

Conceptualization of Islamic Solidarity in Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran

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Abstract: This article intends to elaborate on the strategy of Islamic Solidarity of the Islamic Republic of Iran in relation to Islamic countries. The Islamic Republic's practical foreign policy experience, over the last three decades, has made the latter phenomenon more qualified than the strategy of Islamic unity and Islamic Cosmopolitan (Umm al-Ghora). While addressing non-provocative issues, this strategy seeks for empowerment and promotion of greatness for the Islamic World. Reaching such a status requires self recognition (by Islamic countries) and understanding the condition of other countries of the world as well as proactive, convergent and symbiotic efforts aimed at development, progress and expansion of power and prosperity of Islamic countries.

Introduction

Designating the year 1386 (Iran Solar Hejrah Calendar) by the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran as the year of "Islamic Solidarity" in context of Iran's relations with Islamic countries, was welcomed by foreign policy experts. A former foreign policy official called this designation a "precise choice"(Velayati, 2007:4). Another

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specialist in the field believes that replacing the term "unity" with "solidarity" could serve to alleviate previous difficulties facing our foreign policy, particularly in the first decade following the (Islamic) revolution:

"Historical experiences of approximately last two centuries, demonstrate that the doctrine of unity or union has not been deliberated enough and has been faced with serious difficulties; at least countries have not prepared to give up their national identity in favor of a larger entity. Bearing this notion in mind, the option of "Islamic Solidarity" is apparently well crafted to address such exigencies." (Broujerdi, 2007 :12)

Viewpoints on Islamic Solidarity are noteworthy from three perspectives; first, although the Islamic solidarity corresponds to "Islamic Unity"(Vahdat) or "Umm al-Ghora' (Islamic Cosmopolitan) doctrines in our foreign policy over the last three decades, it is not necessarily in contrast with those approaches. However it could not be also considered as identical definition of unity. (Velayati, 2007:5) In other words, Islamic Solidarity is in pursuit of cohesion and increasing interaction among Islamic countries that can both provide grounds for Islamic unity or the formation of Islamic community (Umma) model. It also maintains common approaches and reduces the differences and reinvigorates the national identity of Islamic countries. Achieving any of those two objectives requires interaction, agreement and strategic political decision by Islamic countries. Second, the viewpoints discussed on the concept of Islamic Solidarity in our country, have been mostly based on previous discourses on Shia-Sunni unity or in the same direction taken by "The World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought". "Religious proximity is following up the approximation of disciples of Islamic faiths with the aim of recognition of each other's commonalities. It also seeks the expansion of common grounds in order to achieve Islamic brotherhood and religious unity based on indisputable principles and Islamic commonalities and alleviates the difference among each other." (Taskhiri, 2007:2) Meanwhile, the approach of Islamic Solidarity in certain extent seems to be different from its previous precedents and is considered to be preliminary stage of better

understanding and a path toward economic, professional and technical interdependence among Islamic countries. Third, Islamic Solidarity could be used as a foreign policy tactic and strategy of Iran in harmony with other Islamic countries and has more operational capacity, comparing with Islamic Unity and Umm al-Ghora doctrines; It aims to assuage the problems and difficulties among Islamic countries arising from realist and nationalist paradigms—since they are not nuanced to distinguish between Islamic and non-Islamic countries; hence providing a breakthrough while the universal Islamic Umma seems to be still a far reaching ideal at the present situation. Utilization of three decades of foreign policy experience could be very crucial in this strategy.

A. Conceptual Framework of Islamic Solidarity

The concept of solidarity and cohesion among countries maintain the fact that the structure of nation-states not only does not address the major existing economic and social issues among countries, but also obstructs the trans-national functions of their relations due to the emphasis on geographic and territorial specificities. For instance, environmental issues do not fit within territorial frameworks. Where as a world government capable of handling regional, trans-national and global issues has not yet been achievable, countries carry on their functions within the framework of nation-states while keeping self-preservation and diverging inclinations in their foreign relations; This is the fact because “nationalism may emerge in racial, ethnic, lingual and even in religious forms and act as a divergent force and antidote to the realization of political unity”. (Kazemi, 1996:68) Under such circumstances, the inability of countries in managing the international system has intensified the suspicion and cynicism toward international unifying and converging initiatives. “Historical facts indicate that exertion of military force has been more prevalent in realizing political unity, but such an obligatory and coercive political unification should not be confused with integration”. (Columbus & Wolf ,1996:896) On this basis, scholars consider cohesive and unifying

measures as modest and suitable to address supra-national issues, even in terms of international peace and security. This solution while acknowledging the current mechanisms can also address universal ideals. Having this in mind, this conceptual framework raises the following assumptions:

1. The cooperation, interaction, ties, solidarity and convergence, have primarily apolitical and technical premises for and thus have less sensitive nature;
2. The increase in level of trade and cooperation results in more communication between nations and thus strengthening solidarity and convergence between them;
3. Experience of cooperation in a given field can spill over to other areas. Therefore in certain cases of misunderstanding among the involved parties and prior to any unilateral action, the initial communication and reconsideration is assumed to alleviate and ultimately resolve the differences and altercations;
4. The prerequisite to peace and international cooperation is social and economic prosperity. (Elger,1993: 167-169)

There are three important approaches in theories of international relations on regional convergence and integration: they are dealing with process, conditions, and outcomes. The process approach is influenced by functionalism theories. Functionalism theories emphasize on processes and interaction among countries. Since the nature of relations between countries is mostly technical and functional, the furtherance of such ties depends on their mutual benefits and interests. In such processes, establishment of functional institutions (engaged in areas like production and supply of energy, transportation and communication control, medical care and improvements in healthcare conditions, regulating the standards and exchange of labor, and customs unions) are more lenient comparing to high-profile political bodies that are dealing with national sovereignty of countries. (Columbus & Wolf, 1996: 893) Such institutions and interactions facilitate different aspects of countries' relations and

prioritize cooperation over conflict. Social and cultural rapprochement further strengthen the interactions and common procedures among countries while reducing the influence of international powers for intervention in sub-systemic crises. It also brings about sort of a compromise between interests in both national and international levels. In other words, while increasing the compatibility of national self-reservation tendencies and accountability for supra-national issues and altruism, it ultimately broadens the learning processes between countries. This process could transform the governments' inclinations from a "will to power" to a welfare and functional orientation. (Dougherty & Faltzgraph, 1997:675) Moreover, the process approach within framework of functionalism is incremental and requiring patience, tolerance and political prudence. Such political leaders give preference to their national interests over political partiality, or factional and personal motives. In this context, realism and interactive visions are inevitable parts of political structure agenda by which mutual trust emerges among experts and politicians. This approach (Functionalism) is indebted to views and queries of David Mitrany and Ernest Haas.

The second component of this approach is mostly derived from Amitai Etzioni's thoughts. He deems that convergence and solidarity among countries originate from the existence of a decision making centre involved in allocation of resources and values. Decrease in violence and more control over the tools of coercion are specificities of such conditions emerged from convergence. (Dougherty & Faltzgraph, 1997:668) Ultimately, the goal-oriented approach, contemplates the regional integration as the final objective of the convergence and solidarity. Such an integration is formed either by federalism or through the establishment of pluralistic security associations which are based on conformity of decision makers' values, their mutual predictability and accountability. (Dougherty & Faltzgraph, 1997:673) Interdependence is also based on multifaceted official and unofficial channels, lack of hierarchy of in addressing the issues, absence of priority for security matters in particular, and

complex interdependence between countries. (Keohane & Nye, n1997: 947) According to Ernest Haas, convergence can bring about three forms of regional institutions: a regional government in which a centralized authority distributes the resources; a regional council that while having interdependence lacks a completely defined authority; and asymmetrical regional overlap of which the relegated jurisdiction of comprising units are not devolved proportionately to the new centre, rather it is distributed unevenly among several centers. (Frankel, 1992: 91)

On such basis, the concept of Islamic solidarity is primarily refers to the expansion of economic and technical ties among Islamic countries. The economic and technical relations of Islamic countries spill over to political and security areas and finally, cultural and Islamic contiguity further facilitate the interactions of Islamic countries, bringing about mechanisms for conflict settlement. Therefore implementation of Islamic Solidarity in foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran should be initially introduced to neighboring countries and immediate geographical locations and the be expanded to other regions of Islamic world. In this way, the efficiency of supra-national Islamic institutions like Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) would be boosted up and increases in trade, social, cultural and political exchanges among Islamic countries could provide them with more common grounds and affinity or even some forms of merger among them. In other words this process can be transformed to the ultimate goal of "Islamic Solidarity" or "Islamic Umma", conditions in which misunderstandings among Islamic countries and meddling of non-Islamic countries might be prevented. Therefore by taking into account the three decades experience of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy, and without challenging the existing Westphalian context of international relations, the status quo could best be utilized for implementation of a model for convergence and Islamic Solidarity. Hence, through a short review of foreign policy of the Islamic

Republic of Iran, we try to demonstrate that this approach (Islamic Solidarity) is more efficient, comparing with that of Islamic Unity and Umm al-Ghora doctrines.

B. Islamic Unity Model and Umm al-Ghora Doctrine

Paradigms of nationalism and Islamic Umma both have been companion since the emergence of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the proponents of two models are still persistent to prove their efficacy. This continuity and persistence indicate that the Islamic republic of Iran may not avoid either of the two concepts and instead has to find a way to compromise and link them together. Throughout the Islamic Republic of Iran's history whenever each one of discourses overwhelmed and ignored the other, it has brought up difficulties on the domestic and foreign arenas. The fact that supporters of both approaches have to acknowledge is that the Islamic Republic of Iran - while being originated of an Islamic revolution with its own characteristics - as a nation-state and like all other nations abides in the Westphalia structure of international relations. At the same time, Islamic revolution in Iran is not beholden to European (Western) ideologies and its establishment is not indebted to any major powers. Islamic tenets have been foundations of this system in which the people-and not any sort of avantgarde party-took the crucial role in the revolution. (Ehteshami, 1999: 202)

The quest for achievement of a new structure based on Islamic ideology, fighting against tyranny and injustice of great powers, to deliver the genuine Islamic ideal teachings to other Islamic countries and the whole world, inclination to popular movements instead of political structures, have been some consequential characteristics of Iran's foreign Policy conduct in international system.

indicators/ Bases	Islamic Republic Ideal Structure	Present Structure of International System
Power structure	Achievement of a political structure consistent with Islamic ideology	A Nation-State structure out of a Westphalian legacy
Foundation of Foreign policy behavior	Achievement of Just & fair manner in international system	Oppressive policies by major powers
Ideological Basis	Divine Islamic Beliefs	Capitalist materialistic beliefs
Agency	Popular- Based rule	Agency through elitism

Table1- Ideal types for the Islamic Republic foreign policy behavior

Two more points have to be considered alongside this argument: First, the Islamic Republic of Iran is seeking for a more tolerable order in international relations and deems that such a need has been already addressed by Islamic tenets. The second point is that in international relations context, countries enjoying ideal visions toward the world, peace and international security, believe in “progressive” as an inevitable process and a driving motive to the course of history (Lincoln, 2006: 6-7). Islamic Republic of Iran supposes that such a progressive orientation is inbounded within Islamic beliefs and based upon it, a decade long of Islamic Republic’s foreign policy behavior has been mounted on the strategy of Islamic unity. The theoretical components of this strategy have been made up of the ‘neither West nor East’ policy, the active non-alignment policy (Mohammadi, 1998: 68), export of the revolution, deconstruction of the current (international) system, global revolution, emancipation of the people oppressed by the Eastern and Western powers and ultimately supporting the liberation movements.¹ The important regional impact

of this strategy included Shiite movements in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, fear-mongering efforts and provocation against Iran in order to shift the attention from Israeli threat in the Middle East, Western advanced arm sales to Iran's neighboring Islamic countries, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the most important of all the Imposed War (1980-1988) of Saddam Hussein against Iran. The aforementioned events raised the major question for Iranian decision makers that if Iran as the main base for the revolutionary-Islamic beliefs gets threatened, weakened or harmed, how it can realize its ideals. The Imposed War further strengthened the patriotic feelings toward the territorial integrity of Iran. In other words, the War shifted the Islamic Republic's strategy (on Islamic Revolution) from an outspread-oriented to a self-preserving approach. (Tajik, 2004: 86-87) On such basis, the Islamic Umm al-Gohra theory, did not emerge from a Westphalian discourse of existing international system, rather it was a new strategy and a logical outcome stemming from a political unity approach within the Islamic Republic power structure. Therefore: "The Islamic Republic of Iran in confronting the complex realities of today's world reached to this conclusion that implementing its revolution's aims and aspirations is not realistic in short term, given its limited resources. Hence, while abiding with its principles and ideals, compromised with present realities and did not fight to reach its ideals in the short term. Thus the debate on supporting the Islamic Umm al-Gohra gradually found a special status and has been prioritized as the dominant discourse in the timeframe of the Islamic Revolution's objectives." (Mohammadi,1998: 203) Along the same vein, the Umm al-Gohra theory was a practical answer to the question and dispute on the priority of the expedience and existence of Umm al-Gohra over the authority of the Islamic world. It concludes that though the interests of Islamic Umma have always its own priority, the preservation of Umm al-Ghora is a Must not only for its people but for the whole Umma. (Larijani, 1990: 49)²

In fact, the doctrine of Umm al-Ghora was provided in answer to questions of increasing external threats against political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran and optimization of governance efficiency from a domestic point of view. (Bymann, 2002:7) Despite their genuine

and humane nature, the messages of the Islamic Republic of Iran got reverse effect on outside world. This was not only true with regard to the superpowers that considered status quo changes as detrimental to their interests, but was the same with some Islamic neighboring countries as well. This was somehow natural because of these countries' feeling of powerlessness against the superpowers. The strained background of Iran's relations with those countries, and sharp contrast in their political power structure, all were conducive in giving a security identity to mutual relations between Iran and these countries. Thus, the Islamic Republic has always tried to correct the misperception of the Islamic countries that "Iran lacks a realistic approach to the issues". "It has not been the Islamic Republic's intention to replace the superpowers and behave likewise." (Mohammadi, 1998:35) Or "in its foreign policy, Iran does not covet an inch of other nations' territories or their wealth because consider such a manner as oppressive and tyrannical fashion." (Mansouri, 1986: 180)

Therefore the reconstruction period in post- imposed war era got vital significance to promote the Islamic Republic of Iran's rightful positions and alleviating the wrong impression of Islamic countries. (Mofid, 1990) It also seems to some that cognitive and political structure of the Islamic Republic have dual and reversal nature and whenever the ideological aspects are emphasized, the nationalistic feelings got momentum in balance and vice-versa. Hence they have assumed that the Islamic Republic of Iran has neither been able to coexist with the current international system nor could avoid it and has taken realistic approaches in its foreign policy just in extraordinary circumstances. However Iran "Has not considered itself as the sole responsible for elimination of political, economic and social difficulties of all Muslims and the world, but behaves as benevolent and kind brother to be of assistance as much as possible." (Larijani, 1990:47) The essential question in this relation is whether a third intermediate path exists in foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In addressing the question, this article presumes that "strategy of Islamic Solidarity" fits as the blueprint for a third way.

C. "Islamic Solidarity" as the strategy of Iranian Foreign Policy

The strategy of Islamic Solidarity –as explained before- is analogous with the aforementioned theories while it introduces a new direction before the Islamic countries. Therefore to understand this argument, it is necessary to view the strategy of Islamic Solidarity alongside the two previous theories. In fact, Islamic Solidarity is perfectly consistent with the export of revolution policy, but they differ somewhat in their method of application. In this case, the Islamic Solidarity strategy is more fit since “the export of revolution can substantively be summarized as awakening other nations. It does not mean forceful military imposition of ideas upon the world, but providing the possibilities and a favorable atmosphere so that countries themselves can freely recognize the facts of life and distinguish between truth and fallacy and choose the correct path vigilantly”. (Mohammadi, 1998:52) This has been because the aim of exporting the revolution is to promote the genuine and pure Islamic values. Therefore employing non-provocative method toward Islamic countries is not only more compatible with Islamic tents, but it is even advisable on non-Islamic nations since they are not necessarily belligerent countries (Dar al Harb).

Secondly, this strategy points out to the relative nature of sovereignty that mainly was considered absolute in presumptions of decision makers. This relativity maintains the significance of interdependence as a replacement for autarky (impossible in practice) in different field of production or consumption. (Mohammadi, 1998:73) Thirdly, in previous approaches toward the promotion of revolution, the initial outlook on Islamic countries was stereotypically categorized and the categories included:

“The first group were those administered based on Islamic principles and the Islamic Republic of Iran was looking for further convergence and brotherly relations with them; the second category was made up of Islamic countries that do not possess Islamic government but their governments enjoy popular support and are true national governments. The relations of the Islamic Republic with these governments would be amicable and Iran tries to expand

relations and take common positions with them on political and international issues providing that credible Islamic movements in their lands had freedom of action without the fear of persecution. The third group included countries without a national and popular platform and having been imposed on their people. It was presumed that such regimes are dependent on foreign powers and serve their interests. It was assumed that Islamic Republic of Iran supported the Islamic movements opposed to such regimes and encouraged the countries of the first and second category to this the same". (Norouzi, 2004:208-209) The strategy of Islamic Solidarity while clarifying those primary categorization, tries to expand the communications with Islamic countries of the third type. At the same time and according to the new method of promoting the revolution, this strategy is looking to present the Islamic Republic of Iran as a proper model and is principally taking efforts domestically. Having accomplished the first stage and making Iran as an efficient pattern for other Islamic countries, it can take the pivotal place contemplated in Iran's twenty year Prospect Plan (2024)[‡].

The fourth point about this strategy is based on mutual trust between political and technical professional experts. (Motaqi, 2006: 65-67). Such an understanding would help to neutralize some harmful crisis and tension which are not only incompatible with détente provisioned in ITYPP(2024) but also at odds with the ninth (current) administration plans. The fifth point on this strategy is dealing with the pursuit of empowerment and power accumulation in the Islamic world. This debate is based on the conceptual framework named: "Harmonious Accumulation", introduced by an Iranian political thinker as: ".....Thus if a noticeable aggregate of the Islamic world would be unanimous and likeminded over definite objectives, they can reach their goal. While there would not be such a mass and power accumulation, paramount objectives will be out of reach and merely will remain in the articles and paragraphs of the Constitutions. Every

[‡] - This plan refers to a mid-term development strategy, approved by the supreme leader of the I.R. Iran, and pursues higher status of economic, scientific, and technological development for Iran, upon which Iran takes the first place among middle eastern countries in 2024.

goal requires an amount of power. Creation the grounds for growth and advancement among Muslims is a function of their independence, capabilities and common sense. If Muslims could plan for the next two centuries and come to consensus among themselves for attainment of independence and religious partnership, this will be feasible." (Sareiolphalam, 2000: 53-54)

Thereupon, and for considering the Muslim conditions in the world, an assessment of the religious believers configuration in the world indicates that 33.03% of them are Christian, 20.12% Muslim, 13.34% Hindu, 5.89% Buddhist, 0.39% Sikh, 0.23% Jewish, and other religions are 12.61%, 12.03% non-religious and 2.36% are atheist. (CIA, Factbook, 2007:2) Despite the fact that Muslims occupy the second place among other religions, they also have the largest number of illiteracy. More than two thirds of the illiterates live in 8 countries: India, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Egypt. (CIA, Factbook, 2007:4) About 40% of exports and imports of the world are controlled by a handful of countries: US, Germany, France, Britain, China and Japan. (CIA, Factbook, 2007:5) 29% of the world's total population are Muslims and 85% of them are Sunni and 15% are Shi'ite Muslims. (Table No.2)

Table No.2 -World Muslim Population Percentage

Row	Specifics	Population numbers	Population percentage
1	Total world population	4,992,663,560	100
2	Muslim population	1,461,813,559	29
3	Sunni Muslims	1,237,404,192	85
4	Shi'ite Muslims	218,371,767	15

Source: Islamic World/Demographics of Islam-Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. 2007, p.3.

The distribution outline of Muslim population suggests that 69.336 percent of the world's Muslim population live in Asia, 27.23

percent in Africa, 25 percent in Oceania, 2.987 percent in Europe, and 0.822 percent in are in the US.

Table No.3- Muslim Populations in Asia

N	Region	Total population	Muslim population	Percentage Muslims	Percentage of total world population
1	Central Asia	92,019,166	76,105,962	82,702	5,155
2	East Asia	1,527,960,261	39,609,350	2,592	2,683
3	Middle East	274,775,527	252,219,832	91,791	17,085
4	South Asia	1,437,326,682	456,062,641	28,947	28,184
5	South East Asia	571,337,070	239,566,220	41,931	16,228
6	Grand Total	3,903,418,706	1,023,564,005	26,222	69,336

Source: Islamic World/Demographics of Islam-Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. 2007, p.4.

Table No.4 -Muslim Populations in Africa

N	Region	Total population	Muslim population	Percentage Muslims	Percentage of total world population
1	Central Africa	97,665,660	15,347,332	15,714	0.852
2	East Africa	283,765,021	81,890,564	28,859	4,497
3	North Africa	200,519,502	179,623,477	89,579	12,199

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4	South Africa	54,055,000	885,474	1,639	0.605
5	West Africa	265,005,740	134,577,785	50,78	9,077
6	Grand Total	901,010,923	412,324,632	45,762	27,23

Source: Islamic World/Demographics of Islam-Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. 2007, p.5

Table No.5 -Muslim Populations in Europe

N	Region	Total population	Muslim population	Percentage Muslims	Percentage of total world population
1	Balkans	65,407,609	8,165,137	12,483	0.553
2	Central Europe	74,510,241	521,284	0.7	0.035
3	Eastern Europe	212,821,296	21,826,829	10,256	1,479
4	Western Europe	375,832,557	13,577,116	3,613	0.92
5	Grand Total	728,571,703	44,090,366	6,053	2,987

Source: Islamic World/Demographics of Islam-Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. 2007, p.6

Table No.5 -Muslim Populations in America and Oceania

N	Region	Total population	Muslim population	Percentage Muslims	Percentage of tot world population
1	Caribbean	23,809,622	15,860	0.067	0.001
2	Central America	42,223,849	84,035	0.199	0.006
3	North America	446,088,748	5,115,892	1.147	0.347
4	South America	371,075,531	4,514,716	1,073	0.269
5	Grand Total	883,197,750	9,730,503	2,705	0.822

Source: Islamic World/Demographics of Islam-Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. 2007, p.7

Muslim Populations in Oceania

6	Oceania	30,564,520	372,968	1.22	0.025
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Source: Islamic World/Demographics of Islam-Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. 2007, p.8

At the same time, from economic point of view, Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) possesses only 9.14% of the world's gross production, 10.10% of the exports and 7.12% of world imports. Taking into account the 29% share of world population by Muslims, those indicators do not show a significant situation. (Table no 7)

Table No.7 Economic Status of OIC

N	Unit	GDP in US \$	per capita income \$	Exports \$	Imports \$
1	OIC	5,540,495,000,000	----	1,042,910,600,000	733,746,100,000
2	World	60,630,000,000,000	----	10,330,000,000,000	10,300,000,000,000
3	EU	12,180,000,000,000	28.100	1,318,000,000,000	1,402,000,000,000
4	America	12,310,000,000,000	41.600	927,500,000,000	1,727,000,000,000
5	China	8,883,000,000,000	6.800	752,200,000,000	631,800,000,000

Source: Economy of the OIC- Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. 2007, p.3

Apart from the OIC, Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) is also a body made up of Islamic countries around Iran. ECO's share in world economic equations in 2000 was \$1.42 billion in imports and \$1.32 billion in exports. This means that in 2000, ECO has a negative trade balance of \$10million. The same trade balance in 2005 reached to \$2.06 billion of imports and 1.93 billion exports. This means a negative balance of 13 million dollars, and during 5 years it has had a 3 million dollar negative trade balance. (*ECO Secretariat Website, 2007:7*) Alongside this economic situation, Iran is also a member of the oil exporting countries(OPEC) that are mainly made up of Islamic countries, in particular sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf. OPEC alone provided 35.50 percent of world's oil in Sep 2007. (*World Oil.Com, 2007:7*) At the same time, six member countries of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council possess approximately 406 billion barrels of the 1.312 trillion total proven world oil reserves and more than 70 trillion cubic meters of 172.8 trillion cubic meters of world gas reserves. These conditions persist while more than 95 percent of their economic partners are made up of the US, China, South Korea, Japan, France,

Britain, India, Germany and Thailand that are not Muslim countries. (CIA, Factbook the GCC) This situation also corresponds to Iran's position. Iran's export partners in 2006 were Japan 16%, China 12.8%, Turkey 7.2%, Italy 7.2%, South Korea 6% and Holland 4.6%. This means with the exemption of Turkey, the rest of our major export partners are from non-Islamic countries.

Meanwhile, our import partners in the same year, were Germany 12%, China 10.5%, UAE 9.4%, France 5.6% Italy 5.4%, and Russia 4.5% respectively: meaning from our import partners only the UAE with 9.4% occupies the third place. (CIA Factbook-Iran).

These figures demonstrate that Islamic countries, despite having large populations and noticeable consumer markets, do not enjoy suitable economic/social status in the world. Another important point and in our neighborhood in particular, is that Islamic countries, (trade and economic) relations are mainly with Western world and developed countries. Since Islamic countries are mainly weak in terms of infrastructure and their economy while being rentier and are not supplementary, therefore their economic ties are far from desirable.

Hence, taking into account the retracting economic situation, dispersion of population and low levels of social and economic exchanges, Islamic unity will prove highly idealistic in short term and the Islamic Solidarity faces an uneven and difficult path requiring a long, time intensive and persistent course by the Islamic countries. Therefore, instead of emphasizing on coalitions and strategic exchanges, trade, social and cultural ties among Islamic countries should be taken into account, starting from minimums and extending them to more sensible levels. This task requires cooperation in establishment of Islamic countries' data bank, creation of unofficial academic and parliamentary communications, and friendly multilateral or bilateral ties, increase in different charity cooperative bodies, education, health, development funds and likewise. The numerous experiences of political unions between Islamic Countries, like Arab League, Council for Economic Arab Unity; Common Arab Market and Persian Gulf Cooperation Council have not been so successful (Drisdell, 1991: 298-357). Therefore taking a less sensitive path of apolitical and technical cooperation among Islamic countries

must not be counted as insignificant. The Islamic countries have not experienced such approaches in their foreign policy and rather than seriously intertwined relations, the drive has been toward strained and divergent course. For example, Iran and GCC technical cooperation on peaceful nuclear program can be pointed. Iran can share Persian Gulf littoral countries in its nuclear program, implementing something like the Argentina-Brazil cooperation model in the region. These two Latin American countries, despite their major rivalry, under the auspices of the IAEA, cooperate in the fields of electricity production, radio isotopes, ship fuel, and other areas. Iran can also transform Bushehr power plant into a pole of peaceful nuclear and other sort of cooperation in the region via programs in water desalination, preventing the shift of sand dunes and production of electricity in the region. This action would reduce sensitivity toward Iran's nuclear energy program while employing the immense financial power of Sheikdoms, preventing additional costs in nuclear issues in neighboring countries. (Makouee, 2006: 56-57) Therefore, increase and improvement in economic, social and cultural situation of Islamic countries provides greater possibilities for their cooperation and solidarity while upgrading their economic and political status in the world.

Conclusion

The presented article has sought to demonstrate that the strategy of Islamic Solidarity, based on normal relations between Islamic countries, can be more effective than the two previous strategies employed by Islamic Republic of Iran in relation to Islamic countries. In fact "study of normal relations between governments-those kind of ties that do not make headlines, since they do not end in crisis- are important; since such normal activities constitute peace and are foundation for things like trade, improved social welfare, improved living standards, reduction in human suffering and many activities relating to economy that we value." (Holsti, 1994: 756) In other words, the objective of this approach is providing answers to the question that why certain disagreements are solved peacefully while

in other situations they lead to war. Existence of many sects and orders within Islam is a natural circumstance but the contentious issue is that all such sects consider their discourse as the sole regime of truth and anything else that may be said is null and void. (Gharayagh Zandi, 2000: 125-127) Therefore the strategy of Islamic Solidarity helps to prevent the potential for escalation of issues to crises and tensions, through the increasing of exchanges between Islamic countries. Meanwhile greater proximity between Islamic countries provides better opportunities for their participation at the different regional and international levels. Accordingly Islamic countries, while emphasizing on commonalities, must avoid provoking the sensitive issues. According to Sheikh Mohammad Rashid Reza in his exegesis called *Al Manar*:

“Let’s cooperate upon commonalities and excuse each other on differences.” (Alghrzavi, 2007: 10)

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² This theory was recently defended like its instigators. For its review see: Larijani, Mohammad Javad (2006) "A Revision on Umm Al Ghora Doctrine", Interview of Hadi Khosrow Shahin with Mohammad Javad Larijani, *Diplomatic Hamshahri*, First Year, No.11.