is widely used in the international relations literature in this work. It is understood as the politics of the country that gives preferences to the particular circumstances and factors over ideology/religion.

with regards to the Central Asian (CA) region. He analyzes, namely, how Iran's cultural strategy is implemented in Persian-speaking Tajikistan and to some extent in Afghanistan to ensure its pragmatic goals are achieved, in particular, its ultimate goal – of increasing its influence in the region. The tendency of strengthening cultural ties with CA states and Afghanistan can be observed most prominently during the presidency of Khatami (1997-2005) but is also evident during the presidency of Ahmadinejad (2005-2013). The article demonstrates how pragmatism is manifested through the particular use of the so-called revolutionary rhetoric. It becomes evident from the above study that one of the conduits of Iran's pragmatic diplomacy is, among others, the cultural sector, namely activities of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) of Iran. Another interesting tendency that can be distilled from it is that Iran's cultural moves in CA coincided with the tensions Iran was having/has with the West. Provided these relations improve in the future, Iran may find those cultural activities in Central Asia and Afghanistan no longer important. This idea is echoed by other scholars, like Salehzadeh (2013) who have studied Iran's foreign policy through the lenses of the cultural and ethnicity issues and in light of the nuclear deal.² The interdependency between Iran's cultural initiatives in the region and Iran's negotiations with the West on its nuclear program that can be derived from these two studies is an interesting one and is considered in the present study.

The studies on Iran's foreign policy are still very often preoccupied with religious rhetoric, namely, I imply here relations of Iran with U.S. and Israel, although their authors recognize that it is by no means purely sectarian (see for example Byman *et al.*, 2001; Parsi, 2007). The goal of this study, however, is to specifically focus on the factors such as economy and national interests (as there is still much to be done towards their analysis), by addressing the domestic factors in the Iranian politics, such as economy, security, formal and informal structures in Iran and the main institutions, implementing the FP of Iran towards Afghanistan in order to see the broader picture.

Iran's position in the Middle East region is influenced by the presence of the U.S. and Iran-Saudi Arabia competition regarding the dominance in the region. The competition concerns most importantly the energy sector and was much affected by the Iranian revolution that brought into existence a Shia state, thus creating a major Shia-Sunni clash in the region (Monshipouri and Dorraj, 2013). The Iranian revolution has also

² The nuclear negotiations and relevant domestic policies are researched in particular details by Seyedamir Hossein Mahdavi (2014).

become a cornerstone of the difficult US-Iran relations, which worsened after the Iran hostage crises. There are several recent studies on Iran's foreign policy in general that describe Iran's position in the region, that consider Iran-Saudi Arabia competition and dynamics of US-Iran relations. Before reviewing the relevant studies related to Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan, which is the focus of this study, it is worth mentioning a few that are concerned with Iran's foreign policy more generally.

Kenneth Katzman a specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs provides a good overview of Iran's foreign and defense policies as influenced by the combination of four different factors, whereby these factors, as shown in some examples, do at times collide. He, thus, mentions national interests, ideology (rooted in Islamic revolution), the individual perceptions of Iranian leadership (most notably of Iran's Supreme Leader) on perceived threats to Iran's regime (threat perception) and other factional interests in Iran. Katzman labels them as "Iran's Policy Motivators" (Katzman, 2018). One of his notable observations is that Iran (as perceived by this U.S. analyst) regards the U.S. as the main financial contributor and supporter of the Islamic State and other terrorist groups of Sunni doctrine, as well as Sunni Arab regimes in general. The latter explains the dynamics of difficult US-Iran relations from America's perspective. The lesson that can be learned from the analysis is that both U.S. and Iran are most likely going to continue the relations in the same manner of animosity, which makes Iran's foreign policy logic between 2001 and 2014 more comprehensible to the thorough analysis this study undertook.

Farideh Farhi (2015), the American scholar of Iranian origin, provides an overview of Iran's position in the region from what is assumed to be the Iranian viewpoint. Iran's regional role is discussed in consideration of the situation in Iraq and Syria and in light of its obvious objectives to attain regional influence. These objectives, according to Farhi, are largely based on Iran's 20-year perspective document³, the embodiment of Iran's foreign policy (see more on economic development, regional power and foreign policy planning in Sajjadpour and Nourian, 2011) on various issues of national concern, among which are the economic, political, security and cultural objectives that will supposedly ensure Iran's influence in the region by 2025. To assess Iran's position in the Middle East, Farhi's article draws attention to certain internal

³ See more on these objectives in the "20-Year National Vision Plan (2005-2025)" at the website of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance of IRI, see also Dr. Jahangir Amuzegar, the former Minister of Finance of IRI (2009) on "promises and pitfalls" of this 20-year plan.

dynamics that determine the role of this country in the region. Thus, for instance, it draws attention to the internal institutional problems within Iran that are greatly the result of the settings that Iran has been forced into by, *inter alia*, the imposition of the sanctions on it, and the political as well as economic consequences thereof. The article reveals clear interconnection between Iran's domestic politics, namely the role of its various institutions, and Iran's regional political influence. This gives an important message for the present study as well: one should not underestimate Iran's domestic institution's role in shaping Iran's foreign policy towards the countries of the region.

Sara Bazoobandi (2014) analyzes Iran's regional policy, whereby she also emphasizes the importance of the influence of the foreign forces military presence on the dynamics of internal institutional changes within Iran. According to her this consequently contributes largely to shaping Iran's foreign policy towards its neighbors in the region, which is full of controversies. The lesson that can be learned from this analysis, as well as all analyses on Iran's foreign policy in general, for the present study is that Iran's regional strategy is focused on enhancing its influence in the neighboring countries, but not at the expense of its own national security considerations, which are preoccupied with the U.S. presence in the region.

The state of the art relevant for the present analysis is represented by two thematic focuses of the previous research dedicated to (1) the analysis of Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan in general and (2) the impact of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan and the dynamic of the US-Iran relations on the Iranian foreign policy towards its Afghan neighbor. Below I organize the review of the existing literature according to the year of publication.

As it was mentioned above, this literature review does not cover publications on Iran's foreign policy before 2001, though various studies followed the Islamic revolution of 1979 (e.g. Hunter, 1990), as Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan is analyzed in the present study from 2001 onwards. Thus, one of the first publications right after the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 is a co-authored article by Allison *et al.* (2001) entitled "Living with Afghanistan". This article is an attempt to provide the most important highlights on Afghanistan in light of the world affairs of 2001. The length of the article does not allow it to be regarded as a thorough analysis, nevertheless, it should be mentioned here as opening the discussion on Afghanistan from the new perspective. The new perspective on Afghanistan from Iran after 2001, according to the article, is

concerned with the increased flow of refugees, drug trafficking and gun smuggling over the Iran-Afghanistan border into Iran. Iran's policy towards Afghanistan immediately after 2001 evolved around these threats, coming from its neighbor, but also around the U.S. presence – perhaps Iran's biggest concern. The article gives an overview of the security situation in the region around Iran and the US-Iran relations that are affected, on the one hand by the situation in Afghanistan, and on the other, by the ongoing conflict on the Israel-Lebanon border and Iran's support to Hezbollah in the conflict. It reveals that Iran has very different positions on the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, in the U.S. and on what is done by the liberation movements in the region as two things of very different order. Despite the resentment of Iranians of the September 11 terrorist attacks, an interesting fact is highlighted in this report of the Royal Institute of the International Affairs, namely, that there is no common agreement in Iran on the connection of Osama Bin Laden's network to these terrorist acts. This explains the reaction of Iran to the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, which was regarded by the former as not proper in the given circumstances. The report makes very clear that despite Iran's concern with the Taliban, Iran is much more concerned with having U.S. military forces in Afghanistan and in Central Asian states. This is because Iran believes the U.S. has a secret plan of encircling Iran so as to cut off its communication with the CA states and thus controlling oil transfer routes and preventing its transfer via Iran. The report, thus, communicates an important message, that will reappear across many subsequent publications on Iran-Afghanistan relations beyond 2001: Iran regards the U.S. presence in Afghanistan not only as a military threat to itself but also as a threat to Iran's economy.

In the period between 2001 and 2008, there was no thorough study on Iran's policy/activity in Afghanistan. This silence was interrupted in 2008 by the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research when it published a report, "Iranian influence in the Levant, Iraq, and Afghanistan" (Kagan, Kagan and Pletka, 2008). The report describes the involvement of Iran in the economic, social and cultural spheres, rather than analysis of the foreign policy of Iran, but its data, inter alia, regarding the support Iran provided to the Afghan refugees and labor migrants in its own country and the support of the insurgents can instigate future research on Iran's activities in Afghanistan. The report fails to identify Iran's strategy in Afghanistan and the de facto situation of Iran's involvement in Afghanistan (though it does describe the internal events

in Afghanistan, as an outcome of Iran's FP) that sometimes goes in contravention of its stated foreign policy goals and leaves open the question open of its actual goals.

The first foreign policy analysis of the "structural patterns" of the Iranian moves in Afghanistan is produced by Andreas Wilde (2009). In his article, Wilde emphasizes the necessity to shift the focus of the research on Iran's foreign policy from its nuclear program discourse to other factors, neglected in the Western media. He does so by discussing the structural patterns of the Iranian foreign policy in its neighboring Afghanistan. His work indeed provides much deeper understanding of the Iran-Afghanistan relations (which are at the focus of his paper) by, inter alia, drawing lines between several time periods in Afghanistan's history, among which are the time before the Afghan conflict began, the Taliban regime and the period after the fall of the Taliban. He argues that the fusion of outside and inside (domestic) factors were always crucial for the relationship between the two countries throughout the modern history of Afghanistan and Iran. He particularly describes these relations around the water and refugee's issues and Taliban. He highlights the role of the external actors (US, Pakistan) as important for Iran's engagement in Afghanistan. In analyzing Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan, Wilde's study, however, does not occupy itself with Iran's regime nature and the analysis of Iran's state policy-makers as contributing to the course of this country's activities with regards to Afghanistan.

Iran's interests in Afghanistan are explored by Stephen Carter in his article, published in the *International Journal of Canada* (Carter, 2010). The article does not analyze the foreign policy of Iran in all its dimensions but rather is aimed at understanding the impact of the NATO activities in Afghanistan and before all – Canada's role in the possible future discussions on Afghanistan with Iran back in 2010. It makes a historical excursion to the initial short Iran-US cooperation against the Taliban, then later the U.S. placing Iran on the "axis of evil" (Bush, 2002) and announcing it as sponsoring terrorism, while at the same time inevitability of the necessity to have Iran participating in all possible future discussions about Afghanistan, due to the contradictory involvement of Iran in Afghanistan such as among other – Iran's backing insurgents in Afghanistan fighting against NATO personnel. The article highlights the main elements of Iran's interests in Afghanistan: energy corridors (and associated with this competition with Pakistan, China and India), slowing down the NATO's activities and undermining the democratic process in Afghanistan. Carter discusses these elements in connection with

the questions he poses: what factors are crucial for Iran's policy towards Afghanistan in 2010 and what does this all entail for Canada's activities in Kabul and Kandahar and for the NATO's overall objectives? He leaves the questions open, though he stresses that Iran is an important regional actor and should, by all means, be involved in all discussions on Afghanistan.

Iran's policy as reflected in its balancing strategy towards the U.S. moves on the one hand and towards the Pakistan and Saudi Arabia activities in the region of Afghanistan and in its neighborhood – on the other hand, are explored by Alireza Nader and Joya Laha in the policy paper aimed at understanding the Iranian policy and interests in Afghanistan and what do they mean for the U.S. forces in this country (Nader and Laha, 2011). The paper's focus and main concern U.S. has with regards to Iran and the backing of the Taliban by the later as a countermeasure to the U.S. forces in Afghanistan. The paper reveals contradictory policies Iran pursues in Afghanistan, evidenced by backing Taliban, while at the same time providing support to the ethnic groups (Tajik and Shia Hazara) that are in extreme opposition to the Taliban. Nader and Laha explain it partially by the fact that the U.S. supports Baluchi insurgency within Iran. The authors conclude that by undermining U.S. activities in Afghanistan, Iran attempts to demonstrate to the U.S. the consequences which will always follow, should the U.S. try to undertake any hostile act against Iran. One may say, that the paper is in the end about U.S. relations with Iran, that take place in Iran and Afghanistan.

In 2012, there has been just one analysis of the Iranian foreign policy, *inter alia*, towards Afghanistan. The report represents the refined version of the paper published in 2008 on the same subject (Kagan, Kagan and Pletka, 2008) but includes new data and observations on the matter (Kagan et al., 2012). This new report by the American Enterprise Institute for the Study of War also includes the case study on Egypt and has expanded the section on the economic sphere of Iranian influence in Afghanistan (in comparison to the 2008 report). The religious assistance by Iran, as well as support of the insurgency in Afghanistan (including Iran's involvement in the espionage activities in the three bordering with Afghanistan provinces: Herat, Nimroz and Farah), are also more deeply explored. The new report focus is shifted from the labor migration to the situation with the illegal immigrants from Afghanistan coming and living in Iran. Last but not least, the earlier report had considerably more questions, than explanations. On contrary, the authors of the new report are coming to the concrete outcomes in understanding the

main characteristics of the Iranian foreign policy and influence, among other neighboring countries, in Afghanistan. The essence of the outcome is that Iranian foreign policy is unquestionably inconsistent. The authors come to this conclusion by describing Iran's very contradictory moves in Afghanistan, ranging from fighting the Taliban, because Iran clearly sees them as a threat to its national security, to supporting Taliban, because the U.S. presence in Afghanistan is still perceived as a greater threat.

Closer to the Afghan presidential elections (of 2014) a publication of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in 2013, demonstrates the concern of the U.S. government with Iran's involvement in Afghanistan in light of the then planned ISAF forces withdrawal (Shelala II, Kasting and Cordesman, 2013). In the report, Robert M. Shelala II, Nori Kasting, and Anthony H. Cordesman (2013) describe Afghanistan's (among other countries) impact for the strategic competition of Iran and the United States, inter alia, in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is chosen as one case study, where the interests of the two countries have been constantly clashing in recent years. The paper, before all, communicates the concern Americans have regarding Iran's ties with the Taliban. In this regard, the authors discuss possible challenges that may arise after the presidential elections and withdrawal of the U.S. and allied ISAF forces in 2014, in particular in the economic and in social spheres (considering high rate of unemployment among Afghan youth). In making assumptions, the authors largely rely on the data of the World Bank and CIA reports. With regards to the analysis of Iran's current relations with Afghanistan, the report insists that the U.S. presence in Afghanistan has made this country more strategically important to Iran than it has ever been. The authors briefly describe the ties of Iran with the Taliban and various insurgents in Afghanistan, inter alia ethnic minority Hazara as well as other ethnic groups, in particular in western Afghanistan. The report touches upon the water issues and trade, narcotics and border security as well as migration, though does so very superficially, without deeper analysis. The outcome statement of the research is that Iran is interested in having a strong central government in Afghanistan, with which it can cooperate in the economic sphere and with regards to the border issues. The report further makes recommendations on how the U.S. should perceive this information in its further relations with Iran, in light of Iran's nuclear program. This work is information-rich, however, is very much US-centered and thus only superficially allows one to understand Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan.

One of the first in-depth analytical papers on Iran's foreign policy with regards to Afghanistan belongs to Bruce Koepke (2013). Of particular interest is his analysis of the pragmatic strategic approach that Iran pursues with regards to its neighbor. To come to this conclusion Koepke makes a three-decade-long excursion into relations of these two countries. He divides the analysis into three time frames (also covering near future): from the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran to the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001; from the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 to the withdrawal in 2014; and tries to forecast the post-2014 events in Afghanistan, including foreign engagement. With regards to the post-2014 scenarios, Koepke highlights the importance of the outcome of the 2014 presidential elections in Afghanistan and Iran's consequent post-transitory foreign policy towards its neighbor. Understanding the main elements of Iran's Afghanistan strategy according to the author can have a very practical contribution towards dialogue between Afghanistan and the countries of its neighborhood which can foster cooperation on security issues.

This is an excellent, thorough analysis that highlights the most important trends in Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan with a focus on its ideology, shaped by Khomeini and is founded on Islamic solidarity while at the same time very rational and pragmatic and thus multifaceted and sophisticated. The paper makes an effort to forecast the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan after the then planned withdrawal of the foreign troops in 2014 and under the newly elected president in Iran, Hassan Rouhani. Rouhani's presidency is expected, according to the paper, to differ from his predecessor President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad under whom Iran's policy towards Afghanistan was mostly concentrated more on undermining the activity of the foreign military there, rather than supporting stabilization or democratization (as it was under President Mohammad Khatami).⁴ The author of the paper comes to the conclusion that Iran will continue its influence in Afghanistan and in fact, will try to strengthen it in all spheres (political, cultural, economic and social) with the main purpose in mind to ensure its national interests (inter alia, national security) and its geopolitical position. Koepke expects Iran to strive for more cooperation with Afghanistan because such cooperation will allow Iran's wider engagement in the political issues discussed internationally in its neighborhood. The main contribution of the paper is its recommendation to the U.S. that it includes all of

⁴ See more on analysis of Hassan Rouhani views in the thorough study of Steven Ditto (2013) and on the foreign policy under Rouhani as presented by its Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (2014).

Afghanistan's neighboring countries (and most importantly Iran) in the U.S. long-term strategy towards Afghanistan thus highlighting that the role of Iran in all discussions on Afghanistan is crucial and should not be neglected. Iran can and should be a partner in such discussions, according to Koepke, despite its measures against the US, because Iran's policy remains quite realistic and pragmatic and its strategy remains the same during these many years: to avoid and prevent where possible, civil war in Afghanistan.

The implications of Iran's influence in Afghanistan for the reduction in the presence of the U.S. forces in this country are explored by Alireza Nader, Ali G. Scotten, Ahmad Idrees Rahmani, Robert Stewart and Leila Mahnad (2014). The focus of the report is rather the U.S. than Iran itself, as Iran's Foreign policy is analyzed against the U.S. influence in the region. The article makes the assumption that Iran will enhance its influence after the U.S. drawdown in 2014. It explores implications of Iran's greater presence in Afghanistan for Iran's position in the nuclear dispute, foreseeing greater cooperation between Iran and the U.S. with Hassan Rouhani as Iran's president. The report discusses Iran's long-term interests in Afghanistan by exploring political and ideological, as well as the economic and cultural aspects of Iran's influence. The new cooperation with India, Russia and Pakistan, which such influence opens for Iran, is also analyzed as significant for the United States.

In the European Institute for Security Studies, Walter Posch defines Iran's foreign policy with regards to Afghanistan by highlighting the three main goals Iran has: keeping good terms with Afghanistan, prevent any possibility of civil war and to prevent Afghanistan from serving as a bridgehead for any foreign aggression towards Iran (Posch, 2014). These goals are seen as everlasting ones to ensure Iran's presence in the affairs of its neighbor. This alert paper emphasizes the complicity of the foreign policy Iran pursues in Afghanistan, whereby it acts both as a donor of multiple development projects in Afghanistan and at the same time undermines many economic efforts of Afghanistan to become independent that can have adverse effects on Iran's own economy. Last, but not least, Posch does not foresee intensification of cooperation between Iran and the West, or at least that such cooperation can be no longer built on the mere existence of the global jihadist threats or internal instable situation in Afghanistan.

The means taken by Iran to ensure the fulfillment of its continuing aims are explored by Sumitha Narayanan Kutty (2014). The analysis emphasizes that Iran has more in common with the U.S. than the later does with Pakistan (the U.S. partner in the

war led in Afghanistan). Kutty also explains why by exploring the continuing interests of Iran as compared to those of Pakistan. While Afghanistan – Iran relations are at the focus of the article, Kutty analyzes them against Iran's goals (whereby the main remains to ensure a pro-Iranian democratic government in Kabul) and the means to pursue them, most importantly by the military and economic involvement, as well as in the ethno-religious sector. Although the article begins with recollection of Iran's involvement in supporting anti-Taliban operations led by the U.S. after the 9/11 and consequent Bonn Process that shaped new Afghan constitutional law, it also concludes that the situation became more complicated between the U.S. and Iran over the fissile materials, and the atmosphere of suspicion will assumedly remain, if not escalate under President Rouhani. The confrontation of Iran with U.S. and Israel may result in the shifts in its foreign policy in Afghanistan. Kutty plants a seed for speculation on the prospects of Iran-India cooperation in Afghanistan that should instigate new research directions.

Iran's status as the most important neighbor of Afghanistan is explored by Henner Fürtig in his article on the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan, alongside foreign policies of Turkey and Saudi Arabia (Fürtig, 2014). In his article, Fürtig demonstrates how Iran has been making efforts to ensure a strong central power in Kabul, contributing to stability in its neighboring Afghanistan after the ISAF withdrawal, as compared to the measures taken with regards to this country by Turkey and Saudi Arabia (countries regarded as pro-Western in their policies towards Afghanistan). This article explores relations between Afghanistan and Iran after the 1979 revolution by conducting a historical examination and addressing the changes this revolution has brought. It discusses the consequences of Iran's support to the Afghan Shias. In this regard, it analyzes the new directions of the foreign policy of Iran demanding it to first fight against and later provide support to the Sunni Taliban fighters in Afghanistan (due to the changing international environment). The article explores the relations within the so-called "Afghanistan-Iran-US triangle" which helps to understand the shifts in the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan and the multifaceted nature of this policy. The article touches upon the competition for superiority between Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as explains Turkey's policy towards Afghanistan. The study concludes with the assessment of the positive and negative sides of the ISAF withdrawal from Afghanistan from the Iranian perspective, with an emphasis on the importance of having stable Iran on the international arena, if one aims for the stability in Afghanistan.

One of the recent studies on Iran's post-Taliban policy towards Afghanistan belongs to Kayhan Barzegar (2014). In his article Barzegar bases his argument on the fact that the foreign policy of Iran was historically evolving in the two directions ever since the defeat of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. On the one hand, Iran has been supporting stability and, thus, the central government, on the other hand, it has been preventing and undermining foreign military presence in Afghanistan. In the post - 2016 phase, the article tries to draw perspective conclusions on Iran's involvement in Afghanistan. It does assume that even under the pragmatic leadership of Hassan Rouhani, much will remain the same and the policy of Iran will be a balancing between its "rivalry" with the U.S. and Pakistan on the one hand and its "cooperation" with these countries on the other. Iran's interests in Afghanistan are explored in light of the Iranian "Look East" grand strategy, which this country pursues by cultural, economic and political-security measures of involvement. As with authors before him, Barzegar once again emphasizes the stability incentives of Iran in Afghanistan, especially in the bordering provinces. The article re-states that Iran sees the U.S. presence in Afghanistan as a threat to its own security, though under pragmatic-centrist Rouhani as the president of Iran, the danger of an imminent clash between Iran and the U.S. will most likely be avoided. Barzegar further discusses possible ISAF post-withdrawal developments with regards to relations between Iran and the Taliban, Iran and Pakistan and Iran and the United States. The article draws quite realistic conclusions, that despite common incentives of Iran and the U.S. to contribute to the stability of Afghanistan, the differences in the national interests of these two countries do not likely allow for any relationship between the two rivals.

Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh and Mohammad Fazeli discuss the foreign policy of Iran with regards to Afghanistan "after the nuclear deal" and the prospects for constructive cooperation between these two countries (Tadjbakhsh and Fazeli, 2016). The policy paper they co-author is aimed at aiding policy-makers in enhancing the relationship between Iran and Afghanistan. The paper discusses the relations in light of the lifted sanctions against Iran and how the nuclear agreement may enable it to bring alterations in its affairs, both domestically and internationally. The authors analyze how the new pragmatic governance of the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, different from the previous ideological rhetoric, will allow for better cooperation with Afghanistan. The paper further discusses the prospects of economic cooperation and the necessity to find

solutions for water-sharing, enhancing cultural and educational exchange as well as rebuilding cooperation with the world outside.

The brief summary of the literature presented above provides one with an overview of the most prominent studies, relevant for the present analysis. The above excellent studies have already done a great deal to come closer to understanding what Iran's foreign policy is in general and with regards to Afghanistan in particular. An important observation that one can make from the above studies is that most of the authors put a lot of emphasis on Iran-US-relations as an important factor shaping Iran's FP towards Afghanistan. The present analysis takes this observation into account.

It is evident that the nature of the Iranian domestic agenda and how that agenda affects Iran's relations with Afghanistan remains insufficiently examined in the literature. The present dissertation aims to fill in the gaps of the previous studies by delving deeper into the nature of Iranian foreign policy towards Afghanistan in the border region between the two countries. I hope to achieve this objective by taking into account the first-hand information that I have accessed and collected from primary sources and analyzed in this study.

1.3 Research Question

The overarching central research question of this thesis is: "What is the nature of Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014?" This overall research question comes from the thorough preliminary research of the relevant literature on Iran-Afghanistan relations from both before and after 2001. It allows one to assume that the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan has been inspired by different motives in different periods of the relationship between these two countries. This study reveals these motives and thoroughly analyzes them in the subsequent chapters. It does so by looking to answer the following sub-questions:

1. In what ways has the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan changed over the period of time due to the changing internal dynamics within Afghanistan and also due to the external regional and global dynamics?
2. What is the formal power structure of Iran and how do the informal foreign policy institutions function?
3. How is the foreign policy of Iran implemented in Afghanistan?

4. What are the main foreign policy interests of Iran in Afghanistan?
5. What constitutes Iran's economic policy towards Afghanistan?

1.4 Timeframe of the study

The time frame of the present study begins from the U.S. Afghan intervention in 2001, and the resumption of power by President Hamid Karzai under the Bonn Agreement on December 5, 2001. Therefore, it would include the period of the presidency of Hamid Karzai who served for 2 years as interim president from 2002-2004 and then followed with an additional 10 years (two terms of 5 years each) until 2014. It ends with the withdrawal of most foreign forces and the shift of their security responsibility to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and the government itself in the year 2014. The residual US/NATO foreign forces remained to “advise, train and assist missions, including counterterrorism and air support” for the national security forces of Afghanistan, as per the U.S. Naval Institute in their fight against the insurgents (which is claimed to be now a two-fronted, both Taliban as well as IS). The number has reduced down to approximately 8500, although there are speculations from the Pentagon that an additional 1500 troops might be deployed to strengthen the already present troops (Paton, 2017).

A primary reason why this time period has been taken into account vis-à-vis the study is because, after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the decision-making of Iranian foreign policy towards Afghanistan had to be shaped in consideration of the foreign military intervention in Afghanistan. As already mentioned, the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan has cut across different and at times conflicting fronts. For example, to limit the US-dominated western presence in Afghanistan, Iran both actively and passively assisted the Taliban even as there were numerous cases of violence against Hazaras (Shias) in Afghanistan committed by the Taliban which contradicts one of the main objectives of Iranian foreign policy in general (which is to consolidate and strengthen the Shia socio-political and socio-economic development in the region).

The change in post-2001 Iran-Afghan policy was brought about for security, economic and national interests. However, it symbolizes a sort of change within continuity, and it was developed after periodic Tehran-Kabul-Dushanbe diplomatic and official meetings for mutual benefits. Ironically, for Iran to support the Taliban seeds a

level of ambiguity as far as the security dimension of the bilateral agreements is concerned. Therefore, the study aims to demonstrate how Iranian foreign policy has metamorphosed during the 2001-2014 period in its relations towards Afghanistan and how this dynamism has complicated the overall security and other aspects of the bilateral relationship.

1.5 Relevance of the present study

The present study has focused on the foreign policy of Iran with regards to Afghanistan as there has been neither deep enough research done in this regard by the Western and Afghan scholars, nor has there been focus made on the domestic sources of the foreign policy of this country. Thus, the present research will contribute to the academic discourse on Iran and Afghanistan and will serve as a guideline for policymakers in both countries and to various stakeholders (academic and non-academic) at the regional and global level. Subsequently, the present study will provide a relevant framework between the two countries in terms of socio-political and socio-economic interaction and also to some of the foreign state or non-state actors that have had an active role in the region over the period of time. In congruence with understanding the significance of the study, the following points will also be dealt with in order to reflect upon the anatomy of the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan as well as its operationalization and its overall relevance for other outside actors:

- Where the line between the officially stated foreign policy of IRI and its de-facto implementation in Afghanistan lies.
- To shed a light on the management of Iran's interests in the bordering region with Afghanistan on the following three realms: economic, political and security.
- To define and explain the mechanism of policy implementation through the example of Iran's social and development programs in Afghanistan.
- To provide a better understanding of the pragmatic aims of Iranian dominant political actors as reflected in its foreign policy.
- To comprehend the decision made by Iran in a high-level politics and derive from conclusions for understanding the behind-the-scene foreign policy implementation on the local level in Afghanistan.

- To make the prognosis with regards to the role of Iran in Afghanistan's affairs and Iran's major foreign policy strategies by examining potential scenarios for Iran-Afghanistan relations after the withdrawal of the international troops in 2014.
- The research will serve as a supplementary aid to the German policy making institutes to help them to comprehend better the micro-level realities of the Iran-Afghanistan relations in Afghanistan's settings. The reason is that Germany is one of the main countries that has intervened both diplomatically and militarily in the region of Afghanistan besides the European Union, which happens to be the major non-state actor in the post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan, is again dominated by the German political and operational discourse across the globe especially in a place as volatile as Afghanistan.
- The appendix provides some policy suggestions for Germany and the European Union which follow from the conclusions drawn in the present research.

Due to a variety of reasons including the complexity and protracted nature of Afghan conflict and the lack of academic institutions and researchers, this is the first time that a work is being done to analyze Iran's foreign policy in relation to Afghanistan. This research opens up an academic discourse and establishes a roadmap for future research for other young professionals and interested academicians. As mentioned before, the study provides a better understanding of relations between the two countries and gives an analytical overview of these relations.

1.6 Research Methodology

The present dissertation is a qualitative case study on Iran-Afghanistan relations from 2001 to 2014. It encompasses a discussion of three components viz. historical reconstruction, content analysis, and semi-structured interviews. It is focused on understanding a phenomenon, rather than making predictions about the future. The study analyzes the nature of Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014. The historical reconstruction features a discussion on Iran-Afghanistan relations from 1979 to 1989 and then from 2001 through 2014. Iran was always involved in such historical Afghan processes for being Afghanistan's immediate neighbor. Therefore, besides the

interview method, the historical methodology will be followed in pursuit of the present study.

Accordingly, the source material will be scientifically analyzed to draw inferences and identify specified characteristics of the content on the basis of objectivity (Holsti, 1969, p.14). The objective is to present a balanced perception of Iran's Afghan policy. The study will thus be based on the consultation of sources, both primary and secondary, such as official documents of Afghanistan and Iran (national laws, international treaties and agreements, official statements in the national languages: Dari, Pashto and Farsi as well as in English), administrative files, personal diaries of the Afghan and Iranian officials and academicians, and proceedings of political discourses, economic initiatives, and cultural cooperation ventures, newspapers (Afghan and Iranian newspapers available online and in the library archives in Kabul and Herat, Tehran and Mashhad), historical accounts collected from the interview partners in Afghanistan and in Iran relevant for the research question of the present study. While conducting this study I have made two field trips to the Islamic Republic of Iran (Tehran and Mashhad) and seven field trips to Afghanistan (Kabul, Herat Farah and Nimroz). During the three field trips, travelling to Farah and Nimroz was under high risk, therefore additional field trips at a later stage to these provinces were necessary to conduct missing and follow-up interviews. Semi-structured interviews and participant observation methods were followed for data-collection during the three field trips to Herat province. By participant observation method I imply here the personal observations I made during the field trips to the border provinces of Afghanistan with Iran. Namely, I spent more than a week at the border, Islam Qala Border point, during each field trip, where I observed the goods flow across the border, the traders and border police behavior and had conversations with people, traders and drivers there in order to understand the peculiarities of everyday relations between the two countries. The interview partners consisted of both Afghan and Iranian nationals, a wide range of diverse people from different sectors of society, among whom were government officials, big traders and small businessmen, shopkeepers in the Western provinces of Afghanistan, long-distance truck drivers on the Iran-Afghan border, university professors and academicians, representatives of civil society (NGO employees, journalists), local elders and religious figures, former Mujahideen commanders and former governmental employees. While accessing people, I have used various methods: both my personal acquaintances, as well as the snowball technique, which is when people

I interviewed recommended to me another person with whom to communicate. I have thus managed to build a network of relevant partners who possess knowledge on the subject of the present study. Due to the sensitivity of the context in Afghanistan and ongoing conflict, most of the interview partners agreed to participate in the interviews, provided that their names were anonymized. The list of the interviews used in the present study with the details of interview partners, anonymized in the present work, is provided in the Annex for the internal purposes only and is not to be published. Being an Afghan native and contemporary to all that is happening in and across Afghanistan, I am well acquainted with the country's history, languages, culture, etc., and could, therefore, organize interviews with the respondents in native language Dari, Pashto and Farsi, the most productive means of constructing data on a certain subject.

The primary data was collected during the field research in Afghanistan (Kabul and the western part of Afghanistan) and Iran (Tehran and Iran's bordering region with Afghanistan) and includes the above-mentioned interviews as well as documentary data.

1.7 Theoretical Framework of the present study

The present study uses the theory of realism in international relations because its inherent rationalism provides a strong base for interpreting Iran's multilateral (political, economic, social, security) foreign policy towards Afghanistan (Ehteshami, 2002, p.284). The word "realism," in the context of international relations is associated with a number of key concepts: "power politics," "balance of power," "anarchy", "national interest", "security dilemma". These concepts are rich in content; hence, useful in understanding the present study within the conceptual framework of realism (Ashley, 1981, p.204).

Geoffrey Stern describes realism as "a tradition which prefers 'inertia to innovation, stability to change and experience to experimentation', accentuating [thereby] the phenomenon of political metamorphosis and the capacity of states to adapt as per the political dynamics taking place across the global political arena" (Stern, 1995, p.15).

Realists see power as the "currency" of the international politics. Great powers, the main actors in the realist's view, are concerned with the issue of the amount of power they possess with regards to each other. Meanwhile ensuring that balance of power cannot be easily changed by the counterpart state, so as to ensure that the later has more

resources on its side. For the realists, international politics is synonymous with power politics (Mearsheimer, 2013, p.78).

The theoretical part of the present study begins with a question as to what constitutes the notion of foreign policy and what are its key determinants in terms of national interests, national security, power politics etc. This will be followed by a discussion on the dynamics of the classical concept of realism by Morgenthau and the contemporary concept of neo-realism by Waltz. Further, it will also determine which one, classical or modern, concepts aptly fits in the present study and why.

The theory of realism facilitates understanding of Iran's behavior in the international system. This exogenous dimension is crucial for understanding the logic behind Iran's foreign policy. The study also seeks to study Iran's internal political structure, since to the realists, the logic behind establishing the foreign policy is dual in nature, internal and external state policies are intertwined. In this case, therefore, the focus of study will be on Iran's holistic political structure including both internal as well as external factors.

Realism in international relations is all about power politics in a state of international anarchy, and "the normative core of realism is national security and state survival; all these values drive the realist doctrine and realist foreign policy" (Jackson and Sorenson, 2013, p.66). Even when nation-states did not exist, political philosophers like Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and other classical realists like, Carr, Morgenthau, and Kennan believed that the power possession and its use are the central political activity of states (Jackson and Sorenson, 2013 p.66). Therefore, in realism, states' security and national interests are always at the forefront of the international relations (Mearsheimer, 2013, p.73). The psychological perspective of realism, to a certain extent, can be associated with the correlation existing in the maxim of "survival of the fittest", where the states' strive for mutual wellbeing within their competitive relationship, thus squeezing the scope of their self-centric nature. According to Hans Joachim Morgenthau, one of the leading authors of Realism, "politics is a struggle for power over men and whatever its ultimate aim may be, power is its immediate goal and the modes of acquiring, maintaining, and demonstrating it determine the technique of political action" (Morgenthau, 1965, p.195).

Thus, the core concepts which all realists agree upon are: (a) the international system is anarchic (Morgenthau, 1965), (b) states are the most prominent actors in the international system (Mearsheimer, 2013), and (c) states act in their own interest in pursuit of either power or security (Morgenthau, 1985, p.10). To summarize, the main concepts found in realist theory are anarchy, the balance of power, and national interests.

Realists were accused of being incapable of explaining the resumption of harmonious relations between the USSR and the USA at the end of the Cold War era. Nevertheless, in my view, Realism can best explain the complex socio-political and socio-economical pragmatic policies of the states in the Middle East. Also, recent deterioration of the relations between Russia and Western states as well as the competition between China and the USA show that Realism might not be as outdated as a number of authors have thought since in the 1990s.

As mentioned before, Iran's Afghan foreign policy is the core of the present study. Based on a Realist understanding of foreign policy, the study will investigate the relationship between Iran's national and the international politics (here, in this case, international in relation to Iran's interaction with Afghanistan) - between its policy formulation and policy execution. (Mearsheimer, 2007, p.71-88)

With the help of the chosen theory, the political, security and economic aspects of the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan will be the center of attention, more specifically during the period of 2001-2014. The realist paradigm defines a body of theories that share a hand-full of core beliefs, more specifically based on the analogy that nation-states are the principal actors in world politics (Groupism), and no higher authority sits above them. This structure of world politics leads to an absence of hierarchy in the state system, commonly called anarchy, which does not mean chaos and balance, per se, but rather that states are sovereign political entities representing a significant recognition within the ambit of the global polity. Furthermore, strong power dominates state thinking as the primary national interest, and the states compete for the same (power- centrism) among themselves (Mearsheimer, pp.58-59). In a way, it suggests that "states are the primary actors or the centers of the power" in world affairs and it is the language of power politics that somehow helps to understand the state behavior in the midst of such interactions (Elias and Sutch, 2007, p.43).

Precisely, realism in international relations is all about power politics operational in a state of international anarchy. The national security and state survival that reflect a parallel manifestation of the power politics are the fundamental elements of realism in international relations (Morgenthau, 1978, p.9).

1.7.1 General Context of Realism

A. Anarchy in the international system:

Anarchy in the international system does not virtually mean lawlessness or global disorder but more specifically an absence of a vertical global hierarchy, which according to Morgenthau, is because of a powerful centralized political authority over otherwise warring nation-states in a vulnerable geopolitical scenario. More so, this is because nation states find themselves in an incessant security dilemma (Kissane 2011, p.181). Security dilemma is a situational configuration in international relations under the garb of anarchy which promulgates actions by states aimed at strengthening their security by various means, like increasing their military strength, upgrading military strength and making alliances both at regional as well as international levels. Subsequently, other states also initiate a similar response to boost their security, thus leading to a state of tensions with a potential to pose a threat of a conflict even if it is unwanted. For example, North Korea and U.S. present political/security developments as the best characteristic of security dilemma which has led the two countries and their respective alliances on the verge of a large-scale conflict, a series of war of words has already begun. Therefore, “security dilemma theory and the broader spiral model constitute a powerful theory of war and peace via interaction. They capture general dynamics leading to the outbreak of war and the maintenance of peace (that is, by reversing or alleviating the security dilemma). The concept’s influence thus extends well beyond theory” (Tang, 2009) and hence, is a prominent driver for initiating a war or maintaining peace depending upon the direction in which the measures are taken.

The classical realists view state behavior at two levels, one domestic and another international. In the former, the states’ anyhow manage security dilemma through national laws and regulations, whereas it is difficult for them, in the latter case, since actors are many and the states’ jurisdiction is limited. Mearsheimer characterizes the international system as being “self-helped” in the sense that there is no higher actor in it

to which a state may appeal in the case of need, such as an aggression from an outside powerful state. Even though states enter into multilateral agreements in order to protect their interest, no state, however, will prioritize the interest of another over its own. Even great powers will try to gain more power which will enable their dominance (Mearsheimer, 2013, p.72). Even international organizations like United Nations to some extent have a limited role to play when it comes to interaction between two states especially in matters related to their economic or security issues, more specifically those states which are members of the United Nations. The reasons could be many but the prime reason is that the concept of neutrality is somehow reflected by the United Nations through its intervention which is more of a tactical display than a result oriented interposition. For example, Israel has time and again been involved in gross human rights violations in Palestine in contravention of the International law, but due to its very strong alliance with the US, it gets carried away. The general concept of international anarchy can be related to a generalized perception that international system continues to be a volatile entity, and there is every possibility of a cataclysmic development at any point of time obviously for the clash of interests between/among nation-states (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2006, p74). These point to an unprecedented pessimism in the global political system. To conclude, all the realists, both classical and the contemporary, argue that the international system is exposed to constant threat and conflict for the absence of a central authority over the nation states. Consequently, states seek to ensure their own fate and survival at the expense of others states which further complicates the whole network of international relations.

B. States are the most important players:

The states' emergence gained significance after the Treaty of Westphalia 1648. Since then, the states consider themselves as the ultimate political institutions on the global forefront. All the international non-state actors, per se, regional and international organizations, formulate and operate policies within states' interests, their sovereignty and integrity. Their thought has not changed despite the change in times. Instead, with every passing day, states try to be more strong and dominant (Vaughan, 2011).

Hans Morgenthau's approach shows as to how for the vested interests of the nation states shape their interaction with regional or global actors. The states are least bothered about morals and ethics in political, economic or societal structures. Therefore, "the main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of

international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power” (Morgenthau, 1978, p.5).

C. Power Politics:

Power sharing, the balance of power and power dominance have gained significance in global politics, primarily for the realist school of thought, both traditional and non-traditional). Naturally, the state has no limits for power urge: the more power a state gets, the more it wants, “as a key concept of interest defined as power” (Morgenthau, 1978, pp.4-15) pointing thereby to an "insatiable power appetite" (Toledo, 2005). Realists establish a close link between power and military potential of states and its use against other states. This state-centric nature of realism inevitably pushes the states towards self-help and survival purportedly for their own safety (Riley, 2008). Morgenthau, in a way, gives a lot of weight to the concept of national interest in terms of power (Morgenthau, 1993, p.5).

Morgenthau defines power as “anything that establishes and maintains the power of man over man” (Morgenthau, 1993, p.11). In political or the security/military terms he explains power as either the threat of use of force or the actual use of force by the states’ in the war. He also justifies the war and use of force unmindful of the international moral and legal obligation (Morgenthau, 1993, pp.4-32).

Hans Morgenthau believes that power politics is in the very human nature since one individual tries to overtake another by whatever means possible, foul or fair. Precisely, the same kind of human urge is replicated in the state behavior for ‘power and security-centrism’. This presupposes that it is the desire for power more than anything else that constitutes the evil in human action (Morgenthau, 1946, p.194).

Despite being a contemporary realist, Waltz upheld some basic assumptions of classical realists regarding human and state nature for power. However, he denounced ‘self-help’ or ‘self-sustenance’ variables of classical realism, although these constitute a roadmap for the states’ adjustment in the regional and global framework (Erik, 2010, p.80). Both global politics and power politics are synonymous considering that power is the global currency. All the great powers, therefore, are in the constant race for building an army, arms and other military soft- and hardware to outweigh each other or to compete with other great economic and military powers (Wight, 1946, p.50). The power game has

two fundamental targets: to increase own power and reduce the power of others simultaneously to control the balance of power in their own favor.

Morgenthau perceived national power in its national interests, national geography, natural resources, military capability, industrial power, national morale, the quality of government and diplomacy. However, he considers “quality of diplomacy” quite important because it “combines those different factors [aforesaid indicators] into an integrated whole, gives them direction and weight and awakens their slumbering potentialities by giving them the breath of actual power” (Morgenthau, 1985, p.14).

Morgenthau in his book, *Politics Among Nations, the Struggle for Power and Peace* 1948, “categorizes power as means to the nation's ends, other than nation's ends for power”. Any deviation from it is due to affect the states’ status quo and policy formulation and exposition. Though he advocates imperialism as an expression of ‘state-centrism’, he does not undermine the human tendency for peace, moral obligation and humanistic principles. He admits that “there exists necessity of a certain relativism in the relation between moral principles and foreign policy; one cannot overlook this if one wants to do justice to the principles of morality in international politics” (Morgenthau, 1979, p.4).

D. Foreign Policy and Realism:

The Foreign policy reflects the mode of a state interaction with other states or non-state actors for the national interest pursuits. The national interests are diverse ranging from political, social, and economic to cultural horizons. These interests have changed over the years due to changes in the global setting. The new phenomenon of globalization and armed insurgency periodically impacted on the national interests as well as on their foreign policy formulation and execution. The foreign policy involves a comprehensive mainstream and peripheral vision. It has thus both internal and external dynamics. National interests and foreign policy are co-related processes in a global system.

Foreign policy during the 21st century is characteristic of aggressive exhibitionism. Traditional and non-traditional security threats radiating especially from the rise of fundamentalism or extremism pose serious threats to the national security/interests. Classical realism explains the security compulsions binding the states in a common security mechanism through motivation and persuasion and provides the guidelines for conducting the states’ with unruly behavior, although neo-realists advocate

the former rather than the latter dimension (Rose, 1998, p.145). By and large, the national interests can guide foreign policy on three accounts:

- National interest can pre-empt the participatory approach involving the local masses in the foreign policy formulation decisions of their concerned state.
- National interest can provide a roadmap for the election or selection of a genuine national leadership; and
- National interest can directly serve as a tool for the formulation, execution, and analysis of foreign policy.

Hans J. Morgenthau prescribes two distinct levels of national interest, the vital and the secondary (Morgenthau 1962, p.191). The former concerns some of the general interests of a state, per se, its security, institutions, protection of freedoms and values. "Vital interests also negate compromise and represent issues over which the state is willing to wage war." (Liotta, 2000) On the other hand, secondary interests are softer in nature and revolve around the national diplomacy paradigms (Liotta, 2000). Both the levels of interest are significant at their own places depending upon the kind of situation in which a state actually remains at a particular period of time.

Gideon Rose (1998) in his article, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy" discusses four major theories of foreign policy. All of them have been classified on the basis of the internal and external factors responsible for the shaping of the foreign policy. Of these, only the first theory, *Innenpolitik* (Domestic politics) is crucial because it directly influences the foreign policy dynamics of a state. The remaining three theories focus upon the international system and its impact on the foreign policy of the states.

1.8 Iran-Afghan Relations within international Relations Paradigms

The Iran-Afghanistan foreign policy is based on the reciprocity of "giving and taking" relationship. However, it is ensured that mutual interests are safe within their respective national and international paradigms. The set analogy that "I scratch your back and you scratch mine" best illustrates the nature and scope of this and international relations in this modern era.

The conflicts in the world today once again confirm the realists' view that countries shape regional or global politics for their own interests rather than the interests

of others, and do not feel bound by any ethical or moral obligation, even though they may have mutual agreements simultaneously. The national interest or national power expressed especially in the states' "quality of diplomacy" reigns supreme to them, since it "combines those different factors into an integrated whole, gives them direction and weight and awakens their slumbering potentialities by giving them the breath of actual power" (Morgenthau, 1985, p.14).

The UN failure to restore global order validates the classical realist thought that the states (presently China, USA, Russia and other great powers), "are the primary actors or the centers of the power" in world affairs and that the states (Iran in the present case), adopt themselves as per the changing global politics. No wonder it does not think necessary to balance the gap between 'saying and doing', which approach reaffirms that language of power politics is a key to comprehend the state behavior (Iran's conduct) in the international relations (Elias and Sutch, 2007, p.43). Iran's Afghan foreign policy precisely exhibits the same. In a way, Iran's approach approximates to Morgenthau's vital determinants of foreign policy (Morgenthau, 1962, p.191). That Iran's relations with Afghanistan involve security and other vital considerations and that compromise and negotiate with other secondary measures that are essential for Iran's vital foreign policy objective. Both the levels of foreign policy interest intertwined and vigorously pursued as regards its partner Afghanistan.

Iran's Afghan foreign policy replicates classical realism proposed by Morgenthau and is multi-factorial in nature and limited in the scope of 'state-centrism'. The relationship between Iran and Afghanistan sustains on the basis of an anarchic manifestation of the global politics, here in this case, regional in nature, since Afghanistan seems to be an open and semi-porous territory for various close-by and far away international actors (India being the recent "to be addition" in this race). The dense neighborhood intervention in Afghanistan including Iran is justified to a large extent since Afghanistan has had a historical lineage to affect the political climate of its neighborhood and this lineage seems to be ever sustainable even in present times. The scope of the relationship between Iran and Afghanistan is predominantly confined between the two countries (mostly in case of Iran if not completely for Afghanistan) even if outside actors, both state as well as non-state, have stakes in the emerging political dynamics of the region. United Nations being a major non-state actor also persuades a limited scope for intervention when it comes to formulation and implementation of the foreign policy of

Iran towards Afghanistan, even though the same cannot be said about the reciprocity of reaction by the Afghanistan government wherein the scope of foreign actors especially the UN and the U.S. is inevitable. Iran's policy towards Afghanistan seems to be dominated by economic factors that are somehow favorable for both and wherein the scope of outside actors is very minimal. It is the security dimension of the political interaction between the two countries that has attracted regional as well as international actors. Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan is governed by the realist thought of high-levels of vital and secondary dimensions of the foreign policy. The dimensions range from traditional security threats from other states to the non-traditional security threats from the IS and Al-Qaeda like violent religious organizations. Iran-Afghan security cooperation is covered under the vital dimension of the foreign policy. Even if Iran opposes the US-Afghanistan security ties up for its chronic enmity with the US, it nonetheless sustains security cooperation with Afghanistan. Iran-Afghanistan economic cooperation under the "bilateral strategic cooperation agreement" also falls within the same realist purview. Their mutual trade expansion and transport networking diversification constitute their vital foreign policy initiative. Pertinently, Afghanistan happens to be the transit route for Iran's Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline project and Iran's connect with China under China's "One Belt One Road" overland and over-sea trade and transport project Central Asia, Russia and Europe (Khalil, 2017).

Iran's Afghan foreign policy describes the changing paradigm of international relations. It developed on the eve of the famous Iranian Revolution of 1979; both countries were then caught up in inextricable challenges. Iran was busy in nation building and post-revolution recovery and reconstruction. Afghanistan was fighting the Soviet occupation through an armed struggle, as has been the case for Afghans in wars with the foreign occupational forces in the past. It makes the Afghan history kaleidoscopic in nature and scope.

The Iran-Afghanistan relations were thus partly the product of the change of the role of international actors (e.g. US) vis-a-vis Afghan affairs. Overtly or covertly, Iran then supported the Afghan Mujahideen against the Soviets. Similarly, it supported the Taliban against the U.S. since 2001. Clearly, Iran's involvement in Afghanistan was governed by its own multidimensional foreign policy as is normal in the realism-centric state structure. However, such a policy experienced transformation from time to time.

Iran's Afghan foreign policy reflects its changing response to the changing Afghan government, its institutions and others structures over time. One major driver of this policy is anti-US rhetoric. Iran's leaders are apparently motivated, at least to some extent, by the perception of threat to their regime and their national interests posed by the United States and its allies. Iran's paramount decision maker and one of the main components of formulating the foreign policy, supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Ali Khomeini (and erstwhile Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini), has repeatedly stated that the United States has never accepted the Islamic revolution and seeks to overturn it through support for domestic opposition to the regime, imposition of economic sanctions, and support for Iran's regional adversaries. The following two points insinuated by the Grand Ayatollah vis-à-vis their political discourse towards the U.S. unequivocally confirm the threat posed by the U.S. (as claimed by *Rahbar*⁵):

- a) The Supreme Leader frequently warns against Western “cultural influence”—social behavior that he asserts does not comport with Iran's societal and Islamic values.
- b) Iran's leaders assert that the U.S. maintenance of a large military presence in the Persian Gulf region and in other countries around Iran reflects its intent to intimidate Iran or attack it if Iran pursues policies the United States finds inimical (Katzman, 2017).

Another major driver is the Islamic ideology since both countries confess Islam as the state religion. Yet another is a sectarian factor, on which account Iran supports its fellow ethnic Shia Hazaras in Iran's immediate Afghan neighborhood of Herat and elsewhere. The community suffered ethnic cleansing at the hands of the Taliban, which Iran always resented and protested at the international forums. The Shia Hazaras' vulnerability has no ending till date. It is for this sectarian factor that the Iran-Arab world is sharply divided in the Middle East and it is this very factor that drives Iran to befriend Afghanistan and seek the security of Shia Hazaras community and their due representation in the country's legal, executive, financial, political and other governmental institutions. It is again for this reason that Iran opposes the Presidential form of Government in Afghanistan and supports a Parliamentary set up so that the Shia Hazaras find a legitimate platform for expression and security against the Sunni-centric

⁵ *Rahbar* – translated from Farsi into English as “Leader”, used in Iranian academic literature to refer to the Supreme Leader of Iran.

fanatic insurgents. Even Iran backs them to find a reasonable representation in the State cabinet and indeed in the entire politico-economic format of the country.

1.9 Thesis Structure

This study intensively as well as extensively demonstrates how Iran has made a significant impact on the political, security and economic stability of Afghanistan and also what have been the issues that have arisen concerning the national interests of both state actors alongside and what has been the reaction of the two, by analyzing the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014. I have explained my arguments on the basis of information contained in my eight-chapter format. Chapter one contains the introduction of the research problem, its theoretical foundation and methodology used for its pursuit as well as the literature review. Chapter two situates Iran-Afghanistan relations in a historical perspective since the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, including a time frame prior to the subscribed time frame of the study (which begins from 2001), because the historical development in terms of their relationship is significant to the analysis of the various dimensions especially at a time when the global configuration was changing dramatically (Iranian revolution of 1979 and 1991 Soviet breakdown). Chapter three focuses on formal and informal Iranian political institutions, including foreign policy making institutions. The intention is to link Iran's domestic policy with its foreign policy formulation vis-à-vis Afghanistan in this particular case. This chapter is based on the qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources. The materials used in this chapter are mostly relying on the analysis of the Iranian Constitution to describe the political structure of Iran. Various sources such as books, journal articles and governmental and non-governmental reports and documents have been used as primary tools for the analysis of the formal and informal power structure of IRI in practice. This chapter also analyzes the power and role of the Iranian Supreme Leader and the institutions under his direct supervision, per se, executive, legislative and judiciary. However, to comprehend Iranian political institutions, it is necessary to understand its post-1979 constitution as well as the ideology of the revolutionary leader of Iran. The chapter concludes with an overview of the de facto shaping of the foreign policy. Chapter four is an Iran's foreign policy review, with a focus on the underlying goals and objectives (2001-2014), and their relevance to Afghanistan as a state and local non-state actors, such as political parties, civil society, and the Taliban. It shows how Iran achieved these goals and objectives through various,

sometimes contradictory, policies: by building ties with political parties, state officials, and individuals within Afghanistan and promoting and protecting the rights of Shia ethnic groups through the medium of ethno-sectarian ideology, as well as by rendering Iranian assistance to Taliban and finally recognizing the Taliban as a key non-state actor not only in the conflict in Afghanistan but also as a political entity in the region by allowing the Taliban to open an office in Zahedan (eastern Iran) in 2012. The analysis is conducted in light of the four major visions of Iranian government I single out to discuss Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan. Chapter five examines Iran's foreign policy interests (security, economic and political) in Afghanistan, existing Iran-Afghanistan geopolitical setting and its influence on Iran's political, security, strategic and sectarian interests in Afghanistan. More important, it unfolds the Iran-Taliban links building upon what already has been focused upon vis-à-vis Iran-Taliban relationship more exclusively and even more comprehensively. Chapter six is a detailed analysis of the Iranian institutions that implement its foreign policy in practical policy pursued with regards to Afghanistan. Chapter seven is devoted to a discussion on Iran's economic policy, its strategies and given financial support to Afghanistan for building trade, railway roadways and other economic projects. This policy has both short- and long-term objectives to reach the regional market in Central and South Asia via Afghanistan as a transit zone. Finally, in Chapter eight I draw the conclusion and discuss the findings which will be based on the comprehensive observation of the different dimensions of the relationship between the two countries in terms of the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan. I look back at the theory of realism in light of all the dynamic developments that have taken place over the period of stipulated time frame and make suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2. Iran-Afghanistan Relations: A Historical Overview

Iran-Afghanistan relations date back to the Achaemenid rule (the first Persian Empire) in 550–330 BCE. Its famous King, Cyrus the Great, occupied and ruled over the territory of today's Afghanistan through his Governors, and thus laid the foundation of the Iran-Afghanistan relations during the period BCE. The Persian Afghan rule sustained under the Parthians (150 BCE-633 CE) and the Sassanids (3rd Century CE). In fact, the Sassanid Empire was the last Iranian rule over Afghanistan before the advent of Islam. Subsequently, Afghanistan fell into the hands of different other dynasties, the Khanate of Bukhara, Mughals from Kabulistan and the Safavids from Iran in the 16th century.

The Safavid King, Shah Ismail I (1501-1524) occupied eastern Afghanistan in the wake of territorial expansion. However, his rule diminished in the 17th century as a result of his anti-Sunni policy and the repression that followed for conversion of the Afghan Sunnis into the Shia creed. The sequential reaction led to the decline of Iranian rule in Kandahar and the independence of southern Afghanistan under the leadership of Mirwais Hotak, a distinguished Sunni Ghilzai Pashtun tribal chief. In retaliation, his son Mahmud conquered Persia but retained it for only a brief period in 1722 and because Iran was then confronted with civil strife and the foreign threat from the Ottomans and the Russians (Amy, 2003). However, the Iranian King Nadir Shah retook Afghanistan in 1736 and retained it till 1747 when Ahmad Shah Durrani defeated him and established an independent Afghan empire by uniting all Afghan tribes under one political flagship. Nonetheless, Iran's meddling in Afghan affairs did not end. Iran made several invasions in Afghanistan, especially in the Herat province, in the 19th century. (Clements 2003, p.8).

This is the extended past and is meant here as background to the description of the historical developments more relevant for the present study of Iran-Afghanistan relations. This chapter aims to provide an overview of the historical events in the modern history of the Iran-Afghanistan and show how they shape the relations between these two countries. Such historical excursion is necessary, as it will help to prepare the reader to understand the analysis performed in subsequent chapters. The below historical overview covers several important periods and aspects: after the independence of Afghanistan from the British Empire in 1919 (section 2.1); the period starting with the Soviet occupation of

Afghanistan and the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 (section 2.2); the next period starting with the pull-out of Soviet troops in 1989 and covers the beginning of the civil war in 1991 (section 2.3); it leads to the post-2001 period, in which the involvement of Iran and other regional actors is briefly described (section 2.4); in light of the events after 2001, the next section discusses the shift in Iran's foreign policy (section 2.5); it further discusses the cultural aspect of Iran's policy towards Afghanistan (section 2.6); and the summary (section 2.7).

2.1 Independence of Afghanistan from the British Empire in 1919

Although Iran-Afghanistan relations were almost dormant during the 20th century Anglo-Russian imperial wars, some relations did exist. King Amanullah Khan declared independence from the British Empire in August 1919. He assumed power through war while the Iranian King, Reza Shah (Iran's ousted King after the Islamic revolution), assumed power with British support in 1920. Both were focused on the economic development of their respective countries and believed in peace and cooperation with each other (Mozhda, 2010). Their mutual relations were declared especially after the three Anglo-Afghan Wars in 1839-1842; 1878-1880 and 1919 respectively.

For the love or hate of the growing British power, the two countries under King Amanullah Khan and Iranian King Ahmad Shah of the Qajar dynasty (1908-1925) thought to sort out border, water, and political issues. As a confidence-building measure, they established diplomatic relations between Tehran and Kabul in 1920 (Amanat, 2013, pp.2-3), and the first Afghan Ambassador to Tehran, Abdul Aziz Khan, was appointed. This was followed by a Friendship Treaty (accessed in Dari language in the Archive of the MoFA of Afghanistan 2016) between them in 1921 with following terms stipulated in the agreement:

- To start a friendly dialogue and establish diplomatic and political relations;
- To establish an Afghan Council in Mashhad city of Iran; and
- To develop trade relations between Kabul and Tehran.

However, the relations were strained due to the countries' making of alliances and counter-rallies with Turkey, Russia, and Britain. Between 1927-1928 King Amanullah Khan visited several European countries in order to strengthen diplomatic relations with these countries, followed by visiting Turkey and Iran. During this detour, he called for the

signing of a treaty between the Soviet Union, Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan. This proposal was welcomed neither by Turkey nor by Iran and has aggravated the Afghanistan-Iran relations. On return to Afghanistan, King Amanullah Khan gave such statements before Loya Jirga (Grand Afghan Assembly) as infuriated Iran to the extent that it called back its Ambassador from Kabul (Haqiqi, 1386). These statements were not only anti-Iran but also pro-Baloch separatist movement launched by Dust Mohammad Khan Baloch in Iran-controlled Afghan area. Russia unsuccessfully tried to intervene and restore Iran-Afghanistan relations (Haqiqi, 1386, p.109). During an interview at Balkh University, a Professor of Balkh University commented on these changing Iran-Afghan relations by saying that actually,

“Afghan King Amanullah Khan feared that Iran may, with the British support, re-attempt taking Herat from Afghanistan, though Russia announced that it would fully stand by King Amanullah in that event. Obviously, Amanullah Khan visited Turkey to garner Turkish support against the anticipated Iranian threat on its western borders. Further, since Iran was drawing close to Britain, Afghanistan wanted to be close to both Russia and Turkey for the security of its national interests” (N. M., personal interview, 17 March 2015).

Indeed, the fear of Afghan King was substantiated. Thus, when King Amanullah has started his reforms after returning from its European detour, which was met by the popular rebellion in Afghanistan, the claims on Herat were once again expressed by Iran. Iran has offered its military support to the Afghan King to suppress the rebels, asking for Herat to be returned to Iran, in exchange (Rahmani and Hoseini, 1391, p.236).

King Amanullah Khan was dethroned by Nadir Shah Khan, who later was succeeded by his son Mohammad Zahir Shah in 1933 (Mozhda, 2010). During Zahir Shah's regime, Kabul-Tehran diplomatic and political relations resumed. In the process, Nadir Shah recognized all the prior treaties and agreements with Afghanistan by his former King Amanullah Khan. Their relations, however, were damaged in 1933 on account of border and water issues.

Further progress in their bilateral relations was achieved through a four-power arbitration agreement between Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan in 1937 (Sadabad Pact) in order to resolve border issues and ensure non-interference in one another's internal affairs (Zürcher, 2004, p.202).

The settlement of the border and water issues between Tehran and Kabul was possible because of the recommendations of an international commission. Accordingly, in

1936, the Commission Chairman, General Fakhruddin Altay, demarcated up to 234 km. borderline (Altay Borderline) between Iran and Afghanistan. Their border dispute in Musa Abad district also ended in 1937 with the Sadabad Pact signed by the Afghan Foreign Minister Faize Mohammad Khan and Iranian Ambassador Mirza Mohammad Taqi Khan Esfandiari. In view of the improved relations, the first Tehran and Kabul postal service were commissioned in 1938 (MoFA archive, Kabul, Afghanistan).

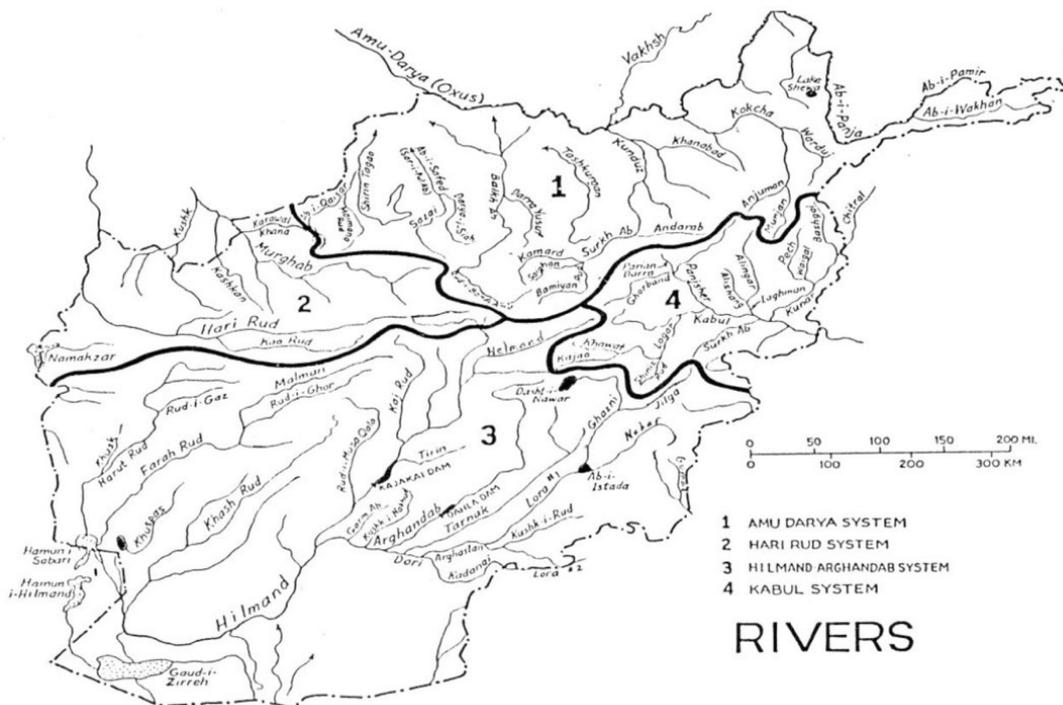
Nonetheless, while border issues were settled by the Altay Commission, water issues existed particularly because of Iran's water scarcity due to climatic and other changes. The scarcity was of such intensity that Iran vainly approached U.S. Security Council for its settlement at the time of the Altay Commission (Mozhda, 2010, p.45). Since water significantly characterized Iran's foreign policy, Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran again picked up the issue with the last Afghan King, Mohammad Zahir Shah, in 1938. The result was a treaty through which "the governments of Iran and Afghanistan agreed to divide into equal shares all waters of the Helmand River which flow to Band-e Kamal Khan (30 miles inside Afghan territory) between Iran and Afghanistan" (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2007, p.249). Further, Afghanistan pledged not to repair old or construct any new stream on the Band-e Kamal Khan River (Bakhtyari, 1381, p.68). But this agreement was not realized due to the collapse of Reza Shah's Kingdom in Iran and the denial of the Afghan Parliament (*Majlesi Shura*) to ratify it (Bakhtyari, 1381, p.69), although Iran regarded this agreement in accord with international standards. The Sistan Draught in Iran in 1947 was the result of the construction of a dam by Afghanistan on the Helmand River done through the Americans in 1945 (Islam, 2011, p.125).

While the two countries established air service in 1956 and joint transit and trade relations on December 3, 1960, they nonetheless lacked mutual trust to permanently normalize their relationship.

Iran-Afghan relations resumed in 1963. These relations sustained during the Republican government of Sardar Mohammad Dawoud Khan. His presidency (1973-1978) was noted for his close relations with USSR, the emancipation of women and the famous Helmand Valley project. Under him, Kabul and Tehran kept good border relations through mutual understanding on border issues and water sharing of Helmand River (Clements 2003, p.8). Friendship with Iran was so close that Iran facilitated smoothing over of Afghan-Pakistan relations related to the impasse on the Pashtunization issue. Dawoud Khan realised that the cordial relations with Iran were essential for

Afghanistan's economic development. Afghan president visited Tehran in 1354 (1975) and returned to his country with a promise of two billion USD for Afghanistan made by Iran's Shah, to be paid in the course of ten years. However, water issues between Iran and Afghanistan have remained unresolved. In addition to this, Iran was also concerned with the close relations of Kabul with Moscow (Masiha 2018). With the U.S. help, Iran paid 300 million USD in a loan to Kabul with a condition that Kabul limits its relations with Moscow in exchange. Iran also provided two billion USD in a loan to Kabul for its railway projects, although it could not materialize due to the Communist coup d'état in Afghanistan in which Dawoud Khan was assassinated (Grantham, n.d.).

Figure 1. Drainage Map of Afghanistan



Note: Showing Helmand River basin as Number 3; Hari Rud and Murghab as Number 2.

Source: Center for Afghanistan Studies, (n.d.).

2.2 Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan and the Islamic Revolution in Iran

Iran-Afghanistan relations were severed after Soviet Afghan occupation in 1979, which coincided with the occurrence of the Khomeini-led Islamic Revolution in Iran. Initially, Iran's response to Soviet Afghan occupation was passive so as not to offend

Moscow. Subsequently, however, it condemned Soviet Afghan occupation (Milani, 2006) on ideological grounds (namely, due to the ideology of *Velayat-e faqih*: guardianship of the jurist) and its allied foreign policy shift (1979-1992). Under this ideology, Khomeini was not only the Iranian religious-spiritual Supreme Leader but the decision-making power in all political matters. In that capacity, he underscored the need to export the Islamic Revolution outside of Iran. He advised the Soviet Union Ambassador to Iran before 1979 to abstain from the invasion of Afghanistan:

“On the day when the Soviet Ambassador came to me and told me that Afghan government has requested the Soviet Union to send troops, I told him that it will be a mistake if the Soviet Union will do this. Of course, Soviets can occupy Afghanistan but they cannot remain there. If you think you will take Afghanistan, and you will stabilize it, it is a useless idea. Afghans are Muslims, they stand against the communist government. If you or any other power will go there, this power will break” (The Institute for compilation and publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works, 2013)

The first ten years of Iran’s policy towards Afghanistan, therefore, were largely shaped by Khomeini and his successor Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (as this study will analyze in detail in chapter four of this study).

Foreign Minister Sadegh Ghotbzadeh (1978-1980) outlined Iran’s policy in Afghanistan in 1979, during the Soviet occupation, in three simple terms. First, all Soviet troops must leave Afghanistan. Second, the “insurgents” should be brought into a new movement. Third, the Karmal regime cannot be recognized as Kabul’s legitimate government but could participate in negotiations on the country’s future as an ‘interested party’ (Emery, 2013, p.170).

With the resumption of Presidency by Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in 1989 and until 1997, Iranian foreign policy radically changed (Ehteshami, 2002, p.238-309). Ideology was exhaustively used as a cover for pursuing security, economic and geopolitical interests, settling remaining border issues with Afghanistan and extending security to the ethnic minority Shia Hazaras of Afghanistan and their participation in the political structure of Afghanistan. Simultaneously, the foreign policy objective was to block the Saudi *Wahhabism*⁶ or what was labeled by Iran as the ‘America’s Islam’ to the region as a whole. Similarly, it featured support for the one and a half million Hazara Shia refugees from Afghanistan to Iran (Milani, 2006).

⁶ Simply explained, Wahhabism is a religious movement and doctrine within Islam, which is often seen as extremist.

A little lyrical digression must be made here to describe the Afghan migration/refugees issue. There were various reasons, but most prominently economic reasons, that led to the migration of many Shias from Afghanistan to Iran. This migration was happening in different periods. For instance, at the end of the 19th century, around five-thousand families traveled to Iran in order to settle there. Often this was due to the active pilgrimages by the Afghan Shias to the holy places important for the followers of this branch in Islam, which were situated in Iran. Only under the Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (1880-1901) – Afghanistan’s Emperor, about 15,000 Hazara families left Afghanistan for Iranian Mashhad (namely Torbat-e Jam, a place in the close vicinity of Mashhad), making up 90 percent of the population in Torbat-e Jam of that time. It is important to mention that, in 1925, when Reza Shah Pahlavi became the King of Iran, the Afghan ethnic Hazaras (Khawari)⁷, residing in Iran were very much integrated in Iran’s life, inter alia, during various celebrations. Thus, Hazaras became a recognized tribal group within Iran’s borders and as part of Iran’s social life (Abbasi-Shavazi, 2005, p.13). One should also not forget here the historical seasonal migration of the Afghans to Iran, so-called “*Raft-o-omad*”⁸, which was happening sporadically and had its ebbs and flows (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2016). Finally, another migration of Afghans was during the Soviet occupation (1979-1989) of the country. According to some sources, almost three million Afghans fled to Iran during this period (Abbasi-Shavazi, 2005, p.13). After half of these refugees returned to Afghanistan in 1992, Iran, besides other objectives became puzzled with the vacuum, caused by the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, which led to the outflow of the Afghan refugees.

Indeed, the influx of the Afghan refugees during the Soviet occupation was on the largest scale, comparing to previous historical periods of migration. All these refugees obtained so-called “blue cards” of *Muhajireen*⁹. It is important to note here that these refugees, in contrast with Pakistan where refugees had to reside in the special settlements, scattered themselves all over Iran, and thus dissolved themselves among the local population. Such integration was possible due to the fact that there was no impediment to their employment, additionally, these Afghan *Muhajireen*, (Refugees) were provided with

⁷ The Hazara Khawari or Berberi is a term, used to refer to the people of Mongolian descent who immigrated to Iran from the neighboring Afghanistan in the 19th century.

⁸ *Raft-o-omad*, can be literally translated as “coming and going”, also referred to the seasonal migration.

⁹ *Muhajir* literally refers to a Muslim immigrant (who migrated for various reasons).

various subsidies towards accommodation, work, and even education. (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2016).

This situation is very different from the bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Iran in the recent years, which are much more complex than they were historically because Iran is strategically alarmed by the U.S. presence within Afghan borders, although people still do emigrate to Iran for economic reasons. This has led to the controversies in Iran's policies towards Afghanistan ranging from "solidarity and brotherhood with the Shias" to the ties with the Afghan groups that are opposed to the Shias. The irritation of Iran is of course also instigated by its tensions with Saudi Arabia and the economic sanctions imposed on Iran (Alam, 2000).

2.3 Soviet troops pull-out (1989): Civil war (from 1991) and the Taliban (from 1994)

Iran's initial response to the outbreak of the new violent conflict in Afghanistan following Soviet pull out was quite passive. It joined with the UN and called for peaceful resolution of the Civil War and vainly appealed to the then interim Afghan government to share power with Pashtuns and Shias (Milani, 2011, p.156). Kabul could not agree to it as it tried to pacify Saudi Arabia and Pakistan instead. Subsequently, Iran, like other powers, became active in the Afghan Civil War.

Each country had its own agenda in the Afghan Civil war: Saudi to promote Wahhabi Islam; Pakistan to empower Pashtuns for resuming power and Iran to shield and unite all Dari-speaking population (Milani, 2011, p.156). Therefore, while Saudi and Pakistan governments backed the Sunni Pashtun groups, Iran supported the warring Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara Mujahideen groups of non-Pashtun origin (these groups from 1996 to 2001 were known as Northern Alliance, or officially as the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan).

During an interview in Kabul in 2015, a former Mujahideen commander explained that the "Iranian religious Qom center had built firm ties with the Afghan people, especially in rural areas. Such a support was possible because of the response of country's population to the Pakistan and Saudi-led Islamic fundamentalist movements within Afghanistan." (K. S., personal interview, 19 April 2016). In this way, on the stretch of Civil War, Iran backed the Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan under

its veteran leaders, the former Tajik President Burhanuddin Rabbani and his military commander Ahmad Shah Massoud and Uzbek and Tajik warlords, Abdul Rashid Dostum and Ismail Khan respectively. The group was generally identified as the Northern Alliance (NA). Iran's support for it was because it considered Taliban a serious security, ideological, and economic threat to its own security and its fellow ethnic Shias in Afghanistan.

India and Russia also supported the Northern Alliance, though Iran was its principle military strength (Milani 2011). Further to this support, Iran has been supporting various organizations of Iranian Islamic thought in Afghanistan since 1982 (Wilde, 2009, p.19). These include, for instance, *Shura-inqilab-Ittifagh-Islami-e-Afghanistan* (Revolutionary Council of the Islamic Union of Afghanistan) under the leadership of Sayyad Beheshti. Beheshti has a large number of supporters in Central Afghanistan (Hazarajat), (Salahi, 2015); the Islamic Victory Organization of Afghanistan (*Sazman-i Nasr-Islami-yi Afghanistan*), comprised the educated Shia Hazaras from Iran. This radical Islamist organization has its main office in Daykundi (Salahi, 1394) [2015]; *Harakat-i-Islami* Islamic organization, comprising Shias only, was operated by Ayatollah Asif Muhsini from Iran. It encompassed all ethnic Shia groups regardless of the region. Its prominent commander, Mohammad Anwari, is known for his famous Turkmen Valley battle towards the western Kabul (Demont and Roy, 2015, p.89); and the Army of the Guardians of the Revolution, *Sepah-e Pasdaran*. This radical Islamist party is commanded by Akbari and Saddiqi (Tsyarkin, 2013, p.126). The support of this group by Iran can be indirectly evidenced in the message of Imam Khomeini to the Head of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachyov during the Soviet occupation: "A serious view to Islam [Author's note: proper understanding of its essence] will save you from the problems in Afghanistan and in the rest of the world. We recognize the Muslims of the world in the same manner as we recognize the Muslims of our country and we consider ourselves as the partners in building their destiny" (The Institute for compilation and publication of Imam Khomeini's Works, 2013). Former Iranian Ambassador to Afghanistan and Pakistan Mohammad Ebrahim Taherian in his interview to Iranian Diplomacy news agency has officially acknowledged that Iran provided support to the Afghan Mujahideen (Iranian Diplomacy, 2012).

In 1367 (1988) the first assembly of the Afghan Shias took place in Tehran. Following the event, Iran has pursued to establish a unified pro-Iranian Shia military

alliance in Afghanistan made up of the previously uncoordinated Shia groups/parties described above. These parties were united under the one Islamic military-political party, known as *Hizb-e Wahdat Islami Afghanistan* (hereinafter, Wahdat party/ The Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan). Its establishment was announced after some of the Afghan Shia leaders met with the Iranian Supreme Leader in Tehran. After 1988 Iran provided continuous support to Wahdat party and trained twelve thousand men from Afghan Shias in Sabzawar and Fariman military camps in Iran (Rahmani and Hoseini, 1391, pp.238-239). It may be thus concluded that that the military solution was chosen by Iran to deal with Afghanistan's situation.

The Afghan conflict of the 1990s was perceived by the Iranian state as a danger to "security and stability in the region, and even global peace", and even more dramatically as "one of the biggest, unresolved tragedies of the centuries" (Alam, 2000). Although Iran's President Khatami (1997-2005) many times has called the Afghans to leave aside the factional differences for the sake of peace, Iran itself continued to pursue its own interests in Afghanistan. The national interests that Iran continued to pursue, as well as those of another of Afghanistan's neighbors – Pakistan, influenced the conflict in Afghanistan greatly, in the direction of its aggravation. Regardless of the friendly statements that Iran and Pakistan continued to make with regards to each other, in reality, these two countries have competed in Afghanistan on many accounts (e.g. to access the routes to Central Asia) (Alam, 2000).

The Taliban emerged triumphant in the Civil War but not until thousands of people were killed, caged, and displaced from Afghanistan. It framed an Islamic Government lasting for five years until 2001 (Fatima, 2014, pp.35-46). But Iran did not recognize it and rather denounced it by labeling it as a government of the 'narco-terrorists' based on the draconian laws, all to the detriment of the Northern Alliance and Shia community. Obviously, news about the Taliban's rise to power in 1996 was not at all heartening to Iran in its immediate Afghanistan neighborhood. In view of ideological compatibility, Iran perceived the Taliban as a potent threat to its identity because of its anti-Iranian and anti-Shia rhetoric. It considered the Taliban an exclusivist group of wayward Islamists, meant to spread religious extremism across the region, besides a deterrent to the state systems and their national borders. Instead, the Taliban believes in an Emirate (Barzegar, 2014). For this reason, Tehran did not recognize the Taliban from 1996 to its collapse in 2001.

For Iran's anti-Taliban perception, the Taliban blocked the supply of Helmand River water to Iran (Bhatnagar, 2013, p.6). This brought them virtually on the brink of a war and especially after the assassination of nine Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e Sharif city of the Balkh province (Siddique, 2014, p.51). Iran mobilized troops on the Iran-Afghan border, leading to nervous speculation about an impending war (Akbarzadeh, 2014). Naturally, Tehran's economic relations with the Taliban regime were limited in scope, structure and time. Iran-Pakistan and Iran-Saudi relations also diminished on the same Taliban account.

A few remarks should be made with regards to the improvement of the relations between Iran and India as a result of the Taliban regime in the recent past. These two countries' concerns with the Taliban were based on their perception of the Taliban as a threat to their own countries' order as well as to security in the entire region. Iran and India thus saw themselves as, perhaps, the main actors who should be involved in the international negotiations on the formation of the Afghan post-Taliban government, whereby Iran's concern here was also about ensuring the interests and share of those ethnically and culturally affiliated with Iran Hazaras as well as Tajiks (Alam, 2000).

2.4 Iran's involvement in the post-2001 Afghanistan

The events of September 11, 2001, in the U.S. became a turning point in Afghanistan's modern history. The U.S. has used the events to justify its invasion of Afghanistan, toppled the Taliban from power on the pretext of it giving shelter to Al-Qaeda chief, Usama Bin Laden, the alleged leader behind the 9/11 terror attack. Iran's active involvement in Afghan affairs continued further with the US-Afghan invasion in 2001. It joined the UN and the U.S. call for "War against terror". Its army worked hand-in-hand with the U.S. army and even offered to provide sanctuary to the stressed U.S. military personnel and to transport humanitarian aid to Afghanistan from its soil (Sadat and Hughes, 2010). Reportedly, it facilitated the precision of military targets on the Taliban hideouts. Publicly, it supported the formation of a provisional government under Hamid Karzai via Bonn Conference resolution in December 2001. It also joined the international community to reconstruct Afghanistan and provided 560 million USD for the Herat region and in its immediate neighborhood (Saikal, 2016, p.148) at the Tokyo conference. Iran aided western Afghanistan with an extra 15 million USD for the construction of a power line from Iran to Herat and spent 38 million for the building of a

highway from the Iranian border to the Afghan city of Herat in Iran's immediate neighborhood (Fiscus, 2003, p.55). The given aid was expended on Afghanistan's infrastructural development, roads, bridges, education, agriculture, and power generation and telecommunication projects (Saikal, 2016, p.148). Iran also facilitated building a 176-kilometer railroad from Iran to the city of Herat and declared it a free tax zone for trade from the Iranian Chabahar port on the southern end of the Sistan via Balochistan province, near the Oman Sea, to the southwestern border post of Malik in Afghanistan, and onwards to Kandahar and Kabul. The railroad was intended to decrease the distance between the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan by 700 kilometers, which "would significantly diminish the importance of the Karachi-Kandahar road, which is Afghanistan's traditional roadway to international waters" (Milani, 2006).

Iran's main consideration in doing so was to transform Herat into a high economic zone for the transit of goods and service between the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Central Asia, China, and India (Milani, 2010). Additionally, it was to ensure necessary supplies to the Afghan Government amid adversary.

Contrarily, however, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia supported the Pashtun-centric Taliban resistance movement against the foreign forces presence in Afghanistan. From the very beginning, Pakistan wanted to have a pro-Pakistan government in Kabul not only to secure its position and interests against India's but also because of the unresolved issue of Durand line, that Pakistan wanted to resolve in its favor (Sajadi, 2009). They even patronized Sunni-led separatist movement in Iran-controlled Baluchistan for their own interests. Saudi Arabia's intent was to spread Wahabbi Islam in Afghanistan and neutralize Iran's revolutionary spill over (Sajadi, 2009). Pakistan intended to establish a Pushtun-controlled Taliban government to gain leverage against its enemy, India. Iran wanted to set up a non-Pashtun Government of all Dari-speaking people preferable with the Shia background, all presupposing varying foreign power perceptions about post-Soviet Afghan affairs.

Coming back to Iran's involvement in Afghanistan post-2001 and in light of the above-mentioned Iranian assistance, one must keep in mind, that from then on whatever Iran did and still does is very much connected to the fact that the U.S. is present in Afghanistan. Iranian involvement in the reconstruction of Afghanistan cannot be disregarded, they, nevertheless have to be viewed through the lenses of a pragmatic approach, that from 2001 will start to gain increasing dominance in Iranian foreign policy

with regards to Afghanistan. Thus, in the winter of 2008-09, for instance, it supplied 25 million liters of oil at cheaper rates to help address Afghan energy shortage. In the same winter, however, it was Iran that deported 800 Afghan refugees – the move that was quite sufficient to demonstrate to the U.S. that Iran can pursue any policy suiting its interests, regardless of the U.S. in Afghanistan. (Institute for the Study of War, n.d.)

As the events of the time, 2001-2014 will be intensively examined in the analytical chapter of the present study, one will not go into the further details of their description here. Below, however, to prepare the reader for the comprehension of the analysis conducted in the subsequent chapters, it is important to elaborate further on the shift in the foreign policy, on the cultural aspects, and the future prospects, already at this point.

2.5 The shift in Iran's foreign policy

Iran's foreign policy after 2001 indicated a radical shift on four accounts. First, the 2002 statement given by the U.S. President George Bush in which he termed Iran as a member of the "axis of evil." Second, the U.S. decision to overstay in Afghanistan despite its announcement in 2002 that Taliban elimination was complete. Iran perceived the US-Afghan overstay as a potential threat to its national security, in the backdrop of its established impasse with the U.S. on its nuclear program.

Third, instead of exclusively backing on the Shia Hazaras, Iran turned to the Tajik, Uzbek and other non-Shia groups for creating Iranian influence in Afghanistan (Rubin, 2013, p.34-35) as well. Its Hazara factor had, otherwise, also led to the division of and infighting among the Afghan Shias. Most of them followed Ayatollah Abul Qasim Khui, an Iranian-born Islamic jurist of Najaf, Iraq, who unlike Khomeini, was disinclined to spreading Iranian political Islam outside Iran (Ibrahimi, 2009, p.4).

Fourth, perhaps more important than other changes was a shift in Iran's Taliban policy. What was hitherto an ideological enemy (Taliban) turned to be Iran's strategic asset against its arch-rival (US) (Levkowitz, 2017). What was hitherto an identity-ideology-centric power politics turned to be power-politics-centric identity-ideology in Iran's foreign policy. In an interview a Professor at Herat University, stated towards this end, that: "Iran wants the Taliban to be strong enough to remain a thorn for the United States, but not strong enough to become a challenge for Karzai or his successor's

government, or to turn into a dominant power in Afghanistan.” (H. J., personal interview, 24 October 2016)

Iran, thus, in the course of this shift started to see the Taliban as a bulwark against the U.S. in Afghanistan. Iran always thought a direct war with the U.S. was infeasible. Hence, Iran’s changed policy after 2003 was aimed at avoiding a full-fledged or open war with the U.S. across Afghanistan, preserve its Islamic character and defend its territory from the foreign aggression.

Iran felt slight respite on the U.S. announcement to pull out its forces from Afghanistan in 2014 (Kaw, 2016, pp.271-290). However, it was soon disappointed to see that the U.S. was leaving behind around 8,500 soldiers purportedly for the training of the Afghan National Security Force, a catalyst to continued Afghan conflict with little or no scope for recovery immediately after 2014 evacuation of foreign forces (Kaw, 2014, pp.6-9). It was compounded as growing foreign powers struggle to fill the partial vacuum created by the U.S. forces draw down in Afghanistan. The Baghdadi’s Islamic State (IS) growing militant attacks in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran borders was an added factor behind Iran-Taliban bonhomie in the changed Iran’s foreign policy narrative (Zindia, 2017).

Thus, since both the U.S. and IS posed a potent threat to Iran, it chooses the lesser evil Taliban as its ally in the post-2014 Afghanistan. The understanding was to maneuver efforts to oust the U.S. and eliminate the IS from Afghanistan and its Iran-Afghan borders (Levkowitz, 2017). However, Iran’s reported support to the Taliban is “tactical and limited”, as Iran is disinclined to any direct military encounter with the U.S. in Afghanistan. Moreover, Iran’s Taliban support is not because either like each other (Majidiyar, 2017). It is rather because of an old saying that for expediency “you should sometimes even own enemies”.

For Iran-Taliban discreet ties, Iran’s trade with the present Afghan Government is largely confined to bilateral trade and culture-related activities. The changing geopolitical settings also favor the Iran-Taliban alliance. According to general Sharif Yaftali the Army Chief of Staff of the Afghan government, Iran is reportedly supplying the Taliban with mines and weapons against the U.S. and Afghan forces, as was revealed often by the Afghan Intelligence agencies (BBC news, 2017). True, Iran is indisposed to the Taliban’s

return to Afghan power. But for the U.S. threats, Iran desires the Taliban to sustain at least while the U.S. remains in Afghanistan.

The objective of Iran's Afghan foreign policy around the historical water issue continues. As it was described above, Helmand water has been a source of constant Iran-Afghanistan conflict from the early 19th century. It flows some 1150 km before reaching Iran's Sistan wetlands (Aman, 2016). The dispute emanated from General F. Goldsmid's demarcation of the Iran-Afghanistan border in the middle of the Helmand River and in absence of any adequate water-sharing agreement (Islam, 2011, p.123). The issue was partially sorted out by a British commission led by Henry McMahon (Shroder and Ahmadzai, 2016, p.224). However, after King Nader Shah death in Iran, the issue resurfaced but was neutralized by his son King Zahir Shah in 1939, to the effect that the Helmand water would be shared between the two countries right from the Kamal Khan Dam, 47 km. to the Iranian border, and that the Afghan government would not construct any dam on its water. It is a different issue that the agreement was not implemented for the collapse of King Reza Shah and the absence of Parliamentary ratification on it. Consequently, the Afghan Government in 1948 unilaterally decided to build two water dams (Kajake and Boghra dam) on Helmand River; hence, pre-empted the two-country water-borne conflict, which had no ending, though in 1973 the Afghan Prime Minister, Mohammad Mussa Shafiq, had suggested a plan to settle the water dispute by allowing twenty-six cubic meters per second to flow to Iran. It was the only official agreement of Afghanistan with its western neighbor (Habib, 2014). But, it went into a limbo of political uncertainty in both Iran and Afghanistan.

The problem thus continues until the present day. During an interview, a Professor at Herat University confirmed to me that: "Helmand water was always a point of conflict between Afghanistan and Iran. Before the Iranian revolution when Afghanistan had a strong government, Iran intended solving the water issue through dialogue and diplomacy with Afghanistan". He further emphasized that "after the Afghan civil war and its allied instability, Iran used the Afghan Mujahideen to destroy the Salma Dam and they did so. Iran was benefiting from the Civil War in Afghanistan as the Helmand River was going fully to Iran..." (H. J., personal interview, 24 October 2016). Thus, the water issue remains to be a tricky one, which justifies its extensive description in the present chapter of the study.

Additionally, Iran's Afghan foreign policy is targeted towards stopping the flow of drug traffic from across the Afghanistan border. Significant amounts of narcotics are continuously transported to the international market through Iran and Pakistan. Although Iran remains a transit country for poppy transport to Europe, 2.08% of its own population, between the ages of 15 and 64, are afflicted with drug ailments. (Ghane *et al.*, 2017)

Stopping the influx of Afghan refugees and their repatriation also features Iran's Afghan policy. The majority of Afghan refugees are comprised of Tajiks and Hazaras. Since the 2001 U.S. invasion, Iran has hosted around 2 million Afghan refugees at a huge cost to its economy, society, and culture. Iran wants their deportation and is, thus, building great pressure on Kabul to accept and re-settle them. The present Afghan Government does not have the capacity or the compulsions to do so (Christensen, 2016).

In aggregate, Iran's Afghan foreign policy has been oriented towards blocking radicalism and IS infiltration across Afghanistan, expediting the U.S. withdrawal, ensuring equitable water sharing, promoting Iranian influence, protecting the Shia Hazara ethnic minority, repatriating Afghan refugees, demonstrating that Iran can pursue any Afghan foreign policy agenda unmindful of the U.S. liking or disliking and underlining that Iran's security is grounded in Afghanistan's stability.

2.6 The Cultural Aspect of Iran-Afghanistan relations

The cultural relations are not going to be extensively dealt with in the present analysis, that is concerned with other, more dominant issues, analyzed through the realist's lenses. The cultural aspect of the Iran-Afghanistan ties is nevertheless contributing to the understanding of the greater picture of their relationship and, therefore, I would like to mention a few things about it in this historical excursion chapter.

Political integration, foreign policy relations, trade connections, mutual influences, mutual diaspora, cultural assimilation and transmission and social, political, economic, religious, diplomatic and other processes tended to create cultural commonality between Iran and Afghanistan. For mutual religious interactions, for instance, Zoroastrianism or fire cult was common to both countries before the Arab Muslim conquest of Persia. Essentially, an Iranian practice, Balkh Afghanistan was its main hub. It is from here that the cult radiated to Central Asia, India and other parts of the Asian continent. Like other parts of Asia, Persian-originated spring festival, Nowruz (in Persian means: New Day) is

celebrated in Afghanistan with zeal and zest. In fact, Balkh in northern Afghanistan is its typical representative. As an eastern dialect of Persian, Dari is one of the common official Afghan languages. Almost half of the Afghans speak one of the several dialects of Persian (Dari). Baluch ethnic community is common to both. The Baluchs live in Pakistan, Iran, and southwestern Afghanistan simultaneously. Shia sectarian groups form a part of the demographic profile of both countries. Iran as a Shia-inhabited country contains a certain percentage of Sunni Muslims. Similarly, Afghanistan has a certain percentage of Shias in its Sunni-dominated demographic profile. Among the Afghan Shias, the Hazaras form the largest group in central and western Afghanistan. Above all, both countries share a common and protracted borderline since the days of the British Indian rule. It is drawn by the flow of a famous Helmand River along Herat, Farah, Nimroz provinces from this side of the Afghan border.

For decades, the cultural relations between Iran and Afghanistan have persisted due to the same language and many other local similarities; people to people relations between Herat in Afghanistan and Mashhad in Iran were growing even stronger. Starting with the year when Mahmood Tarzi founded the newspaper *Seraj al Akhbar* (Lamp of the News) in Afghanistan in 1911 and in the years that followed this event, a number and variety of newspapers and magazines were exchanged between the people in both countries. Today this exchange implies, most prominently incoming mass media and literature, etc. from the Iranian side. According to the Head of the Printing Media Department of the Ministry of Culture and Information of Afghanistan in Herat, the Iranian influence in this province was considerable and it is still perceived as such:

“For a long time, Iranian newspapers such as *Atlahat*, *Jong-e Hafta*, and *Sukhan* were coming to Herat each week and from Afghanistan, the same way - our newspapers and magazines such as *Herat*, *Baladya*, and *Mehri* were sent to Mashhad. Iranian newspapers and magazine were always available in a bookstore *Haji Sahid Hashim Koril* that existed in Herat. If a newspaper or a magazine would not come to this store even for one day, a number of people would come to ask for the reason, why it is not there, this is how high the demand was. Iranian musicians and singers were coming to Herat very often to perform in the concerts. Same goes for our singers and musicians [Author’s note: Once Afghan, they also made tours in Iran on a regular basis. Even today, the main TV channels in Herat, watched by our people are the Iranian TV channels. People watch Iranian TV shows even more than the Afghan. There are no issues raised by the Iranian side with regards to the copyright issues, associated with unofficial broadcasting, which is most likely the Iranian policy to provide such free access to its media sources.” (N. A. K., personal Interview, 27 October 2016)

Indeed, this Iranian cultural policy is often seen in Afghanistan as a conduit of various other Iranian policies. The control over the information dissemination is certainly in favor of Iran's strategic and pragmatic goals in Afghanistan.

2.7 Summary

There was no such concept of foreign policy until the creation of nation-states as the bilateral relations were then among the despots and these largely revolved around their imperial interests. The foreign policy concept evolved with the formation of the nation states and their designated and varied foreign policy perspectives regarding security, resources, land, trade, culture etc. For its pursuit, they framed relevant strategies, both for and against each other, as is characteristic of realism in international relations.

The chapter was intended to reveal these strategies in the historical relations of Afghanistan and Iran, to provide the reader with the main motives and incentives behind these relations that have emerged, it describes the ebbs and flows of the relationship. In the course of the chapter, it becomes clear what the issues are that represent the major areas of concern for Iran.

As this historical overview described, initially, Iran had no Afghan foreign policy since Afghanistan itself was Iran's political constituent during the reign of the Achaemenids, Sassanids, and Safavids. Regular Iran-Afghanistan foreign policy evolved after the formation of the nation states in the 19th century. The benefit of such a foreign policy, however, was mostly in Iran's favor because it was far ahead of Afghanistan in terms of requisite systems, structures, and institutions.

The Iran-Afghan foreign policy experienced ups and downs in view of their long pending land, water, sectarian, ethnic and other issues. Besides domestic factors, foreign power politics impact on the making and re-making of their foreign policies. No doubt, their relations soared to a level where war seemed sometimes inevitable. But both averted it for expediency and the threat looming large on them due to British and Russian imperialism and colonialism. Afghanistan, in particular, was cautious about it considering its complex ethnic composition and "predatory neighborhood" threats. Despite considering the U.S. as its arch-enemy, Iran also ensured that it has no direct encounter with the U.S. in Afghanistan, its immediate neighborhood.

Despite often conflicting interests, both countries have managed to resolve the conflicts through negotiations. Iran's Afghan foreign policy changed radically after the Islamic Revolution in Iran and Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. During the subsequent Civil War, Iran stood by the non-Pashtun Afghans, the Shia Hazaras, Tajiks and Uzbeks (Northern Alliance). Iran wanted the Northern Alliance to assume power in Afghanistan in preference to the Taliban.

There was, however, yet another structural change in its foreign policy after the US-Afghan invasion in 2001 and the violence that stemmed from it between the U.S. and the Taliban for power and ideological domination. The U.S. presence in Afghanistan has become an assumed threat to Iran's national existential reality. During this change, Iran entered into an alliance with what was otherwise its staunch ideological enemy, the Taliban. The consideration was to use the Taliban insurgency to deflate the U.S. mission in Afghanistan and make Iran's borders safe from its harmful designs. Since 2001, the Iranian government has urged Afghanistan to accept back those hundreds and thousands of Afghan nationals who took refuge in Iran for decades. But the Afghan Government is unable to entertain Iran's request for its own reasons such as its weak economic situation.

This excursion into the history of the Iran-Afghanistan's relations provides background knowledge, necessary as a foundation prior to jumping into the analytical field of the study – to dig deeper and wider in order to increase the understanding of all trajectories, shifts, and peculiarities of Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan in the period 2001-2014.

Chapter 3. Formal Power Structure of Iran

3.1 Introduction

The political system of Iran is comprised of the formal and informal power structures. It runs on the basis of two sets of hierarchies of authority; elected and non-elected (religious) (Swarte, 2013). The inclusion of the latter in it reveals the State's magnanimity of taking on board personal networks and peer groups in policy formulation of domestic and foreign affairs. Sometimes, personal networks are even stronger than institutional or formal power organs.

The formal power structure is clearly defined under the Islamic Constitution and is visibly exhibited in the working of the government institutions held and run by the Supreme Leader, Assembly of Experts for Leadership, President, Council of Ministers, Expediency Council, *Majles*, Judiciary, Council of Guardians, armed forces, and State Television and Radio.

The informal power structure consists of religio-political and paramilitary organizations. These are woven into "four concentric rings" for real functioning. The first, the central ring, includes prominent clergymen in the executive branch, the judiciary and the legislature. The second ring is made up of the high-ranking government officials. The third consists of revolutionary, security and media organizations, including the *Basij* Militia and the *Pasdaran* groups. The outer ring is comprised of the individuals formerly in power. They provide a link between those in power and outside the power (Prifti, 2010).

Political Institutions, both formal and informal, shape the foreign policy of Iran (Crane, 2008, p.34; Hasib, 2011, p.44). However, these institutions are ambiguously complex (Crane, 2008, p.34; Hasib, 2011, p.44). Consequently, cardinal contradictions exist in Iran's institutional formulation and institutional functioning within the country's constitutional framework. These contradictions are manifest in the day-to-day enforcement of the constitutional norms (Hasib, 2011, p.5; Arjomand, 2008, p.210; Moslem, 2002, p.99) that this chapter demonstrates through the specific examples below.

The constitutional contradictions between institutional form and function are traceable in the continuum between theocracy and democracy (Kesselman, 2012, p.365;

Lust, 2013, p.478). The supreme religious leader, the key player of this system, enjoys unlimited powers since Ayatollah Khomeini espoused the idea of *Velayat-e Faqih* ("Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist") in 1979. According to Ruhollah Khomeini, "God has formed the Islamic Republic. Obey God and his Prophet and those among you who have authority". So absolute are his powers that it has tended to undermine the democratic spirit in Iran (Rabinovich and Shaked, 1989, p.397; Buchta, 2000, p.46), although democracy continues to have a space in the country's constitutional framework.

Whatever its implications, clerical supremacy opened vistas for the complementary role of formal and informal institutions in Iran and its internal and external policies. The informal institutions are effectively conducted by the Iranian Supreme Leader; Friday Prayer Leaders Association (*Imam Joma*) and Religious Foundations (*Bonyads*), besides heads of the Iranian Foreign Policy; Politically Active Iranian Society and Nation's Exigency Council (Buchta, 2000; Rakel, 2008, pp.56-58; Posch, 2013, p.11; Kutty, 2014, p.148).

In the post-revolutionary era, the Iranian authorities expressly established a political continuum between theocracy and democracy. The Supreme Leader, usually a state actor, wields unlimited powers, given to him by the Iranian Constitution (see article 57 of the Constitution of IRI). As a result, two respective sets of institutions are in place in Iran. One comprised of democratically elected officials and the other of heads of clerical councils. These key actors enjoy optimum authority in the country's power structure. This is perhaps why, in the last three decades, clerical institutions have been complementing the country's power and administrative structure (Rasmussen, 2009).

The Iranian Revolution of 1979, led by Khomeini, was based on the concept of *Velayat-e Faqih (the Governance of the Jurist)*, (Article 5 of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran), a conduit for political and religious ideology, served as a justification for the religious and political legitimacy of the Revolution. The concept implies that a religious leader, by law or constitution, combines religious and political authority in one. The former equips him with the popular legitimacy, while the latter gives him the leverage to mobilize the society for a collective action (Roy, 1999, p.203). Indeed, the Islamic Revolution caused a fundamental change in the composition of state institutions in Iran (Khiabany, 2013, p.32).

A variety of social forces have unfolded in response to Iran's republican form and its foundation on Islamic ideology. This has eventually tended to foster a peculiar type of contradiction both within Islamic and Republican principles since the two are radically opposed to each other (Katouzian, 1999, p.203). These cardinal contradictions find a detailed explanation in the sections below and throughout the present study as one of the root causes of the double-face external policy of Iran vis-à-vis Afghanistan, and as contributing to the overall argument of the research, presented in chapter one.

The present chapter has an aim to discuss the fundamentals of political structure within the Iranian constitution that help to understand Iran's internal political picture and how it influences the political decisions made in the country and outside. This implies, before all, a closer analysis of the formal and informal institutions that are involved in the foreign policy shaping, which provides the necessary foundation for comprehension of the analysis conducted in the subsequent chapters.

The chapter unfolds in the following way: section 3.1 provided an introduction to the discussion; section 3.2 analyzes the Iranian Constitution in order to explain the political structure of Iran; section 3.3 thoroughly analyzes the role of the Iranian Supreme Leader; section 3.4 elaborates on the activity of the Assembly of Experts; sections 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 analyze the three branches of power: executive, legislative and judiciary respectively; section 3.8 elaborates on the informal institutions active in shaping foreign policy; section 3.9 analyzes the role of the individual actors and associations; section 3.10 summarizes.

3.2 Fundamentals of the Political Structure within Iran's Constitution

The nature of Iran's constitutional structure is well formulated in the following statement:

“In theory, Iran's constitution combines theocracy with republicanism. But in practice, Iran's unelected institutions, namely the Supreme Leader and 12-men Guardian Council, wield far more power than the elected institutions of the Presidency and Parliament. The Guardian Council is competent to vet all candidates for public office and disqualify those whom it feels are not sufficiently loyal to the Supreme Leader” (Sadjadpour 2010, September 1, n.p.).

The decision-making process is split between the state apparatus and a parallel, vertically integrated “shadow” status system under the direct control of the Supreme Leader (Mason, 2015). Policy deliberation among the senior ranks of the government in

the Islamic Republic is a process that Western diplomats often refer to as a “black box”. Whereas political figures and bastions of power that shape policy in Iran are detectable, it is the informal and non-transparent debate within elite circles that continues to confound Western audiences. From the perspective of the West, such uncertainty about the division of labor and power surfaced during the European Union (EU)-Iran negotiations over Tehran’s controversial nuclear program. (Vatanka, 2008)

The Iranian Constitution recognizes three branches of government, the legislative, judicial and the executive (Article 57 of the IRI Constitution). Being intertwined, these are inseparable from each other. However, all these are under the supervision of the Iranian religious Supreme Leader,¹⁰ who thus wields unlimited and absolute powers in the whole Iranian set up (Hasib, 2004, p.6). In the process, all three branches stand integrated and harmonized under the chief religious’ leadership of the country (Mahmood, 2006, p.52).

“The governing powers in the Islamic Republic of Iran consist of the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary powers. They operate under the supervision of the absolute authority of the command (velayat-i amr) and religious leadership (imamat) of the community of believers and according to the forthcoming articles of this law. These powers are independent of one another”. (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979, Article 57)

According to Hossein Bashiriyeh, the Iranian scholar in political theory and political sociology, the Iranian Constitution is based on totalitarianism, therefore, the role of the Leader is the core power in the governmental structure of Iran. The unlimited power of the Leader can be seen in Majles (Parliament), Expediency Council, Guardian Council, Judiciary, and in the President’s Office (Bashiriyeh, 2006, p.62).

The Iranian Scholar Abdolkarim Soroush goes further in asserting that:

“the theory of Velayat-e Faqih is the same as religious tyranny. The theory cannot, in principle, create a democratic order. No one can justify justice under the authority of Velayat-e-Faqih, because, as the old philosophers have said, an absolute power creates grounds for the absolute corruption. If a person is the head of an unaccountable government, such person’s policies after a few years will be far from justice. Therefore, the theory of Velayat-e Faqih of Ayatollah Khomeini from the very beginning was an immoral theory, in practice, too, it has revealed its nature. Now, more than ever, with the bitter experience of the Islamic Republic, it has become clear that the theory of Velayat-e Faqih is not a theory of justice. If something is to be sacrificed, it is absolute power and absolute authority of the

¹⁰ The reader may be more familiar with the Arabic and Persian term “Imam,” rather than its English translation as “leader”.

jurisprudents, if this shadow is removed from Iran, the Iranian people will be able to see the colour of freedom and justice” (Soroush, 2010).

The Iranian Constitution gives a sufficient space to Islam in its domestic and foreign policy agendas. A quoted *Quranic* verse in the Constitution reads: "Your community is a single community, and I am your Lord, so worship me" [Quran 21:92]. Such position of Islam became possible only after the Imam Khomeini-led 29th and 30th March 1979, a referendum with a large majority of popular votes (98.2%) in its favour. It combined country's national sovereignty with a preponderance of Islam in the Constitution of the country (Article 1 of the IRI Constitution).

In fact, the foundations of the Iranian Islamic Republic are based on the following few determinants of Article 2 of the Islamic Republic of Iran [henceforth IRI]:

- That “God is absolute [inalienable, indivisible and infallible]; hence, worship none other than Him”;
- He has [the or a] divine role in setting forth the legislation of the country;
- Islam is the key to the success of humans in the world hereafter;
- Continuous *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning) of the *Faqihs* (Rule or guardianship by a jurist) on the basis of the *Quran* and the *Sunnah* [Saying of the Prophet of Islam] is necessary for equity and justice and politico-economic and socio-cultural independence and national solidarity;
- Perpetual religious leadership by a chief cleric (*Imam*) is crucial for the restructuring of Islam in Iran;
- Human rights and responsibilities are guaranteed and governed by natural laws;
- All forms of oppression and exploitation are un-Islamic (Article 2 of the IRI Constitution).

Besides Islam, the Iranian Constitution is explicit on the country's domestic and foreign policy formulation as can be gleaned from the following fundamentals discussed in the next section.

3.2.1 Non-alignment with Oppressive Powers

Iran is disinclined to alignment with most oppressive and super-powers of the world. However, it cherishes cultivating mutual relations with countries devoid of conflict

from within and without. Further, Islam and Muslim rights are the cornerstone of Iran's domestic and foreign policies (Article 152 of the IRI Constitution).

- Imamat and leadership:

Perpetual *Imamat* is essential for the country's religious revivalism and eternal inspiration of the Iranians by a certain supreme religious chief (Article 2 paragraph 5 of the IRI Constitution).

- Muslim Brotherhood:

Iran recognizes that extending generous support to the *Mustad'afin* (the oppressed people of the world) is incumbent upon all Muslim Brethren (Article 3 paragraph 16 of the IRI Constitution).

- Policy of Non- interference:

Iran upholds the principle of non-interference in the affairs of other countries, believes in the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations and vice versa. However, it would seek to support oppressed Muslims across the globe (Article 154 of the IRI Constitution).

- Islamic Unity:

Iran strongly believes in the unity of all Muslims into a single national whole. The Iranian government feels duty-bound to promote it for the harmonization of the Muslims and their political, economic and cultural convergence at the global level (Article 11 of the IRI Constitution).

- Securitization:

Iran considers securitization essential for its national sovereignty, national security and Islamization of the government (Article 3 paragraph 11 of the IRI Constitution).

- Foreign Aggression:

Iran will resist all forms of foreign aggression for the security of its resources, territory, ethos etc. (Article 153 of the of the IRI Constitution).

- The Separation of Powers:

Iran recognizes the executive, legislature and judiciary as three separate entities of the government. Although these function independently, they are under the common

control of the Supreme religious (*Imam*) and Supreme Leader (*Rahbar*). (Article 57 of the IRI Constitution), which is currently Ali Khamenei.

3.3 Supreme Leader

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 was a response to the decades-old and pro-US Shah regime in Iran. The Revolution led to an inside-out renaissance of the political and diplomatic machinery of the country. Additionally, it brought to fore the country's Supreme Leader. The Revolutionary leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, was the first Supreme Leader holding the highest political and religious authority in Iran. No major policy decision can be taken without his consent purportedly for the national interests (Sadjadpour, 2010). Consequently, Iran's foreign policy is highly influenced by the Supreme Leader's own vision about the country, region and the globe at large (Swarte, 2013).

After Ayatollah Khomeini's death, Ali Khamenei became Iran's Supreme Leader with the complete support of the public and of the security and intelligence organs of the government. For expediency, he avoided implementing policies that could accelerate the existing rift between his faction of the conservatives and their reformist/pragmatist opponents. His range of powers naturally extends to the realm of foreign policy and Islamic government pursuits and management of severed relations with the US. Arguably, therefore, "Ali Khamenei, the current supreme leader, is ...one of the best indicators of Tehran's foreign policy behavior and goals in the immediate future" (Vatanka, 2008).

Still, while Khamenei is the final arbiter in Iran's foreign policy deliberations, he has his own internal and external pressures to manage Iran's relations with other countries, also within the country's Islamic format. Accordingly, he remains preoccupied with maintaining the greatest possible control over policy debates and warding off attempts to diminish his powers (Vatanka, 2008). His responsibility expanded manifold with the 1989 constitutional amendments which bestowed upon the Velayat-e Faqih, even more powers than enjoyed by Khomeini before (Nourbakhsh, 2005). Therefore, the Supreme Leader's decisive role in decision-making does not allow the President to function independently in foreign policy matters (Negahban, 2017, p.37). Indeed, the Supreme Leader determines the course of Iran's domestic rules and foreign policy by himself (Negahban, 2017, p.37).

Every foreign policy initiative [“from below”] mandates the approval of the Supreme Leader [“from above”] (Hunter, 2010, p.29). Seemingly, his position is very convenient. Nonetheless, he has inextricable challenges before him due to the surging Shia-Sunni divide in the Middle East, the ever-increasing rift with the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, and managing the impact of the bygone and the forthcoming economic sanctions due to the changed U.S. policy towards Iran under President Trump. These challenges demand his balanced approach lest the country descends into a serious social unrest (Shanahan, 2015).

The Supreme Leader has before him a complex Iranian political system due to a mix between Islamic theocracy and liberal democracy. On the one hand, it is a semi-theocratic style of rule based on the *Velayat-e Faqih* system (governance based on the Islamic jurists, religious bodies and foundations) and, on the other, it is a democratically elected institutional formation (republic institutions), (Rakel, 2009, p.109). Such a conspicuous configuration foretells growing split among various factions on country’s domestic and foreign policy perspectives (Rakel, 2009, p.108).

Policymaking in Iran, as elsewhere, is primarily about political struggles between and among various factions; the conservatives and the reformists/pragmatists remain the major factions (Rakel, 2009, p.108). The conservatives’ aim is to reinforce the Islamic values and restore the ideals of the Islamic Revolution through “a good partnership with Islamic countries” only (not necessarily with their governments). Contrarily, the reformists/pragmatists pursue a more liberal approach and wish Iran to emerge as an important player in the international arena through diplomatic and economic cooperation with all countries irrespective of religion (Rakel, 2007a, p.166). Nevertheless, as compared to the reformists, the conservatives hold Iranian power to articulate their vision within their ideological setting.

In a sense, the constitutional amendments opened up vistas for Iran’s top elite to perceive consensus rather than conflict as a key to Iran’s peace, stability, success and cordial foreign power relations (Nourbakhsh, 2005). Consequently, the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, demonstrated his authority through reconciliation on the one hand and surveillance by 2,000 clericals “commissars” on the other. In this kind of situation, the President alone can’t be a watershed in Iran's foreign policy (Swarte, 2013).

After the 1979 Revolution, Iran shaped its own Constitution, which, *inter alia*, includes the provisions related to the creation of the institution of the *Velayat-e Faqih* by the then chief revolutionary cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (often called as Iran's Supreme Leader). By this idea, the Iranian government is mandated to build a theocratic Islamic state, run it in accordance with the Islamic model (Janin and Kahlmeyer, 2007, p.142) and transport its idea to other Muslim states for adoption of the state. The underlying objective of the Shia Islamic model of the governance, in a way, is to restore and relive the position of 12th "Hidden" Imam, Imam Mahdi (who is assumed by Shias to have disappeared in 941 AD) for producing quality Believers and protecting the *Ummah* (Community of Believers).

For furtherance of the idea, the Supreme Leader (*Rahbar*) is granted extensive powers under the Iranian Constitution, which eventually transforms him into a most powerful man of the country (Tarzi, 2011, p.23). Among other things, he is empowered to recruit and dismiss the Judges, bureaucrats, both civil and military, and resolve the issues between various government institutions, the executive, legislature and judiciary. Quite precisely, the whole Iranian system reflects Khomeini's influence, his "his eyes and ears" are everywhere. In fact, his office established vide Article 5 of the Constitution is the by-product of the institution of the *Velayat-e faqih* in the pyramid of Iran's governance (Ruth de Boer, 2009).

The aforementioned doctrine was made the basis for the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran, of which Khomeini was the first prominent Supreme Leader (*Imam*), presupposing the establishment of a theocratic state in Iran (Thaler, 2010, p.54). This is why the Iranian Constitution prescribes that "all civil, penal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria". (Article 4 of the IRI Constitution)

The Supreme Leader is responsible for all religious and spiritual affairs besides the functioning of different political institutions at various levels. To be short, Iran's constitution has two manifestations, one religious and the other political. The first has a co-relationship with the Islamic model regarding the nature of the state and the other with the French Republican model for political governance (Jones, 2011, 1; Arjomand, 2000). However, Iran's constitution bears the imprints of the models of other modern states. In either case, the Presidential and Parliamentary elections exemplify Iran's democratic model within the Islamic prefecture.

The officials of the Guardian Council, Expediency Council, Judiciary, Parliament, Presidency, Assembly of Experts, Association of Friday Prayer Leaders, Special Court of the Clergy and other institutions are under the absolute control of the Supreme Leader. Half of the Guardian Council's officials are appointed by the Supreme Leader and the remainder by Parliament. The responsibility of the Guardian Council is overseeing Parliamentary affairs. All this suggests that the Supreme Leader has an extraordinary impact on republican institutions.

Article 110 of Iran's constitution empowers the Supreme Leader to mobilize the armed forces and act as the Commander-in-Chief to declare war or conclude peace with any power he chooses. In that capacity, he can recruit or dismiss the Supreme Commander of the regular army, General Commander of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (*Sipah-i Pasdaran-i Inqilab Islami*) and that of the Basij (A branch of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps). Both the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and *Basij* play a strong role in Iran's policy-making process; hence, they are staunchly loyal to the Supreme Leader (Sadjadpour, 2009). In addition, the *Rahbar* can recruit or dismiss the members (six) of Council of Guardians (*Shura-e Negahban*) and Chiefs of the Judiciary and the state TV and Radio. Alongside the powers, he is responsible to ensure that the country's politics are rooted in the Islamic system and Revolutionary values and that various government institutions are run smoothly (Cordesman and Seitz, 2009, pp.16-17; Cavendish, 2006, p.488).

3.4 The Assembly of Experts

Pursuant to Articles 107 and 111 of the IRI Constitution, the Supreme Leader is appointed and removed, if so needed for his poor-performance, by the Assembly of Experts often termed as the *Majles-e Khobregan* or *Majles-e Khebragan-e Rahbari*. The Assembly is composed of high ranking and duly-elected Muslim clerics from all 30 of Iran's provinces and is empowered to elect or disqualify the Supreme Leader. However, the Assembly mandates the approval of the Guardian Council for this purpose. According to Article 96 of the IRI Constitution, the Guardian Council is comprised of twelve prominent *Ulema* of the country, of whom six are appointed by the Supreme Leader and six by the Supreme Judiciary Council headed by a *Mujtahid* (someone qualified to exercise *ijtihad*) appointed by the Supreme Leader himself (Przeczek, 2013, p.64).

3.5 The Executive Branch

3.5.1 The President

The head of the executive branch is the President, the second most prominent official after the Supreme Leader. He too is elected with the majority votes of the members of the Guardian Council for up to two successive terms, each of 4 years tenure.

The President is empowered to appoint the administrative officers; sign international treaties; designate Iranian Ambassadors; approve the appointment of foreign ambassadors in Tehran; control the Planning and Budget Organizations; confirm ministerial appointments of Parliamentary Council and authorize the implementation of Iranian laws.

In addition, the President heads the National Security Council, since the "Presidential Center" was created at the head of the executive in August 1989. This Council is a nerve center of foreign policy formulation and execution, though foreign policy decisions are not taken in isolation of other power centers (Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, 2002, pp.292-293). In addition to this, the President heads the Council of Ministers and the Foreign Minister is under the President's direct control. However, the President does not control any forces such as police, security services or any other organ of the armed forces (Milani 1993) since they are under the Supreme Leader.

Actually, the Supreme Leader rather than the President formulates and executes foreign-policy decisions. Nonetheless, the Faqih remains important for the purpose. He is represented by his personal representative in the NSC. He is thus empowered to justify foreign policy decisions in the face of public criticism (Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, 2002, p.293).

The President chairs the NSC on issues regarding the intelligence services, defense, and foreign policy, however, he does not solely conduct the foreign policy domain (Tazmini, 2009, p.100). Even though the president is the second most powerful official after the Supreme Leader, in some more affairs, like foreign policy, defense, judiciary and many others, both offices share responsibility (IRI Constitution, Articles 113-142).

3.5.2 The Council of Ministers

According to Article 133 of the IRI Constitution, members of the Council of Ministers are appointed by the President with the advice of the Assembly of Experts. As head of the Council, he oversees the performance of the Ministers (Article 134 of the IRI Constitution). He coordinates the government decisions and ensures their implementation in the state system. However, he is required to take the Assembly of Experts on board for every decision. The essence of the ministerial post, its operational tasks, and procedural issues are provided in Articles 138 and 139 of the Constitution. This article, however, does not apply to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

3.5.3 The Supreme National Security Council (SNSC)

The Supreme National Security Council is the superior body associated with country's national security and defense policies. It is constituted by the Supreme Leader. This office emerged as a result of the constitutional amendments of 1989. Its policies have nonetheless co-relationship with country's other issues: economy, polity, society, culture, intelligence, etc. (Buchta, 2000, p.23). The Constitution thus reads:

“In order to protect national welfare, safeguard the Islamic Republic, and territorial integrity and national sovereignty, the Supreme Council of National Security is established under the leadership of the President of the Republic. Its duties are as follows: 1. determining the defense and security policies of the country within the boundaries defined by the leadership; 2. coordinating political, social, informational, cultural, and economical activities in relation to general defense and security concerns; 3. benefiting from the country's material and spiritual resources in confronting domestic and foreign threats.” (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979, Article 176).

The SNSC is headed by the President since he is in charge of the country's policy formulation. (Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, 2002, p.293). Its other members are the heads of the Judiciary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Intelligence and Interior, Revolutionary Guards and Regular Army, Speaker of Majles (Parliament) and the Supreme Leader representatives. In addition, each decision of the SNSC is forwarded to the Supreme Leader for consent (Dumitrescu, 2010), which was not always guaranteed. For instance, the SNSC had proposed that the Supreme Leader attack and occupy Herat province in response to the Taliban's killing of nine Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e Sharif in 1998 (Jehl, 1998; Cafiero and Wagner, 2013; Agarwal, 2014). The proposal was shelved by the

Supreme Leader for fear of an open war with the Taliban as a consequence (Byman, 2001, p.24).

3.5.4 Iranian Force

Iran has two military forces, the *Artish* (the regular army) and the *Pasdaran Inqilab Islami* (Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps / IRGC). Each has its own identity within Iran's security system (Byman *et al.*, 2001, p.54).

The different missions of these institutions have had an impact on the nature and attributes of the security institutions involved. The former is an internal risk minimizer since it formulates and implements strategies in a manner that could marginalize the potential damages from the enemy side. The latter engages in fight for the defence of the country, even outside its borders. (Byman *et al.*, 2001, p.42). It is on the forefront for meeting the security challenges facing the country. (Byman *et al.*, 2001, p.53). The difference between Artish and IRGC stem partly from the rivalry between them in the past. It is important to be said that IRGC has started as a militia group organized under the order and protection of Ayatollah Khomeini in order to safeguard Islamic Revolution in Iran from the then Artish which swears its allegiance to the Iranian King. Even after the Islamic revolution has happened Artish has remained under the suspicion of the Supreme Leader as if it continues to support the King in exile. This rivalry, although does not take place today, after so many years have elapsed, does, however, continue, among other reasons, due to the legal base that was set in the Constitution of Iran, which foresees functions of Artish and IRGC that often overlap. Thus, based on article 143 and article 150 Artish and IRGC should be concerned with military and ideological protection of Iran from foreign aggression and influence accordingly. However, de facto, as the example of Iraqi aggression shows, both forces intend to intervene in each other's realm: Artish – have a say in ideological debates and IRGC – become involved in direct military decision. Other issues of rivalry concern doctrinal issues, different access to materiel and recruits and last but not least great civilian control by the Artish (Alfoneh 2011).

3.5.5 Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)

The role of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the *Pasdaran Inqilab Islami* in the Persian language, is crucial in Iran's political system. Its role is, however,

seriously debated in public domain of Iran as compared to the role of Artish, so-called “regular” military force of Iran. The debates on the role of IRGC are mostly concerned with its growing political importance and vast economic resources of this “revolutionary institution” (Katzman 2011).

The IRGC was established by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 (Article 150 of the IRI Constitution). He also created Basij military force the same year (Article 150 of the IRI Constitution), initially independent Basij became subordinate to IRGC in 1981 by the act of the parliament under the control of the IRGC consisting of 20 Million Iranian armed men. Thus, the main task of the IRGC is “providing for all the citizens a program of military training and its facilities, in accordance with the criterion of Islam such that everyone will always be able to engage in the armed defense of the country and the order of the Islamic Republic of Iran” (Article 151, Constitution of IRI).

The purpose of IRGC is to safeguard the Islamic Republic from the foreign aggression, provide internal security, guard Iranian Revolutionary values and export (Johnson, 2012, p.190) and provide financial and other kind of support to Islamic movements across the globe. It has around 4 million military men for the purpose, beyond “standing army” - the reservists, subcontractors and volunteers (Buchta, 2004, p.9-10).

The IRGC consists of various groups. Its special group conducts underground operations and organizes intelligence activities within and outside Iranian geographical borders (Octavina, 2010). In fact, the “The IRGC has no geographical border. The Islamic revolution is the border of the IRGC.” (Byman *et al*, 2001, p.54).

A part of the annual national budget [Author’s note: in 2010-2011 amounted to USD 368.4 billion] is allocated to the IRGC, which has been varying over the years for changing defense-budget allocation in the overall national budget. In 2010-11, it was USD 5.8 billion as compared to the USD 4.8 billion for the army (*Artesh*) the same year. However, unlike the army, the IRGC has direct access to Iran’s foreign exchange reserve. The IRGC’s *Khatam al-anbiya* unit, resembling the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, was allocated USD 25 billion for gas and oil mining during 2009-11. In addition, the IRGC’s role is visible in other sectors also: economic, legal etc., which together have made the IRGC one of the most important actors in the Tehran Stock Exchange. The army has no such role within the constitutional framework (Alfoneh, 2011, p.33). The Revolutionary Guard’s importance in Iran is due to its well-known entrepreneurial activity as well, that puts it in the direct interest to safeguard the Islamic Revolutionary order of Iran also

outside its borders. Thus, for instance, according to the Iranian Minister of Oil during Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005-2013), IRGC was running gas projects in South Pars equal to USD 21 billion and is involved in a number of other gas pipeline projects (BBC 2011, 26 February). It justifies IRGC's active involvement in the region and in Afghanistan, that this study is concerned with, which I elaborate on in the next chapter.

3.5.6 Regular Army (Artesh)

The *Artesh* (Islamic Republic of Iran Army) is the formal military force of Iran. Its responsibility is to safeguard Iranian territory and to maintain internal peace and order. The *Artesh* is composed of three forces, the Air Force, Navy, and Army (Grossman 2011).

It has a wide range of powers on national security issues for both advice and action. Its functional role recognizes no geographical borders within or outside the Iranian domain. It has a direct role in procuring military supplies, organizing military exercises and training and discussing the annual national budget. However, its domain on the procurement of military supplies is mandated to have the consent of a political think tank in Tehran on the basis of its political calculations and budget limitations (Grossman, 211, p.54).

In October 1998, Khamenei created a new position of the Supreme Commander for the regular army which is analogous to that of the IRGC in 1981. However, with the creation of the post of supreme commander, the regular military was now equal to IRGC in this regard. This move meant that in the event of a war with Afghanistan or any other power, Iran would rely on the role of its regular army and the IRGC both (Buchta, 2000, p.147).

3.6 Legislature

The legislature is represented by the Iranian parliament (*Majles-e Showra-ye Eslami*) which is an Islamic Consultative Assembly. Majles are accountable to the Council of Guardians (another important component of the legislature that hold a reviewing power), the latter can veto any of Majles' decisions. As of today, roughly 40% of the Parliament's decisions have been overturned, which can arguably be considered as

Majles' lesser powers vis-à-vis the Council of Guardians. The Parliament's role is nevertheless important as it affects a number of foreign policy decisions. Namely, the Parliament approves all international treaties and agreements, as well as bilateral and multilateral contracts to which Iran is a party.

3.6.1 Majles-e Showra-ye Eslami (Parliament)

The Majles is to oversee the budget, propose bills, and confirm treaties and the performance of the President and Ministers (Article 71-90 of the IRI Constitution). Thus, Iran's annual budget must be ratified by the *Majles* (Article 52-53 of the IRI Constitution) through discussion under its Speaker, a strong actor since he can sometimes afford to roll back the decisions of the President by his "power of review".

Its members need clearance by the Guardian Council nomination in the Majles. This pronounces the role of the Supreme Leader in its decisions as half of the Guardian Council members are directly and remaining half are indirectly appointed by him.

The *Majles* head, the Speaker, is elected by the *Majles* members. In case of a constitutional dispute between the *Majles* and the Guardian Council, the Expediency Council mediation remains supreme. Anyhow, the competence of the *Majles* is to seek clarification in writing from the Ministers regarding the decisions of their respective Ministries. Therefore, the *Majles* has a wide role in country's policy formulation including foreign policy affairs. Its Foreign Affairs Committee is, of course, proactive when it comes to the issue of foreign policy (Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, 2002, p.293). It can exert a great deal of pressure on government institutions for both national interests and the Iranian Islamic ideology (Kostiner, 2009, p.171).

3.6.2 Guardian Council (Shora-e Maslahat-e Nezam)

This *Shora-e Maslahat-e Nezamis* is the most powerful body in the overall Iranian power structure (Mishal and Goldberg, 2014, p.87) as can be gauged from the following passage: "All civic, penal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria. This principle governs all the articles of the constitution, and other laws and regulations. The determination of such compatibility is left to the Foqaha of the Guardian Council" (Article 4 of the IRI

Constitution). It is comprised of 12 members (Article 91-99 of the IRI Constitution), half appointed by the Supreme Leader and half by the Majles on the recommendation of the chief of the Judiciary Council (who is himself appointed by Supreme Leader). The tenure of all members is either 6 years or until new elections, whichever is earlier.

The Guardian Council regulates and oversees the *Majles* proceedings. It can recommend reformist candidates for election (Samii, 2001) and obstruct the passage of un-Islamic and un-constitutional laws in the *Majles*. (Mishal and Goldberg, 2014, p.87). A Decree passed by a 75% vote in the Guardian Council has constitutional value.

3.6.3 Expediency Council (Majma-e Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nezam)

The Expediency Council, also termed as the *Majma-e Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nezam*, was created in 1988 with 35-40 members. Its permanent members, which are now 290, are appointed by the Supreme Leader and the temporary members on the need-basis only. It is meant to resolve as and when there is a constitutional dispute between the *Majles* and the Guardian Council (Article 156-158 of the IRI Constitution), of course under the advice of the Supreme Leader (Rakel, 2009, p.34).

In addition, the Council is competent to pass laws on its own under “emergency” conditions, and neither the *Majles* nor the Guardian Council has the right to challenge such laws of the Expediency Council (Giles, 2003, p.134).

The Expediency Council is the other major clerically-dominated organ of the government with a disclaimer that it does “not become a power alongside the other three powers”. Presently, it has transformed into a legislative body though its decisions are reviewable. In fact, one-third of its laws were reviewed in its first four years of history (Gheissari, 2009, p.252).

The Council designs the so-called “Grand Strategy” and proposes foreign policy guidelines. Ayatollah Rafsanjani, its former President, is now the head of the Tehran’s Friday Prayer body (Imam). (The Friday prayer is a vehicle to convey the views of clerics each week). Within the framework of “Asian Identity,” he advocates close ties with Russia, China, and India and free market exchange within the global economy (Maleki, 2002).

3.7 The Judiciary

According to the letter of Iran's Constitution (Article 156), the judiciary is an "independent power". Its role is in ensuring the rule of law and the order in the country in all areas, except those legal matters which are considered to have constitutional aspects and importance. The latter areas fall under the jurisdiction of the Council of Guardians. While civil and criminal cases fall under the jurisdiction of the Public Courts, the issues of a national concern are considered only by the Revolutionary Courts. Such cases are important for foreign policy decisions and include, inter alia, national security matters, drug-trafficking issues etc. (Sial, 2011) There is also a special Clerical Court for the trial of the crimes where clerics are suspects. Since the decisions of the Revolutionary and Clerical Courts are final (Alexander and Hoenig, 2008, pp.16-17), they may be arguably considered more powerful in comparison with the Public Courts.

The institution of the judiciary serves as a bridge between the offices of the President and the Supreme Leader. Its head, the *Rais-e Qowa-e Qazaiyya*, is appointed by the Supreme Leader for a term of 5 years and retains office at his discretion. He has to ensure the conduct of judicial proceedings as per the Islamic and Iran's Revolutionary ideology (Mahmood, 2009, p.53). As argued above, the judiciary is an independent body responsible for the imposition of Islamic laws and recommendation of 6 non-religious scholars for the Guardian Council (Bruno, 2009).

The Iranian constitution has prescribed the following structural organization of the judiciary branch:

- Head of the Judiciary:

Appointed by the Supreme Leader from amongst the Muslim jurists (Mujtahids) for 5 years, the head of the judiciary holds high-ranking position in the judicial, administrative, and executive structure of Iran. He is believed to be well-versed in judicial knowledge and managerial skills (Article 157 of the IRI Constitution).

- Minister of Justice:

The minister of Justice is appointed from amongst a panel of names recommended by the President of the Judicial Branch to the President of the Republic (Article 161 of the IRI Constitution). He is responsible for the relationship of the judiciary with the executive and legislature. He is also competent to set up lower-level judicial courts, define their

jurisdiction and arrange for their premises and personnel, in accordance with the law (Mahmood, 2009, p.94).

- Office of the Supreme Leader:

The Office of the Supreme Leader consists of those clerks and other officials who represent the Supreme Leader in almost all Ministries and government and civil institutions. These representatives are sometimes more powerful than the Ministers (Schirazi, 2007, p.73).

The Supreme Leader's representatives constitute channels through which he knows about the changes to be affected in foreign policy decisions. They ensure that the Supreme Leader's position remains paramount on the decision-making bodies (Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, 2002, p.293).

Indeed, the Office of the Supreme Leader and its working reflects the mind and thought of Khomeini in the country's foreign policy. Obviously, this office is considered to be the strongest in terms of its role and influence on Iran's strategic foreign policy goals related especially to the USA (Vatanka, 2008).

Amid huge controversies and opposition by the U.S. and Israel in particular, the executive, judicial and legislative set up of Iran so meticulously structured as has little scope of its collapse in future. Alamdari writes that "The political structure of the IRI is not constructed like a canopy, in which removing the central pole causes its collapse; rather, it is built on many independent, rival, parallel columns of power that hold the system together" (Alamdari, 2005, 129). Even Bill Clinton admitted this reality of Iran's conspicuous but well-structured political design. To quote him,

" ... Iran is the most perplexing problem ... we face, for the following reasons: It is the only country in the world with two governments, and the only country in the world that has now had six elections since the first election of President Khatami [1997]." (Bill Clinton, 11 February 2005 issue of Executive Intelligence Review)

Precisely, Iran's executive, judicial and legislative bodies do not overlap in real functioning. Realm of responsibility is clearly defined on foreign and other policies. The Supreme Leader is meant to approve or disapprove the foreign policy initiatives submitted by the President of the country. The President is required to shape foreign policy in coordination with the other power centers. The Guardian Council seeks, develops and recommends foreign policy guidelines for adoption within the constitutional

framework. The Foreign Minister gives feedback to the policy planners about establishment, retention or continuation of foreign relations with other countries. The SNSC (Supreme National Security Council) is a key institution for debating foreign policy issues. Although the *Majles* (Parliament) has no direct role in foreign policy decision-making, it can issue statements in its regard at regional/international levels (Rakel, 2010, pp.109-110) After the necessary process is complete at all levels, the foreign policy bills are referred “from below” to the Supreme Leader for consent “from above” (Sadjadpour, 2010, p.7).

All this presupposes diversification of institutions, formal and informal, for a common cause and a politically pluralistic approach for dealing with most sensitive and complex issue of maintaining and winding up foreign relations with other nations of the world. It is a reality that such an approach bounced back sometimes during the Iran-Iraq War and Iran Hostage Crisis. The country nonetheless remained intact and gave little rather no chance for fragmentation and foreign aggression or adversary (Nourbakhsh, 2005).

3.8 Informal foreign policy institutions

Informal actors make significant contributions to the Iranian political sphere (Sallam, Mandelbaum and Grace, 2007). These are sometimes more influential than the formal bodies of the government (Thaler, 2010, p.35). They possess a say in foreign relation matters and are often seen active in the public debates. But, there is no such institutional mechanism as could tend to distribute power among them (Rakel, 2008, pp.58-59).

In all, four groups influence Iranian foreign policy: those who form a breakaway group of Iran’s political or bureaucratic leadership; those legislative and other government actors who share power with the executive (described in detail above); those who are politically active in the Iranian society and those who form the civil society groups for opinion-building in foreign relations. These groups are especially active during internal and external crisis (Hagan, 1989, p.343).

3.8.1 Religious Foundations (*Bonyads*)

Religious Foundations (*Bonyad*) characterize yet another contributory to Iran's political and economic domain. The most important *Bonyads* are Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (IKRC), Foundation for the Oppressed and Disabled, Martyr's Foundation and Imam Reza Foundation (Rakel, 2008, p.38). These are meant to evaluate and promote the Islamic and Revolutionary values in the country. Those ways, these *Bonyad* are sometimes comparable with those formal institutions (Saeidi, 2009), which receive direct orders from the Supreme Leader and are accountable only to him. They thrive on the resources drawn from donations and charity, of which they transfer to the office of the Supreme Leader for routine functions (Aris and Snetkov, 2013, p.104). Even these Religious Foundations have their indirect role in shaping the country's foreign policy for they provide necessary feedback to Iranian policy-makers.

The largest charity organization is the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (IKRC), which raises funds from both governmental and non-governmental organizations within and outside Iran (BBC Persian, 2009). The foundation is mandated to "support as much as possible the needy outside the country based upon the Islamic Republic of Iran's government policies" (BBC Persian, 2009).

A part of the funds so raised are provided to newly-wedded couples (USD 220), farmers (USD 700), Afghan families (approx. USD 7,000) and Afghan orphans (around USD 72,000) as help, aid, assistance, loan etc. In the first 6 months of 2011, the IKRC provided an amount estimated at USD 623,000 (non-cash assistance only) in Herat province. This is in addition to the relief given in-kind: sugar, cooking oil, flour etc., and assistance given for training courses of auto mechanics and sewing workshops (Peterson, 2013). All such philanthropic activities of the IKRC are perceived to support *Shiism*, the Iranian ideological and political base and its anti-American narrative (Christensen, 2011).

Besides the *Bonyads*, the Iranian cultural groups contribute to the foreign policy formulation and execution. Indeed, these cultural groups represent the country in foreign lands through the medium of their concerned Embassy (Buchta, 2000, p.50).

3.8.2 Friday Prayer Leaders Association (Imam Joma)

The Friday Prayer Leaders on whom Friday Prayer is obligatory, are extensively used as a special conduit by the Supreme Leader, Iran Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Expediency Council, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the President of Iran for the furtherance of Iran's domestic and foreign interests. They are meant to publicize the Supreme Leader's position on important aspects of Iran's domestic and global issues considering that they are under his direct control (Rakel, 2009, pp.54-55).

In Iran, the week begins on Saturday and ends on Friday and millions of people offer Friday Prayers across the country. These prayers provide a platform for the government to invoke public support regarding its domestic and foreign policies. The *Imams* of the Friday Prayers, the leaders, have thus a crucial in building public trust for the state.

3.9 Individual Actors and Associations

3.9.1 Individual Actors

Within the Iranian political system, powerful individuals also impact the country's foreign policymaking. One of them is *Faqih*, the term describing the religious role of the Supreme Leader as an individual (not political figure). Although no one has, to date, substituted his political role, it does not mean that Iran has no active political leaders after the Supreme Leader (Maleki, 2002, p.39-58).

The *Faqih* makes an apt case. The position was created by the Council of Experts on 4th June 1989. He remains an important person to influence country's foreign policy domain, the President, the heads of Expediency Council, Parliament and the others.

3.9.2 Iranian Youth Organizations

Youth constitutes the largest population in Iran: over 60 percent of Iran's 73 million people are under the age of thirty (30). Compared to the 57 Muslim countries, Iranian youth is particularly active in country's political life. It remains on the forefront of the opposition to the government policies. That way, the Iranian youth pose a threat to the

changing governments (Wright, 2010, p.48). The youth organizations are generally made up of the college and university students in Iran.

Office for Strengthening Unity, *Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat*, is Iran's largest student organization which surfaced to pursue Imam Khomeini's given Revolutionary Islamic thought in 1979. Its branches are spread across Iran's state and private universities. While its initial agenda was to resist the liberal secular policies and support the Islamic Revolution, subsequently it diversified the same with the inclusion of human rights issues in it (Wright2010, p.51).

3.9.3 Students for Freedom and Equality

It is a left-wing student organization established in 2006 to resist the presence of security in Iranian universities. It organized peaceful demonstrations in December 2007, following which around 70 people were arrested, the majority of whom were members of the Students for Freedom and Equality (Khiabany and Sreberny, 2009, pp.129-130).

3.9.4 Green Movement

It is an informal youth association that surfaced in response to the alleged rigging of the Presidential elections on June 12, 2009. Its initial forms of protest were confined to the boycott of consumer goods and the display of anti-government graffiti by youth, both men and women (Nesvaderani, 2010). President Mehdi Karoubi and former Prime Minister Mirhossein Mousavi were the prominent Green Movement leaders in Iran.

3.10 Summary

The aforesaid discussion profiles Iran's structural formation for governance and foreign policy management. The institutional structure is unique for it combines state and non-state actors for building Iran nation and making it powerful enough to thwart any hostile design from within or outside the country.

However, in all this, Islam remains the nerve of the Iranian regime and its foreign policy and the post of the Supreme Leader is its main driver. As it becomes apparent from the above analysis of various norm of the Iranian Constitution, the Supreme Leader dominates each and every branch of power of the Iranian state. The letter and spirit of the

Constitution make it clear the Supreme Leader's role cannot be overestimated by saying that he guides and advises the state actors and institutions both formal and informal on matters of national importance, which includes the foreign policy issues in the first run. Most of the Iranian formal institutions are led by Iran's hardliners who are loyal to the Supreme Leader and the ideology of the Islamic Revolution. His absolute authority is sometimes so imposing that other organs and actors of the government are bound and restricted by them in their official business.

The tension between the republican and religious elements in the constitution and the overlapping competencies of the various elements in the formal structure of Iran are important messages the present chapter has communicated, they are the pieces of the foreign policy puzzle that serve the better understanding of how and who shapes the foreign policy in Iran. It provides an initial thought as to where the contradictory foreign policies of Iran take their roots.

Chapter 4. Iran's Foreign Policy Review: three presidents, four visions

Foreign policy formulation and execution is always a ticklish issue with every government since various compulsions and complications must be considered. Iran's position is particularly complex due to its nuclear question marks, anti-Western rhetoric and its impasse with neighboring Saudi Arabia. Regional and international experts on Iran's foreign policy unanimously agree that Iran's foreign policy is caught up between its insightful ideology and political and institutional complexities. To quote Mahan Abedin saying that the "foreign policy making process in Iran is considerably more complex; that consensus is either lacking or where it is achieved, it is at an unacceptably high price. Moreover, the actual policies often reflect the tensions and divisions bedeviling the Iranian elite, leading foremost to inadequate implementation". However, he states that "Iran has made huge inroads in relatively non-contentious foreign policy areas, namely in the region where it is steadily emerging as the dominant power. But now it is faced with a hostile global climate, an outcome that is directly tied to Iran's antagonistic relationship with the West" (Abedin, 2010).

The diversified nature of its policies and foreign affairs are a result of both Iran's officials and formal institutions. But there remains a significant scope for political malfunctioning in the overall system of the country. It may unfold a crisis of greater magnitude, which, in the event of delayed response, could deepen on the analogy of the 1979 Iran Hostage Crisis. Notwithstanding that more than 38 years have passed and regional and global geopolitics has radically changed since the Iran Hostage Crisis, it can nonetheless be a lesson for the present government. Any delayed response to the potential crisis could be suicidal for Iran keeping the surging Shia-Sunni divide in the Middle East and bitter US-Iran and Iran-Saudi relations in mind. Forthcoming crisis aside, the Foreign Ministry is already marginalized due to its high-level of institutionalization. As a result, the Iranian leadership has become a subject of great criticism. Further, ideological diversification, internal power struggle, personal rivalry, sectarian and/or factional dissension can all impede the decision-making process in foreign relations. Therefore, the profound philosophical and ideological contradictions have penetrated into every Iranian institution, which breeds the lack of consensus on a broad range of domestic and external issues (Abedin, 2010).

Iran encountered a battery of complications from within and outside Iran: the Iran-Iraq War, UN economic sanctions for its nuclear program and anti-Semitic stance. However, it managed to withstand till date. But hereafter, it seems to be difficult, if not impossible, in view of steeply growing differences with the US-led West and the Saudi-guided Middle Eastern Muslim world.

Since the domestic policy has a co-relationship with the foreign policy narrative, the overpowering role of the Supreme Leader at the cost of other actor or organs serves only to deepen inbuilt complexities. Subject experts unanimously agree that the foreign policy of Iran is caught up in strange ideological, political and institutional complexities.

Notwithstanding the complexities and contradictions, Iran continues to show resilience in its domestic and foreign policies and disallows their allied challenges or complexities to affect its basic governmental edifice. Towards this end, the formulation of the foreign policy is examined from the four major visions as reflected in the governments of the three Iranian presidents.

This chapter analyzes the goals and objectives of Iran's Afghan foreign policy from 2001 to 2014. During this period, a number of internal changes took place in Afghanistan, significantly, the fall of the Taliban and the U.S. Afghanistan invasion in 2001. Meanwhile, in Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected to the office of the President, however, it is perhaps still the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan that brought about a major change in Tehran's relations with Kabul.

Further, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that Iran's foreign policy has several dimensions. One dimension revolves around the Sunni-Shia discourse and is paramount to understanding the ideological foundations of Iran's foreign policy. The other dimensions are in the economic, political and cultural realms. The discussion below shows as to how far Iran's foreign policy narrative is workable in real practice. The chapter, in particular, is focused on the analysis of the foreign policy objectives of Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and Hassan Rouhani, for their relevance to the present study.

The Iranian foreign policy is reviewed on the basis of the information contained in the secondary sources and the primary sources (interviews in Iran and Afghanistan), gathered from the empirical analysis conducted during the field trips of the investigator of this study. Further, the chapter presents the analysis in light of one of the major concepts

of International Relations (IR) - realism (for more on the theoretical approach see: chapter 1, subchapter 1.9), operationalized in this chapter in order to explain Iran's Afghan foreign policy.

Iran's Afghan foreign policy has experienced changes in various periods, depending upon the changing dynamics of Afghanistan's political structure under different regimes: the Soviets (1978-1992), Mujahideen (1992-1996), Taliban (1996-2001) and the post-Taliban 2001 US-sponsored interim government in Afghanistan. Beyond that, another thing is also certain – the dynamics in Iran also have played their role, and the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan, indeed, has always been, throughout the history, determined by the internal political processes of both, Iran and Afghanistan. The analysis of the foreign policy with consideration of these changing dynamics serves as a tool to unfold the main argument of the present study on the contradictory foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan.

The chapter unfolds in the following way. It starts with describing a paradigm shift in the Iranian foreign policy objectives, which is to be associated with the Islamic revolution (section 4.1). Then, I present the four main visions, partly overlapping with the tenures of the three Iranian presidents, existing in the Iranian government with regards to Afghanistan, that I formulate as geopolitical, geographical-cultural, geostrategic and geoeconomic (section 4.2). I elaborate on the Iranian foreign policy sources after the Islamic revolution (section 4.3). The discussion on the trajectories of the foreign policy is discussed in greater detail in the analysis of the important elements of the foreign policy Iran pursues (section 4.4). Last but not least, the analysis of the goals, done in the sections above, allows one to summarize the objectives of the foreign policy, corresponding to the presidencies of Khatami, Ahmadinejad, and Rouhani (section 4.5). The last paragraphs summarize the outcome of the chapter (section 4.6).

4.1 Islamic revolution: a paradigm shift for Iranian foreign policy objectives

The Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 is undoubtedly the most significant development in Iran's modern history. It led to an inside-out revivalism of the country's political and cultural identity. It injected Iran into global politics. It pointed to a transition from the decades-old pro-American Shah regime to a new theocratic-republican political and economic model of the state. The structural renaissance of Iran's political system had

thus religious and republic orientations, which eventually opened vistas for revival of the country's domestic and foreign policies.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 took place at a time when the global politics was conspicuously divided into bipolar identities; the pro-US Capitalism and the pro-Soviet Communism. The newly emerging nation was determined to safely position itself in between two opposing blocks. Eventually, the Islamic Revolution pre-empted Iran to re-orient its foreign policy for expediency. While it espoused the slogan of "Neither the East nor the West", it devised its own model of state by combining theocracy with republicanism for furtherance of its interests within and outside Iran. Indeed, a new foreign policy approach was the natural corollary of the Islamic Revolution and its orientation to perceive beyond the East and the West. It became operational during the Imam Khomeini's period. True, changes were affected in it from time to time. But, these did not exclusively discard Khomeini's original plan of the state-building and foreign policy formulation and execution on the basis of the Islamic Revolutionary and modern republican thought/s. It was a sort of combination of continuity and change in Iran's foreign policy narrative.

With the demolition of the old order, a purely new and unique political structure emerged in the post-Islamic Iranian Revolution in 1979. Although the new order assured convergence of Islamic and democratic narratives, it could not balance the two, and thus its foreign policy was affected by sequential system fault-lines. These breed cardinal contradictions and indiscreet conflict between and among formal and non-formal actors and institutions, and thus cause a split between the state apparatus and a parallel, vertically integrated "shadow" status system under the direct control of the Supreme leader (Mason, 2015, p.86). For this reason, western diplomats began to label Iranian policy strategy as a "black box". The opaque and contradictory characteristics of Iran's foreign policy, in general, are also observed in its relations with Afghanistan. This study demonstrates and emphasizes the difference between Iranian foreign policy goals towards Afghanistan as clear and aiming at influence and the de facto foreign policy implementation, that at times seems to conflict with these goals, as being rather contradictory (see in particular chapter 6).

The 1979 Islamic Revolution was a turning point in the history of Iran as it determined the Iranian Foreign policy objectives for the following decades and religion was one of the major driving forces behind Ruhollah Khomeini's orchestration of the

aforesaid Revolution. The Revolution was also an antidote proposed not only to Ulama and to Iranian merchants, the so-called Bazaaris, against the allegedly utterly corrupt and brutal reign of the Iranian Shah. During the first ten years after the Revolution, however, Iranian foreign policy can be described as featuring the "combination of the pragmatic and ideological considerations", whereas "pragmatism became more evident" than ideology in the subsequent ten years of the Revolution (Rakel, 2007a). Consequently, security and economic concerns began to dominate Iran's foreign policy formulation and execution (which was the case during the Shah's regime and according to realism is what foreign policy is concerned with). The latter was indisputably a shift from the isolation of Iran after the revolution to interdependence and cooperation with other countries (Beasley *et al.*, 2010). The balancing attempts between the ideology and pragmatism and the final choice made were explained by the Professor of Political Science in Tehran:

"If we will look back to the history of Iran's foreign policy after the revolution, the Iranian government was struggling between idealism and realism and it was and still is dependent on the domestic/internal as well as of course international events, especially in the Middle East. This struggle was resolved when Iran made a choice in favor of its pragmatic considerations. We are evidencing a clear pragmatic shift in the foreign policy of our country in the last years. Changes in the Middle East, Afghanistan and Iraq wars¹¹, internal economic problems, negotiations with the West on Iranian nuclear program are only some of the variables in Iranian foreign policy shift towards pragmatism. Yet, I believe, they are the most important ones". (K. S., personal interview, 10 April 2017)

This is an interesting explanation that allows one to suggest that it is not only the Supreme Leader and clergy who direct the foreign policy but regular politicians and bureaucrats as well. This shift was observed and perceived not only in the western academic literature but by the Iranian scholars inside the country as well. It was further confirmed in another interview in Iran. Thus, according to the Research Fellow of the Iranian think tank in Tehran:

"Iran started to realize the importance of the external factors – cooperation with the countries of the region- for its own survival. We need to manage our relations in such a way as to adjust them to the realities around us. Actually, this is what the Iranian government does today. We must fight IS, there is no other way, as IS is a threat to Iran. On the other hand, we continuously work on enhancing of our relations with other EU countries, not in the immediate neighborhood, like Russia, China, India, and EU, which is a must for ensuring Iran's economic goals and objectives. You see, today the ideology became a servant for the Iranian realistic national interests." (A. Sh., personal interview, 8 April 2017).

¹¹ In particular, Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988) has allegedly pushed Iran to a more pragmatic foreign policy due to its high cost.

The recognition of the importance of cooperation by the Iranian leadership had to naturally emerge from Iran's long isolation and the consequent attempt of Iran to re-establish positive relations with other countries. Such attempt can be seen as somehow reflecting the Iranian leader's recognition of the benefits of interdependence, and hence of the importance of the external factors (Beasley *et al.*, 2010).

This chapter argues that, initially, Iran upheld the concept of a pure Islamic State, and shaped its foreign policy accordingly. With the passage of time, however, its foreign policy changed, from idealism to pragmatism, due to the rapidly transforming geopolitical setting from bipolar to unipolar and to a multi-polar world, which has affected Iran's goal at the international arena. Iran has rationally adopted a pragmatic foreign policy towards most actors (both state and non-state) that fall within the ambit of Islam as ideology, while also continued focusing on the ideological part (which was greatly reduced over the period of time, though). The ideological dimension was exhaustively used to mobilize people during the time of formation of the Islamic state of Iran against the USA that was presented by Iran to the population as the primary enemy of Muslim *Ummah*¹². Ever since the Islamic state of Iran has settled down as a people's republic, the ideological aspect of the foreign policy has decreased considerably.

To summarize the above, Iran's foreign policy was drawn to the accomplishment of two fundamental objectives: one, to fight back its arch-enemy - the US, and second, to organize the Muslim *Ummah* against the anti-Islamic block. Currently, however, Iran's extent of enmity has widened. Besides the neighboring Sunni world led by Saudi Arabia, Iran has potent threats from the non-state actors, the ISIS/*Daesh*, *Al-Qaeda* etc. Eventually, Iran revamped its foreign policy to fit in the new geopolitical scenario. Shunning its Revolution-times isolation, it began developing cooperation both with the Muslim and non-Muslim world. Some of the major practical changes that have taken place in the foreign policy of Iran, in light of the above-described shift, would generally include:

"adopting a new flexible approach toward the United States; forging closer ties to Russia; deepening the Khatami-led cooperative *détente* with Europe; improving Iran's role and image in the international community and international

¹² The word *Ummah* literally means Muslim society.

organizations; fostering better relations with the Arab world—particularly in the Persian Gulf; stabilizing relations with Turkey, Pakistan, and Iraq; enhancing regional cooperation; exploring new security arrangements; and, simultaneously, upgrading its military preparedness" (Afrasiabi and Maleki, 2008).

Obviously, more thrust is on pragmatism than the Islamic ideological dimension. Foreign policy towards Afghanistan is no different from Iran's aforesaid paradigm shift in its general foreign policy, especially after the Taliban's fall in 2001. The foreign policy shift towards Afghanistan followed the change in Iran's domestic policy due to the country's tilt towards democracy and the security threat exacerbated by the foreign forces presence in Afghanistan.

Specifically, the chapter emphasizes that the main policy goals include the development plans which Iran adopted over a period of time. These pertain to the following areas/objectives:

- Promoting Iran's security interests (also by undermining the U.S. presence in Afghanistan);
- Building ties with the political parties and individuals within Afghanistan, such as Afghan officials and Shia minorities;
- Safeguarding the Shia minority rights and bringing them into Iran's political mainstream.

While the Shia factor at the first glance creates an impression that Iran is only driven by ideological concerns, the issue, in fact, is quite tricky and one should not misunderstand how this factor, embedded in Iran's political mainstream, serves the pragmatic approach Iran has of placing its security considerations at the forefront. The sections below (as well as this study in general) demonstrates how Iran is able to achieve this goal technically, by focusing on the above objectives.

4.2 The four major visions of Iran's government regarding Afghanistan

Iran has a number of opportunities as well as challenges and threats coming from Afghanistan's internal and external dynamics. Thus, Iran sees Afghanistan as an economic market and at the same time as a threat in terms of security due to the internal chronic conflicts in Afghanistan and the external factors such as the presence of the U.S. troops and the long-lasting competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The weaknesses

of the Afghan government, the long border with Iran, the long history of Iranian involvement in Afghanistan and a number of other factors make it very complicated to understand how Iran is exhibiting its political interests in Afghanistan.

For the purposes of convenience, however, I single out the four major areas for the review in this particular chapter, which I call four visions (perceptions) regarding Afghanistan existing within Iranian government:

- Geopolitical vision:

Iran knows well that its Afghan neighbor is fragile on many accounts. Nevertheless, it pursues the geopolitical vision while keeping its larger security, economic, ethnic and other interests in mind. For the fulfillment of these interests, it goes as far as to engage with the Taliban and other anti-governmental groups, while at the same time enhancing its cooperation with the Afghan government. It does so despite knowing that the latter is supported and sponsored by its arch-rival, the United States.

- Geographical and cultural vision:

Under this vision, Iran endeavors to befriend those groups and minorities which share the same culture and religion (specifically, this refers to the Shia branch of Islam) and are part of the Persian civilization (which includes linguistic affinity). Iran wants all such groups to share the Afghan power. While some in Iran want only to empower the Shia population, others want the Afghans of Tajik ethnicity¹³ to enjoy Iran's patronage as well. There are also groups in the government who believe that both groups should be patronized.

Due to its importance for understanding Iran's geographical and cultural vision, it is relevant to provide an overview of the Sunni and Shia Islam dichotomy and existing discourse, which I analyze in light of the above-mentioned vision of Iranian government.

For the sake of historical clarity, a short remark should be made on *Shia mazhab*¹⁴ before going further into the terrain. The *Shia* emerged as a consequence of the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson, Imam Hussein, in the Battle of Karballa. They held that Hazrat Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet, was actually entitled to the *Khilafat* after the Prophet's death; hence, denounced the *Khilafat* of the first three *Khalifas* (califs). Since

¹³ There is a linguistic affinity between Tajik Afghans and Iranians, since Dari (spoken in Afghanistan), Farsi (Iran) and Tajik (Tajikistan) are essentially the same language.

¹⁴ *Mazhab* is a school of *Sharia* Law in Islam.

Iran is largely inhabited by the *Shia*, it has been, as such, upholding the cause of the *Shia* all over the world. The *Shia* is dominant in Iran, Lebanon, Bahrain, Syria, Iraq (Husain, Kéchichian, Dabashi and Moussalli, n.d.). In 2015, there were approximately 1.8 billion Muslims in the world (Pew Research Center, 2017), while Shia constituted a minority, approximately 10-13 percent (Pew Research Center, 2011, pp.153-154).

Very tactical, Khomeini and his associates used Islam as a tool to oust the pro-American Shah and the decade's long Pahlavi rule. The use of Islam by *Rahbar* can be compared with the idea of "Pan-Arabism" of Jamal Abdul Nasser in the 50s in Egypt where it was used as a means of mobilization of the nation (Terry, 2013). He (*Rahbar*) followed the constructivist approach to elevate *Shiism* as compared to the *Sunnism*. The constructivist approach demonstrates how the Iranian foreign policy was socially constructed in the international relations right after the Islamic revolution and until the death of the Grand Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. During that period, the Iranian leadership has situated the country's shared values and ideas within the ambit of Islam, and, at the same time, sustained support to the *Shias* of Afghanistan, while not disregarding their counterparts in Pakistan, India, and Central Asia and the Middle East.

- Geostrategic vision:

Based on this vision, Iran shapes its Afghan policy in a manner as would marginalize its enemies, the U.S. in particular. To this end, it utilizes all its tools and resources, to implement its policy. Strategic goals and cooperation of Iran with other regional powers, such as Russia, China, India, and Central Asian countries are also aimed to limit the U.S. influence in Afghanistan and in the whole region. The core institution which has this geostrategic view is Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and it can be considered the main body which implements this policy in Afghanistan.

"Afghanistan has been at the core of Iranian foreign policy since the Islamic revolution in Iran. It can be stated that this country has been important for Iran for different reasons First, Afghanistan has a geopolitical importance for Iran meaning that Iranian foreign policy has noted its geographical and geopolitical situation. In other words, it has been and still is considered that Afghanistan is the neighbour of Iran and apart from the nature of politics and government in this country, Iran has to come to terms with the governing state. It may be said that efforts made to establish a relationship with the Taliban within the last two years of its ruling, can be evaluated in this framework." (Haji-Yousefi, 2012)

- Geo-economic vision:

For Iran, the export of its goods to Afghanistan and use of Afghanistan as a transit route to Central Asia and China constitutes a major geo-economic interest. Precisely, Iran has invested significant resources in the construction of the transit routes within Afghanistan through a number of projects (discussed in Chapter 6 and 7).

With regards to the geo-economic vision, one thing requires clarification. Indeed, Iran, like any other country strives to attain economic growth. However, in this regard, one has to highlight that such economic growth often presupposes a country's willingness to open itself to the world. In the case of Iran, the situation does not fall under this generally accepted view, as this country continuously tries to make sure that geo-economic considerations do not collide with Iran's overall perception of the imports, coming from the West as, what Iran considers to be, the "soft war", posing in long-run a danger to the Islamic core values and even to the very integrity of the country's regime (Sariolghalam, 2018).

However, understanding Iranian foreign policy is difficult, since a number of individuals and institutions are involved in its formulation and execution. In many cases, the policy is not public and the objectives are usually kept secret. Moreover, the fact that Afghan people and even Afghan government, based on their past experiences with Iran and its policies towards Afghanistan often pigeonhole this country, by sticking various labels on its policies, which often is done in the manner that is quite exclusive, makes it difficult to unambiguously name Iran either a friend or an enemy.

On the one hand, following the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Iran has been suspected of creating security challenges in Afghanistan, namely in the western part of the country. By supporting insurgency and organizing attacks on governmental entities and even civilians, Iran is following its strategic agenda which can be narrowed down to 1) giving warning to those who are against the presence of Iran in Afghanistan; 2) putting pressure on the Afghan government to give a bigger space for Iran in the political agenda of Afghanistan; and 3) demonstrating its power to the western counterparts in Afghanistan, namely to the U.S. (but also to the Afghan government).

On the other hand, however, the Iranian government claims to have provided support to the Afghan government worth billions of USD for a number of construction projects. The focus of such support is mostly on trade and in the transit sector, where

Iran's activities have been more overt, making its geo-economic vision more comprehensible. The covert activities (analyzed in this study) are observed when it comes to Iran's security and political considerations towards Afghanistan – its geopolitical and geostrategic vision.

4.3 Overview of the Post-Revolution Iranian Foreign Policy Motives

Although the literature on Iran's foreign policy is vast, the details about the driving forces of this policy are far from clear. Nevertheless, I dare to offer the following critical, though non-exhaustive, explanations with regard to the impetus behind Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan:

- The general driving force behind Iran's foreign policy is its perceiving of the existing global world order as unipolar, dominated by the US, a major rival of Iran. Iran's strategy is to fit itself in the same order while keeping its larger national interests in mind.
- Another major driving force is the complex Iranian domestic structure and the incompatibility issues existing between conservatives and the liberals, hardliners and the moderates as well as various cultural groups.
- Economic troubleshooting has been one of the major drivers of Iran's foreign policy, considering the fact that the UN has periodically imposed economic sanctions on Iran for its alleged nuclear program, a perceived threat to Israel and its allies.
- Iran's foreign policy is driven by its concern with the composition of global power (the international distribution of power, and precisely Iran's place in it), with the domestic policies (the internally belonging to regime factional, strategic and cultural competition).
- The *Shia-Sunni* rivalry is another potential driver of Iran's foreign policy. Pertinently, Iran represents the Shia sectarian groups within the Middle Eastern/West Asian region. It perceives the *Wahhabism* and *Sunnism* as a potent threat to the *Shia* followers in general. Such a perception followed the Khomeini-guided Iranian 1979 Revolution. Though Khomeini, theoretically speaking, espoused that Revolution was meant to protect the Muslims in general, in practice, Iran stood for the *Shia* in particular. Consequently, the post-Revolution Iran aims at overturning the Sunni or the Saudi power

domination in the Middle East, following the nexus between the US, Israel and the Sunni Muslim Arabs (Katzman, 2015).

A digression should be made here to elaborate a bit on how the Shia factor should not be seen as purely an ideological tool that Iran uses, but as a tool very much embedded into the pragmatic approach Iran pursues. In fact, the notion of constructivism of a famous campaigner of this approach - Alexander Wendt is suitable for an explanation of the usage of the Shia factor by Iran during the Khomeini era. His doctrine of constructivism has two dimensions. One relates to the composition of the human association, in our case, *Shias*, who are welded together by the common idea of Shiism. Second, the dimension of constructivism underlines that the "identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature" (Wendt, 1999, p.1), both dimensions help to understand the trajectories of Imam Khomeini's approach in the foreign policy.

To study Iran's foreign policy via the combination of discourse study (in the narrow sense: a study of text and talk) and constructivist approach is a way that has, indeed, been often used. A normative discourse on IRI foreign policy principally emanates from political Islam (Shia Islam), the constitution of Iran, the guidance of Imam Khomeini and the history of Iran as a strong nation in the region (Nia, 2012). In fact, the composition of Iran's Islamic ideology and pragmatism in its policies were complementary to each other during the first years of Khomeini's Islamic Revolution (Friedman, 2010). However, it is not always clear as to which one of the two is a priority: the ideology is making use of the resources which the nation possesses or the nation represented by the country of Iran, is making use of the ideology for the sake of increasing the power and weight it has within international community (Posch, 2013). This study, based on the realism perspective as a theoretical foundation of the analyses, assumes that most of the obtained data speak in favor of the second, particularly as applied to the timeframe of the present analysis – from 2001 to 2014.

Iranian policy-making experienced substantial change after 1989. The shift from the ideological use of Islam to other factors that gained more importance is crucial in shaping Iran's relations with the rest of the world. Thus, the historical events in revolutionary Iran became turning points in its foreign policy. The combination of the post-revolutionary internal changes in Iran, including the demise of the Supreme Leader Khomeini in 1989 with the changing settings in its neighborhood in the post-Khomeini

era (like Gulf war, the consequences of the Cold war and, most prominently, the collapse of the USSR) led to the paradigm shift from Khomeini's "Neither East, nor West" to his successor Khamenei's and Iranian President Rafsanjani's so-called "Both North and South". (Ramazani, 1992, p.393)

Although supporting the Islamic movement is still one of the aims of Iranian foreign policy, the difference from the time of the Islamic revolution is evident. Back then, the support was ideological and much larger, it reached out almost to every Islamic movement in the world. Nowadays, this support is focused only on the Middle East and only to those against the Israeli state. The export of the Islamic revolution was principally an important part of Iranian foreign policy following the regime change in Iran. Gradually, however, after the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and other changes in Iran, such as the death of Khomeini and the internal economic problems, this idea has lost its ideological meaning and became the basis for economic modeling. President Rafsanjani believed that the revolution should be exported via Iran's economic development. The idea of such approach was an assumption that if Iran, as an Islamic state, proves that it can manage its economic development, then other Islamic countries will voluntarily adopt such a model which would all but ensure achievement of the principal goals of the Islamic revolution. (Moeinaddini and Entezarulmahdi, 2009, pp.203-204)

The emphasis on the economic modeling, rather than on the ideological aspects of the Islamic movement has naturally become possible due to "the rise of the dual leadership of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani" (Ramazani, 1992, p.393) as opposed to the monarchy of the Khomeini leadership.

The essence of this dual leadership was in the following. In 1989, the presidential system was established by the amendment to the Iranian constitution that formally put an end to the prime minister post. Rafsanjani, thus, became the fourth president of Iran, who in the absence of the prime minister and because of his close relations with both old and the new Supreme Leaders, was vested with a strong decision-making authority, which he exercised in order to shift the foreign policy into the economic and pragmatic directions. (Bakhash, 2015) Under the above-mentioned amendments to the constitution, the National Security Council was formed under the president. It is an important institution of policy-making and serves to increase and affirm the president's power (Yapp 1996, p.351). The power of future presidents will change based on their personalities and particular affiliation to Rahbar.

In other words, the Iranian foreign policy, which presents the Iranian regime as a rational actor (Amuzegar, 2014, p.121), is rather constrained than motivated by ideology (Warnaar, 2013, p.11), whereby ideology is more a compulsion. This setting (though with variations) can be observed for the whole period under the investigation in the present study (from 2001 to 2014).

The economic impetus behind the foreign policy of Iran is not only politically supported but also voiced today by the Iranian intellectuals. A prominent scholar in Iran, a Professor of political science of the Tehran's University draws a clear line between the ideological motives vs. economic considerations, whereby he favors the economic once:

"I do not agree with the ideological approach to the foreign policy, when it is about ideology 'two plus two, not equal four, but five' when it is about ideology 'you die or you kill – in any case, you are the winner'. We need the economic allies and we need to give preference to the religion-based relations in general as opposed to the Mazhab-based affiliations. This has been realized by our policymakers: that in today's world we can't win with an ideological approach only. Iranian policy-makers need to build an economic union from Afghanistan to Iraq, include here also Lebanon, Syria and Mediterranean states. We need to consider Russia as a part of this union, as well. Without Russia, building such economic union is unlikely to easily happen. Russia needs to have access to water due to its geographical location, but it still has more geopolitical goals in the region, comparing to the US, which has more geo-economical goals. The U.S. is primarily after the resources." (H. P., personal interview, 09 April 2017)

This invalidates the argument that the Iranian regime is primarily guided by ideological considerations, particularly by the political interpretation of *Shia* Islam (Amuzegar, 2012). It includes many other aspects, that allow one to justify the approach to Iran foreign policy from a realist perspective.

Once again, it is true that the 1979 Constitution of Iran emphasized the ideological factor of its foreign policy. Accordingly,

"The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on the rejection of any kind of domination, both its exercise and submission to it; the preservation of the all-inclusive independence of the country and its territorial integrity; the defense of the rights of all Muslims; non-alignment in relation to the domineering powers; mutual peaceful relations with nonaggressive states." (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979, Article 152).

Since Iran's Islamic Revolution gave rise to the "first theocratic regime" in the modern world, the spirit of ideological thoughts then dominated decision-making concerning foreign policy. Rather, revolutionary ideas back then dominated the new

government and its foreign policy (Amiri *et al.*, 2010). Subsequently, however, Islamic ideology took a backseat to pragmatism (Flanagan, 2009).

The discussion on Iranian “realism” versus “idealism” has long characterized the academic debates on Iranian foreign policy, both inside and outside the country (Katouzian and Shahidi, 2007). Only recently, a third view of Iranian foreign policy behavior emerged: the one based on a constructivist approach to the study of Iranian foreign policy (Warnaar, 2013, p.11) that tries to balance between realism and liberalism. In this study, however, the Iranian politics in the timeframe from 2001 to 2014 is looked at primarily through the lenses of the realism.

4.4 Important Elements in Iranian Foreign Policy

This part of the chapter focuses on the main features/elements of the Iranian foreign policy: inter alia, on the ideological (including Shia factor, security, geopolitical and economic) ones. They are congruent with the “visions” discussed above in section 4.2 and are meant here to continue the discussion on the sources, factors, and trajectories, analyzed in section 4.3, in greater detail. These main features/ elements form the core of the Iranian foreign policy, after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and Iran’s behavior with the world, outside its own borders.

4.4.1 Islamic Ideology (Revolutionary Islam)

The Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979 is undoubtedly a landmark in the history of modern Iran. It combined theocracy with democracy, possibly a mismatch, and created a cluster of formal and non-formal actors and organs to complement each other for smooth government running, foreign relations managing and reshaping Iran’s internal and external dynamics, as the previous chapter has demonstrated. In consequence, Iran remained neither exclusive with the East nor with the West. Instead, it chose a mid-path for posterity (Saghafi-Ameri, 2009, pp.136-137).

For the first decade after the Islamic Revolution, two ideological stances determined Iranian foreign policy: Khomeini’s general perception course of “Neither East nor West, but the Islamic Republic”, and the idea of the “Export of the Revolution in

order to free Muslim countries and non-Muslim countries from their oppressive and corrupt rulers” (Rakel, 2007a).

The Iranian crucial political position is the one that is based on mutual protection: Islam for the Republic and the Republic for Islam. Simultaneously, the Iranian government takes control of both the country's security and the economy, since the lack of material sources exposes the Islamic system itself to danger (Matar, 2012). Ali Khomeini, the prominent conservative head, is alleged to have scaled down the President's over-arching powers in the foreign policy domain. Thus, he superimposed the Guardian Council; a group of clerics and laymen, on his authority (Abdo, 2013). Similarly, the Expediency Council's foreign policy authority is substantially marginalized purportedly for balancing and building confidence among those constitutional bodies which were feeling threatened due to the extraordinarily growing powers of the Expediency Council.

After the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988 and particularly starting from the presidency of Rafsanjani (1989-1997) Iran's religious agenda and its relations with the outside world were also changing and underwent a transformation. This depended on the national and international situation at this particular time. Though President Rafsanjani in his interview given in 2003 mentioned that the Islamic factor is subject to change depending on the situation (Matar, 2012), he, most importantly, also maintained that: “we [Author's note: Iranians] can solve whatever foreign problem is threatening U.S. from the viewpoint of Islam... Our ideology is flexible. We can choose our expediency on the basis of Islam. Still, to put the country in jeopardy on the grounds that we are acting on an Islamic basis is not at all Islamic” (Savyon, 2003). The two statements exhibit inconsistency in the thinking of Iran's ruling elite about the future of its relations with the outside world. At the same time, these too suggest Iran's preparedness towards change for good, irrespective of religious considerations.

The Iranian leadership prioritizes its interests according to the attainment of stability in its system. The prioritization of these interests is based on religion and depends on the following three formulas: that religion should contribute to and strengthen the national interests of the country; national interests should be holy and symbolic for

Muslims and the ideology in Iran, namely its connection to the notion of "Mahdism"¹⁵ and that the religious interests should be juxtaposed and serve the Islamic cause within and outside Iran. The interrelation between these religious and material aspects are of great importance for Iran's vitality, sustenance, rationality and the interpretation of religious texts, etc. (Matar, 2012).

Iran's foreign policy is guided by the leitmotif of the "revolution" and religion for a variety of reasons. First, the religious issues are related to the Islamic order in Iran and "Mahdism". The government incorporates religious discourse in the country's national framework (Matar, 2012). Second, the Supreme Leader has a particular religious and ideological outlook. His suggested religious acts become law with the consent of the country's President (Matar, 2012). Third, religious discourse accompanies the state-given legitimacy to Islam (Matar, 2012).

4.4.2 Shia Islam in Iranian Foreign Policy

Shiism is one of the two main branches of Islam, and Iran is the only dominant *Shia* regime in the world. The *Velayat-e Faqih* system, which stems from the essence of *Shiism* in Islam, constitutes the foundation of the political structure of Iran. *Shiism* has some sub-branches in itself: *Imaamiyyah*, *Ismalliyyah*, *Zaidiyyah*, and *Naseeriyyah*.

One can perhaps consider the *Shia mazhab* in Islam as the cornerstone of Iran's foreign policy since the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Rakel, 2007b, pp.149-150). Iran positioned itself as a player who could change the setting of Islam in a region where, for decades, Sunnis had been dominant. The Revolution itself was perceived by Iranians as a *Shia* revolution rather than an Islamic revolution generally, since Shia had no share in the country's power politics for a very long period of time (Barzegar, 2008) because of the regime in the Ba'athist Iraq and the oppressive Sunni Arab policy (*muthloomiya*) toward the *Shia* in general. The Islamic Revolution in Iran enabled the Iranian *Shias* to raise up their heads in the world (Rhode, 2013), which, in the process, led to a great deal of clashes between the two *mazhabs* (Sunni and Shia): the *Shias* in Iran and the *Sunnis* in the Persian Gulf, as well as the secular nationalists in Iraq under the regime of Saddam Hussein (Barzegar, 2008).

¹⁵ Shias expect the Twelfth Imam (Imam Mahdi) as the Twelfth Imam until the end of time, to return to save the world when it had descended into chaos.

By supporting the *Shia* minorities in Iraq, Pakistan, the Arab world and Afghanistan, Iran's strategic goal remains to safeguard its security and economic interests in the region. However, Iran's *Shia*-centric policy has caused domestic tensions in Afghanistan. Afghan Sunnis who constitute the majority of the population, often regard Iran's support to *Shias* as a source of conflict between the two *mazhabs*. On the other hand, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have historically supported Sunnis in Afghanistan including the Sunni extremist groups during the post-Soviet Afghan Civil War and various Sunni militant groups today. This fact also contributes to the appearance of a violent face to the religious factor in Afghanistan (which is elaborated in other chapters of the present study in detail).

The current Iranian leadership seeks to secure a leading Iranian role in the Middle East. Towards this end, the recent Arab Spring opened up opportunities for Iran to pragmatically play the ethnoreligious card (the *Shia mazhab* card) to counter the Saudi-led Sunni anti-*Shia* movement in the Middle East (Miller, 2018).

It may be expected that Iran will continue pursuing a more pragmatic approach in its foreign policy for fulfilling the strategic, security, economic and other goals in the current geopolitical setting, the same approach that was expected already 20 years ago (Sadri, 1998). Thus, the present Iranian situation is in many ways different from what it was at the time of the Iranian Revolution (Barzegar, 2009).

4.4.3 Security and Geopolitical Concerns

Iran's geographical setting is such that it has mounting security threats all around it. Iran has northern borders with Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Caspian Sea; to its east lie Pakistan and Afghanistan; Iraq - to its west; Turkey - to the northwest; to the south - the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. In fact, the stability of the entire region is very fragile, which has presented Iran with challenges all around including the Arab Spring in the Middle East, the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq, Syria, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and growing *Shia*-Sunnite divide due to the swelling Iran-Saudi differences. Besides, in the north, Iran's challenges are caused by the instability of the processes in the political, economic and social spheres of the Caucasus and Central Asian States (CAS) that include socio-economic problems, high labor-migration rates and political transformations. To the south, Iran is challenged by the

cross-border infiltration and drug culture emanating from Afghanistan and Pakistan. To reduce this non-traditional security threat, the three countries warrant strict border management. Equally important to Iran's security is the threat posed by the U.S. presence along the Afghan-Iran border and the unending Afghan political instability in Afghanistan (Barzegar, 2010). It has intensified with the changed US-South Asia policy and its intent to stay on in Afghanistan until lasting peace is achieved. A further complication to this entire situation is the involvement of competing foreign powers in Afghanistan.

Iran's security has become critical in the given circumstances, warranting it thereby to take proportionate measures for redress as per the realist thought: "States act in response to their vital needs, not in response to international norms or institutions" (Sadat and Jones, 2009, p.95). Thus, quite a significant portion of Iran's budget goes toward protection of its own security (Barzegar, 2009).

Since 1979, Iran's foreign policy was aimed at addressing various challenges and threats radiating from the west especially the U.S. and Israel, at the same time both feel threatened by Iran, its nuclear programme and the Islamic ideology that they tend to equate with extremism, fundamentalism, and even terrorism. This is in addition to the threats emanating from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/ISIL (hereinafter also referred to as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/ISIS) and the Wahabi-centric, anti-*Shia* movements in the Middle East, the Arab world, and Afghanistan. Iran views ISIL as a Sunni extremist movement backed by Saudi Arabia against the *Shia* Iran. Recent reports suggest the presence of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) fighters near the Iranian border on the Afghan side (Levkowitz, 2017). It is possible that Iran will continue and re-establish its support of the Taliban and other groups that oppose ISIL, as the Taliban movement has declared war against the ISIL in Afghanistan. Interestingly, from the Iranian perspective, such support of the Taliban is "positive" as it helps to fight the "common enemy" of Afghanistan and Iran, as the Professor of Mashhad University explains it:

"Iranian security is under the threat of ISIL and it [Author's note: ISIL] receives the support from Arabs, to be used against Iran. As it is clear that Arabs have had a long history of supporting Mujahideen in Afghanistan and they are very well aware where the weakest points are - where to create a problem for Iran and its security. For example, in Farah province of Afghanistan ISIL is very much active and we [Author's note: Iran] have a long border with Farah, therefore we must help those who will fight with them right there, on spot. It can definitely be also Taliban, but of course also the Afghan government or even our own military

forces. Iranian support and relation (if there is any) with Taliban will not make problems for Afghans. I would call it even positive relations, as in this case Iran manages them [Author's note: Taliban] to fight and stop our [Author's note: Iran's and Afghanistan's] common enemy". (H.A., personal interview, 14 April 2017)

More important, however, has been the fear caused by the presence of U.S. forces in its immediate Afghan neighborhood. In fact, Khamenei, in a meeting with the former Afghan President, Karzai, stated that the withdrawal of the foreign military forces from Afghanistan is the wish of Iran: "The people of Afghanistan are suffering from the presence of American troops in their country, because this presence will bring about suffering for the Afghan people and the entire region" (Office of Iranian Supreme Leader, 2011). The Iranian leader also referred to the U.S. President Barack Obama's promise to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan and cautioned that: "The Americans are after permanent bases in Afghanistan, which are dangerous because, as long as American forces are present in Afghanistan, genuine security will not be established" (Office of Iranian Supreme Leader, 2011). These statements of concern reveal Iranian leadership's efforts to communicate the threat the U.S. poses to Afghanistan. The US-Afghan policy under Trump contributes to the above statements, as it now seems clear that the U.S. will not move its bases from Afghanistan. On August 21, 2017, announcing his new "Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia," U.S. President Donald Trump stated that: "Conditions on the ground – not arbitrary timetables – will guide our strategy from now on. America's enemies must never know our plans or believe they can wait U.S. out" (White House, 2017). Iran must cope with these new realities.

Iran's foreign policy has thus changed from idealism to pragmatism (Barzegar, 2009) due to the changing geopolitics in the region and globe (Farhi and Lotfian, 2012, p.117). This can be observed in the way Iran has behaved in the international arena in recent years. This pragmatic approach is evidenced, *inter alia*, by the fact that Iran realizes the necessity of creating strategic allies and maintaining relations with them, due to the insecurity (as viewed by Iran) in the light of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan (Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, 2002, pp.284-286). It's pragmatism towards Afghanistan, thus, is rooted in the U.S. presence in this country. Every Iranian foreign policy move with regards to Afghanistan revolves around this fact.

4.4.4 The Economic Element of Foreign Policy

Ayatollah Khomeini, the architect of the Iranian 1979 Revolution, carved out an independent Iranian state free from outside influence. He also created its strong economic base with the support of its natural resources. In fact, the economy is considered central to the Iranian foreign policy during the post-Revolution period (Hinnebusch, and Ehteshami, 2002, p.305). Oil and gas exploration and export contributed significantly to the making of modern Iran, modernization of society and industrialization of the country. Over a very short period of time, the economics and politics of oil began to influence the foreign policy and national security strategy of the country (Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, 2002, p.288).

The reinforcement of the status quo has been ensured by the continued domination of religious leaders and the monopoly with regards to the natural resources in the country. After 1990, the change which has happened in the environment of Iran in geopolitical matters, as well as outcomes of the Cold War, it became evident to the leadership that the economic concerns in making foreign policy would shape the main strategy for Iran, although one should, certainly, not understand it as the total replacement of ideology factor with an economic one (Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, 2002, p.305).

Iran is aware that its economic strength is dependent upon the high price of export energy while a low price will weaken its economy. As a result, from 1988 on, Iran pursued policies to increase oil income, by all means, including cooperation with other Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) or oil-producing countries of the region, notwithstanding conflicts with many of them on various issues (Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, 2002, p.289).

Thus, contemporary Iran has largely been built upon oil wealth. The country's modernization has equally become dependent on hydrocarbons. Iran's foreign policy, national security, and political structure are equally dependent upon its potential to produce and market its energy wealth (Wheeler and Desai, 2016). At the moment, Iran's economic strength has weakened due to financial pressures in the form of economic sanctions from the outside (Laub, 2015). Of course, economic sanctions and the low energy prices in the global market that followed them might be seen as an impediment to the modernization process pursued by Iran. It adopts various alternatives to counter the financial pressures, among them is an attempt to develop and enhance relations with

Russia, China, India, and Central Asia and using Afghanistan as a transit corridor for marketing Iranian goods in Central Asia (despite political fragility in Afghanistan), South Asian countries, Russia and China, whereby transporting them via the Wakhan Corridor of Badakhshan.

Iran-Afghanistan relations also have energy and trade-allied contours since Afghanistan offers a transit corridor to Iran and it is one of the biggest importers of Iranian goods. The trade volume between Afghanistan and Iran has been only increasing from 2013 onwards. The economic element of the foreign policy is crucial for the survival of Iran as a country, as a regime as a key economic actor of the region, and inevitably as a country that can remain to be the biggest Shia-dominated country of the world, which will be elaborated in further details in chapters 6 and 7.

4.5 Iran's Foreign Policy Objectives

The previous sections above were mostly related to the goals/aims Iran has. This section is focused on the objectives/tasks Iran is trying to realize for advancing its foreign policy goals. With a reference to the above sections, one has to repeat that Iranian foreign policy was rooted in the Islamic ideology, framed by the great revolutionary Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini and followed by his Prime Minister Bazargan (during the time period 1979-1980). Iranian foreign policy allows registering a change after the death of Khomeini: from utopianism to pragmatism and from isolation to integration into the world community. President Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997) played a key role in this regard. President Khatami has followed his course during his presidency, by appealing, *inter alia*, to the notion of Islam in connection to “liberty and development” (Khatami, 1998). Khatami, in particular, resumed dialogue with the countries of different civilizations of the West (see Khatami, 2001). Ahmadinejad, however, reversed Khatami's process by reverting back to the Revolutionary-centric Islamic ideology of the Khomeini times (Soltani and Amiri, 2010). Yet, the present President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, again made some important changes in country's foreign policy to improve its socio-economic conditions for the accomplishment of its nuclear vision. Thus, as is already stated about, based on the individual/personal characteristics of the Iranian presidents the pendulum of the foreign policy was swinging between ideological and pragmatic concerns.

Since half of the period of present study (2001-2014) is covered by the Khatami's tenure as the President (1997-2005) and the rest by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) and Hassan Rouhani since 2013, a review of Iranian foreign policy objectives has to be done in consideration of these different regimes, each with its own peculiarity.

Seyyed Mohammad Khatami's election as the Iranian President in 1997 was a "turning point" in Iran's history. He established relations with the European Union (EU), and thus spearheaded the movement to take Iran to new heights through cooperation with the non-Islamic world. He chose a reformist approach by:

- Pursuing detente in foreign policy to solve domestic problems with outside support; and
- Introducing reforms in domestic politics to integrate with the global institutions of democracy etc. (Amiri, 2006).

With the help of these broad measures, Khatami sought to upgrade Iran's relations with the European states; present Iran as an active member of the international community; safeguard Iran's national identity; promote the Islamic ideology; and strengthen Iran's dialogue with other civilizations (Tajik, 2003).

On assuming the office of the President in 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad promoted political conservatism among the elite and widespread disillusionment against the reformist measures of President Mohammad Khatami. During his Presidency, Iran's foreign policy relapsed to the Islamic Revolution times. Ahmadinejad's tenure was a dramatic change from Khatami's foreign policy, since he pursued a non-cooperative policy with international organizations; took an antagonistic stance against Israel; despised big powers for their intervention in the internal affairs of other countries (Mowlana and Mohammadi, 2008); condemned the U.S. presence in Afghanistan and demonstrated "duplicity" towards Afghan imbroglio, keeping ties with Afghan government while, at the same time, supporting its rival Taliban group (Nader *et al.*, 2014).

Unlike Mohammad Khatami's liberal-pragmatic vision or Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's ideological-populist stance, newly elected Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, pursues a centrist pragmatic agenda, which emphasized that Iran should engage in serious negotiations with the Western world; reduce regional conflict, and prioritize its economic recovery and the general well-being of its people above its nuclear program (Monshipouri and Dorraj, 2013). Hassan Rouhani's period is strikingly different in that he

established diplomatic connections with the U.S. in September 2013 under Barack Obama. He led a robust diplomacy to settle Tehran's longstanding nuclear dispute with the West while keeping following objectives in mind:

- To eliminate anti-Shia Islamic State (ISIS) militants from Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. He brazenly declared that “the Islamic Republic will not tolerate violence and terror as foreign-backed Takfiri militants wreak havoc in northern Iraq” (Rouhani, June 14, 2014, during a press conference);
- Rebuild relations with Turkey, which were strained since 2009;
- Manage the critical situation with the Arab world especially with Saudi Arabia (although there remains to be more troubleshooting in Iran-Saudi bilateral relations over the Yemen issue);
- Restructure Iran's relations with the EU and its major partner the UK (Ehteshami, 2014);
- Facilitate total U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan (Harrison, 2014); and
- Discreetly support the Taliban in its anti-US drive in Afghanistan (Nader *et al.*, 2014).

In other words, Khatami and Rouhani's foreign policy have been distinguishable from their Iranian counterparts in that they established and sustained relations with the West in general and the U.S. in particular, although it has not been that easy, after all, as can be thought of in practical terms. Their foreign policy attitude has been largely liberal and cooperative as compared to the conservative, parochial and confrontational policy of the last three Iranian Presidents. For example, during Ahmadinejad's tenure, Iran adopted more of an isolationist economic policy, which, in return, led to the imposition of further UN and U.S. economic sanctions on Iran. Contrarily, Khatami and Rouhani pursued a liberal economic policy vis-à-vis other countries of the West and East. This is why Ahmadinejad was highly criticized within and outside the country. Rouhani even went a few steps ahead of Khatami. He established friendly relations with Saudi Arabia, despite alleging, at times, that ISIS (ISIL) is backed up by Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the US.

4.6 Summary

The foreign policy review conducted in the present chapter had an aim to thoroughly analyze the pragmatic aspects of Iran's foreign policy objectives while paying

attention to the ideological moves it often contains. The analysis of the present chapter contributes to the overall argument of the study on the contradictory character of Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014 by providing clues to what may have been contributing to the implementation of often contradictory policies of the three Iranian presidents.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution led to the setting up of an Islamic state in Iran. Soon thereafter, global geopolitics had a change from bipolarity to the unipolar setting in the world order following the collapse of erstwhile the Soviet Union and the emergence of the USA as the global leader. This development was followed by the 9/11 terror attack on the US, the retreat of the Taliban from power in Afghanistan in 2001 and the launching of an anti-terrorist campaign by the U.S. at the global level. Iran was impacted by it since the US, in the course of its Afghan invasion, began to knock at its borders, which Iran perceived as a dire threat to its national security. This threat compounded that of the Saudi-led nexus of the Arab world against Iran on the sectarian grounds and the grounds of regional domination.

Iran's foreign policy is a subject to great criticism on the grounds of its innate contradictions between its adherence to ideology on the one hand and the need to be more pragmatic and realistic on the other. This leads Iran to take actions that may not appear to be in line with its stated ideological objectives, that this chapter was able to demonstrate.

The reason behind this, that was revealed in the course the analysis is because of Iran's irresistible urge to behave in a certain way in light of a number of factors, such as the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, Saudi and ISIS-triggered anti-*Shia* drive in Iran's Middle East and South Asian neighborhood, as well as authoritarian regimes in Central Asian and Caucasian states. This is beside the non-traditional security threats of Afghan refugees into Iran and thriving narcotic culture in Afghanistan with cascading effects on Iran. This chapter was able to demonstrate how Iran adopted a pragmatic approach to reckon with these threats and shaped its foreign policy accordingly. However, such an approach was not coherent. It changed under different Presidents of Iran due to the internal and external settings. While some based it exclusively on Islamic ideology and *Shia* security issue, others based it on cooperation with the Western and the Arab world. In the end, however, Iran perceives itself to be caught up in a web woven by the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia against it. Iran tries to neutralize it by cultivating and strengthening its relations with Russia, China, Turkey, EU as well as with India.

It may be concluded, that Iranian foreign policy goals and objectives with regards to Afghanistan have remained on the forefront irrespective of the changing leadership in the country. The chapter elaborates on these goals and objectives of Iran from 2001 to 2014 by juxtaposing them with the internal political processes in this country and the external factors, all in correspondence to the singled out four main visions of the Iranian government with regards to Afghanistan.

Chapter 5. Iranian Foreign Policy Interests in Afghanistan

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the interests of Iranian foreign policy in relation to Afghanistan. The main issues explored are; what goals does the Iranian government pursue, and what are the reasons for its actions. Taking a realist approach, this chapter aims to conduct a theory-based, empirical policy analysis of Iranian foreign policy regarding Afghanistan. This chapter is based on the qualitative analysis of both primary and secondary sources.

The present chapter provides the overall analysis of Tehran's security, political and economic interests in Afghanistan, which will be elaborated on in the next chapters of the study in greater detail (chapter 6: security and political aspects and chapter 7: economic aspects).

Section 5.1 provides an overview of the Iranian foreign policy interests in Afghanistan; section 5.2 focuses on the security issues; section 5.3 describes the patterns of the politics; section 5.4 analyzes economic interests; section 5.5 investigates empirically Iran's ties with Afghan individuals and political parties. It explores, in particular, the aims of Tehran to gain support from political figures and the public for the implementation of its policies in Afghanistan; Section 5.6 highlights the importance of the Shia factor; section 5.7 provides an introduction (picked up in the subsequent chapters) on the link between Iran and the Taliban; section 5.8 draws a summary.

Chapter four of this study already addressed the pragmatic change of the Iranian foreign policy in relation to Taliban after 2001, this chapter investigates and analyzes the line followed by Tehran in its relations with Taliban to a greater extent. The chapter further explains how Iran utilizes the Shia factor in order to achieve its goals in Afghanistan by introducing the Shia-based approach to its security demands and political course. Historically, Iran has considered Afghanistan a source of instability as well as an obstacle to its strategic aims. Therefore, Iran has long demonstrated its power and influence in making sure that western Afghanistan is secure from Iran's enemies.

Iran's policies vis-a-vis Afghanistan appear diametrically opposed. Iran applies both defensive and offensive policy towards Afghanistan. On the one hand, Iran is

destabilizing the country with its support of the anti-government and anti-US elements. On the other hand, since 2001, Iran has maintained strong political and economic ties with the Afghan government. Such policies may protect Iran's interests but they have both positive and negative impacts on the internal situation in Afghanistan.

The outcome of Iran adopting such policies towards Afghanistan can be observed from the varying positions of top Afghan officials in Kabul, who often disagree with the official policy towards Iran. For example, during his recent trip to Tehran, Afghan President Ghani signed the "strategic partnership agreement" and called Iran a strategic partner. However, at the same time, Afghanistan's chief intelligence official accused Iran of destabilizing the security situation in Afghanistan.

The post-revolutionary enthusiasm of Iran could be clearly traced by observing its role during the U.S. intervention in 2001 against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Iran aided the Northern Alliance, one of the prominent opposition factions, during the transition period 2001-2004. Also during this period, Iran played an active part in shaping the interim government. At the Bonn Conference in December 2001, Iran put pressure on Burhanuddin Rabbani, one of the leaders of the Northern Alliance, to concede his potential nomination in favor of Karzai, who has been supported by the U.S. (Takeyh, 2006, p.123).

Iran's efforts to participate in shaping the new government extended beyond talks when in January 2002, at the Tokyo Conference, it offered 530 Million U.S. Dollars for the reconstruction of Afghanistan (Takeyh, 2006, p.123). Therefore, it may be assumed that at this particular stage the idea of exporting the Islamic Revolution (Iran's logical intention as one of the world's major Islamic actors) has been put aside in the face of the more important national security interests at the time. Moreover, Tehran's objectives transcended the immediate issues of removing the Taliban from power in Afghanistan. As Khatami noted, "Afghanistan provides the two regimes (Iran and the US) with a perfect opportunity to improve relations" (Sadat and Hughes, 2010, p.31).

Since the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001, a new path has been established for Iran's strategies and their implementation. Iran, alongside other allies, has become an important part of this path with the expectation of economic advantages through improved business and reconstruction efforts (Tarfeh, 2013, p.111).

Iran's overall policy interests with regard to Afghanistan include the following five main objectives:

1. To uphold effective political and economic relations with Kabul;
2. To create a "sphere of influence" and a security zone in the western region of Afghanistan;
3. To ensure that the U.S. presence in Afghanistan does not create any threats against the Iranian regime and Iranian interests in Afghanistan and the region;
4. That the economic policy of Iran toward Afghanistan is not only narrowed down to supplying the internal market of the latter with Iranian goods; its essence is in Tehran's strategic goal to be the essential partner in regional integration, particularly economic integration - Iran's economic policy is to have access to the gas market in South Asia, China and Central Asia; and
5. To secure its borders from drug trafficking.

These strategic objectives are the result of the real circumstances due to Iran's immediate border with Afghanistan, which means that even if Iran wanted to untie its relations with Afghanistan, it could not do so. Foreign policy reviewers in Iran conventionally understand the significance of Afghanistan for their country's security, and this is reflected in their apparent need to demonstrate their presence in Afghanistan and uphold communication through diplomatic and intelligence data collection in economic, political and cultural areas (Posch, 2014, p.1).

Since the international intervention to remove the Taliban from power in 2001, Iran's influence in Afghanistan has gone through diverse stages. Primarily, Iranian relations and influence have been exerted through the projection of soft power, via economic and cultural affairs (Majidiyar, 2012), which this chapter reveals. Iran's security and intelligence agencies have become more active since 2001 following the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan in order to support the withdrawal mechanisms of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States and go assist Afghanistan's political stabilization (Samad, 2013).

Iran's policies toward Afghanistan have several dimensions. On the one hand, Iran has been an important facet of the stabilization process in Afghanistan, since the Bonn Conference and beyond, notably through spending millions of dollars on reconstruction and construction projects as well as supporting anti-drug trafficking efforts. On the other

hand, Tehran has been accused of supporting the Afghan Taliban in order to counter U.S. interests and presence in Afghanistan (Torjesen and Stankovic, 2010, p.31-32).

Iran's support of the Taliban after 2001 is a complex issue particularly since it is very complicated to provide a clear understanding of the Taliban itself. A significant number of Taliban local groups have and continue to fight with the Afghan government and international troops and each group has different interests. While Iran's relation with the Taliban indeed exists, its strongest ties are with some local insurgents (that call themselves Taliban) mostly in western Afghanistan and not necessarily the Taliban as an aggregate of all these factions. While these local insurgents appear under the name of the Taliban, the real nature of their affiliation is difficult to determine. This study is not aimed to explain the Taliban insurgency, although, throughout the research and study of the primary sources and interviews, the term "Taliban" has been used for all local groups who appear under this name.

While Iran's strategy in Afghanistan includes the security of Iran in terms of having a stable Afghanistan as its neighbor, its strategy is also greatly affected by its unfriendly relations with the United States. This unfriendliness is due to the United States' close relationship with Saudi Arabia, Iran's support of Hezbollah and Iran's nuclear production (Sharma, 2012). In view of the cold relationship between Iran and Afghanistan during the Taliban regime, Iran's policies in fact strongly supported assisting allies opposed to the Taliban that could lead to 'a genuine strategic opening' for Iran and U.S. (Cohen, 2011, p.38). However, the failed strategies to pursue peace in Afghanistan under the George W. Bush administration, and Iran's concerns that its relations with the United States upon its nuclear production might worsen have led to changes in the Iranian policymakers' estimations. These facts also impact the U.S. "strategy of managed chaos" in Afghanistan (Torjesen and Stankovic, 2010, p.32-33). This approach results in the destabilization of Afghanistan through the support of anti-government elements (Taliban and other insurgent groups), (Jones, 2008, p.61; Milani, 2011; Boon *et al.*, 2011, p.478). For this reason, the U.S. points to Tehran's important position in Afghanistan's stabilization process, a result of which is an improvement of its role with respect to the U.S. (Torjesen and Stankovic, 2010, p.32-33).

Over the last decades, Iran's policies toward Afghanistan have been substantial and frequently productive. In 2002, President Bush linked Iran to the so-called "axis of evil". This resulted in progress in the policy of Iran with regards to Afghanistan. For

instance, the Iranian government under President Khatami made pledges and assisted the reconstruction process in Afghanistan, and Iran's policy toward stabilization in Afghanistan continued to be supportive. However, the signs of another, simultaneous strategy slowly became apparent beginning in 2005 when the new president of Iran, Mahmud Ahmadinejad, came to power (Akbarzadeh, 2014). Among the new moves in the Iranian strategy, one can name the focus on disruption of military activities of the foreign countries, specifically Britain and the United States, due to security concerns. Iran's pragmatic policy involves maintaining Islamic unity and solidarity and to support the ethnic groups of Dari speakers and Shia Muslims in western and northern Afghanistan. Beyond this, Iran has economic interests and wants to keep its position as a regional power (Koepke, 2013, p.12).

However, Iran's policy in Afghanistan has not been considered favorably by everyone, and it is viewed with a degree of anxiety and caution in Afghan society and Afghan political circles. In particular, Iran's pragmatic and sporadic support for some group of Taliban and Iran's struggles to advertise its cause through academic means, religious and press organizations have brought up concerns and doubts about Iran's objectives in Afghanistan (Bhatnagar, 2013, p.2). Amongst Afghanistan's neighbors, Iran is the only one to exert a degree of influence to balance out the influence exerted by Pakistan (American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, 2009).

Being viewed as an important regional power, Iran could see that consideration of its interests could play a vital role. Iran has spent millions of dollars on Afghanistan's rehabilitation and reconstruction process, through which Iran played its part in creating regional business networks and linking Central Asia with the eastern Afghanistan, which has effectively contributed to Iranian governed trade affairs (Riecke, 2013, p.11). Below, is a concrete analysis of Iran's course in security, economy and in political aspects of the Iranian-Afghan relationship, which reveals and explains the essence of the foreign policy interests of Iran in its neighboring country.

5.2 Security Interests

This section explains Iran's security policy towards Afghanistan through the lenses of the realism approach. To do this, the independent variables, common for

realism, such as power, economic resources, and the international system's polarity are operationalized.

The chapter is structured in order to show how the economic, cultural and political dimensions shape Iran's security policy towards Afghanistan. In the course of the chapter I try to establish whether they contribute to Realpolitik, therefore these aspects although discussed in other sections, are also analyzed in this section. Through this analysis, I aim to determine whether Iran is a so-called realist "utility maximizer" whose actions are rooted in the logic of consequence.

Following the realist tradition, this section operationalizes systemic factors: polarity of the international system and the role and power capabilities of a particular country in such system. Thus, it highlights the international system settings in which Iran and Afghanistan are placed and further analyzes the position of Afghanistan in this polarized system in which Iran interests contrast with the west, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia.

Iran's security policy toward Afghanistan can be seen from three different angles

Firstly, from the view of the other regional (Pakistan) and international players (the USA and the Saudi Arabia), secondly, in light of the interests of the Afghan internal groups (Taliban and pro-Iranian groups in Afghanistan), and thirdly, considering the existence of the anti-regime groups within Iran itself (Sunni Baluchis). In brief, these three existing angles manifest in the following ways:

1. Iran is shifting its security policy based on the ideological and physical presence of regional and global powers in Afghanistan. In ideological terms, Iran's primary concern is the support of Sunni extremist groups within Afghanistan by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The second concern is the presence of the USA military in Afghanistan which Iran sees as a direct threat to its own security. Of fundamental interest to Iran is the withdrawal of U.S. forces, which is viewed as more important than the internal situation in Afghanistan. (Stepanova, 2009, p.7) Pakistan, which shares a border with Iran, is also of significant concern due to its support of the Taliban as a Sunni extremist group.
2. The second element of Iran's security policy is support for Afghan internal interest groups, which can be divided into pro- and anti-Iranian, due to their religious, ethnic and financial interests. This includes some of the Taliban

groups, Shia minorities, and individuals within the Afghan government and political parties.

3. The third element is internal potential security problems. Iran is concerned that the Sunni extremist groups supported by the Arabs and Pakistan could build ties and provide support to the Sunni Baluchis and other anti-regime movements within Iran. The affiliation of the Wahhabists with the above-mentioned groups on both sides of the border is a direct threat to Iran's internal security, national unity and its territorial integrity (Abbasi, 2011, pp.173-196).

According to the realist view, states share the same common knowledge about the international system. Iran sees the west, and especially the presence of the U.S. in Afghanistan, as the main threats to the existence of the regime itself. Given this, security is considered as the main goal of Iran's realist foreign policy. Everything else it strives to do can be seen as supplementary to the means of achieving strength in the political arena (Omidi, 2013, p.3).

On his meeting with President Karzai, the Supreme Leader of Iran said, "the Americans are after permanent bases in Afghanistan which are dangerous because as long as American forces are present in Afghanistan, genuine security will not be established" (Omidi, 2013, p.4).

Iranian interest is to exert influence on Afghanistan and understanding the strategic position of the U.S. and the West in Afghanistan which is influencing the region. Iran is aiming at influencing the region through its security and economic policies and at ensuring its dominant position. In fact, Iran is trying to shift the balance of power in the region.

According to Sariolghalam, the head of the Center for Strategic Studies in Tehran, "In the reality Iran is against the presence of U.S. in the region, dominance of the U.S. and Institutionalization of its politics in the region which includes Afghanistan and central Asia is the important part of it" (Sariolghalam, 2003, p.78).

Hence, Tehran sees that the increasing influence of the U.S. in Afghanistan and in the region is leading to the reduction of Iran's influence and power capabilities there. That is why Iran aims to exert its influence in Afghanistan. Iran's self-help approach is to realize its interests, both economic and political, by making the country's policymakers focus on influencing Afghanistan, especially in the bordering region, to secure their

interest. A large number of Iranian agencies are working in the western region of Afghanistan. Media (TV, radio channels, newspapers), charity organizations and a number of other institutions are working there. Chapter seven of this study analyzes the mechanisms of Iran's policy implementation and the institutions involved in Afghanistan.

As a strategy to ensure its internal security and to prevent possible security challenges within the border zone with Afghanistan, Iran sees its political and security involvement on the Afghan side of the border region as an important and strategic factor. Thus, apart from its economic involvement, Iran is playing an effective role in the security and political situation in Herat, Farah, and Badghiz provinces. It is interesting to note that despite the differences in the foreign policy of the U.S. and Iran in general, they actually have much in common when it comes to Afghanistan. Thus, both countries are highly interested that the extremist Sunnis, represented by the Taliban, do not come back to dominate ideologically in the country.

Iran-Afghanistan relations are the reality reflected in the constitution, which serves as a foundation for Iran's security interests in Afghanistan. Thus, under the categorization of the countries mentioned in the Iranian constitution (e.g. neighbouring countries, Muslim countries etc.), Afghanistan occupies the following significant position due to its relevance to the objectives of the Iranian foreign policy: 1) Afghanistan as a neighbor; 2) as a Muslim country; 3) as a third world country and 4) as one of the countries having a significant position in terms of economy and security (Omid, 2013). Since 2001, Afghanistan's security-related issues have presented one of the greatest challenges not only for the Afghan government but also for its citizens all over the country due to the insurgency of Taliban and other anti-governmental groups. Kabul's government can hardly manage its security and establish a secure environment, even within Kabul itself (Fitzgerald, 2005).

At the same time when it is about the security of Iran, Tehran never can fully trust that the Afghan government will have the control of any action of the U.S. on its soil, which can be aimed against Iran. Therefore, Iran's policymakers and its different institutions active in Afghanistan aim to control the situation and take steps to ensure the limitation of the threat to their internal security from the territory of Afghanistan.

"Iran sees the U.S. as a direct threat to its security. Iranian officials believe that U.S. presence in the region can only strengthen the extremism and prevent Iran to have more close political and economic relations with Afghanistan. Tehran must

safeguard its economic and security interests in Afghanistan and Iran will challenge the presence of U.S. in Afghanistan in any possible way. Iran needs to continue its relations with government and other internal players, even with the Taliban and other military and political parties.” (M. W. T., personal interview, 23 August 2017)

Iran’s security concerns explain its deep involvement in western Afghanistan, which territorially is connected to Iran. By supporting a number of projects and charity activities in a formal (governmental level) realm and informally (among the people), Iranian officials possess significant influence in the western region of Afghanistan.

“Iran has strong ties with governmental officials and with locals in Herat and provinces around. The western part of Afghanistan, especially Herat, is the battlefield of Iran and the US. Iran has ties with local Taliban and at the same time with local government. Each month Taliban and some local government officials are receiving money from the Iranians...” (K. K., personal interview, 24 October 2016)

Cooperation and competition from the realism stance are two alternatives which states may choose with regards to each other based on the existence or absence of the common interests in a particular context and the period of time (Adams, 2006). Both phenomena constitute the two faces of Iranian foreign policy, and it will most likely remain the same in post-US Afghanistan as well (Barzegar, 2014, p.120). Relations based in a cooperative manner with the Afghan government will also remain unchanged, not to mention competition with other regional and trans-regional actors which are involved in the ongoing political changes in the country (Barzegar, 2014, p.120). Although short-term cooperation was achieved between Iranian intelligence sources and the CIA in the post 9/11 war on terrorism, this cooperation was to supply the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance forces and to exchange related data and information. However, such cooperation did not last for an extended period (Mishra, 2012, p.82). The cooperation between Iran and the U.S. started due to their similar interests, but for Iran, it was also important to have a pro-Iranian government in Kabul. Additionally, a stable Afghanistan creates the opportunity for Iran to build its regional cooperation network. Last, but not least, Iran wanted to ensure that there was no security threat on its eastern border (Mishra, 2012, p.83).

The shared interest of Iran and the U.S. created an optimistic view for reformists within the Iranian government. The reformists hoped for a long-term cooperation between both sides. Indeed, the cooperation in the “war on terror” after 2001 can be seen as a turning point in the creation of such a promising prospect. However, after the fall of the Taliban and the establishment of a new government in Afghanistan, Iran found itself in a

critical situation; especially after the U.S. President George W. Bush named Iran as a member of the “axis of evil,” alongside two other direct critics of the U.S. (Whitlock, 2003, p.30). Following the involvement of international forces in Afghanistan, Washington leveled several accusations against Iran, some of which are listed below:

- Iran financially supported a local warlord Ismail Khan in Herat and encouraged him to act independently from the central government in order to maintain Iran’s influence in the region. Ismail Khan had a remarkable influence in the western provinces of Afghanistan (Johnson, 2004).
- Iran backed anti-US movements, specifically by supporting anti-US groups in Afghanistan and Iraq (Weitz, 2014).
- Iran gave shelter to the leader of Hizb-e Islami-ye Afghanistan, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, whose fighters were involved in the insurgency in Afghanistan and is targeting local and international forces. In fact, Hikmatyar is a Sunni Mujahideen leader who was backed by Arabs during the war against the communist regime in Afghanistan (Howard, 2004).

Among other issues of concern for Iran are the U.S - Afghan relations. This is not surprising since the “Memorandum of Understanding” was created between Afghanistan and the U.S. in 2005 and, later in the same year, a “strategic partnership” between the named parties, which allowed the U.S. military presence in the country, especially in the region bordering Iran (western Afghanistan). Such steps made Iran more concerned with its security and possible outreach of U.S. forces (Weinbaum, 2006, p.13). In his meeting with President Karzai in June 2011 in Tehran, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei declared that for Tehran, the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan is a wish and is an important goal. Khamenei has stated that Iran is willing to find a regional solution to the Afghan crisis, where Afghans and regional players can handle the situation themselves (Office of the Leader, 2011).

The view of the Iranian Supreme Leader should be taken as an important factor in Iran’s politics and foreign policy. In this context, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sought to conduct the necessary steps for the incorporation of the Leader’s view within the conception of foreign politics in Iran. It is not only the Supreme Leader who seeks regional mechanisms for a solution to the Afghan puzzle; his view is shared by other top-ranking officials in Tehran (Omid, 2013, p.4).

Drug trafficking, refugees, and border security are the main challenges, which Iran faces as a result of the Afghan crisis now and in the past. Iran's concerns mostly arise from the cross-border security where Al-Qaeda and Jundullah terrorists are directly threatening the national security of Iran from its borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Apart from the issues mentioned above, water is another issue of security concern for Iran. This is due to the fact that the Iranian border province Khozistani Rizavi is dependent on Afghan water, namely that flowing from the Helmand River. The Afghan government claims that Iran sabotaged the Salma hydroelectric dam project in Herat. Other disagreements between Tehran and Kabul exist on the water management issues (Peyrouse, 2014). Thus, when the Taliban government blocked the flow of water to Iran it had a significant impact on the economy of the region (Zentner, 2011, p.152). Moreover, the water crisis resulted in the migration of a large number of people from Iran's Sistan-Balochistan province (Aman, 2013).

Issues related to security and the Iranian approaches within its foreign policy towards Afghanistan are also discussed within the following chapters of the study.

5.3 Economic Interests

Iran's economic interest in Afghanistan is manifold. Afghanistan is a link to Central Asia and is situated on the crossroads between South Asia, the Persian Gulf, and Central Asia, and, therefore, provides easier trade between them (Kutty, 2014). Iran's economic interests are not only in the internal market of Afghanistan. It is also related to the transit routes, which Afghanistan can provide for the transit of Iranian gas, oil, and goods to Central Asia and China and from there back to Iran. The Silk Road, Iranian gas pipeline, the railway to Central Asia and China, accessing the gas market in South Asia are the primary goals of Iranian economic policy in Afghanistan. Iranian economic projects in Afghanistan will be discussed in the next chapter (Iran's economic policy towards Afghanistan).

There are certain constraints to research on Iran's economic policy with respect to Afghanistan. Only general information on economic ties between the two countries is accessible. Such information comes from sources in the government; however, information on trade and transit exchanged is often contracting, cannot be verified and is thus often questionable.

The widespread corruption is an additional factor to the existing insurgency in Afghanistan. Thus, its already slow economic development is suppressed even more by the ongoing practices of corruption, which overall make Afghanistan politically unstable and insecure and even more vulnerable to the mistrust of the people in their government.

Afghanistan is highly dependent on imports as it has had low internal economic growth, of just 1.5% in 2015, for example. At the same time, Afghanistan always has an important role in regional economic integration. Thus, the Silk Road, which crosses its territory, linking the Middle East to Central Asia, and Central Asia to South Asia are important regional routes.

In light of this, one should view Iran's attempts to build relations with neighboring countries as part of an overarching aim to build regional cooperation between all of them, as will be examined below. Within this process of cooperation, Iran sees itself as the most important player. If this is going to be ensured, Iran must have its say on all issues of trade as well as other issues of regional concern. It is Tehran's intention that this will re-establish the order which existed historically within the region (Parsi, 2013).

The statistics about the trade between the two countries is difficult to assess. This is because the governments of the respective countries cannot come to an agreement with regards to the statistics of their trade relations, the accounts they have in the various public documents and reports are quite different.

According to the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA): "Iran's export to Afghanistan stands at 3 billion USD which accounts for 40 percent of Afghanistan's total import. The goods exported include consumer goods such as detergents, foodstuff, construction material, fuel, drugs, wood and plastic" (Islamic Republic News Agency, 2016).

Iran rates itself as one of the largest trading partners of Afghanistan (Jahanmal, 2017). As a potential market for Iranian goods, Afghanistan is one of the biggest trade partners of Iran (Tasnim News, 2014). Nevertheless, trade between these two countries is not mutually beneficial, as Iran exports to Afghanistan more goods than it imports from this country. Iran enjoys a large trade surplus with Afghanistan, as imports from Iran cover half of the fuel requirements of Afghanistan. In 2011, this trade amounted to two billion U.S. Dollars while in 2013 the figure increased to five billion (Nader *et al.*, 2014,

p.11). The dependence of Afghanistan on oil and fuel from Iran strengthens the relationship between the two countries (Kagan, Pletka and Kagan, 2008).

As a result of the long-term international economic sanctions imposed on Iran, the attention of the country's policymakers is focused on the possibilities of improvement of its economic situation. Therefore, Tehran's foreign policy with regards to international economic relations is aimed at promoting the national economic development. In addition to this, a stronger economy is considered as a means to realize national interests.

The case of Iran's economic policy towards in Afghanistan is an example of the realism approach, of how the increase of the economic potential can influence the policies by making them more confident and forceful. Thus, the economic policy of Iran demonstrates that the latter is a realist actor, with clear goals justified by the proper assessment of the balance of potential benefits and expenses, which may be necessary. The separate chapter of the present study (Chapter 7) will provide a thorough analysis of the economic relations, including the proper study of the data, objective factors (inter alia trade between the two countries, investment policy, and economic integration) and last but not least regional economic projects in which both countries are involved.

Iran's intentions and willingness to be actively present in Afghanistan stretch far beyond its borders into the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. As Iran tries to increase its nuclear potential, the bridging of its interests in the Persian Gulf and Central Asia and South Asia has become one of the cornerstones of its foreign policy. Therefore, another angle from which one must look at Iran's involvement in Afghanistan is the long-term goal of Iran with respect to the countries of the region that are linked to Afghanistan, which can be of interest to Iran in terms of the supply of energy (Mishra, 2012, pp.94-95).

Finally, Afghanistan is also of great geostrategic importance to Iran. Therefore, as long as Iran is economically present in Afghanistan, it is certain that its economic interests in the region are duly observed (Haji-Yousefi, 2012, p.65).

5.4 Iran's Political Interests

For Iran to reach its economic goals in Central and East Asia it needs political support in the Afghan government. Implementation of Iran's big economic projects with regards to China and Central Asia depends on its influence on the Afghan government and policymakers. Tehran is aiming at least to balance the influence, which the U.S. has

on the Afghan government. For Iranian officials, U.S. influence on Afghan government can challenge the Iranian interests in Afghanistan.

The political dimension of Tehran has its influence on the Afghan government's decisions and on Afghan society. Thus, the Iranian ambassador to Afghanistan, in a meeting with the Head of Afghan upper house, asked him to reject the strategic agreement with the US, stating that otherwise, the Iranian government will send back all of the Afghan refugees currently living in Iran (Farzad, 2012).

Iranian diplomacy tries to make sure that Afghan government gives the first hand to Iran rather than Turkmenistan for its natural gas transport to South Asia. The Afghan government has recently explored the possibility of the Lajward (Lapis lazuli) Route, which will link Afghanistan to the Black Sea (through Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Georgia), which ultimately means entrance to the markets in the eastern and western European states.

During the Taliban's regime, Iran viewed the Taliban as a strategic adversary to its domestic security and interests in Afghanistan, and later on in the wider region. For Tehran, it is important not to have any radical Sunni government in Kabul, which is more likely going to be backed by Saudi Arabia with their radical Wahhabism ideology (International Crisis Group, 2005). In addition to maintaining a multi-ethnic government, Iran wants Afghanistan to be independent of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in terms of its foreign policy. Iran advocates for the rights of Shias. Iran remains consistent in its support to the multi-ethnicity of Kabul's government (Dodge and Redman, 2011, pp.196-197).

Iranian financial support to the Hazaras in the 2010 parliamentary elections added to the levels of distrust among the U.S. and some Afghans when 50 of 249 seats in the lower house went to Hazaras, which over-represents their population within the country. Even within a province, dominated by ethnic Pashtuns, 11 Hazara members from Ghazni province have taken seats in parliament (Mishra, 2012, p.88).

The three angles of Iranian support to Afghan ethnic groups are as follows. Firstly, there is a culture-related approach to strengthening its influence, especially in western Afghanistan. This region has historically been considered the focal point for the implementation of such a policy, dating back to the period of the Anglo-Persian war of 1856-1857 (Nader and Laha, 2011, p.3).

Nowadays, Iran supports media outlets to promote its cultural policy. This support goes to media groups, TV channels, and radio networks as well as to the newspapers (Houk, 2010).

The second angle of Iran's interests is to make sure that Afghan Shias are subject to the same rules and access to political life and changes within the country (Matinuddin, 2000, p.151). By its constitution, Iran is committed to supporting and safeguarding the idea of Islamic Revolution worldwide as a principle of the Iranian Islamic Revolution (Article 3 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran). A political and governmental system where all ethnic groups can be represented, with the independent authority to shape its foreign policy and have friendly ties with Iran is Tehran's goal. Its objectives are to support and to establish a multi-ethnic structure government in Kabul including Shia Hazaras (Tadjbakhsh, 2013, p.41).

The third angle of Iran's interests lies in its competition with Saudi Arabia. Iran's goal is to mobilize the Shia Hazara minority and Tajik ethnic group in Afghanistan. The aim is to provide a balance to counter other, anti-Iranian, elements that are backed by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (Milani, 2006). Moreover, Iran's efforts to keep the bordering regions within Afghanistan under its influence is also a priority, as it would act as a contingency against any possibility that the regime in Kabul will take an unfriendly position towards Iran (Toscano, 2012).

Thus, these three angles of Iranian support to Afghan ethnic groups contribute to understanding the specific characteristics of the strategy this country implements in pursuing its political interests in Afghanistan.

5.5 Iranian local non-governmental partners and partner-individuals in Afghanistan

5.5.1 Ideology, Religion, and Education

The Iranian ideological aspiration of Shiism can create tensions between the Sunni majority in Afghanistan and a minority population of Shias there, where both are influenced by Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia in terms of Islamic principles. With Iranian support, the Islamic University of Khatam al-Naybe was built in the west of Kabul. The Madrasa (Islamic School) is a part of the Islamic University. Both the

Madrasa and the University teach the Shia version of Islam with the direct involvement and support of Iran (Behn, 2012). For example, one of the most famous Shia jurists and a former Mujahideen leader, Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Asif Mohseni, leads Khatam-al-Nabye Islamic University. This University is one of the most prominent landmarks in Kabul since it serves as a central locale for pro-Iranian activities and promoting the *Velayat-e Faqih* ideology of the Shia branch of Islam. Moreover, the University disseminates the ideology of the Iranian Revolution to Shia people which creates revolutionary groups such as Hizbullah and other groups and movements loyal to Iran. By providing aid to the University, Tehran aims to introduce new religious leaders into society who will carry on the Iranian version of politics and Islamic ideology (Nazar and Recknagel, 2010).

Pragmatically, Iran funds and supports a number of religious, educational and media institutions. The purpose of this considerable help and support from Iran is to maintain an impressive position of influence in Afghanistan, particularly in the western part of the country. Upon the opening of the Iranian Center (Iranian Corner) in Kabul University, thousands of copies of books and magazines were provided to the center, and it was equipped with computers and access to the internet.

Iran has provided thousands of books to a number of universities and schools in Afghanistan and has provided help for the construction and rebuilding of a notable number of schools as well. Most of these books and educational materials provided advance either a political or ideological agenda (Kagan, Kagan, and Pletka, 2008).

5.5.2 Iranian links with Afghan Media and Civil Society Organizations

To support various religious, media and cultural organizations, Iran spends USD100 million in Afghanistan on an annual basis (D. M., 2014).

Iran also financially supports projects in education, media, and civil society. Media - including newspapers, broadcast media, and magazines - that is backed by Iran make up almost a third of all Afghan media. Among these, the Tamadon and Noor TV channels and Ensaf newspaper have been identified by the Afghan government as being in receipt of financial support from Iran and promoting the Iranian agenda, the latter in particular. Through its influence in the media and the Afghan Parliament, Iran seems to be targeting a specific set of objectives, for example conducting anti-US propaganda. While the provision of grants and the financing of the media and civil society by the UN,

USAID or other western donors looks very natural and positive, when it comes to similar Iranian support for the media and civil society the issue attracts more attention, and more negative connections are made. The Afghan government and U.S. officials are more concerned when Iran steps in and gives financial support to such institutions (Tadjbakhsh, 2013, p.42).

5.5.3 Afghan Individuals and Parties

Iranian policymakers' focus on the non-governmental actors dates back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This will be explained in the next section (5.6) of this study. As soon as Iranian policymakers realized that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were supporting the Sunni Mujahideen groups and parties, in order to ensure its own political influence, Tehran focused on the Shia jihadists and minority in Afghanistan. This was not only due to the security and political interests but due to the ideological similarities of Shias in Afghanistan and the Shia regime of Iran as well.

As explained before in chapter four of the study, the ideological element of Iranian foreign policy towards Afghanistan had shifted to a pragmatic approach in the course of the last three decades from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and then during the civil war in 1992 until the Taliban emergence in 1996.

As was mentioned above, in December 2001, Iran played a supportive role in the Bonn conference on Afghanistan and had a positive attitude towards Afghanistan's new leadership. Despite this, President Karzai was not seen as the first choice for the new leadership post in Afghanistan by Tehran. One can say that Iran's foreign policy has subsequently become mostly "low-key" and friendly towards Karzai's regime (Weinbaum, 2006 p.12). During its process of writing a new constitution and during the first presidential and parliamentary elections in 2004, Iran's position was positive towards the transitional government in Afghanistan. Iran joined Russia and India in attempting to stop a Tajik political leader, Younis Qanuni, from contesting election against the ethnically Pashtun Karzai in October 2004, although these efforts were not successful. However, although these three countries had historically supported the Tajiks and Northern Alliance, in which Mr. Qanuni was an important player, they were hoping to gain more from a deal between him and Karzai if he (Mr. Qanuni) did not run for election. After the election was over, Iran convinced both the Hazara Shia leader and Mr.

Qanuni to accept the outcome of the election in which Karzai won (Weinbaum, 2006 p.12).

During this period and continuing after the elections, Iran made sure that its activities covered western areas of Afghanistan, namely Herat, Nimruz, and Farah. Iran has thus tried to ensure its full control in the educational, economic as well as social areas of these regions in the long run. By doing so, Iran believed it could make sure that Kabul administration adopts an Iran-friendly strategy (Kagan, Pletka and Kagan, 2008 p.37-56).

Although at the outset Iran had concentrated its activities in these areas, which it deemed to be addressing Iran's direct interests in Afghanistan, its attitude has subsequently evolved in a different way. Thus, its policy now disregards the ethnicity and language factor as long as the support of this or that segment of Afghanistan's society provides a countermeasure against U.S. policies in the region.

On 10 August 2010, at the end of President Karzai's official visit to Iran, Omar Daudzai, the head of President Karzai's office, reportedly received a bag of money, Euro notes from Feda Hussian Maliki, the Iranian ambassador to Afghanistan. The money represented a "secret, steady stream of Iranian cash to buy the loyalty of Mr. Daudzai and promote Iran's interests in the presidential palace", the report said, citing Afghan and Western officials' (BBC, 2010).

Mr. Karzai has subsequently denied reports of having received money from Iran when an amount of USD2 million each year from Iran was mentioned. He emphasized that the cash is spent on governmental operational plans. "The government of Iran assists [the presidential] office," Karzai said... "Nothing is hidden... Cash payments are done by various friendly countries to help the presidential office, to help expenses in various ways." (Rosenberg, 2013). Cash payments to the President's office started in 2003 (Rosenberg, 2013).

Recently, as the U.S. and Afghanistan have attempted to reach an agreement on Afghan-U.S. Strategic Partnership Pact, the pro-Iranian media gave a negative picture of the consequences of such an agreement. In addition to this, they have also made all possible efforts to argue against the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. Moreover, Tehran's political shadow can be seen in the Afghan government. Iran keeps top Afghan officials at the presidential office and ministries on its payroll, as well as some parliamentarians (Kagan *et al.*, 2012, p.80-82).

Nevertheless, Iran's ties and relations with the opposition groups, the Tajik *Sayeds*, MPs from Herat and Hazara MPs, are strong and are steadily cultivated (Fitzgerald and Vira, 2011, p.4). It is suspected that 44 parliamentary members out of 294 are involved in the pro-Iranian activities within Afghan law-making and political activities (Bhatnagar, 2013, p.5). Iranian support for individuals led to charges being brought against the Second Vice President and leader of the Hazara party Hizb-e Wahddat-e Islami, M. Kharim Khalil, amid claims that he has been receiving direct financial support from Iran (Sarwary, 2010). Adopting such a policy by Iran to support the top ring of Afghan officials can result in more tensions and problems within the government itself. Thus, it can challenge the relations between Afghanistan and its western partners as well.

Among its other involvements in Afghanistan's affairs, Iran supports non-governmental organizations, prominent Afghan politicians, and religious actors. Iran has also been accused of funding a powerful warlord and Afghan Vice President, Mr. Qasim Fahim (Nader *et al.*, 2014, p.13).

Analyzing such policy can explain two realities of Iran's position: first that each Iranian institute (Office of the leader, IRGC, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs) has a different approach towards Afghanistan, and second that Tehran makes use of any possible way to safeguard its interests, among which mainly security and economic ones in Afghanistan.

5.6 Shia factor

Afghanistan is a landlocked country in the heart of Asia which links three of the most important cultural and geographic regions: the Indian subcontinent to the southeast, Central Asia to the north, and the Iranian Plateau in the west.

In Afghanistan, the *Hazara's* are the leading Shia community, the majority of whom have been residents in the Hazarajat, also called Hazarastan, since the 13th century (Nader *et al.*, 2014).

Since Iran is the only neighboring country of Afghanistan where the majority of the population are Shia with a Shia ideology based government, they and the Afghan Hazara Shias share a mixed relationship. However, this fact alone has not resulted in constructive relations between Iran and the Hazaras. Rather, this relationship is the result

of various factors, predominantly political and material support provided by Iran to the Hazara during the period of resistance to Soviet troops and later to the Taliban in the 1997 military operation in Bamiyan (Gladstone, 2011, p.6).

Over the years, Afghanistan's relations with Iran have changed tremendously. Iran supported and assisted Afghanistan in combating diverse threats. In 1979, for example, Iran opposed the Soviet incursion and supported the Afghan effort by providing financial and military aid to resistance leaders who in turn vowed loyalty to the Iranian vision of Islamic revolution. Among these prominent Afghan rebel leaders, Ahmed Shah Massoud, leader of the Northern Alliance, was the most dominant (Fitzgerald and Vira, 2011, p.3).

In order to oppose the plans of the communists to establish their rule over the Hazarajat, the Afghan Hazaras in September 1979 created an organization *Shura-ye Enqelab-e Etefaq-e Eslami* (Council for the Islamic Revolutionary Alliance). The organization consisted of the military and political wing and was operated by the *Sayed* Shia leaders. The political wing had Sayyed Ali Behishti as its political chief, while Sayyed Hassan was appointed a head of military operations of the Shura located in Waras in Bamiyan Province (Public Intelligence, 2002, p.5).

Furthermore, to administer and arrange the Hazarajat territory following the Soviet incursion in 1979, the Shura created specialized administrative institutions in order to hire new people, ensure taxation, issue ID cards and passports; it has opened administrative centers in Iran's capital Tehran and in Quetta, Pakistan. (Public Intelligence, 2002, p.5).

The *Shura* defied the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) by working with other Afghan factions until the mid-1980s. However, in 1984, with the aid of the Pakistani government, most of the military and international assistance was allocated to the parties of the Sunni opposition, to the so-called Alliance of Seven (seven Pakistan-based parties). On the other hand, the Shia Hazaras were barred from this aid due to their alliance with Iran. Consequently, this initiated Sunni-Shia segregation within the Islamic resistance which was in opposition to the Soviets. Moreover, cohesive Hazara support for the Shura also played a part in the split, as the Afghan central government shifted its focus toward combating the Pakistan-based Sunni Mujahideen opposition movements, and thus posed less of a threat to the Hazarajat (Public Intelligence, 2002).

In the period from 1982 to 1989, the Hazarajat witnessed a critical phase as a prolonged struggle for dominance in that region. During nine years (1979-1988), five parties competed with the Shura to secure power over the Hazarajat area as well as securing the loyalty of the Hazaras. Of these five parties, four were based in Iran, namely: Hizbullah (Party of God), Harakat-e-Islami (Islamic Movement), Sepah-e Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guard Corps) and (Victory). The three parties: Sepah-e Pasdaran, Sazman-e-Nasr and Hizbullah adhered to the fundamentalist reading of Islam, while Harakat-e-Islami – on traditional stance. Beside the above parties, another party was based in Afghanistan itself. Unlike the previously mentioned ones this party, named Sazman-e-Mujaheddin-Mustazafin (Organization of Warriors of the Dispossessed), was more politically oriented, the religious goals were ousted by more militant ones. It turned out that this struggle for power exceeded losses of the struggle against the central government. In addition, the new conflict started after the alliance between the Islamist in Shura and Nasr party was achieved in 1982 (Public Intelligence, 2002, p.6).

In view of the devastating consequences of internal fighting between the different groups, in 1987, the Iranian authorities sought to form the eight parties into an alliance to sort out the crisis. Accordingly, the four Iranian-founded Shia Islamist parties: Hizbullah, Harakat- e Islami, Nasr, and Pasdaran alongside the four smaller parties created an alliance of eight titled the Shura-e Ettelaf-e Islami Afghanistan/Council of Islamic Alliance of Afghanistan (Public Intelligence, 2002, p.6). However, in October 1987, it was renamed as Hizb-e Wahdat-e Islami-e Afghanistan/Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan (Emadi, 2010 p.144).

Iran's Afghanistan policy became more and more organized under President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989–97) with the termination of the Iran–Iraq War, shifting the concerns in the direction of support for the establishment of a multi-ethnic government encompassing both Sunni and Shia representatives (Koepke, 2013).

In the 1990s, with the rise of the Taliban in neighboring Afghanistan, it became undeniably apparent that fundamental Sunni Islamists were not merely anti-Western, but also anti-Shia and anti-Iranian. In fact, the Taliban (and afterwards al-Qaeda) promoted an Islamic revolutionary ideology that competes with Tehran's philosophy. Thus, the spread of this hostile Sunni radical Islamic revolutionary ideology would not only confront Iran's claim to guide the transnational Islamic revolutionary movement but

could even threaten Iran itself if the Sunni radicals acted upon their anti-Shia beliefs (Katz, 2012).

Consequently, in view of the above, Iran started its assistance to all anti-Taliban factions. Iran's attitude towards the Taliban as an acute threat to its national security was justified when they (the Taliban) on August 8, 1998, killed the diplomats and a journalist in the Mazar-i-Sharif Consulate of Iran (Koepke, 2013, p.7).

The Iranian Government was initially divided regarding how to act in response to the prevailing situations. IRGC was insisting on retaliation by military means, however, other high-ranking officials saw danger in such intervention as it could, in their opinion, result in the further reciprocal actions, e.g. from those Sunni Islamists which are affiliated with the Taliban (Koepke, 2013).

In 2001, since the ousting of the Taliban, the Hazara, who were always backed by Iran due to the religious similarity (Shiism), emerged as crucial social and political actors in Afghanistan. At present, Hazara politicians occupy key posts in the Afghan government and will most probably keep hold of them, particularly after the decrease of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. The leader of the Hazara Hezb-e Wahdat-e Islami, Karim Khalili (formerly the vice president of Afghanistan), was seen as one who would come into politics as a vital player in the Afghan post-2014 administration. The formerly persecuted by Taliban Hazaras have now become more explicit in the demonstration of their faith. As a consequence, the Afghan Hazaras have begun to enjoy their liberty and freedom of expression, which was once suppressed under the autocracy of Taliban Regime. For instance, public processions signifying Shia sacred days, formerly prohibited under the Taliban, have become much more frequent in Kabul and other cities (BBC, 2009).

Iran is most likely to make use of its links with the Hazara (and other Shia) in order to gain ground and exercise power in Afghanistan. According to a reliable source, around 55 parliament members in 2014 were Shia. They might turn out to have associations with Iran (Katzman, 2014). Moreover, a myriad of Afghan Shia leaders also believes in a special religious kinship with Iran. Indeed, some Shia clergymen in Afghanistan have to contrast with *Velayat-e Faqih* views. This, however, does not really influence the overall picture of Iranian influence in Afghanistan in the religious realm, since the number of those affiliated with Iran remains high.

Iran played a decisive role in defending the Shia Hazaras from numerous autocracies; it considers itself the guardian of the Shia Hazaras from the autocracy principally Sunni Taliban regime who are militantly anti-Shia. Consequently, various forces helped them achieve their aim of supporting Shia Hazaras, particularly the Hizb-i-Wahdat (Nader *et al.*, 2014, pp.7-8).

Hizb-e Wahdat, the Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan, founded in 1989, has been a vital political and military actor in Afghanistan. The idea behind its foundation was to unite nine groups with very opposed military and ideological agendas under one umbrella. Moreover, the idea comes also from the time of the anti-Soviet experience of opposition movements in the 1980s. They had a significant role and were established as the agents of the interests of the Iranian regime in Afghanistan, to counter the interests of Pakistan, articulated through the Taliban. For that reason, Hezb-i-Wahdat is alleged to make available intelligence and agent provocateur forces to the Iranian regime (Nader *et al.*, 2014, pp.7-8)

During the same period, Tehran offered all possible support to factions that pursued Khomeini's line. The Shia Ulema (Religious Scholars) of Afghanistan, at that point in time, advocated an array of views on the role of religion in government. Accordingly, quite a lot of Afghan Shia factions based in Iran were amalgamated Hezb-e Wahdat political party, dominated by Hazara (Mojde, 2010; Ibrahimi, 2006). However, to fulfill its purpose, Hezb-e Wahdat required not just Iran's assistance in the energy and finance sector. The needed support also included media, schools run by Iran and mosques. Besides Kabul, an immense number of these activities and centers were pursued in western and northern Afghanistan (Majidiyar and Alfoneh, 2010).

Although the key focus of Iran's power activities in Afghanistan was the Tajik and the Hazara, the Hazara were politically prominent and had many authoritative armed force figures who opposed the dictate of Iran. The wish to represent an independent ethnic and religious group within Afghanistan and avoid influence from the outside resulted in a certain coolness between Hazara leaders and Tehran. Additionally, several Hazara leaders arguably disliked Tehran's progressing interference in Afghan affairs (Nader *et al.*, 2014, p.17).

To this end, a speaker of the holy institutions in Herat, Mir Farooq Hosseini, thus refers to the Iranian banners raised ahead of the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam

Hussein, "Each black flag is reflective of Iran's evil intentions in Afghanistan"(Latifi, 2013). Even before the November 14 observances, Hosseini alleged that inside and outside political actors misuse Ashura for individual purposes, although he did not provide any substantiation for his allegations against Shias (Latifi, 2013).

5.7 Iran and the Taliban

As a strategic change, Iran aims to play an important role in Afghanistan to cement the achievements of its own security. For this to succeed, Afghanistan requires a stable government capable of enforcing security and bringing peace, which includes the Taliban as a part of the process. However, Iran prefers a pro-Iranian government in Kabul in order to prevent Saudi Arabia and Pakistan from playing any significant role in Afghanistan's politics (Milani, 2011). It never recognized the Taliban government. Iran viewed the Taliban as an ideological enemy and a security threat created by Pakistan's intelligence service with the financial support of Saudi Arabia, who sought partly to undercut Iran with their ideology of Wahhabism (Peiman, 2003). That said, the Taliban has been acknowledged as a reality and a constituent part of the security dilemma which cannot be ignored.

During the war against the Taliban, the U.S. relied on the military groups of the Northern Alliance (backed by Iran) not only to defeat the Taliban but also to install a new government in Kabul. This period was seen as a honeymoon period in relations between Iran and the U.S, and they were pursuing the same interests in Afghanistan, i.e. the ousting of the Taliban and empowering the Iran-backed forces in the country.

With the near elimination of the Taliban and the establishment of a new US-backed government in Afghanistan, Iran changed its policy towards the Taliban. The current strategic aims of Iran and the Taliban have much in common as they both seek the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the foreign forces from Afghanistan, towards which both have different reasons for concern: one regional and the other local (Milani, 2011). Iran does not just see the U.S. presence as a threat to its national security; it understands that the U.S. strategy is to assume an influential position in South and Central Asia as well as the Persian Gulf. As a result, Iran put political and economic pressure on Afghanistan in order to prevent it entering into the US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership

Agreement (SPA)¹⁶ which limits Iran's involvement in Afghanistan (Barzegar, 2014 p.120).

In order to combat the presence of the U.S. in Afghanistan, Iran gives support to any groups and movements regardless of their background, ethnicity or religion. This represents a pragmatic change of Iranian policy since 2001 in Afghanistan. The escalation of insurgency in the border region and Shia-populated provinces in central Afghanistan is the outcome of Tehran's strategy.

“The presence of Iranian intelligence in the Taliban-influenced parts of Farah province has been reported; they often meet with the locals and offers financial support and military equipment to the Taliban to fight against international forces and destabilize the security situation in Farah province” (A. N., personal interview, 27 October 2015).

To facilitate closer ties, Tehran allowed the Taliban to establish an office in the city of Zahedan, located near the Afghan border (Joscelyn, 2016). The Taliban's Quetta Shura in Quetta, Pakistan, agreed to the establishment of the Zahedan office and to move some of their prominent members to Zahedan in Iran (Silinsky, 2014). Due to a direct transit link between the two cities, this could be more fruitful for relations between Iran and the Taliban (Habibi, 2012).

Afghan and international forces have repeatedly blamed Iran for sending weapons to the Taliban (Adeel, 2015). Such accusations were made against Iran several times (Walsh, 2007). Following the discovery of arms by NATO forces in western Afghanistan, NATO forces blamed Iran for supplying these arms. In March 2010, another shipment of weapons was seized in Kandahar. In retaliation, the U.S. government issued an Executive Order against IRGC officers in Quds forces (Special Forces unit of Iran's Revolutionary Guards) in August 2010 for supporting the Taliban (Tawil, 2010). Following the discovery by ISAF forces in the Afghan province of Nimruz of a weapons convoy, the UK Foreign Secretary declared that “detailed technical analysis, together with the circumstances of the seizure, leave us in no doubt that the weaponry is recovered came from Iran” (Borger and Taylor, 2011). Moreover, top Afghan officials in the western city of Nimruz arrested five Taliban members who had received training in Iran as suicide bombers (Dodge and Redman, 2011, p.194). Iran's strategic goal of supporting the Taliban is not aimed at bringing them back into power in Kabul and replacing the present

¹⁶ This agreement enables U.S. to retain its troops in Afghanistan beyond 2014, at the same times banning any U.S. military moves to other neighboring countries from Afghanistan.

Afghan government (Hairan, 2010). Rather, Iran sees the Taliban as a useful tool to challenge the interests of another strategic enemy, which in this case appears to be the United States. In view of this strategic goal, Iran's denial and its refusal to acknowledge the behind-the-scenes support of the Taliban by its operatives should not be a matter of surprise, although such support is done in a limited manner in order to maintain the Taliban as a headache for the U.S. while avoiding any negative impact on Iran's interests (Ahmad, 2013).

Furthermore, Iranian officials accuse the U.S. of backing the Sunni insurgent group Jundullah, who are active in the Iranian part of Balochistan (Gunaratna and Iqbal, 2012, p.226). Jundullah fighters are accused of killing a significant number of Revolutionary Guards Corps (Kutty, 2014). After the Jundullah leader, Abdul Malik Rigi, was arrested by the Iranian government, Tehran tried to prove its claims by publicizing statements made by him. Following his arrest in 2010, Rigi made a statement that was broadcast by the State television of Iran. In this statement, for the first time, he confessed that he had received support from the United States for his anti-governmental activities (Leverett and Leverett, 2010). The U.S. has never accepted this accusation and stated that the statement had been made under coercion. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the Baluchi insurgency is going to continue into the future, which will have a direct impact on the way Iran will behave concerning the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Thus, one may clearly view the support of Afghan fighters by Iran as a counter-measure against the U.S. (Milani, 2011).

The aid coming from Iran to Afghan insurgents and the assistance provided by the U.S. to Jundullah is on the rise (Larison, 2010). The latter is directly proportionate to the growth of the Baluchi insurgency. This situation may complicate the whole scenario of the support given by Iran to the Afghan fighters against the U.S. presence. Although Iran has never been on friendly terms with the Taliban, this may become irrelevant in light of greater goals. These scenarios are not to be underestimated (Nader and Laha, 2011).

State sources do not agree on the direct support and involvement of the Iranian regime regarding the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan. Looking to organs such as the Revolutionary Guards (N.B. the structure of IRGC has been explained in Chapter Two), which are only accountable to the Supreme Leader, one sees that they can act independently from the Iranian regime's National Army ("Artesh") (Singh, 2005). This makes it possible that the same institutions are involved in arms trafficking (Tawil, 2010).

Because of the inability of Afghanistan to control its borders, arms-trafficking from Iran is simplified. One could argue the involvement of some elements within the IRGC is backing the Taliban without the knowledge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran (Hairan, 2010). However, taking into account the nature of Iranian support of the Taliban in such a critical situation, for some researchers it looks impossible to run such extensive operation without having the involvement of the majority of the institutions that are involved in the foreign policy-making process (The Institute for Middle Eastern Democracy, 2012).

Iran is interested in taking part in peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban not only to make itself involved in regional security but also due to the fact that Pakistan, China, and the U.S. are involved. Its main concern is to safeguard their interest in the event that an agreement is reached with the Taliban.

In his last visit, the Executive Director of the Afghan government to Iran was officially informed by the Iranian president that Iran should be part of the peace negotiations with the Taliban (Khaama Press, 2016). In late 2013, the Taliban were actively engaged with the media. Afghan and foreign governmental officials, as well as the Taliban, confirmed the visit of the Taliban to Iran. According to the Taliban's official web page,

“The Taliban's visit to Iran on their invitation, their formal negotiations and then publicizing these diplomatic relations are considered a significant achievement for Taliban from political point of view because the nature of this visit and the language of the Taliban's declaration prove that Taliban have not visited Iran as an insignificant party or group, rather they have been invited by the Iranian side as an independent political system and crucial issues have been brought under discussion” (Voice of Jihad, 2013).

The Taliban visit to Tehran was reported by Tasnim News Agency, an agency which is affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Thus, Tasnim first reported the talks in Iran; however, the report did not cover the details and agenda of the meeting. Tasnim reported that the Taliban's representative, after meeting with Iranian security officials, highlighted Iran's commitment to bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan. They also covered the participation of the Taliban delegation in the annual Islamic Awakening Conference in Iran. It was reported that Sayyid Tayyab Agha, Mawlawi Shabuddin Delawar, and Shir Muhammad Abbas Stanekzai, were in the Taliban's political delegation to Tehran (Tasnim News Agency, 2015a).

A member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission in the Iranian parliament Nozar Shafie, also reported on the visit, “The Taliban has influence and credit with the groups that are responsible for instability and chaos in the region. Therefore, they can play a role in managing the current regional developments and solving regional problems. This might be the reason why Iran has taken them into consideration.” (Qaidaari, 2015) .

The Taliban are also committed to keeping their ties with Iran not only for the same strategic goals but also because the Taliban are seeking to build diplomatic leverage in the current political sphere. Bearing in mind the withdrawal of international military forces, it is highly likely that the Taliban are also trying to destabilize Tehran’s relations with Kabul and with other anti-Taliban groups and elements. Arguably, the Taliban will attempt to convince Iran to stop backing anti-Taliban forces in post-withdrawal Afghanistan. The Taliban have assured Iranian officials of the existence and maintenance of a multi-ethnic, religious and political group, which will be in the post-NATO political order in Afghanistan (Zambelis, 2013).

Iran is backing Taliban not only to fight the U.S. but also to stop its new growing enemy in Afghanistan - the Islamic State, which has an anti-Iranian agenda. The clashes between the Taliban and ISIS in western Afghanistan show that ISIS is interested not only in the northern region bordering, at least, three central Asia countries but also in the western part of Afghanistan where it shares a notable border with Iran. It is important to know that due to the ethnic and historical elements Iran had control of western Afghanistan for many decades but it is questionable how ISIS would increase its interest in the western part of Afghanistan. Iran is concerned that ISIS, with the support of Saudi Arabia, will try to bring its Sunni extremist ideology to Shia Iran and fight against Iranian interests in the region, namely in Afghanistan. Reportedly, Iran has organized attacked on ISIS in this region. Thus, in his interview with *The Daily Beast*, Mullah Khan Muhammad Noorzai, an ISIS commander in western Afghanistan claimed: “I was not at the camp at the time of the attack, but the Iranians coordinated it. There were a few Iranians making films of the dead ISIS fighters” (Yousafzai, 2015).

It remains paradoxical that Iran has been backing the Taliban. Among the various reasons to be cited, one should mention the antagonistic attitude of the Taliban towards the Shia population in general. In 1998 alone, nine Iranian diplomats were assassinated by the Taliban and hundreds of Shia civilians were massacred in Balkh province. However,

despite this loss, Tehran's enmity towards the U.S. has quite significantly contributed to the strengthening of their relationship with the Taliban. The overall relations between Iran and Afghanistan remain rather weak, especially due to the sporadic support of the Taliban by Iran and because Afghanistan is unable to adequately provide Iran with the necessary means to achieve its aims within its borders, despite the number of reconstruction and economic enterprises there. Backing the Taliban by the Iranian government not only has a negative impact on U.S. policy in Afghanistan but also impacts security and political efforts by Afghanistan and other international partners at the same time (Agarwal, 2014, p.3).

5.8 Summary

The analysis conducted in the present chapter has revealed political, security and economic interests of Iran in Afghanistan, as the main ones pursued by Iran. The evidence provided above supports the argument of the study on the contradictory policies of Iran towards Afghanistan, by linking Iran's foreign policy interests to the means, through which these interests are enforced, among which is the support provided to Shia and Taliban, as well as the links Iran has established with civil society organizations in Afghanistan, Afghan individuals and parties.

As is becomes apparent from the analysis, the most important thing for Iranian foreign policy seems to be the security issue due to the number of domestic factors in Afghanistan, the presence of international troops, insurgency, Sunni-Shia competition of Saudi Arabia and Iran and drug-trafficking. For this reason, security is paramount for Iran. This explains Iran's goal to be involved in Afghanistan politically, economically as well as ideologically.

As the chapter demonstrated, Iran has adopted a number of strategies to implement and safeguard its national interests in terms of security in Afghanistan. However, Tehran's relations with Kabul, its economic support and investments, on the one hand, and its support given to the political opposition and the Shia minority population, on the other hand, creates security challenges for the Afghan government and its international partners.

It was determined herein that Iran's primary concern is in the area of western Afghanistan. Iran and Afghanistan share the long border in this region which creates

incentives for the trade relations, construction projects, economic exchanges and counter-trafficking measures to fight the drug trade. Therefore, most of Iran's investments go to western Afghanistan. Through its economic relations and support for the local government, Iran ensures its influence in western Afghanistan to prevent security challenges from the neighbor and control drug-trafficking from Afghanistan to Iran.

Indeed, a number of security challenges exist on the border with Iran. The Taliban and various activities of ISIS, provide a challenge not only to the internal security of Afghanistan but also to that of Iran. Iran's ties with the Taliban are peculiar, as they are not only meant to rein the later but also are intended to use the Taliban as a proxy to fight against the U.S. and ISIS. At the same time, Iran between 2001 and 2014 was financing a number of construction projects in Afghanistan, which contributed to the political and economic stability in Afghanistan.

Clearly, the foreign policies of Iran are complex and sometimes contradictory so it can be difficult to ascertain how they manifest in Afghanistan. However, Iran is a rational actor that pursues a realistic foreign policy to secure its national interests, especially when it comes to security issues and the presence of the U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Towards this end, Iran has also managed to keep its ties with the former Mujahideen leaders, who are still strongly present in the political decision-making in Afghanistan. In keeping with its aspiration to be a regional power, Iran aims to influence the decision-makers in Afghanistan when it comes to the Afghan-US and Afghan-Saudi Arabia relations. To conclude, Iran's interests and objectives can be described as balancing between its economic, security and political interests.

Chapter 6. Iran's policy in relation to Afghanistan: security and political aspects

This chapter focuses on the Iranian institutions that implement Iran's foreign policy in Afghanistan, in light of Iran's security and political interests. It aims to describe, where possible, various events and incidents in Afghanistan and demonstrate their connection to the activities of these particular Iranian institutions. As has been presented in this study, many Iranian institutions, both formal and informal, are active in Afghanistan. They cover security, economy, charity, culture, education and the religious sphere. These are most dominant in western Afghanistan since Iran is building up a security zone there to thwart security threats associated with the U.S. presence, drug-trafficking, and Sunni extremism. All these activities are related to the security interests of the IRI in Afghanistan.

For outside experts and observers, Iran's intervention in Afghanistan has been more a means of expanding its own sphere of influence and deflating and limiting U.S. influence in Afghanistan (Toscano, 2012). Thus, Iran's soft power/hard power political tactics have been perceived as having "little to do with inflating Afghan interests as a nation state" and more with furthering of its own interests (Bhatnagar, 2013). Iranian-Afghan interests in the post-2014 Afghanistan were in a correlation with the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. The aggravation of the Iran-US relations in the world should have had a definite impact on their relations in Afghanistan too. However, instead of direct confrontation, Iran, as was expected, followed a pragmatic approach, i.e. was concerned with the formation of a pro-Iranian government in Kabul and pursuing strategic interests, adoption of measures for border anti-trafficking, and enhancement of its influence there, especially after the expected exit of most of the foreign troops in 2014.¹⁷

In this context, a former senior Intelligence chief in Afghanistan, Amrullah Saleh, emphasizes that there is an institutional movement operated from Iran, which is working extensively with a view of endorsing this political and strategic agenda. According to

¹⁷ This study does not analyse the new US-South Asia Security Policy, "America First" and the decision of the Trump administration to enhance the forces for direct fight with Taliban and Al-Qaeda rather than to leave Afghanistan, as was the Obama pledge, because the year 2017 lies outside the scope and timeframe of the present dissertation.

him, some of the Iranian institutions involved are: Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), especially its secretive Quds Force, Ansar Base of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, the clerical establishment in Qom, the Ministry of Intelligence, Charity Organizations (Imam Khomeini Relief Committee) and the Supreme National Security Council (Saleh, 2013).

Afghanistan has always been crucial for Iran's national interests: for its economy, its security and for the cultural component of Iran's politics in the region. However, Iran's foreign policy implementation strategies in Afghanistan after 2001 have been rather contradictory. Iran has been supported the central power in Afghanistan, while its concerns with the presence of the western troops in the country have resulted in its simultaneous backing of various anti-governmental fighters including the Taliban, among others (Levkowitz, 2017).

With this complexity and contradiction (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 for more on the peculiarities of Iran's foreign policy) of Iran's foreign policy implementation, it is hard to guess which institution is responsible for each particular act. Behind the construction and reconstruction projects and development aid, the Iranian government has security, economic, cultural and religious interests in Afghanistan. Thus, on the one hand, in foreign policy implementation, Iran uses intelligence and provides financial support to forces opposed to the Afghan government. On the other hand, it exploits development aid and economic support as a means of involving itself in the internal politics of Afghanistan (Bhatnagar, 2013). In this chapter, I elaborate in more detail on how Iran's various institutions are involved in carrying out its foreign policy.

This chapter starts from the analysis of the involvement of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) in Afghanistan (section 6.1) and provides insights into the activities of its ground force at Ansar Base which is entrusted with certain special operations both inside and outside of Iranian borders (section 6.2). The presence of Iran in religious (including Shia factor) and educational spheres, as well as the media and civil society organizations of Afghanistan, are analyzed under the umbrella of the clerical establishment of Qom (section 6.3). The foreign policy implementation cannot be imagined without the activity of the Ministry of Intelligence and Security of Iran (section 6.4). Because the public opinion in Afghanistan is created at the very local level, the importance of the activities of the Iranian charity organizations, particularly the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (IKRC), should not be underestimated (section 6.5). Not an

insignificant role in decision-making with regards to the policy towards Afghanistan belongs to the Council on Afghanistan in the office of the Supreme Leader (section 6.6). Last but not least, the Iranian diplomatic missions in Afghanistan are the conduit of the Iranian strategies towards its neighbor (section 6.7). The chapter concludes with the summary (section 6.8).

6.1 Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)

In the third chapter of this study, the structure and mandates of the IRGC have been explained. Its involvement in Afghanistan dates back decades, from the Russian invasion to the civil war and, later, to the period of the Taliban and the dramatic changes that followed the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. The IRGC plays an important role in the implementation of IRI's foreign policy in Afghanistan. It uses both soft and hard power as it considers the U.S. presence in Afghanistan as one of its high-level targets. The IRGC has its representatives in every institution (diplomatic missions, charity organizations, cultural and economic) not only inside Iran but also outside. It considers Afghanistan's security instability as being a threat to the very regime of Iran (Byman *et al.*, 2001, p.71).

The Global War on Terror, which began with the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, has brought outside actors into the country, each with its well-calculated foreign policy agenda (Nader and Laha, 2011, p.9). For Iran, the Revolutionary Guards is one major organization that plays a significant role in the formulation and implementation of its foreign policy agenda as a branch of Iran's Armed forces that ensures safeguarding Iran's Islamic system from any outside foreign involvement (Nader and Laha 2011, p.9).

Iranian financial as well as strategic assistance to the ideologically synchronized Shia community in Afghanistan has not only raised questions about this support from the outsider's perspective but also from within the stratified Shia community. Thus, Iranian economic and other kinds of support to the Shia have led to the division of the Shia Afghan community first during the Soviet period (Koepke, 2013, p.4). Thereafter, the IRGC, under the Shia ideology, continued its support to the Afghan Shia minorities (Roggio, 2010). The Afghan Shias, though, feel as if they were used by Iran. One of the Shia clerics of Herat describes the advantage of the Shia factor for Iran in the following way:

"Shia people in Afghanistan were used by Iran during the civil war in Afghanistan and are used even now with a different approach. During the civil war, Iran was using Shia to fight USSR, through *Sepah* Iran was providing military training to a number of Shia movements against the Soviet troops. But now they use Shia as an ideological instrument to build their influence and implement their anti-US agenda. Shias in Afghanistan and in other countries are used by Iran only for its own interests. Many Afghan Shia refugees are living in Iran, but people and the government of Iran don't treat them as humans." (S. K., personal interview, 26 August 2014)

The shift in Iranian foreign policy after 2001 mandated the IRGC to focus not only on the Shia ideology but also to develop ties with other political parties, individuals and even with anti-governmental groups such as the Taliban. Although the evidence is difficult to obtain, various accounts, including the one coming from the member of Herat's provincial council, allows one to emphasize such support with a great certainty:

"Iran is using any tool to weaken the US, and Taliban are one of these tools, I can't prove this fact 100% or reject such connections, but there is some evidence and signs in support of this. The international troops raised the issue many times, but such connections between Iran and Taliban are very complicated and secretive and for us, it is hard to prove it due to the policies of our central government [Author's note: in Afghanistan]. But let me say that we do have the information that Iran is supporting the Taliban, but how exactly and up to which level, - it is hard for us to prove." (M. Y., personal interview, 25 October 2016)

However, what is more striking is that the Iran-Taliban ties are not denied in Iran, and the answer provided by the Iranian official and a university professor in Mashhad when that question was posed, clearly communicated, that:

"There is no dispute on Iran's support provided to Afghan Taliban. It is clear and realistic. Pakistan and Arabs are supporting Taliban, and U.S. is supporting all of them against Iran. We [Author's note: Iranians] need to manage Taliban and have relations with them, not only to protect our interests and security as a nation but also to be able to talk to them for the sake of the peace a process in Afghanistan. We have IS problems on our border with Afghanistan, and we know that the Afghan government is not able to control the situation. In such a context, we must take some adequate actions to defend ourselves. And it is also, actually, a help to Afghans." (H. A., personal interview, 14 April 2017)

Just like any other nation-state caught in a spiral of conflict for such a protracted period of time, Afghanistan represents an almost perfect specimen of a loose and porously bordered country. This porous nature of its borders makes the territory vulnerable to both welcoming and unwelcoming elements and people coming from outside. This can include secretive and clandestine groups or institutions from outside which operate in the country. To complicate things further, Afghanistan and Iran have a mutual visa waiver program for diplomats aimed at trouble-free movement between the two countries. The IRGC has

assigned two branches of its covert Quds Force, the Ansar Headquarters based in Mashhad and the 23rd Headquarters in Birjand, to carry out various subversive activities within the territory of Afghanistan. According to the former Intelligence Chief of Afghanistan, Amrullah Saleh, the free movement of diplomats gives IRGC officials the easiest possible means of entering Afghanistan by disguising themselves as businessmen, aid workers, journalists, etc. (Tisdall, 2010).

Due to it being a neighboring country inhabited by a minority Shia Hazara community, Iran has been cognizant of various political and strategic developments taking place in Afghanistan. The increased international interest in Afghanistan during the current period, due in part to the U.S. presence in the country, included increased interest by Iran. According to one of the parliamentarians of the Farah province, "there is evidence that the state of Iran is sponsoring and proliferating terrorism in Afghanistan in an organized form as well as via unorganized non-state actors" (M. S. F., personal interview, 25 January 2018). He further highlighted in the interview that "a remarkable number of Iranian officials, working behind the curtain, aimed at toppling the government of Afghanistan or, at least, operate in a way which maximizes the influence of the pro-Iranian agenda in the political machinery of Afghanistan" (M. S. F., personal interview, 25 January 2018).

In the west of Afghanistan, Iranian ties with local officials are well established. It starts from the governor's office and stretches to the heads of provincial and district police and other governmental and non-governmental institutions. Thus, in December 2012, the Afghan intelligence agency (National Department of Security) arrested the Executive Director of the Herat governor's office on charges of spying for Iranian entities in Afghanistan (Kabul press, 2015). A year before this event, in December 2011, the IRGC announced that they had captured a U.S. drone that had entered the Iranian airspace from western Afghanistan (Farah province). But the Afghan officials in Farah reported that the drone, in fact, had crashed on Afghan soil in Farah province. Based on the very detailed information provided by the top-ranking official of the Intelligence Department of the Farah police, the peculiarities of the case were the following: "The drone has crashed in Farah province, but our border police put it in a police car 'Ranger Ford' car, carried it away and sold it to the IRGC because the IRGC is aware of everything happening in Farah and they have an everyday connection with our police and government officials." (N. Ah., personal interview, 30 August 2014)

According to information from one of the top-ranking officials of the Herat police, a number of Afghan officials in the western part of Afghanistan faced various problems connected to the presence of Iranian diplomats and informal elements in their provinces. Iranian diplomats in the Iranian Consulate in Herat met Afghan officials without following the procedure and any Afghan officials who declined to do so, was grilled by his seniors because of Iranian influence on them:

"Iran has good and supportive ties with our officials and governmental institutions, and they [Author's note: Iranian officials] kept strong influence inside of our governmental organizations. Iranian *Pasdaran* force [Author's note: IRGC] is spying and is very active in Herat and its border region. Iranian diplomats and unknown Iranians informally paying to the local police and local leaders at district and province levels and most of them are loyal to them. Iranians are here since long time ago, but starting from 2001 until now Iranian support to Taliban and their anti-American and anti-Afghanistan activities have increased, especially from 2008." (S. Q., personal interview, 19 August 2014)

The involvement of IRGC is also mentioned on the U.S. list of global terrorists, although one has to remain skeptical of such information, when Iran, a US-enemy, is concerned. The U.S. government has increased the list of global terrorists by including in it some of IRGC's special forces unit - Quds Force officers (Sayyed Kamal Musavi, Alireza Hemmati, Akbar Seyed Al-Hosseini, and Mahmud) and one "associate" (Afkhani Rashidi) who are believed to be part of a greater plot aimed at the "use of terrorism and intelligence operations as tools of influence against the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan" (Roggio, 2014). Parallel to the above operations, Iran exercised its influence over Afghan government in a more creative and discrete way. Thus, there have been several incidents of bribery against Afghan political officials initiated by various Iranian agents with a simple aim to strengthen its political base in the politically active Kabul (Roggio, 2014).

Consequently, Iran has been suspected of creating security challenges in Afghanistan, especially in the western part of the country. By supporting insurgency and organizing attacks on governmental entities and even civilians, Iran is reported to have had the following objectives: arming those who oppose the U.S. presence in Afghanistan; pressurising the Afghan government to give a bigger space to Iran in the country's political profile, and demonstrating its power before the U.S. as well as before the Afghan government. It meets these objectives, inter alia, by implementing the scheme described by one of the members of the provincial council in Farah province: "Whenever Iran's relations with the Western powers on its nuclear program are critical, Iran is trying to

push on the crisis in Afghanistan and use the situation in Afghanistan for its political and security relations with the West" (D. Q., personal interview, 12 March 2016).

The results of efforts to influence the Afghan government by Iran and the U.S. are a direct and negative impact on the security as well as the economy in Afghanistan. This negative impact was highlighted by a high-ranking official of Herat province:

"I can say 90% of the problems for Iran in Afghanistan are associated with the US. That is why Iran supports the Taliban, creating thereby security problems for the Afghans and Americans both. Precisely, Iran's multi-pronged strategy is to create pressure while the U.S. exits Afghanistan. In my opinion, such a strategy, foul or fair, has negative effects on us. It can create a security problem for us and have an impact on our government and economy. Iran wants us not to cooperate with the U.S. and instead wants us to keep up such relations with Iran." (F.W., personal interview, 21 August 2014)

Afghan officials and civil society activists have accused Iran (through, inter alia, its IRGC) of attempting to create hurdles for the works on the Salma dam project in western Afghanistan (8am Daily News Paper, 2017). Though all previous accusations on Iran's involvement have been rejected by the Iranian Consul in Herat province, Mahmood Rashidi Afkhami (MFA of Iran, Herat Consulate 2015), however, the Senator from Herat province emphasized with certainty, that Iran went as far as trying to convince India to stop the Salma dam project financing. He further connects the military attacks on the Salma dam by some Afghan militant groups to Iran, by claiming IRGC is backing these groups (J. R., personal interview, 7 March 2016). Salma Dam is a hydroelectric and irrigation dam project located on the Hari River in Chishti Sharif District of Herat Province in western Afghanistan. This India-sponsored project of construction of Salma dam was worth about 275 million USD for the Indian government (Gulati and Saxena, 2016). It was later renamed by the Afghan Cabinet as the Afghan-India Friendship Dam.¹⁸ Based on the statistics of the Ministry of Water and Energy of Afghanistan, the price of the water, which flows to Iran from Afghanistan, is estimated at around 1.5 billion USD. (8am Daily News Paper, 2011). This justifies the concern of Iran about the construction of the Salma dam that was expressed by the Iranian leadership. Thus, Rouhani, at the International Conference on Combating Sand and Dust Storms: Challenges and Practical Solutions, highlighted the ecological threat this dam poses for Iranian provinces: Sistan, Baluchistan and Khurasane Rezawi (Iran Daily, 2017).

¹⁸ This dam was finally completed and officially opened on June 4, 2016.

Another interest of Iran for security and stability in Afghanistan is connected to the pipeline projects of IRI itself in the region. Thus, Iran has built a 3400-km gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Iran for export to India via Karachi port of Pakistan. The goal was to sabotage the US-propelled TAPI Pipeline (Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India) project which starts from Turkmenistan, crosses Afghanistan and Pakistan and then enters India (Nabizada, 2013). The Afghan officials have tried to find ways to engage Iran, but it did not work, as the Head of the technical support department of the Ministry of Water and Energy of Afghanistan explained it:

“Iran wants to export its gas to South Asia and therefore it is clear that Iran would not support the TAPI project. Due to US-Iran unfriendly relations in Afghanistan, the Afghan government could not convince and even talk with Iranian officials on the possibility of construction of the projected works by some Iranian companies, which would be one of the ways from this deadlock situation. At the same time, Saudi Arabia has agreed to provide financial support to the project via Turkmenistan government and the Turkmen government welcomed Saudi's support for the TAPI project. Due to the critical relations between Iran and Saudi, this constellation was also not welcomed by the Iranian government” (K. Sah., personal interview, 12 May 2017).

The TAPI project is decreasing Iran's role in the region, according to the expert opinion of Omid Shokri Kalehsar, the Senior Energy Security Analyst in Washington, which is what Saudi Arabia, Iran's main regional competitor sought. He emphasized that both Iran and Saudi Arabia's competition is due to their position as the major oil suppliers in the region. (Yazdani, 2018). Indeed, due to its strategic importance to Iran, the TAPI pipeline project was and still is under the great attention of Iran. What is, perhaps, more important though is that these countries' economic interests are allegedly pursued through military means. Thus, according to one of the top members of the Afghan Security Council, Iran's IRGC was and is “trying to undermine the TAPI project implementation”. He emphasized Iran's concern with the project, that this country intended to be implanted within its own borders. It is *Sepah*, according to him, that was organizing the attack during the February 2018 project inauguration ceremony, while ten insurgents, caught by the Afghan Security forces after this attack were allegedly trained by *Sepah* in Iran (N. A., personal interview, 30 July 2018).

Unlike Iran, the U.S. officially regards the pipeline project as an initiative that can foster trade cooperation between East Asia and Europe, by creating incentives for more investments in the rails and roads industry, trade and regional exchange, including the interconnection between the region of Central Asia and South Asia, and, thus, give their

approval for its (Narula, 2015). Obviously, Iran considers the U.S. to be trying to diminish the importance of Iran in the region by providing such support. This fact irritates Iran even greater and provokes it to exhaust the IRGC's potential in Afghanistan towards creating impediments to this project.

6.2 Ansar Base of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps

From the Revolution in Iran onwards, the foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan is based more on the military approach than political use of the development agencies aid for creating influence or promoting economic ties with Afghanistan.

Though the Soviet Afghan invasion pushed a lot of refugees into Iran, which meant an additional encumbrance onto the state of Iran, the state government in the form of its various organizations managed to yield some benefits from this misery. The Islamic Republic of Iran used various emerging organizations within the refugee population of Afghanistan to exert its influence over the Republic of Afghanistan (Nojumi, 2009, p.93). One such group is called *Showra-ye E'telaf-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan* [Allied Islamic Council of Afghanistan] and is made up of eight Shia *jihadi* groups (Alfoneh, 2012). The resultant Afghan Shia refugee population, trained and controlled in Iran within the premises of Ansar Base established by IRGC, was later used in Afghanistan overtly and covertly for operations (Alfoneh, 2012).

Although the 1979 Iranian revolution finished the rule of the last Persian monarch, Iran experienced a certain amount of tribal unrest during the post-revolutionary period in the south-east region (Alfoneh, 2012). But Iran's IRGC "Ansar Military Base" promptly quelled the turbulence in the southeastern part of the country. (Alfoneh and Fulton, 2012). Soon, however, the situation was exacerbated by the Soviet-Afghan occupation around the same period (1979). It followed the influx of bands of Afghani *Shia* refugees into Iran from its eastern neighbor Afghanistan (Majidiyar and Alfoneh, 2010).

According to U.S. analysts, the Ansar Base is responsible for Iranian involvement in the Afghanistan and Pakistan region. It has a number of bases, Eshaq, Ranjvari, and Moqaddam, along with Iran's eastern border with Afghanistan, that secretly sponsor and support the various *Shia* Afghan groups in Iran and Afghanistan, apart from the Afghan Taliban, that since 2001 also have received Iran's support (Gold and Cordesman, 2014, p.148). These Ansar-organised activities in Afghanistan are allegedly creating and

consolidating Iranian influence in Afghanistan (Alfoneh and Fulton, 2012). These accounts are further confirmed by the former head for the National Security Directorate of Afghanistan (NDS), Amrulah Saleh. The Head of Intelligence Service, Saleh ascertains that Ansar Base was ever present in Afghanistan since the Islamic Revolution (Saleh, 2015). For this purpose, Iran is reported to have supplied arms and ammunition to its proxies in Afghanistan (BBC, 2011). Other means that Iran used to consolidate its influence in Afghanistan include broadcasting anti-US news on the Iranian Radio and TV channels, backing up former Afghan warlords and influencing the Afghan official clients, e.g., Ismail Khan, the Governor of Herat (Samii, 2002).

It is important to note here, that Iran's Ansar base could succeed in its activities due to the widespread corruption and other imperfections within Afghanistan itself. Thus, in order to combat the Iranian strategies to woo the Afghan population and create pro-Iranian bands among them, the Afghan National Army led several military operations against all such nefarious elements in Herat in 2004. These operations resulted in the arrests of the number of people and marginalizing the anti-national and pro-Iranian activities of its governor, Ismail Khan. However, the fact that Ismail Khan was soon appointed as the Minister of Energy by the then President Hamid Karzai is a naked example of nepotism and corruption within Afghanistan itself.

6.3 Clerical Establishment in Qom

An idea about the religious foundations of the Iranian-Afghan foreign policy is exemplified by Iranian support to the *Shia* communities of Afghanistan. It has led to the creation of Iranian influence in the bordering regions of Afghanistan. Iranian influence has affected traditions related to the speaking of Afghan language in Iranian accent (Persian)¹⁹ as well as the wearing dresses (costume) and playing music in the Iranian style. However, this is done strategically, by providing financial aid and assistance to the Afghans and their government (Juneau and Razavi, 2013a, p.11) for infrastructure and other activities: the building of roads and mosques, the distribution of religious literature and the organization of special religious ceremonies (i.e. on the Ashura²⁰ Day, and on the

¹⁹ People in Afghanistan are speaking Dari which has a different accent and most of the times different terminology in comparison with the Persian Language spoken in Iran.

²⁰ "The Day of Ashura is marked by Muslims as a whole, but for *Shi'ites* it is a major religious commemoration of the martyrdom the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussain at Karbala. It falls on the

eve of Khomeini's death and birth anniversary and on other Shia religious leaders as well). An Iranian institution, the Qom, is responsible for organizing and promoting these soft power activities in its bordering regions with Afghanistan. Doing anything to sabotage Qom initiatives implies deprivation of financial and other support to the defaulters (Saleh, 2013).

As a soft power policy, a number of Iranian religious institutions are active in Afghanistan. The Iranian ideological aspiration of Shia Islam as a dynamic reality can create tensions between the Sunni majority in Afghanistan and a much smaller population of Shia there, where both are influenced by Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia in terms of Islamic principles accordingly. With Iranian support, the Islamic University of Khatam al-Nabye was built in the west of Kabul. The Madrassah (Islamic School) is a part of the Islamic University. Both Madrassa and the University teach the Shia version of Islam with the direct involvement and support of Iran (Behn, 2012). One of the most famous Shia jurists and a former Mujahideen leader, Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Asef Mohseni, leads the Khatam-al Nabye Islamic University. This University is one the most prominent landmarks in Kabul since it serves as a central locale for pro-Iranian activities and promoting the *Velayat-e Faghih* ideology of the Shia branch of Islam. Moreover, the University disseminates the ideology of the Iranian Revolution to Shia people, which creates revolutionary groups such as Hizbullah and other groups and movements loyal to Iran. By providing aid to the University, Tehran aims to introduce new religious leaders into society who will carry on the Iranian version of politics and Islamic ideology (Nazar and Recknagel, 2010).

Apart from building and sponsoring their own universities, Iran also organizes study centers on the basis of the Afghan universities, where one can deepen knowledge of Persian language and Islamic issues as seen from the Iranian perspective. One of the examples of such Iranian initiative is organized on the basis of the Syed Jamaluddin Afghan University in Asadabad, Kunar province of Afghanistan. (Sawahel, 2017) Iran also encourages Afghan students to study in universities in Iran by providing a range of scholarships for those who stand out in their knowledge. The above concerns, in particular, the postgraduate students of technological and natural science disciplines.

10th of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is marked by Muslims with one-day of fasting, which commemorates the day Noah left the Ark, and the day that Moses was saved from the Egyptians by God. For Shia Muslims, Ashura is a solemn day of mourning the martyrdom of Hussein in 680 AD at Karbala in modern-day Iraq." (BBC, 2011)

(Sawahel, 2017) Further, some universities of Iran also established branches in Afghanistan, where Afghan students, are issued diplomas and certificates of the Iranian university. Among the universities of Iran that have opened their branches in Afghanistan are: Al-Mustafa International University (widely spreading the ideology of Iran in the Islamic countries) with a branch in Kabul, the Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (one of the largest universities of Iran) with a branch in Herat, named Khajeh Abdollah Ansari University. At the time of conducting this study, more branches of Iranian universities in Afghanistan were scheduled to open. (Sawahel, 2017) According to the Islamic Republic News Agency, the number of the Afghans pursuing their education in the Iranian universities is estimated at around 15,000. (Islamic Republic News Agency, 2017)

Pragmatically, Iran funds and supports a number of religious, educational and media institutions. The purpose of this considerable help and support from Iran is to maintain an impressive position of influence in Afghanistan, particularly in the western part of the country (Fox News, 2011). For instance, upon opening of the Iranian Center (Iranian Corner) in Kabul University, thousands of copies of books and magazines were provided to the center, and it was equipped with computers and access to the internet. An interesting fact is that there is no restriction on access to web pages, even those that are blocked in Iran by its government (Rohde, 2006).

Iran has provided thousands of books to a number of universities and schools in Afghanistan as well as help for the construction and rebuilding of a notable number of schools. One should, of course, not forget that most of these books and educational materials advance either a political or ideological agenda (Kagan, Kagan, and Pletka, 2008). In 2017, around 250,000 students were enrolled in the universities of Afghanistan, according to information provided by the spokesmen of the Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan, Faisal Amin. As of 2017, there were 32 state universities and 82 private higher education institutes/universities (Khabarnameh News Agency, 2017).

Of course, Iran is not the only regional power to use this soft power tool. For instance, Saudi Arabia's funded educational projects estimate around USD 500 million alone for the Islamic University of Afghanistan in Nangarhar. The funding to Afghanistan's universities thus comes from two opposite Islamic powers: Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran, making Afghanistan generally, and its universities, in particular, an arena for the proxy competition. (Sawahel, 2017)

Iran's regional agenda encompassing its political, ideological and cultural aspirations as a Shia-dominated country is clearly focused on enhancing its position as a center connecting Asia with the Middle East and making this position sustainable, where Afghanistan is allocated a special role (Sawahel, 2017).

6.3.1 Iranian links with Afghan Media and Civil Society Organizations

The link between the soft power activities organized by Qom can be also established with regards to the support of various religious, media and cultural organizations. Thus, according to the head of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS), Iran spends around 100 million USD in Afghanistan on a yearly basis in this sector, because it sees Afghan media and civil society organizations as the conduit for its soft power activities (D. M., personal interview, 12 March 2016).

The involvement of Iran in the media sector is indeed considerable, based on the various accounts coming from media employees. One of the representatives from the Afghan media asserted that in fact, one-third of media agencies in Afghanistan receive financial support from Iran (W. P., personal interview, 23 October 2016). Most likely, such support can induce these media agencies to facilitate Tehran's anti-American propaganda in Afghanistan.

The projects supported by Iran are in areas such as education, media, and certain projects within some civil society organizations. As it was highlighted above, almost a third of all Afghan media, including newspapers, broadcast media, and magazines are backed by Iran, which allows one to assess the involvement of Iran in this sector as substantial. Among these, the Tamadon and Noor TV channels, as well as Ensaf newspaper, have been identified by the Afghan government as being in receipt of financial support from Iran and promoting the Iranian agenda in their programs and articles. Through its influence in the media and in the Afghan Parliament, Iran seems to be targeting a specific set of objectives, among which the most crucial one is conducting anti-US propaganda. While the provision of grants and the financing of the media and civil society sector by the UN, USAID or other western donors looks very natural and is generally assessed as positive when it comes to similar Iranian support of the media and civil society the issue raises numerous concerns. This is often seen as having negative consequences of such involvement for the overall freedom of expression in Afghanistan -

a side effect of such foreign country's financing of an important so-called fourth branch of the power (Tadjbakhsh, 2013, p.42). This inevitably leads to the justified concerns of the Afghan government with such overt and covert steps Iran takes in controlling the dissemination of information and public opinion in Afghanistan, let alone the U.S officials being anxious about the situation which collides with their own objectives.

6.4 The Ministry of Intelligence and Security

The Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) is strongly involved in foreign intelligence activities of Iran in Afghanistan. It is a "key player in Iran's global efforts to export its revolution" whereby "most of the MOIS work is oriented towards building power outside Iran" (Modell and Asher, 2013) and creating an influence of various sorts. According to Amrullah Saleh, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security assign the task of collecting intelligence reports to its Iranian clients in Afghanistan (Majidiyar, 2013). These relationships are publically as well as secretly organized, through literature distribution, offering bribery and gifts etc. (Saleh, 2013). The MOIS officers and Iranian embassies operationalize such programmes "through their cultural centers, reconstruction committees, non-governmental organizations and real businesses" (Modell and Asher, 2013). Beyond that, the MOIS in close connection with the Qods Force, manage relationships with the Taliban insurgents and some smuggling networks in Afghanistan (Joscelyn, 2013).

6.5 Charity Organizations (Imam Khomeini Relief Committee: IKRC)

Besides other initiatives of Iran to dominate in various spheres of neighboring Afghanistan, the U.S. feels threatened by the soft power tactics organized by charity foundations like the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (IKRC) in Afghanistan. The IKRC has a well-defined and institutionalized mode of operation across Afghanistan. It has many offices and 45 branches in Afghanistan (Kutty, 2014), the main are in Kabul, Herat, Zaranj -the capital of Nimruz in western Afghanistan and in Mazar-e Sharif of the Balkh province in the North of Afghanistan. Their stated primary objective is to provide basic aid in the form of food, shelter, clothing and health facilities to the needy, however, their ultimate objective is to influence people's religion, culture, education etc. (Kutty, 2014). Recent statistics reveal that nearly 32,000 Afghans from over 7,000 families have

benefitted from the IKRC aid and educational programs (Riecke and Francke, 2013, p.118). It is not only the U.S. that suspects Iran's soft power strategies to be behind the various programs of IKRC. The Afghan government also accuses the IKRC of being involved in the espionage activity and in furtherance of Iran's multi-pronged interests, under the cover of IKRC. The Afghan government's accusations have been echoed by the information, communicated to me by one of the Afghan parliament members from Farah, who has named the IKRC as "the most important generator of the IRGC soft power in Afghanistan." He further emphasized that in his view "IKRC is the organization where Iranian intelligence is working covertly under the purpose of humanitarian aid." (B. R., personal interview, 11 March 2016)

The Imam Khomeini Relief Committee became active across Afghanistan in the 1990's. The IKRC's diversified program is not limited to Iran's Afghan borders but stretches beyond (Modell and Asher, 2013). However, its action plan remains largely intended for the *Shia* communities in major Afghan cities and provinces, most importantly in Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif and Bamyan province. On the Taliban's assumption, its operational offices were shifted from Kabul to Pul-e Khomri, the capital of the northern Baghlan Province, and to the Punjab district in Bamyan Province. It had to close many of its offices because of Taliban threats across the country though it continued with its assistance programs in the Tajikistan-bordering Northern Afghan provinces. This mode of proxy programming, involving a third country (Tajikistan), alters Iran's intervention into a classic tool of soft power in Afghanistan (Alfoneh and Majidiyar, 2010).

It must be once again highlighted that the organizations, such as the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee are under the control and supervision of Iran's Supreme Leader. The IKRC also happens to be a very rich and ostensibly respectable committee, primarily because it survives on government funding, huge donations from inside and outside of Iran from both private and public individuals and communities, religious taxes, fundraising activities and its money and assets (belongings of the committee). The IKRC, as an integral part of Iran's greater objective of using soft tactics to wield increasing influence on the territory of Afghanistan, has been actively promoting Iran's ideological and political mandates beyond the borders of Iran (Alfoneh and Majidiyar, 2010).

In his interview to Afghan Voice News Agency, Raza Salm Abadi, the Chair of IKRC said that the IKRC has four central offices, which manage the work of other local

offices around the country (Afghanistan): in Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, Kabul, and Nimroz. Salm Abadi. He provided interesting statistics that “the IKRC provides humanitarian aid and provisional training to 170 thousand persons who come from 70 thousand families. IKRC provides families with a so-called ‘coupon book’ and based on this document they receive the aid from the IKRC” (Afghan Voice Agency, 2014).

Although IKRC is the main actor involved in the above activities, according to the head of the NGO department of the Ministry of Economy of Afghanistan, “...apart from IKRC, there are three more Iranian humanitarian aid organizations which are working in some parts of Afghanistan: the first one is “Sabz-e Parsian” in Kabul, Herat and Takhar provinces, which provides health facilities. The second organization is “Basir” and the third one is “Hami”, which focuses on women and children” (R. B., personal interview, 16 March 2015). It was not possible to trace the affiliations of these three organizations with IKRC, although there are also no accounts that would speak against the existence of such connections, either.

Apart from the above activities, the IKRC makes its presence felt by organizing events on the occasions of the Iranian Revolutionary Day, Quds Day²¹, Khomeini's death anniversary, Ashura and Ramadan. It also conducts certain events to show solidarity with and express concern about the tyranny and oppression of their fellow Muslims across the world. Both common people and the local ruling elites of Afghanistan participate in such events (Alfoneh and Majidyar, 2010).

The IKRC has a profile of providing aid and assistance to the Afghans (approximately to 170,000 all over Afghanistan). It organizes vocational training programs for men and women in Herat, Farah, and Nimroz. Each year IKRC supplying 10,000 thousand books and stationery to school children in western Afghanistan and provided scholarships worth 1000 Afs. (equal to about 20 USD) to each student. It organized marriages of orphans and helped each such family with 220 USD for meeting their immediate needs (Afghan voice agency, 2014). On the birthday of Fatima Zahra (the daughter of Prophet Mohammad), the IKRC managed the marriage of 22 couples in Herat province. Thus, IKRC ensures Iran's presence at the very core of the Afghan society – in the lives of the separately taken families and individuals.

²¹ Official day in Islamic calendar, last day of Ramadan to show the unity with Palestinians.

The effects of the charity work of IKRC as one of the most powerful institution of Iran implementing soft power policies is enormous due to its vast financial sources and due to the wide spectrum of activities it is involved in, covering not only educational and religious spheres but also personal lives of Afghan population, which increases sympathies among vulnerable Shia population and sometimes even beyond. This often creates an atmosphere of trust, encouraging Afghans to willingly share valuable information Iran might be interested in, as a gratitude for Iranian charity activities.

6.6 Council on Afghanistan in the Office of the Supreme Leader

The Council on Afghanistan in the Office of the Supreme Leader is another major appendage in Iranian policy-making towards Afghanistan. This council played a tremendous role during the civil war in Afghanistan. Indeed, its role is diversified: mobilizing Hazara ethnic groups, organizing cultural events, providing economic support and collecting data for the office of the Supreme Leader. In addition, it is involved in some research-oriented projects meant for data collection and social mapping of *Shia* groups in Afghanistan (Bakhtyari, 2003, p.250). Due to the fact, that this Council is under the immediate supervision of the Supreme Leader, it is quite difficult to find out about it in more detail, although some information could be obtained from Afghan sources. Thus, according to information, provided to me by a former Afghan diplomat in Iran:

“The Council [Author's note: The Council on Afghanistan in the Office of Supreme Leader] was most active during the Jihad in Afghanistan [Author's note: 1979-1991, during the time of the Soviet occupation] and later on during the civil war (from 1991 to 2001). The council provided information to the Leader and delivered the Leader's views and guidelines to other institutions within Iran to organize their activities and involvement, based on it. The Council also coordinated meetings between Iranian officials and Afghan Mujahideen leaders in order to provide Afghan fighters with financial support during the Russians [Author's note: during the Soviet occupation] and later on for the fight with Taliban. Members of the Council have good relations, I would say even; - close ties with the Shia clerics in Afghanistan”. (K. N., personal interview, 09 April 2017)

For the reasons stated above, it is not possible to cross-check this information but based on the demeanor of the interview partner and the circumstances surrounding my interview, I found the source to be credible.

6.7 Iranian diplomatic missions

Afghanistan began its diplomatic relationship with Iran following the declaration of independence in 1919. The Friendship and Neutrality Treaty was signed between Iran and Afghanistan on June 22, 1921 (Hoshang, 1996, p.37). In the same year, Iran established its embassy in Kabul (Babahi and Riza, 1996, p.325). In the same year, King Amanullah Khan of the Kingdom of Afghanistan sent a delegation headed by Abdul Aziz Khan on a diplomatic mission to Iran.

The Friendship and Neutrality Treaty declared that: 1. Afghanistan and Iran would keep friendly relations; 2. The trade relations between Iran and Afghanistan are hence established; 3. Apart from the embassy in Tehran, Afghanistan will open a consular office in the Iranian city – Mashhad; and 4. Both countries would build strong political relations and these relations would be at the level of embassies (Mojda, 2010). The Treaty thus has placed a strong emphasis on the building of sustainable diplomatic ties that would enable the two states to build the political and economic, inter alia trade, cooperation.

Indeed, as the treaty foresaw, during the reign of the last King of Afghanistan, Mohammad Zahir Shah, Iran had a stable economic and political relationship with Afghanistan. When the Islamic Revolution took place in Iran and the new leadership with the Islamic ideology came to power, Iran's foreign policy changed, especially towards Afghanistan. The political regime of Afghanistan has also undergone transformation and Imam Khomeini opposed the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, calling it a historical mistake. Consequently, Iran supported Afghan Mujahideen in their fight against the Red Army (Mazari, 2009). Later on, such support was provided to the Taliban. This support, though certainly never confirmed by the Iranian diplomatic missions, is nevertheless evidenced by the manner in which Iran's diplomats comment on the issue. Thus, in 2016 the Ambassador of Iran to Afghanistan Mohammad Reza Behrami clearly admitted that "Iran maintains contacts with the Taliban" (News Desk, 2017), though explained Iran's objectives as "intelligence purposes". It seems that the diplomat was quite modest in explaining the real nature of such existing ties, because, even Iranian media Jahan News reported that the Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour (before he was killed in Pakistan in a U.S. drone strike in 2016) had not only spent two months in Iran but also held intensive meetings with various Iranian authorities (Majidiyar, 2017). However, the link between the Taliban and Iran was "formalized" much earlier, already

in 2014, when the Taliban were allowed to establish their representative premises in Iran (News Desk, 2017).

Today, apart from the Iranian embassy in Kabul, the consulate departments of IRI are open in Balkh, Herat, Kandahar and Nangarhar provinces. According to embassy and consulate officials, Iran issues one thousand visas to Afghans on a daily basis. (Bakhtar News Agency, 2017)

Iranian diplomatic missions, allegedly, actively interfere in the political decision-making process in Afghanistan using various means of leverage at their disposal. There are accounts on IRGC's presence in the diplomatic representations of Iran, with an aim to ensure the goals of Revolutionary Guards. Thus, according to the head of the Afghan political party, *Hambastagii Milli* (National Unity Party),

“most the members of embassy and other Iranian agencies in Afghanistan are *Sepah* members, they are operating and enjoying the diplomatic immunity and meeting Afghan officials, politicians and other relevant actors under the name of Iranian diplomats. When the Taliban killed nine Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e-Sharif in 1998, later it became clear that they were also *Sepah* members.” (N. K., personal interview, 22 March 2018).

The IRGC presence in the diplomatic corps of Iran is concerned, above all, with the decisions taken in Afghanistan with regards to the issues that Iran sees as threatening its own security, even at the expense of Afghanistan's political interests. Any interference in the decision-making processes to address this concern is, arguably, undermining Afghanistan's sovereignty as an independent state and leading to internal instability and it has a negative impact on Kabul's political will.

6.8 Summary

This chapter has elaborated on the security and political aspects of Iran's foreign policy with regards to Afghanistan. Towards this end, several institutions of Iran were discussed and their role in the implementation of security and political interests of Iran was analyzed.

It was demonstrated that Iran has a complex and often overlapping institutional setup. Some of these institutions are meant to execute foreign policy in Afghanistan and elsewhere, while the others focus primarily on Afghanistan. Their job profile is varied and ranges from Iran's political, diplomatic and strategic relations to trade, cultural and

scientific ties with Afghanistan. Their activities are overt in some cases and secretive and covert when it comes to security issues. The choice is substantiated by the aims in Iran's foreign policy agenda in the particular moment. The funds allocated by the Iranian government serve the purpose of dissemination of certain information and views in favor of Iran and its foreign policy objectives in Afghanistan.

While one cannot provide an exhaustive list with all possible Iranian institutions involved in the security and political aspects of the foreign policy implementation in Afghanistan, it became evident in the course of analysis that there are several entities/categories of institutions, which are the most crucial. All of them have been analyzed above in relation to the activities they engage in or to which they contribute.

The security and political interests Iran pursues in Afghanistan, as this chapter was able to convey and demonstrate, are in alignment with the argument of the present study, in that they are the main interests of Iran's foreign policy towards its neighbor and their interplay often contributes to the contradictory policies Iran pursues.

To conclude, Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan is based on two interrelated factors: the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, which Iran sees as a direct threat to its national security, and the Pashtun-dominated government in Kabul, which has relied on strong relations with the U.S. and with Saudi Arabia – Iran's well-known rival. As a result, Iran is forced to constantly check its moves against any possible risks that may run in contradiction with its aspirations as a realist state. This fact shapes Iran's course of policy towards Afghanistan and is rooted in its geostrategic and security threats concerns as well as geopolitical considerations. Despite the fact that there are instances where interests of Tehran and Washington may coincide in Afghanistan, Iran still considers the U.S. as its major rival when it comes to its own security interests, which leads to the fact that some of the political interests of Iran in Afghanistan may suffer from such circumstances. This is because Iran is also concerned by the political chaos in Afghanistan, the sphere of concern where it might have created an alliance with the US, but security concerns do prevail greatly over the political ones.

Chapter 7. Iran's Economic Policy in Relation to Afghanistan

7.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the main aspects of Iran's economic policy in relation to Afghanistan from 2001 through 2014 and beyond to 2016 when the information is relevant to the discussion. The analysis of Iran's economic policy has been done through empirical investigation and normative exposition. Iran's economic policy towards Afghanistan has been defined by the mosaic of internal developments, by its economic relations with Afghanistan and the political competitive relations with the regional and international players in Afghanistan predominantly the political exhibitionism of the United States in Afghanistan.

The significance of Afghanistan in economic terms for various regional, as well as inter-regional state and non-state actors, is reflected by the fact that Afghanistan is closely surrounded by two of the major economic corridors and a potential third corridor developing in the region. On its South lies the famous Gwadar port located in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan and known to feature prominently in the much-anticipated China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that is also considered to be a link between the One Belt One Road and Maritime Silk Road projects. On the other hand, Chabahar port lies on the South Western side of Afghanistan which serves as Iran's only oceanic port and it is developed jointly by Iran and India, for latter is developing Chabahar port to open a trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia without crossing over Pakistan. Chabahar port is also expected to act as a counter to the Gwadar port in Pakistan, barely 100km away, which is being developed by China (Srivastava, 2017). On the North-Eastern side of Afghanistan lies Wakhan Corridor in the Badakshan province, which connects Afghanistan to China and has historically been used exclusively for trade and by travelers. Energy-dependent China has eyes on the unexplored mineral and hydrocarbon reserves of Afghanistan and there has been speculation that China might use Wakhan Corridor to fulfill its ever-growing energy needs.

The study interprets Iran's economic behavior towards Afghanistan on the basis of realism. Iran can be described as a realist, goal-oriented agent. Iran's actions are based on cost-benefit calculations albeit the costs are purely economic in nature yet the benefits are both economic as well as political in nature. In order to understand Iran's economic

policy regarding Afghanistan, it is important to study material objectives and factors and the available data, such as the trade relations between the two countries, Iranian investment in Afghanistan, the importance of economic relations between the two countries and the geo-economic importance of Afghanistan to Iran's regional economic goals. This chapter is more focused on the realist variables – trade, resources and economic power. Relevant information on the trade volume and its changes, foreign direct investment in Afghanistan in general and the mutual relative importance of trade between Afghanistan and Iran unfold in the course of the present chapter.

In accordance with the realism approach, more economic power leads to more assertive policies, and this can be observed in the case of Iranian economic policy towards Afghanistan and other regional countries. Although the Iranian state and private businesses were influenced by the international sanctions, the Iranian government managed to improve its internal industry and economic relations with Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and India at the regional level.

This chapter unfolds in the following way: Section 7.1 is an introduction to Iran's economic policy in relation to Afghanistan, which includes the key findings. The subsequent sections explain the main important dimensions of Iran's economic policy towards Afghanistan. Thus, Section 7.2 provides the general description of Iran's economic policy towards Afghanistan. Section 7.3 analyzes the road infrastructure. Section 7.4 focuses on the railway network. The Iranian development aid is elaborated on in Section 7.5, whereas it is focused on the post-Taliban Afghanistan. Iran's Trade relationship with Afghanistan's western region (Herat, Farah, and Nimroz provinces) is discussed in Section 7.6. Challenges for the local Afghan traders at the ground level are analyzed in Section 7.7. Finally, Section 7.8 summarizes the outcomes of the chapter.

Subsequently, this chapter is internally structured in two parts. The first part will explain the economic involvement of Iran in Afghanistan from 2001 (Macro-Economic), development aid for construction and reconstruction projects in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the largest Iranian construction and reconstruction projects, with a focus on the bordering region of Afghanistan with Iran. The second part will shed light on the ongoing daily trade, Iranian economic interests, its presence in the region (Herat, Nimroz, and Farah provinces) and trade exchange (Micro-economics) at the border area. Since we are talking about daily trade here and, a country does daily trade usually with areas closer to it and that is the case with provinces like Nimroz, Herat and Farah located

on the western side of Afghanistan bordering Iran. Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan has largely been defined by historical and cultural factors in addition to the ideological affiliation with the minority Tajiks and Hazaras. Today's Afghanistan has periodically been ruled by the erstwhile Persian and Sassanid empires over a period of 2000 years and some historians still consider western Afghanistan as part of Iran. After the loss in the Anglo-Persian War (1856-1857) Iran had to give up its demand on the return of Herat. Many Iranians continue to view western Afghanistan as part of Iran's natural sphere of cultural, religious, and political influence since a significant number of Afghans follow Persian cultural traditions like the Nowruz (Persian New Year) and speak Dari language, which is very similar to the Farsi language aside from the dialectical intonation (Nader and Laha, 2011).

The chapter's main aim is to provide a general economic intervention of Iran in Afghanistan rather than to compile a precise and comprehensive economic report. The chapter concludes with an analytical interpretation in the form of its political motivations and repercussions.

7.2 Iran's Economic policy towards Afghanistan: General description

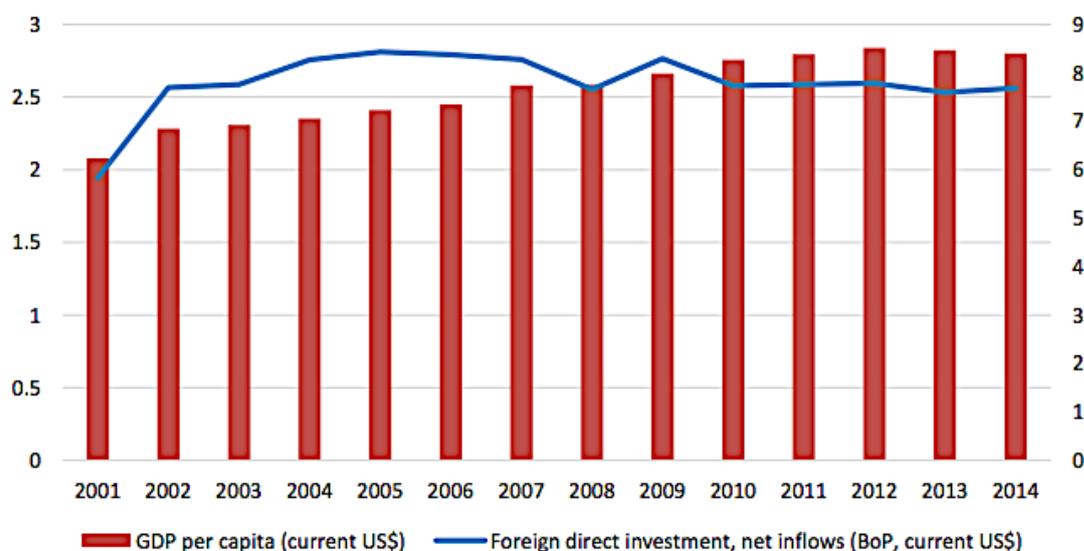
This section summarizes the main concepts of the Iranian economic policy in relations to Afghanistan. The section is also based on empirical data collected both in Afghanistan and Iran (interviews) and information released by the officials in Kabul, Herat, Nimroz, Farah, provinces of Afghanistan, Mashhad and Tehran in Iran. Iranian economic policy vis-a-vis Afghanistan can be described by the domestic political and security developments in both Iran and Afghanistan.

The fall of the Taliban in 2001 provided refurbished opportunity not only for Iran but also for international and regional players to invest in Afghanistan. Afghanistan's GDP (from 2001 to 2014) was very much influenced by the Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in Afghanistan's economy. The Figure 2 below, "Total Foreign Direct Investment and Gross Domestic Product of Afghanistan", demonstrates the direct dependence between the foreign direct investment and the economic growth (GDP per capita) in Afghanistan.

For Afghanistan, it is important to have close economic and trade relations with Iran among other regional countries. Iran is one of the biggest regional players investing

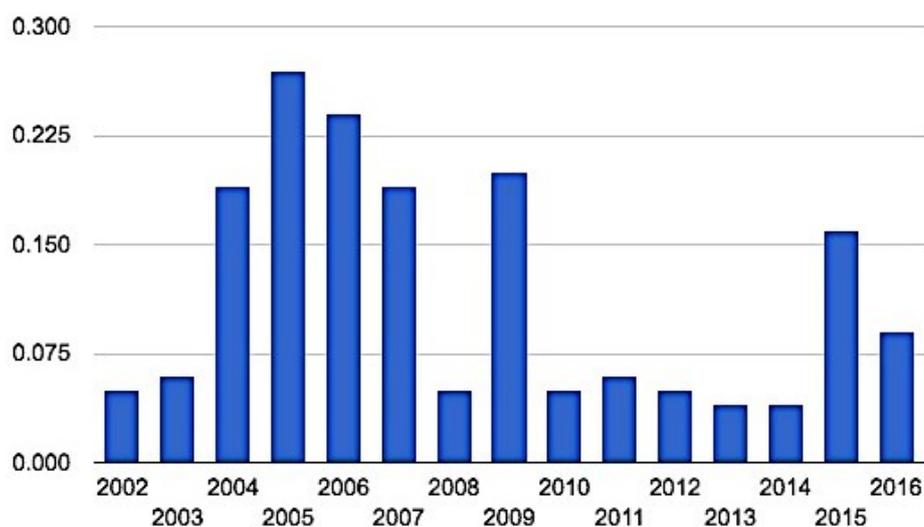
in Afghanistan and running large-scale developmental projects in Afghanistan. Surprisingly, there is no information available on Iran's FDI in Afghanistan, as a separate country, in the publicly available sources including from the common points of reference such as the World Bank and the IMF. The only information one is able to obtain is the overall FDI in Afghanistan which is demonstrated in the Figure 3.

Figure 2. FDI and GDP of Afghanistan



Source: Tahiri, 2017, p.10.

Figure 3. Afghanistan - Foreign Direct Investment (billion USD)

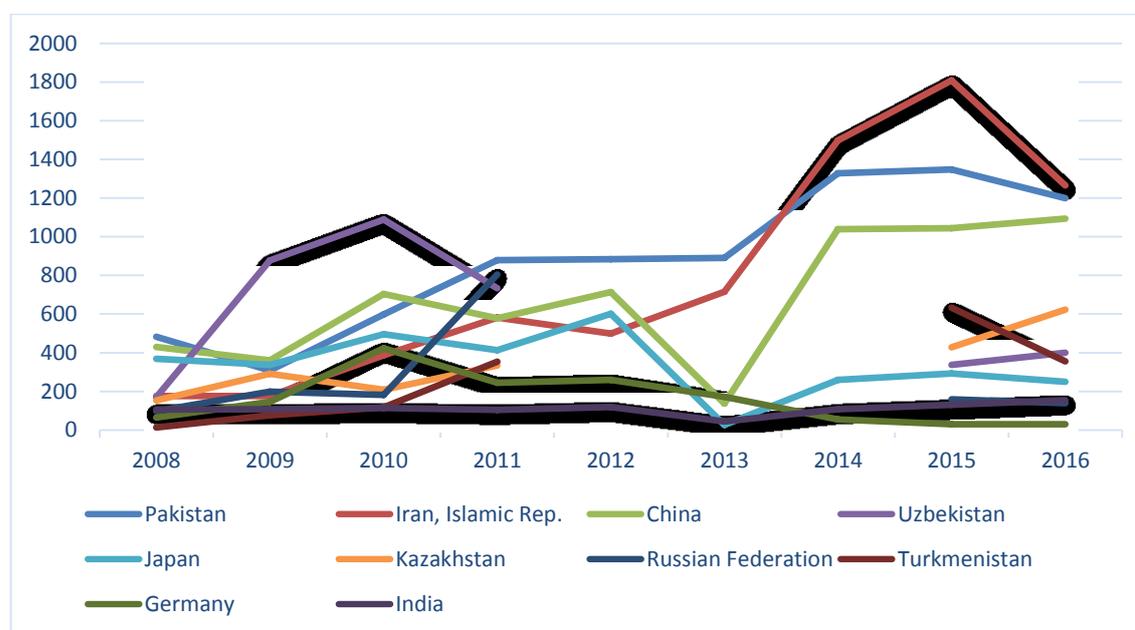


Source: The Global Economy, 2016.

If one interprets the above graph, it appears that the total FDI was the lowest in 2013 and 2014, which, according to, the Head of Afghanistan Investment Supporting Agency, was due to the “aggravation of the security situation in Afghanistan in light of the international troops withdrawal, lack of strategies within Afghanistan for creation of favorable climate for foreign investments and corruption within the Afghan government”, he also identifies “poor infrastructure and lack of industrial park” among the challenges. (Q. H., personal interview, 22 April 2016)

Due to the lack of necessary information (FDI per countries), we cannot state beyond a doubt that Iran is the biggest investor in Afghanistan, neither can we compare the volume of investments of Iran with other countries. Nevertheless, Iran is a significant trade partner of Afghanistan today and was between 2008 and 2016. The below several diagrams demonstrate the trade relations of Afghanistan not only with Iran but also with other states, which reveals the relative importance of the trade with Iran in comparison to other countries. Iran clearly leads when it comes to trade imports from this country in comparison to other trade partners of Afghanistan from 2014 onwards which is illustrated in the graph below.

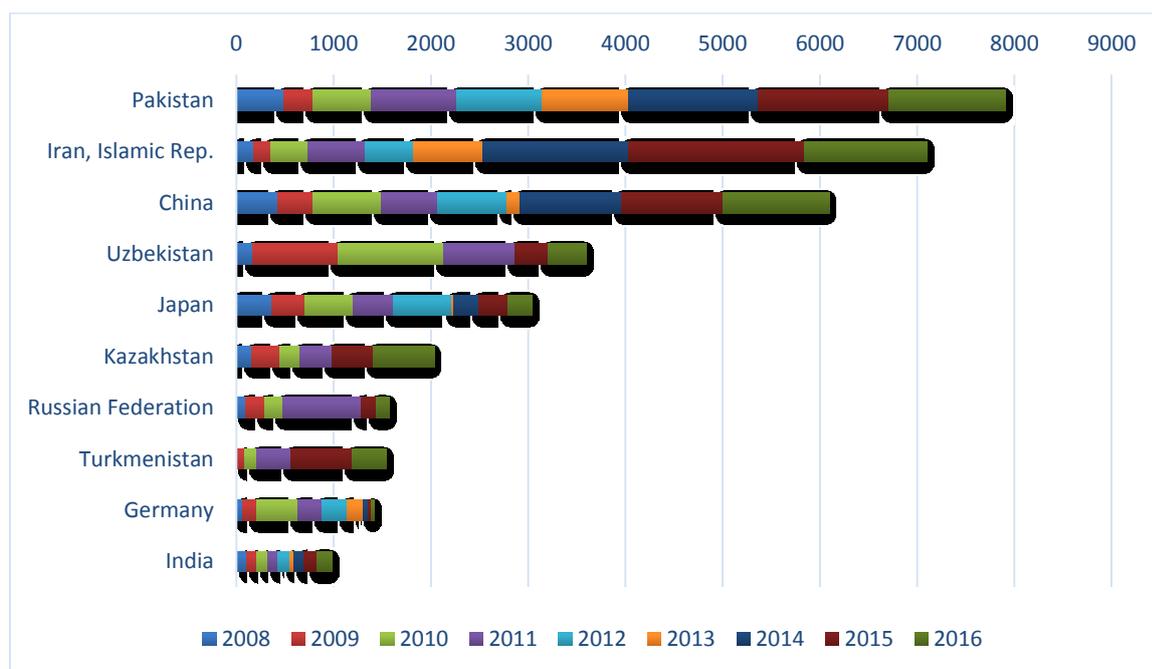
Figure 4. Afghanistan Imports by Year (2008-2016) (in USD Millions)



Note: Author's compilation. Data derived from World Integrated Trade Solution, 2016b.

The next chart also clearly demonstrates that the total volume of imports from Iran between 2008 and 2016 was second highest after Pakistan, which allows one to conclude that Iran was Afghanistan's most important trade partner during the timeframe 2008-2016, at the very least.

Figure 5. Afghanistan Imports by Country (2008-2016) (in USD Millions)



Note: Author's compilation. Data derived from World Integrated Trade Solution, 2016b.

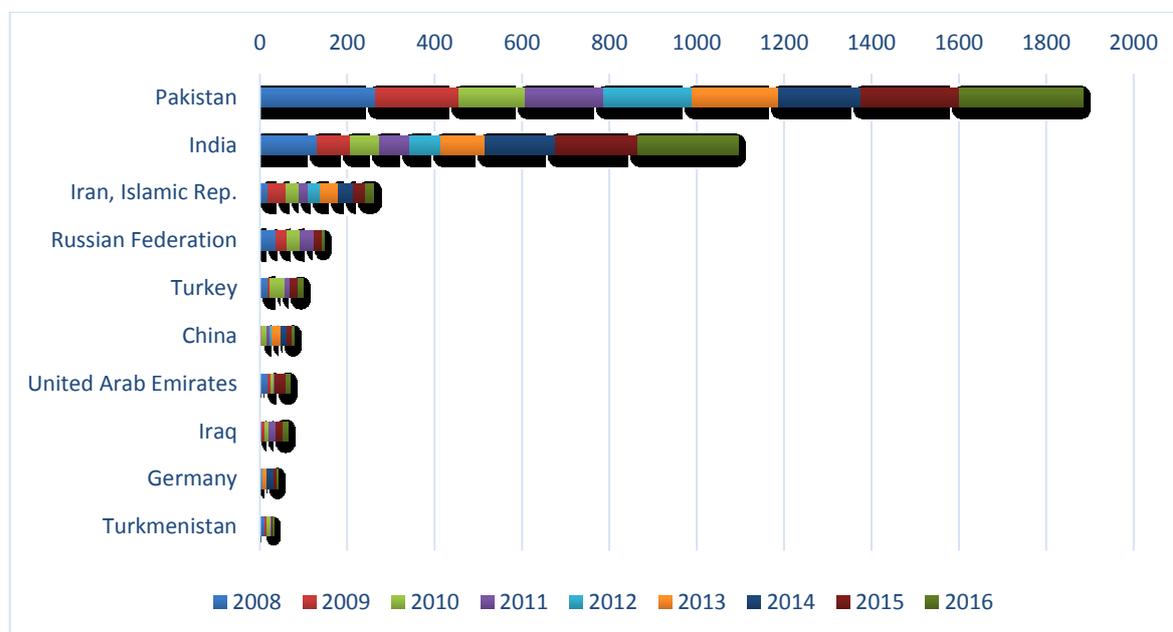
Afghanistan's exports to Iran were very much lower than the imports from Iran as the Figure 6 demonstrates, although Iran still ranks as the third country to which Afghanistan exports, after Pakistan and India.

This trade imbalance justifies the necessity to analyze Iran-Afghanistan's trade relations and Iran's economic policy towards Afghanistan in the present chapter, as influencing overall foreign policy of Iran with regards to Afghanistan.

Iran has a lot at stake in Afghanistan vis-à-vis the former's economic expansion and also in the form of the substantial market that Afghanistan, with its total population of approximately 34 million, provides for goods and services from Iran. Furthermore, for Iran, Afghanistan is the transit of its "Look to the East" strategy, which mainly seeks increased energy and economic relations between Iran and eastern neighbors, both near and far, including India, Pakistan, China and Japan. A stable Afghanistan means a stable

impact on the economic policy of Iran at least towards its eastern fronts. As a result, Iran has been part of almost all state building measures in post-Taliban Afghanistan within this time period.

Figure 6. Afghanistan Exports by Country (2008-2016) (in USD Millions)



Note: Author's compilation. Data derived from World Integrated Trade Solution, 2016a.

The presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani in Iran is a characteristic of the time when pragmatism came to serve the interests of the country by substituting the former idealism approach. Islamic values are a matter that the statesmen consider while shaping this pragmatic course of foreign policy and fulfilling economic needs of Iran, not the other way around. Under his leadership, the country managed to make use of its potential, thus aiming to fulfill the deficiencies that such nature of the state may have in the international arena (Sarmadi and Badri, 2017). In relation to the tenure of the presidency of Rafsanjani, Iran made substantial use of its economic reformism in order to focus on the much needed state building from a modernist perspective. At the forefront of its foreign policy, it placed the national and regional interests (including a significant focus on Afghanistan) while trying to avoid any confrontations with the foreign counterparts. Thus, the geopolitical era of the Rafsanjani presidency enabled Iran to reconnect to the rest of the world after years of isolation, brought about by the Islamic revolution (Sarmadi and Badri, 2017).

The economic relationship between Iran and Afghanistan is in a way imbalanced from a neutral perspective. The trade relationship between the two countries is symbolic of the trade surplus on part of Iran and the trade deficit on the part of Afghanistan. A trade surplus means that exports are higher than imports and a trade deficit means that imports are higher than exports. In the case of the Iran-Afghanistan trading relationship, both the trade surplus and the trade deficit are very high which is a cause of concern particularly for Afghanistan. From an economic perspective, and for an emerging market like Afghanistan, a trade deficit might not be that disturbing because of the fact that for an emerging market much needs to be imported to upgrade its market infrastructure and product diversification. Usually, a uniform, gradual increase in the exports (of the weaker country) will eventually mean a uniform reduction in the import-export ratio, which is characteristic of a progressive economic relationship between two countries. But, as the analysis demonstrates, in the case of the Iran-Afghanistan trade relationship, the trade deficit for Afghanistan has shown no uniform progress but rather has non-uniform irregularities.

Table 1. Iran's trade with Afghanistan (in USD Millions)

Fiscal Year	Export	Import	Surplus
March 2005-2006	497	6	491
March 06-07	515	9	506
March 07-08	539	9	530
March 08-09	633	11	622
March 09-10	1002	15	987
March 10-11	1362	12	1350
March 11-12	2179	10	2169
March 12-13	2874	2	2872
March 13-14	2417	32	2385
March 14-15	2376	13	2363
March 15-16	2582	26	2556

Source: Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA²²), 2017.

²² ISNA was established in December 1999 in order to report on news from Iranian universities. It now covers a variety of national and international topics. Editors and correspondents are themselves students in a

The statistical representation of the trade between Iran and Afghanistan above is clearly illustrative of the economic dominance of Iran. The massive import –export surplus in favor of Iran and to a large extent against Afghanistan has been perceived as a threat for their future relationship from an Afghan perspective as articulated by former Secretary-General of Iran-Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Trade Mozaffar Alikhani. In summarizing its interview with Mr. Alikhani, the Financial Tribune reported that,

“Afghans are unhappy about the ongoing trend in bilateral ties which, in his opinion, is expected to harm Iran’s economic ties with the neighboring country in the long run. In a meeting with Hassan Rouhani on the sidelines of his swearing-in ceremony as Iran’s president for the second term, Alikhani said Afghan President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai expressed concern and dissatisfaction with the current trend of economic exchanges between the two nations, stressing the importance of doing trade in a more ‘bilateral’ and ‘balanced’ manner”. (Shirdelian, 2017).

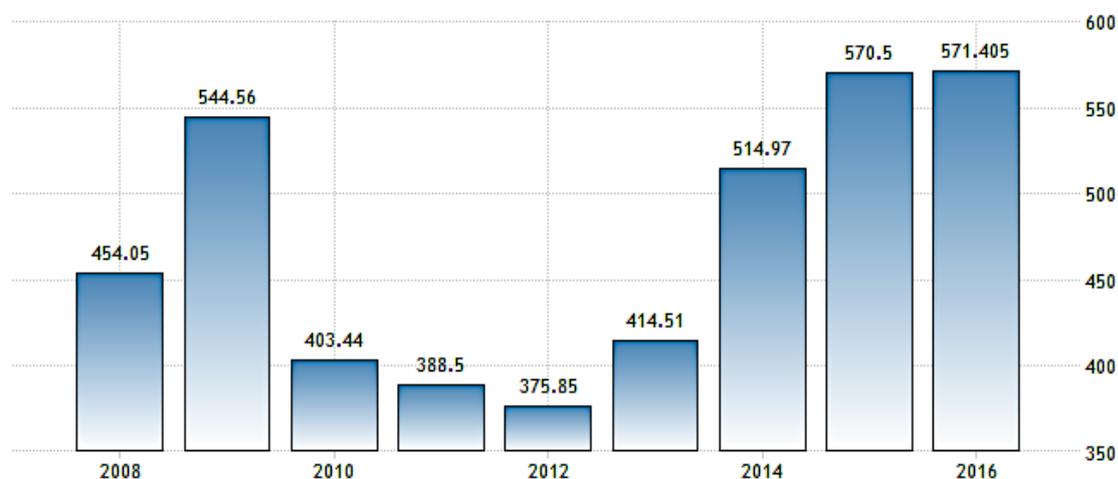
A very interesting observation revealed through the table above (Iran-Afghan Trade) reflects that since 2005-2006, there has been a uniform and progressive increase in the imports from Iran to Afghanistan, beginning with 497 million USD to 2582 million USD up to the year 2015-2016. On the contrary, the picture is totally different from an Afghan perspective. The exports from Afghanistan to Iran beginning from the financial year 2005-2006 were 6 million USD and then, 32 million USD in 2013-2014, 13 million USD in 2014-2015 and 26 million USD in 2015-2016.

It is quite surprising to see the exports of Afghanistan to Iran at such a low when compared to the overall exports of Afghanistan in general and to other regional countries, as demonstrated by the following statistical depictions.

As per the reports of Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) the top export destinations of Afghanistan (2016) are: India (220 million USD), Pakistan (199 million USD), Iran (15.1 million USD), Iraq (10.1 million USD) and Turkey (9.1 million USD) (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2016a).

variety of subjects, many of them are volunteers (nearly 1000). ISNA is considered by Western media to be one of the most independent and moderate media organizations in Iran, and is often quoted. "While taking a reformist view of events, ISNA has managed to remain politically independent. It has, however, maintained its loyalty to the former president and carries a section devoted to "Khatami's perspectives". Although it is generally considered independent, the ISNA is financially supported in part by the Iranian government and is supported by ACECR (Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research), another student organization.

Figure 7. Afghanistan Exports (in USD Millions)



Source: Trading Economics, 2018.

Reflecting upon the mosaic of hurdles that characterize the negative trade balance between Iran and Afghanistan from an Afghan perspective, Alikhani emphasized the issues that revolve around the notion of “Technical Health Certificates”. He stated that,

“Iranian authorities are super strict when it comes to issuing the Certificate of Veterinary Inspection to allow the import of livestock and related products, noting that Afghan products often do not meet the requirements set out by the Iran Veterinary Organization. A CVI, also known as a Health Certificate, is an official document issued by a federal, state, tribal or accredited veterinarian certifying that the animals identified on the document have been inspected and were found to satisfy the regulations pertaining to their intended movement—within the same state, between states, or internationally” (Shirdelian, 2017).

As per Alikhani, visa issuance is another major contributory factor for this significant import-export imbalance (negative trade balance) as the procedures are very strict and complex. In furtherance, he also emphasizes that Iran should not merely see Afghanistan as a consumer market rather must maintain the balance of import-export ratio so that both countries benefit from each other. (Shirdelian, 2017). Another major reason could be the growing political and diplomatic proximity between Afghanistan and India (since India happens to be the major export destination of Afghanistan as revealed in the stats aforementioned) or the low tariffs imposed upon the goods by the other countries. It is also very interesting to mention here that the products usually exported by Afghanistan are in less demand in the Iranian markets since the latter also has a substantial production of such products. For example, as per the reports of OEC, the top exports of Afghanistan

are Grapes (96.4 million USD), Vegetable Saps (85.9 million USD), Other Nuts (55.9 million USD), Knotted Carpets (39 million USD) and Tropical Fruits (33.9 million USD), using the 1992 revision of the HS (Harmonized System) classification (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2016a) and Iran already has a domestic potential for a significant production of such items. As per the reports of OEC, the most dominant products that are imported from outside include (2015): Cars (3.3%), Corn (2.1%), Vehicle Parts (2.1%), Rolled Steel (2.0%), Jewellery (2.0%), Rice (1.8%), Wheat (1.6%), Soya beans (1.4%). (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2016b).

Besides, Afghanistan with a low industrial potential as compared to Iran is also one of the reasons for this economic lag on part of the former. Even though the magnitude of trade is not that substantial, yet as per the reports of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) Iran retained its position as the country's largest trade partner for 2016. Statistics by the ACCI shows that Iran's trade value with Afghanistan for 2016 was 1.8 billion USD. However, trade volumes between Afghanistan and Pakistan for 2016 dropped by 1.2 billion USD in the backdrop of the strict border management process initiated by Pakistan in the form of closure of key crossings in the Afghan-Pak border and fresh border restrictions imposed. (Jahanmal, 2017) Based on the ACCI's statistics, trade volumes between Afghanistan and Iran is estimated to total almost 2 billion USD, with Pakistan at 1.3 billion USD, China at 1 billion USD, Turkmenistan at 700 million USD and with Kazakhstan at 500 million USD, and this statistical representation clearly reflects that Iran is the most important trading partner for Afghanistan. (Jahanmal, 2017).

One of the major prerequisites for the development of trade between the two countries is the connection through roads and maritime, and most importantly how developed is their respective infrastructure. Considering that Afghanistan is a landlocked country with no direct access to sea, construction and development of roads and other related routes are of tremendous significance. Consequently, the next part of this chapter deals with the status of road infrastructure between the two countries and how this development has significantly led to more progressive economic interaction between the two countries. The role of India in the development of road infrastructure in Afghanistan and also Iran (in the form of the Chabahar Port) is inevitable since the former has invested a lot of money and manpower in doing so. Therefore, arguably India also plays a significant role in the development of trade and economic relations between Iran and

Afghanistan, not to forget there are a number of national interests at stake as far as India is concerned.

7.3 Road infrastructure

In January 2005, a new 122-kilometre highway was inaugurated (Moradi and Abolfathi, 2012). The highway, connecting Herat with Iran, was constructed by Iran. In addition, to connect western Afghanistan with the Iranian port of Chabahar which is located in the Gulf of Oman in southwestern Iran, Iran is constructing a railway system and a road jointly with India; this will create some competition with the Pakistani port of Gwadar (Weinbaum, 2006, p.13; Rubin, 2008, p.5).

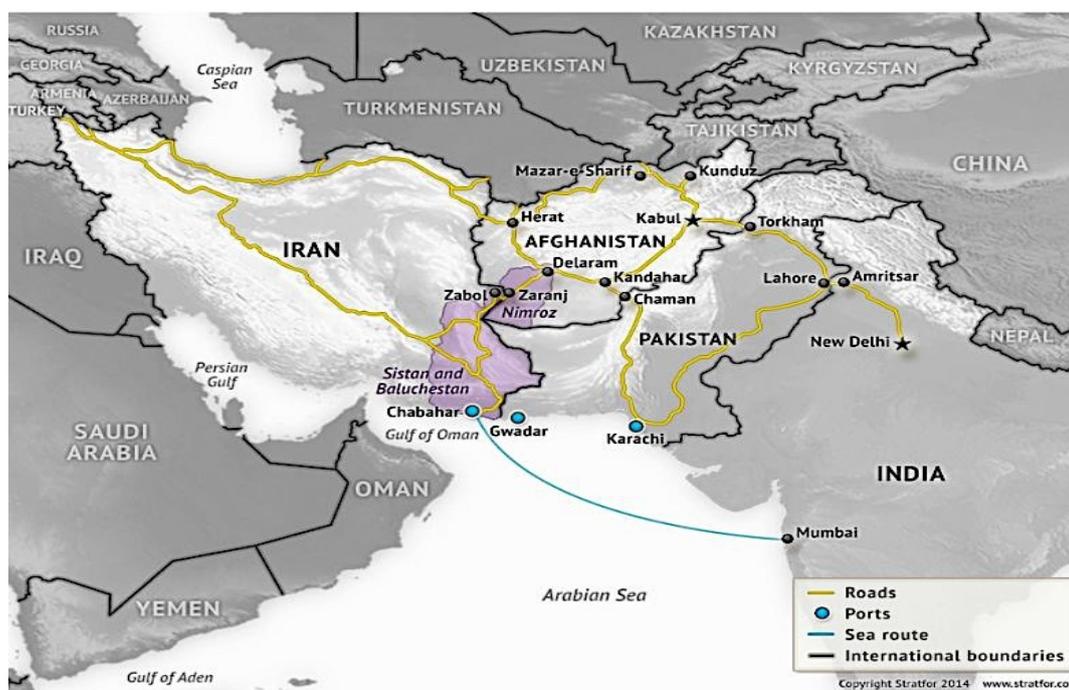
Delaram-Zaranj Highway, also known as Route 606A, a 218 km roadway in the Nimruz province of Afghanistan connecting the Delaram district of Farah province in Afghanistan to the border of Iran, was initiated in the year 2005 jointly by the governments of Afghanistan and India. Delaram-Zaranj is a two lane road in Afghanistan that connects the Afghan-Iranian border with the Kandahar-Herat highway in Delaram, thus acting as the main source of connection with the remainder of the country along its major cities (The Hindu, 2009). The distance between the two districts Delaram and Zaranj is covered in only 2 hours as opposed to the 12-14 hours it took prior to the operationalization of Delaram-Zaranj highway. From Zaranj onwards, the diverse roadway connects to Zabol across the border to Iran which further ends up at the port of Chabahar.

The Figure 8 below not only demonstrates the diversity of routes (both land and maritime) across this very significant economic crossroad but clearly reflects the Delaram-Zaranj highway and all its enroute areas unto Chabahar, like, Zabol in Iran. The yellow representation clearly reflects the complex roadways across Pakistan and Iran going across intermediary Afghanistan.

This complex network of roadways has led to the diversification of Afghan access to the outside world as previously Afghanistan was solely dependent on Karachi Port of Pakistan for their economic adventurism into the outside world. "The road is much shorter and more stable than any of the routes in Pakistan, making it perhaps the most efficient means of reaching Afghanistan" (Padukone, 2012). Delaram-Zaranj highway

was inaugurated by Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee in 2009.

Figure 8. Indo-Iranian Trade Routes

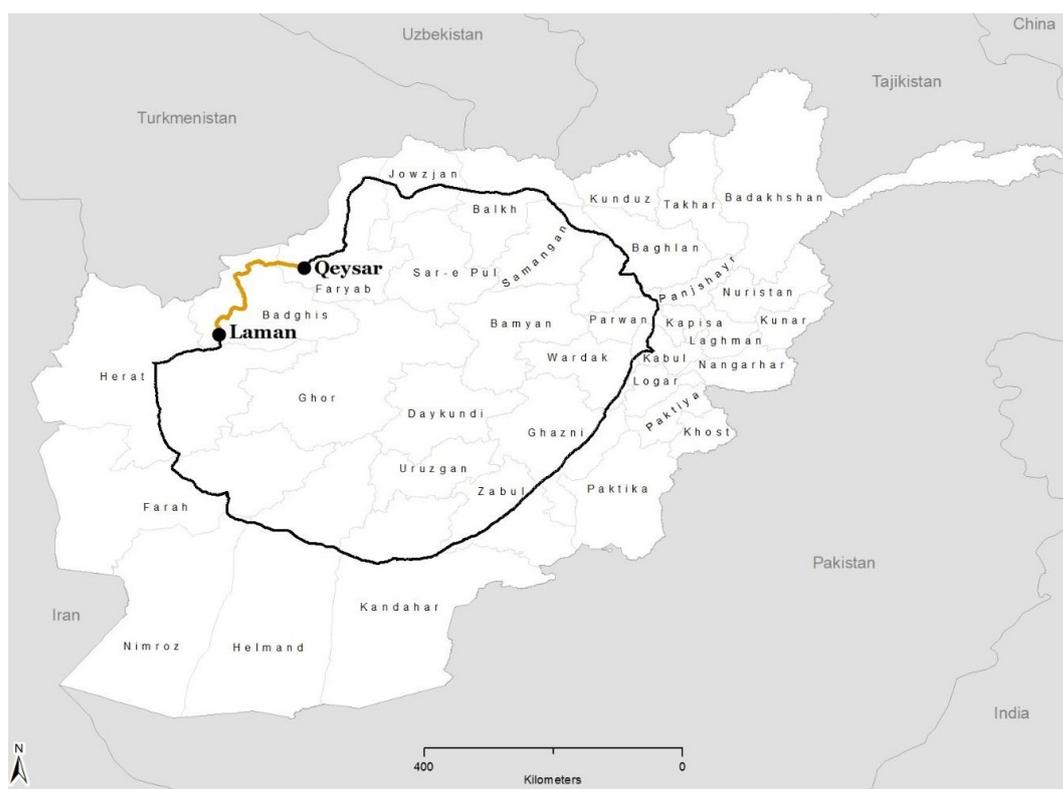


Source: Stratfor Enterprises LLC, 2014.

The government of Iran provided Afghan exporters a ninety percent concession on port fees and a fifty percent discount on warehousing fees. In addition, Afghan vehicles were given full transit rights on the Iranian roads. One of many significant consequences of this road is that it reduces the prominence of Karachi-Kandahar road²³. The Karachi-Kandahar road was the only route to the international market for a long time. However, Afghans are now able to transmit their goods through Chabahar instead of Karachi (Institute for the Study of War, 2010). Furthermore, this highway reduces the distance from the Persian Gulf to Afghanistan. Iran's reconstruction projects also include the asphaltting of more than sixty kilometers of a highway that leads north and paving fifty percent of the streets in Herat (Varner, 2008).

²³ Karachi port is in Pakistan and most of the goods from Pakistan come to Afghanistan by Karachi port.

Figure 9. Afghanistan Ring Road – Laman to Qeysar



Source: *Special IG for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2018.*

Infrastructure development projects that are funded by Iran are mostly designed to build a link between Iran's Gulf ports and Afghanistan. This is to be done in two major steps: by connecting Bandar Abbas and Chabahar to Dogharun and by connecting the two earlier ports to Milak (Sistan Baluchistan). In addition, another project which is in progress will link Khaf, South Khorasan with Herat (Koepke, 2013, p.13). According to the Afghan government, the transit and trade-related issues with Pakistan are having an adverse impact on the economy in Afghanistan, and Afghanistan is, therefore, trying to establish ties and supportive trade relations with Iran to have access to Chabahar port as an "alternative transit route to decrease dependency on Pakistan" (Jahanmal, 2013).

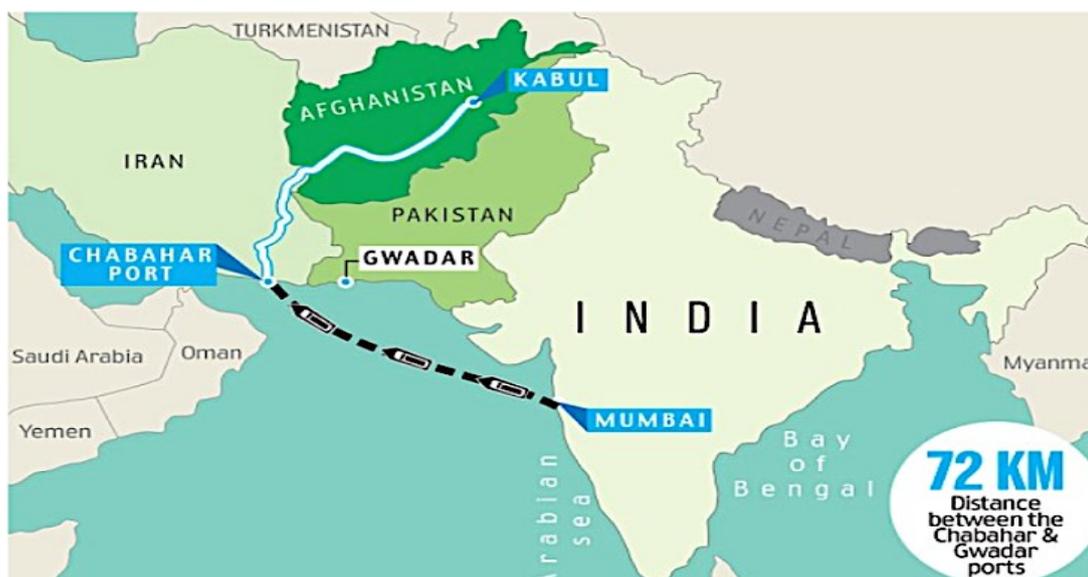
Thus, for instance, the cost of a cargo truck coming to Afghanistan via Pakistani territory is approximately 3000 USD for 40 tons of the goods. Meanwhile, the same amount of goods, if brought to Afghanistan, avoiding the territory of Pakistan will be estimated only 200 USD. Not only price but also uneasy political and security issues between the two countries made Afghanistan look for alternatives. One of such solutions

to become more independent from Pakistan for Afghanistan is to bring the goods through the Chabahar city of Iran (Iran Review, 2016).

Based on the Trade and Transport Agreement among the three countries (Iran, India, and Afghanistan), Zahidan-Zaranj-Delaram route of the province Nimroz will link Afghanistan to India and enable import and export to and from Central Asian states. In particular, it will be beneficial for the trade with Tajikistan.

Iran responded to the efforts made by the Afghan government by agreeing to a 30% discount on customs tariffs for Afghan traders and offered 50 hectares of land to establish a new transportation company jointly between Afghans and Iranians at Chabahar port. Iran has also made a commitment to allow Afghan traders to unload up to 50,000 tons of goods at Chabahar, a notable change from the 5,000 tons that they were previously allowed (Kagan *et al.*, 2012, p.80-81).

Figure 10. Chabahar and Gwadar Ports



Source: Tasnim News Agency, 2018.

7.4 Railway Projects

Railway network in Afghanistan is developing across different borders into its neighboring countries and it is undoubtedly a sign of optimism and progression as far as connectivity and trade enhancement across Afghanistan is concerned. The post war reconstruction in Afghanistan has an important component of railway development and it

is a significant gesture by both the neighboring and other regional actors to come forward and collectively carry forward this great adventure into its logical conclusion.

On March 2012, during the fifth trilateral summit between Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan in Dushanbe, the presidents of the three countries signed a joint agreement to improve their relations. As a result, Tehran is part of a railway and 'energy lines' project that will connect the three countries to one another (Reuters, 2012). Serhetabad (Turkmenistan)-Torghundi (Afghanistan) The railway project is going on at a brisk pace and will make huge inroads to connect Central Asia through Herat to South and West Asia (Railways of Afghanistan, 2018). There is serious speculation and great interest shown by Pakistan to revive the Khyber Pass railway project or more specifically, the Peshawar (Pakistan)-Torkham (Afghanistan) railway track, as reported in the Express Tribune. Similarly, in June 2017 Afghanistan and China signed a memorandum "for a Chinese-funded feasibility study to be conducted within the next 12 months for a railway line which would run from Sher Khan Bandar on the border with Tajikistan to Herat" (Railways of Afghanistan, 2018). This initiative by China is part of the greater "One Belt One Road" manifestation with an aim to promote regional cooperation through economic intervention (Railways of Afghanistan, 2018).

Other than these projects, the most important railway project which has caught the attention of most of the people is the Khaf-Herat railway project between Iran and Afghanistan. Over the period of time, the project has seen both signs of progression and periodic interruption due to security related issues and financial shortages.

7.4.1 Project Outline

"From the eastern corridor of Iran originates a railway which begins from Chabahar port and through Dogharoun connects to Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and China railway networks. Khaf-Sangan-Harat²⁴ [sic] is a part of the east corridor which is 191 km long. 2 [sic] parts of this rail lines are in Iran's territory and 2 parts are located in Afghanistan. Considering the location of Sangan ore mine in Khaf, a major part of ore is being transported through this railway so the development of railway from Khaf toward southern parts of the country is considered as one of the government principle programs in this field. From an international perspective since Afghanistan is a country gifted with many minerals, particularly the extension of Sangan mine, importance of using railway system as to reach to the open water highlighted. Khaf-Harat [sic] railway project,

²⁴ "Harat" refers to Herat, mistake was in the original source.

which is a single line with 76.8 km length starts from 24th km of Sangan-Torbat Heydariyeh railway and from the 55th, is located along the border and at 78+800 reaches Shamtigh border point. This railway is designed based on axial load of 25 tons and 160 km/h speed” (Railways of Afghanistan, 2018).

The Khaf-Herat Railway project is a key connectivity project that connects Afghanistan to the international railway networks through Iran. The Herat-Khaf railway project started in 2007 and was planned to be finished by 2009. After the project was postponed several times, the governor of Herat requested in 2014 that the Iranian side speed up the construction of the project, for the good of trade relations between both parties. Iran is currently working on the two parts of the project on the Afghan side. The first phase of the project finished in 2011, and it is continuing. The Afghan government requested the investment of USD75 million by Iran on the project, and annually USD 200-300 million will be the outcome of the trade exchanges via the railway (Wadsam, 2015). If Iran connects the railway to its national railway network, Afghanistan will also have access to Turkey and European markets in the future (Oskarsson, 2013, p.4). In fact, The Khaf- Herat Railway project is a key connectivity project that connects Afghanistan to the international railway networks through Iran.

By implementing the railway project from Herat to Shirkhan Bander (Afghan border zone with Tajikistan), Herat will be linked to Central and South Asia, the Middle East via Iran and onwards to the Caucasus (Jafarov, 2015). Bulk and non-perishable cargo, namely cement, bitumen for road construction, cotton, oil and fuel, processed foods and agricultural equipment will make up the major transits by the railway. This rail line will cross the north of Afghanistan and will provide opportunities for Tajik and Uzbek goods to reach the Persian Gulf without passing Turkmenistan and will play a significant role in regional transportation (Oskarsson, 2013).

7.5 Iran's Development Aid to Post-Taliban Afghanistan

Iran undoubtedly remains one of the biggest aid donors for Afghanistan in a pledge to reconstruct the post-Taliban Afghanistan. This is observable through Iran's activities in Afghanistan, inter alia, direct implementation of the projects by Iranian companies and direct governmental initiatives through its ministries. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Iran accounts for USD 1 billion in financial aid provided to Afghanistan (Katzman, 2013). In the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan Recovery and Reconstruction in 2002, of a total of USD 4.5 billion in reconstruction assistance, Iran pledged USD 560

million in aid to Afghanistan to be disbursed over five years between 2002 and 2007 (Bikdeli, 2006). Moreover, an additional USD 100 million in aid was announced by Iran at the London Conference on Afghanistan Reconstruction in 2006. In the same conference, Iran declared that the final installment of the initial USD 560 million would be paid out by the end of 2006 (Milani, 2006, pp.235-256). Iran's contribution and aid were considerably lower in the period 2007-2013, averaging around USD 50 million per year. In this period, the aid provided was mostly used to finish ongoing projects (Koepke, 2013).

As reported by the National Defense Research Institute, the former Iranian representative to the United Nations Danish Yazdi in making his statement to the United Nations General Assembly in 2007 has told "Iran had spent more than 270 millions USD of its pledge on 'mutually agreed projects in the areas of infrastructure, technical and educational services and financial and in-kind assistance' " (Nader and Laha, 2011). Afghanistan International Chamber of Commerce stated that "2,000 Iranian private firms, many financed by the Iranian government, operate in Afghanistan" (Gardesh, 2006). A large number of these enterprises were in Herat, whereby they contributed greatly to the economic reconstruction of this province after 2001. Further, the government of Iran allocated funds for the reconstruction of the transportation and energy sector in this province (Nader and Laha, 2011). This railroad is expected to foster the trade between Mashhad and Herat and contribute to the increase of the Iranian imports to Afghanistan. Indeed, Herat, due to its proximity to financially stable in comparison to its Afghan neighbor Iran, is one of the most economically developed provinces of Afghanistan (Nader and Laha, 2011; Mulrine, 2010).

The budget of Iran's aid for the reconstruction of Afghanistan was approved by the Iranian legislature after the proposal made by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance of Iran in 2002. The five working groups under the Committee on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan planned to implement more than 100 projects on issues related to economic, cultural, social, and scientific and educational matters (Abbasi, 2011, p.184).

One of the most important assignments of the economic group under the Committee was to prioritize the projects to be implemented in different economic sectors, namely industry, agriculture, technical service, and commerce. The economic group was also assigned to manage all the commercial, industrial, economic, mining and service

activities of all other organizations involved in the Committee. It is worth mentioning here that these are high priority areas for the reconstruction of Afghanistan (Abbasi, 2011, pp.184-185).

The Ministries of Industries and of Roads and Transportation, and the Ministries of Agriculture, Commerce, Energy, Organization of Management and Planning, Communications and Information Technology as well as the Governors of the provinces of Sistan, Baluchistan as well as Khorasan-Razavi, were the members of the economic group headed by the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs. Within the economic working group, 18 projects were planned by the Ministry of Agriculture, three projects by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and eight projects by the Ministry of Roads. It is important to mention that all of the above-planned projects received the relevant budget from the Iranian government (Abbasi, 2011, p.185).

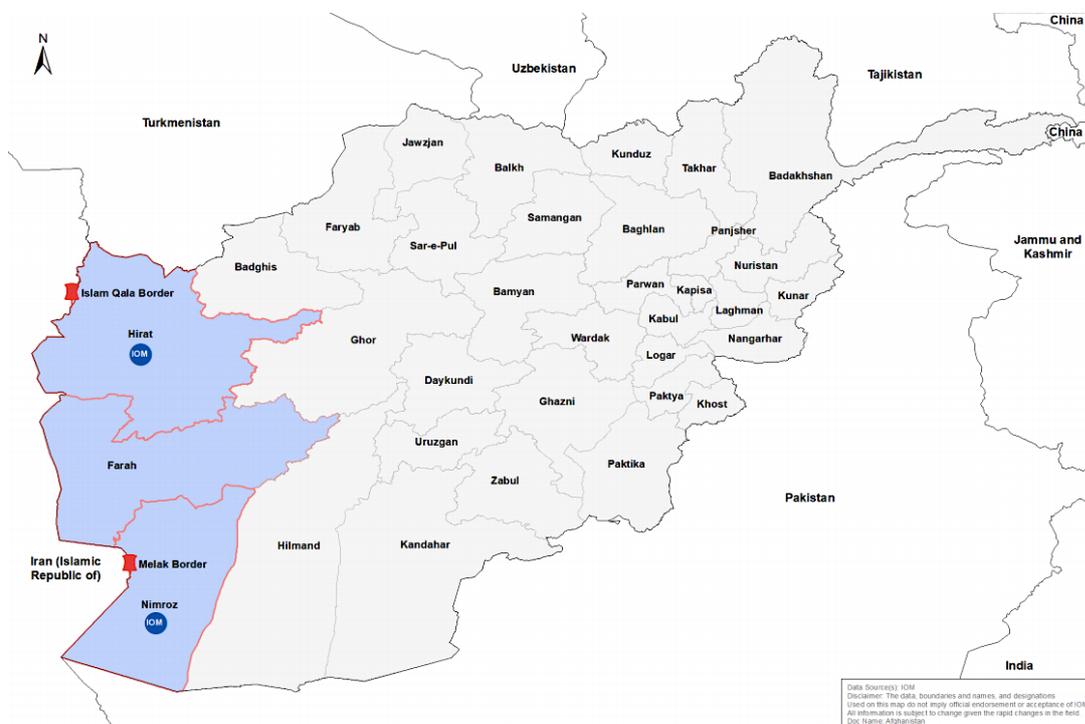
Financial assistance focuses on water supply, healthcare, energy, road construction, agriculture, customs and trade whereas assistance in political and security affairs have been in the form of cooperation with the state agencies specialized in combating drug-trafficking and assistance provided in the border issues. The major role in the above-listed financial assistance can be attributed to Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation and Iranian Red Crescent Society, as well to various religious organizations, such as bonyads and IRGC among others (Abbasi and Potzel, 2010, p.12).

7.6 Iran's Trade relationship with Afghanistan's western region (Herat, Farah and Nimroz provinces)

Iran's constructive involvement in Afghanistan is substantial in terms of gaining Tehran's stabilizing objectives moving toward its post-war goals, and to solidify its support base around the country. Iranian aid and financial support to Afghanistan have been focused on infrastructure projects, such as transportation connections to link Afghanistan and the Central Asia region to Iran. Such links can create platforms for a greater integration and a greater economic market for Iranian goods (D'Souza, 2011, p.5). Moreover, Tehran's agenda is to become involved with any project which persuades towards regional integration by aiming to link the Persian Gulf to the Central Asia region via Afghanistan. Those projects are more likely to be related to railways, pipeline projects, and roads. Iran's interest is not only in those projects under implementation, but

also in those projects that are under negotiation, and which are likely to enhance trade, energy, and industry, as well as cement the region as a part of Iran's eastern tendency. It is also highly likely that Iran wants to safeguard its involvement in Afghanistan and not to be cut out of the Afghan political and economic agenda. Due to the tensions between India and Pakistan, Iran enjoys the support of India as well, keeping a balance of interests among Afghan politicians (Dodge and Redman, 2011, p.195). As mentioned earlier, the three provinces of Herat, Farah and Nimroz share the border with Iran (see the Iran-Afghanistan border map below) and thus symbolize the higher relevance in terms of any sort of economic interaction between the two countries.

Figure 11. Map of border provinces between Afghanistan and Iran



Source: International Organization for Migration, 2017.

7.6.1 Herat Province

Herat is one of the most important provinces of Afghanistan in terms of its strategic position and economic importance since it shares a border with Iran on its west and Turkmenistan on its north. The significance of this third largest city of Afghanistan is evident by the fact that it is part of a complex connectivity network both within Afghanistan and outside it. For example, Herat is linked with Kandahar and Mazar-e-

Sharif via one of the biggest national highways across Afghanistan and linked to the city of Mashhad, Iran through the border town of Islam Qala, and the border town of Torghundi with neighboring Turkmenistan. Herat also has a very rich history of connecting Middle-East, South and Central Asia and in contemporary times serves as a regional business hub in western Afghanistan. Being the gateway to Iran for the latter's entry into Afghanistan, Herat collects massive amounts of customs revenue for Afghanistan from any Iranian entry into Afghanistan, be it the people, goods, capital or any kind of service.

Islam Qala is located in the western part of Herat city. It is a border town and an official custom point between Iran and Afghanistan. Islam Qala is under the administration of Kohistan district of Herat province. The highway of 110 km links Islam Qala with the Herat city center. It enables transportation of the Iranian goods, entering Afghanistan via Islam Qala, to Herat and other cities by the Islam Qala Highway.

Figure 12. Islam Qala border point in Herat Province



Source: The New York Times, 2006.

Iran focuses mostly on provincial development in Herat. At the same time, Iran has achieved notable influence on local officials in Herat due to frequent movement of goods and people across the border into Afghanistan. Generally speaking, even though the movement of goods and services across the border into Herat has progressively contributed to enhancing the economic domain of both countries, there are certain deficiencies and issues alongside. This movement of Iranian products and goods has also led to the strangulation of local businesses to some extent which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. Iranian financial support diversifies beyond the purely economic dimension as it has also extended its intervention into earning the indigenous recognition and favors. For example, Iran has built several industrial and recreational parks, roads, community halls and mosques in the region. It harkens back to what the Mughal empire did with strategic institutional motives, which led to, first to provide employment to the local populace and secondly leave a cultural legacy that allows it to push its political ascendancy into the system.

According to Nazir Ahmad Haidar, the head of Herat's provincial council, "Iran has influence in every sphere: economic, social, political and daily life. When someone gives so much money, people fall into their way of thinking. It is not just a matter of being neighborly" (King, 2010).

Herat is highly dependent on Iranian goods. Due to the proximity of the Iranian market and lower transportation costs, these goods are cheaper than those of other origin and easily accessible in the Herat market. "About 90% of the food products of Herat come from Iran. During the civil war in Afghanistan, most of the people from Herat migrated to Iran and they know the products there and their quality very well. This fact has a huge impact on the trade between Iran and Afghanistan" (Kh. M., personal interview, 15 December 2016)

The widespread corruption, lack of control over the imports, existence of the illegal border routes (apart from the official customs points) are the reasons that make it very easy to bring any kind of goods, while quality does not constitute a big issue. The low standard of living of the people in Afghanistan allows them to be concerned only with the price, not the quality. These complex factors have a negative impact on the Afghan internal industry. According to the Head of Herat's Industrial Union:

"Same as the political influence of Iran in Afghanistan one can see a strong economic impact as well, especially in the bordering region. Iranian goods are

well presented at a high level in the region namely Herat province as the entry point for it. On one hand, it is good to have better trade relations with Iran, but Iranian goods have a negative impact on the domestic production in Afghanistan particularly in Herat. Local industry has been strongly affected by Iranian goods in the last years. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, many Afghans invested in the industry in Herat and it has the biggest industry after Kabul. But in the last few years, the higher percentage of Iranian goods caused many domestic investors to not invest in the region and other bordering areas with Iran. It is both due to the free markets and weak government in Afghanistan especially in the western border regions with Iran, that the indigenous production lag has affected the industrial investments in Herat" (H. Kh., personal interview, 15 December 2014).

Many Afghans are crossing the border into Iran for daily trade. Upon registering a company in Afghanistan, the procedure, which costs less than 100 USD, the Afghan government issues a business passport to those who own a company (small scale or large scale). Having a business passport makes the process of getting an Iranian visa much easier. Thus, local businessmen from the western provinces, in particular from Herat, and people who run supermarkets bring most of their goods from Iran.

"Business with Iran is based on a very simple mechanism, it is very easy to bring goods from there to Afghanistan. There are two categories of trade going on with Iran: the large-scale businesses and small-scale business with a very low capital. In case of a very small capital, even if you have 200 USD, you can cross the border and bring something to the market. Iranians are issuing the visa to the people who are involved in the trade and business without any problem. Due to the short distance between Mashhad (center for the bordering region with Afghanistan in Iran) and Herat (biggest Afghan province on the border with Iran) people are traveling across the border on a daily basis." (H. Kh., personal interview, 15 December 2014).

Other than the purely economic investment in Afghanistan, infrastructure development has been another significant priority for Iran. The head of the Iranian consulate announced in February 2012 that his government will extend a gas pipeline from Iran to Herat. (Afghan Information Network, 2013). The agreement was signed by Herat's Chamber of Commerce with Iranian investors from Markazi province. Based on this agreement, they agreed to bring machinery and new technology to Afghanistan for economic purposes (Yarmand, 2012).

Some of the main economic projects implemented by Iran in Herat province of Afghanistan are analyzed below:

Other than the aforementioned major projects like the Khaf-Herat railway project, another significant economic project initiated by Iran in the Herat province of Afghanistan was the much anticipated Cement Factory. The project was inked down in

the year 2012 between the Ministry of Mines Afghanistan and Iranian company Sanat-i-Majad, wherein the latter pledged to invest 150 million USD to establish the project in the Zende Jan district of the Herat province. In the same year, the former Minister of Mines, Wahidullah Shahrani said the project would boost Afghanistan's annual revenue by 10 million USD since the agreement between the two meant the firm (Sanat-i-majad) would give the Afghan government a royalty of two dollars per ton of cement production and also 20% of the factory income in tax. "The company would extract coal from the Pahlawanan mine for use in cement production that would start in two years and a half, the minister said, adding that the pact would be valid for 30 years" (Siddiqui, 2010). What made the project more promising was not only the cement factory itself but other obligations on the Iranian firm. Thus, according to Shahrani, the firm had to provide employment to Afghans,

"establish a clinic and construct houses for workers and a mosque in the area. A recreational park was also supposed to be created and education facilities provided for workers' children. The construction of an 11-km road was among the company's responsibilities. The government has obtained a 1.5 million USD guarantee from the firm, which was selected from amongst 13 bidders" (Siddiqui, 2012).

Unfortunately, the project did sustain but the Iranian involvement did not, as the Ministry of Mines spokesman Ahmad Tamim Asi announced in the year 2013, "The Iranian company could not address the articles in the contract and its commitments in due time. Following review and discussions, the Ministry of Mines terminated the contract with this company" (Siddiqui, 2012). In fact, Herat cement factory along with other two major cement factories in Afghanistan, Jabul Saraj in Parwan province and Ghori in Baghlan province, were tendered afresh after the termination of the Iranian company.

7.6.2 Nimroz province

Nimroz is one of the western Afghan provinces with a 220km border with Iran on the west and a 221km border with Pakistan on the south. Nimroz lies to the east of the Sistan and Baluchestan Province of Iran and north of Balochistan, which makes this province one of the most volatile provinces of Afghanistan. Both Iran and Pakistan have a substantial population of ethnic Balochs, and over the peirod of time Balochs in both countries, have started a political and armed insurgency against the governments for a separate and sovereign Balochistan. The insurgency and secession movement is more

significant in Pakistan and a bit lesser in Iran and there have been serious speculations that the U.S. might play a role in flaring up the insurgency and that is one of the reasons why Iran sees U.S. presence in Afghanistan as a big threat to its territorial integrity.

In terms of land area, Nimroz is one of the largest provinces of Afghanistan but also one of the sparsely populated regions as well, since a large part of its area is covered under the desert. Zaranj is the provincial capital of Nimroz which is one of the pivotal areas as far as the trade relationship between Iran and Afghanistan is concerned.

Like other western provinces in Afghanistan, the economic market of Nimroz is dependent on Iranian goods. Nimroz has an official custom point (Melik) with Iran in Khorasan Jonobi. A direct link between Nimroz and Khorasani Jonobi via Melik border point makes trade between the two provinces easy. Nimroz has two joint cross-border bazaars with Khorasan province of Iran, where locals can find any type of goods for their daily life. These cross-border bazaars, which are located partially on the territories of both countries, are managed by Iranian government (the local government in Khorasan province of Iran). The currency in the bazaar expectedly is the Toman due to the market dominance of Iranian products and even in Zaranj (center of Nimroz province) the denomination of capital remains the same (Toman) as endorsed by one of the respondents interviewed in Zaranj: "It is very usual to pay with Tomans (Iranian currency) in Nimroz province of Afghanistan. If you go to buy something from any shop, they prefer if you pay with Tomans. As we bring all our goods from Iran and there we pay with Tomans, it is easier and even more advantageous for us to receive Tomans from our customers" (Z. Kh., personal interview, 2 April 2016).

Iranian cell phone companies have lot of customers in Nimroz, as it is much easier to buy an Iranian sim card for the cell phone and benefit from its high speed internet and calling offers (as compared to Afghanistan sim cards and subsidiary offers). One of the reasons is the presence of at least one of the Afghan members of each Nimroz family living in Iran or working or studying there.

"For many years already, people from Nimroz are travelling to Iran in search of work opportunities. During the war in Afghanistan and now due to the low work offers, Afghan young people are crossing the border illegally and working in Iran in order to support their families in Afghanistan. Although, a big number of our youth is killed by the Iranian border security officers while crossing the border to Iran, the truth is that at the same time, most of the families have to fully rely and depend on the support of their family members, who are working in Iran" (S. Ah., personal interview, 02 April 2016).

On a daily basis, goods are coming from Iran to Zaranj in most of the local shops in the form of clothes, food, non-alcoholic drinks, and even bread is coming from Iran which is cheaper than the bread coming from Kabul or North Afghanistan. Such flow of goods from Iran has a strong cultural influence on the locals as well. Women dress the same way (Iranian Hijab) in Zaranj, the Persian accent, music, TV channels, Radio and the decoration of the houses and offices are mostly the same as in Iran.

According to a local bread-maker, Iranian bread which comes to Zaranj has a negative impact on the local bread business: "Iranian bread comes via illegal ways to Zaranj and no one is controlling it, it is much cheaper and has no quality at all compared to our bread, and it can make my business fail, I may have to stop it. If the bread will continue to come from other countries like Iran... I might have to find something else to do". (Samad, personal interview, 04 April 2016).

According to Mohammad Ali Piri, Head of Harimand district of Northern Sistan province of Iran: "In a daily base around 500 vehicles are crossing the border from Iran to Afghanistan and back by Melik custom point" (Fars News Agency, 2016). He further says that food, plastic goods, carpets, cement, clothing and health care material, potato, tomato, water pumps, canned beans, water coolers, salt, water, bitumen, and coal are the Iranian exports to Nimroz province.

Nimroz is not only dependent on Iranian goods but also on the energy supplies from this country and even the labor market in Nimroz is dependent on various small scale labor projects sponsored by Iran. Most importantly most parts of Nimroz get electricity from Iran. This dependency was especially felt by the province in 2011, when in the absence of the electricity supply from neighboring Iran, it had a total blackout, not able to substitute the Iranian electricity with any other supplies (Pajhwok Afghan News, 2011).

The stagnant economy in general and in the province, in particular, provides no option for its citizens other than leaving their country and settling instead to work as day laborers in Iran.

"According to those who have made the journey, it costs about 500 USD per traveler, which can be earned back in a month as a construction worker, bricklayer, or fruit picker in Iran. That is more than twice the salary of an Afghan soldier on the front line. There are risks that come with this trade-off. Once migrants make it to Iran, they often face mistreatment from employers. And many

young Afghans pick up drug habits in Iran, which has the world's largest demand for opiates" (Rasmussen, 2017).

Some of the officials in Nimroz and local smugglers are involved in the drug trafficking across the borders into Iran and then into Europe. Due to a massive geographical interface with Iran and the poorly managed border, the province of Nimroz provides an optimum environment for drug cartels and trafficking across the region. Pertinently, "Nimruz's provincial capital, Zaranj, is like no other Afghan town in terms of its wild and rough habitat and thus a higher degree of security lags. As Afghanistan's smuggling capital, it houses about 160,000 permanent residents, but its contours are shaped by streams of passers-through and torrents of money flowing from drug barons, arms dealers, and human smugglers" (Rasmussen, 2017) Subsequently, The Head of Nimroz police Mr. Qasim Jangal Bagh, in his interview with Fars News in Kabul, admitted that 50% of drugs indeed go specifically via Nimroz to Iran due to the long border of the country with Iran in Nimroz province (Fars News Agency, 2015).

7.6.3 Farah province

The province is surrounded on the north by Herat, on the northeast by Ghor, the southeast by Helmand, the south by Nimroz, and on the west by Iran. The total population of Farah province is about 925,016 (Naval Postgraduate School, 2009) which is a predominately tribal and rural society. More than 80% of the province consists of ethnic Pashtuns (excluding Kuchi nomads) followed by Tajiks as the second largest group residing mainly in Farah city and Baluchis as a third group (Naval Postgraduate School, 2009).

In terms of the relevance of the economic and strategic interaction with Iran, Khoja Abu Nasr-i Farahi in Farah province of Afghanistan and Maheroad in South Khorasan province of Iran is the third custom point between the two countries (Iran and Afghanistan). The daily capacity of the customs service is to process 250 transportation trucks out of which 105 transport oil and gas. The border with Iran was opened in 2009 and the distance between Iranian borders to the center of Farah is 121km. The Iranian government started a project to asphalt the highway in order to boost trade, however, the project has been stopped due to the security problems in the last year as endorsed by the following statement. According to the Spokesman for Farah province governor:

“After the hostage of 12 Iranian workers by the armed men in Farah, (April 2011) and even though in a very short duration of time the Iranian workers were released, the Iranian company (Rahabadan Pars) stopped working on the project for a brief period of time until the tensions settled down. There was probability of restoration of work by the Iranian company, but the company could not start its activities due to some technical underestimations. The first part of the project which is 50km was constructed by the company but after the observation of the project by Afghan experts, the Afghan government did not permit to continue the project, due to the low quality of the material used. We don't know the exact cost of the project, but we believe it to be equal to around 120 Million U.S. dollars” (N. ME., personal interview, 07 April 2015).

The same Iranian company started another construction work of the highway linking Farah to Khorasan province of Iran in 2015. This project is estimated to be completed by the end of the year 2018.

Farah is the nearest Afghan province to Chabahar port. The Indian government completed the construction of a 219km Zaranj-Delaram highway with the cost of 136 million USD. According to the Farah governor, “Chabhar Port has a significant impact on the economic development of Farah province. As the closest point to Chabahar, the Afghan government agreed to transport 30% of all the goods via Farah to other parts of Afghanistan” (A. N., personal interview, 08 July 2015)

7.7 Challenges for the local Afghan traders at the ground level

Generally speaking, many problems still exist in the economic relations between Iran and Afghanistan, especially in trade. Afghanistan still remains a weak country in terms of economic, political and security stability. Kabul government is not yet able to control corruption. There is a lack of rule of law, insufficient transparency and accountability, militant insurgency, the clash of interests between the foreign players (especially U.S. and Iran and now growing India-Pakistan) and lack of support from the internal public and private institutions. The lack of economic policies and developmental plans in Afghanistan and surplus dependency on imports gives chances to neighboring countries like Iran and other regional state actors to control Afghan markets without facing significant barriers.

On the ground, the situation is not good, especially for the traders and commuters from Afghanistan intending to cross over to Iran. The pragmatic and more specific on ground problems faced by the traders include security problems and the most glaring

issue being the widespread corruption. A truck driver who was interviewed narrated the following series of issues:

“We have a number of the problems on the Afghan side. If such problems will not be solved, all the drivers will stop working and will not allow a single truck to cross. One great problem we are facing every day is that we are paying in two different ways for our activity: one payment is the legal tax and one is the payment which we are forced to pay as a bribe to the Afghan border police and to other governmental officials. Recently, the price of the road pass has also been increased by the Afghan embassy in Tehran. We used to pay 450 USD for the visa and for border post and could cross 9 times during 3 months, but now for the same service we need to pay a double price” (Kako, personal interview, 09 April 2016).

A local trader from Herat province of Afghanistan projects these problems on a more general economic level, whereby he highlights especially the widespread corruption problem:

“Lack of the necessary economic regulations and the implementation of the sound economic policy are the major challenges for the Afghan government. The Afghan government needs to setup policies and secure our economic borders. We have two official customs border posts with Iran, but there are many other border points (illegal ones). Daily, a huge number of goods are smuggled from Iran to Afghanistan. They don't pay taxes and bringing goods of a very low quality. Of course, this has a negative impact not only on local industry but also on the trade with Iran and overall economy of Afghanistan” (S. A., personal interview, 19 August 2014).

The serious gravity of corruption is again demonstrated by the following interview:

“Most of the imported goods come via the unofficial borders in an illegal way. Trucks, full of goods, coming to Herat, Farah, Nimruz or any other province in Afghanistan from Iran mostly pay no taxes at any border. Corrupted officials allow them to transport goods by paying a bribe at any destination point” (S. A., personal interview, 19 August 2014).

The illegal flow of goods from Iran is, however, not only a concern for the businessmen but is also voiced by the Afghan government as being a damaging factor for the local industry. Meanwhile, some of the local businessmen are, in their turn, accusing the local authorities of not controlling this flow of illegal imports to Afghanistan and they believe it to be due to the corrupted officials, responsible for controlling the border issues:

“There are still joint markets on the Afghan side with Iran (Bazar-e Mushtarak) and they are opened two times a week. Goods to such markets are coming by the illegal ways and in large quantities. The border police officers are bribed by the businessmen, enabling them to cross through illegal corridors without any problems. The existence of the illegal border points (Kalat-e Nazar and Mili 73) is making a very negative impact on domestic production and the overall economy

of Afghanistan. Not only such joint markets and the illegal border points are used by smugglers, sometimes their operations also happen at the legal custom point in Islam Qala port. A huge number of trucks enter on a daily basis. Iranian side is even providing the facilities to any kind of export to Afghanistan for any type of trade" (H. Kh., personal interview, 15 December 2014).

These interviews reveal the baseline information not only about the existence of illegal and distortive trade markets in western Afghanistan but also how various state institutions like police and security forces pay a safe way for such economic misadventurism. The level of corruption and its relevance to porous borders between the two countries not only feeds the illegal trade into Afghanistan but also leads to other structural and operational inefficiencies like illegal trafficking of goods and the infamous opium that threatens Iranian society as well.

On the other hand, the use of economic power (development aid included) for Iran in Afghanistan is to promote its political and security interests. All the way since the fall of Taliban in 2001, even though Iran has actively been involved in the reconstruction of post-Taliban Afghanistan, it has opposed the presence of any foreign forces in Afghanistan primarily U.S. forces. If Iran loses influence in Afghanistan, the anti-Iranian influence (consolidation of U.S. and anti-Iran ideological sentiments) will likely grow, and this will reduce Iran's influence and power. Within its economic policy, Tehran aims to keep its influence in Afghanistan especially in the western part of the country.

Based on the realist approach, more economic power means more assertive policies and this can be seen in the economic policy of Iran in relation to Afghanistan. The Iranian government and private sector are actively participating in the export of goods into Afghanistan. The large presence of Iranian goods and services is perceived by Tehran as an active means of acquiring influence and political control in Afghanistan.

Even if Afghanistan has fewer trade opportunities with major actors like the U.S. and the EU, as compared to regional actors like Iran, Pakistan and India, the political influence of the U.S. on the Afghan government is substantial. The U.S. influence is undoubtedly due to significant developmental assistance in the post war Afghanistan and mostly due to U.S. dominance. But Iran perceives this growing U.S. influence in the region as a threat to their national interests and territorial integrity.

7.8 Summary

In the course of this chapter, it became evident that it would be inapt to view Iran's economic policy (inclusive of the development aid as well) towards Afghanistan as holistically hegemonic with an intention to completely dominate the institutional and structural operationalization in Afghanistan. Iran's Afghan foreign policy in general and economic policy, in particular, is very complex and based on addressing multi-faceted interests like securing its volatile eastern border of Iran with Afghanistan.

It was revealed in the course of the chapter that although trade relations are growing, they are not balanced, imports from Iran to its neighbor are much higher than the exports from the later. Afghanistan, nevertheless, is benefiting from the relations as the country's GDP remains to be low and there is a lack of industries to fulfill the needs of the population.

The increase in the economic cooperation and trade relations with Iran is influenced by various factors, among which aggravation of Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan. Another reason for the enhancement of relations is opening of Chabahar port.

Iran, as this chapter has communicated in the provided graphs, in its economic relations and policy towards Afghanistan is prone to changes, sometimes even dramatic, influenced by the tensions with the U.S. and the competition with Saudi Arabia and in order to ensure its political influence and security interests in Afghanistan. This reveals quite a dependency between Iran's economic policy towards its neighbor and its security and political interests in Afghanistan, elaborated on in the previous chapter (see chapter 6).

Iran's focus on the western Afghanistan was analyzed in the chapter in light of the fact that Iran considers this area as a buffer zone. The two countries' common border simplifies the trade between the Afghan western provinces and Iran and creates opportunities for the movement of goods, transport and the people.

Another important observation that can be distilled from the chapter is the tendency of the recent years: the economic relations between Iran and Afghanistan are expected to grow, due to the number of the projects Iran supports in Afghanistan. The main perception of the Iranian foreign policy towards Afghanistan can be visualized through a government in Kabul, which looks for a regional economic and political

communion rather than an extra-regional strategic cooperation with great powers (like the US) to solve its problems (Haji-Yousefi, 2012). But amidst all this complex economic intervention in Afghanistan, there is an uncertainty regarding the economic relationship between the two countries. The operational predicament of the economic assistance to the Afghan governmental projects on one side and to the anti-state elements like the Taliban on the other side is a reflection of duality and a great cause of concern. Even though Tehran rejects the accusation of assisting the Taliban, there is evidence that support these allegations. With the passage of time, there have been increased attempts formulated as well as implemented by Iran to undermine the relationship between Afghanistan and the U.S. thus impeding the joint commitment between Afghanistan and U.S. to reconstruct and stabilize the former. Moreover, Iranian leadership at all levels has exploited the periodic hairline fractures in the relationship between Afghanistan and the U.S. with an aim to diminish U.S. influence in the region, albeit at the cost of destabilizing Afghanistan.

Conclusion

The foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan has changed not only due to the political developments of Afghanistan but also based on the dynamics of decision-making within Iran that are complex but as a result of the present analysis are discernible.

This analysis had the goal to understand and explain Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan in the timeframe from 2001 to 2014. Every chapter had an aim to elucidate this matter by looking at different dimensions, aspects, layers, factors – different corners of Iran-Afghanistan relations that reveal peculiarities of Iran's contradictory external policies regarding its neighboring country.

This final chapter aims to discuss the results of the study and draw a comprehensive conclusion. These are two constituent parts of this chapter, but of course one cannot really separate one from another, therefore they go hand in hand in the sections below. I will recapitulate the main findings and relate them to the overall thesis/argument and the questions presented in the introduction (section 8.1). After that, the self-critical reflections and reflections on shortcomings of the study at the stage of data collection and its processing will be presented (section 8.2). The section will be followed by a retrospective view of the theory of realism with an aim to assess its explanatory role in addressing the main argument and eventually distilling the theoretical/conceptual and empirical contribution this study has made (section 8.3). This chapter's pre-final remarks will be meant to initiate further academic investigation, whereby several suggestions will be presented (section 8.4). Finally, I will try to sketch some future prospects of the Iran-Afghanistan relationship that may be of interest for those who conduct a study situated in the realm of the present research (section 8.5).

Restatement of the argument and the main findings: recap

In this conclusion, one finally comes to the point, when the answer to the overall research question “What is the nature of Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014?” and its sub-questions (section 1.4) raised in the introduction of the study, as well as the explanation corresponding to the overall thesis/argument (presented in section 1.1) is provided.

Recapitulation of the results of the research will be done through presentation of the key results that help to answer the research question on the nature of Iran's FP towards Afghanistan and check the assertions made as part of the central argument of this study: on the contradictory character of Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan in the time frame from 2001 to 2014.

The foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan underwent changes from 2001 to 2014, but also before 2001 – in the history of the relations of these countries as chapter 2 of the study demonstrated. The paradigm shifts in the relations before 2001 have coincided with the internal dynamics in Afghanistan. They include such major historical events as the independence of Afghanistan from the British Empire (1919), the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979) and, later on, Soviet troop pull-out (1989), the break out of civil war (1991), the establishment of the Taliban regime (1994) and its fall (2001). The foreign policy of Iran towards Afghanistan before 2001 changed also due to the dynamic internal settings within Iran itself. In this regard, the end of the Pahlavi era and the Islamic revolution (1979) in Iran stand out as the major events that had an enormous effect on Iran's Afghanistan policy. The external regional and global dynamics also led to the reshaping of Iran's foreign policy in light of the new challenges to its economy and national security. They include such events as the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) that exposed economic issues in Iran, U.S. sanctions (after the hostage crisis and the sanctions that followed), the U.S. sanctions post-2001 and UN-mandated sanctions in relation to Iran's nuclear program, the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan (2001) as well as the unrest in the Middle East and the Arab spring (from 2010 onward).

The ebb and flow in relations between Iran and Afghanistan throughout its history and prior to the Islamic revolution were associated mostly with water and land issues. These were the major areas of concern (Chapter 2). However, after the Islamic revolution and the Soviet troop withdrawal, there was a radical change in the foreign policy approach, because sectarian and ethnic issues started to prevail, this is the time when Iran draws particular attention in its foreign policy to support non-Pashtuns, specifically Shia Hazaras, Tajiks and Uzbeks, those who made up the Northern Alliance. The security concerns came to light as the Taliban attained political power in Afghanistan and due to the ongoing Saudi-Iran competition for regional domination. After 2001, Iran saw threats to its national security coming from the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, which brought a new turn in the foreign policy: Iran began backing the Taliban. The analysis demonstrates

(in Chapters 3 through 7) that this backing was by no means constant, as the Taliban were known to be in conflict with Iran's aspirations as a Shia-state with pretensions to regional domination. It should be mentioned here that the advancement of the cause of the Islamic revolution by Iran in its foreign policy towards Afghanistan was premised on the notion that Iran and Afghanistan shared values and ideas coming from Islam, when in reality, as was observed in the analysis, it was the elevation of the Shia Muslims above other sects of Muslims. In other words, Iran positioned itself as a state that stands for all Muslims, but in reality, Iran stands before all, for the Shia Muslims, not all Muslims, at least in the case of Afghanistan where the Shia factor is concerned. This analysis was not an attempt to dig deeper into the historical differences and religious aspects of the two branches of Islam (Sunni and Shia), but it was necessary to explore the Shia factor, as Iran is home to a Shia majority population while Shia is a minority within Islam, whereby Iran takes extra measure to offer aid, assistance and protection to the Shia population around the world, including in Afghanistan. This is where ideological concerns start to conflict with the pragmatic ones – this fact contains the major clue to understanding the contradictory policies and moves Iran was making in its foreign policy towards Afghanistan under its three last presidents (Chapter 4). Add to this the Saudi and IS triggered anti-Shia mood in Iran's neighborhood as causes for Iran to rethink its Taliban policy and discontinue the support to this movement (Chapter 4). But, generally, the pragmatic approach was prevailing. The foreign policy fluctuated based on the goal and objectives of a particular time, subject to Iran's internal and external concerns (Chapter 4). The goals and objectives were narrowed down in this study to the following three: security interests that often imply undermining the U.S. presence in Afghanistan; building ties with the political parties and individuals in Afghanistan; and safeguarding the Shia minority rights (Chapter 4). They were motivated by the three major groups of interests that Iran, as a realist actor, has in Afghanistan: security, political and economic (Chapter 5). To enforce these interests, Iran was urged to bring its foreign policy behaviour in response to specific issues of the time. Thus, it made Iran constantly change the direction of support between the Shia and the Taliban, its economic support and investments focus, its political support to Kabul on the one hand and the opposition, including Shia leaders, on the other. Meanwhile, Iran was sporadically creating obstacles and challenges to Afghanistan's government and its partners.

It became evident in the course of the analysis that the major focus of Iran lies in western Afghanistan, and Iran's economic foreign policy is concerned predominantly with this region as well. By providing support to the western provinces, Iran is hoping to prevent the security threats (from Taliban and IS) and the drug-trafficking (Chapter 5). As a rational actor Iran, ultimately, needs to secure its national interests, this is when the presence of the U.S. troops began to influence Iran's foreign policy – namely, Iran at varying times, tried to keep and maintain ties first with Mujahedeen and then with the Taliban. Thus, the nature of the foreign policy can be characterized as an attempt to balance its security, economic and political interests (Chapter 5). It was demonstrated that the foreign policy of Iran was (and continues to be) implemented in Afghanistan by the various formal and informal institutions (analysed in Chapter 3). The analysis of the Iran's unique institutional structure that combines state and non-state actors, formal and informal institutions in shaping its internal and external policies, with the Supreme Leader as its most powerful element and the main driver, left no doubt as to who *de facto* guides and advises the various institutions in internal and external policy-shaping. The study shows that his personal involvement should not be overestimated in everyday issues such as trade and drug-trafficking or at the middle and bottom level relationships where relevant institutions of Iran are involved. However, his guidance on issues such as the U.S. presence in Afghanistan and other issues of immediate national interests is as a direct order and every institution and actor in Iran is unconditionally bound by this fact.

The analysis of the different norms of the Iranian constitution has revealed the tensions between the religious and republican components in governance. This allows one to regard this as the *de jure* Achilles' heel that contributes to the contradictory character of Iran's FP (Chapter 3). Iran's foreign policy is contradictory in many aspects, yet the economic aspect analyzed in this study (Chapter 7) revealed among the most controversial actions undertaken by Iran with regard to Afghanistan. Apart from the security interests and political considerations, economic interests serve as another, perhaps the greatest impetus for Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan. The analysis of the economic foreign policy of Iran *vis-à-vis* Afghanistan has revealed that its nature is not lacking in complexity either. It is intertwined with other dimensions: security, political, hydro-political, where I also imply the US-presence in Afghanistan. Although trade relations have been growing they are by no means balanced. Iran sees Afghanistan as a market for its goods and investments and is much less interested in Afghan goods.

This is because Iran's economic policy is also checked against what is good and what is not for Iran, in light of its anti-US agenda and competition with Saudi Arabia. Thus, in a way, economic policy has developed a dependency on security policy. It is, therefore, ultimately, the security considerations that motivate Iran to involve economically in Afghanistan and particularly in the western part of the country, the area of Iran's security interests (due to the shared border). This explains the duality of Iran's assistance to Afghanistan as dubiously shifting from assisting the governmental projects to providing aid to the anti-governmental elements, as far as the Taliban are concerned. (Chapter 7) These key findings have enabled one to provide the answers to all sub-questions of the central research question and brought one closer to understanding of: "What is the nature of Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014?"

The discussion of the key findings allows one to emphasize the central argument (thesis) on Iran's contradictory foreign policy towards Afghanistan with a high degree of certainty. This central claim presented at the beginning of the study was assessed as reasonable in the course of the analysis and thorough study of the relevant literature (section 1.2). Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan in the time frame from 2001 to 2014 is contradictory indeed. This is because, on the one hand, Iran acts as a rational realist player (by advancing its security, political and economic interests), but on the other enforces the agendas that do not fit within the realism paradigm (the cultural and ethnical aspects of its foreign policy).

If it is easy to justify some of Iran's behavior in pursuing its national security and political interests due to the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, insurgency and drug trafficking, it is much harder to explain the other moves, like backing the Shia-known rival Taliban, that Iran regards as a force posing a threat to its national security. The economic agenda in Afghanistan is part of the attainment of the larger national and security interests in Iran's foreign policy. This explains why Iran has a rather regional approach that is not focused solely on Afghanistan when it comes to Iran's economic involvement in Afghanistan. Finally, it explains why and how Iran uses economic relations as leverage to exercise some control over Afghan politics.

Various factors have been analyzed and assessed as contributing to Iran's contradictory foreign policies in Afghanistan, among them: historical patterns of relations (chapter 2), complex and controversial institutional structure within Iran (chapter 3), mixture of pragmatic and ideological moves with contained complexities (chapter 4),

Iran's simultaneous links with the Afghan Shia and the Afghan Taliban (chapter 5); political and security interests (chapter 6) and economic policy of Iran as a means to advance its national (political and security) interests (chapter 7). This is a combination of all these settings, factors and events that make Iran's foreign policy so sophisticated. Thus, Iran's foreign policy was determined to be full of contradictions that stem from two significant facts: on the one hand, Iran has pragmatic economic interests as a realist actor, which it pursues in Afghanistan while on the other hand its actions follow out of the national security concerns. Countering U.S. influence in Afghanistan leads to moves like backing Taliban that is counterproductive to Iran's economic interest and more than other moves, can hardly be explained by the theory of realism since they are fueled by the religious agenda (support of Shia).

Self-critical reflections

In this section, I would like to elaborate on some concerns I have had along the way.

The first issue is concerned with the fact that I was not able to go deeper into the terminology issues in my work, I wonder whether delving deeper into the history of the Taliban and analysis of various Taliban factions and the existing differences between them could lead to the emergence of new themes in this research. It strikes me as an area that may have had an influence on the course of analysis, especially now after the completion of the study and after the research has demonstrated the importance of the Iran-Taliban nexus in its foreign policy formulation towards Afghanistan.

Another self-critical concern is that I left aside thorough elaboration on the cultural aspect of Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan. This was not because I considered it unimportant but because it would have had a big effect on the research design, especially as the theoretical foundation is concerned. It would have also required much more time spent in the field where only with the use of ethnographic methodology could the links between Iran and Afghan Shia be better observed and fully explained.

Yet another critical question to consider is whether one could go deeper into the analysis of the religious and secular aspects of Iran's foreign policy shaping by having a closer look into the dichotomy of secular versus Islamic and the inherent characteristics

of *Velayat-e faqih*, a theory in Shia Islam on the custodianship given to the Islamic Jurist, with its complex theological peculiarities.

However, the reason I decided not to address the above issues was because they would have pushed me outside the theoretical paradigm I chose as substantiated at the beginning of my research – the realism theory. Nevertheless, I consider the above issues as quite interesting for closer analysis. Perhaps had I thought about this midway through, I might have decided to incorporate these points, even at risk of expanding the workload, but as these ideas came towards the end of the financial period and other obligations to finalize the research, I had to make the pragmatic decision to eliminate these issues from closer analysis in this particular study. I hope further studies will cover for these gaps.

The other shortcomings of the research pertain to specific chapters (research areas). This led to the fact that some parts of the analysis may seem less convincing, as one lacks the evidence and has to work with the assumptions. It concerns especially the economic analysis, where important information does not exist in the publicly available domain. Thus, for example, while I could get access to the information on the FDI in Afghanistan as an aggregate, there is no information on the FDI of Iran taken separately in Afghanistan. The lack of this information also signals the discreet nature of Iran's investments in Afghanistan, not least due to this country's nontransparent foreign policy decision-making, which made it hard for one to follow and explain the actual decision-making in Iran. However, this is not very surprising as Iran is not the only country where this applies – it is quite hard to explain how the actual decision-making works in practice in much more open and allegedly transparent democracies in the western world. Such precise data, however, is absolutely necessary for the economic studies which may be conducted in future, as Iran becomes more economically and politically significant for its neighboring Afghanistan. However, the objective of the present study was to analyze the political impact that economic factors have on Iran's foreign policy towards Afghanistan. Since the purpose of the present study was not in preparing an economic report, the information that I was able to access seemed to suffice for the analysis of the economic factors of the foreign policy of Iran and the above lack of the statistical clarity cannot be seen as influencing the results of this research.

The insufficient access to information was indeed a limitation, a fault that might have restricted the richness of description in this analysis. It can be particularly attributed to finding the supporting evidence for the information provided by the interview partners.

Often, I had to deal with information communicated to me, that is not contained elsewhere in a written, audio or video recorded form, but that was allegedly very well known to the interviewed persons due to the special positions they held or the nature of their activity.

Another point of concern is the timeframe. The timeframe 2001-2014 was chosen because, at the time of commencement of this research in 2013, the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan was still a prospect. However, many things in the planned scenario went differently after 2014. Operation Enduring Freedom was officially ended in 2014 and 2015 saw the initiation of Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Iran's behavior in its foreign policy was again influenced by this shift. This turn should be taken into consideration in future research since it can give more clues as to how and why Iran acts that way it does towards Afghanistan.

The last important remark to be made in this section is that, unfortunately, some of the interesting thoughts communicated to me in the interviews did not or could not become part of this thesis because they were not relevant for the chosen theoretical framework. Some of the information contained highly sensitive material which, due to the high level of security risks in Afghanistan and the nature of Iran's regime, could not be revealed here as well. The peculiarity of the field research in Iran was due to the nature of the regime, which often left me with an impression that people interviewed were censoring the themes that may be regarded as particularly sensitive.

Nevertheless, many things did work nicely and despite the security problems, I was able to conduct all planned interviews in Iran and Afghanistan as well as to conduct the follow-up interviews and access the materials in the Ministerial archives in Afghanistan. This was not least due to my own characteristics and my background and personal connections I had in Afghanistan, being an Afghan myself – that I could get access to the materials and people, that would be normally reluctant to speak with foreigners. On the other hand, conducting the field trips as part of the German academia also had a positive impact on the people in these two countries that seem to be more open to German researchers by comparison than to those coming from the US, for instance. I am grateful that all these factors enabled me to provide the evidence and the first-hand information on the events of the analytical import.

Realism theory in retrospect: the empirical contribution

Iranian foreign policy towards Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014 can be explained by the realism theory, especially its security, political and economic dimensions. Iran, as a rational state, is highly concerned with its security interests and political influence in the region and promotion of the economic development of Iran.

As discussed in the thesis, Iran sees the presence of the U.S. in Afghanistan as a direct threat to its national security, therefore it takes pragmatic measures to secure its regime and fulfill its security interests. After the Iran-Iraq war, Iran had critical economic and political issues, which Iranian revolutionary idealism could not address. As an example, the realistic and pragmatic shift in Iran's FP promoted Iran-Russian relations. Taking the realist approach, Iran has invested in its military power, which could only be described by realism.

As the analysis of the literature (section 1.2) has revealed, there has been as of today no thorough foreign policy analysis of what constitutes the power politics (Realpolitik) of Iran in relation to Afghanistan, that considers all domestic factors in Iran and assesses their role with regard to Afghanistan within the framework of Realism.

The corpus of the previous literature demonstrated that Iran's foreign policy despite its theocratic regime is far from being purely sectarian. This justifies my choice of Realism as a theoretical framework equipping me with the necessary tools to analyze the national security interests and economic interests. Indeed, today, I can regard realism as having been an appropriate tool to analyze the above in my study.

Meanwhile, it may seem at first glance less clear whether and how realism could explain the ideological moves Iran undertook regarding, among others, the support of the Shia minorities and its charity programs in Afghanistan. While realism does not provide the answer as to why Iran acted in this manner, it does allow one to see how ideology was/is used by Iran for attainment of its pragmatic goals and pursuit of its realistic interests - the misuse (abuse) of religious power (*Velayat-e faqih*, in case of Iran) for enforcement of the secular power, manifested in national security interests, political and economic interests. In this study, this was done by drawing links between these two aspects of Iranian foreign policy-making, namely by relating the empirical data on support of Shia to the pragmatic foreign policy agendas, in line with Realism theory, Iran had in a particular time. While the Shia factor, as an element in the constructivist

approach of *Rahbar* (the Grand Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini) to elevate *Shiism* over *Sunnism* (section 4.2) was in previous studies often approached with a theory of constructivism, this approach is applicable only to the Khomeini era in Iran (section 4.3). The previous studies have already highlighted the inseparability of ideology and pragmatism (section 1.2 in particular Posch, 2013 and Wastnidge, 2014). It was closely analyzed and explained in my study (chapter 4) why the realism approach (and not constructivism, for instance) seems to be the most appropriate one to analyze Iran's foreign policy, including the use of the Shia factor between 2001 and 2014 and the above interdependency. In this particular timeframe, pragmatism was using ideology (the revolutionary rhetoric) rather than depended on it, thus the interdependency is weakened and there is a visible preponderance of pragmatism. During this time, ideology was used by Iran for the sake of increasing power and enhancing its position within the international system – something that realism as an approach is concerned with – which made this approach the best choice for the present analysis.

The practical contribution of the study (perhaps the most important) is in the advancement of the knowledge accrued in previous studies on Iran's foreign policy in general and with regard to Afghanistan, in particular, it allowed much deeper insight in the case study than was done before. Thus, this study represents the most encompassing study on domestic sources of the foreign policy of Iran vis-à-vis Afghanistan today and may be used by the policy-makers in Afghanistan and in Iran, as well as outside these countries' borders.

A few words must be said about the possibility of generalization beyond this case. Under certain conditions, the results of this study may be generalized to broader contexts. This particular case, therefore, has another contribution for studies on international relations, at least when foreign policy analysis and the analysis of the domestic factors and realism are concerned. It contributes to the general understanding of how the state's domestic policies and institutional structure may be reflected in the shaping of its foreign policy towards the neighboring countries. Of course, the peculiar context of Iran makes this case of Iran-Afghanistan relations also of relevance to studies concerned with the Sunni-Shia divide, US-Iran relations and Saudi-Iran competition, at the very least.

Suggestions for further research

This case study and the results it has produced allow one to make suggestions for further research. As previously mentioned in the sections above, this research like all studies has its limitations (section 8.2). It may be assumed that filling in the gaps articulated in sections above in future studies could open up new angles on analyzing Iran's economic dimension of the foreign policy (in case if more information on Iran's FDI in Afghanistan will become more transparent). Further, despite the fact that in this case study realism was indeed able to explain interdependency between the idealism and pragmatism in Iran's foreign policy, one could try to combine the realism theory with the theory of constructivism or idealism in the studies on Iran that try to explain Iran's support of the Shia in Afghanistan. Perhaps one more suggestion could be made with regard to the methodology. The study on Iran-Afghanistan trade relations in the three western provinces could be enriched and deepened through the use of ethnographic methods when a longer stay by researchers in Afghanistan on the border with Iran becomes reasonably safe in future. I very much hope that the present research can and will be used by other researchers to build upon the data analyzed herein to produce new studies in response to this one.

The future prospects

The present analysis of Iran's foreign policy covers the period from 2001 to 2014. Any event that has happened beyond 2014, was not analyzed here unless it was particularly relevant to the above timeframe. However, one cannot achieve full abstraction from the events of the recent past as well as from anticipated events. It is, therefore, reasonable to touch upon a few of such future prospects, that justify the choice of this topic, as well as highlight the practical value of this study.

The literature review, the thorough historical analysis and the first-hand knowledge of the political settings in the region, suggests that Iran will continue to be an influential player in Afghanistan. As Iran's role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan is likely to increase, and as more Iranian-educated Afghan refugees return to Afghanistan, Iran's influence is likely to increase in coming years.

Iran will continue to ensure that it remains economically important for Afghanistan. The economic relations between Iran and Afghanistan are expected to increase, due to the political problems of the Afghan government with Pakistan, which makes Iran a good alternative partner Afghanistan. Iran will continue its efforts to take advantage of the possibility of using Afghanistan as a transit route to Central and South Asia.

As Iranian officials have expressed their interest to officially take part in the peace talks in Afghanistan, Iran will maintain its influence over the Taliban as well as to continue to enhance its relations with Afghan politicians in order to play an important role in the Afghan peace process. The aim behind that is to safeguard Iran's own national interests. Iran's interest in the Afghan peace-process is primarily connected with its aim to defeat the IS, including the Sunni militant fighters who fight under the name of the Taliban and receive support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Secondly, Iran wants to keep its political influence within the Afghan government, to ensure that the Afghan government does not become a totally pro-US neighbor of Iran.

One can assume that Afghanistan's geostrategic importance for Iran will only continue to grow for the numerous reasons mentioned above. In addition, Afghanistan contributes to the expansion of the dominant power of influence Iran has as a Shia-governed state, it provides Iran with the instruments of influence in various issues in the South- and Central Asian regions, and last but not least, it provides Iran with leverage against the U.S. presence in the region.

It is important to note that another Afghan neighbor, Pakistan, will most likely continue to regard Iran's presence in Afghanistan as competition to its own presence in Afghanistan. This will very much instigate Pakistan to continue its participation in the Afghan vs Taliban negotiations, also due to the competition with Iran, since Iran's participation in such negotiations has recently increased.

Compared to other aspects of its foreign policy towards other countries, Iran's policy toward Afghanistan has been relatively moderate. That policy is likely to change, however, if there is a discernable increase in the level of animosity between Iran and the United States. As this study repeatedly emphasized, Iran regards itself as being caught in the scenario plotted by the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia against Iran. As a counterstrategy, Iran tries to enhance its relations with other countries, among which are Russia, China,

and India. It will be interesting to observe in the future how far Iran will push with this inter-state cooperation considering that India is a strong U.S. partner.

These final paragraphs, I hope will inspire interesting new research projects on Iran and Afghanistan in future.

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Annex A

List of Interviews

	<i>Interviewee Name</i>	<i>Job of the Interviewee</i>	<i>Date, Place of the Interview</i>
1.	A. Sh.	Professor at Tehran University	8 April 2017, Tehran
2.	A. N.	Farah governor	08 July 2015, Farah 27 October 2015, Farah
3.	B. R.	Afghan parliamentarian from Farah province	11 March 2016, Kabul
4.	D. Q.	Professor at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad	12 March 2016, Mashhad
5.	D. M.	Head of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies	12 March 2016, Kabul
6.	F. W.	Herat province Governor	21 August 2014, Herat
7.	H. A.	Professor at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad	14 April 2017, Mashhad
8.	H. J.	Head of the International study of Herat University	24 October 2016, Herat
9.	H. Kh.	Head the industrial union of Herat province	15 December 2014, Herat
10.	H. P.	Head of the Amir Kabir research center in Mashhad	09 April 2017, Tehran
11.	J. R.	Member of Senate (Afghan Parliament Upper House)	7 March 2016, Kabul
12.	Kako	Head of a local private transport company in Herat	09 April 2016, Zaranj
13.	K. K.	Former Taliban commander	24 October 2016, Herat
14.	K. N.	Former Iranian Diplomat in Kabul	09 April 2017, Tehran
15.	K. S.	Former Mujahideen commander	19 April 2016, Kabul
16.	K. Sah.	Adviser for the minister of water and energy of Afghanistan	12 May 2017, Kabul
17.	Kh. M.	Local businessman in Herat	15 December 2016, Herat
18.	M. S. F.	Afghan parliamentarian	25 January 2018, Farah

19. M. W. T.	Member of Afghan parliament	23 August 2017, Kabul
20. M. Y.	National security officer in Farah province	25 October 2016, Farah
21. N. A.	Member of Afghan national security department	30 July 2018, Kabul
22. N. A. K.	Head of the printing department of Herat (Line ministry of information and cultural affairs)	27 October 2016, Herat
23. N. Ah.	Local police officer in Farah	30 August 2014, Farah
24. N. K.	Head of Hezb-i-Musharikat Milli political party	22 March 2018, Kabul
25. N. M.	Professor at Balkh University	17 March 2015, Kabul
26. N. ME.	Spokesman for Farah province governor	07 April 2015, Farah
27. Q. H.	Head of Afghanistan Investment Supporting Agency	22 April 2016, Kabul
28. R. B.	Member of National security department of Afghanistan	16 March 2015, Kabul
29. S. A.	Local businessman in Herat	19 August 2014, Herat
30. S. Ah.	Local businessman	02 April 2016, Zaranj
31. S. K.	Shia cleric in Herat province	26 August 2014, Herat
32. S. Q.	Head of the Police department of Herat province	19 August 2014, Herat
33. Samad	Local bread-maker	04 April 2016, Zaranj
34. W. P.	Head of "8am News Daily" newspaper in Herat	23 October 2016, Herat
35. Z. Kh.	Foreign currency trader in Zaranj	02 April 2016, Zaranj

Declaration of Academic Integrity

I declare that this dissertation was written entirely by myself and is an independent research. No assistance, other than the one indicated, was used. The direct and indirect sources were properly referenced. The use of the plagiarism detection tool to scan the dissertation is permitted.

Farid Muttaqi

Bremen, October 15, 2018