

OUTSOURCING CONFLICT
**“AN ANALYSIS OF THE STRATEGIC UNDERPINNINGS OF PROXY
WARFARE”**

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Abstract

The Cold War and the ensuing thaw in tensions between East and West has marked a period of 60 years in which there has not been a truly global conflict. This lack of great power conflict however has been marked by a number of low-level asymmetric conflicts in which weaker states or non-state parties have often complicated the goals of numerically and technologically superior adversaries. Proxy warfare in particular, in which one state provides support to an outside/third party and avoids direct conflict, was used extensively by the Soviet Union and the United States during this period and continues in certain forms today. This thesis explores three distinct case studies in which states employed varying forms of proxy warfare, either through a selected surrogate organization or through support to a nation-state within the context of a larger conflict. Pakistan's support to militant organizations in Afghanistan, Iran's role in shaping Hezbollah as well as the United State's involvement in the Iran-Iraq War through proxy all underscore the value nation-states place on this form of warfare and its role as a tool of foreign policy. In each of these instances these three states sought to avoid outright military involvement while also seeking to advance their interests in strategically valuable venues, while recognizing strategic strength serves as a deterrent to adversarial action. Through an examination of why states conduct proxy warfare and its role as a tool of international policy the following chapters reveal states, both autocratic and democratic, employ differing forms of proxy warfare to advance their national security interests, while minimizing the risk of provoking a wider conflict, as well as to advance a state's influence in a strategic venue.

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To my Father and Mother: For all your constant love and support.

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Introduction

Proxy warfare has been a constant feature of warfare throughout the last century and into the 21st century. This form of war is oftentimes used by large and small states as a way to exercise influence, challenge a peer competitor, or respond to rival proxy forces. In the 1980s, the United States used a form of proxy warfare through its support to the Afghan mujahedeen. Similarly, the Soviet Union supported various national liberation groups throughout the developing world so as to challenge Western-backed regimes during the Cold War. However, proxy warfare does not simply take place between the hegemons in the international system, but also amongst lesser powers for a variety of reasons. This thesis examines why states conduct proxy warfare and whether it is viewed as a legitimate tool of international policy. The following chapters identify specific research questions that will advance our understanding of nation states' use of proxy forces as a tool of foreign policy and whether the structure of the international system creates incentives for this behavior.

Existing literature on proxy warfare tends to focus on the tactical and operational aspects of these conflicts. In the case of Lebanese Hezbollah, Iranian covert support is traditionally viewed through the lens of pan-Shia fundamentalism and the role of ideology. In the case of Pakistan's support to the Taliban, the predominant analysis focuses on the role of the powerful Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate but often without a discussion of larger historical precedence and

strategic considerations.¹ The United States' involvement in the Iran-Iraq War is often seen through the lens of the Iranian revolution of 1979 without a comparative analysis of larger American strategic interests in the Middle East. While a predominance of literature discusses hegemonic involvement in various regional conflicts, little research has been conducted to determine the role the structure of the international plays in influencing these actions.

Prior to examination of the following case studies of conflict it is necessary to first define what constitutes a proxy war. Writing in "The Enemy of My Enemy" author Geraint Hughes seeks to develop a theoretical framework to more fully define characteristics of this type of conflict noting a prevalence of direct assistance, the existence of a common enemy and the maintaining of the relationship for a certain period of time in proxy conflicts.² Author Andrew Mumford writes, "Proxy wars are the indirect engagement in a conflict by third parties wishing to influence its strategic outcome. Mumford views British military aid to the Confederacy and the United States; Lend Lease program to Britain and the Soviet Union as forms of proxy warfare. Mumford's definition of proxy war is not limited to bi-lateral, or state-to-state interaction as he also expands this to a state's support covert or otherwise to any belligerent engaged in a conflict. ³For the purpose of this thesis portfolio I will

¹ Rashid, Ahmed. "The Anarchic Republic of Pakistan." National Interest no. 109 (2010): 24; Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate: A State within a State?" JFQ: Joint Force Quarterly, no. 48 (2008): 104-110.

² Hughes, Geraint. "My Enemy's Enemy: Proxy Warfare in International Politics". (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2012) 11.

³ Mumford, Andrew. Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict, The RUSI Journal, Vol. 158 No. 2 (2013). 40

use a definition similar to Mumford's that states where an outside state attempts to affect the outcome of a conflict to meet its larger strategic goals through the use of a third party and without direct involvement a proxy war is present.

Through a closer look at these three separate case studies, involving both regional and hegemonic powers alike, a number of important trends as they relate to proxy war may be further identified. The United State's support to both Iran and Iraq in particular highlights the role this warfare plays in protecting a delicate regional-status quo while also advancing larger strategic interests. Without direct combat involvement and potential backlash, this type of warfare serves as a valuable tool by which states can apply to defend their vital national interests. The following chapters examine three distinct case studies by which to assess how features of the international system—including the existence of anarchy and the frequent outcome of the security dilemma—affect a state's perception of its strategic environment, and under what conditions a state might participate in a proxy war.

Chapter 1: Dangerous Game: Pakistan's Strategic Rationale for Supporting Militant Groups in 1990s Afghanistan

Research Question: What strategic and historic considerations influenced Pakistan's covert support to proxy forces in Afghanistan during the 1990s?

This chapter examines what historic and strategic considerations influenced Pakistani decision makers in their support to various militant organizations in Afghanistan during the 1990s. Existing literature on this topic focuses on Pakistan's support to these groups largely based upon an ideological commitment to the

Taliban and exporting a radical brand of influence to Pakistan's neighboring states. To understand what considerations influenced these decision makers, I will first examine the British Imperial experience in Afghanistan and the larger Central Asian region. This case study provides an examination of the similar strategic considerations British leaders faced confronting the Russian Empire and how Afghanistan served as a venue for their strategic competition. This case study is analyzed in comparison with Pakistan's support to select militant organizations in Afghanistan during the 1990s.

This paper seeks to understand the historic and strategic considerations for Pakistan's support to militant organizations in Afghanistan through the 1990s. In particular, this paper will explore the parallels between the Russian and British Imperial experiences during the late 19th Century and the more contemporary struggle between India and Pakistan. Through this analysis, I explore Pakistani actions during the 1990s, which can be attributed to that state's precarious strategic position as opposed to an affinity towards radical Islamic movements. The 1990s serves as a particularly valuable reference by which to examine deeper issues of Pakistan's strategic environment and the classical security dilemma. Following the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan and the post Cold War environment Pakistani decision makers confronted a complex security environment in the traditional battleground venue of Afghanistan. The chapter finds that in this chaotic environment, Islamabad's support to militant organizations was the best means by which to guarantee its security by preventing a pro-Indian government on its western border.

This paper explores existing literature on the subject by analyzing previous arguments made towards understanding Pakistani actions and support for militant organizations in Afghanistan. Previous literature focuses on the ISI's relationships with Mujahedeen elements forged during the Soviet-Afghan War and valuable lessons learned in asymmetric warfare battling a numerically superior enemy. Existing arguments discuss Pakistan's support to militant organizations as a natural outgrowth of the increasing Islamisation of its armed forces, a process begun under former President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq.⁴ This paper compares Pakistani behavior in the 1990s to the Imperial British Great Game of the 19th Century by first analyzing Afghanistan's strategic importance in the region during both periods. Next the paper explores the contemporary Pakistani concept of "strategic depth" and how this same dynamic influenced British planners of the 19th Century. Finally, after analyzing British attempts to coerce Afghanistan through intimidation and bribery rather than outright control, this paper will reveal a similar relationship between Pakistan and various militant groups.

An assessment of Pakistan's strategic position reveals how a weak Afghan government and Pakistan's suspicions of India served as prime drivers for its support to surrogates and proxies. By highlighting Afghanistan as an age-old proxy battlefield for the region it is reasonable to assume Islamabad will maintain covert support to select militant groups to advance its interests following the withdrawal of international forces after 2014. Ultimately, by a more comprehensive discussion

⁴ Kapur, S. Paul, and Sumit Ganguly. "The Jihad Paradox." *International Security* 37, no. 1 (2012): 122.

of historic and strategic considerations, this paper will identify why Pakistani decision makers believed support to militant organizations in Afghanistan would advance Islamabad's security interests during the 1990s.

Chapter 2: Revolutionary Outreach: A Neorealist Examination of Iran's Creation of Hezbollah

Research Question: How did the nature of the international system affect Iran's decision to support Lebanese Hezbollah as a selected proxy force in the 1980s?

Chapter 2 examines Iranian covert support to Lebanese Hezbollah during the 1980s. Iranian foreign policy in the immediate years after the revolution and the Ayatollah's consolidation of political power in 1981 has often been characterized as an attempt to export the Islamic revolution to neighboring Arab states. Existing literature focuses on the nature of the Iranian regime, which blended a Shia theocracy with a revolutionary political movement which challenged the existing power structure in the Middle East. The chapter argues, however, that Iran's actions during this period (specifically its support to Lebanese Hezbollah) can also be understood through the constraints on Iranian behavior due to the structure of the international system. In particular an examination of neorealist theory, which posits that states seek to guarantee their survival in the international system by maximizing their power, may allow for a better understanding of the strategic drivers for Iranian action during this period. Seen through this context, the chapter develops a fuller account of Iranian behavior in the 1980s than the existing

conventional explanations, and discusses the structural factors that impacted its foreign policy decisions.

Conventional interpretations regarding Iranian involvement in the Lebanese Civil War largely focused on common Shia linkages between Hezbollah and the Iranian government.⁵ However, little literature focuses on the structure of the international system and whether or not it provides certain incentives for governments, revolutionary or otherwise, to engage in a proxy war as a means of enhancing national power. The chapter's review of literature highlights the key existing arguments that explain Iranian support to Lebanese Hezbollah. This literature emphasizes the unique nature of the Iranian government as a key driver for its behavior. Second, the chapter reviews two theories within neo-realism, defensive and offensive realism, and applies their key tenets to Iranian behavior, specifically its support to Hezbollah, to better understand the key drivers for its behavior during this period.

International relations scholars share a common assumption that the international system is anarchic. This anarchy is defined as a system in which no force or supra-national entity exists to govern the behavior of states. While international institutions such as the United Nations can sometimes serve as arbiters between feuding states, the lack of a central authority above individual states creates a highly unpredictable environment in which states must assume a worst-case scenario and seek to maximize either their power or their security.

⁵ Siklawi, Rami. "The Dynamics of the Amal Movement In Lebanon 1975-90." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (Winter2012): 6-7.

This paper applies a neo-realist theoretical approach to better understand Iranian support to Lebanese Hezbollah by assessing the structure of the international system.^{6, 7} Through a discussion of the competing versions of neo-realism and an understanding of the structural constraints imposed on the Islamic Republic, we may be able to better understand the prime drivers for Iranian behavior while also seeking to understand the geo-strategic environment in which the revolutionary government found itself.

In light of a predominance of literature, which focuses on the Islamist/Shia fundamentalist nature of the Iranian regime, a structural analysis of Tehran's behavior may prove to better identify additional drivers for the regime's behavior.⁸ A review and discussion of Iranian behavior prior to the revolution and possible symmetries in its actions after the fall of the Shah also identifies the likely role nationalism vice ideology played in determining the regime's actions. Iranian covert training and support to Hezbollah may be seen as a calculated recognition of Iran's desire for primacy in the region in the face of numerous external adversaries allowing the regime a tool by which to enhance its national power in an uncertain environment whereby strength is defined as the ultimate guarantor of security.

⁶ Davide Fiammenghi. "The Security Curve and the Structure of International Politics: A Neorealist Synthesis." *International Security* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011): 126-154.; Ibid. 129.

Brooks, Stephen G. "Dueling Realism. (cover story)." *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (Summer97 1997): 464

⁸ Arjomand, Said Amir. *After Khomeini Iran under his successors*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press (2009): 135.

Chapter 3: Delicate Balance: The United States' shifting support between Iraq and Iran during the 1980s to maintain the Status Quo through Proxy Warfare

Research Question: What factors best explain the United States' shifting support to opposing sides during the course of the Iran-Iraq War?

The United States' involvement in the Iran - Iraq War presents a unique case in which a great power attempts to conduct a form of offshore balancing, first by seeking to prevent a conventional military victory by one force but also later support to Iraq to prevent the same outcome by the Iranian military. Having replaced a stalwart ally in Imperial Iran, the new revolutionary government posed a number of threats for the more traditional power centers of Riyadh and Baghdad with most Arab leaders viewing the theocratic government as a threat to the regional status quo. While the United States had little common cause with either the Islamic Republic or the Iraqi regime the strategic role the region played in American oil consumption and the global economy necessitated Washington's sometime contradictory policies. American planners began a strategic reassessment of the country's role in the Middle East following the withdrawal of British forces east of the Suez in 1968. Coupled with the Arab-led Oil Embargo in the wake of the Yom Kippur War, the United States recognized the region as a key battleground between East and West.

A review of relevant literature reveals many Middle East analysts and commentators view the US' support to Iraq as a means of stunting the effects of the

Iranian Revolution.⁹ For some, the revolutionary nature of the Iranian regime is recognized as the prime driver for US support to Baghdad, while others believe the United States was simply trying to maintain the pre-existing status quo of the region.¹⁰ A discussion and application of offshore balancing theory fails to fully explain why the United States believed it was in its self-interest to back opposing parties in a conflict. An analysis of literature and application of this theory reveals US actions were driven by a complicated goal of maintaining a careful balance between both Tehran and Baghdad. This was likely based in Washington's continual belief that possible Soviet action in the region was the greatest threat to its regional hegemony. The possibility of a Soviet-backed client in either Iran or Iraq likely served as the prime driver for US behavior. Washington's involvement by proxy in the conflict was meant to counter Iranian gains after 1983 which posed the threat of overturning the regional status quo and possibly inviting further Soviet interference in the region.

The United State's overt support to Baghdad and covert support to Tehran through the Iran-Contra Affair were largely driven by wider strategic considerations, most notably, the American fear of Soviet involvement in the region and the possibility of a Russian intervention. Washington's concern the Iranian Revolution would spread beyond its borders were largely secondary to a more central goal of resisting possible Soviet entreaties towards the warring states. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 coupled with the Iranian Revolution earlier

⁹ Jones, Toby Craig. "America, Oil, and War in the Middle East." *Journal Of American History* 99, no. 1 (June 2012): 210.

¹⁰ Ramzani, R.K. "*Khumayni's Islam in Iran's Foreign Policy*." *Islam in Foreign Policy*, ed. Adeed Dawisha (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 20.

that same year undercut the US' containment strategy of which Imperial Iran had been a key element. Faced with the possibility Moscow was seeking access to a warm water port and the potential vulnerability of its key oil resources, Washington adopted a more interventionist policy in the region to protect its interests.¹¹ American involvement in the 8-year conflict is often seen through the lens of its role as an offshore balancer. While this theory provides important insights to understanding prime drivers for American action, a discussion of the larger strategic context in which America provided varying degrees of support to both warring sides reveals important factors to explain its involvement by proxy.

¹¹ Crozier, Brian. "The protracted conflict." *National Review* 34, (April 16, 1982): 409.

Chapter One

Dangerous Game:

Understanding Pakistan's Strategic Rationale for Supporting Afghan Militant Groups in the 1990s

Chapter 1: Dangerous Game: Pakistan's Strategic Rationale for Supporting Militant Groups in 1990s Afghanistan

Research Question: What strategic and historic considerations influenced Pakistan's covert support to proxy forces in Afghanistan during the 1990s?

INTRODUCTION

The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 led to an unparalleled covert response by the US and Pakistani intelligence agencies as large amounts of aid would be funneled through the powerful Pakistani Directorate General for Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) to select groups of Afghan freedom fighters loosely known as the Mujahedeen. This series of actions would ultimately result in the defeat of the Soviet Union as well as the eventual collapse of their puppet government in Kabul under Mohammad Najibullah while later giving rise to the fundamentalist Taliban movement. The intervening years of the 1990s and early 2000s would be a chaotic time for Afghanistan as former allies within the disparate Mujahedeen movements would begin a process of savage civil war with ever-shifting alliances and the near complete devastation of Afghan society. Since that time and the ensuing instability in South Asia, commentators have offered numerous theories to explain Pakistan's behavior and its much-maligned support to various militant organizations. This paper seeks to answer what historic and strategic considerations influenced Pakistan's support to various militant organizations in Afghanistan during the 1990s.

As Western policy makers remain frustrated by a lack of Pakistani cooperation in Afghanistan and seek to sever the covert ties between the ISI and

militant groups it is import to understand Pakistani history and its security environment. Existing theories on Pakistan's behavior often begin by analyzing the role of it's military dictator, Mohammed Zia ul-Haq and his desire to recreate Pakistan into an Islamic state.¹² These theories focus on his strategy of arming Islamic fighters against Soviet Russia and a broader desire in which ul-Haq saw Jihad as strategy against Pakistan's enemies. While Zia changed Pakistani norms and sought a greater role for Islam in its policymaking, its behavior in Afghanistan may be better understood by examining both historical and strategic considerations.¹³ These considerations will be analyzed against British Imperial ambitions of the 19th Century. This time period in particular bears a striking resemblance to contemporary Pakistani strategic desires for Afghanistan and Central Asia. As Britain feared Afghanistan would become another Russian client state, thereby threatening London's hold on India, modern Pakistan has viewed Afghanistan as a vital theater for its security ever watchful of Indian incursion.¹⁴

It is also essential to note Pakistan's history is marked by an almost continual covert and outright struggle against its numerically superior regional competitor in India. Since the founding of both Pakistan and India in 1947, the tension between these two nation-states has been punctuated by several short but decisive victories for India while Pakistan has seen a large reduction in territory, most notably when it

¹² Coll, Steve. *Ghost wars: the secret history of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001*. New York: Penguin Press (2004): 61, 63.

¹³ Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban the Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. (2002): 194-195.

¹⁴ Khan, Feisal. "Why Borrow Trouble for Yourself and Lend It to Neighbors? Understanding the Historical Roots of Pakistan's Afghan Policy." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 37, no. 4 (2010): 179.;

lost East Pakistan (Bangladesh), to Indian forces in 1971.¹⁵ Following this decisive defeat, Pakistani officials drew upon British Imperial strategy as they sought to develop “strategic depth” into Afghanistan figuring in the event of future hostilities with India, Afghanistan could provide a reliable rear guard as well as a ready sanctuary for the Pakistani military. Similar to the struggle between Imperial Russia and the British Empire during the late 19th Century, Afghanistan has long served as a venue for great power politics with outside powers supporting or subverting different ruling circles in the country.¹⁶

METHODOLOGY

This paper seeks to understand the historic and strategic considerations for Pakistan’s support to militant organizations in Afghanistan through the 1990s. In particular, this paper will explore the parallels between the Russian and British Imperial experiences during the late 19th Century and the more contemporary struggle between India and Pakistan. The 1990s serves as a particularly valuable reference by which to examine deeper issues of Pakistan’s strategic environment and the classical security dilemma. In this anarchic environment, Islamabad’s support to militant organizations will be assessed through a wider historical context to determine the strategic and historic considerations, which influenced Pakistan’s actions.

¹⁵ Ganguly, Sumit. “Wars without End: The Indo-Pakistani Conflict”. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 541, Small Wars (1995): pp. 167-178

¹⁶ Lieven, Anatol. *Pakistan: A hard country*. London: Allen Lane, 2011.

This paper will first explore existing literature on this subject by analyzing previous arguments made towards understanding Pakistani behavior and support for militant organizations in Afghanistan. Additionally, the paper will explore previous discussions on this topic and note how previous analyses of Pakistani actions fail to fully understand these actions. This paper will compare Pakistani behavior in the 1990s to the Imperial British Great Game of the 19th Century by first analyzing the strategic importance Afghanistan plays in the region. Next the paper explore the contemporary Pakistani concept of “strategic depth” and how this dynamic effected British planners of the 19th Century. Finally, by analyzing British attempts to coerce Afghanistan through intimidation and bribery rather than outright control this paper will reveal a similar relationship Pakistani developed towards various militant groups in 1990s Afghanistan. Ultimately, by a more comprehensive discussion of historic and strategic considerations, this paper will identify why Pakistani decision makers believed support to militant organizations in Afghanistan would advance Islamabad’s security interests during the 1990s.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While much has been previously written with respect to Pakistan’s role during the Soviet-Afghan War, much of the existing literature fails to fully address the deeper reasons behind Islamabad’s actions during the 1990s. Pakistan’s role defeating the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan coupled with the fear of Indian support to Kabul created structural incentives in which Islamabad recognized

Afghanistan as a valuable theater to advance its security interests lest it be surrounded by Indian influence. Lacking a single coherent Afghan political group which to support, the ISI continued to provide lethal aid to select militant organizations to achieve its larger political and economic goals for the region. Most notable amongst these groups was Pakistan's favored Mujahedeen group throughout the 1980s, Hezb-i-Islami (HIG) and its leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Later this proxy support would shift to the Taliban movement, as the HIG would prove unable to capture Kabul in an outright military struggle.¹⁷ Similar to British Imperial planners of the 19th Century, contemporary Pakistani leaders identified Afghanistan as a logical venue by which to further their interests and to create strategic depth in the face of an overwhelming Indian adversary as well as the country's role as a gateway to the wider Central Asian region.¹⁸

Analysis of Pakistani behavior with regards to Afghanistan often begins with an examination of Islamabad's involvement in arming the anti-Soviet resistance during the 1980s. This covert program of providing lethal aid to various proxy forces had an enormous impact on hastening the end of the Cold War as well as enhancing Pakistani ambitions for Central Asia. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, many Pakistani policy makers saw the newly independent states as a new sphere for Islamabad's influence with Afghanistan being a vital first-step.¹⁹

¹⁷ Coll, Steve. *Ghost wars: the secret history of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001*. New York: Penguin Press (2004): 182-183.

¹⁸ Ziring, Lawrence. "Unraveling The Afghanistan-Pakistan Riddle." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 36, no. 2 (2009): 65.;

¹⁹ Coll, Steve. *Ghost wars: the secret history of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001*. New York: Penguin Press (2004): 305.

While much has been written regarding Pakistan's role in supporting the nascent Taliban movement in the 1990s few take into consideration larger issues of Afghanistan's long-standing role in Pakistani security and the country's place as a historic battlefield between competing great powers.

Similar to the "Great Game" played between the Imperial Russian and British Empires of the 19th Century, Pakistani support to militant organizations may have provided low-cost method of advancing Islamabad's security interests – most notably the creation of strategic depth in Afghanistan and denying a India a pro-New Delhi government in Kabul – while also ensuring Pakistani access to the wider Central Asian region. Pakistani strategic planners faced a similar set of considerations today as British planners faced throughout the 19th Century. In the face of a regional peer competitor with opposing security interests, Afghanistan has served as a stage for larger strategic struggles.

This review will focus on the existing literature of Pakistani support to militant organizations in Afghanistan by first exploring the historical precedents for such actions and then exploring Pakistan's need for strategic depth. Articles on either subject tend to view Pakistani support to surrogates as linked to a common Islamic ideology or an extension of Islamabad's support to proxies during the Soviet – Afghan War.²⁰ While these articles address certain key aspects of this behavior they fail to fully account for a deeper understanding of Pakistani history, specifically

²⁰ Cheema, Pervaiz Iqbal. "The Afghanistan Crisis And Pakistan's Security Dilemma." *Asian Survey* 23.3 (1983): 233.

the effect its disastrous loss to India in 1971 as well as an inherently precarious geo-strategic position. This review will examine existing literature on why Pakistan maintained relationships to various militant groups in the 1990s by first examining the historical context of Islamabad's support for select groups. Next the paper will underline Pakistan's strategic position and how this served as a prime driver for its support to surrogates in the 1990s. Finally the paper will highlight Afghanistan as an age-old proxy battlefield for the region and examine why Islamabad recognized strategic value in fostering these partnerships to advance its security interests.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Existing literature examining Pakistani support to surrogates in Afghanistan tends to begin its focus during the Soviet involvement in the country in the 1980s. Numerous authors believe it was the Soviet intervention which necessitated Pakistani support to various groups and that the success of this model would offer opportunities to Islamabad after the Soviet withdrawal. Pakistan clearly emerged from the Soviet defeat in a much strengthened strategic position as a power vacuum in Kabul emerged amongst the varied Mujahedeen factions leading to numerous internecine rivalries. Pakistan's military, long the most powerful center of power in the country, recognized a unique opportunity in the early 1990s to extend Islamabad's influence into Afghanistan and throughout the newly independent

Central Asian states by supporting select proxy groups amidst a growing Afghan civil conflict.²¹

Yet, as some note, Pakistan's support to various groups in Afghanistan may have first been rooted in its disastrous loss of East Pakistan – later an independent Bangladesh – and as early as the 1970s the ISI was relied upon by civilian and military governments to identify and support various Afghan political groups. C. Christine Fair notes Pakistan's ties to these networks is rooted in the heady days of the Mujahedeen insurgency versus the Soviet Union but also has deeper historical precedents. She notes ties to these groups are based not on ideological affinity but rather Pakistan's use of non-state groups as a legitimate tool of statecraft.²²

Pakistan's prime interest in Afghanistan had always been to prevent the emergence of a government that was friendly to India and thereby create a strategic encirclement of Pakistan on both the eastern and western borders. The Soviet invasion of 1979 exacerbated Pakistan's already tenuous strategic concerns and was a genuine threat to Pakistani interests in the region as Moscow and New Delhi enjoyed a close relationship throughout the Cold War.²³ The withdrawal of Soviet forces in the late 1980s refocused Pakistan's interest in developing a government friendly to its long-term interests.²⁴

²¹ Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate: A State within a State?" JFQ: Joint Force Quarterly, no. 48 (2008): 104-110.

²² Fair, C. Christine . "Pakistan's Relations with Central Asia: Is Past Prologue?" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 2 (2008): 201-227.

²³ Price, Colin. "Pakistan: A Plethora of Problems." *Global Security Studies* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 55.

²⁴ Fair, C. Christine . "Pakistan's Relations with Central Asia: Is Past Prologue?," 201-227.

Feisal Khan points to the very creation of the state of Pakistan and the refusal by successive Afghan governments to recognize the Durand line – demarcating the border between modern Afghanistan and Pakistan and created by Imperial Britain through the 1919 Anglo-Afghan treaty – as well as constant fear of renewed Pashtu nationalism. Khan notes how Afghan support to an anti-Pakistan insurgency throughout its western border regions led to a low-level conflict between the two states. Even today, Khan believes these overlapping territorial claims affect Pakistan's desire to influence Afghan politics through select militant groups. Following the disastrous 1971 war with India, Pakistan's military recognizing the strategic necessity of ensuring Kabul would never become pro-Indian which would have the effect of surrounding an already precarious Pakistan.²⁵ Well before the Soviet invasion of 1979, Khan details Pakistan's covert support to pro-Pakistani political parties in Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion of the country and successful use of Afghan surrogates, "created the current aspect of Pakistan's Afghan policy, as the Pakistani government realized that it could manipulate events in Afghanistan to suit its needs."²⁶

Throughout the 1980s a common enemy in the Soviet Union strengthened the oftentimes-complicated relationship between Washington and Islamabad. Large amounts of Western aid was funneled through the premier Pakistani intelligence service, the Directorate General of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) where that

²⁵ Bukhari, Syed Noor Shah, and Amir Ahmed Khuhro. "RISE & FALL OF TALIBANS: AN ANALYSIS." *Interdisciplinary Journal Of Contemporary Research In Business* 2, no. 5 (September 2010): 149.

²⁶ Khan, Feisal. "Why Borrow Trouble for Yourself and Lend It to Neighbors? Understanding the Historical Roots of Pakistan's Afghan Policy." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 37, no. 4 (2010): 175-177.

agency could then disburse materials and weapons to patrons of its choosing. Even after the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989, Pakistan sought to influence events on the ground in Afghanistan through its support of select groups to remove the Communist backed Najibullah regime. Prior to the Soviet invasion however, Pakistan found itself in a tenuous position, which had long-plagued its military leaders. Drawing upon historical precedents, Afghanistan seemed a natural venue to advance Islamabad's security interests.

Nasreen Akhtar views Pakistani behavior towards Afghanistan in the 1990s as an extension of its covert efforts to halt Soviet advances further into South Asia. While the Soviet threat would be defeated through a combination of Pakistani, American and Saudi support to the disparate Mujahedeen movement, Pakistan harbored further designs on the country as well as residual fears of Indian influence.²⁷ The Soviet Union and United States would gradually withdraw from their efforts in Afghanistan; Pakistan remained very much engaged seeking to ensure a coalition of Mujahedeen groups would be part of a post-Soviet invasion government. Akhtar notes Pakistan was unwilling to concede control over the groups and insisted on their representation in a new government as well as the removal of the communist backed Mohammed Najibullah.²⁸ Akhtar views this support to the Mujahedeen and ensuing civil war as an extension of the Soviet invasion and a deeper Afghan internal war which began in the late 1970s. Pakistan's

²⁷ Ganguly, Sumit, and S. Paul Kapur. "The Sorcerer's Apprentice: Islamist Militancy In South Asia." *The Washington Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2010): 52.

²⁸ Akhtar, Nasreen. "Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Taliban." *International Journal On World Peace* 25, no. 4 (December 2008): 53-54.

support to the groups in the 1990s ensured a measure control over the former Mujahedeen movement as well as to counter Indian and a resurgent Russian interest in the country.²⁹

Author Steve Coll also notes Pakistani military and intelligence officers had long feared encirclement by a pro-Moscow India and a communist government in Kabul. The 1979 Soviet invasion and creation of a puppet government in Kabul only confirmed long-held suspicions Pakistan was being slowly encircled by hostile powers.³⁰ Following the withdrawal of Soviet combat forces in 1989, Pakistani leaders continued to harbor fears of a pro-Indian government in Kabul. This continuing suspicion of Indian intentions and a weak Najibullah government, which would lose its political patronage from the Soviet Union in early 1992, likely served as prime drivers for the ISI to continue its support of select Mujahedeen organizations. Coll notes in particular, the HIG emerged as a key recipient of Pakistani covert support as well as direct military assistance; in some instances Pakistani officers would command HIG attacks against the Najibullah regime and coordinate Pakistani artillery support.³¹ Ultimately, Coll views this support to militant organizations as a method to ensure Pakistan would enjoy commercial access to the newly independent states as well as to prevent a regime hostile to Pakistani political designs towards Afghanistan. These experiences served as valuable lessons for Pakistani decision makers and underscored the future utility of supporting proxy forces to ensure a future Afghanistan amenable to Islamabad's

²⁹ Akhtar, Nasreen. "Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Taliban.", 54-56.

³⁰ Coll, Steve. Ghost Wars, 63.

³¹ Coll, Steve. Ghost Wars, 235.

political and economic designs for Central Asia, which gained prominence during the 1990s following the independence of formerly Soviet Republics.

Writing in the *New Statesmen*, William Dalrymple believes since the heady days of the Mujahedeen, Pakistan viewed the use of these Islamist militant groups as, “an ingenuous and cost-effective means of both dominating Afghanistan and bogging down the Hindu-dominated Indian Army in Kashmir.”³² Under this reasoning, Dalrymple believes Pakistani officials recognized the benefits of supporting proxy forces during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This support was measured to check Indian influence in the region and promote Islamabad’s influence in a low-cost manner. While this accounts for contemporary Pakistani behavior with respect to India, it does not go farther in assessing the similarities between Islamabad’s strategic situation in the late 20th Century and the similarity between the Great Game politics of the 19th Century.

Anatol Lieven makes clear, the relationship between the nascent Taliban movement of fundamentalist madrassa students and the ISI was not based on ideological grounds but rather a strategic calculation in which Islamabad needed to form a post-invasion government in Kabul amenable to its interests rather than Indian or Iranian designs.³³ Similarly, Lawrence Ziring sees Pakistani involvement with various proxy forces as tied to Pakistan’s precarious strategic position, which was severely impacted by the tumultuous loss to India in 1971. The Soviet invasion

³² Dalrymple, William. "The military and the mullahs." *New Statesman* 139, no. 5015 (August 23, 2010): 28.

³³ Lieven, Anatol. *Pakistan: A hard country*. London: Allen Lane, 2011.

of Afghanistan served as a valuable opportunity to Islamabad to identify and support key surrogates while also giving it long-term political leverage in Kabul through the groups. This would ultimately allow Pakistan a chance to spread its influence to the north after having its eastern half separated into Bangladesh.³⁴ Similar to this argument is the position Pakistani leaders have often intervened in the affairs of Afghanistan through overt and covert support to various groups.³⁵ While these arguments take into account a deeper understanding of Pakistani history further analysis into parallels between British planners in the 19th Century, who faced similar circumstances, should be made to those of Pakistani military officers in the 1990s.

While existing literature touches upon various aspects of Pakistani support to militant organizations, most fail to take into account a long-standing rivalry, which has taken place in Afghanistan; first between the British Empire and Imperial Russia and later between Pakistan and India. Additional research is necessary to examine the historical linkages between Pakistani support to the Taliban and other militant organizations to prior strategic competitions amongst regional powers. Pakistan's position within the larger struggle of power in South Asia has had an effect on its perceived security dilemma and impacted its relationship with numerous militant organizations in Afghanistan during the 1990s. Within this anarchic environment, successive Pakistani decision makers, military and civilian

³⁴ Ziring, Lawrence. "Unraveling The Afghanistan-Pakistan Riddle." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 36, no. 2 (2009): 59-78.

³⁵ Weinbaum, Marvin G., and Jonathan B. Harder. "Pakistan's Afghan policies and their consequences." *Contemporary South Asia* 16, no. 1 (2008): 25-38.

alike, recognized the strategic importance of Afghanistan and the vital Pakistani security interests at stake.

STRATEGIC DEPTH AND THE BRITISH EXPERIENCE

Literature on Pakistani support to militant organizations also focuses on the concept of strategic depth in which Afghanistan provides a necessary and valuable venue to advance Islamabad's security interests ultimately to ensure a friendly government along its western border. The concept of strategic depth can be traced to the late 19th Century struggle between the British Empire and Imperial Russia over influence through Central Asia. British policy makers calculated that they needed to delineate spheres of influence within Afghanistan to check Imperial Russian ambitions and prevent any advances on the crown jewel of the British Empire, India. Little emphasis is currently placed on assessing the relevance of the British and Russian conflicts to the contemporary struggle between India and Pakistan. Pakistani decision makers drew upon these past precedents to inform their current decision-making in the post-Soviet invasion of Afghanistan with dramatic effect.

Pakistan is confronted with a classical security dilemma in which it must seek to maximize its power in the face of an adversary to guarantee its security; Islamabad has long recognized the strategic importance of Afghanistan lest it be

surrounded by India.³⁶ As Robert Glaser notes in his critique of Security Dilemma theory, “ states are uncertain about their adversaries motives, lacking confidence that others are pure security seekers.”³⁷ Within this classic security dilemma British Imperial planners also recognized Afghanistan as a vital link to the then unconquered Central Asian states of Khiva, Bokhara, Khokand (today known as Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan) as they faced a larger political and geo-strategic struggle with the Russian Empire.³⁸

Pakistan has always faced a difficult geo-strategic situation since its founding in the face of an overwhelming adversary that has distinct advantages in military capabilities as well as in sheer population; India has always served as a perceived threat to Pakistani leaders on its eastern border with advantages of size and power. Since the creation of Pakistan in 1947 the British imposed Durand line has served as an enduring legacy of imperialism, separating the Pashtu ethnic group from between Afghanistan and Pakistan’s shared border. Weinbaum and Harder believe the root of Pakistani interference in Afghanistan and support to various militant groups in the country can be traced to the unrecognized border between the two countries. Similar to the great game between Imperial Russia and the British Empire in the late Nineteenth Century, Pakistan’s support of various militant groups in the anarchic 1990s is linked to a deep historical precedents as Islamabad sought to

³⁶ Cheema, Pervaiz Iqbal. "The Afghanistan Crisis And Pakistan's Security Dilemma." *Asian Survey* 23.3 (1983): 237

³⁷ Charles L. Glaser (1997). *The Security Dilemma Revisited*. World Politics, 50, pp 184.

³⁸ Fromkin, David. "THE GREAT GAME IN ASIA." *Foreign Affairs* 58, no. 4 (Spring 1980): 939.

advance its interests into the Central Asian republics through war-torn Afghanistan.³⁹

Additionally, policy makers in Islamabad have long harbored fears on encirclement from a pro-Indian government in Kabul that would effectively surround Pakistan. The British concept of strategic depth in Afghanistan, applied by contemporary Pakistani decision makers, has long been recognized as a means to counter this fear as well as to provide a safe “rear area” for the military in the event of an overwhelming Indian military invasion.⁴⁰ As a means of balancing against Indian power in the region, the development of a client-state relationship with a pro-Islamabad government in Kabul provides necessary depth to Pakistan.

Ahmed Rashid highlights, throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s, Pakistan attempted to form an “Islamic bloc” of nations that would more effectively promote its political position in the region as well as to develop vital trade routes through the Central Asian states. This effort served to advance a pro-Islamabad agenda whereby Indian commercial and diplomatic interests would be mitigated by Islamabad’s close ties with a number of states to include a government in Kabul that was receptive if not amenable to Pakistani interests. Much like the great power politics of the 19th Century, a similar geo-strategic competition between India and Pakistan

³⁹ Weinbaum, Marvin G., and Jonathan B. Harder. "Pakistan's Afghan policies and their consequences." *Contemporary South Asia* 16, no. 1 (2008): 25-38.

⁴⁰ Kronstadt, K. Alan. "Pakistan and the Afghan Insurgency." Congressional Research Service: Report (2012): 26-34.

emerged.⁴¹ Rashid links the relationship between Kabul and Islamabad's security as he draws upon the historical precedents between the two but also highlights the precarious strategic environment in which Pakistan has long found itself.

Pakistani leaders have also long believed it was necessary to develop what they term "Strategic Depth" as a means of strengthening Pakistan's security. Sumit Ganguly and Nicholas Howenstein note, India has long maintained strong relationships with successive Afghan governments fueling Pakistani fears of strategic encirclement. "Even after Zahir's overthrow [the last monarch of Afghanistan, Mohammed Zahir Shah] in 1973, India managed to maintain close ties with the subsequent communist regimes. Contrary to popular belief, India was less than pleased with the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. During the course of the Afghan war, India came to support Ahmed Shah Massoud's Northern Alliance because of its hostility toward the Pakistani-supported mujahedeen groups."

As Ganguly and Howenstein note, India's support of the Northern Alliance was fueled by its own suspicions of Pakistani designs in the region and as part of the continuing rivalry between the two nations. This long-standing rivalry between India and Pakistan since the end of British rule has exacerbated tensions between the two countries while Afghanistan is often seen in a prism of a zero-sum scheme. The great power rivalries between Britain and Russia serve as a valuable model by

⁴¹ Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban the Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond..* London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2002.; Rashid, Ahmed. "The Anarchic Republic of Pakistan." *National Interest* no. 109 (2010): 23-30.

which to view Afghanistan as the contemporary powers of the region continued to exercise their power based upon similar calculations. Further assessment of the parallels between British Imperial experiences in the region and Islamabad's support to militant organizations will likely provide key insights, which underpin current Pakistani behavior in Afghanistan.

Existing literature also highlights Pakistani fear of covert Indian assistance to the Baloch's to be used as a means to destabilize Pakistan's western border and thereby force the Pakistani military to withdraw critical assets from the Indian border. To counter this perceived threat, Pakistan has consistently sought to destabilize certain ethnic groups in Afghanistan to prevent the emergence of a pro-Indian government by supporting Pashtu groups such as the Taliban. As a 2009 Council on Foreign Relations report notes, "Pakistani security officials calculate that the Taliban offers the best chance for countering India's regional influence."⁴² Ever fearful of strategic encirclement on the part of India, successive Pakistani governments have calculated that their relationships with certain political parties and militant movements in Afghanistan present the best option for ensuring strategic depth and preventing the emergence of a government that runs counter to Islamabad's long-term national interests. The anarchy of the 1990s provided Islamabad a ready opportunity to influence Afghanistan and remake its national power structure in accordance to Pakistani interests.

⁴² Bajoria, Jayshree. "India-Afghanistan Relations." Aug 2009. Council on Foreign Relations.

The Economist aptly noted in its October edition, "Pakistan's generals believe that, with an unfriendly government in place in Afghanistan, they need proxies to represent their interests there. Pakistan preferred to make common cause with ethnic Pashtu's [who straddle the border] to guard against Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras, whom the generals regarded as close to India, their arch-enemy." *The Economist* notes this paranoia was fed by scenario planning in which a hostile Afghan government, with a growing army now trained and equipped by the Americans, joins India to mount a two-front war against Pakistan, sandwiched between the two countries."⁴³ This fear amongst key Pakistani decision makers is key to understanding its view towards India and the rationale towards supporting select groups in Afghanistan.⁴⁴ These factors influenced Pakistani military leaders throughout the 1990s as they sought to bolster the HIG and later Taliban movements as the best means to advance Pakistani interests in the wider Central Asian region.

The ISI emerged as one of the pre-eminent intelligence services in the region and sought to apply lessons learned in the course of the Afghan-Soviet war to Kashmir and other venues. This would serve as a means to asymmetrically challenge its longtime rival India and advance Pakistani interests. ⁴⁵This construct - support to groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Haqqani network - would be applied to Pakistan's long conflict over Kashmir and successfully used as a tool in the war of

⁴³ The Economist. "The Haqqani network: Snake country" Oct 01, 2011.

⁴⁴ Mudiam, Prithvi Ram. "The India-Pakistan Dispute Over Jammu And Kashmir And The United States." *Global Change, Peace & Security* 15, no. 3 (2003): 264.f

⁴⁵ Akhtar, Nasreen. "Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Taliban." *International Journal On World Peace* 25, no. 4 (December 2008): 50-51.

attrition over the disputed territory.⁴⁶ Still more needs to be said regarding Pakistan's long-standing conflict with India and how this dynamic effected its behavior in Afghanistan during the 1990s. It is likely that a combination of historical and strategic factors effected Islamabad's behavior during that decade as well as today.

Through a review of numerous articles it seems a predominance of literature states if Islamabad cannot outright control Afghanistan then it must seek to shape the political environment as much as possible through surrogate groups to ensure a secure eastern border.⁴⁷ While numerous articles provide an analysis of Pakistan's decision to support groups in the post-Soviet invasion, they fail to fully link this action with a wider historical precedents wherein Pakistani decision makers refused to recognize the Durand line and viewed Afghanistan as an integral part of the Islamic state and link this behavior to previous British actions in the region during the 19th Century.

ANALYSIS

Pakistani involvement in Afghanistan has largely been based on its strategic environment and its fear of encirclement by a government in Kabul supportive of Indian interests in the region. Despite billions of dollars in American aid since 2001,

⁴⁶ Khan, Feisal. "Why Borrow Trouble for Yourself and Lend It to Neighbors? Understanding the Historical Roots of Pakistan's Afghan Policy." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 37, no. 4 (2010): 171-189.

⁴⁷ Kapur, S. Paul, and Sumit Ganguly. "The Jihad Paradox." *International Security* 37, no. 1 (2012): 111-141.

Pakistan has maintained a dangerous double game of publicly supporting the US global war on terrorism and covertly supporting elements of the Taliban movement, the HIG militant group as well as the Haqqani network.⁴⁸ This complicated balancing act of dual support is based on a number of strategic and historic considerations that when judged against previous British behavior in the region reveal certain similarities. This speaks to the enduring relevancy of Afghanistan as a vital stage for great power projection; set amidst the Central Asian region and western Pakistani border, Afghanistan remains an enduring battleground between great power politics.

Pakistani involvement in the Afghan – Soviet War would ultimately result in the defeat of the Soviet Union and its client state in Afghanistan under Mohammed Najibullah. The Pakistani ISI benefited as the prime interlocutor of Saudi and American covert aid, funneling this support to Islamabad's selected recipients and creating a useful precedent for future Pakistani covert actions in the country. In the ensuing security vacuum, Pakistani intelligence began to recalibrate its support in the hope of creating an Afghan government more amenable to Islamabad's interests.⁴⁹ The intervening years of the 1990s and early 2000s would be a chaotic time for Afghanistan as former allies within the Mujahedeen movement would begin a savage civil war with shifting alliances and near complete devastation for Afghan society. Despite this instability, Pakistani planners rationally calculated an Afghanistan under militant groups such as the Hezb-e Islami and later Taliban

⁴⁹ Price, Colin. "Pakistan: A Plethora of Problems." *Global Security Studies* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 59.

would promote Islamabad's security interests in the face of growing Indian power. Similar to the strategic environment in which Imperial Britain found itself in the previous century, Pakistan recognized that to ensure its security it needed to maximize its power and ensure Afghanistan remained tilted towards Islamabad's designs for the region.⁵⁰

BRITISH ACTIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

The "Great Game" of the 19th Century pitted Great Britain and Imperial Russia against each other in a tense struggle for influence and control of Central Asia and provides a useful construct to analyze contemporary Pakistani behavior. In this historical struggle between regional powers, British and Russian planners viewed Afghanistan as a vital interest due to its proximity to India and relationship to the Central Asian states.⁵¹ To the Imperial Britain in particular, Afghanistan presented a crucial buffer by which to guard against any further Russian advance through the Central Asian states to ultimately establish a warm water port. At the beginning of the 19th Century, the Central Asian states were largely weak and divided amongst local "khanates" in which they existed in an almost feudal state. Russian ambition had long been to advance Moscow's control farther south and extend its control

⁵⁰ Ziring, Lawrence. "Unraveling The Afghanistan-Pakistan Riddle." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 36, no. 2 (2009): 67.;

Weinbaum, Marvin G., and Jonathan B. Harder. "Pakistan's Afghan policies and their consequences." *Contemporary South Asia* 16, no. 1 (2008): 36.

⁵¹ Becker, Seymour. "The Great Game: The History of an Evocative Phrase." *Asian Affairs* 43, no. 1 (2012): 65.; Khalid, Iram. "The New Great Game in Afghanistan: Role of India (A Pakistani Perspective)." *South Asian Studies* 26, no. 2 (2011): 244.

through this region.⁵² Alarmed by Moscow's intent, British officers in India began to develop intelligence sources to better identify Russian progress. This competition for control would span much of the 19th Century and would only end with the Russian Revolution of 1917.⁵³

Britain's ambitions for South Asia included not only modern-day Pakistan (then part of India and governed by British authorities) but also extended into Central Asia. Imperial planners recognized the strategic importance of Afghanistan and viewed it as a future state within the British Raj. Initially these designs were driven by Britain's desire to control the loosely governed states to the north of Afghanistan loosely known as the Khanates (composed of modern Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kirgizstan).⁵⁴ As the Russian Empire began to exert influence and ultimately control over this region, British authorities became concerned Afghanistan may fall under Moscow's authority and present a strategic challenge to India. Britain would attempt on three occasions to subjugate and control Afghanistan with no real success. These attempts were punctuated by three conflicts between Britain and Afghanistan known as the First (1839), Second (1878) and Third (1919) Anglo – Afghan wars.⁵⁵

⁵² Becker, Seymour. "The Great Game: The History of an Evocative Phrase." *Asian Affairs* 43, no. 1 (2012): 64.

⁵³ Khalid, Iram. "The New Great Game in Afghanistan: Role of India (A Pakistani Perspective)." *South Asian Studies* 26, no. 2 (2011): 242.;

Akbar, Zehra. "Central Asia: The New Great Game." Accessed from:
<http://www.thewashingtonreview.org/articles/central-asia-the-new-great-game.html>
<http://www.thewashingtonreview.org/articles/central-asia-the-new-great-game.html>

⁵⁵ Singer, Andre. *Lords of the Khyber: The Story of the North-West Frontier*. London: Faber and Faber (1984): 192.

Over the course of the Great Game, which lasted from roughly 1839 to 1919, Britain and Russia jockeyed for position and influence in Afghanistan and the wider region. While Imperial Russia could count the former Khanates as under its control, neither power would ultimately be able to control Afghanistan. Britain's only real military success came after the Second Anglo – Afghan War as Afghanistan maintained its internal political structure but ceded its foreign affairs to British control.⁵⁶In lieu of a conventional victory over its adversary, Britain allowed Afghanistan the authority to conduct its domestic affairs while Britain would control its external relations. This in effect amounted to a proxy situation whereby Britain recognized the role a weak Afghanistan could play in stunting Russian ambitions so long as London maintained an upper hand. Imperial Russia would largely, albeit grudgingly, acknowledge Afghanistan as within the British sphere of influence. Russian military leaders were also aware of the near-constant difficulties the British Army faced when previously trying to control Afghanistan, which harbored a deep-seated disdain for foreign influences into its internal affairs. British policy adapted to this reality and rather than control the country directly settled on controlling Afghanistan's external affairs. The country would continue to serve as a strategic buffer between the competing great powers into the 20th Century while also maintaining its sovereignty.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Akbar, Zehra. "Central Asia: The New Great Game." Accessed from: <http://www.thewashingtonreview.org/articles/central-asia-the-new-great-game.html>

⁵⁷ Ziring, Lawrence. "Unraveling The Afghanistan-Pakistan Riddle." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 36, no. 2 (2009): 63.

Since its founding in 1947, Pakistan has been faced with an overwhelming adversary in India which enjoys numerical superiority in military force and a more favorable geographic position. Additionally, Pashtun nationalism in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) has long sought to unite Afghan and Pakistani tribes, split as a result of the British imposed Durand Line. Cognizant of these realities, Pakistani leaders democrats and autocrats alike, have sought to project influence into Afghanistan to check Indian ambitions in the region.

Throughout the two histories of Pakistan and Afghanistan, Islamabad has looked with caution towards Afghan demands in the NWFP and Kabul's insistence that the Durand line is an arbitrary border. Moreover, Islamabad has long viewed Afghanistan as more a client state than a legitimate neighbor; a space where Pakistani influence should be advanced to create strategic depth as well as to guard against great power influence from Iran, Russia and most importantly India. The independence of the Central Asian states following the collapse of the Soviet Union provided Pakistan a unique opportunity to project its influence. Support to militant organizations, which had proved their value during the Soviet invasion, provided Pakistan a new tool which to ensure protected its interests in any Afghan government. If successful this would have the effect of thwarting or hedging against Indian and Iranian political and economic designs.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Price, Colin. "Pakistan: A Plethora of Problems." *Global Security Studies* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 54

Pakistan's early involvement with the Taliban movement can be traced to its successful involvement supporting elements of the Mujahedeen movement during the 1980s. The ISI emerged from the conflict as one of the pre-eminent intelligence services in the region and sought to apply lessons learned in the course of the Afghan-Soviet war to Kashmir as a means to asymmetrically challenge its longtime rival India. This construct, support to groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Haqqani network, would be applied to Pakistan's long conflict over Kashmir and successfully used as a tool in the war of attrition over the disputed territory.⁵⁹

These ties to the Taliban and Hekmatyr networks go back to the heady days of the Mujahedeen insurgency versus the Soviet Union. Used as a successful tool to advance its larger national security interests, this support to proxies would be applied to other insurgent and terrorist networks. These ties to groups are based not on ideological affinity but rather Pakistan's view of non-state groups as a legitimate tool of statecraft. Rather than confront an overwhelming enemy such as the Soviet Union or in a more contemporary context India, Pakistan relies on these groups to execute an asymmetric conflict where the advantages of overwhelming military strength are mitigated by tactics, terrain and possible political blowback.⁶⁰

Throughout the 1980s the oftentimes-complicated relationship between Washington and Islamabad was strengthened by a common enemy in the Soviet

⁵⁹ Ganguly, Sumit, and S. Paul Kapur. "The Sorcerer's Apprentice: Islamist Militancy In South Asia." *The Washington Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2010): 47-59.; Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban the Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond..* London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2002.

⁶⁰ Siddiqi, Ayesha. "Pakistan's Counterterrorism Strategy: Separating Friends from Enemies." *Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2011): 154.

Union.⁶¹ Large amounts of Western aid was funneled through the ISI where that spy agency could then disburse materials and weapons to patrons of its choosing. Pakistan's continual support to militant groups post 1989 was designed to influence events on the ground in Afghanistan through its support of select groups. These efforts were ultimately successful as the government in Kabul fell by 1992 but quickly led to a devastating civil war between formerly allied elements of the mujahedeen movement.⁶²

Despite the withdrawal of Soviet conventional forces in Afghanistan the puppet government under Mohamed Najibullah posed an impediment to Pakistan's long-term designs for the region. Pakistan decision makers calculated that to advance their security and economic agendas they needed to install a government composed of Mujahedeen fighters that would be more supportive of Islamabad's policies. Even without Soviet support the Najibullah government maintained a valiant defense in the face of continued Pakistani support to Gulbudin Hekmatyr and Jalaluddin Haqqani. Pakistan also maintained a suspicion that certain members of the Mujahedeen movement such as Ahmed Shah Massoud and Rashid Dostom would be amenable to support from India. Pakistani leaders harbored fears that Afghanistan would once again be supportive of Russian and Indian designs.

⁶¹ Akhtar, Nasreen. "Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Taliban." *International Journal On World Peace* 25, no. 4 (December 2008): 51.

⁶² Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban the Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond..* London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2002.; Weinbaum, Marvin G., and Jonathan B. Harder. "Pakistan's Afghan policies and their consequences." *Contemporary South Asia* 16, no. 1 (2008): 29.

Ultimately, Pakistan's support of militant organizations through the 1990s was based upon a combination of historic and strategic considerations as a means of guaranteeing Islamabad's security. As John Mearshimer writes, states consistently capitalize on opportunities to increase their power and that this dynamic explains much of great-power behavior. While these groups were contrary to Western interests and drew international admonishment, Pakistan recognized it had few options to advance its interests and saw groups such as the Hezb-e-Islami and later the Taliban as the least worst option amongst an anarchic security environment in the region.

The relationship between the nascent Taliban movement and the ISI was determined by a simple strategic calculation that Islamabad needed to form a post-invasion government in Kabul amenable to its interests rather than to Indian or Iranian designs. To achieve these objectives, Pakistan supported several militant organizations, preferring Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his network due to the previous relationship during the Soviet invasion.⁶³ Hekmatyar proved a willing recipient of Pakistani covert aid but would prove to be unable to capture Kabul, Pakistani military and intelligence officials concluded that his network could not deliver a stable Afghanistan and began shifting their covert support towards the nascent Taliban movement of southern Afghanistan by 1994.⁶⁴ This support should be seen within the larger context of South Asian great power politics. Similar to British views of Afghanistan as a necessary security buffer against Imperial Russia,

⁶³ Coll, Steve. *Ghost Wars*, 287.

⁶⁴ Coll, Steve. *Ghost Wars*, 290.

Pakistani leaders have long understood the strategic importance of Afghanistan to its security and the role it plays in balancing against Indian power.

STRATEGIC DEPTH: AFGHANISTAN'S ROLE IN PAKISTANI SECURITY

British planners fearing an encroaching Tsarist Russia sought to protect the crown jewel of the Empire by ensuring Russia would be denied a warm-water port and any opportunities to control Afghanistan for much of the 19th Century. Russian officials similarly feared British designs into Central Asia and sought to counter increasing British commercial activity in the Khanates.⁶⁵ Paralleling this dynamic of uncertainty, Pakistani and Indian leaders have long feared each other's intention in Afghanistan and exercised varying degrees of actions to counter this threat. These competitions provide clear case studies for the classical security dilemma. As previously mentioned, this paradigm within international affairs is characterized by mutual distrust and uncertainty between two nation-states. In certain cases this creates miscalculation or efforts to maximize a state's comparative power.⁶⁶

Constant British and Russian uncertainty led to a number of costly wars between

⁶⁵ Becker, Seymour. "The Great Game: The History of an Evocative Phrase." *Asian Affairs* 43, no. 1 (2012): 68.

⁶⁶ Mearsheimer, John J. "Structural realism." *International relations theories: Discipline and diversity* 83 (2007).; Charles L. Glaser (1997). *The Security Dilemma Revisited*. *World Politics*, 50, pp 174-175.

the British Empire and Afghanistan none of which would allow London to exert its desired state of colonization.

Pakistan's involvement with the Taliban as well HIG was driven primarily not out of a common Islamic ideology but rather Islamabad's pragmatic calculation that it must maintain influence in Afghanistan to project strategic depth. The concept of strategic depth can be traced to the late 19th Century struggle between the British Empire and Imperial Russia over influence through Central Asia. British policy makers calculated that they needed to delineate spheres of influence within Afghanistan to check Imperial Russian ambitions and prevent any advances on the crown jewel of the British Empire, India. Afghanistan emerged as a zone where British and Russian strategists constantly asserted power through direct intervention or through co-option or cooperation of the local governments.⁶⁷ Pakistani leaders of the 1990s were faced with a similar set of circumstances in which a weak government in Kabul would likely serve as a venue for regional competition between Islamabad and New Delhi.

The concept of Pakistani strategic depth took on additional meaning following the disastrous war with India in 1971. During this conflict, Pakistan lost control over the entirety of its eastern half of the country and suffered a long-lasting humiliation against its archrival. To counter this defeat and the overcome its geographical vulnerabilities, Pakistani military and political officials recognized the strategic importance of Afghanistan in any future conflict with India. Starting with

⁶⁷ Fromkin, David. "The Great Game In Asia." *Foreign Affairs* 58, no. 4 (Spring1980): 936.

the military dictatorship of Zia, Pakistani intelligence began to cultivate relationships that would allow Islamabad to influence Afghan policy in its favor.⁶⁸

British Imperial planners were similarly faced with the reality that Afghanistan would be difficult to control and would likely not accept direct British authority. In response to continued Russian encroachment into Central Asia and a delegation that sought to create a new relationship between Kabul and Moscow, the British military would launch a preemptive attack against Afghanistan. Fully aware of their inability to pacify the country in the First Anglo – Afghan War, British military objectives called for several decisive victories and an assertion of British primacy in the country; Afghanistan would maintain control over its domestic affairs while London would control Kabul’s external relations.⁶⁹

Pakistan’s long standing conflicts with India and its precarious geographic position underscored the necessity of exerting influence into Afghanistan lest India develop friendly relations with Kabul. This strategic scenario creates similar circumstances in which Pakistani planners exerted as much influence as possible into Afghanistan to prevent the emergence of a pro-Indian government in that country as well as to ensure its economic and commercial interests could advance into the Central Asian republics.

⁶⁸ Khan, Feisal. "Why Borrow Trouble for Yourself and Lend It to Neighbors? Understanding the Historical Roots of Pakistan's Afghan Policy." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 37, no. 4 (2010): 177.

⁶⁹ Akbar, Zehra. "Central Asia: The New Great Game." Accessed from: <http://www.thewashingtonreview.org/articles/central-asia-the-new-great-game.html>; Khalid, Iram. "The New Great Game in Afghanistan: Role of India (A Pakistani Perspective)." *South Asian Studies* 26, no. 2 (2011): 242.

While the end of the Cold War was greeted as the end of history by some Western commentators, Pakistani decision makers viewed the defeat of the Soviet Union as an opportunity to create an “Islamic Bloc” of nations in the newly independent Central Asian states.⁷⁰ This security vacuum created structural incentives for Pakistan to extend its influence into Afghanistan as a means of creating strategic depth and furthering its security interests. Viewed through this construct, Pakistan’s support to various militant organizations in the 1990s was entirely logical based upon historic and strategic considerations. Similar to British actions in the late 19th century, Islamabad recognized its security was dependent upon an amenable government in Kabul to counter a peer competitor. Additionally, these actions align with a structural realist view of international relations in which states view maximizing their power as the ultimate guarantee of their survival.⁷¹

The rise of the Taliban movement in the mid 1990s out of southern Afghanistan and their success against the Rabbani government suddenly changed the operational dynamic in the Afghan Civil War. While it is easy to speculate that this was a direct result of Pakistani patronage Ahmed Rashid notes that the Afghan Taliban movement did enjoy unparalleled access to the Pakistani levers of power they were by no means a tool of or subservient to the ISI. While the Pakistani government was clearly supporting the Taliban movement with material and military advisors the Taliban were more a Pashtu based fundamentalist movement

⁷⁰ Fair, C. Christine . "Pakistan's Relations with Central Asia: Is Past Prologue?." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 2 (2008)

⁷¹ Mearsheimer, John J. "Structural realism." *International relations theories: Discipline and diversity* 83 (2007).

that sought to implement a more austere social order amongst the lawlessness of Afghanistan.⁷²

Islamabad calculated that given its tenuous strategic environment the HIG and later the Taliban presented the most readily accessible factions with whom to support even if the ISI did not share an ideological affinity for the fundamentalist movements. While it is impossible to define the exact amount of aid given by Pakistan to the Taliban it is clear that a significant amount of military aid in the form of logistical support and expertise was given to advance Islamabad's interests in Afghanistan. This aid went so far as to place Pakistani military officers in a lead advising role for the sometimes-inexperienced Taliban field commanders.⁷³

The Afghan Taliban, unlike the Pakistani movements of the same name, would ultimately receive large amount of aid in the form of official diplomatic and economic support as well as covert training and weapons material. "The Taliban who governed Afghanistan from 1996–2001 had strong ties to Pakistan, both official and unofficial: they formed their identity in Pakistani schools and refugee camps, received funding and support from Islamabad that enabled their rise, and had close bilateral relations with their patrons after they seized power. Their agenda, however, was primarily a national one, and it remained so even after they were toppled and driven into the wilderness by the United States in 2001–2." Though a fundamentalist movement with a revisionist interpretation of Islam, Pakistan

⁷² Kapur, S. Paul, and Sumit Ganguly. "The Jihad Paradox." *International Security* 37, no. 1 (2012): 132.

⁷³ Ganguly, Sumit, and Nicholas Howenstein. "India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan." *Journal Of International Affairs* 63, no. 1 (2009): 132.

recognized a valuable asset in the Taliban that could be co-opted and utilized to advance Islamabad's long-term interests in the region.⁷⁴

Pakistan leaders, civilian and military alike, have continually sought to ensure Kabul did not emerge as a key supporter of India. The withdrawal of Soviet forces in the late 1980s refocused Pakistan's interest in developing a government friendly to its long-term interests.⁷⁵ As Pakistan was able to score a strategic victory in the 1990s with the rise of the Taliban movement they also gained a government that was more amenable to Pakistani efforts in the region. The success of the Taliban movement in defeating the government of Massoud forced the Indian government to close its diplomatic facilities in Afghanistan resulting in a serious political setback for New Delhi.⁷⁶

Pakistan's strategic partnership with the Taliban presented a number of complex problems as Taliban brutality in the western Afghan city of Herat nearly pushed the regime to war with neighboring Iran.⁷⁷ Few nations other than Pakistan, Saudi Arabian and the United Arab Emirates recognized the legitimacy of the Taliban. As author Craig Baxter notes "The Taliban regime that was essentially security oriented did not earn any international support for reconstruction of the country. Instead, there was a sentiment of passive hostility in that region against

⁷⁴ Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban the Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond*, 184.

⁷⁵ Akhtar, Nasreen. "Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Taliban." *International Journal On World Peace* 25, no. 4 (December 2008): 53.

⁷⁶ Ganguly, Sumit, and S. Paul Kapur. "The Sorcerer's Apprentice: Islamist Militancy In South Asia." *The Washington Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2010): 55.

⁷⁷ Kapur, S. Paul, and Sumit Ganguly. "The Jihad Paradox." *International Security* 37, no. 1 (2012): 131.

Pakistan for the support it had given to the Taliban.⁷⁸ The United States, European countries, and even China, its closest ally, were, “all offended by Pakistan's failure to influence the policies of the Taliban on any issue.” Yet Pakistan calculated that whatever costs were associated with its involvement with the Taliban government were worth bearing to hedge against any possible Indian encirclement in the region.⁷⁹

Pakistan’s behavior in Afghanistan and in its relations with other Central Asian states underscore its desire to develop “depth” as a means to protect its influence and check the ambition of Iran and India. This also allows Pakistan to balance against its principal threat India and ensure its largely ungarded western border remains amenable to Islamabad’s interests. Despite international condemnation for its oftentimes-sustained relationships with militant groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan recognizes that it must maintain these connections to protect its vital security interests. Pakistan covert support for certain militant groups and its diplomatic efforts to ensure these groups are represented in a larger Afghan political process would ensure that Pakistani interests not Indian are represented in a future Afghan government.⁸⁰ This effort served to advance a pro-Islamabad agenda whereby Indian commercial and diplomatic interests would be mitigated by Islamabad’s close ties with a number of states to include a government in Kabul that

⁷⁸ Baxter, Craig. *Pakistan on the brink: politics, economics, and society*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2004. 45.

⁷⁹ Baxter, *Pakistan on the brink: politics, economics, and society* , 45.

⁸⁰ Akhtar, Nasreen. "Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Taliban." *International Journal On World Peace* 25, no. 4 (December 2008):

was receptive if not amenable to Pakistani interests.⁸¹ Recognizing that the defeat and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union provided a unique moment of opportunity for it as Pakistani diplomats, intelligence officers and prominent businesses sought to counter the rising power of India. Much like the great power politics of the 19th Century, a similar geo-strategic competition between India and Pakistan emerged.

Historically India has been open to working with numerous governments in Kabul that were dominated by Islamist militant groups such as the Northern Alliance. Similar to Pakistan's relations with certain groups, India's relationship was based around opposition to a Pashtu led government that would be backed by Islamabad. Ganguly and Howenstein further note that the long-standing rivalry between India and Pakistan since the end of British rule has exacerbated tensions between the two countries where Afghanistan is often seen in a zero-sum scheme. As discussed earlier in the paper, similar to the great power rivalries between Britain and Russia, Afghanistan has served as a proxy battlefield between the contemporary great powers of the region. During the course of the Cold War, India outreach to Pashtu nationalist groups would allow New Delhi to occupy the Pakistani military on both the eastern and western borders.

*SUPPORT TO MILITANT ORGANIZATIONS: A LOW-COST ALTERNATIVE TO
CONVENTIONAL CONFLICT*

⁸¹ Rashid, Ahmed. Taliban the Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond.. London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2002: 194-195.

Today American and international forces led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) remain frustrated at their inability to quell a resurgent Taliban insurgency throughout much of Afghanistan. Washington has attempted to use its influence and military aid as leverage toward Islamabad in an effort to stem the Taliban movement and as a means of stabilizing Afghanistan. Recognizing that Islamabad's established relationships with the various factions in the Taliban movement are key to a future political solution, U.S. and NATO leaders believe Pakistan's security establishment can be dissuaded from future support to the Taliban movement. Upon a further examination of Pakistani support to these groups, Western policy makers would be wise to view Islamabad's support to militant organizations through a strategic prism in which Islamabad seems unlikely to change its current behavior. While contrary to Western interests and a wider struggle against fundamentalist movements, Pakistan's support to militant organizations is based on a cold but pragmatic calculus in recognition of its precarious strategic environment vis a vis India.

Cognizant of the British Imperial experience in the region one hundred years prior, Pakistan's intelligence and military leaders recognized Afghanistan as a vital interest to Pakistani security. Given the lack of a national government following the Soviet withdrawal and the tenuous position of the Najibullah government, Islamabad recognized the disparate Mujahedeen movements as its best chance to advance its security interests. Always aware of competing Indian interests, the HIG and later Taliban movement were seen as the best means by which to create a pro-

Pakistani government in Kabul.⁸² If successful, this would have the effect of guaranteeing security on Pakistan's western border and enhancing its commercial and political advances into Central Asia.

Pakistan's support of the Mujahedeen and later Taliban movement of the 1990s provided a valuable number of lessons for Islamabad's decision makers; The costs of covertly supporting a surrogate were far fewer than overt Pakistani military and diplomatic involvement. Pakistan gained a valuable ally in the Taliban and despite a lack of shared ideological interests the Taliban government served as a valuable patron for Islamabad's wider interests in the region. ISI support to the Taliban movement in the 1990s and early 2000s served Islamabad's interests well by thwarting Iranian and Indian efforts to advance their respective interests.

This support to militant organizations also provides a low-cost option to Pakistan while reducing the possibility of outright conflict with its peer competitor India. The ISI's covert support to the Mujahedeen in the 1980s served as a valuable model by which to challenge Indian influence in the region. Over time this construct would also be applied to Jammu and Kashmir where since the independence of both India and Pakistan a low-level conflict has continued between the competing countries.⁸³

Pakistan also feared that covert Indian assistance to the Baloch's could be used as a means to destabilize its western border and thereby force the Pakistani

⁸² Weinbaum, Marvin G., and Jonathan B. Harder. "Pakistan's Afghan policies and their consequences." *Contemporary South Asia* 16, no. 1 (2008): 30.

⁸³ Mudiam, Prithvi Ram. "The India-Pakistan Dispute Over Jammu And Kashmir And The United States." *Global Change, Peace & Security* 15, no. 3 (2003): 267.

military to withdraw critical assets from the Indian border. To counter this perceived threat, Pakistan has consistently sought to destabilize certain ethnic groups in Afghanistan to prevent the emergence of a pro-Indian government by supporting Pashtu groups such as the Taliban. As a 2010 Council on Foreign Relations report notes, "Pakistani security officials calculate that the Taliban offers the best chance for countering India's regional influence."⁸⁴ Ever fearful of strategic encirclement on the part of India, successive Pakistani governments will likely calculate that their relationships with certain political parties and militant movements in Afghanistan present the best option for ensuring strategic depth and preventing the emergence of a government that runs counter to Islamabad's long-term national interests.

Pakistani decision makers will likely re-evaluate the lessons of their past support for a Taliban-led government in Kabul and conclude that this support advances their interests. The Taliban will likely remain an important asset for Pakistan leaders and most especially the ISI who are ever fearful of a Kabul government amenable to Indian interests. Moreover, as American aid to Pakistan is likely to decrease following a drawdown in conventional forces and Washington and Islamabad reevaluate their relationship, the ISI will likely be called on once again by the military elite to expand their relationship with the Taliban. This will be done to ensure that Islamabad's interest in a friendly government is advanced and Iranian and Indian efforts are checked.

⁸⁴ Bajoria, Jayshree. "India-Afghanistan Relations." Aug 2009. Council on Foreign Relations.

The costs of confronting an adversary that has military and economic advantages through the use of trusted surrogates allows a weaker state such as Pakistan to level the playing field and turn weaknesses into strengths. The suspicions between New Delhi and Islamabad date to the founding of the two countries. Pakistan's relationships with militant and terrorist organizations draw directly upon the ISI's success in battling the Soviet Union and the Communist government of Afghanistan.⁸⁵ Absent military parity, Pakistan will likely continue to view a friendly government in Afghanistan as a strategic necessity and a key venue to prevent Indian encirclement.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Following an eventual withdrawal of US and Coalition forces, Pakistan's strategic interests will remain largely unchanged from what they were in the 1990s, with a constant suspicion of Iranian, Russian and Indian designs in Afghanistan and the wider Central Asian region.⁸⁶ As a result, Pakistan's support for militant groups and its desire to significantly shape or create a friendly government in Kabul fit into its strategic vision for the region. If the past serves as prologue then the situation in Afghanistan following a withdrawal of Western forces will closely mirror the

⁸⁵ Kronstadt, K. Alan. "Pakistan and the Afghan Insurgency." Congressional Research Service: Report (2012): 30.

⁸⁶ Fair, C. Christine . "Pakistan's Relations with Central Asia: Is Past Prologue?." Journal of Strategic Studies 31, no. 2 (2008): 210.

Afghanistan of the 1990s with shifting coalitions amongst the various ethnic groups and Pakistan as well as the other regional great powers.⁸⁷

Pakistan's involvement with the Taliban as well as violent groups such as the Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) in the 1990s was driven primarily not out of a common Islamic ideology but rather Islamabad's pragmatic calculation that it must maintain influence in Afghanistan to project strategic depth. The withdrawal of Soviet troops and a weak coalition government in Kabul allowed Islamabad an opportunity to promote its political and security interests into the country as well as expand commercial influence to the newly independent states of Central Asia.⁸⁸ Amidst this security vacuum, Pakistani leaders recognized that to fully take advantage of a weak Afghanistan - in the face of numerous warring factions - select militant organizations provided the best means by which to exert influence into Afghanistan. One hundred years prior, British Imperial planners were faced with a similar set of circumstances viewing Afghanistan as a stage for a larger geo-strategic struggle with Imperial Russia. Similar to the British Imperial experience in the 19th Century, Pakistan was faced with a weak-neighboring state, which would serve as a venue for competing regional powers.

Given this complicated security environment, Pakistani decision makers tactfully shifted their support to a number of militant organizations in Afghanistan throughout the 1990s in order to advance Islamabad's security interests. Ever

⁸⁷ Price, Colin. "Pakistan: A Plethora of Problems." *Global Security Studies* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 59.

⁸⁸ Padukone, Neil. "India and Pakistan's Afghan Endgames." *World Affairs* 175, no. 4 (November 2012): 82.

fearful of being encircled by India on both borders Pakistan's security officials made a calculated decision to provide lethal aid to Afghan militant groups in order to create or influence a future government in Kabul amenable to Islamabad's interests. Pakistani involvement in Afghanistan has largely been based on its precarious strategic environment and fear of encirclement by a government in Kabul supportive of Indian interests in the region.⁸⁹ Pakistan calculated its security interests would be best served through an alliance with numerous Afghan militant organizations thereby ensuring India would not be able encircle Pakistan and deny it strategic depth in the face of an outright conflict.

US policy makers have been continually frustrated with attempts to convince Pakistani decision makers to withdraw their support to militant groups in Afghanistan and support a comprehensive regional solution. Yet, a wide array of public and private musings within Western capitals seem to acknowledge that Pakistani fears of strategic encirclement and a desire to promote their interests through surrogates in Afghanistan may be too substantial to change Islamabad's behavior. To be sure, Pakistan and India remain deep enemies with fundamentally different political systems and divergent national interests. Their respective histories are laced with sharp periods of competition as well as covert and overt hostility. These differences may be too much to bridge absent security guarantees that would be accepted in both New Delhi and Islamabad.

⁸⁹ Rashid, Ahmed. "The Anarchic Republic of Pakistan." National Interest no. 109 (2010): 24.

Moreover, Islamabad's behavior in Afghanistan since the Soviet invasion belies that Pakistan values that country as a valuable asset that can be used to improve its strategic position in the region, advance its commercial and diplomatic agenda. Pakistan's successful relationship with the Taliban throughout the 1990s will likely be deepened with the withdrawal of Coalition forces as Islamabad recognizes that it must negotiate based upon the realities in Afghanistan with a less than desirable partner lest India or Iranian influence grows in that country.

The depth of Pakistani support to the Taliban and HIG networks may never be fully known outside the guarded corridors of the vaunted ISI. Yet Pakistan seems to be conducting a set of actions that are intended to shape Afghanistan for the long term similar to their policies of the 1990s. American and Western staying power in the region are growing increasingly thin after 10 years of protracted conflict and countless high profile attacks against symbols of Western influence in the country. Pakistan clearly understands that it must have a substantial role in the region following the departure of these forces. To do so, it has likely calculated that it must work with the Afghan Taliban as well as deepen relationships it has historically relied upon to ensure that its strategic position in the region is not further weakened. As British planners of the 19th Century recognized Afghanistan's strategic relationship to Central Asia, Pakistan has likely calculated the benefits of supporting the Taliban and other militant groups outweighs any costs as this provides Islamabad the best chance to ensure its security interests are met.

Current US policy towards Afghanistan states that by 2014 a substantial number of American troops deployed as a result of the 2009 surge will be withdrawn and replaced by a larger Afghan National Army force of some 400,000 troops. Yet most foreign policy scholars believe substantial Western diplomatic support, material aid and clandestine presence will remain in Afghanistan for the next decade. In the absence of a large US and International Security Assistance Forces presence Afghanistan will likely emerge once again as a proxy battlefield between competing Iranian, Indian and Pakistani interests.⁹⁰ Pakistan will likely recreate or further enhance existing relationships with certain elements of the Taliban movement and their long-time patron Gulbuddin Hekmatyar to ensure a government in Kabul amenable to Islamabad's interests.

⁹⁰ Pant, Harsh V.1,2. "Pakistan and Iran's Dysfunctional Relationship." *Middle East Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (2009): 45.

Chapter 2

Revolutionary Outreach: A Structural Examination of Iran's Support to Lebanese Hezbollah

Chapter 2: Revolutionary Outreach: An Examination of Iran's Support to Lebanese Hezbollah

Research Question: How did the nature of the anarchic international system and the character of Iran's post-revolutionary government affect Tehran's decision to support Lebanese Hezbollah as a strategic proxy force?

Introduction

The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 are often cited as transformative events in world history in which the pre-existing status quo was replaced through the formation of revolutionary governments. In the case of Iran, the Shia-theocratic forces, which would eventually consolidate their power to the detriment of the more moderate/pragmatic factions of the revolution, would come to challenge both the Western-backed monarchies of the Middle East as well

as the Arab secular regimes of Iraq and Egypt. This abrupt change in the character of the Iranian state would challenge the decade's old balance of power in the Persian Gulf and upend the security calculus of the region while also having long-standing implications on American involvement in the region.

Similar to the immediate years following the Bolshevik victory and consolidation of power, revolutionary Iran sought to export its unique brand of ideology outside its borders as a means of enhancing its national power as well as to burnish its credentials. In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the new political structure, which would come to be known as the Guardianship of the Jurist, combined elements of Shia theology with revolutionary tactics previously employed by the Bolshevik vanguards of the early 20th Century. Former Central Intelligence Agency Officer Robert Baer likens the theocratic government of Iran as eminently pragmatic and in even in the heady days following the successful revolution, the Ayotallah's recognized they would be unable to bring their version of Islamic government to the country overnight. The construct they would create recognized the need to adapt to Iranian society while also proper adherence to Islamic law. As Baer notes the Shia jurisprudent was, "not far from Plato's rule of philosopher king."⁹¹

The new revolutionary government would also seek to export its version of government to what it viewed as the corrupt apostate's of the region starting first with Iraq. Starting in 1979 the Iranian regime sought to export the Islamic revolution, or at least the Shia interpretation, throughout the world. Iranian scholar

⁹¹ Baer, Robert. *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the new Iranian Superpower*. Three Rivers Press. New York (2008): 73.

Said Arjomand notes, “in October 1981, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mir-Hossein Musavi, set up a committee to determine the basis of foreign policy from an ideological perspective, and drew up plans for an Islamic front worldwide.” This would result in several Iranian-backed political organizations throughout the Middle East to include Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Iraq. By 1982 the military and political vanguard of the revolution, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), had begun a covert involvement in the Lebanese Civil War.⁹²

In the years after the consolidation of power, Iranian decision makers and security officials began a complex involvement with the minority Shia communities of Lebanon amidst that country’s disastrous civil war. The almost 15 year conflict would see Western, Israeli and Arab support for various proxy forces and political movements as well as outright deployment of conventional forces. Iran’s decision to support the country’s Shia communities in the early 1980s was made amidst a costly conventional conflict with Iraq as Saddam Hussein sought to strengthen his own credentials in the Arab world by invading the Iranian oil-rich region of Khuzestan and containing the revolutionary government in Tehran. In the face of a technologically superior ally in Iraq and diplomatic isolation, Tehran embarked on a covert undertaking to secretly support a nascent militant group in eastern Lebanon.⁹³

Though this group had once been affiliated with the more mainstream Amal, the new organization, which called itself, Hezbollah (literally party of god) sought to

⁹² Arjomand, Said Amir. *After Khomeini Iran under his successors*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press (2009): 135.

⁹³ Arjomand, Said Amir. *After Khomeini Iran under his successors*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press (2009): 135.

challenge the Israeli and Syrian factions of the Lebanese Civil War. Since this time Western observers have struggled to accurately understand Iranian support to proxy forces.⁹⁴ Since the successful revolution over the pro-Western Shah Reza Pahlavi, Islamic Iran has sought to continually challenge the existing status quo in the Middle East. A 2009 Jane's country risk assessment noted "Iran's strategic doctrine is shaped by its regional political aspirations, threat perceptions and desire to preserve the legacy of the Islamic revolution."⁹⁵

Conventional interpretations regarding Iranian involvement in the Lebanese Civil War largely focus on common Shia linkages between Hezbollah and the Iranian government.⁹⁶ While Lebanon had often been the venue for previous proxy wars, the Shia minority may have seemed a logical surrogate for Iranian largesse. However, little literature focuses on the structure of the international system and whether or not it provides certain incentives for governments, revolutionary or otherwise, to engage in a proxy war as a means of enhancing national power. The following review of applicable literature will attempt to highlight the key arguments to explain Iranian support to Lebanese Hezbollah. I will first review literature, which emphasizes the unique nature of the Iranian government as a key driver for its behavior. Second, I will review the two theoretical outlines of neo-realism divided between defensive and offensive realism and apply the key tenets of these

⁹⁴ Baer, Robert. *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the new Iranian Superpower*. Three Rivers Press. New York (2008): 23.

⁹⁵ Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments, *The Gulf States Issue 25 – 2009 Edition* (Alexandria, VA: HIS Jane's, 2009), 105.

⁹⁶ Siklawi, Rami. "The Dynamics of the Amal Movement In Lebanon 1975-90." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (Winter2012): 6-7.

theories to Iranian behavior, specifically its support to Hezbollah, to better understand the key drivers for its behavior during this period.

Methodology

ANARCHIC INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AS AN UNDERLYING ASSUMPTION

Amongst international relations scholars a common assumption exists which largely posits the international system between nation-states is anarchic. This anarchy is defined as a system in which no force, or supra-national entity, exists to govern the behavior of states. While international institutions such as the United Nations can sometimes serve as arbiters between feuding states, the lack of a central authority above individual states creates a highly unpredictable environment in which states must assume a worst-case scenario and seek to maximize either their power or their security.⁹⁷

In the *Theory of International Politics*, Kenneth Waltz believes the prime driver for state action is to understand a balancing against power from an opposing state or an alliance of states. Waltzian theory would lead to a rejuvenation within realist circles and a modification on the more classical strains of the theory. Waltz's emphasis upon assessing state's threats and relative power distribution would place analysis at a structural level vice the classical realist approach which emphasized

⁹⁷ Davide Fiammenghi. "The Security Curve and the Structure of International Politics: A Neorealist Synthesis." *International Security* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011): 129.; Brooks, Stephen G. "Dueling Realism. (cover story)." *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 464.

the role of human motivation, and a desire for power as the key driver for a state's behavior.⁹⁸ While both versions of realism acknowledge anarchy as the constant state of international affairs, structural realists believed systemic constraints and incentives were the key to understanding why states (democratic or autocratic) conducted certain behaviors.

Writing in the *International Studies Review*, F. Gregory Gause states, "The Middle East is a "hard case" for the neo- realist theory of balancing, for he (Walt) discerns numerous bandwagoning incentives in the region related to transnational ideologies and identities."⁹⁹ In this paper I will seek to apply neo-realist theory (structural realism) to better understand Iranian support to Lebanese Hezbollah and identify structural incentive that better explain Tehran's behavior. Through a discussion of the competing versions of neorealism and an understanding of the structural constraints imposed on the Islamic Republic, we may be able to better understand the prime drivers for Iranian behavior as it relates to this proxy force while also seeking to understand the geo-strategic environment in which the revolutionary government found itself.

Both offensive and defensive realists recognize structural considerations as key to understanding behavior. However, offensive realism largely posit states seek to constantly maximize their power as the only true guarantee of security whereas defensive realists would note a state's actions would be best understood by

⁹⁸ Forde, Steven. "International realism and the science of politics: Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Neorealism." *International Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (June 1995): 141.; Davide Fiammenghi. "The Security Curve and the Structure of International Politics: A Neorealist Synthesis." *International Security* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011): 127.

⁹⁹ Gause III, F. Gregory. "Systemic Approaches to Middle East International Relations." *International Studies Review* 1, no. 1 (Spring1999): 15.

recognizing a need to seek security before expansionism.¹⁰⁰ This leads to either a behavior of bandwagoning with another state or balancing against a common competitor or actions which seek to change the balance of power in favor of the revisionist state (the state which seeks to maximize its power). Both theories believe it is the structure of the international system and a state's relation to its peers, which provides certain incentives for either offensive or defensive action. Simply put, when states feel threatened they will either seek to counter their adversaries or balance against a potential threat.¹⁰¹

Perhaps the leading contemporary offensive realist, John Mearshimer succinctly captures the key tenets of this theory when he states, "Given the difficulty of determining how much power is enough for today and tomorrow, great powers recognize that the best way to ensure their security is to achieve hegemony now, thus eliminating any possibility of a challenge by another great power. Only a misguided state would pass up an opportunity to be the hegemon in the system because it thought it already had sufficient power to survive."¹⁰²

Similarly, defensive realists acknowledge the preeminence of anarchy within the international system but diverge from offensive theorists believing state's actions should be assessed through an understanding of balancing against perceived

¹⁰⁰ Guzzini, Stefano. "Structural power: The limits of neorealist power analysis." *International Organization* 47, no. 3 (Summer93 1993): 443.; Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "The Foreign Policy of Iran," in *The Foreign Policies of Middle Eastern States*, ed. Raymond Hinnebusch (London: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 298.

¹⁰¹ Davide Fiammenghi. "The Security Curve and the Structure of International Politics: A Neorealist Synthesis." *International Security* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011): 126-154.

¹⁰² Mearsheimer, John (2001). *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton. p. 35.

risk.¹⁰³ While both theoretical camps believe states seek to guarantee their security through certain actions, defensive realists would point to those actions which enhance a states security in the face of a threat vice promoting or enhancing national power at first blush as offensive theorists would contend.

In light of a predominance of literature which focuses on the Islamist/Shia fundamentalist nature of the Iranian regime, a structural analysis of Tehran's behavior may prove to better identify additional drivers for the regime's behavior. A review and discussion of Iranian behavior prior to the revolution and possible symmetries in its actions after the fall of the Shah may also identify the role nationalism vice ideology played in determining the regime's actions.

Literature Review

CHARACTER OF THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT

The nascent post-revolutionary Iranian government offered an alternative to prevailing Western and Soviet backed economic and political models. Ayatollah Khomeini and other Shia clerics in Iran had formed the theoretical concept of Iran's revolutionary government, the guardianship of the jurist, decades earlier.¹⁰⁴ Broadly speaking, this form of government placed an emphasis on the wisdom of the learned

¹⁰³ Forde, Steven. "International realism and the science of politics: Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Neorealism." *International Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (June 1995): 141.; Davide Fiammenghi. "The Security Curve and the Structure of International Politics: A Neorealist Synthesis." *International Security* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011): 140.

¹⁰⁴ Arjomand, Said Amir. *After Khomeini Iran under his successors*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press (2009): 30 -32.

Imams as representatives of god. Former Presidential Aide, Gary Sick believes the cardinal rule American decision makers should fully appreciate with regards to Iran is Tehran's behavior should be analyzed in full appreciation of the domestic drivers for its behavior. Also turning to the unique theocratic nature of its government Sick notes, "The supreme goal of Ayatollah Khomeini and his associates is to assure the continuation of the theocratic rule and to preserve the legitimacy of the new regime." In this view, Iranian national security and the survival of the theocratic regime are closely tied to regime preservation. Therefore, Iranian actions, specifically its support to Hezbollah, should be assessed in light of the state's necessity in maintaining its particular form of government.¹⁰⁵

The Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979 offered the sharp political alternative to the prevailing politic models of the region.¹⁰⁶ In Egypt, Gamel Abdel Nasser and his successor, Anwar Sadat, had attempted to unify the Arab world under the banner of Arab Socialism. This nationalism developed over time to chart an independent course for the Arab regimes, tied neither to the West nor to the Soviet East, but rather to develop along uniquely Arab-lines of political thought. Writing in the *Washington Quarterly*, Graham Fuller recounts Israel's defeat of the principal revolutionary Arab states—Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq—in the 1967 Six-Day War was a turning point at which it became apparent that Arab nationalism had failed to deliver on its promises of unity, prosperity, and strength against the West."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Sick, Gary. "Iran's Quest for Superpower Status." *Foreign Affairs*, (1987): 699.

¹⁰⁶ 6. *Islam and Revolution – Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, translated and annotated by Hamid Algar (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1981).

¹⁰⁷ Graham E. Fuller. "The Hizballah-Iran Connection: Model for Sunni Resistance." *The Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2006): 141.

Fuller notes this political failure would have long-term implications on the Middle East as it would soon give rise to a more radical form of resistance in political Islam.

Rami Siklawi writes the 1979 revolution would be greeted as a success against the perceived injustice and corruption of the old statist regimes. Similar to the Nasser-backed Governments, "The Shah of Iran had been renowned for his corruption and his ties with the West and Israel. The Iranian Revolution was also viewed as a major success for the Shiites of the Arab world, including Lebanon."¹⁰⁸ Abbas William Samii notes even prior to a deeper involvement with Lebanese Hezbollah, the newly ratified Iranian constitution mandated the revolutionary regime's involvement with the Lebanese Shi'a. Article 3 asserts that the government is duty-bound to provide "unsparing support to the dispossessed of the world," and Article 154 says that the government "supports the just struggles of the oppressed against the oppressors in every corner of the globe."¹⁰⁹

The Congressional Research Service report notes, "Lebanese Hezbollah is Iran's chief protégé movement in the region; their relationship began when Lebanese Shiite clerics of the pro-Iranian Lebanese Da'wa Party began to organize in 1982 into what later was unveiled in 1985 as Hezbollah. Iran's political, financial, and military aid to Hezbollah has helped it become a major force in Lebanon's

¹⁰⁸ Siklawi, Rami. "The Dynamics of the Amal Movement in Lebanon." *Arab Studies Quarterly*; Winter 2012, Vol. 34 Issue 1: 11

¹⁰⁹ Samii, Abbas William. "A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands: Assessing the Hizbullah-Iran-Syria Relationship." *Middle East Journal* 62, no. 1 (December 15, 2008): 34-35.

politics.”¹¹⁰ Writing for the Middle East Institute, Ray Takeyh further notes Iran’s conduct in the Iran – Iraq War and involvement in the Lebanese civil war reflected its revolutionary nature. “Iran’s conduct in the war reflected its militancy and revolutionary fervor. This was not an interstate conflict fought for territorial adjustment or limited political objectives. At stake was a contest of ideologies and a competition for power.”¹¹¹

Takeyh believes in the immediate aftermath of the successful revolution, Iran’s clerical elite had a belief their religious piety and valor would again allow them to defeat a technologically superior ally in Iraq as well as challenge the other traditional powers of the Middle East. This would result in Iran viewing its struggle against its Arab neighbors as part of a larger religious war waged against the Great Satan (the United States). “Military planning and issues of strategy and tactics were cast aside for the sake of martyrdom and sacrifice. The war and revolution had somehow fused in the clerical imagination.”¹¹² Yet others, such as, Barbara Ann Rieffer-Flanagan, believe realism has always been at the heart of Iranian decision-making. While Iranian elites would often cloth policies under the guise of radical Shia-Islamism, another level of analysis would reveal Tehran’s calculated decision making calculus’s in its antagonism with regional peer-competitors.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Katzman, Kenneth. "Foreign Policy and Support for Terrorist Groups." Congressional Research Service: Report (May 28, 2013): 43.

¹¹¹ Takeyh, Ray. "The Iran-Iraq War: A Reassessment." Middle East Journal 64, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 363-365.

¹¹² Takeyh, Ray. "The Iran-Iraq War: A Reassessment." Middle East Journal 64, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 368.

¹¹³ Rieffer-Flanagan, Barbara Ann. "Islamic Realpolitik: Two-Level Iranian Foreign Policy." International Journal On World Peace 26, no. 4 (December 2009): 7-9.

Aside from its support to Hezbollah, Iranian behavior in the international system, Takyeh believes it is essential to recognize the Islamic Revolution of 1979 as a watershed moment. Unlike other political revolutions however, he believes Iranian external behavior was an outgrowth of its domestic experiences as young revolutionary guards sought to challenge the existing power structure of the region and unite disparate Shia factions under a more unified structure.¹¹⁴ Still other commentators take a more nuanced view when ascribing Shia Islam and the revolutionary nature of the regime as prime drivers for Iran's action. Throughout the Cold War, the Middle East was often a proxy battleground between the United States and the Soviet Union.

While Iran was aligned with the United States under the Shah, the revolution removed one of the West's most consistent allies and dramatically altered the regional balance of power. Author's Imad Salamey and Zanoobia Othman believe the while the role of ideology has had an effect of Iranian foreign policy it is also important to recognize "that Islamic Iran emerged amidst a deepening Cold War between its most detested foe, the US, and its next-door communist neighbor, the Soviet Union. Born out of Khomeini's vision of an Islamic state, Iran had to assert its position in world politics. Inspired by neither the East nor the West, the Islamic Republic evolved as an "anti-imperialist Muslim version of the French Republic".¹¹⁵ Salamey and Othman believe Iranian behavior has gone through three periods characterized by a growing sense of realpolitik and acceptance of the country's

¹¹⁴ Takeyh, Ray. "All the Ayatollah's Men." *National Interest* no. 121 (September 2012): 52.

¹¹⁵ Salamey, Imad, and Zanoobia Othman. "Shia Revival and Welayat Al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 12, no. 2 (June 2011): 200.

political realities vis a vis its neighbors. These periods have been marked by a growing acceptance among the Iranian elite the country faced near strategic isolation, apart from an alliance with Syria, necessitating a more moderated tone to its pan-Islamic ideology.

Confronted with a large scale Iraqi invasion in 1980 and continued American largesse to Saudi Arabia and Israel, Iran also had to accept the reality of its geo-political isolation and seek to balance its adversaries. In the 1980's, Iranian support to Hezbollah and involvement in the Lebanese Civil War allowed the nascent regime to burnish its Islamic revolutionary credentials as a means of enhancing its security. This proxy force would not only challenge Israeli influence in the country but also seek to develop a popular Shia political movement in-line with Iranian interests in the region.

STRUCTURE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Examination of Iranian behavior in the international system often begins with an emphasis on the Islamic revolutionary nature of the regime. This discussion often revolves around a discussion of the Iran's attempts to spread its version of an Islamic revolution across the Middle East as a direct challenge to the more traditional Arab monarchies of Qatar and Saudi Arabia as well as the secular governments of Iraq and Egypt. While Iranian behavior is no doubt influenced by a distinct political ideology, its actions are often not analyzed assuming the state is a rational actor. Iran faces a unique geostrategic reality as Arab peer-competitors and a high-degree of American involvement in the strategically crucial Persian Gulf

region confront the state. In light of these challenges, Iranian actions, specifically its support to various proxy forces is often mischaracterized and misunderstood. Its Shia religious orientation and ethnically heterogeneous population separate it from many of its regional neighbors and in many cases isolate the regime thereby limiting its political options.¹¹⁶

In the immediate years following the revolution, Iranian radicals sought to challenge the perceived adversaries of the Islamic revolution wherever possible. Similar to other revolutionary regimes, Said Amir Arjomand notes, “The first major foreign policy in revolutionary Iran was the typical one for all revolutions: the choice between the export of the revolution beyond Iran – and accommodation with the rest of the world.”¹¹⁷ At first blush Iranian support to Hezbollah seems as a natural outgrowth of its revolutionary character. However, a discussion of the nature of the international system and the competing viewpoints (offensive realism vs. defensive realism) may also provide a better understanding of Iranian covert support to its Lebanese proxy.

In his seminal work, *Theory of International Politics*, Kenneth Waltz contends that states balance against power.¹¹⁸ Waltz views structure as a set of constraining conditions imposed upon the units of the system. Additionally, Waltz notes, “in international politics, overwhelming power repels and leads others to try and

¹¹⁶ Takeyh, Ray. "The Iran-Iraq War: A Reassessment." *Middle East Journal* 64, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 371.

¹¹⁷ Arjomand, Said Amir. *After Khomeini Iran under his successors*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press (2009): 133.

¹¹⁸ 7. Kenneth N. Waltz. *Theory of International Politics*. New York: McGraw-Hill, (1979).

balance against it.”¹¹⁹ In a balance of power, weaker states recognize this imbalance and will undertake actions which seek to correct the imbalance. Waltz believes this situation leads the weaker state faced with a security dilemma under which they will seek to strengthen their positions relative to the stronger state(s).¹²⁰

Similar to Waltz, Stephen Walt argues that states balance against threat and states they rarely bandwagon with other peer competitors to avoid a potential conflict, seeing self-help as a better means of ensuring security.¹²¹ Walt’s analysis also notes the importance of domestic driver’s of foreign policy. Unlike offensive realists who assume conflict is the most likely outcome of a strategic competition, defensive realists such as Walt believe that the anarchic structure of world politics places all states under certain constraints.¹²² Brian Rathbun further notes, “States are forced to fend for themselves in a world in which no one can be counted on to protect them. Assuming states want to survive, the system therefore provides certain incentives to states.”¹²³

In order to better understand the core differences amongst neo-realists, Jeffrey Taliaferro divides the arguments into two camps while noting, “Realist

¹¹⁹ Waltz, Kenneth N. "Structural Realism after the Cold War." *International Security* 25, no. 1 (Summer2000 2000): 27.

¹²⁰ Waltz, Kenneth N. "Structural Realism after the Cold War." *International Security* 25, no. 1 (Summer2000 2000): 29.

¹²¹ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987).

¹²² Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*;

Stephen M. Walt, “The Progressive Power of Realism,” *The American Political Science Review* 91, no. 4 (1997).

¹²³ Rathnn, Brian. “A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism.” *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (April 2008): 303

theories share certain core assumptions.”¹²⁴ Taliaferro notes these assumptions are that the international system is anarchic and there are incentives and opportunities to strengthen a state’s security. Both offense and defensive realists agree, “States under anarchy face the ever-present threat that other states will use force to harm or conquer them. This compels states to improve their relative power positions through arms buildups, unilateral diplomacy, mercantile (or even autarkic) foreign economic policies, and opportunistic expansion.”¹²⁵ While Taliaferro does not conclude either defensive or offensive realism provide better explanations for a state’s behavior he does believe defensive realism allows more theoretical room to also examine the role domestic politics plays on international behavior.

Davide Fiammenghi attempts to analyze the nature of the international system, also from a structural viewpoint, asking whether the system itself can explain, in part, a particular state’s behavior and interaction with friends and foes alike. Fiammenghi attempts to synthesize the two competing camps of neo-realism by noting both, “both offensive and defensive realists consider structural incentives as constant.”¹²⁶ Yet Fiammenghi believes these competing views, loosely associated with Waltz and Walt, result in an oversimplification. The core of this oversimplification is the theory, “states always attempt to maximize their power, or they always try to maintain their power position.”¹²⁷ This fails to account for

¹²⁴ Taliaferro, Jeffrey W. "Security seeking under anarchy: defensive realism revisited." *International Security* 25, no. 3 (December 15, 2000): 129.

¹²⁵ Taliaferro, Jeffrey W. "Security seeking under anarchy: defensive realism revisited." *International Security* 25, no. 3 (December 15, 2000): 129-130.

¹²⁶ Davide Fiammenghi. "The Security Curve and the Structure of International Politics: A Neorealist Synthesis." *International Security* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011): 129-130.

¹²⁷ Fiammenghi, 130.

instances in which states fail to take offensive action when it is in their interest or when an opportunity presents itself. Ultimately, Fiammenghi believes “structural incentives change as a state moves along the power continuum,” in which certain situations create beneficial circumstances for either band-wagoning or balancing.¹²⁸

Cameron Thies further defines Waltz’s approach noting, “structure acts as a selector by rewarding some behaviors and punishing others. In this manner structure limits the kind and quality of outcomes produced by agents in the system despite the varying goals and efforts of those agents; however, structure does not directly produce effects in the system.”¹²⁹ Thies’ approach expounds upon Waltz’s observations of the international system but does not discount the role domestic character in shaping a state’s behavior. Moving beyond a myopic focus on simply the structure of the system, Thies notes, “ structure affects behavior indirectly through two means: competition and socialization.” Thies’ approach recognizes the structure of the system, anarchy still pervades, but also believes state’s assume certain roles commensurate with their material capabilities. He identifies the great powers as the “dominant socializers in the international system,” who seek to maintain order and ensure their interests are met by the existing status quo. However, Theis believes states can assume roles within this system when the status quo does not allow for their socialization.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Fiammenghi, 131.

¹²⁹ Thies, Cameron G. "State Socialization and Structural Realism." *Security Studies* 19, no. 4 (October 2010): 691.

¹³⁰ Thies, Cameron G. "State Socialization and Structural Realism." *Security Studies* 19, no. 4 (October 2010): 695-696.

Iran's position with respect to its neighbors in the 1980s offers a unique case-study in which to assess its behavior. The revolutionary regime found itself without allies in a region where the United States and Soviet Union had long sought to extend their influence. The chaotic Lebanese Civil War seems to have provided a circumstance in which the revolutionary Islamic government could challenge the existing status-quo of the region while also spreading its form of Shia Islamic influence.

Existing literature discussing Iran's support to Lebanese Hezbollah too often focuses on the role of ideology when assessing Iran's actions in the Middle East and abroad. While we cannot fully dismiss the character of the regime as a driver for its actions, Iranian behavior has far too often not been fully analyzed through a consideration of Iranian national interest and a long-sought desire for Persian preeminence in the Middle East.¹³¹ A wider analysis of Iranian behavior during the 1980s should also be assessed in the context of its geopolitical position. Iran proclaimed itself neither part of the West or the East but as something distinct from the bi-polar axis of the Cold War. A neo-realist assessment of Iranian behavior with a focus on the structural constraints and incentives may allow for deeper assessment of Iran's support to Hezbollah amongst other militant groups.

Analysis

UNDERSTANDING OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE REALIST THEORY

¹³¹ Ali, Lubna Abid. "Historic US - Iran Relations: Revisiting Ideology and Geostrategy." *Pakistan Journal Of American Studies* 26, no. 1/2 (April 2008): 55.; Menashri, David. "Iran's Regional Policy: Between Radicalism and Pragmatism." *Journal Of International Affairs* 60, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 155.

Realist theory, both offensive and defensive, makes several important assumptions that should first be outlined before applying the different tests they ascribe to understanding a state's actions. Both defensive and offensive realists posit states often tend to view the international system through a lens, which assumes the worst-case scenario. As previously stated, states must operate under the assumption the international system, lacking an overarching power to govern individual state's actions, is largely a self-help world.¹³² Within this anarchic environment, a state must assume a "zero-sum" environment exists between states in which one's gain relative to the other serves as a disadvantage to the weaker state.¹³³

Writing in *International Organization* Stephen Brooks further identifies the following as core assumptions shared between both offensive and defensive theorists: "both have a systemic focus; both are state centric; both view international politics as inherently competitive; both emphasize material factors, rather than non-material factors; and both assume states are egoistic actors that pursue self-help."¹³⁴ Additionally, while neo-realist theories have often been criticized for a lack of appreciation on the role domestic politics can serve to influence a state's policies, both offensive and defensive proponents would again point to the system of international politics, which provides incentives and

¹³² Thies, Cameron G. "State Socialization and Structural Realism." *Security Studies* 19, no. 4 (October 2010): 689-717.

¹³³ Guzzini, Stefano. "Structural power: The limits of neorealist power analysis." *International Organization* 47, no. 3 (Summer93 1993): 443.;

Waltz, Kenneth N. "Structural Realism after the Cold War." *International Security* 25, no. 1 (Summer2000 2000): 5-41.

¹³⁴ Brooks, *Dueling Realisms* 446

constraints on a state's range of decision. "When states do not respond ideally to their structural situations, neorealism tells us we should find evidence of domestic politics and ideas distorting the decision-making process."¹³⁵

Both theories allow the nature of state's internal decision making process or structure to influence its range of action, but more precisely, neo-realist theory would point to instances in which a state was not fully appreciate of which options it possessed at a given time. In this instance both would point to structural limitations imposed on a state, which regardless of its ideology or form of government either constrained or provide options to exercise power or provide greater security.

Additionally, neo-realists make similar assumptions in identifying the state as the sole entity by which to safeguard or advance specific national interests. While interests groups and individuals may have an influence on certain elements of a state's behavior, the nation-state is the ultimate arbiter of international affairs. "A state should act as a unitary actor protecting a country's national interest, understood as more than just the aggregation of the preferences of individuals and groups in society."¹³⁶

Finally, realists assume individual states determine their respective actions based upon a rational assessment of one's geo-strategic environment. Simply put, a weak state which faces a relative disadvantage to a stronger neighboring state would be foolish to engage in bellicose behavior unilaterally as the stronger state's power would largely constrain the weaker state's options. This rational assessment

¹³⁵ Rathbun, Brian. "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism." *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (April 2008): 296.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* 304.

of a state's environment and the systemic constraints, which exist in international affairs often, serves as a prime driver for understanding a state's action.¹³⁷

Given these common core assumptions it is also necessary to identify key points of disagreement between offensive and defensive realist proponents. Offensive realists point to the inevitability of conflict between states. This reality serves as a prime driver for particular actions a state undertakes. Under this "worst case option" states recognize strength through the acquisition of power as the best deterrent to conflict or in the face of conflict, providing it with the maximum amount of advantage. Perhaps the most prominent contemporary offensive realist, John Mearsheimer writes the international system is like, "brutal arena where states look for opportunities to take advantage of each other. International relations is not a constant state of war, but is a state of relentless security competition."¹³⁸ This possibility of a conflict amongst a state and a near competitor thereby forces the state to seek ways in which to advance its interests and influence in its region. Offensive realists would note security in the anarchic international system is often fleeting – if a state is to survive in this environment it must look for potential allies to counterbalance a threat or a weak state it can influence to ultimately enhance its sense of security against looming threats.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Rathbun, Brian. "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism." *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (April 2008): 305; John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/1995): 7.

¹³⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/1995): 10.

¹³⁹ Davide Fiammenghi. "The Security Curve and the Structure of International Politics: A Neorealist Synthesis." *International Security* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011): 132.

Unlike defensive realist theory, offensive proponents believe states will resort to aggressive action when they recognize it will enhance its own national security. As opposed to the status-quo theory, offensive realism assumes states will always attempt to maximize their power as the surest means of survival. In an uncertain environment in which the true intentions of competing states can never be fully understood, a state will attempt to become a hegemon thereby asserting dominance over peer competitors.¹⁴⁰ Mearshimer believes this is the underlying tragedy of great powers as conflict is almost inevitable when states attempt to seek gains at the expense of others, ""great powers recognize that the best way to ensure their security is to achieve hegemony now, thus eliminating any possibility of a challenge by another great power. Only a misguided state would pass up an opportunity to be the hegemon in the system because it thought it already had sufficient power to survive." ¹⁴¹

In contrast to the pessimistic outlook offensive realism holds, defensive realists theorist tend to take a more nuanced approach to understanding why states undertake certain actions. Defensive theory holds while the international system is indeed anarchic, states make their decisions based upon an assessment of the probability of potential threats.¹⁴² Most importantly, defensive realists maintain the ultimate goal of any state in this environment is not power (as offensive realists

¹⁴⁰ Brooks, Stephen G. "Dueling Realism. (cover story)." *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 464.

¹⁴¹ Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 35.

¹⁴² Stephen Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories," *Foreign Policy* 110 (Spring 1998), 29-45.;

Davide Fiammenghi. "The Security Curve and the Structure of International Politics: A Neorealist Synthesis." *International Security* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2011): 136.

would maintain) but rather the acquisition of security.¹⁴³ This change in priorities, between power and security, often results in states first ensuring they have acquired enough defensive capability, economic and military, before seeking to advance their interests in what could be perceived as bellicose by neighboring states. Therefore, defensive theorists maintain: "state decision makers do not maximize power because of an insatiable desire to dominate others; rather states pursue power because doing so allows for maximum flexibility in achieving the nation's instrumental interests. In other words, postclassical realism holds that decision makers pursue power because it is the mechanism by which to achieve the state's overriding objectives."¹⁴⁴

A defensive realist would likely hold the proposition that actions a state undertakes, while appearing bellicose to others, are in fact rational actions intended to guarantee its security. This also results in a balance of power in which these states seek to either increase influence to balance against a competitor or form alliances to check the relative power of a peer competitor.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, defensive realist theory allows for the influence domestic political ideology can have in shaping a state's threat perception. This may result in a more bellicose state which recognizes its security as linked to territorial acquisition while a less radical state may be willing to live with whatever status quo is present in its strategic

¹⁴³ The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory. In *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars*, edited by Robert Rotberg and Theodore Rabb, 39-52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (1989) 40.

¹⁴⁴ Brooks, Stephen G. "Dueling Realism. (cover story)." *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 462.

¹⁴⁵ Kenneth N. Waltz, "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory", *Journal of International Affairs* 44:1 (1990): 34.

environment. Amongst defensive realists, domestic politics act as an influence on a state's foreign policy choices, however the structure of the system and more importantly the constraints a state faces will in fact limit those options they can exercise.¹⁴⁶

APPLYING NEO-REALISM THEORY TO UNDERSTAND IRAN'S SUPPORT TO HEZBOLLAH

Iranian support to Lebanese Hezbollah then provides a unique study by which to apply both offensive and defensive realist theory. Widely regarded as a highly ideological and unpredictable actor in the international system, theocratic Iran has long been referred to as an international pariah and a constant spoiler to maintaining a stable balance of power in the Middle East. Beyond these pronouncements however, Iran's actions may be better understood by applying the different tests of offensive and defensive realists theory identified above.¹⁴⁷

While Iranian opposition to Israeli influence in the Middle East is undoubtedly connected to its vision of pan-Islamist ideology, Tel-Aviv and Tehran have long fought for influence in similar venues throughout the region. The Israeli

¹⁴⁶ Rathbun, Brian. "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism." *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (April 2008): 301.

¹⁴⁷ Wege, Carl Anthony. "Hizbollah--Syrian Intelligence Affairs: A Marriage of Convenience." *Journal Of Strategic Security* 4, no. 3 (August 2011): 244.

invasion of Southern Lebanon on 1982 was originally directed against Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) enclaves in the Bekaa Valley and Eastern Beirut. While the Israeli Army would dislodge Arafat's safe-havens in the country and force their withdrawal to Tunisia, Iran recognized an opportunity to expand its influence to the dispossessed Shia population of Lebanon, which had long suffered economic and political disenfranchisement.¹⁴⁸ This action would have the dual benefit of appealing to a larger Shia audience within the region as well as to challenge the traditional regional hegemon of Israel.¹⁴⁹ Following the consolidation of power within Iran, Khomeini maintained his revolutionary exhortations of world revolution but this rhetoric would be supplanted with a far more pragmatic application of Iranian actions in the region.¹⁵⁰ It is therefore likely Iran and Israel both sought to expand their influence as a means of maximizing their power and/or security so as to maximize their strategic advantage. Lebanon, with its highly sectarian and factionalized government, offered both states a means of expanding their power respective to other peer competitors. Iran's early recognition of the long-marginalized Shiite population should be seen not only as a means by which Tehran could burnish its revolutionary credentials but also a venue to project its power and balance against its Arab Socialist and monarchist competitors.

As Israel presented a challenge to both the Arab monarchies and Arab socialist regimes (Egypt, Syria and Iraq) an Islamic Iran with larger desires in the

¹⁴⁸ Fuller, Graham E. "The Hizballah-Iran Connection: Model for Sunni Resistance." *Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2007 2007): 142-143.

¹⁴⁹ Rieffer-Flanagan, Barbara Ann. "Islamic Realpolitik: Two-Level Iranian Foreign Policy." *International Journal On World Peace* 26, no. 4 (December 2009): 22.

¹⁵⁰ Rieffer-Flanagan, Barbara Ann. "Islamic Realpolitik: Two-Level Iranian Foreign Policy." *International Journal On World Peace* 26, no. 4 (December 2009): 10.

Middle East believed support to the Shia fundamentalist Hezbollah would allow the regime to claim a large moral victory as well as frustrate Israeli strategic designs. Prior to the 1979 revolution, Iran was one of the few states to recognize the legitimacy of Israel and in the case of the Shah, Tel Aviv enjoyed robust diplomatic relations and a limited intelligence sharing relationship to counter Arab influence. While Israel was initially skeptical of the Islamic revolution and its implications on future regional power dynamics, the Tel Aviv continued to believe Tehran would remain a reliable partner against Iraqi and Saudi power.¹⁵¹

In recognition of its place in a dangerous geo-strategic environment, Iran's support to Hezbollah was likely a piece of Tehran's broader strategy to project power outside of its borders and change or at least challenge the existing status-quo of the Middle East. Iran prior to the 1979 revolution was similarly viewed with suspicion by its regional competitors. Author Raymond Hinnebusch writes, "The Shah made Iran a regional power in material terms through oil-fuelled modernization, arms acquisitions, and positioning his regime under the Nixon Doctrine as a bulwark against Soviet power and Arab radicalism."¹⁵² Under the new theocratic government, Iran's leaders recognized their isolation as a dangerous strategic impediment. Coupled with the revolutionary fervor and potential appeal of pan-Islamic ideology, Khomeini recognized the Lebanese Civil War as an

¹⁵¹ Parsi, Trita. "Israel-Iranian Relations Assessed: Strategic Competition from the Power Cycle Perspective." *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 2 (June 2005): 255.;
Salamey, Imad, and Zanoobia Othman. "Shia Revival and Welayat Al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 12, no. 2 (June 2011): 203.

¹⁵² Hinnebusch, Raymond. "Failed Regional Hegemons: the Case of the Middle East's Regional Powers." *Journal Of Diplomacy & International Relations* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 80.

opportunity to challenge the region's status quo and become a player in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

While a wide-range of commentators often ascribe Islamic ideology as a prime driver for Iranian actions, a structural assessment of the international system with which Iran confronted following the 1979 Revolution provides important insights to better understanding the rationale behind its behavior. Support to the destitute Shia of southern Lebanon would allow Tehran to burnish its pan-Islamic credentials to domestic and international audiences but more importantly, it provided the regime a means to advance its interests in the region while challenging both the United States and Israel. This constituted part of a wider strategy to position itself as a challenger to the traditional balance of power in the Middle East and insert a new form of Islamic justice into world politics.¹⁵³ Here, offensive realist theory tends to better explain Tehran's actions in the wider Middle East as defensive theorists would maintain states are largely satisfied with the status quo and conservative in nature. While Iran sought a greater sense of security, the revolutionary government also recognized Hezbollah as a valuable proxy by which to mobilize the Shiite minority; were this intervention to be successful it may provide a future roadmap for increased Iranian influence in other Arab states.

As offensive theory would postulate, Iran's revolutionary government sought not only to challenge the traditional power centers of the Middle East but also to apply its unique brand of Islamic theology to challenge the existing status-quo. As David Menshari notes, The Islamic Revolution led to a dramatic change in Iran's

¹⁵³ Parsi, Trita. "Israel-Iranian Relations Assessed: Strategic Competition from the Power Cycle Perspective." *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 2 (June 2005): 257.

foreign outlook and its international relations. For the new leaders of Iran, the Islamic Revolution was not just a title for a movement, but an ideal they wished to put into practice throughout the Muslim world. The Islamic regime viewed its victory as one stage in and an instrument of an overall change in the world of Islam—a model for imitation by other Muslims.”¹⁵⁴ Within the context of the still simmering Cold War and Iraq’s unsuccessful invasion of the country in 1980, Iranian decision makers recognized a unique opportunity to export their brand of religious governance into the complexities of the Lebanese Civil War.

Iran’s position with respect to its rivals and peer competitors in the 1980s found the Islamic Republic without allies in the region and a near international pariah state. Saddam’s invasion of Iran in 1980 was largely supported by the Arab Gulf monarchies that believed the fractured Iranian revolutionary government would collapse in the face of a large conventional-force invasion.¹⁵⁵ Despite early tactical gains in the oil-rich province of Khuzestan, Iraqi commanders failed to exploit the initial Iranian surprise and soon found themselves on the defensive. Recognizing the potential challenge Iran posed to the status quo of the Middle East, Arab monarchies supported the Iraqi invasion not out of ideology but rather a common fear of revolutionary Iranian actions especially amongst their own Shia populations. Trita Parsi observes, “The Iraq-Iran war reinforced the notion that Iran could not afford to allow its security to be dependent on any other state, and as a result, befriending Iran’s immediate neighbor was a more optimal policy than

¹⁵⁴ Menashri, David. "Iran, Israel and the Middle East Conflict1." *Israel Affairs* 12, no. 1 (Winter2006 2006): 108

¹⁵⁵ Sick, Gary. " Iran's Quest For Superpower Status." *Foreign Affairs* 65, no. 4 (Spring 1987): 698.

weakening them through alliances with remote states.”¹⁵⁶ Iranian leaders recognized this struggle had more to do with traditional competition over influence in the region and accordingly they needed to seek an external balancer to offset the predominance of Arab influence as well as to challenge Israeli military dominance.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini stated shortly after the Shah was removed from power, “Iran was only “the starting point.” Muslims “are one family,” he added, “even if they live in regions remote from each other.”¹⁵⁷ As Salamey and Othman describe, throughout history, Shia communities, in various degrees, have presented a serious challenge to the different empires that dominated the Islamic world. As a result, most Sunni monarchs have viewed the Shia with suspicion, brutally repressing their revolts with an iron fist.”¹⁵⁸ Even during the time of the Shah, Arab states remained suspicious of Iranian intentions in the wider region and feared America tilting its support in favor of Iran vice maintaining the delicate balance of power in the region. The addition of Islamic/Shia universalism to Iranian behavior likely further underscored Arab fears of Iranian intentions. Khomeini’s early attempts at sparking a unifying pan-Islamic movement did little to mobilize the Arab world however who still viewed his rhetoric through the context of the wider Shia – Sunni religious split. Arab states still viewed Iranian behavior through a nationalist lens based on competing political, and economic interests.

¹⁵⁶ Parsi, Trita. “Israel-Iranian Relations Assessed: Strategic Competition from the Power Cycle Perspective.” *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 2 (June 2005): 257.

¹⁵⁷ Interviews with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *al-Mustaqbal*, 13 January 1979; *al-Safir*, 18-19 January 1979; Radio Tehran, 7 May 1979, as reported in *Daily Report*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 8 May 1979.

¹⁵⁸ Salamey, Imad, and Zanoobia Othman. “Shia Revival and Welayat Al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy.” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 12, no. 2 (June 2011): 199.

Similar to Reza Shah Pahlavi's claims of Iranian supremacy in the Persian Gulf, the revolutionary government claimed to be dominant power in the Middle East with former President Hajatollah Rafsanji declaring in 1985 Iran's naval and other forces as the guardians of Persian Gulf security.¹⁵⁹ Ray Takyeh believes the Iraqi invasion of the nascent government unwittingly handed the hard-line clerical elements a significant political victory as they were able to silence more secular elements within the still forming government. As the Iran – Iraq War continued throughout the 1980s Iranian leaders were able to conveniently fuse the rhetoric of radical Shia Islamism while still appealing to a more traditional sense of Persian nationalism. Takyeh states, "In its quest to defend the war, the clerical state did not neglect Persian national-ism, but rather fused it with the larger Islamic task. As a vanguard revolutionary state, Iran was the first nation to inaugurate an Islamic Republic and dedicate itself to the awakening of mankind."¹⁶⁰ The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon equally provided Iran a unique opportunity to increase its influence in the region as a means of challenging the conservative Gulf monarchies as well as the Israeli regime whose very legitimacy Khomeini would refuse to recognize.

By the early 1980s with a stalemated war against Iraq only increasing in terms of human and economic costs Tehran was unable to diplomatically engage its Gulf neighbors who still feared Persian dominance more than Saddam's Arab Socialism. Tehran was unable to separate the disparate Gulf states in their support

¹⁵⁹ Sick, Gary. "Iran's Quest For Superpower Status." *Foreign Affairs* 65, no. 4 (Spring 1987): 713.

¹⁶⁰ Takeyh, Ray. "The Iran-Iraq War: A Reassessment." *Middle East Journal* 64, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 367.

for Saddam as, the longer the Gulf states supported Saddam, the more difficult it was for the clerics to maintain a policy of reconciliation. This structural impediment likely drove Iran to reevaluate its relative position in the region and recognize the need to maximize its power, amidst a self-help world, and identify possible venues by which to increase its influence and change the existing balance of power. In the end, Iran's determination to prosecute the war, its frequent denunciation of these states' legitimacy, and its support for local opposition groups obscured its hesitant and modest efforts to reach out. The fact that the Gulf states remained a steady source of support for Saddam had much to do with Iran's self-defeating and contradictory practices."¹⁶¹

Soviet Russia's grudging acceptance of "Socialism in One Country," serves as a parallel to Iranian decision makers recognition on the limits of their revolutionary appeal provided the dispossessed of the Islamic world.¹⁶² While Khomeini genuinely believed in spreading the revolution amongst the Arab states he also recognized the limits of Iranian national power. David Menashari notes, "Although national considerations were alien to Khomeini's stated desire to expand Islamic influence throughout the Middle East, his regime chose to conduct its policy primarily from a perception of Iran's state interests."¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Takeyh, Ray. "The Iran-Iraq War: A Reassessment." *Middle East Journal* 64, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 375.

¹⁶² Menashari, David. "Iran's Regional Policy: Between Radicalism and Pragmatism." *Journal Of International Affairs* 60, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 156.

¹⁶³ Menashari, David. "Iran's Regional Policy: Between Radicalism and Pragmatism." *Journal Of International Affairs* 60, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 155.

Conclusion

While both offensive and defensive realist theories focus on the structure of the international system proponents chiefly disagree about the prime drivers for a states action. Simply put, this debate revolves around the question of security or power. Analyzing Iranian behavior and its support to the nascent Hezbollah movement in the 1980s, offensive theory seems to provide a more consistent rational for Tehran's behavior.¹⁶⁴ The status-quo in the region was clearly unaligned with Iranian interests as its national decision makers faced a massive Iraqi invasion as well as being ostracized by the region's power brokers, to include the United States.¹⁶⁵ These structural limitations therefore likely served as a key driver for Tehran's decision to covertly support Lebanese Hezbollah. The insurgent movement not only allowed Iran to burnish its pan-Islamic credentials but more appropriately as a means to expand Iran's power in the region. This action also allowed Tehran an opportunity to balance against its perceived threats from neighboring Arab states. The development of a strong-Shiite proxy force would allow the Iranian regime a means by which to enhance its regional standing and compensate for its strategic isolation.

Additionally, Tehran's decision makers exercised a remarkably similar view of Iran's view in the wider Middle East – contending the country was a natural regional great power which should be able to exercise its influence. While the Iran-

¹⁶⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/1995): 7.

¹⁶⁵ Goodarzi, Jubin M. "Chapter 3: Intra-Alliance Tensions and the Consolidation of the Syrian-Iranian Axis, 1985-88." In *Syria & Iran* (1-84511-127-3): 267.

Iraq War stymied Tehran's efforts to export their revolution to neighboring Arab states, Lebanon and the dispossessed Shiite minority provide Iran with a valuable venue to increase its power vis a vis its competitors. Consistent with Imperial Iranian designs to spread Tehran's influence, theocratic Iran also sought to expand influence across the region. Despite a revolutionary government, Iranian actions during this period bear a striking resemblance to previous designs on the Middle East exercised by the Shah. While revolutionary rhetoric consolidated domestic political control, Iran's ever-pragmatic Ayatollah's likely recognized the need to expand Tehran's influence as a means of guaranteeing the regime's survival and expanding its power.

Iran's involvement in the civil war and its support to Hezbollah was nothing new to the country which had seen successive external powers assert influence into the country's political scene. Iranian involvement could similarly be understood to be part of a larger recognition of Lebanon as an age-old proxy battlefield in which French, Israeli and Syrian governments sought to extend their respective power. The competing Shi'ite movements of Amal and Hezbollah were never understood to be complete extensions of Tehran's foreign policy but rather convenient allies based upon common Shia political linkages. Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps training and support to Hezbollah was rather a calculated recognition of Iran's desire for primacy in the region in the face of numerous external adversaries. This proxy would allow Tehran a mechanism by which to enhance its national power in an uncertain environment whereby strength is the ultimate guarantor of security.

Chapter 3:

Delicate Balance: The United States' shifting
involvement in the Iraq and Iran War Through Proxy

Chapter 3: Delicate Balance: The United States' shifting involvement in the Iraq and Iran War Proxy

Research Question: What factors best explain the United States' involvement during the course of the Iran-Iraq War through proxy?

Introduction

Following the tumultuous events of the Iranian Revolution in which a stalwart American ally in Middle East was dramatically replaced by a hostile theocratic government. Iraq under Saddam Hussein would soon seek to exploit the revolutionary unrest by launching a preemptive invasion into the southern region of Iran. In the waning years of the Carter Administration, amidst the Iranian Revolution and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the United States assumed a more direct role in the Persian Gulf stating it would use all means necessary to include force to maintain access to the region's oil resources.

American national security officials had long feared the possibility of a single power, Arab or Persian, assuming a dominant role in the Middle East as well as the possibility of Soviet interference. Saddam Hussein's largely secular form of Arab Socialism sought to emulate Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's efforts to unite the disparate Arab states into a unified union also posed a direct threat to the monarchical regimes of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain.¹⁶⁶¹⁶⁷ Additionally, the United States viewed the Islamic Republic – having overthrown a key US security

¹⁶⁶ Dodds, Joana, and Ben Wilson. "THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR: UNATTAINABLE OBJECTIVES." *MERIA Journal* 13, no. 2 (June 2009): 76.

¹⁶⁷ Wright, Claudia. "Implications of the Iraq-Iran war." *Foreign Affairs* 59, (December 1980): 298-299.

component - as a serious threat to its previous hegemony of the Persian Gulf region. Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran in 1980 was largely greeted with overt support from his Arab neighbors who feared Iran's desire to spread Shia theocracy across the Middle East.¹⁶⁸ Over the course of the 8-year conflict the United States would shift its support, both overt and covert, between Tehran and Baghdad as it sought to apply a policy of offshore balancing to maintain a tenuous balance of power in the strategically important region.¹⁶⁹

This paper will examine the US' considerations in the region during the 1980s and seek to understand which factors influenced US actions and how seemingly contradictory support for both Iraq and Iran can be best understood. During the course of the eight year-long Iran Iraq War, the United States would shift its support at different times for both Iran and Iraq amidst the 8 conflict. Despite the fact Revolutionary Iran posed a number of threats for the more traditional power centers of Riyadh and Baghdad as most Arab leaders viewing the theocratic government as a threat to the regional status quo, the United States still viewed Iran as a strategic focal point to prevent possible Soviet diplomatic and military influence into the region. Additionally, Washington would seek to reestablish official diplomatic relationships with Baghdad as well as providing key intelligence to Iraq amidst the conflict to prevent a possible Iranian victory. Through an examination of relevant literature this case study present a unique instances where a hegemonic state provided aid to both belligerents in a conflict.

¹⁶⁸ Viorst, Milton. "Iraq at War." *Foreign Affairs*. (Winter 1986/1987): 360-362.

¹⁶⁹ ERSOY, Eyüp. "Saudi Arabia and Iran in the New Middle East." *Middle Eastern Analysis / Ortadoğu Analiz* 5, no. 51 (March 2013): 49.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Starting in 1968, British Prime Minister Harold Wilson declared his intention to withdraw military assets from east of the Suez.¹⁷⁰ Into this power vacuum the United States asserted a role previously held by the British Empire as it sought to develop a dual strategy of arming the Iranian military and providing political support to the monarchy of Saudi Arabia. Author David Crist notes, "With Saudi oil money and its regional prestige as keeper of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina, coupled with Iran's military muscle, these two nations would serve as America's proxies to contain the Soviet Union."¹⁷¹ American security and economic interests were best served through Washington's sometimes-complicated bilateral relationship with both Tehran and Saudi Arabia. The United States functioned in much the same way as the British Empire had; providing support to the regional power centers while maintaining a calculated balance whereby neither Tehran or Riyadh would be able to assert dominance in the region.¹⁷²

Additionally, US strategic priorities in the aftermath of the Vietnam War began to shift towards the region as Britain's retrenchment left the lingering fear of possible Soviet influence. Presidential Directive 62 stated, "While NATO will retain first call on force deployments in peacetime, for wartime operations, the Persian

¹⁷⁰ Smith, Simon C. 2012. "'America in Britain's place?': Anglo-American relations and the Middle East in the aftermath of the Suez crisis." *Journal Of Transatlantic Studies (Routledge)* 10, no. 3: 262.

¹⁷¹ Crist, David. *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran*. New York: Penguin Press, 2012: 9.

¹⁷² Kaussler, Bernd, and Anthony B. Newkirk. "Diplomacy in Bad Faith: American-Iranian Relations Today." *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 23, no. 2 (June 2012): 362.

Gulf shall have highest priority for improvement of strategic lift and general purpose forces in the five-year defense program.”¹⁷³ As Roham Alvandi states, “Britain’s balance of power policy in the Gulf consisted of preventing either of the two largest littoral powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, from dominating their smaller and weaker Arab neighbors, while also deterring any other great power from entering the Gulf.”¹⁷⁴

Since the energy crisis of the 1970s where a grouping of international oil producing states, largely based in the Middle East, began a concerted oil embargo in protest towards US support for Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the US strategic planners began re-assessing American military and diplomatic posture in the region.¹⁷⁵ As President Jimmy Carter and his national security staffed re-assessed vital American interests it became clear the United States was becoming more and more beholden to Middle Eastern oil as a result of declining domestic production.¹⁷⁶ In response the United States began an important pivot towards the region as it dedicated military assets and political influence to safeguard the vital resource.¹⁷⁷ Iraq’s invasion of revolutionary Iran presented the United States with numerous difficulties and limited options in a region identified as key to American

¹⁷³ D/NSC-62, 15 January 1981,

¹⁷⁴ Alvandi, Roham. "Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The Origins of Iranian Primacy in the Persian Gulf*." *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 2 (April 2012): 337-;

Dodds, Joana, and Ben Wilson. "THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR: UNATTAINABLE OBJECTIVES." *MERIA Journal* 13, no. 2 (June 2009): 73.

¹⁷⁵ Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York, 2008), 385–86; Lloyd C. Gardner, *Three Kings: The Rise of an American Empire in the Middle East after World War II* (New York, 2009), 19–25.

¹⁷⁶ Michaels, Jeffrey H, "Dysfunctional Doctrines? Eisenhower, Carter and U.S. Military Intervention in the Middle East." *Political Science Quarterly* 126, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 470-71.

¹⁷⁷ Jones, Toby Craig. "America, Oil, and War in the Middle East." *Journal Of American History* 99, no. 1 (June 2012): 210.

interests.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the ensuing Iran Iraq War posed a challenge to the delicate order, which had previously existed. Then President Jimmy Carter along with his national security staff responded to this rise in instability by fundamentally altering America's role in the region with the announcement of a new US strategy, which would come to be known as the Carter Doctrine. In his 1980 State of the Union Address, Carter announced. "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States. It will be repelled by the use of any means necessary, including military force."¹⁷⁸ This change in policy reflected growing American unease at regional instability caused by ongoing territorial and political disputes between Baghdad and Tehran; even prior to the revolution, American backed Shah Pahlavi threatened to invade Iraq to satisfy Iran's long-held claims over the important Shat-al-Arab waterway linking Iraq to the Persian Gulf.¹⁷⁹

The eight-year Iran-Iraq War began in September of 1980 as Saddam Hussein's forces crossed into Iranian territory with the stated aim of capturing oil rich and Arab ethnic minority inhabited Khuzestan. Hussein believed a quick strike into the valuable region would have the two-fold effect of limiting the spread of the Iranian revolution to Iraq's Shiite majority as well as taking advantage of Khomeini's still fractured government. Iraqi forces made initial gains and capturing several vital population centers, however, this initial success would be met by a quick reversal of

¹⁷⁸ Michaels, Jeffrey H. "Dysfunctional Doctrines? Eisenhower, Carter and U.S. Military Intervention in the Middle East." *Political Science Quarterly* 126, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 481.

¹⁷⁹ Alvandi, Roham. "Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The Origins of Iranian Primacy in the Persian Gulf." *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 2 (April 2012): 349-50.

fortunes as the Iraqi Army quickly entered into a stalemate with the Iranian forces. Prior to the Iranian Revolution, the Shah's military had been regarded as highly competent benefiting from American largesse as well as training and state of the art military hardware. However, the immediate years following the revolution devastated the Shah's former military as revolutionary purges had led to a large-scale exodus of well-educated professionals and military officers connected to the Pahlavi regime.¹⁸⁰

Hussein viewed himself as a replacement to Egyptian General Gamel Nasser; an Arab ruler who could forge a united political entity across the region and unite disparate peoples under the banner of Arab socialism. The Islamic regime presented Hussein with a political threat, which he believed had the potential to incite revolt across the Shiite majority population of Iraq. The 1980 September invasion of Iranian Khuzestan was intended to serve as a quick death knell to the still unformed government in Tehran. Perhaps to some degree, Hussein was correct; the once vaunted Iranian military was in disarray as many of its American trained officers feared reprisals from the revolutionary government.

As the *New Republic* noted in a 1984 article, "Large-scale defections reduced the Iranian order of battle. The officer corps was decimated by purges and executions affecting 50 percent of the field-grade officers and all two hundred generals."¹⁸¹ This had the effect of changing Arab perceptions in the region as the

¹⁸⁰ Dodds, Joana, and Ben Wilson. "THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR: UNATTAINABLE OBJECTIVES." *MERIA Journal* 13, no. 2 (June 2009): 76.

¹⁸¹ Heller, Mark. "Turmoil in the Gulf." *New Republic* 190, (April 23, 1984): 16-20. Heller, Mark.

once vaunted Iranian military was suddenly without a key component of its national military leadership. This perceived domestic instability likely gave Saddam Hussein and his revisionist view of Iraqi land claims the necessary pretext for which he had been waiting. Beginning on September 22 1980 Iraqi forces conducted a large-scale invasion of Iranian territory with the stated aims of re-asserting Iraqi claims to the Shat-al-Arab as well as occupying the oil rich and Arab majority Iranian province of Khuzestan.

Iraq's initial victories against the disorganized Iranian Army were soon halted and by late 1980 the war had reached a standstill. Following a reorganization of the Iranian military and mass mobilization of its youth, the Iranian Army began to slowly recapture lost gains of the previous year. By 1982 Iranian forces had erased the Iraqi gains and begun a widespread invasion of southern Iraq as Hussein attempted to negotiate a cease-fire. The war would continue for another six bloody years, as the Iranian counterattack into southern Iraq would soon bog down into stalemated trench warfare reminiscent of World War One. The United States and other outside powers initially maintained a stance of official neutrality aware that an overwhelming Iraqi victory and seizure of Iran's southern oilfields could potentially upend the regional balance of power. Soon however, this neutrality would become far more nuanced as the United States and the Soviet Union jockeyed for influence between the warring states as well as supplying massive amounts of military aid.

"Turmoil in the Gulf." *New Republic* 190, (April 23, 1984): 17.

Methodology

The Iran Iraq War provides a unique case study in which to better understand a superpower's involvement in a regional conflict through proxy. The United State's complex involvement in the conflict would include the provision of covert military aid to the fledgling Iranian revolutionary government as well as sharing sensitive intelligence with Iraqi leaders as the nature of its involvement changed over time. The 1979 hostage crisis and subsequent Soviet invasion of Afghanistan marked dramatic upheavals in the region, as a delicate status quo would be upended by Khomeini's excommunications and Hussein's invasion of Iran. The seemingly contradictory nature of America's provision of covert aid to Iran, known as the Iran Contra affair, and its later political and military support to Iraq offer an example by which to assess a superpower's involvement through proxy.

In seeking to better understand American strategic rationale for its nuanced approach to the Iran - Iraq War a review of relevant literature In this paper I will seek to better assess strategic considerations which likely affected United State's involvement in the Iran Iraq War. A review of relevant literature as important to understanding existing research assessing the strategic rationale for the United States' behavior in the conflict as well as to identify competing theories. In light of a predominance of analysis which focuses on the impact of the Iranian revolution rather than a systematic review of great power interest in maintaining a delicate balance of power further research should be conducted to better identify prime drivers for American action.

Literature Review

A large body of existing literature on the United States' role in the 1980s Middle East tends to focus on the role the nature of the Islamic Iranian government played in effecting Washington's decision making processes. To be sure, the 1979 Islamic Revolution sent shockwaves throughout the Middle East as Ayatollah Khomeini's vision of *velayat-e faqih* directly challenged the Arab monarchies as well as the Arab Socialist states of Iraq, Syria and Egypt.¹⁸² Prior to the revolution, the United States viewed the Shah as a crucial piece of its defense strategy in the Middle East. Alongside Saudi Arabia, pre-revolutionary Iran was viewed as one part of a "dual-pillar strategy" in which it would serve as a crucial buffer to any possible Soviet intervention in the region.¹⁸³ The sudden erosion of a key piece of Washington's strategy overturned decades of American military and political support and created a security vacuum in a strategic theater. At the outset of the war, both the United States and the Soviet Union declared official neutrality in the conflict as both sides warily assessed the implications of the still simmering Iranian Revolution. Despite this stated neutrality, as the war progressed both Washington and Moscow would calculate their aid to the combatants as a means of advancing their respective interests.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Rakel, Eva Patricia. "Iranian Foreign Policy since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006." *Perspectives On Global Development & Technology* 6, no. 1-3 (June 2007): 163-165.

¹⁸³ Layne, Christopher. "America's Middle East grand strategy after Iraq: the moment for offshore balancing has arrived." *Review of International Studies*, no. 35 (2009): 16.; Jones, Toby Craig. "America, Oil, and War in the Middle East." *Journal Of American History* 99, no. 1 (June 2012): 210.

¹⁸⁴ Dodds, Joana, and Ben Wilson. "THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR: UNATTAINABLE OBJECTIVES." *MERIA Journal* 13, no. 2 (June 2009): 83.

*US SUPPORT TO IRAQ DRIVEN BY A DESIRE TO CONTAIN THE IRANIAN
REVOLUTION*

Ray Takeyh believes the war between Iran and Iraq presented the United States with a number of unpleasant options but American involvement, especially in provision of aid and intelligence to Iraq, was borne out largely as a result of a spreading Islamist political order. While the United States fully recognized the inherent nature of the Iraqi regime, it calculated it could not tolerate an additional “radical clerical regime” in a major oil producing nation. Takeyh notes the ideal outcome for Tehran would be to extend its template of Shiite revolutionary government to Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein’s apostate regime.¹⁸⁵ Citing the writings of Ayatollah Khomeini in which he stated, “We [Iran] should try to export our revolution to the world. We should set aside the thought that we do not export our revolution, because Islam does not regard various Islamic countries differently and is the support of all the oppressed peoples of the world.”¹⁸⁶

Additionally, Zach Fredman believes American fears of Iranian actions were based primarily on Tehran winning the war and spreading the war to a prominent Arab regime in the region. These fears were illustrated by the US State Department’s removal of Iraq as a state-sponsor of terrorism as Washington began a slow but

¹⁸⁵ Takeyh, Ray. “The Iran-Iraq War: A Reassessment.” *Middle East Journal* 64, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 365-371.

¹⁸⁶ Ramzani, R.K. “*Khumayni’s Islam in Iran’s Foreign Policy*.” *Islam in Foreign Policy*, ed. Adeed Dawisha (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 20.

steady re-orientation towards Baghdad.¹⁸⁷ As Fredman states “The bottom line, according to analysts, was that Iranians wanted to overthrow Saddam, and Saddam would be more likely to improve American–Iraqi ties than any potential successor regime.”¹⁸⁸ In conjunction with an increase in Saudi and Kuwaiti oil exports, Fredman believes the United States recognized it could do without Iranian oil and sufficiently tilt towards Baghdad without economic repercussions. American calculations, in this instance, were based on Washington’s fear of the Islamic Revolution spreading to key allies in the region and the threats this new type of governance would pose to the wider region.¹⁸⁹

While Baghdad was far from a consistent US ally, American officials were well aware of the takeover of the US embassy in Tehran and the tense standoff to free the hostages as well as the suspected Iranian hand backing the Shiite fundamentalist group Hezbollah in Lebanon. This fear was grounded in an appreciation of Tehran’s revolutionary designs for the wider-region as well as the possibility of fomenting discord amongst Saudi and Bahraini Shiite minorities. Daniel Pipes noted in a 1987 article “At stake is the possible resurgence of anti-American fundamentalist Islam, the security of Western access to Persian Gulf oil, and potential Soviet predominance in the region. Abdication is not a responsible choice.”¹⁹⁰ This view reflects a Washington foreign policy consensus that was largely focused on the role

¹⁸⁷ Fredman, Zach. "Shoring Up Iraq, 1983 to 1990: Washington and the Chemical Weapons Controversy." *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 23, no. 3 (September 2012): 535-537.

¹⁸⁸ Fredman, Zach. "Shoring Up Iraq, 1983 to 1990: Washington and the Chemical Weapons Controversy." *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 23, no. 3 (September 2012): 538.

¹⁸⁹ Fredman, Zach. "Shoring Up Iraq, 1983 to 1990: Washington and the Chemical Weapons Controversy." *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 23, no. 3 (September 2012): 548-550.

¹⁹⁰ Pipes, Daniel, 1949-, and Laurie Mylroie. "Back Iraq." *New Republic* 196, (April 27, 1987): 14-15

of the Islamic Revolution and possible effects of a possible Iranian victory. Support to Baghdad through intelligence sharing and material support would have the effect of blunting the Shiite revolutionary fervor as well as putting Tehran on notice with respect to American resolve towards the region.

Writing in the *National Review* columnist Brian Crozier states the United States and the Soviet Union failed to fully appreciate the revolutionary nature of Shiite-fundamentalism. This new form of government, which blended Shiite theocracy with revolutionary fervor, posed a unique challenge to Western interests in the region. Only by backing the regime of Saddam Hussein would the United States be able to counter the Iranian regime, which held the potential of unseating long-established regimes throughout the wider region. Moreover, Crozier believes in these circumstances, the United States and Soviet Union shared a rare-confluence of interests in which neither government benefited from a renewed Shiite fundamentalist movement which could potentially transcend national boundaries and political allies.¹⁹¹

Since the tumultuous events surrounding the Iranian Revolution and the dramatic seizure of American diplomatic personnel, both countries have seemingly been entrenched in a zero-sum game of competition. Writing in *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Bernd Kaussler and Anthony Newkirk believe American foreign policy towards Iran has been one of consistent containment towards the Islamic regime. Fearing the possibly transcendent nature of the Islamic revolution and the possibility Tehran could stir-up trouble amongst the region's disposed Shiite

¹⁹¹ Crozier, Brian. "The Protracted Conflict." *National Review* 33, no. 25 (December 25, 1981): 28-30.

minorities, Washington began a campaign of containing the nascent Khomeini government combining economic, diplomatic and military actions.¹⁹²

Yet this does not adequately explain why the United States would carefully calculate its provision of lethal aid and intelligence to Iraq if it did indeed view Iran as the primary regional threat. American covert provision of aid to the Iranian regime occurred in the shadows as leverage to release the American hostages held in Beirut during the early 1980s. Washington likely recognized Tehran's influence over the disparate Shiite groups in Lebanon and viewed the covert deliver of arms to Iran as a valuable tool to affect the hostage's release. As Crist notes, in 1985 the United States began approaching Iranian officials through clandestine intermediaries the possibility America could provide key weaponry to the regime as an act of good faith as well as a demonstration of Washington's possible support contingent upon Tehran's moderation of its actions.¹⁹³ Crist believes American officials were more concerned with currying good favor with the regime to ensure a bulwark against possible Soviet interference in Iranian domestic affairs.

Additionally, a key component of the Iranian revolutionary movement often overlooked was the influential communist Tudeh party which had long enjoyed direct support from Moscow.¹⁹⁴ Writing in *The Rise and Fall of the Tudeh Party*, Farhang Jahanpour notes "Since the 1979 revolution, Tudeh members have been among the staunch supporters of the Islamic regime. In fact, the Tudeh Party

¹⁹² Kaussler, Bernd, and Anthony B. Newkirk. "Diplomacy in Bad Faith: American-Iranian Relations Today." *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 23, no. 2 (June 2012): 350.

¹⁹³ Crist, David. *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran*. New York: Penguin Press, 2012: 179.

¹⁹⁴ Crozier, Brian. "The protracted conflict." *National Review* 34, (April 16, 1982): 22.

was the last non-clerical group which continued to support Ayatollah Khomeini's 'popular and anti-imperialist line' ; and it was, in turn, tolerated by Khomeini until it was no longer regarded as useful and joined those many other supporters of the Islamic regime who were eventually destroyed by it."¹⁹⁵ Khomeini and American officials nervous about a post Shah-Iran viewed this political movement as a possible vanguard to a pro-Soviet Iranian state. Khomeini's internal consolidation of political power in the immediate years of the revolution was largely focused on blunting any possible challengers to the Islamic theocracy from the left.

In assessing Iranian foreign policy and the United State's response to the changed post-revolutionary environment Imad Salame and Zanoobia Othman observe, "It is important to note that Islamic Iran emerged amidst a deepening Cold War between its most detested foe, the US, and its next-door communist neighbor, the Soviet Union. Born out of Khomeini's vision of an Islamic state, Iran had to assert its position in world politics."¹⁹⁶ Salame and Othman believe the Iranian regime and its concept of revolutionary Islamic theocracy posed a unique challenge to the neighboring Arab states as well as to the United States.

The Iraq invasion of Iran in 1980 provided Tehran with a unique opportunity in which it could export its revolution to neighboring Iraq and its Shia majority population. In a sense, Hussein's invasion of Iran would allow Khomeini to counterattack against the apostate regime by an appeal to its underserved Shiite class, "It was therefore only natural for the Iranian Revolution, if it was to be

¹⁹⁵ Farhang Jahanpour. "Iran: The Rise and Fall of the Tudeh Party." *The World Today* , Vol. 40, No. 4 (April 1984): 154.

¹⁹⁶ Salamey, Imad, and Zanoobia Othman. "Shia Revival and Welayat Al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 12, no. 2 (June 2011): 202.

expanded or exported, to find in Iraq a host group to support its ideological zeal.”¹⁹⁷

Salame and Othman conclude the uniqueness and danger posed by revolutionary Iran therefore would serve as a key component in the United State’s decision to support Iraq over its former ally. Despite Hussein’s character and past support for terrorist organizations, the United States recognized intelligence and material aid to Iraq would best serve its interests to blunt the spread of the Iranian revolution.

Joana Dodds and Ben Wilson state, “Saddam feared that the Shi’a population might rise up against him. He attempted diplomatic approaches to the new Islamic Republic; however, Iran also offered enticing new possibilities. Iran, which once dominated the region, was in trouble. Its once-mighty army was in shambles and its all-important ties with Western powers severed.”¹⁹⁸ Saudi Arabia in particular looked suspiciously on wider Iranian designs for the region and Khomeini’s open calls for revolution to the Shiite minorities of the Gulf kingdom.¹⁹⁹ Stated simply, US policy makers and their Gulf allies sought a policy which sought to prevent Khomeini from securing a victory over Iraq, asserting a more dominant position over world oil markets as well as stopping Tehran’s ambition to support extremist Islamic movements throughout the region.

¹⁹⁷ Salamey, Imad, and Zanoobia Othman. "Shia Revival and Welayat Al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 12, no. 2 (June 2011): 207

¹⁹⁸ Dodds, Joana, and Ben Wilson. "THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR: UNATTAINABLE OBJECTIVES." *MERIA Journal* 13, no. 2 (June 2009): 75.

¹⁹⁹ Sterner, Michael. "THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR." *Foreign Affairs* 63, no. 1 (Fall 1984): 135.; Salamey, Imad, and Zanoobia Othman. "Shia Revival and Welayat Al-Faqih in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 12, no. 2 (June 2011): 201.

OFFSHORE BALANCING

The theory of offshore balancing is described as a foreign policy strategy whereby an outside state relies upon regional proxies or allies to protect mutual interests and in which the outside power will only engage its forces to address an immediate threat to its primacy. In the case of offshore balancing, the outside power, such as the United States in the case of the Middle East, will seek to keep its forces “over the horizon” in an effort to only commit forces where/when it is absolutely necessary.²⁰⁰ Stephen Walt states the United States’ interest in the Persian Gulf have long been best maintained by adopting a policy of offshore balancing which recognizes, “we have to make sure that Persian Gulf oil doesn't fall under the control of a single hostile power.” However he also notes this policy is a realistic assessment of military force noting, “Intervening with our own forces should only be a last resort, partly because other countries see U.S. power as potentially dangerous. Offshore balancing recognizes that U.S. power can do many good things, but the United States is not good at running other societies and we should stay out of that business. Finally, offshore balancing recognizes that there are limits to U.S. power.”²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Layne, Christopher. “America’s Middle East grand strategy after Iraq: the moment for offshore balancing has arrived.” *Review of International Studies*, no. 35 (2009): 5-25.; Layne, Christopher. “Offshore Balancing Revisited.” *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 233-248.;

Walt, Stephen M. “In the National Interest: A New Grand Strategy for American Foreign Policy.” *Boston Review* 30, no. 1 (February /March 2005).

²⁰¹ Ikenberry, G. John, and Stephen Walt. “Offshore Balancing or International Institutions? The Way Forward for U.S. Foreign Policy.” *Brown Journal Of World Affairs* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2007 2007): 14.

Christopher Layne notes states applying offshore balancing theory typically have two primary objectives minimizing the risk of a future great power and enhancing a state's standing in the international system. Rather than conducting outright involvement into a regional conflict, the outside power is able to calculate its political and military aid to one or both of the power as a matter of checking each other's adventures. In the case of the Iran Iraq War, the United States provided covert aid to both sides and at varying times likely as part of a strategy to prevent outright victory by either side.²⁰² Similarly, John Mearsheimer recognizes the United State's involvement in this conflict was in keeping with its previous policies in the Middle East, "Reagan's decision was neither surprising nor controversial, because the United States had an offshore-balancing strategy in the Middle East during this period. Washington relied on Iraq to contain Iran during the 1980s, and kept the rapid-deployment force—which was built to intervene in the Gulf if the local balance of power collapsed—at the ready should it be needed."²⁰³

"Offshore balancing, moreover, is nothing new: the United States pursued such a strategy in the Middle East very successfully during much of the cold war. It never tried to garrison the region or transform it along democratic lines. Instead, Washington sought to maintain a regional balance of power by backing various local allies and by developing the capacity—in the form of the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF), which brought together five Army and Marine divisions, seven tactical

²⁰² Layne, Christopher. "From preponderance to offshore balancing." *International Security* 22, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 88.

²⁰³ Mearsheimer, John J. "Imperial by Design." *National Interest* no. 111 (January 2011): 32.

fighter wings and three aircraft-carrier battle groups—to deter or intervene directly if the Soviet Union, Iraq or Iran threatened to upend the balance.”

As it relates to America’s position in the Middle East, political scientist Christopher Layne believes the United States employed a consistent strategy since the Cold War as it has sought to prevent the emergence of a single hegemon in the region. In the Cold War this resulted in the United States forging alliances with Saudi Arabia and Iran to prevent Soviet dominance but also to ensure neither of these states could themselves assert a hegemonic position in the vital region.

As US policy makers sought to define the nature of their relationships with the Gulf States to include their longtime ally Shah Reza Pahlavi, then national security advisor Henry Kissinger coined the term, “twin pillars strategy.”²⁰⁴ Under this framework, the United States would seek to bolster the non-communist regimes of the Gulf, primarily Saudi Arabia and Iran. Henry Kissinger noted, “The vacuum left by the British withdrawal would be filled by a local power friendly to us.”²⁰⁵

Regarding the previous British strategy Toby Craig Jones writes, “U.S. policy makers observed the doctrine in the Gulf by keeping American military forces “over the horizon.” Without the British present to preserve the Gulf’s balance of power, the United States moved to build up local militaries to maintain regional order.”²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Alvandi, Roham. "Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The Origins of Iranian Primacy in the Persian Gulf*." *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 2 (April 2012): 340-341.

²⁰⁵ Crist, David. *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran*. New York: Penguin Press, 2012: 10.

²⁰⁶ Jones, Toby Craig. "America, Oil, and War in the Middle East." *Journal Of American History* 99, no. 1 (June 2012): 212.

Jones believes American aid to these states, and Iran in particular, was calculated to ensure a delicate balance existed in the region to protect the vital access to oil for Western economies as well as to stave-off any potential interference from the Soviet Union. While the 1973 oil embargo had radically altered the nature of the relationships between Western oil companies and Middle Eastern oil states, the countries of the Gulf region recognized they depended upon outside American power to guarantee their security as well.

While both theories provide key insights into American policy-maker's decisions they fail to fully explain the United State's deeper suspicions about Soviet influence in the region and the possibility for Russian military action into Iran. To be sure, the Iranian Revolution sent shockwaves across the traditional power centers of the Middle East and changed the existing status quo over night, however US officials maintained hope they would be able to work with the new regime's more moderate members. While the Iran-Contra scandal fails to fully define the scope of US relations with Iran during this period it is important to note American planners did not view Iran as a pyrrhic state during the Iran-Iraq War. As the United States provided key intelligence to the Iraqi regime, it also sought to reestablish the previous balance of power. However, when viewed through the wider context of the Cold War additional analysis needs to be made to understand what role Soviet action had in influencing US actions in the conflict.

Analysis

INITIAL OVERTURES TO IRAN

Subsequent to the British withdrawal of forces from east of the Suez in 1968, the United States soon became the leading outside power in the Middle East. While the British Empire had maintained a dominant position in the region for nearly a century by combining protection and outright coercion to the Gulf States the United States recognized the inherent strategic necessity of replacing Britain's leadership in the region.²⁰⁷ While American officials outwardly recognized they had neither the resources nor desire to supplant the British Imperial role in the region, they recognized the growing power of both Saudi Arabia and Iran which could serve as valuable proxies to safeguard American interests.²⁰⁸ This policy, first adopted under the Nixon Administration recognized the strategic role both nations could play in stunting Soviet influence in the region as well as balancing against Arab states who received large amounts of aid from Moscow.²⁰⁹

The Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980 was designed to strike a quick blow on a nation reeling from deep-seated political divisions and internal instability. Saddam's stated goal of occupying the oil rich and Arab-majority region of Khuzestan was also designed to exploit perceived Iranian weakness at an opportune moment. This

²⁰⁷ Smith, Simon C. 2012. "'America in Britain's place?': Anglo-American relations and the Middle East in the aftermath of the Suez crisis." *Journal Of Transatlantic Studies (Routledge)* 10, no. 3: 252-270.

²⁰⁸ Smith, Simon C. 2012. "'America in Britain's place?': Anglo-American relations and the Middle East in the aftermath of the Suez crisis." *Journal Of Transatlantic Studies (Routledge)* 10, no. 3: 262.

²⁰⁹ Alvandi, Roham. "Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The Origins of Iranian Primacy in the Persian Gulf*." *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 2 (April 2012): 348-49.

initial invasion took Washington and other Western powers by surprise. Writing in *Foreign Affairs* Claudia Wright noted. The U.S. and Western response apparently was to increase naval forces in the area on the basis of bilateral consultations. Happily these forces were kept "over the horizon. Any such action [such as direct US involvement] would surely both have divided the allies and been perceived by Iraq as a move in support of Iran, with its remaining port of Bandar Abbas on the Gulf."²¹⁰

During the initial years of the Iran – Iraq War, the United States maintained a policy of official neutrality towards the conflict. Many within Washington believed in the possibility the United States and Iran could mend relations and rebuild the previous level of bi-lateral military cooperation that existed during the time of the Shah. The Iranian military in particular though ravaged by waves of purges, still contained a large amount of American trained officers with whom Washington believed it could influence. This initial support would include the release of key Iranian financial assets abroad as well as a resumption of military material necessary for the fledgling Iranian armed forces. Writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 1980, Claudia Wright stated a common view among Washington's foreign policy elite noting the United States had little leverage over Iraq and likely would benefit more by supporting Tehran to return the region to its status-quo balance.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Wright, Claudia. "Implications of the Iraq-Iran war." *Foreign Affairs* 59, (December 17, 1980): 278.;

David, Steven R. "American Foreign Policy towards the Middle East: A Necessary Change?." *Israel Affairs* 12, no. 4 (October 2006): 614-641.

²¹¹ Wright, Claudia. "Implications of the Iraq-Iran war." *Foreign Affairs* 59, (December 17, 1980): 294-296.

However, as the war continued and began to shift in favor of Iran, the United States and other Gulf States (Kuwait and Saudi Arabia) began to provide key intelligence to Iraq as well as financial backing and lines of credit. Ray Takeyh notes, "As the war dragged on and Iran grew determined to export its revolution, the sheikhdoms sided with the Iraqi strongman. Along this path, they augmented Iraq's military capabilities, came together in an unprecedented anti-Iranian alliance in the form of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and sporadically tried their hands at diplomacy that they hoped would somehow end the conflict."²¹² While Washington's Gulf allies backed Hussein, American remained cautiously on the sidelines of the opening years of the conflict. Some within the Carter and then Reagan Administration's believed bi-lateral relations with the Islamic Republic could be renewed again under the aegis of confronting a common foe in the Soviet Union. During the initial stages of the conflict the United States sought to maintain a delicate balance between Baghdad and Tehran still believing it could leverage both sides in an effort to return the Persian Gulf to its prior, albeit tenuous, stability.

To increase its limited leverage with Tehran, the United States began a series of covert arm sales to the Islamic Republic through a complex series of transactions involving Israeli intelligence and trusted back channels. The Iran Contra affair, as it would become known, was devised by Reagan Administration officials as a key bargaining chip for American hostages held captive by the Iranian affiliated terrorist organization Hezbollah.

²¹² Takeyh, Ray. "The Iran-Iraq War: A Reassessment." *Middle East Journal* 64, no. 3 (Summer2010): 370.

This covert operation was driven by two sets of motives. Reagan approved the project in hopes of inducing Iran to arrange the return of US hostages held by radical Shiite groups in Lebanon and also larger strategic concerns of possible Soviet influence through Tehran.

In the aftermath of what became the largest scandal of the Reagan Presidency, the bipartisan Tower Commission noted, “the U.S. Government had a latent and unresolved interest in establishing ties to Iran. Few in the U.S. Government doubted Iran's strategic importance or the risk of Soviet meddling in the succession crisis that might follow the death of Khomeini. For this reason, some in the U.S. Government were convinced that efforts should be made to open potential channels to Iran.”²¹³ Similar to its relationship with Baghdad, Washington’s efforts towards Iran were intended to check any possible Soviet involvement in the conflict. It was believed covert relations with the Islamic government would prevent Tehran from seeking aid from the Soviet Union as well as fostering relations with moderate leaders within the regime. ²¹⁴

FEAR OF SOVIET INVOLVEMENT/TILT TOWARDS BAGHDAD

As the Iran Iraq War continued throughout the 1980s and showed little signs of ending in a decisive victory for either side, the United States recognized the tenuous hold Iraqi forces had on their strategic oil fields in the south of the country.

²¹³ Tower Commission Report, accessed from:
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/PS157/assignment%20files%20public/TOWER%20EXCERPTS.htm#PartI>

²¹⁴ Brands, Hal. “Making the Conspiracy Theorist a Prophet: Covert Action and the Contours of United States–Iraq Relations.” *The International History Review*, Vol. 33, Iss. 3, 2011: 381-408.

As the possibility of an Iranian victory seemed more and more likely the United States began sharing sensitive intelligence to Hussein and his commanders through the Central Intelligence Agency's Baghdad station. Brands cautions however that while the US gave Iraq access to vital military intelligence, "It would be a mistake to overstate the Reagan administration's enthusiasm for working with Saddam.

The subtle shift in Washington's policy towards the war closely after Iranian military victories and counteroffensive into Iraqi territory in 1982 can be linked to a desire to maintain balance rather than outright victory by either side. Michael Sterner points to these events as a seminal change in Washington's tone and support towards Baghdad noting, the first shift in US official attitudes came in the wake of Iran's impressive military victories in 1982 when it appeared that the Iraqis might collapse leaving Iran in a commanding position of power throughout the Gulf.²¹⁵ In addition to American fears of growing Iranian power, Gulf States too began openly supporting Iraq as fears of a spreading Islamic revolution spread amongst the Gulf-Arab states.²¹⁶

Senior US officials such as National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane were without illusions as to the nature of the Baathist regime and made little secret of the fact that they preferred Iraq only in comparison to Iran. US policy, wrote McFarlane, 'is not out of political affection for Saddam Hussein, but rather because of the instability and chaos his regime's collapse could trigger throughout the Gulf. The

²¹⁵ Sterner, Michael. "THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR." *Foreign Affairs* 63, no. 1 (Fall 1984): 128-129.

²¹⁶ Wright, Claudia. "Implications of the Iraq-Iran war." *Foreign Affairs* 59, (December 17, 1980): 281.

US–Iraq relationship, in McFarlane’s view, was one of necessity, not amity.”²¹⁷ This support to Hussein was recognized the delicate balance of power, which had long served US interests prior to and after the Islamic Revolution. An overwhelming victory by either side would likely affect American access to oil or provide Iran or Iraq an unacceptable monopoly over regional oil resources.

The fear of Soviet action and the ensuing instability in Iran likely served as a prime driver for increased American involvement in the region. Washington recognized any change in the status quo could present Moscow with the necessary strategic incentive to increase its influence either through covert or overt involvement. The possibility the Soviet Union could take a more activist through support to Baghdad drove the United States to begin a diplomatic rapprochement with Iraq in the early years of the Iran – Iraq War. Then National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski believed the Soviet presence in Afghanistan could serve as a jumping-off point for a larger-scale invasion of Pakistan or Iran.²¹⁸

In 1983 Washington increased its arms supplies to Baghdad as a more formal diplomatic relationship was sought. Donald Rumsfeld was dispatched to Baghdad to meet with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz as well as President Saddam Hussein. The Reagan Administration believed in keeping with the previous Carter Doctrine and to prevent a challenge to the regional status quo, the United State’s needed to take a more activist role in the ongoing Iran-Iraq War.

²¹⁷ Brands, Hal. “Making the Conspiracy Theorist a Prophet: Covert Action and the Contours of United States–Iraq Relations.” *The International History Review*, Vol. 33, no. 3, 2011: 394.

²¹⁸ Crist, David. *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran*. New York: Penguin Press, 2012: 39.

Stephen Walt observes, "When the shah fell, the United States created the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (rdjtf) but did not deploy it to the region; instead, it kept the rdjtf over the horizon until it was needed. Washington backed Iraq against Iran during the 1980s, and the U.S. Navy escorted oil tankers during the Iran- Iraq War, but it deployed U.S. ground and air forces only when the balance of power broke down completely, as it did when Iraq seized Kuwait. This strategy was not perfect, perhaps, but it preserved key U.S. interests at minimal cost for over four decades."²¹⁹

The US involvement in the Iran-Iraq War was likely not connected to Washington's desire to stop the spread of Islamist ideology but rather to maintain the balance of power in the region; this balance was necessary to prevent either Iraq or Iran from emerging as potential hegemons and threatening Saudi oil production. Despite the revolutionary nature of the Iranian regime, American action was influenced by a realistic assessment of national interests and recognition of Tehran and Baghdad as competing power centers in the region. This policy represented a case of offshore balancing whereby it sought to maintain a tentative status quo in the region to prevent either Iran or Iraq from emerging in a stronger position relative to its adversary. Additionally this policy of seeking to maintain balance was one previous Administrations had maintained during the time of the Shah and even after the Islamic Revolution.

Revolutionary Iran posed a number of threats for the more traditional power centers of Riyadh and Baghdad with most Arab leaders viewing the theocratic

²¹⁹ Walt, Stephen M. "The End of the American Era." *National Interest* no. 116 (November 2011): 14.

government as a threat to the regional status quo. To be sure the, the United States had little common cause with either the Islamic Republic or the Iraqi regime but had a number of vital interests in the region, which it sought to protect. Amidst the still ongoing Cold War between East and West, the United States viewed the Middle East as a vital theater and quite possibly an Achilles heel were it to fall under Soviet influence or the delicate balance of power were to shift.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution in the same year confirmed numerous fears amongst Washington's foreign policy elite that the Middle East could now become a target for further Russian attempts to gain influence as well as access to the Gulf's warm water ports.²²⁰ Possibly sensing an opportunity to strike at the revolutionary government and recognizing a key pillar of American defense policy had been removed, Saddam Hussein conducted a large – scale invasion of Iran. The Soviet Union's military action in Afghanistan was likely viewed as a possible change in Soviet policy towards the Middle East. This coupled with Iran's revolution sent shockwaves throughout American defense and security circles as Moscow's aggressive actions could presumptively signal a desire to project power into the unstable Middle East region and challenge America's traditional role of outside balancer.

As outlined above, the Carter Doctrine was designed to directly challenge not the Iranian Revolution but rather Soviet involvement in the region. Carter's 1980 State of the Union address was intended to broadcast American resolve with respect to

²²⁰ Alvandi, Roham. "Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The Origins of Iranian Primacy in the Persian Gulf." *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 2 (April 2012): 339-344.

the Middle East stating, "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States. It will be repelled by the use of any means necessary, including military force."²²¹ Along with the address, American military involvement in the region began a significant re-orientation as military planners began preparations for a Soviet invasion of the Persian Gulf to include the possibility of a seizure of Saudi oil fields. David Crist notes a classified CIA report believed the fall of the Shah and the success of the Islamic Revolution would likely result in a strategic windfall for the Soviet Union.²²² This fear most likely influenced Washington to begin a slow but steady tilt towards Baghdad as its favored proxy in the conflict.

In its June 18th 1984 editorial, *The New Republic* identified US policy in the Middle East succinctly when it noted, "The United States cannot tolerate the fall of the oil states to the permanent control of a hostile power. The imperative is geopolitical, because loss of the oil states would radically shift the balance of power in the Middle East, and the world, against the West and its allies. In the Middle East, the dominoes are made of paper."²²³ Lingering American fears of Soviet involvement in Iran through internal subversion via the Communist Tudeh party as

²²¹ Jimmy Carter: "The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress.," January 23, 1980. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33079>.

²²² Crist, David. *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran*. New York: Penguin Press, 2012: 39.

²²³ "America's Gulf Stake." *New Republic* 190, no. 24 (June 18, 1984): 8.

well as a robust arms trade with Baghdad likely reinforced the existing suspicions of Soviet strategic intent for the region.²²⁴

As the conflict continued throughout the 1980s, American policy took a more activist tone as Washington began first providing tactical intelligence to Iraq followed by a more robust relationship involving a formal intelligence relationship through a CIA Chief of Station. Moreover, this relationship with Baghdad was further reinforced through a number of American-encouraged credit guarantees through numerous Gulf States.²²⁵ Raymong Heinbush notes, “the West was content to merely contain the war, in which these two potendal Gulf hegemonns enervated each other to the benefit of the fragile pro- Western monarchies. However, once the US perceived an Iranian threat to close the Straits of Hormuz—hence stopping oil exports—it stepped up naval pressure on Iran.”²²⁶ As Washington sought to further strengthen its proxy relationship with Iraq, it sought to isolate Iran to return the region to the previous status quo. This outcome, and the use of one power in a regional conflict to effect the outcome for a third power is a clear indication of Washington’s use of Baghdad as its proxy.

²²⁴ Crozier, Brian. "The protracted conflict." *National Review* 34, (April 16, 1982): 409.

²²⁵ Crist, David. *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran*. New York: Penguin Press, 2012: 99-102.

²²⁶ Hinnebusch, Raymond. "Failed Regional Hegemons: the Case of the Middle East's Regional Powers." *Journal Of Diplomacy & International Relations* 14, no. 2 (Fall2013 2013): 81.

Conclusion

The Iran Iraq War cost approximately 1.25 million military and civilian over the course of the eight-year conflict amplifying already deep rifts between Arab states and Iran while resulting in a return to the status quo, which existed prior to the war. American involvement in this conflict took a number of forms but Washington began a marked tilt towards Baghdad following successful Iranian counterattacks. This tilt and the ensuing American support to Baghdad was designed with stability in mind; not as it related to simply Baghdad and Tehran but rather with a keen eye towards Soviet intentions. Like many other conflicts during the Cold War, the United States viewed the Iran – Iraq War as a future battleground between itself and the Soviet Union. The invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet troops in 1980 likely reinforced these fears. The ensuing Carter Doctrine sought to place the United States into a more activist role in the region fearing a possible threat to its strategic oil assets.

The United State's shifting support to both Baghdad and Tehran was likely driven by larger strategic considerations, most notably, the American fear of Soviet involvement in the region and the possibility of a Russian intervention. While Washington was concerned with the threat a Tehran-backed revolution could pose towards other states in the region, US planners consistently highlighted the threat the Soviet Union continued to play in the vital region. A weak Iranian government susceptible to Soviet influence, overt and covert, and an Arab Socialist regime, which maintained a large amount of Soviet material and technical assistance presented the United States a challenge to the existing status quo in the region. Therefore, the

United States likely recognized a status quo between Iran and Iraq as most beneficial to its interests.

While the policy of Offshore Balancing provides some insight into American behavior, an assessment of the United State's larger geostrategic environment – largely its competition with the Soviet Union – provides the most accurate context by which to view its behavior. Washington's support to both parties, in various forms and in differing degrees, was most likely driven by a desire to ensure neither side could upset the balance of power and possibly invite involvement from the Soviet Union. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 signaled to a number of prominent officials a possible larger Russian drive to acquire a warm-water port as well as access to Middle Eastern oil as well as threaten a crucial Western resource.

The ultimate US foreign policy objective in the Middle East at this time was likely seeking a return to the previous balance of power between Tehran and Baghdad not only for the sake of balance but also more importantly as a means of stunting possible Soviet involvement. Despite a lack of evidence to support the Soviet Union intended an outright invasion of Iran, US defense and intelligence planners maintained a suspicious view of Soviet intentions in Afghanistan, similarly viewing that action as a necessary step towards further involvement in the Persian Gulf.

While US decision makers viewed the Islamic regime and its calls for global Islamic revolution, the key driver to understanding American actions should be a larger focus on US – Soviet competition. Andrew Mumford states, "Where state or group survival is not at stake but the augmentation of national interests or

ideological gains can still be achieved, states and sub-state groups have historically proven to be conspicuous users of proxy methods as a means of securing particular conflict outcomes.”²²⁷

Even following the US Embassy hostage crisis of the late 1970s and hostile anti-American rhetoric, officials in Washington believed Iran could be persuaded to rejoin the previous US-led security strategy for the region with the ultimate aim of containing possible Soviet advances. This long-standing fear of increased Soviet involvement in the region likely served as the prime driver for American involvement in the conflict.²²⁸ As the Islamic Republic recovered from its initial battlefield losses and conducted a large scale counterattack, Washington re-evaluated its involvement in the regional conflict. The opportunity to thwart Iranian hegemony in the region as well as replace the Soviet Union as Iraq’s benefactor in the region proved irresistible to the Reagan Administration. Despite deep suspicion within Washington foreign policy circles regarding Saddam’s true capacity, support to Iraq and the development of a proxy relationship served as a necessary means to advancing Washington’s interests in the region.

²²⁷ Mumford, Andrew. Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict, *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 158 No. 2 (2013). 41-42.

²²⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), p. 33.

Conclusion

Proxy warfare has long been viewed by a range of states, hegemonic powers and regional powers alike, as an important tool of international policy. A large involvement of military forces oftentimes increases the risk destabilization and can lead to numerous unforeseen consequences. The use of non-state actors or a third party can oftentimes serve to advance a states national security interests while avoiding the unknown costs of overt military force. In the instances of Pakistan's support to the Taliban, Iran's support of Lebanese Hezbollah and the United States' support to Iraq the sponsoring party was able to ensure security interests, whether it be affecting a government's influence or a desire to maintain the status quo were attained through indirect involvement. Proxy wars can also serve as the stage for larger regional conflicts, such as in the case of the Iran-Iraq War. While states may calculate the costs of direct military engagement against peer competitors is too high, a proxy war often serves a battleground in the context of a larger strategic struggle.

In "Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict" Andrew Mumford writes, "President Dwight D Eisenhower once called proxy wars 'the cheapest insurance in the world', while former Pakistani President Zia-ul- Haq deemed them necessary to 'keep the pot boiling' in existing conflict zones. The appeal of what can be characterized as 'warfare on the cheap' has proved an irresistible strategic allure for

nations through the centuries.”²²⁹ In each of the above case studies, state’s recognized the value of conducting a form of indirect warfare; shifting the burden of fighting to a third party, be they another state or a non-state actor, as a means of achieving strategic balancing against an outside party and ensuring national interests were secured.

Pakistan’s use of the Taliban in the 1990s can be seen as a successful use of warfare by proxy; the post-civil war Afghan government was largely amenable to Islamabad’s larger regional designs and more importantly would not become aligned with Pakistan’s archrival India. While the costs of supporting these militant groups appear to now be complicating Pakistan’s internal security, through the 1990s they were a valuable low-cost option for the Pakistani military²³⁰. Faced with a similar set of strategic considerations as Imperial Britain – a largely ungoverned Afghanistan as a potential venue for regional competition – Pakistan’s intelligence services fostered clandestine relationships with both the Taliban and Hezb-i-Gulbudin to ensure its vital interests would be protected. Islamabad’s covert relationship with these militant groups allowed it to achieve its desire for strategic balance to counter its larger neighbor and competitor India.

Similarly, Iran’s support to Lebanese Hezbollah allowed it to project its power through proxy. Faced with near international isolation amidst the Iran-Iraq

²²⁹ Mumford, Andrew. Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict, *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 158 No. 2 (2013). 40.

²³⁰ Akhtar, Nasreen. "Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Taliban." *International Journal On World Peace* 25, no. 4 (December 2008): 49-73.

War, the Islamic Republic recognized the nascent organization as a valuable tool to both bolster its revolutionary credentials while also maximizing its power in the international system. A neo-realist examination of Iran's support to this proxy provides a useful construct by which to analyze the key drivers for Iranian actions. Along with a status-quo in its war with Iraq and the ever-present role of the United States as an offshore balancer in the Middle East, Iran likely recognized it could best enhance its position in the international system through support to surrogates thereby attaining an important balance against hostile Arab states. As with Pakistan, this support provided the new revolutionary government a low-cost option to exert influence in the region, burnish its credentials throughout the region while also avoiding provoking a larger conflict with an outside power.

During the course of the Iran-Iraq War the United States leveraged its support to Baghdad so as to maintain strategic balance in the region while also dissuading outside interference by the Soviet Union. Fear of communist influence in the region and the possibility of further destabilization following the Iranian Revolution and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan heavily influenced Washington's careful calculation to provide support to its proxy Iraq. Though highly unlikely in retrospect, the possibility Moscow would seek to use this conflict as a pretext for further military action served as a prime driver for American intervention in the conflict. Washington's strategic reassessment in the aftermath of the 1973 oil embargo marked a significant pivot by the United States towards a more activist

approach in the vital region.²³¹ Support to Baghdad vice an over military intervention provided Washington a means to ensure the region maintained a delicate balance, prevented any one power (Iran or Iraq) from gaining control over a majority of oil resources as well as to prevent a Soviet alliance with any of the warring parties.

Here as well, proxy warfare was successfully employed by an outside power to protect its national security interests. While the United States planned several contingencies in the event of Soviet intervention or an Iranian breakthrough the logistic hurdles, financial costs and potential political backlash dissuaded Washington committing conventional forces in large numbers. The United States would intervene several occasions during the Tanker War but only to maintain the free flow of oil and prevent further escalation of the conflict. Likewise, Iran's proxy force in Lebanese Hezbollah provided Iran an alternative means to enhance its regional power and expend its influence to the Shiite minority amidst the Lebanese Civil War without risking outright confrontation. These considerations also affected Pakistan's decision to covertly support the Taliban and HIG. Ever fearful of Indian military action, Pakistan's generals determined support to its selected militant groups as a proxy force would allow Islamabad to achieve its desired end-state in Afghanistan.

While the international system likely constrained the behavior of Pakistan, Iran and the United States – as offensive military action could have resulted in

²³¹ Jones, Toby Craig. "America, Oil, and War in the Middle East." *Journal Of American History* 99, no. 1 (June 2012): 208-218

unforeseen escalation – support to a selected surrogate allowed these states to maximize their power to enhance their survival. In the Iran-Iraq War the United States as a hegemonic power likely sought to maintain the existing status-quo; any change in relative balance between Iran and Iraq posed the possibility of upending the tenuous regional balance. Aware the costs, difficulty and the potential Indian response to an invasion of Afghanistan, Islamabad recognized its security could be maximized through a strong relationship with various Afghan militant organizations. Finally, Iran's regional isolation prevented it from action its near-abroad, however the possibility to foster a Shiite proxy would allow Tehran to challenge the existing strategic balance between it and the traditional Arab centers of power.

In all these cases, the neo-realist theoretical emphasis on strategic balance provides a useful guide to explain why states engage in this particular form of warfare. As previously discussed in this paper, the role of ideology in the Middle East and South Asia does not serve as a prime driver for state's support to proxy groups. Rather the structure of the international system and a state's desire to balance against perceived threats are likely the strongest influence on its behavior. Stephen Walt notes that "though there are reasons why we would think that alliance behavior in this region would be different from that in other areas, in fact Middle Eastern states adhere to neorealist hypotheses—they balance instead of bandwagon."²³²

²³² Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987) 26.

As is likely playing out in the current Syrian Civil War, war by proxy will continue to be used by states well into this century. While these wars can positively advance a state's national security interests there are a number of spillover effects, which are often unforeseeable at the outset of intervention. In the case of American support to the Afghan mujahedeen in the 1980s the United States cost the Soviet Union its biggest strategic defeat of the Cold War. The forces unleashed by the destructive conflict however likely served to exacerbate the instability of Afghanistan. Little more than 10 years after the Cold War ended the United States would respond to the September 11th attacks with a large-scale military response to the Taliban Government. Many of these fighters benefited from earlier American largesse where allies soon became enemies. As was also the case in Iraq the United States would find itself drawn into a response following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Despite these risks, proxy warfare will likely continue to be a constant fixture in international security affairs given the benefits it presents national policy makers.

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