

## The U.S. Strategy of Entangling Iran in Peripheral Conflict

EBRAHIM MOTTAGHI†

**Abstract:** The U.S. invasion of Iraq has jeopardized the security of the Middle East. Although Shiites play an effective role in the political structure of Iraq, they have been facing stern security pressures by the fundamentalist Sunni groups since 2003. In other words, the dilemma for Shiites is that while they are dealing with multilateral reactions and threats by the Arab states, they have lost the support of the Western countries. This indicates of shaping a new regional structure of political and security relations.

During his last year's State of the Union address before the U.S. Congress, President George W. Bush tried to introduce a new security threat in the Middle East. He said fundamentalist Shiites just like their fundamentalist Sunni counterparts would pose a threat to the American interests and national security. It means that a new form of political and strategic conflict is emerging whose parties are the United States, Iran and the revolutionary Shiite groups. Arrangements for such a conflict were made after through a new coalition among U.S. and the regional states of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.

Continuation of such a coalition raise new threats to the Shiites in the region, equally endangers Iran's national security, and revives the autocracy of regional conservative Arab states and they will be prone to clash with Shiites -assumed by them- as Iran's "Political proxies". Such

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† Director of Political Sciences Study Group at Faculty of Law and Political Science, Tehran University

conflictual situations or regression of political autocracy is not to interests of Iran and strains the Iranian security edge.

The following article examines the U.S. security strategy that has been implemented since September 2006; thereupon Washington has built an effective coalition with the authoritarian Arab regimes in opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Through this ongoing strategy Washington is looking to expand the scope of its hostilities towards Iran and undermine its power.

### **Introduction**

Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 vitalized new socio-political forces across the Middle East. During the Cold War, the Americans took optimum advantage of the new development to offset the influence of Communism and the former Soviet Union. Whereas Opposition forces having political identity and ideology could challenge the status quo political regimes, the Islamic revolution in Iran contributed to the awakening of these revolutionary forces in the Middle East which were confronting the dominating forces of the bipolar world. The end of cold war and decline of the former Soviet Union's structural position in international system, paved the grounds for political and ideological disparities between the Islamist groups and the United States.

Among these Islamist groups, Shiites are the social forces that hold both doctrinal teachings and influenced by the movement of Imam Hussein (AS) and the legends of the Ashura epic<sup>1</sup>, are revolutionary and seeking to uphold justice. These forces have been able to secure a new status in the Islamic world. The religious and doctrinal forms of Shiites' political behavior, influenced by the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (AS), are evidenced by "Justice Seeking", "Otherworldly" and "Messianism". Therefore the Shiites have become more prominent in the region. Transformation of Shiites' morality, tendencies and (political) behavior paved the way for emergence of Shiite revolutionary movements, and these forces did manage to leave a lasting impact on the socio-political settings of the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region.

American occupation of Iraq dismantled the former political structures and institutions and under the circumstances, Shiites got more desirable opportunities and could bring the Iraq's political space under control, something that gradually provoked the Sunni groups' reactions and caused friction between religious groups, as well as political instability and volatility in Iraq.

The trend of democratization of the political structures of Mideast countries, would contribute to the furtherance of Shiites political roles. However, the political realities in Iraq demonstrated that the Mideast countries were against any kind of political movement with Shiite identity in its core. Escalation of instability and political imbalance further radicalizes the reactions of dynamic forces and leads to conflicts and clashes between Shiites and extremist Sunnis and of course the United States.

Iraq's political instability blocked U.S. strategic goals in the region and conduced to changing the regional strategy of the United States. The Iraq Study Group headed by Baker-Hamilton came up with new solutions to ensure stability in that country. In its proposed strategies, the study emphasized on American cooperation with Iraq neighboring countries and adopting "constructive diplomacy" to ensure security in Iraq. Under the circumstances, the US should have adopted a multilateral approach instead of its unilateral actions, so it could pave the grounds for changing the American policies as well. However, Bush was against the new approach as he believed that there should be no flexibility towards the revolutionary policies of Shiites and Iran as well. Therefore the U.S. government while trying to contain the revolutionary Shiites, instead of "diplomatic flexibility" employed the new security strategy of "entangling" Iran in strategic confrontation and replaced the proposed "constructive diplomacy" with "security conflicts".

The following article discusses the security conflict between Iran and the United States. The Americans shy away from "direct confrontation" with Iran. The U.S. security experience in Iraq forced them to adopt patterns of "low-intensity" war against Iran. It can be concluded that the scope of U.S. clash with Iran is in periphery.

Therefore “peripheral conflict” could be named as defining model for the current U.S. strategy vis-à-vis Iran.

Since the Shiite are main allies of Iran in its periphery, the article also tries to pinpoint the areas where the United States concentrates on its conflict with Shiite groups. The existing regional/international evidences also point to the security conflicts with Shiites. The United States’ main objective in this trend is to slash the power of revolutionary Shiites in the Middle East and institute an effective collaboration with the conservative Sunni groups and traditional-autocratic regimes.

### **Shiite Political Role in the Middle East Countries**

Throughout the region’s political history, Sunnis have always been in charge of political power either in form of caliphate or states. In the past, Shiites at times took political and security measures to challenge the complete control of the Sunnis and in most cases they failed to get the expected results. Therefore they always reluctantly acquiesced in the Sunnis’ authority. Meanwhile the Shiites' aspiration were not fulfilled in the Middle East, Therefore, the will to change the political status quo as the “aspirations of Shiites” existed to remain in all Middle Eastern countries. Shiite religious leaders and social groups had never legitimized the religious authority of Sunni rulers. This led to maximization of the resistance spirit among Shiites. (Fadlallah, 1980:10)

Shiite religious leaders believe that as “guardians”, “exegetes” and “jurisprudents” they are required to play an effective political role until Imam Mahdi (AS), the savior's recrudescence. This has led to the formation of a certain concepts and jargons upon which these jurisprudents could take the role as representatives of the sinless Imam (AS) in his absence. Whenever the political systems in the region weakened, these groups became stronger. Thus Shiites in the Middle East though failed to play a much more decisive political role

in the region, they always tried to make use of the above-mentioned identity elements to promote their own status. (Akhavi, 1987:31)

In response to the risky and restricted situation of Shiites' political activities, there have been two schools of thought and approaches among Shiite groups: One is known as the "cultural Shiites" and have been following the religious teachings and norms based on historic and traditional patterns. The second group called "political Shiites" has the inclination and will toward the political activities. Such an orientation is prevalent across all Shiite geographical regions; there exists a mix of cultural and political Shiite groups in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Oman and Lebanon. Consequently, the Persian Gulf is a region that binds the Arab Shiites together with the Iranian Shiites as well as Shiites religious seminaries and institutions in Iran.

After the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran, emergence of a common identity among Shiites caused the raise in inclinations towards the "political Shiites" in Persian Gulf region. The historic and religious characteristics of Shiites' identity are referred to as "inherited identity" and people with such characteristics have traditional and close tendencies to "cultural Shiites". However, after the Islamic revolution in Iran, a new religious tendency identified with its revolutionary and dynamic character emerged as the "acquired identity". Under the influence of Islamic revolution, the "acquired identity" with its cultural, historical and hereditary nature, transformed to a revolutionary nature. It indicates that victory of Islamic revolution in Iran has affected the patterns of Shiites' political behavior. Therefore the social context paved the way for the emergence of the "acquired identity" and radicalization of Shiites in the region. (Ramazani, 1982:32)

Therefore, it can be argued that Shiite identity is influenced by internal and international factors and regional issues played a pivotal role in re-construction and development of the Shiite identity. In this respect, Graham Fuller says, "as much the Shiite identity is influenced by the internal characteristics it is also affected by the outside pressures. Except for short intervals, Shiites have often been outcast and suffered from discrimination and persecution. They have been

accused (by the Sunnis) in three aspects of religiosity as well as politics and loyalty towards their country. They have depicted Shiism as suspicious and heterodox which has undermined the principles of Islam.

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“From the political standpoint, Shiites are assumed as arch opponents who were not in good terms with the caliphate ruling system from the very beginning and were conspiring to divide the Muslim Umma. The contemporary Arab chauvinist writers have been promoting anti-Shiite accusations under the guise of “anti-Arab movements”. (Fuller, 2002:53)

Considering the afore-mentioned points, Shiite groups in the Persian Gulf littoral states as well as the Middle East have always been contained and marginalized. The authoritarian structure of the regional states has never provided Shiites with an effective role or status. In fact, Shiites have always been politically isolated and were given a very limited role in the government and have always been seen as a restive force. Such attitudes towards Shiites make them feel politically isolated and lack of political justice in their own countries. Under such circumstances, they’ve defined their surroundings from a revolutionary viewpoint and always have opposed the political systems in the Persian Gulf and Middle East regions as unfair and repressive. This has created an atmosphere of distrust and conflict between the ruling systems and Shiites. (Batana, 1978:44-45)

Political dissidence and frustration against social status quo have naturally created revolutionary social waves and excited the political and identity issues among Shiites. Although there is a direct link between the revolutionary Shiism and Iran’s Islamic revolution, Iran has never applied the radicalization patterns or interfering mechanisms to create “Shiite identity” in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. In fact, Iran supported the Shiites’ political identity risen out of political and structural pressures of the regional ruling systems. This ideological support augmented the Shiites’ self-confidence in their opposition to the socio-political conditions and political pressures of authoritarian Sunni regimes. After formation of their political and social identity, Shiites transformed their belief system into a political agenda in order to play a much more effective political

role and consequently resisted the political pressures of the regional ruling systems.

Therefore the Islamic revolution in Iran helped the Shiites of Persian Gulf to retrieve their long-lost courage and strengthened their aspiration to acquire their identity based on traditional and religious-political visions. Therefore they resisted against political systems and alleviated their social isolation and could recreate and maximize their political activities. In words of Benedict Anderson, "The Persian Gulf Shiites once again could realize their patterns of social conscience within the identity frameworks. Short of identity factor, they would have not been able to confront the so-called regional political systems in an all-out and effective way". (Anderson, 1983:32)

The trend of the revolutionized Shiite Identity began in early 1980s and gave them a better momentum in their political activities upon which they were able to overcome the dominated situations in the Persian Gulf. The social forces in regional countries subscribed their identity with Shiite teachings and set up new political institutions and consequently, a full-fledged struggle broke out against the political systems. In its first step, the revolutionary political Shiites began with criticizing the authoritarian political systems. Since the Americans also were using the democratic rhetoric in some cases, that led to some kind of concordance between the Shiites' identity and political mindset and of the American perceptual frameworks. In other words, Shiites pursued their aspirations by criticizing the ruling political structures, similar to the Western approach towards the Middle East political systems. (Balz & Brownstein, 1996:37-41)

However, perceptual consonance between the American analysts and Shiites on regional political structures was not stemmed from the same identity function. Americans' critical attitude (towards the regional government systems) was serving their political and strategic agenda, whereas Shiites' political behavior was a reflection of their aspirations, religious principles and beliefs and ideologies. Therefore, as a trend during 1991-2003 the Americans found no alternative but to replicate reports published by Shiites or criticize the restrictions enforced against them. Saddam's dictatorship was a

symbol of Sunni domination and as an undemocratic conduct of a regime which ignored his own people's civil rights and the political sovereignty of the neighboring states in the Persian Gulf. However, Shiites managed to reinstate their status through collaboration with the regional states and the international community. (Iraqi File, 1993:37-41)

### **Debates on Export the Revolution and Impact on Shiite Political Movements**

As mentioned earlier, Shiites' quest for justice was based on indigenous paradigms and perceptual frameworks. When such formations are under political pressure and systematic restriction, they tend to realize their identity. Although seeking identity requires social and cultural patterns, in most cases the identity patterns can help create the necessary political motivation for playing effective roles in political structures. In this respect, the Shiite culture has a special significance. Jihad, martyrdom, fight against oppression and seeking justice are parameters that can provide Shiite followers with common identity functions. In this respect, Manuel Castles says, "The Shiites' reconstructed identity paved the way for their political agenda. This will be the focal point of the most determining process which can shape the future of the world to a great extent. There were significant differences between the Shiite heritage - which inspired the late Imam Khomeini - and the Sunni beliefs. In the Shiite culture, martyrdom means following the path of Imam Hussein (AS) who was martyred in 681 AD. This is viewed as the core principle in religious purity. However, sacrifice in the way of God is held a sacred obligation in entire Islam." (Castles, 2001:31-33)

Despite these indicatives, Islamic revolution of Iran managed to reach out to the new political and ideological movements in the Middle East. Iran devised and implemented the policy to export its revolution based on the social indices of Middle East social milieu and the role of Shiites in the political arena. The "resistance identity" was a prerequisite of the Islamic revolution to succeed. The wave of Shiite identity created by Iran also spread across the region. Therefore, the

“resistance identity” would fortify itself for resistance and self-preservation in a region. The policy of export the revolution was an original idea in the Islamic world and the reflection of preparedness in Middle East social forces that were able to resist against the authoritarian political structures.

There are similar resistance identities like Iran’s in other Persian Gulf littoral states and the Middle East. In other words, identities are socially constructed in local context and phony identities could not be transferred to other geographical locations, and this is the fact with regards to the “resistance identity”. The signs of Iranian revolution are being noticed throughout the Persian Gulf littoral states, because of shared identities that have strengthened their status under the influence of Islamic revolution in Iran. In the words, of Manuel Castles, “From a social theory perspective, an identity is not a substance and could not be evaluated as either progressive or reactionary out of its historical context. The important point is that the advantage of an identity is for those who have subscribed in it. Every process of identity building could lead to a different result. The “resistance identity” can develop societies that could build up resistance against domination and repression. This can arise from alienation and anger over political, economic and social injustice and discrimination. (Castles, 2001:25-27)

Therefore Shiites managed to redefine and restore their status based on the subjective concepts because they were not engaged in political and power structure of their countries. The political and ideologized actors would need support in a social context which is appropriate for identity building and the internal social forces can provide effective and organized political activities. Under such circumstances, the “resistance identity” links with the “planned identity”, which the latter can tie the Islamic revolution in Iran with identity patterns of Shiites in other countries.

The victory of Islamic revolution in Iran transformed the Shiites’ “resistance identity” into a redefined “planned identity” in the Middle East whose manifestation is obvious in new political atmosphere in which Shiites in the Middle East surpassed the frontlines of resistance and defending their identities and rights, and

challenged the authoritarian political structures all over the region. Consequently, the entire political, social and security structures of region have become the focal point for Shiite groups and they have set agenda for realizing their political goals in the Middle East. This indicates that Shiites' interactions got affected by new social environment which goes way beyond the sole identity and "resistance identity". They also seek for rationalization of their political interactions in the Middle East and bring about a condition based on their "planned identity".

In this context, Iran's Islamic revolution is seen as a prop for outcast forces or demoralized and diffused Shiite identities which were under restrictions in the Middle East and now are prepared for political participation. Shiites who created the "resistance identity" in the 1980s developed a new ground for interactions in the 1990s which was based upon objective setting, revolutionary strategizing, tactics and organization. Therefore the "planned identity" was formed on the basis of organized and strategic rationality as determining trend for more effective political change in the socio-political structures of the Middle East. The role of Shiites in confronting the Saddam Hussein and the Lebanese Shiites position in their fight against Israel could be placed within the category of Shiite interaction and such programmed interactions can be categorized as an "organized identity".

To achieve a planned and programmed identity, going beyond the resistance identity is inevitable since it necessitates challenging the status quo which was the mode in 1980s across the entire Persian Gulf region. The other form of identity having a planned and programmed nature was demonstrated by Shiites in the 1990s. Each of the above-mentioned processes should be reviewed and analyzed within their own historical context. Modernization, however, shortened the time of transforming the "resistance identity" to the "planned identity". Shiites in the Persian Gulf have been placed in this particular process for some time now. Therefore the impact of the policy to export the revolution is still high on the agenda of Shiite political activism.

In 1990s, Shiites were considered as an active and effective force who managed to fulfill their aspirations for having a distinctive identity, and realizing their historical experiences. During the period,

Shiite revolutionary movements turned themselves into political subjects in a bid to restore and re-establish their identities along other association and the "Positive Others". It demonstrates that Shiites have become self-aware actors within the identity frameworks as well as the process of export the revolution and contributed to the political and identity configurations of other like-minded and common aggregates in different geographical locations.

In his research work on regional issues, Anthony Giddens came to the conclusion that Shiites are new identity forces who have applied their personal talents and inner motivations to influence on the region's political situations based on dialectic interaction.. Their "ideological identity" transformed into "social identity" and their dialectic interaction with regional/international forces helped to rebuild a new political atmosphere for Shiites. This suggests that "ideological identity" through social links can institutionalize its status in history and the political environment. (Giddens, 1985:52)

Hence, the Shiites' tendency towards identity, the materialization of "planned identity" in their socio-political interactions plus the political objectives of Islamic Republic of Iran have had significant impact on formation of "revolutionary Islam" paradigm in the Middle East. Iran's Constitution emphasizes on the importance of exporting its revolution. The amendments to the Constitution that came later also did not modify the main orientation of Iranian foreign policy. In other words, the emergence of pragmatist politicians did change Iran's foreign policy approach with little or no impact on the strategy to export the revolution. Generally speaking, "Changes in Iranian foreign policy, from one hand came as a direct consequence of new developments in the region and beyond and from another hand, the economic needs paved the way for changes in the country's foreign policy. During this period of time, there was urgent need to establish dialogue with the Western countries, Russia, the Persian Gulf littoral states, the neighboring countries and those across the Middle East. In the 1980s, Iran had been diplomatically isolated and this had a huge impact on its regional status."(Ehteshami, 2006:76)

The political situation related to the ideological principles as well as Iranian political decisions played a pivotal role in the process of exporting the revolution and introducing the Shiite symbolism to the world. In general, the Iranian revolution was in the name of Islam and the slogan of "God is Great". It was based on Shiite ideology and symbolism and directed by Islamist leaders and contributed to World Muslims' embracement of Iran's Islamic identity. Imam Khomeini's political agenda was to unite all Islamist/social groups across the globe. Although Islamic ideological principles were Shiites' political guidelines, their motivations to confront the symbols of infidelity, atheism, and authoritarianism were further promoted per the Iranian political literature and strategy.

The strategy of Iran's foreign policy was devised in line with institutionalizing the Islamic revolution's lofty principles inside the country and abroad. There are still some who believe that the imposed Iraqi war on Iran came as a reaction to and consequence of Iran's probable export of its revolution and/or incite Shiite groups in the Persian Gulf littoral states. Therefore, under the auspices of such a policy, "Shiites of the Persian Gulf littoral states and in Pakistan who are important minorities, governed by the Sunnis rules, courageously expressed their religious identities, performed their religious worships and even criticize and protest their rulers.

However, by branding the dissidents as "Khomeinists" the Sunni rulers alleged that Iran is meddling in their internal affairs. Rulers in Persian Gulf states were afraid of the Iranian revolution's striking narrative and model. The former Iraqi Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein was shaken by the 1979 Shiite uprisings in the holy cities of Karbala, Najaf and Kufa. The regime suspicious of supposed Iran's connections with the Shiite groups of 'Al-Dawah' and 'Mujahedeen'- which were established in 1979- arrested all Shiite leaders in that year." (Esposito, 2003:49-50)

The imposed Iraqi war on Iran (1980-88) was indeed as a response to the policy of export the Islamic revolution. The Persian Gulf littoral states were thinking that Iran's involvement in a regional conflict would undermine its ideological potentials in the region. However, the symbolic aspects of Iranian religious and strategic

approaches sustained the policies of exporting the revolution (amid the war) and confronting the great powers. According to the late Imam Khomeini, the Iranian resistance against the containment policies of the west was the main factor behind the Shiite's dynamism in the Muslim world. He laid emphasis on the importance of implementing the 'defensive war' in an attempt to fulfill the strategic goals and for the same reason, the positive outcome of the imposed war was largely lauded. More important though, the late Imam said, "Every day of the war was designed to contain us, however we made optimum use of them all; We could manage to promote our revolution in the world during war; We prove our innocence and the cruelty of the aggressors during the war; Through the war we figured out our friends and foes; During the war we realized to appreciate our self-reliance; We broke the supremacy of two superpowers of the East and the West during the war; Through the war we reinforced the roots of our Islamic revolution's achievements." (Esposito, 2003:67)

The late Imam Khomeini's comments in those days should be seen as manifestation of Iran's political incentive to mobilize the potential dynamic social forces in its peripheral environment. As mentioned earlier, the Iranian Constitution has affirmed the export of revolution through liberation movements since this has been an integral part of universal ideals of Islamic revolution of Iran. Thus, the region's political and ideological currents which had promoted their socio-historical identities under the influence of Islamic revolution and could upgrade their identity to "political identity" synchronized their approaches with the strategy to export the revolution.

### **Shiites' Strategy in the Middle East**

Shiites' strategy has been a function of structural conditions and their expectations in social and international arenas. As mentioned earlier, the majority of Shiites in the Middle East have been deprived of effective rights as a citizen. In many cases, they have no civil rights at all and in general, the Arab authoritarian regimes have prevented Shiites of entering the central to be part of the political process. Consequently, they -as political, ethnic and religious forces-

have been alienated of the socio-political sphere of their countries and this social alienation has marginalized them in the social context of the Middle East. Therefore, the Shiites' strategy has naturally been and still is based on overcoming their peripheral status and raises their demands for civil rights.

These demands are being made in different aspects, since the Shiites are trying to pave the way for effective participation in social affairs within the framework of existing the government systems and laws. However, if the concerned political systems -like Saddam Regime- would have an oppressive and authoritarian nature per se, Shiites are unable to secure their political and social rights through democratic channels. Existing evidences indicate that the Shiite groups have adopted two strategic patterns for their behavior. Those who are in majority or have higher social capacities are using a political pattern quite different than the Shiite minority in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE. The Shiite strategy, hence, is dependent on political situation and social circumstances. In this respect, the following strategies could be considered.

#### **A- Strategy of Low-Profile Approach and Step-By-Step Policy**

Shiites who are at the start of their identity leap, have had limited demands thus far and are not inclined to clash with the central governments. They prefer to meet their demands through peaceful means and consider the fulfillment of their civil rights conferred by the central government as a requirement that could offer them a legalized socio-political status. In general, these Shiites are trying to achieve equal rights as to their Sunni counterparts and this has invoked them to utilize civil apparatus such as printed media, statements and so forth to express and protect their rights.

In countries like Saudi Arabia or Kuwait, Shiites try to advance their professional and business status and this partly lessens their (political) demands in those countries. Naturally, this sort of demands are met through maximization of democratic reforms consistent with social exigencies of respective country. Shiites in Saudi Arabia have been concerned of the "majority dictatorship". So, given the legal

frameworks expand, they will ordinarily coordinate their socio-political roles with the country's general policies.

The Shiites who are not majority in their countries strive to get benefit of "democratic norms" in order to promote their participation and minimize the imposed ethno-religious discriminations. Efforts made by Shiites in those (Sunni dominated) countries are aimed at supporting their free and participatory movements in political and economic domains. Strengthening the rights of minority groups, securing new privileges and striking a balance in civil rights are among other measures taken by the minority Shiites.

### **B- Forceful Conflict Strategy**

The strategy of forceful conflict is being adopted in places where Shiites have already experienced moderate social cooperation and low-intensity patterns of political behavior. In general, if political environment does not have a conflictual nature, part of demands could be addressed but conflicts break out when the social demands are not favorably or acceptably met. Indeed, the authoritarian regimes have often refrained from any kind of compromise vis-à-vis the peaceful demands of Shiites and this has created extensive security risks and threats for Shiites.

The revolutionary groups get radicalized in countries where various strategic limitations are imposed and political activities have never got possible. In general, Sunni groups in Iraq have had a biased attitude towards Shiites. This is also the same in Saudi Arabia. For instance, in January 2007, 38 "Wahabi Muftis" issued a decree (fatwa) calling for the genocide against Shiites where they had claimed, that "Shiites are non-Muslims and have close links with the Safavis, the Heretics (Rafidi) and the Christians." As long as such anti-Shiite prejudices persist, there will be pretexts for ethnic conflicts.

In countries like Iraq and Lebanon, Shiites managed to strengthen their social status alongside their population growth and their security strategy and struggling approaches were important factors in upgrading Shiites' role in these nations. They also could accomplish the ideological identity which has a political nature and

also they promoted their historical identity. Achievement of political identity would help the groups to meet their ideological and strategic objectives. In fact, these groups have raised their expectations and have not sufficed to cultural or ideological identities - they found them in the past. They are now trying to enforce their identity in form of social facts. This has strengthened the Shiites' activism and at the same time escalated their conflicts with outsider and opposing groups. This trend has been further aggravated since 1990s. In the new era, the historical and cultural identity has turned into a new form of identity, heightening the level of conflicts. If the identity forces cross the ideological line but fail to get the expected results, the level of conflicts could spread even further.

The evidences indicate that in the 1990s Shiites did manage to use more effective tools in the fight against the authoritarian ruling parties. The political identity of Shiites served as a catalyst that spread the conflicts and they managed to trim down the number of barriers and play far more effective roles in the political arena. They have also experienced new developments in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The third stage of Shiites' identity revivalism deals with their fight against the international domineering players. The political status of Shiites has become revolutionized in way that they are now prepared to effectively confront the threats posed by the interventionist foreign forces. This has increased the political and strategic disputes and set the ground for emergence of the "New Other". This may be considered as the reflection of political equations in Shiites' behavior and in international level. These global restrictions and pressures being exerted on the Shiite revolutionary groups and Iran are part of the conflict strategies being implemented by the regional/international players.

### **Conclusion**

The Shiites' identity achievement stems from their dynamic cultural, social and ideological aptitudes. The signs of identity have essential roots in cultural and political behavior of Shiites in Middle East. Iran's Islamic revolution helped strengthen the tendency

towards identity revivalism. More importantly, in the 1980s the trend was towards the transformation of Shiites' historical identity into the political and strategic identity which brought up the phenomenon of the "political Shiite". The political Shiite was dissenter towards its socio-political status and made an all-out effort to struggle against the political restrictions. This was indeed the first step towards implementing the political and ideological patterns of Shiites. In 1980s, its "Political Other" were authoritative political systems of the region and the trend got even worse in the 1990s. As a consequence, the political Shiite did intensify its battle against the regional authoritative regimes, therefore during this period, there were Shiites' uprisings across Lebanon and maximization of their movements in Iraq.

The third wave of the Shiites' political/security activism came in mid 2006 when Israel became the focal point for Shiites as the US agent and its "proxy regime" in the Middle East. Instead of directly confronting the US, Shiites launched a "peripheral conflict" to meet their strategic and ideological goals. The 33-day war between Israel and Lebanon (August 2006) was a new turning point for the Shiite movement in the Middle East in its fight against the United States and its regional agents. The framework of the "Greater Middle East" made public by the U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice also paved the way for the American confrontation with Shiites.

The first American hypothesis is that the revolutionary Shiites whose political behavior has radicalized, would fight and undermine U.S. and Western strategic goals and interests. The new American hypothesis gave way to a new set of policies against Shiites. In the new situation, the Americans would oppose any Shiites' ideological and/or strategic development that could help them realize their political and security identities in the region. Therefore, containment of the revolutionary radical Shiites got to be a top priority on the American agenda

Under the second American hypothesis, Shiites are perceived as Iranian proxy forces. Since the United States and Iran are at loggerheads over the regional development in the Middle East, the Americans prefer to counter Iran's regional policies instead of

confronting it in actual terms. This has led to the security conflict between the US and the political Islamist groups.

The indirect conflict with Iran will be in the form of fighting the revolutionary Shiites in the Middle East. In fact, the American strategy to fight Shiites is the underlying component of U.S. conflicts with Iran. Under the U.S. hypotheses, Shiites are seen as stooge of Iranian security movements in the Middle East. The Arab regimes of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East tend to buy American allegations and hypotheses. All those countries that came up with the theory of "Shiite Crescent" can similarly be judged as the American gophers in the ongoing strategy to offset the identity policies or strategies of Shiites groups in the Middle East. Based on such an assumption, from one hand the revolutionary Shiites would be contained by collaboration of the authoritarian Sunni regimes, and from another hand, the United States would restrain Iran's power and its security movements in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. This might even give way to new conditions in which the conflicts spill from the Shiite core to its periphery.

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<sup>1</sup> Imam Ḥussein ibn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (حسين بن علي بن أبي طالب) (third of Shaban 4 AH / 8th January 626 AD, at Medina - tenth of Muharram 61 AH / 10th October 680 AD, at Karbala) was the grandson of the Islamic prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the son of Imam Ali, the first Imam, of Shiites and Muhammad's daughter Fatima Zahra. Imam Hussein ibn Ali is revered as a martyr who fought tyranny, as the third Imam by most Shiite Muslims. He refused to pledge allegiance to Yazid I, the Umayyad caliph. He rose up to found a regime that would reinstate a “true” Islamic polity as opposed to the unjust rule of the Umayyads. As a consequence, Imam Hussein was killed and beheaded in the Battle of Karbala in 680 (61AH) by Shimr Ibn Thil-Jawshan. The anniversary of his martyrdom is called Ashura and it is a day of mourning and religious observance for Shiite Muslims. Revenge for Imam Hussein's death was turned into a rallying cry that helped undermine the Umayyad caliphate and gave impetus to the rise of a powerful Shiite movement(Editor)