“THE” SHIA CRESCENT DISCOURSE:
A CRITICAL GEOPOLITICAL APPROACH

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I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

"THE" SHIA CRESCENT DISCOURSE:
A CRITICAL GEOPOLITICAL APPROACH

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This thesis aims to study "the" Shia Crescent discourse through a critical geopolitical approach. King Abdullah II of Jordan claimed in 2004 that the Islamic Republic of Iran aimed at creating a Shia Crescent under its own control and in accordance with its own interests. Moving from this discourse, on the one hand, this study analyses the effect of this discourse on the Middle Eastern countries ruled by Shia political elites, while on the other hand, it elaborates on the approaches taken by those Middle Eastern countries' political elites who have acknowledged the Sunni branch of Islam, but rule over substantial Shia populations, to what extent those elites are influenced by this discourse, and are susceptible to Iranian influence. While undertaking these tasks, this study offers a critical geopolitical analysis of "the" Shia Crescent discourse.

Keywords: Shia Crescent, Iran, foreign policy, critical geopolitics, sectarianism, Shiism.

ÖZ

‘Şİİ HİLALİ’ SÖYLEMİ:

ELEŞTİREL JEOPOLİTİK YAKLAŞIMI ÇERÇEVESİNDE BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

PEHLİVANTÜRK, Şermin

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Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık

Bu tez, Ortadoğu ülkelerinde Şii Hilali söyleminin eleştirel jeopolitik kuramı açısından incelenmesini amaçlamaktadır. İran İslam Cumhuriyeti’nin kendi kontrolünde ve çıkarları doğrultusunda bir Şii Hilali yaratma gayretinde olduğu ilk kez 2004 yılında Ürdün Kralı II. Abdullah tarafından iddia edilmiştir. Bu söylemden hareketle, bu çalışma bir taraftan Şii mezhebini benimseyen idarecilerce yönetilen Ortadoğu ülkeleri üzerindeki etkisini incelerken, diğer taraftan da Sünni mezhebini benimseyen idarecilerce yönetilen ancak kayda değer büyüklükte bir Şii nüfus barındıran ülkelerin siyasi elitlerinin bu söyleme nasıl yaklaştıklarını, ondan ne derece etkilendiklerini ve İran’dan etkilenmeye ne derece açık olduklarını inceleyecektir. Bunu yaparken de bu çalışmada Şii Hilali söyleminin eleştirel jeopolitik doğrultusunda bir değerlendirmesi yapılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şii Hilali, İran, dış politika, eleştirel jeopolitik, mezhepçilik, Şiilik.

I dedicate this thesis to Aylan Kurdi.

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I would also extend my gratitude to Dr. Burak Bilgehan Özpek and Dr. Ayşe Ömür Atmaca for their critical, yet constructive comments on the final version of this study. I will certainly take on their challenging points, and enrich my further studies in accordance.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A growing body of literature in international relations today discusses whether a "Shia crescent" exists as articulated by King Abdullah II of Jordan back in 2004 stretching from Iran into Iraq, Syria and Lebanon (Nasr, 2006; Walker, 2006; Ehteshami, 2006; Takeyh, 2007; Escobar, 2007; Ayoob, 2011; Byman, 2014). Attempts are made to reveal the futility of the Shia crescent discourse (Barzegar, 2008; Mazur, 2009), and they focus on a variety of reference points along the matter that seems plausible, each of which indeed deserves particular attention not only for the sake of academic discussion, but also, as the role this thesis undertakes, for a critical geopolitical inquiry that shuns bias as much as possible.

This thesis is mainly concerned with the deconstruction of the Shia crescent discourse which appeared in practical geopolitics discourses and has ever since been controversed in a number of academic/semi-academic discussions. Those academic discussions laid the bases for the formation of formal geopolitics discourse, and set a legitimate basis for policy prescriptions that would most likely highlight and serve the interests of states concerned other than Iran. While emphasizing these discussions, this thesis also lays out more scholarly counter-arguments and where existent, constraints that possibly limit those arguments are deliberated lest somewhat corrupt knowledge legitimized for, at times, the reckless consumption of statesmen goes unnoticed.

In the thesis, a number of questions ranging from the source of this discourse to its applicability by and actual politics of Iran are tried to be answered along the

lines of discussions concerning the alleged Shia crescent. These questions are significant as each of them plays a role in disentangling the puzzling matter of the Shia crescent discourse, and they seek to understand foreign policy making in Iran, allegedly involved parties, and the owners as well as the supporters of the Shia crescent discourse. Jumping to conclusions without paying attention to details whether being contemporary, historical, social, cultural, linguistic, or political in content would cause a false understanding not just in and of Iran, but also in and of those states, which might benefit from or fear such discourse. After discussing these, an evaluation is offered from a critical geopolitical standpoint that addresses the ability and inability of "the Shia crescent" practical and formal geopolitics discourse relating the matter.

Thus, this thesis aims to answer the question of whether it is 'possible' for Iran and Shia Arabs of the Middle East to form a Shia Crescent or not. Although what King Abdullah II called as 'Shia Crescent' in December 2004 was vague, and his later remarks attempted to explain that he did not, by any means, mean to cause any sectarian grievances in his country or elsewhere, what started as a practical geopolitics term quickly took its place in formal geopolitics discussions. Hence, by questioning the 'possibility' of a Shia Crescent, this thesis tackles the question of whether a Shia Crescent really exists, or it is a discursive construction.

Chapter 2 continues with a study of classical and critical geopolitics. This thesis first tries to understand classical geopolitics and its implications in actual policy making in contemporary world history. It is through a study of classical geopolitics that the chapter continues with an examination of critical geopolitics. Chapter 3 deconstructs the terms 'Shia' and 'crescent', scrutinizes the conceptual changes in their use especially in academia. It concludes that both terms, separately,

have undergone massive changes in meaning. The same chapter also is an attempt to understand how Shiism as a sect evolved in Muslim countries, not only as a religious but also as a political phenomenon. Furthermore, it also aims to understand what it means to be a Shia in the cases that this study covers, namely, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran. Next, Chapter 4 lays out the pro- and anti-Shia Crescent arguments offered by different scholars since 2004, and tries to understand what reasons serve as the gist of their arguments. Chapter 5, therefore, is devoted to revisiting the afore-mentioned countries, and to offering an evaluation regarding the situation of the Shia in these states, especially in the post-Arab Spring period. Eventually, the last chapter serves as both a conclusion and a summary of the thesis.

This thesis argues that a Shia Crescent is rather *problematique*, and the discourse which it produces is suggestive of a view of Iran inimically (Chubin, 2009) and counter-measures that would range from further violation of rights of Shia minorities inside Sunni regimes to perhaps "military solutions" that would produce conflicts in the region. What such discourse could result in, at best, would be a rising tide of sectarianism within these Sunni-reigned regimes and confining them in their domestic problems as to the Shia minority question.

Because the main question this thesis aims to tackle is to understand the process of the creation of a discourse, and its reflections in practice, the study utilizes the method of historical representations, which is a qualitative method. This method is designed to understand those concepts and terms making up the discourse. However, in so doing, the aim is not to comprehend what those concepts are or why they came about, but rather, how they have been transformed throughout history, and came to gain the meanings that they hold today (Dunn, 2008: 78-81). In other words,

this method of historical representations make it possible to understand the meaning those terms, which we accept as given, retain today. Understanding the meanings of the terms is possible through the interpretation of the researcher on the material that is collected. Hence, the terms 'crescent' and 'Shia' are going to be studied, evaluated, and interpreted through this method.

The only two restraints placed upon this study have been the ongoing conflictual situation in the Middle East, and lack of a field study. In other words, Syria and Yemen are undergoing serious crises currently, and the Islamic State (formerly the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant (ISIL)) is still actively fighting in Iraq, as well as Syria. The existence of these situations both helps and complicates an analysis on the practicality of a Shia Crescent discourse. It has helped this study because the post-2011 period allowed us to see the general stance of Iran towards the parties mentioned above; but it also complicates the analysis of this study because it becomes difficult to make conclusive analyses when the conflicts are ongoing, and Iran engages in them. Furthermore, had there been a chance to conduct field study for the sake of understanding the Shia motivations in the region, it would further strengthen the conclusions of this study.

CHAPTER II

GEOPOLITICS AND CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS

All words have histories and geographies and the term 'geopolitics' is no exception. Coined in 1899, by a Swedish political scientist named Rudolf Kjellen, the word 'geopolitics' had a twentieth century history that was intimately connected with the belligerent dramas of that century.

(Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 2006)

This chapter provides an historical sketch of the studies of geopolitics and critical geopolitics. It examines the types of geopolitics, and discusses the epochs in which each of the geopolitical discourse was utilized in great powers' policies. Furthermore, the same section on geopolitics also elaborates on the prominent figures of geopolitics. Next section of the chapter continues with the study of critical geopolitical discourse, how and why it was born, what it studies, and what it aims to achieve in being critical of the study of classical geopolitics.

2.1. Visions of the World through Heuristic Lenses: Geopolitics

What is it that comes to mind when one hears "the geopolitical importance of country X" or "geopolitics of (natural) resource Y"? In either expression or any other else containing the word 'geopolitics', one is likely to understand the existence of power politics over a given geographical space. It is that space which comes to

obtain a certain characteristic in addition to being merely a space, and hence acquires a meaning commonly shared. The connotation of the space becomes so similar to all ears that the uniqueness of the space evades almost unquestionably. The space is no longer seen over a beeline, but is rather zoomed in. Still, however, the zooming lenses are selective given that only certain constants of the space are "bestowed" significance, and it is, from then on, thanks to those constants, which turn the space into a place. Ó Tuathail's attempt to describe geopolitics is also similar to the argument above: "Geopolitics addresses the "big picture" and offers a way of relating local and regional dynamics to the global system as a whole" (Ó Tuathail, 1998: 1).

For different scholars, such conceptualization of space happens through similar means. For instance, both Agnew (1987) and Staeheli (2007: 159-163) offer that when space is seen as a locatable physical place, a cultural location that has its own context which then also necessitates certain narratives of it (that is, constructed over time), then it turns into a place.

The following two sections are going to draw on this most famous concept of geopolitics –place, while reviewing the emergence and evolution of geopolitics in terms of its epochs and types, as well as the founding fathers' view of this heuristic means to policy making and implementation.

2.1.a. Epochs and Types of Geopolitics

According to Agnew (1998: 86), there are three ages in which three different discourses of geopolitical representation emerged, based on the characterizations of space, place and people. All these three epochs in geopolitics emerged around the understandings of (a) spatial differences as modern and backward, (b) the world as a

whole in which states conduct their relations, (c) states as main actors in world politics, and (d) great power politics as the main factor shaping world affairs (Agnew, 1998, 86).

With changing technological, economic and social conditions, representations of the above-mentioned constants have changed dramatically. Thus, periodization, for Agnew, is based upon the dominant geopolitical discourse of certain times. Each dominant geopolitical discourse has its roots in its preceding epoch and context. Also, each geopolitical discourse both evolves within its own epoch and transforms into another discourse as well. This mainly happens due to the inability of a certain discourse to catch up with constantly changing characteristics. In other words, Agnew (1998: 87) states that internal contradictions cause the demise of the dominant discourses, and new ones thus arise. It is against such an understanding that the categorization of civilizational, naturalized, and ideological geopolitics is made.

The discourse of civilizational geopolitics emerged as a result of the rising world capitalism towards the end of the 18th century with Great Britain and other Western European powers wanting to maintain their interests through colonialism. Civilizational geopolitics reflects a dichotomy between Western Europe and the rest of the world (in particular, the colonized East), against which the former has been defined to be superior. The Europeans had revived ancient Greek roots of civilizational superiority with a need to rule over colonized places so as to protect economic interests.

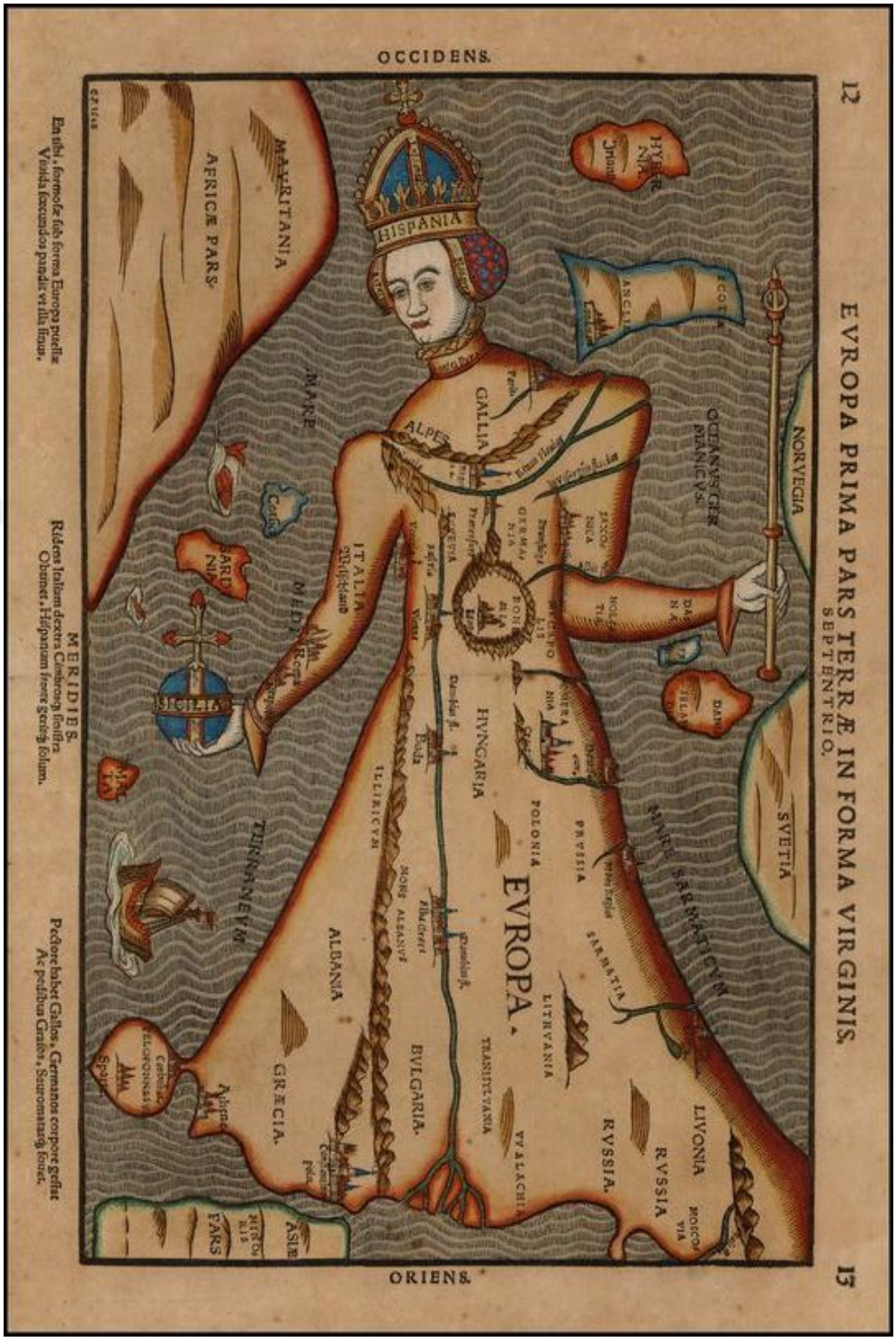
The main characteristics of civilizational geopolitics were "a commitment to European uniqueness as a civilization; a belief that the roots of European distinctiveness were found in its past […and] an increasing identification with a

particular nation-state as representing the most perfected version of the European difference" (Agnew, 2003: 87). Although the end of the civilizational geopolitical discourse stretches back to the late 19th century, one might very well claim that it still continues to this day. Samuel Huntington's pessimistic (1993) "The Clash of Civilizations" thesis is not a very unsuccessful attempt to commence a new discourse. In this famous work, Huntington focuses on civilizational identity as the mere constant, which governs the post-Cold War relations in world politics. Huntington views the world on a civilizational basis and outlines eight civilizations, which are "Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilizations." (1997: 160). Despite the question mark inserted in the title of his work, Huntington suggests a certain conflict would emerge between the Western and Islamic civilizations, thus oversimplifying the trans-civilizational conflicts via creating two hostile camps. In the concluding remarks of his study, Huntington underlines that the West is superior (to the Rest), and for non-Westerners who wish to adopt modernity of the West, cultural differences would serve as offending factors, which would lead to frictions with the West (1997: 169). This is why, Huntington suggests the West to take measures before any possible conflicts, and maintain its military and economic might (1997: 169). Hence, Huntington's thesis may be regarded as an extended form on civilizational geopolitics as the West here is expanded from Western Europe to the US.

Perhaps one of the best geopolitical imaginations of the civilizational discourse epoch can be explained by the imaginative-map like depictions of Europe. Map 2.1. below is such a depiction of Europe titled *Europa in forma virginis* (Europe in the form of a virgin). This map was drawn by Johann Putsch in 1548, and later in

1588, another map (Map 2.2.), this time by Sebastian Münster titled as *Europa regina* (Queen Europe) was drawn depicting Europe as the center of the world, and superior to other places in the world. Further, Hispania is regarded as the brain of the continent. Bohemia represents the heart, while the rest of upper body is made of France and the Holy Roman Empire. The arm that forms Denmark holds the royal insignia, while the right arm is depicted as the Italian peninsula, holding the *globus cruciger*, namely "cross-bearing orb", symbolizing the Christian authority. These are dominantly Western European regions. On the same drawings, we come to see Eastern and Southeastern Europe as "the rest" of Europe, forming relatively less important parts of a human body.

Map 2.1. Europa in forma virginis (Raremaps.com, 2015)



Map 2.2. Europa regina (Swaen.com, 2015)

With the onset of the inter-imperial play in Europe, naturalized geopolitics became the dominant theme of the epoch lasting from last quarter of the 19th century until 1945. The main idea behind naturalized geopolitics is based on seeing states as human beings, and hence, legitimizing their 'biological needs', i.e. enlargement. States and relations between them were regarded identical to natural events, and whatever happened among states was interpreted by means of nature, not politics. To put it differently, states, like human beings, are born and they grow (expand).

At a time when imperialism was in its zenith in Europe, and concept of race and nation were seen as almost identical, white people claimed dominance over the others (i.e. African, Middle Eastern others), and saw themselves superior and more civilized in particular over their colonies. States were likened to living organisms; hence, they had the need to grow territorially and evolve towards a better, stronger entity, and become not only racially better, but also territorially superior. Naturalized geopolitics hence largely draws on social Darwinism, and claims that the "fittest would survive" (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995: 57). Herbert Spencer was a British conservative who defended social Darwinism arduously, employed the phrase of "survival of the fittest" to the human societies. Spencer claimed that the competition over territory and resources entails states to be "fit" in order to survive, and those who cannot guarantee their place would either die or move to a new territory (Turner, 2014: 80).

As nationalist sentiments were boosted, naturalized geopolitics also came to attain a racist characteristic. This epoch, hence, witnessed the conflict between the two main camps of the European powers which yearned for political-economic success, and "a world of fixed geographical attributes and environmental conditions that had predictable effects on a state's global status": Britain and France on the one

side and Germany on the other (Agnew, 1998: 96). The culmination of their conflictual policies in this age led to two world wars in less than half a century. Aside from the two world wars, another area of conflict where naturalized geopolitics demonstrated itself was again colonies.

Agnew's final categorization is the ideological geopolitics. Ideological geopolitics is reflective of the Cold War geopolitics. The end of the Second World War came with the end of the political-economy rivalry between imperial powers, and a process of de-colonization also started to take place. Now that the inter-imperial rivalry was over, a new epoch for geopolitics began to be formulated. The geopolitical imagination of the era was to be determined by the United States and the Soviet Union.

The Cold War geopolitics, or the ideological geopolitics, dictated that the world is divided into three camps: the First, Second, and Third World. While the First World, led by the US and West Europe defended capitalist mode of economic relations, the Second World, whose forerunner was the Soviet Union, inserted communism. Eventually, the Third World was composed of former colonies as well as self-declared "non-aligned" states that did not prefer to join either of the camps. According to Agnew (2003: 12), "…operational during the years of the Cold War, an *ideological geopolitics*, was based on dividing up the world between competing ideas about how best to organize political and economic life ('socialism' versus 'capitalism', etc.)." Hence, the geographical space was seen as two homogenously ideological places where struggle took place to carry their ideologies beyond their own territorial boundaries. As Agnew argues (1998: 113), "this homogenization of global space made knowing the details of local geography unimportant or 'trivial'." Considering local geography not only as a spatial constant, but also one as containing

numerous changing and not-so-homogenous elements (i.e. people) makes the picture even worse, demonstrating that ideological geopolitics, too, retains its own contradictions in itself.

Following the categorization of geopolitical discourses in three epochs, it is also possible to make another categorization to view geopolitics in another perspective. This other periodization of the history of geopolitics is provided by Ó Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge (1998) (See Table 2.1). According to this categorization, imperialist geopolitics connotes a time when geopolitics first emerged as both a concept and practice (Ó Tuathail, 1998: 4). The aim of imperialist geopolitics was to secure empires and ensure their expansion through the making of power/knowledge nexus.

Cold War geopolitics begins with the US-Soviet rivalry in world politics, and is dominated by the ideological rift between the two superpowers. Cold War geopolitics shifted foreign policy making from an evaluation of physical geographical characteristics that drive global strategies of major powers to the amalgamation of both the physical space and ideology.

Towards the end of the Cold War, the New World Order geopolitical discourse began to dominate, which claimed, in particular by Francis Fukuyama, that the world would go under the triumph of liberalism, and this would mark "the end of history" (1989). A similar remark was made by Luttwak (1990) who suggested that world political relations were to be conducted through geoeconomic relations.

Eventually, another discourse is being shaped around environmental issues. The environmental geopolitical discourse suggests that political relations are to be dictated by the environmental damage human beings have caused and how those causes can be re-negotiated. For Ó Tuathail (1998: 7), however, "knowledge of "the

global environment" is never neutral and value-free. [Measures offered] reflect vested interests and protect certain structures of power that are deeply implicated in the creation and perpetuation of environmental problems."

Discourse	Key Intellectuals	Dominant lexicon
Imperialist Geopolitics	Alfred Mahan Friedrich Ratzel Halford Mackinder Karl Haushofer Nicholas Spykman	Sea power Lebensraum Land power/Heartland Land power/Heartland Rimlands
Cold War Geopolitics	George Kennan Soviet and Western political and military leaders	Containment First/second/third world countries as satellites and dominos Western vs. Eastern Bloc
New World Order Geopolitics	Mikhail Gorbachev Francis Fukuyama Edward Luttwak George Bush Leaders of G7, IMF, WTO Strategic planners in the Pentagon and NATO Samuel Huntington	New political thinking The end of history Statist geoeconomics US led New World Order Transnational liberalism/ Neoliberalism Rogue states/ nuclear outlaws and terrorists Clash of civilizations
Environmental Geopolitics	World Commission on Environment and Development Al Gore Robert Kaplan Thomas Homer-Dixon Michael Renner	Sustainable development Strategic environmental initiative Coming anarchy Environmental scarcity Environmental security

Table 2.1. History of geopolitics (Ó Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge, 1998: 5)

All the above-mentioned intellectuals contributed to the geopolitical discourses of their times. In this study, only a few of the most influential of these geopoliticians will be mentioned for an understanding of the alternative historical categorization of geopolitics offered by Ó Tuathail, Dalby and Routledge (1998). It should be noted that not all these geopoliticians have been from academic circles, they have been from different backgrounds such as "private foreign policy research institutes, think-tanks, the media establishment and government agencies" (Ó Tuathail, 1998: 9).

2.1.b. Prominent Figures of Geopolitics

The term 'geopolitics' was first coined by Rudolf Kjellén in 1899, but his definition was one that of a simple concern about the imperial power politics and its relation to geographical factors. The term later came to obtain different meanings in different epochs as discussed above, and will be further mentioned below based on varying understandings and conceptions of geopoliticians.

Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) was an American naval strategist who claimed that the most important determining factor for the prosperity of nations was their acquisition of sea power (Mahan, 2013: v-vi). Advising Theodore Roosevelt, the then-US president who desired to expand American influence around the globe, towards the end of the 19th century, Mahan suggested that Russian Empire and Germany were the two strongest threats against the US aims for expansion.

Furthermore, what Mahan offered was not mere naval power maintenance for times of war; he also argued that peace-time naval power is as much important, in particular with the contribution of the colonies, to maintain and enhance peaceful commerce and related economic activities (Mahan, 2013: 82-83). Although back

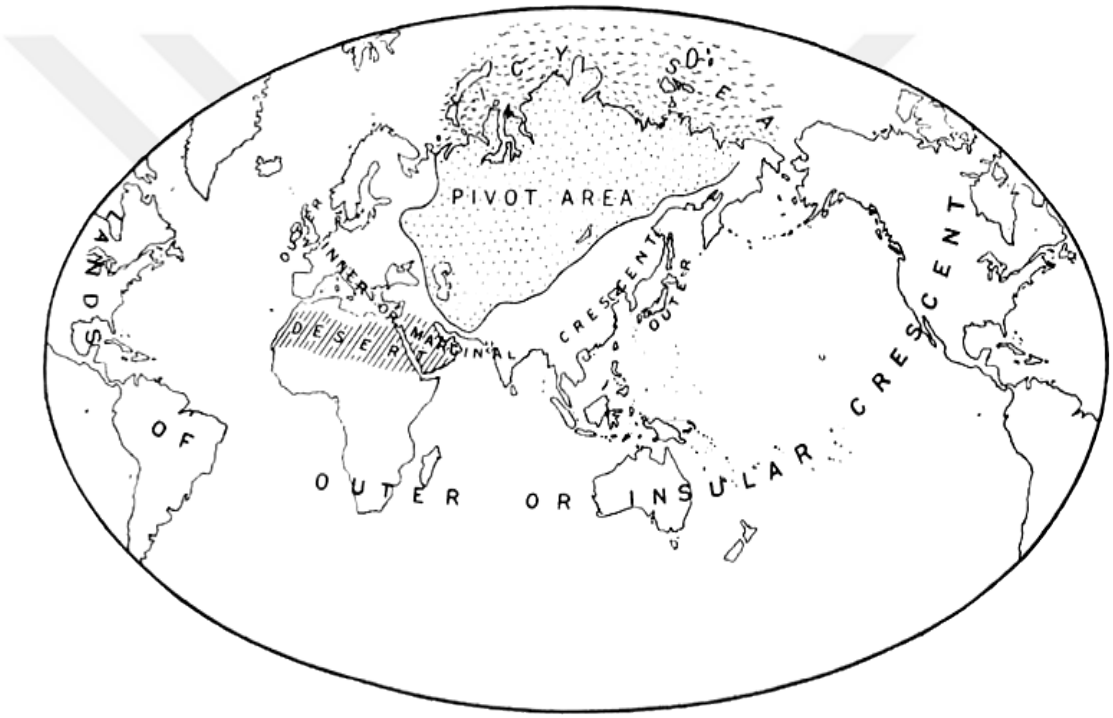
then, the US lacked substantive number of colonies or other peaceful reasons for locating its naval power around the globe, Mahan's theory was suggestive for the American policy makers that the country *should* try to gain such influence in the world politics.

Another prominent figure who contributed to the formation of imperial geopolitical discourse was German geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904). For Ratzel, the world is a complex place where there is a lot of struggle and that states need to be fit in order to survive in such environment. Given that Ratzel was a student of natural sciences, he approached states in a similar vein where he regarded states as complex organic structures and stressed the need for acquisition of territory and resources (Dodds, 2007: 28). Ratzel's roadmap for the acquisition of territory and resources passes through attaining land and sea power, which would then lead a state toward using that power for territorial expansion. For Ratzel, there would appear rival states longing for the same goal, and thus an eternal competition and the rise and fall of the states would continue until they secured a "living space" (*Lebensraum*) for themselves (Ratzel, 1897). "Germany, he argued, should expand at the expense of "inferior" states (organisms) to secure more Lebensraum or living space for itself" (Ó Tuathail, 1998: 4).

Perhaps it would be apt to consider Sir Halford Mackinder (1861-1947) as the founding father of geopolitics as a field of study, despite the fact that he never used the concept "geopolitics". Mackinder was a British geographer and politician who tried to link history to geography in search of making sense of geographical basis of world politics. Aiming to arm Britain against the two rising threats of the time, Russia and Germany, Mackinder proposed the theory of Heartland to the Royal Geographical Society in 1904.

Mackinder's argument was that there was no place left in the world to expand territorially in the post-Colombian era. Therefore, Mackinder regarded the world in certain zones with an attempt to identify "natural seats of power" (see Map 2.3.) (Mackinder, 1904). For the history research he made, Mackinder came to analyze that whoever controls the East Europe would control the Heartland[1]; and whoever commands the Heartland would rule the world island.

Map 2.3. Natural seats of power[2] (Ideas.time.com, 2015)



While Mackinder's theory of the Heartland was aimed for the British policy-makers, its repercussions were rather felt by German geopoliticians. Karl Haushofer (1869-1946) was a prominent German military strategist/geopolitician who adopted largely from Mackinder as well as Friedrich Ratzel following World War I.

[1]"The Heartland is composed of Baltic Sea, the navigable Middle and Lower Danube, The Black Sea, Asia Minor, Armenia, Persia, Tibet and Mongolia" (Mackinder, 1919: 135-136).
[2] Pivot area – wholly continental. Outer crescent- wholly oceanic. Inner crescent- partly continental, partly oceanic.

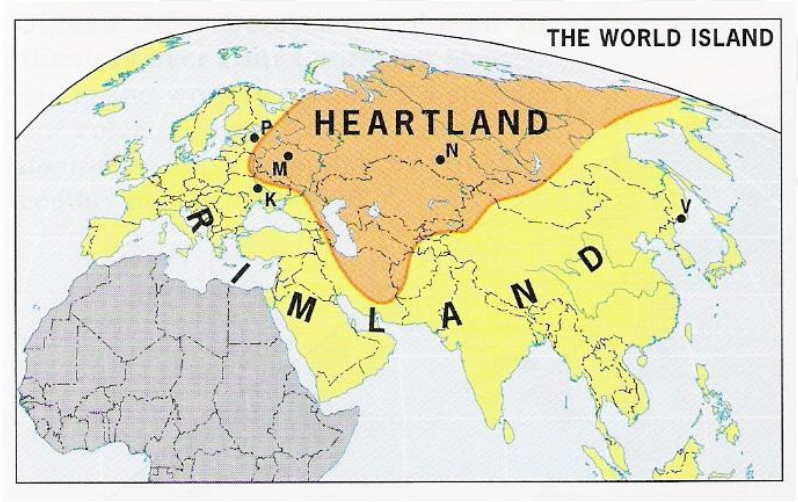
Haushofer was a military commander who served during the First World War in Japan, yet later resigned from his post joining academia as a lecturer (Ó Tuathail, 1996: 35). Discontent with the Treaty of Versailles, Haushofer founded *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik (the Journal of Geopolitics)* and later the study area *Geopolitik* (geopolitics) with the claim that the reason for the German loss of World War I was the lack of geopolitical knowledge (Kiss, 1942: 639).

Rudolf Hess, a student of Haushofer and would-be Deputy Führer in Nazi Germany, introduced Karl Haushofer to Adolf Hitler after the failed attempt to seize power in Germany. This does not come to mean, however, that Haushofer and Hitler had identical views. Their ultimate goals were almost on the contrary. For Haushofer "Germany must emerge out of the narrowness of her present living space into the freedom of the world" (Haushofer, 1942: 34). It would be the heartland that was going to ensure a *Lebensraum* for a Germany, if it would be content with the Munich Agreement in 1938 (Ó Tuathail, 1996: 37). However, Hitler focused on his project of creating a pure Aryan race, a thinking that departed from Haushofer's geopolitical goals. Thus, Haushofer put emphasis on space while Hitler considered race to be the most important determinant factor in the destiny of mankind (Ó Tuathail, 1996: 101).

Nicholas Spykman (1893-1943) is the final important geopolitician who is of concern to this study due to his geopolitical theory. Spykman was a Dutch-American geopolitician who regarded geography as a static constant element in foreign policy making of states. Furthermore, Spykman argues that when demands of statesmen change, geography is always to cause struggle and conflict among states (Spykman, 1938: 28). Due to its geography, a state's foreign policy is liable to certain influences such as the size of the country, natural resources, location with reference to the equator and sea outlets (oceans, in particular), as well as topography and climate. As

a result of these factors, it is possible to speak of three types of states, that are land-locked states, island states, and states with both land and sea frontiers. The result is dividing the world into three zones (somewhat similar to that of Mackinder's): the Heartland, the Rimland, the offshore islands and continents. In this zonal categorization, the Rimland (or Mackinder's 'inner crescent') was claimed to be the most significant geopolitical arena for a state's security, and suggested that the US followed a non-isolationist foreign policy (See Map 2.4. below). This non-isolationist foreign policy of the US, for Spykman, would require the US to focus on sealing Eurasia, and thus containing a Soviet threat (Kearns, 2009: 24).

Map 2.4. Spykman's Rimland Theory



2.2. Critical Geopolitics

Critical geopolitics emerged as a field of study in the 1980s, whereas Simon Dalby first used the term in 1990. Towards the end of the 1990s, the area gained popularity among scholars of political geography. Its main aim has been to move beyond classical geopolitics. Critical geopolitics is not a theory, but an inquiry to

understand spatial representations of socially constructed nature of space and their translation into foreign policy making. In this regard, critical geopolitics emerged as an approach wider than geopolitics, closing in on classical geopolitics and subjecting its ontological and epistemological perspectives to scrutiny. In so doing, critical geopolitics interweaves insights from the critical theories of the Frankfurt School as well as Foucault, Derrida, and Gramsci. In this regard, critical geopolitics borrows largely from poststructuralism. Therefore, its focus is rather dedicated to microelements of power, and not the macro level mechanisms and developments that take place in world politics (Kuus, 2010: 692).

The fact that critical geopolitics is a "problematizing theoretical enterprise that places the existing structures of power and knowledge in question" does not reduce its goal to merely floating philosophical discussions (Ó Tuathail, 1999: 107). Contrary to this, "Like orthodox geopolitics, critical geopolitics is both a politically minded practice and a geopolitics, an explicitly political account of the contemporary geopolitical condition that seeks to influence politics" (Ó Tuathail, 1999: 109). To take the dictum of Robert W. Cox "theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose" one step back, we would see perspectives comprising theories, each of which harbors tacit agendas (1986: 207).

Hence theories, Cox discusses (1986: 207-208), have two purposes: one of them is to solve the problem at hand, and the second one is to create awareness for the underlying perspective that problematized the question, thus opening the perspective to evaluation. Such perspectives are not separate from reality surrounding the researcher, rather than being everyone's reality. Therefore, what is problematized is not subject-free, and does contain an agenda for that matter.

In this regard, the *raison d'être* of critical geopolitics is to point out that reality does not stand still, and cannot be taken with certitude. Instead, it changes across time and space, thus depending on the interpreter. This is one of the perspectives that critical geopolitics aims to demonstrate while criticizing classical geopolitics. Moreover, critical geopolitics scrutinizes both the geographical and political assumptions of classical geopolitics, and the interplay between them. Therefore, "[t]his strand of analysis approaches geopolitics not as a neutral consideration of pre-given "geographical" facts, but as a deeply ideological and politicized form of analysis" (Kuus, 2010: 683). In other words, critical geopolitics produces inquiries that delve into the very details of concepts, terms, understandings, manifestations, and representations offered by geopolitics; primarily making a genealogical questioning so as to fathom the ideas and goals that stand behind what is visible and offered directly to its particular audience (be it academics, media, politicians, or an ordinary person).

In this vein, it is essential to note that critical geopolitics does not represent itself as a "neatly delimited field, but the diverse works characterized as such all focus on the processes through which political practice is bound up with territorial definition" (Kuus, 2010: 683). Given that "from a historical perspective, geopolitics must be understood not only as an academic theorizing of politics, but also as the political action of all sorts of actors who have sought to mold political spaces", the main concern of critical geopolitics becomes eventually how policy-making processes are influenced by productions of classical geopolitics (Moisio, 2015: 220).

Just like the above-noted "theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose" view, critical geopolitics argues that maps and territorial visualizations are also "*for* someone and *for* some purpose". Hence, this study field also includes:

> re-evaluating the role of scale (Agnew and Corbridge 1989; Dodds and Sidaway 1994), problematizing the binaries embedded within security discourse (Mitchell 2010; Ó Tuathail 1998), questioning established political frameworks of identity and representation (Dalby 2007; 2010), and considering long marginalized actors and spaces (Dowler and Sharp 2001; Hyndman 2004)" (Moore and Perdue, 2014: 893).

It is through deconstructing traditional views of territory that critical geopolitics challenges those representations that are "imposed by political elites upon the world and its different peoples, that are deployed to serve their geopolitical interests" (Routledge, 2003: 245).

Critical geopolitics argues that geopolitics is a "decentered set of practices with elitist and popular forms of expressions" (Ó Tuathail and Dalby, 1998: 4). Those expressions are categorized under formal, practical, and popular geopolitics. Formal geopolitics refers to those geopolitical knowledge produced by a "strategic community, within a state or across a group of states"; practical geopolitics refers to geopolitics of "state leaders and the foreign policy bureaucracy"; and popular geopolitics refers to "the artifacts of transnational popular culture, whether they be mass market magazines, novels or movies" (Ó Tuathail and Dalby, 1998: 4) (See Table 2.2.).

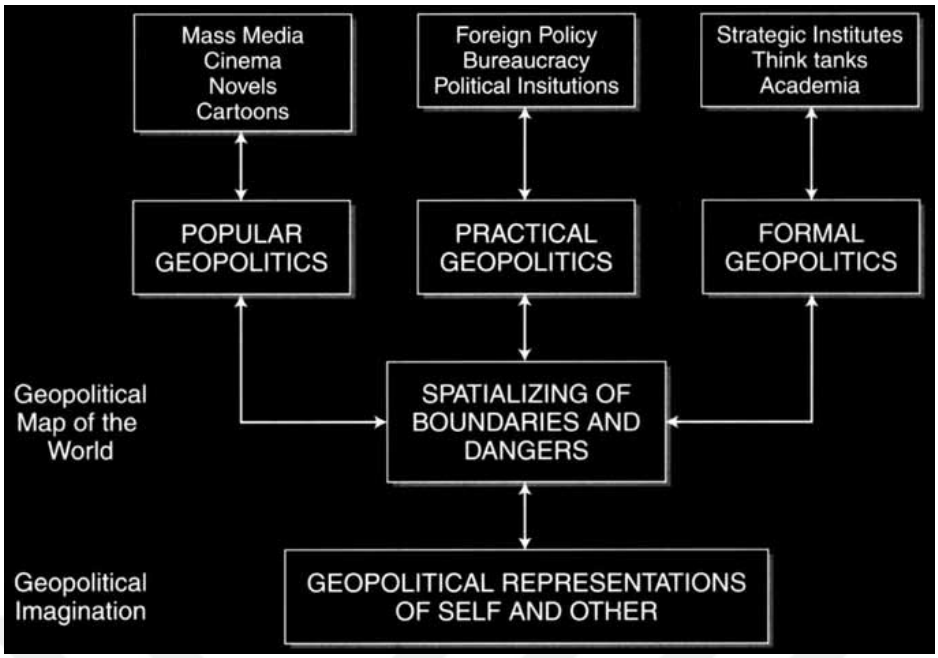


Table 2.2. A critical theory of geopolitics as a set of representational practices

Whether interpreted and formulized by formal, practical, or popular geopolitics, critical geopolitics argues that geopolitics is not about power politics, but it is power politics, and state philosophy (Ó Tuathail, 1999: 109; Ó Tuathail, 1998: 23). This self-interested power politics and state philosophy rooted in classical geopolitics texts and discourses create "objective" knowledge and make power claims based on that knowledge so as to accumulate a legitimate basis for certain perspectives that are translated into policies (Hepple, 1992: 139). Knowledge produced in accordance with one's perspective and interests empowers specific actors/states while marginalizing others. "For critical geopolitics, the notion of 'is' is always an essentially contested perspectival notion" (Ó Tuathail, 1999: 108). There is, therefore, also an agenda, in critical geopolitical discussions, albeit not tacit. Critical geopolitics stands against the naturalization of interests and ideology through revealing the relationship between knowledge and power (in this sequence).

Hence, a sharp distinction can be made ontologically between classical geopolitics and critical geopolitics. For critical geopolitics, there cannot exist an

objective reality 'out there', and "seeing is [not] a naturalistic and objective activity" (Ó Tuathail, 1999: 112). 'Seeing' takes place within certain contexts. Classical geopolitics "takes the world as it finds it" (Cox, 1986: 208) in order to theorize on how to deal with certain circumstances occurring in international relations. As Ó Tuathail notes (1998: 1) "[m]any decision makers and analysts come to geopolitics in search of crystalball visions of the future, visions that get beyond the beclouded confusion of the immediate to offer glimpses of a future where faultlines of conflict and cooperation are clear." Critical geopolitics questions the processes that lead to the emergence of those circumstances, and "how power works to sustain particular contexts" (Dodds, 2005: 30).

The concept of 'context' is not used by critical geopolitics as "a pure original point, an objective space/time coordinate, or a final resting place". It is rather "an open structure, the limits of which are never absolutely determinable or saturated" (Ó Tuathail, 1996: 56). The context for one, thus, is the perception of events that has been formed at a particular time and under certain circumstances, which are not only dynamic, but also relative to one's own understanding and interests. Hence, this might essentially differ from the perspective of another.

This ontological difference between classical geopolitics and critical geopolitics creates further differences between them regarding what they seek to explain and their epistemological approaches. On the one hand, classical geopolitics is concerned with the formulation of foreign policies through "objective" realities concluded by help of geographical factors. Critical geopolitics, on the other hand, focuses mainly on discourses that take part in the formulation of those policies. It further concerns itself with how discourses and contexts within which discourses are

made reflect reality; whose reality it becomes eventually; and on whom this reality is imposed.

Epistemologically, the toolbox utilized also differs from each other. Critical geopolitics, unlike problem-solving theories of classical geopolitics, does not depart from fixed spatial and temporal assumptions. In the short-run, there might exist fixed social and politics order, yet in the long-run, proponents of critical approach argues that it "leads toward the construction of a larger picture of the whole of which the initially contemplated part is just one component, and seeks to understand the processes of change in which both parts and whole are involved" (Cox, 1986: 209).

Due to perpetual change, an interpretative methodological approach becomes a necessity. In addition to these, for critical geopolitics, 'what' cannot be understood without 'how', which takes the inquiry into answering 'why'. Only when we come to comprehend 'why' through 'how', then 'what' becomes meaningful. 'Why' becomes the interpretation of the subject that is studied interpretatively. Since this is what critical geopolitics tries to do, classical geopolitics omits the 'how', thus reducing the 'why' to what power/knowledge duo dictates 'what' to achieve certain political goals. For critical geopolitics, reasoning then becomes nothing but a convenient bias for the advancement of political agendas, while causing marginalization of other cultures and societies.

Kuus notes that (2010: 692) "the key trait of critical geopolitics is that it is not a theory-based approach –there is no "critical geopolitical" theory. The concerns of critical geopolitics are problem-based and present-oriented; they have to do not so much with sources and structures of power as with the everyday technologies of power relations." This is one of the main criticisms that critical geopolitics receives in academic scholarship. In this vein, it is criticized for being mainly an

epistemology-centered approach (Moisio, 2015: 224). Furthermore, critical geopolitics is also criticized as being only critical. In other words, it does not offer any alternative geopolitics approach to what it criticizes (Haverluk, Beauchemin, and Mueller, 2014: 22). Therefore, by remaining mere critique, it is argued by Haverluk, Beauchemin, and Mueller (2014) that critical geopolitics remains restricted within a circle of academics, and thus, it cannot be influential in any political decision-making processes in the West.

Scholars of critical geopolitics have immersed themselves mainly in the themes of immigration, borders, war, environment, and security, as well as the nexus between them (Moisio, 2015: 227). Nevertheless, the field of study receives such reviews as conceptual inconsistencies (Albert, Reuber, and Wolkersdorfer, 2014). Still, however, it is hard to deny contributions of this mode of differential thinking into the study of world politics at large as critical geopolitics poses questions that turn the common visions and views offered by geopolitics upside down. In other words, critical geopolitics is an apt field of study as it concerns itself with not geopolitics that causes certain political problems, but political problems that cause geopolitical unrest.

CHAPTER III

A GENEALOGICAL INQUIRY INTO "CRESCENT" AND "SHIA" CONCEPTS

This chapter is an attempt to understand the concepts of "crescent" and "Shia" and what they mean geopolitically. By studying the two terms in retrospect, the chapter aims to understand how affiliations and connotations of both terms evolved in time in the academic literature. To study "crescent", the chapter conducts a review of the academic literature that dates back to first half of the 19th century, and offers a genealogy of the term. In studying Shiism, the chapter first attempts to understand what sectarianism is, and the birth of Shiism. Only following the analysis of sectarianism and Shiism's emergence does this chapter continue to study in specific the Shia in Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran. The aim of conducting a country-based study in this chapter is to better understand how Shiism differs transnationally and therefore, how the analysis needs to be made when it comes to commenting on the Shia Crescent discourse of King Abdullah II.

3.1. Emergence and Uses of the Concept of Crescent

The use of the concept of 'crescent' can be found in the literature that dates back to the nineteenth century. A genealogical search of the concept reveals the use of the term in two different meanings. One use of 'crescent' is made with reference

to Islam and/or national ensign of Turks, and another one is to a geographical area that is located approximately where today is called the Middle East. Some of the 19th century books that use the term 'crescent' as an equivalent to Islam as a religion are *The life of Mahomet* (Green, 1840), *Letters from the old world* (Haight, 1840), *The Life of Mohammed: Founder of the Religion of Islam, and of the Empire of the Saracens* (Bush, 1830), *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Blyden, 1888), *The Religion of the Crescent: Or, Islam: Its Strength, Its Weakness, Its Origin, Its Influence* (Tisdall, 1895), and *The Setting of the Crescent and the Rising of the Cross* (Jessup, 1898). The usage of the concept in a religious sense was formed in opposition to the Christian 'cross', and this binary opposition attaches a negative connotation to the crescent concept in the term of Shia Crescent. This sense of the concept as attributed to Islam owes to Mohammed's flight from Mecca to Medina in 622 (Green, 1840: xi). Hence, in this first type of usage, the concept does have a religious reference whereas in its second form, 'crescent' comes along with another key word, 'fertile', being popularly used as the 'Fertile Crescent'.

In the literature, the Fertile Crescent is commonly used especially for a particular territorial area. The 19th century books such as *A Concise Dictionary of the Bible: Antiquity, Biography, Geography, and Natural History* (Smith, 1863), *The Bible Atlas of Maps and Plans to Illustrate the Geography and Topography of the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha* (Clark, 1868), *A Comprehensive Dictionary of the Bible* (Smith and Barnum, 1868) explain the region Gennesaret mentioned in the Bible noting that "…this term [Gennesaret] was applied to the fertile crescent-shaped plain on the western shore of the lake [Galilee]… " (Smith and Barnum, 1868: 287).

Other than these, there are also works that use 'Fertile Crescent' to underline a more specific area. James H. Breasted, an American archeologist who had excelled on Egypt, offers one such use of the concept of crescent in this second form. In his book titled *Ancient Times: A History of the Early World*, Breasted makes use of the term "Fertile Crescent" quite a few times, and notes that his Fertile Crescent refers to the lands of Palestine, Phoenicia, Syria, Assyria and Babylonia (Breasted, 1916: 239).

Apart from Breasted who mentioned the term 'crescent' in 1916, several other historians later also used it not specifically referring to an area of Islamic nature, but rather one that offers agricultural productivity and trade activity of the area that is referred. However, this area referred to by various scholars at different times does not reflect a uniform usage of the term. In this regard, another scholar to contribute to the popularization of the term fertile crescent is Albert Clay. In his study published in 1924, Clay criticizes his predecessor Breasted, and argues that Breasted's use of the term is misleading given, for instance, that Babylonia in the ancient times was an area without irrigation; hence it cannot be counted within the Fertile Crescent (Clay, 1924: 200-201). Clay's critical approach makes the right point in that such misleading terms emanate from certain lack of knowledge of the area, and without having sufficient knowledge of geographical entities, history writing is likely to produce the kind of knowledge that will cause bias in grasping the reality of our times.

The term "crescent" began to take up a political connotation with the turn of the century. In his theory of geopolitics, Sir Halford Mackinder also uses the term 'crescent'. In Mackinder's theory, there are heartland (where he previously called 'the pivot area' in 1904), the inner or marginal crescent, and outer or insular

crescents. Mackinder claims that heartland is the most important piece of land control of which would give a state the control over the world-island, and hence, control over the land (Mackinder, 1919: 106). The heartland is located at the center of the world-island, and it includes most of Eurasia continent from Volga River to the Yangtze and from the Arctic to the Himalayas. The heartland is where majority of geopolitical transformations take place and is the most important part that should be controlled, as this part of the world owns necessary resources and geographical advantage to rule the rest of the world. The inner crescent that surrounds the heartland is made up of coastal areas of the Eurasian continent and includes the rest of Europe, South-East Asia, India, as well as much of China. The outer crescent is where Great Britain, the Americas, south of Africa, Japan and Australasia are located. For Mackinder, control of the inner crescent would serve as a means to ensuring security for the heartland.

Similar to Mackinder's divisions, Spykman also divides the world into the Heartland, the Rimland, and the Offshore Islands and Continents. While for Mackinder the Heartland composes the most important piece of territory geopolitically, Spykman notes that it is the Rimland (which refers to Mackinder's 'Inner or Marginal Crescent') whose defense and control matters the most because the Rimland serves as a buffer zone between the Heartland and strong states with maritime and land-power capabilities. Thus, control over the Rimland would enable a power to control any emerging power in the Heartland. To follow the chronological order, one could come across the study of Donald W. Meinig titled *Heartland and Rimland in Eurasian History* (1956). Meinig's main purpose in his study is to critically view of the "handy" terms employed by geopoliticians at the turn of the century. To reflect his concern, Meinig argues "[w]e may smile at the medieval

mapmaker who "logically" centers his world upon Jerusalem, but every age, and most certainly our own, is the victim of rigidly conventional ways of looking at the patterns of the world about them" (1956: 553). Meinig argues that Mackinder's "heartland" was complemented with Spykman's "rimland" noting that the ""Inner or Marginal Crescent," the continental periphery of Eurasia, rather than the heartland was the critical zone" (Meinig, 1956: 554). This conclusion was made by Spykman upon examining the situation of the post-war world, and cited by Meinig to simply reiterate that "such casual and simple assumptions as to the "natural" orientations of peoples and nations be rooted out of our thinking. Interpretations must be grounded upon the functional conditions of past and present" (1956: 568). However, Meinig does not rule out the necessity of creating such shortcuts for understanding world affairs, and hence proposes a fivefold categorization of Eurasian positions. The fivefold division includes "(1) Heartland; (2) Continental Rimland; (3) Maritime Rimland; (4) Extrainsular; and (5) Intrainsular" (Meinig, 1956: 556). Continental and maritime rimland concepts apply to those states that act according to their north-south differences, and extrainsular and intrainsular states are defined as those with "inward or outward orientations of an island state (Meinig, 1956: 562).[3] Hence, these constitute Meinig's shortcuts for geopolitical concepts, which should not depend on simple categorizations, but on contextual differences that emerge in history.

Albert Hourani is yet another historian who came to use the term the Fertile Crescent. Hourani's essay is a general inquiry into the 18th century Ottoman Empire (1957). In this study, Hourani briefly mentions "the "Fertile Crescent" which includes Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine (1957: 91). Hourani's purpose for using

[3] Meinig provides instances for continental and maritime rimland states, as well as extrainsular and intrainsular states. For details, see Meinig (1956).

the term is based solely on his intention to make geographical distinction, not a political one.

The literature review further reveals that starting from the end of the Cold War, the usage of the concept of crescent has undergone significant change. The meanings that are attributed to it no longer reflect pure geographical concerns with which the concept was once utilized. Robert Barylski's study *The Russian Federation and Eurasia's Islamic Crescent* is one such instance (1994). In this study, Barylski argues that the Islamic crescents of both ideological camps provided with stability in the Eurasian region during the Cold War. Barylski notes that the Islamic crescent was formed by the Tsarist Russia and Great Britain to include southern and northern bands (1994: 389-390). The smaller regions within the Islamic crescent included the Caucasus, the Middle East, Central Asia and Southwest Asia.

While the northern band of the crescent was under the Soviet influence, the southern crescent was used by the Anglo-American alliance during the Cold War. However, a number of events such as the Sawr revolution, which installed a communist regime in Afghanistan in 1978; the Soviet invasion of the country in 1979; the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran; and 1980 Iran-Iraq War all triggered instability in the region given that the fragile balance was disturbed increasing the potential for international as well as civil war –not necessarily, though- along sectarian lines (Barylski, 1994: 390).

Pointing out the emergence and characteristics of the "new world order", Kanwal (1999: 361) mentions an "Islamic crescent" which is "running through South-West Asia and North Africa, "with its powerful combination of oil, Islam and a long history of anti-Western resentment."" Demonstrating a typical geopolitical

understanding of people and places, Kanwal's point in his above-cited lines is to point out certain regions in the world that are in urgent need of democratization and thus, Western interference. In his very broad definition of the Islamic crescent, Kanwal does nothing but make one wonder whether the area that stretches from South-West Asia to North Africa excludes any state, and direct the reader to thinking about entirety of Muslim people.

Perhaps what is more interesting is to note how more politicized and victimized the Muslim states begin to appear with the arrival of the new millennium. The literature review on the concept of crescent has revealed Zbigniew Brzezinski's study that underlines the possibility of existing cultural differences across different states and societies that are located within the general "Islamic crescent". This distinction is offered in Brzezinski's article *The Primacy of History and Culture* published in 2001 in which he discusses the post-Soviet cultural and political experiences en route to democratization. Brzezinski notes "[b]oth the Orthodox world and the vast "Islamic crescent"—which extends from Nigeria in the west right through to Indonesia in the east—contain more internal variety and cultural diversity than most casual observers recognize" (2001: 23). There is no further explanation on this point by Brzezinski except that this statement in the article is offered for comparison purposes (with the post-Soviet republics).

Boroumand and Boroumand (2002: 6), two Iranian human rights activists, speak of an "Islamic crescent" while mentioning where Islamism (and Islamist terrorism) spread following the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979. For Boroumand and Boroumand, the Islamic crescent "extends from Morocco and Nigeria in the west to Malaysia and Mindanao in the east" (2002: 6).

A similar point is provided by Krauthammer (2004: 17) who discusses (mainly terrorism) threats that exist in the new world order following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and how foreign policy of the US should be formulated. In so doing, the author draws a picture of the world showing where the source of the threat lies, and noting "[t]he existential enemy then was Soviet communism. Today, it is Arab/Islamic radicalism. Therefore "where it really counts today is in that Islamic crescent stretching from North Africa to Afghanistan"" (2004: 17). Here, too, the reader encounters a negation of the entire Muslim-populated states and causes thinking that it is necessary to deal with such "problems".

To sum up, theoretically, the term "crescent" has been a neutral concept, which was used for the purpose of making understanding easier while talking about certain areas, and places, which shared common (geographical) characteristics to be grouped together. Perhaps it is possible to arrive at such conclusions when talking about the use of the concept by historians as cited in previous pages. However, practical implications of citing the very same term especially in geopolitical studies to evaluate certain political contexts may not always prove innocuous, even when people who are originally from the region under scope here make such attempts. Other uses of the term "crescent" came to narrow down those links by weaving them to Islam and later to sectarian differences within Islam, thus popularizing the term "Shia crescent". Hence, the next section discusses the dichotomous Middle East perspectives of seeing and being a Shia in the region, while the emergence and uses of the term "Shia Crescent" is going to be studied in detail in the next chapter.

3.2. Sectarianism, Shiism, and Seeing and Being a Shia in the Middle East

This section aims to understand what sectarianism is and how the Shia and Sunni form the two mainstream sects of Islam. Following these, a more specific account of what Shiism means for the Shia and the Sunni Arabs throughout the Middle East, as well as in specific states that this study focuses on, will be studied. One of the aspects of the debate on Shiism in the Middle East can be discussed through examining being a Shia in the region as well as how their social lives were especially after the politicization of Islam in the 1960s, a date well before the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979. In addition to this, the other aspect of Shiism, that is how it is seen by Arab states of the Middle East; and those states' varying degrees and types of treatment of their respective Arab Shia citizens will also be discussed in this section. Given that a discussion on Shiism and its perception in the region is a complicated matter, this section will attempt to offer a succinct evaluation.

3.2.a. Sectarianism and Emergence of the Shia-Sunni Divide in Islam

The words 'sect', 'sectarian', and 'sectarianism', and their linguistic affiliations to mind do differ from each other. Thereby, there is a need to distinguish and absorb the meanings of these terms. To begin with, a 'sect' can be called a faction in a society belonging to a certain religion. 'Sectarian' could be called the existence of multiple sects within a given state. Finally, 'sectarianism' may be described as an '-ism', a deliberately produced doctrine, which underlines sectarian differences and is thus inclined to cause segregation, hatred, and cause resentment and discontent between different sects in a state (Phillips, 2015: 359). This is not to claim that the existence of sectarian groups inevitably or automatically causes

problems in a state. Rather, reminding and reiterating such loose religious differentiations might serve as causes of breakup of amicable relations in a society. In states where a sectarian discourse is pursued –either by the state, the sect, or both of them – those differences between sects manifest themselves in the sphere of religion. In addition to these, sectarianism fails to specify social, cultural, and political differences within that specific sect (Haddad, 2011: 8), and acts as a self-nominated just categorizer of groups in a society while pointing to their certain characteristics and ignoring other features that might perhaps bring those groups closer to each other.

Before starting to scrutinize Shiism in today's Middle East, it is perhaps a better idea to recall the emergence of this sect within Islam. *Shia'tu Ali* in Islam literally means "followers of Ali", and Shiism is one of the many sects in Islam. Shias believe that Ali, who was the cousin of Prophet Mohammad and the husband of Mohammad's daughter, Fatima, should have become the caliph after the death of Prophet Mohammad in 632. However, the events occurred in a different course, and following the death of Mohammad, Omar, one of his notable friends and followers, declared in a public gathering at Saqifa that Abu Bakr be the new caliph (Aghaie, 2005: 43). This happened despite the claim that Prophet Mohammad alluded to Ali as his successor in Ghadir Khum by saying:

> "Do you not acknowledge that I have a greater claim on each of the believers than they have on themselves?" and they replied: "Yes!" And he took Ali's hand and said: "Of whomsoever I am Lord [Mawla], then Ali is also his Lord. O God! Be thou the supporter of whoever supports Ali and the enemy of whoever opposes him." (Aghaie, 2005: 43)

On the one hand, Aghaei (2005: 43) notes that this decision of appointment was acknowledged by those who were present there. On the other hand, Jafri (1978) finds out in his inquiry into the authenticity of the reports of what happened in Saqifa that there certainly occurred opposition against the caliphate of Abu Bakr, yet the author completes his inquiry underlining that "[t]he seriousness of their opposition to or resentment of Abu Bakr before they become reconciled to him is almost impossible to ascertain, since the Shi'a sources exaggerate this to the extreme whereas the Sunni sources try to ignore or minimize it as much as possible." This conclusion reached by Jafri (1978) is made following an analysis of the records written by various 9th and 10th century historians, and these are Ibn Sa'd, Ibn Ishaq, Tabari, Ya'qubi, and Baladhuri to name but a few. For Jafri (1978), the Saqifa manifestations constitute the origins of the Shia feelings in Islam.

Hence, Abu Bakr became the first of the Rashidun Caliphs, and his rule lasted two years until 634. Before his death, he appointed Omar to be his successor, and he was followed by Uthman as the third caliph between 644 and 656. Ali's caliphate followed the death of Uthman, and lasted until 661. If the Saqifa manifestations can be seen as the starting point for the Shia resentment in Islam, Battle of Siffin (May-July 657) in the First Muslim Civil War (*fitna*), which was fought between Ali and Muawiyah, can be seen as the peak point of Shiism. Dabashi (2011: 61) notes that

> [w]hen Ali agreed to arbitration right at the moment when his army was about to crush Mu'awiyah's resistance, a group of his supporters violently disagreed with his decision on both political and theological grounds and splintered (…*Khawarij/Kharijites*, "those who revolted against Ali").

In addition to this, further defections among Shias also occurred. In fact, following the death of Ali, and every Shia imam, their followers were divided into two or more groups, and eventually divided into twelve imami Shia sects (Dabashi, 2011: 61). Of these twelve sects, only the Five-Imami (*Zaydi* Shias), the Seven-Imami (*Ismaili* Shias), and the Twelve-Imami (*Jafari* Shias) had been prominent in the history of Islam. Furthermore, it was the *Jafari* Shia sect upon which today's Islamic Iranian Republic is based. This sect accepts that the occultation (*ghaybah*) of the Twelfth Imam (*Mahdi*), who disappeared in 874, will continue until he returns to the earth and brings everlasting peace and justice (Dabashi, 2011: 63)

This brief history of the emergence of Shiism demonstrates that Shiism is not only a religious, but also a political sect within Islam. Therefore, confining interpretation of sectarianism in Islam to simply a religious difference does not reveal the truth that would help interpreting events either back in the 7th century or today.

Making any analysis in light of sectarianism debate necessitates underlining such variation in the type of sectarian differences in a given society. This is because "[t]he issue of sectarianism is intertwined with that of ethnicity, minorities, identity, religion, and nationalism, which complicates any analysis" (Potter, 2014: 3). Thus, whether one takes the issue at hand as purely based on only one matter of division would make any analysis difficult in case where there exists more than a single salient topic to be studied within the light of sectarianism. As far as Arabs of the Middle East are concerned, such sectarian divisions exist along various levels. In other words, there does not exist only one variety of identity among Arabs. Potter's brief look (2014: 7) into the history of the Persian Gulf reveals this case:

> Before the modern era, people along the Gulf littoral shared a common maritime culture, and religious and linguistic groups were intermingled, with many Arabic speakers and Sunni Arabs located on the Persian side of the Gulf, and a Shi'i, Persian-speaking community on the Arab side. This causes difficulty when speaking of identity, for in this region people have multiple, overlapping identities that may be activated at different times.

Another means to study sectarian issues is through approaching sectarianism as it is used to define a sort of minorities among population by a given state. The result of this, then, will become one of a conflict at a level particular to that society. As discussed by Haddad (2014: 81) aptly, "[w]hile members of a dominant group will seldom understand or even be aware of any imbalance… the dominated, or the outgroup, will not only have a higher awareness of the issue but will be more likely to develop the identity that they feel is the source of their plight." However, the dominant group's identity will be, to a certain extent, defined vis-à-vis the dominated group. Plus, in the specific example of Sunni-Shia divide, we come to see Arab Shia, being "[e]xcluded from identities crafted in the image of ruling families", to have constructed "their own national folklore on shared notions of political injustice and betrayal rooted in the very foundations of Islam" (Gengler, 2014: 52).

Furthermore, Haddad observes (2014: 75) that:

> sectarian myths and symbols, and by extension sectarian nationalism, like the identities they embody, are not fixed. Symbols are constantly being invented and reformulated; they may lie dormant, all but

forgotten, for years on end, yet they are ever-ready to be reawakened and revisited to suit the needs of a future crisis.

This is especially the case in the Middle East where nation building (or re-building in some cases) has been far from creating –even until today- civil society groups and free political parties. For the ruling elite of the region, such institutional polities equipped with freedom "could threaten the government on ideological grounds", and thus, "people are driven [by the state] into primordial identities such as tribe and religion" (Potter, 2014: 23) so that their governance and legitimization of interests of ruling elites could become easier.

Sectarianism is a complicated topic if sectarian issues are studied as fixed. Rather, sectarianism in any given society-state relationship needs to be taken as a changing phenomenon. "While no national mythology [made up with an attempt at nation building] can hope to resemble perfectly the diversity of people it is meant to encompass, one community consistently and conspicuously absent from the majority of Gulf narratives emphasizing Sunni tribal identity is the Arab Shi'i" (Gengler, 2014: 52). This is a clear account of how such national narratives change over time, and that contentious issues become redefined according to necessities of time and experiences that vary across different states. While histories of the Middle Eastern societies are interconnected to a certain extent, they nevertheless have developed their own courses especially since the 20th century.

Eventually, given that sectarian identities are well constructed primarily as a result of attempts by a state to create its own historical and national narrative, evaluations need to be made as such attempts that cause politicization of the group defined as "the other". In other words, when sectarianism is viewed "as the

politicization of ethnic or religious identity, then this politicization is best understood not as a cause of this or that political malady afflicting Persian Gulf states, but rather as an effect of their particular institutional characteristics" (Gengler, 2014: 42). Thus, it is not that what can be called as the "dominated" group, politicizes on its own with an attempt to alter any political or social situation in a country, but rather policies directed against them and measures taken to preempt any possible future attempt by them makes the dominated groups politicize.

To sum up, sectarianism has a number of characteristics, which needs to be kept in mind in any analysis dealing with sectarian issues. The same is also applicable to Shiism in the Middle East. First of all, sectarian identities and narratives change over time, they are not static identifications. Second, usually there are different identities that are concealed within a society and they are usually intertwined; thus, speaking of one feature of a specific group of people may not always hold true. Third, such different identities that might be incorporated into sectarian discourses of ruling elite can be reactivated at different times. Finally, it is possible to say that sectarianism can be seen as the source of politicization of a group, and not vice versa. Conflict and counter-identity creation, thus, is likely to follow sectarian discourses that are constructed with the aim of creating national narratives for state formation.

All these aforementioned characteristics of sectarianism can be found within the Middle East. To begin with, the Shia-Sunni division in the Middle East is not only based on heterogeneous interpretations of Islam. Social, political, as well as economic reasons certainly play a role in sectarian differences in the countries, which will be discussed below. Because the extent of such differences will be at non-negligible levels in the cases that this study focuses on, sectarianism needs to be

understood as a construction whose practice differs across place and time. For instance, the cases below will reveal identity building following different experiences in history such as war, revolution, or demarcation of borders by external powers. Although not the most important ones, these events are still important factors that are influential in determining how sectarian lines are constituted among the Middle Eastern Arabs.

In addition, the political salience of Shias differs from one state to another, as each of these actors regard Shiism as a problematic issue or lead their political goals with it. As Brunner argues Shiism in its modern context (2009: 140):

> …it was external, that is, Sunnite, pressure that ensured Shiite mobilisation everywhere, either in the form of the latter's economical and/or political disadvantage (Lebanon), religiously motivated discrimination (Saudi Arabia, Bahrayn), fundamentalist exclusion (Pakistan) or plain oppression (Iraq before 2003).

Relevant to the scope of this section are the cases of Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran.

3.2.b. Seeing and Being a Shia in the Middle East

This section studies the cases of Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran. It seeks to understand how Shiism is experienced and seen in these countries. More specifically, while in Sunni-dominated and/or Sunni-ruled Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, the Shia are politically suppressed despite being numerically dominant, or numerically minority

and politically suppressed. Furthermore, the section also focuses on the Shia-dominated and/or -ruled regimes as well as regimes where the Shia have certain political power; and these states are Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran.

3.2.b.i. Bahrain

Shias in Bahrain compose approximately 75 percent of the total estimated population of 1.3 million (Brunner, 2009: 146). Bahraini Shias belong to the Twelver sect of Shiism, and this makes it a susceptive issue for the Bahraini government vis-à-vis the Shia closeness to Iran. Indeed, majority of the Shia clergymen received training in the Iranian city of Qom (Alfoneh, 2012: 5-6). Almost two-thirds of Bahraini Shias are originally from the island, whereas the rest is of Iranian origin (also called the *Ajam*). There is also a claim that Bahraini Shias are actually of Iranian and South Iraqi origins, and have historical ties to the Shia in these places (Rathmell, 1995: 309). In addition to this, another view suggests that Arab Shia in the country moved from Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province (El Marashi, 2007: 11). Furthermore, the two groups also differ from each other socio-economically. According to El Marashi (2007: 11), the natives of Bahrain are seafaring people who are also called as *baharna*, and converted to Twelver Shiism in the 8th century. In addition to this group, some Persians had also moved to Bahrain around three centuries ago, and others moved in the 1920s. Between these two groups, Persians have traditionally been in trading activities, whereas Arab Shias and others have been residing in fishing villages of al-Awal and Muharraq, and working either as

fishermen or agriculture workers; hence, there have been differences between Persians and *baharnas*.

While *Ajams* are politically active and have amicable ties with the al-Khalifa family, *Baharnas* form the lowest layer of the population. These two groups live in different places, and inter-marriage levels are very low. *Baharnas* define themselves not only vis-à-vis Sunnis, but also *Ajams*. To sum up, majority of the Shia in Bahrain constitute middle and lower layers of the society, and live in the rural areas. It should also be noted that the Shia of Bahrain does not have the right to own property in the country.

Moreover, according to Louër, there is a third immigrant group called the *Huwala,* "a group of Sunnis who came from the Iranian Gulf coast in the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth centuries" (2008: 39). The *Baharna,* "often complain that dominant positions in BAPCO [the Bahrain Petroleum Company] and ALBA [Aluminium Bahrain] are controlled by the *Huwala* ... They claim ancient Arab tribal origin, which the *Baharna* usually deny by saying they are Iranians who try to pass as Arabs to gain the favor of the Al-Khalifa" (Louër, 2008: 39).

The political imbalance between the Shia and the Bahraini government reveals itself in the form of governance. The Al-Khalifa family that belongs to the Sunni minority rules the 75 percent Shia majority. The Al-Khalifa family conquered Bahrain in 1783, moving from Najd in central Arabia (Nakash, 2011: 17). Nakash notes that Bahrain was under the possession of Iran for most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but "[a]ctual rule was in the hands of Arab tribes who submitted to provincial governors in southern Iran" (2011: 17). It was a few years after the

conquest of Bahrain that the Al-Khalifa family moved to the island. Until then, they ruled the island from Zubara in northwestern Qatar, paying a small amount of tribute to the governor of Shiraz. Also, according to Nakash (2011: 18), "[t]he Al Khalifa managed to consolidate their rule only after the British government guaranteed the security of their territories in treaties signed in 1861, 1880, and 1892, amounting to a British protectorate that lasted until 1971, when Bahrain gained independence."

Bahrain's concerns about its Shia population began in the 1960s when a number of Islamic movements such as *al-Dawa al-Islamiyya* of Iraq started to spread among Bahrain's Shias (Louër, 2008: 104). This was followed with the formation of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB)[4] in 1976, which at first conducted its activities as a charity organization.

Looking into the Bahraini political life, it can be inferred that Bahrain did not regard the IFLB as a threat against the Sunni regime as Hadi al-Mudarrisi, the leader of the IFLB and an Iraqi ayatollah who opposed the regime of Saddam Hussein, was allowed to remain in Bahrain as a Bahraini citizen until 1979 (Louër: 2013a: 123-124). The *Shiraziyyin* –which preceded the IFLB, and the *al-Dawa* in Bahrain were regarded as shields against the Arab nationalist and Marxist forces that opposed the Bahraini Amir's rule in the country. Both Islamic groups' primary concern was to reduce the influence of the secular movements in the country, and "[t]his was especially true of *al-Da'wa*, which acted mainly as a re-Islamization agent in the Shi'i communities and, contrary to its Iraqi mother organization, never seriously envisaged armed confrontation with the Bahraini regime" (Louër: 2013a: 123). Both the *Shiraziyyin* and *al-Dawa* in Bahrain stood against the penetration of the Iraqi

[4] Whose members were previously known as the *Shiraziyyin*.

religious establishments, and challenged the secularist Marxist and Arab nationalist movements at home.

However, the Bahraini Amir perceived threat from the Marxist and Arab nationalist opposition groups –who, contrary to the expectations joined forces in the parliament- because of their opposition to government's attempt to restrict civil liberties, the first constitutional monarchy experience of Bahrain ended in 1975 with the dissolution of the parliament. In an attempt to topple the Bahraini regime in 1981, the IFLB started pursuing a radical agenda. The actions of the IFLB resulted in Bahraini regime to target not only the members of the IFLB, but also the *al-Dawa*. In the event of the 1981 *coup* attempt in Bahrain, it is significant to keep in mind that it was the IFLB, which took Iranian regime as a model and shared its views whereas *al-Dawa* was certainly far from sharing the same position. The background of the 1981 *coup* attempt included the irredentist claims of the Iranian Shah who espoused to the idea since 1970, and later the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979, which had in its agenda the export of the revolution. All these events strained relations between the Bahraini regime and the Shia Islamic movements within the country (Louër, 2013a: 124).

From the 1980s on, the sectarian issues have risen even more with the Shia becoming located at the center of threat perceptions by the Bahraini ruling elite. Both secular and religious groups in the country demanded the return to representative institutions with petitions presented in 1992 and 1994, and as a response to the former-dated petition, Bahraini Amir Sheikh Isa allowed the establishment of a council in which both the Shia and the Sunni were represented in equal numbers. However, especially economic, political as well as sectarian grievances caused the situation in Bahrain to deteriorate resulting in demonstrations that began in

December 1994, lasting until 1999. As Gause III (1997: 151-152) underlines, "…unemployment as high as 15 percent, …. [t]he Shi'i majority on the island [having been] historically chafed under the rule of the Sunni Al Khalifas, who have been skillfully framing political dissent in sectarian terms to divide political opposition movements" have all contributed to the unrest in the country.

Eventually, despite the fact that such demands came from both Sunni and Shia Bahrainis, the regime viewed the uprisings as emanating from the Shia segments of the society, and even went as further to accusing the Bahraini Hezbollah, even whose existence is debated (Louër, 2013b: 247-248). Although the Bahraini regime has pointed to the sectarian cleavages in the country as the main source of unrest, the opposition movement groups stressed that they had no sectarian agendas, and in particular, no external involvement (i.e. from Iran) or support existed in their agendas. Rather, the opposition demanded a return to democratic practices, and accused the Bahraini ruling elite "of concocting the plot to divert attention from their legitimate grievances" (Gause III, 1997: 151).

Bengio and Ben-Dor (1999: 175) also underline these points as follows:

> First sparked by British initiatives and later by a relatively small, but significant, oil income, Bahrain went through successive stages of development. Shi'i groups were involved in all the accompanying processes: occasional labor unrest, the evolution of trade unionism, demands for increased pay, and greater political freedom, notably through the activity of the National Assembly. Adding to the effects of these developments were regional ideologies that either infiltrated Bahrain from the outside or were brought in by foreign (mainly

> Palestinian) workers. Shi'is who occasionally took opposition stands over the socioeconomic grievances of the middle and lower classes hardened their positions under the impact of a second factor –regional ideological and socialist-radical influences- and developed a strong class identity. Even if expressed in an antigovernment form, this class identity was not purely Shi'i separatist or sectarian, which many Shi'is would have opposed. Rather, it was more inclusive and nationalistic. Indeed, Shi'is of the middle and lower classes often cooperated with Sunnis on broad issues of reform. For middle and lower class Shi'is, who formed the majority of Bahrain's citizens, religious and class identities were interrelated; their struggle for an improved sociopolitical position was combined with preservation of their Shi'i identity.

The 'fear' of the Shia continued with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was followed by a Shia-led government. This was true not only of Bahrain, but served as a general trend in Sunni Arab monarchies of the region. Despite the fact that major uprisings in Bahrain once again erupted during the 2011 Arab Spring movements, state-sponsored sectarian divisions have been revealed due to continuous state repression of the Shia since the country carried on with parliamentary experience in 2002. One example to this can be how Bahraini security forces (police and army) have been composed from among naturalized Sunni foreign mercenaries (in particular from among Syrian and Pakistani nationals) (Louër, 2013b: 248).

As far as sectarian politics and in particular Shiism are concerned, the picture looking back from 2016 elicits extensive dissatisfaction in Bahrain most particularly due to economic ills that have not been remedied. Rather than any sort of external

intervention, especially from the part of Iran, domestic dynamics play an important role in the problems that exist in the country. However, the regime's decades-long anti-Shia policies and the Shia discontent about the very fact that they are under-represented in parliaments in return add a sectarian feature into the unrest. While the Shias are seen by the Bahraini ruling elite as source of the problems, the Shia feel largely discriminated purposively, and being politicized intentionally by the government.

3.2.b.ii. Kuwait

The Shia of Kuwait are dispersed in different locations in the country. This is in contrast to many other Middle Eastern countries where the Shia populations compose the majority of their residence areas. The Kuwaiti Shias do not compose more than 40 percent of any region (El Marashi, 2007: 15). When evaluated within the general population, official numbers of Shia population in Kuwait are never released. However, it is estimated that around 35 percent of the total Muslim population (which is of 85 percent of the entire population) follows the Shia sect (Walker, 2006: 16).

Kuwaiti Shias are not only geographically far from the reach of the influence of Iran, but also they are mainly of Bahraini descent. Hence, it can be argued whether Kuwaiti Shias are Arab or Iranian in origin. Furthermore, apart from the Shia who arrived from Iran, there are also Iraqi and *Hasawiyyin* Shias who regard the Al Sabah family as their guardian (El Marashi, 2007: 11).

Kuwait's experience with Shiism as a problem is also similar to that of Bahrain. Around the same years, Kuwait experienced parliamentary rule where *al-Dawa* members fought for equal representation of the Shia in the parliament.

However, as the government disbanded the parliament in 1976, the demonstrations began to take form. The Shia in Kuwait eventually emphasized a rather general Islamic identity in the country. The Shia of the country does not claim that they had contributed directly to the founding of Kuwait. The Shia "are organized into three major diasporic communities who maintain extensive cross-border family ties with their former place of origin: the *Ajam* from Iran, the *Hasawiyyin* from Hasa in today's Saudi Arabia, and the *Baharna* from today's Bahrain" (Louër, 2013a: 135). All in all, Kuwaiti Shias do not retain either a separatist or anti-regime agenda that would push Kuwaiti Shias towards collaborating with Iran.

3.2.b.iii. Jordan

Jordan has never been afflicted with sectarianism until recently, and this is perhaps the reason why the Hashemite kingdom reacted fearfully against conversions to Shiism in the country (Sindawi, 2010). These conversions have largely happened due to admiration towards Hezbollah following the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict in 2006; and the ruling elite fears further conversions (Sindawi, 2010: 102). Possibly, there is also the influence of the Iraqi Shia who fled Iraq after 2003 on Jordanian Sunni Muslims to change their sects (Sindawi, 2010: 108). Although one cannot claim that there is a direct Iranian-link, the support of Iran toward Hezbollah is one factor that can be seen as an indirect reason to these conversions (Sindawi, 2010: 106).

3.2.b.iv.Saudi Arabia

Another instance where there has been state-sponsored anti-Shiism is Saudi Arabia. The proportion of Shias in Saudi Arabia corresponds to around 15 percent of the total population. Founded in 1932, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has ever been ruled by the absolutist monarchy of the Al Saud family. Similar to Bahraini Shias, majority of Shias of Saudi Arabia also belong to the *baharnah*, and not the Iranian origin. The Shia have resided in the Eastern provinces of the kingdom, where hydrocarbon resources were discovered in 1938. Shias have also been located along the country's borders to Kuwait and Qatar, as well as in Najran in the south. Al Hasa (Hadjar) has been another region where the Shia mainly populates it, and it engulfs the large oil field of Ghawar. Furthermore, the city of Qatif hosts the Shia who compose the 98 percent of its population.

The official ideology of the Saudi state has been Wahabism. Wahabism can be deemed as the toughest interpretation of Salafi teaching, and denies teachings other than its own even if they are recognized by the entire Islamic world. It is in this regard that Wahabism has considered Shiism aberrant, and the teaching has been used as a tool to discriminate against the Shia (al-Rasheed, 2007: 14).

Since 1913, the Al Saud family has made it forbidden for the Shia to mourn during the ashura (Al-Rasheed, 1998: 122). However, the Shia broke the ban in 1979, following the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Yet the Shias carried out a larger demonstration in 1980 and the Saudi state responded by force, causing in a number of deaths (Al-Rasheed, 1998: 122).

In Baranek's views, "[i]n the 1970s and 1980s the Shiites spoke a language of militancy and called for a revolution, but in the 1990s they began to demand

democracy, pluralism, and equal rights" (2009: 4). Thus, the Shia have gone transformation in their radical attitudes toward the state, and eventually came to desire a revival of their own identities within the boundaries of Saudi Arabia, rejecting any direct link to Iran and its ideology (Al-Rasheed, 1998:130). True that the Saudis marginalized the Shia through excluding them from the modernization process[5], as well as expelling them educational institutions, the army, ARAMCO, and appropriating their land (Al-Rasheed, 1998: 133; Jones, 2006: 230). Thus, according to Jones, all these led the Shia to focus on their own problems without seeking to overthrow the government or pursuing any radical agenda of a similar type (2006: 214-215).

Although the Shia in Saudi Arabia stopped their violent actions in particular following the election of Khatami in 1997, the 1980s were the years when conflicts erupted between the Shia and the Saudi regime[6]. According to Matthiesen (2010), there were two radical Shia organizations established in Saudi Arabia opposing the regime, and these were the Islamic Revolution Organization, and *Hezbollah al-Hijaz*.

Following the Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps established the Office of Liberation Movements in 1981, through which it supported Shia opposition groups in Iraq and the Gulf (Matthiesen, 2010: 182). *Al-Shirazi* network, which was a Shia opposition group in Saudi Arabia, gathered around Ayatollah Mohammed al-Shirazi. The network established the Movement for Vanguards Missionaries (MVM) in 1975, and received military training in Iran

[5] The Shia of Saudi Arabia had been continuously expelled from the possibility of benefiting from the modernization of the country, such as being employed in the oil industry. However, in the early 1980s, the Shia opposition groups in the country regarded modernization and becoming Western as the same, and point to the Islamic Revolution in Iran noting that the main drive behind the revolution was not poverty or any other economic problem (See Jones, 2006).

[6] See Matthiesen (2010) and Wehrey (2013) for a more detailed account of incidents.

(Wehrey, 2013: 26).[7] The MVM later adopted the name 'Islamic Revolution Organization' (aka OIRAP – Organization for the Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula). Despite the fact that the *Al-Shirazi* network being strong in Saudi Arabia, the conciliatory turn the Iranian foreign policy took throughout the 1990s had also its repercussions in the attitudes of OIRAP. Although al-Shirazi did not support the ideology of Khomeini and claimed that clerics should not rule on their own (Jones, 2006: 215), the organization was likely to have been influenced by the revolution in Iran, at least in part because Shiism was now seen as a political tool that could be utilized to remedy the problems the suppressed Shia faced (be them in Iran or elsewhere).

OIRAP rather sought to achieve national integration with the rest of the population. Hence the organization first changed its name to the Arabian Peninsula and instead of identifying itself vis-à-vis the Saudi regime, they chose to claim that they had settled in the land even before the Bedouins, thus underlining their rightful and peaceful existence along the Sunni Saudis (Louër, 2013a: 130-132).

The second radical Shia group established in Saudi Arabia was *Hezbollah al-Hijaz*. It was created in opposition to OIRAP, and the main division between the two groups emanated from their views of the Islamic regime in Iran. As mentioned above, the *Al-Shirazi* network's OIRAP favored the rule of a council of clerics instead of a single Ayatollah. Over the years, the Iranian regime withdrew its support from this organization, and in 1987, Iran's Office of Liberation Movements was closed down, and its head Mehdi Hashemi was executed (Matthiesen, 2010: 183-

[7] It should be noted that the Movement for Vanguards Missionaries was established four years before the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

184)[8]. Yet, *Hezbollah al-Hijaz* aligned its views with the ideology of the ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamanei (Matthiesen, 2010: 179). This was not the sole reason, however, for the creation of *Hezbollah al-Hijaz*. During the Hajj incident in Mecca in July 1987, many Iranians and Saudi policemen (over 400 people) were killed. Iran and Saudi Arabia blamed each other for the incident, and Iran's quest from the OIRAP to carry out military operations in the country was turned down by its members (Matthiesen, 2010: 184). Hence, *Hezbollah al-Hijaz* was created following these events, and its goal was to establish an Islamic Republic in the Arabian Peninsula akin to that of the Iranian model (Matthiesen, 2010: 184-185). For Matthiesen (2010: 184), "Iran wanted to have small, controllable organizations that could be used as pressure tools on the al-Sa'ud but would not endanger Iran's foreign policy objectives." *Hezbollah al-Hijaz*'s activities, too, were no longer violent as relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia improved in the 1990s, and the organization was eventually dissolved following the arrest of many of its members as they were accused by the Saudi regime for the Khobar Towers bombings in 1996 (Matthiesen, 2010: 191-194).

Overall, the Al Saud family has always regarded the Shia as the heterodox while recognizing Sunni version of Islam as the orthodox representation of the religion. Although OIRAP and Hezbollah al-Hijaz had radical agendas especially in the 1980 uprisings and most likely were influenced by the revolution in Iran, it cannot be ruled out that the Shia comply with rather than fight the Saudi regime given that they only constitute 15 percent of the population.

[8] Hashemi's execution was due to factional divisions in Iran.

3.2.b.v. Yemen

Since the occupation of Aden in 1839 by the British naval forces, and continuing with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, Yemeni Imamate had existed under several forms of British rule, and been forced to pay tributes (Farah, 2002: 120, 124). The Yemen Arab Republic was proclaimed in the north in 1962, following which violent civil war between the royalists and republicans erupted in the north (Etheredge, 2011: 125). However, the civil war witnessed the meddling of external players: while Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Iran came to support the imam's royalists, Egypt and the Soviets wished to see the republicans to win (Etheredge, 2011: 125).

The turning point came with three decisive events: the defeat of Egypt in the June 5, 1967 war by Israel (Halliday, 1990: 10); the ouster of the pro-Egyptian regime in 1968 in North Yemen (Etheredge, 2011: 126), and the Saudi withdrawal of support of the royalists in 1970 (Rugh, 2015: 141). Egypt began to remove its troops from North Yemen after the Six-Day War with Israel, and a 'Compromise' in 1970 had been reached with Saudi Arabia for the end of the civil war in North Yemen. In the meantime, the People's Republic of Yemen in 1967 was declared in the south (Burrowes, 1991: 489), but the republic was renamed in 1969 as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen as a result of the Marxist takeover of power, hence becoming the only socialist Arab state.

In spite of uneasy relations between the two Yemens, both South and North worked towards unification, which came to be achieved in 1990, with Ali Abdullah

Saleh[9] –who resigned in 2011 as a result of mass Arab Spring movement in Yemen- becoming the president of the Republic of Yemen. With the unification, Halliday notes (1995: 131) that:

> A common government was created, but posts in cabinet and ministries were allocated on a proportional basis between officials of the two regimes; the parties, the armed forces, and security forces of the two sides remained separate. In effect, two states continued to exist. As the economic situation deteriorated, to a considerable extent because of Yemeni support for Iraq in the Kuwait conflict and Saudi retaliation, the political situation also deteriorated.

Despite the unification, the South remained discontent primarily due to the North's domination of the new republic's political culture and institutions (Phillips, 2008: 47). In addition to this, the South's Yemen Socialist Party had been "prevented from winning significant electoral gains" despite its success in the north (Halliday, 1995: 132). Hence, the political problems in the Republic of Yemen culminated in the eruption of a brief civil war led by the South for secession in 1994, which President Saleh subdued.

Ever since the merger in 1990, Yemen has faced serious internal issues, which included but were not limited to, economic problems, corruption, food shortages, as well as the North's marginalization of the South. These issues, along with the involvement of foreign powers in the strategically significant Yemen, have kept the country in political turmoil. It was against such background that first in 2004 the Houthi rebellion broke out in the north (Phillips, 2008: 107), and in 2007, the

[9] For a detailed account of how President Saleh tried to manage different internal and external players in Yemen, please refer to Rugh (2015).

'Southern Movement' sought to gain independence through secession or a federation (Phillips, 2008: 121).

The Houthi rebellion that started in 2004 was led by and named after Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi[10][11]. For Salisbury (2015: 5), "[t]he Houthis, who prefer to be known as Ansar Allah [Followers of God]… began as a faction within the youth offshoot of Al-Haq, a Zaydi political party formed in 1990 to contest the united Yemen's first legislative elections, held in 1993." According to Terrill (2014: 432) the Houthis' agenda was to secure more autonomy and economic security for their home province of Saada, and counter "Yemeni government's tolerance of Saudi-inspired proselytizing by militant Salafi Sunnis in North Yemen", while reviving Zaydism in particular in the post-2011 period (Rugh, 2015: 143).

Houthis in Yemen are Zaydis, but it should also be noted that not all Zaydis are Houthis, nor do all Zaydis share the same common interests (i.e. Yemeni President Saleh, who is also a Zaydi, long fought against the Zaydi Houthis). Zaydism is a branch of Shiism, but it differs largely from the Twelver Shiism. Zaydis are also known as Fivers, that is the followers of the Fifth Imam. "Zaydism is, in many aspects of its doctrine and practice, closer to Sunni Islam than to other branches of Shi'i Islam" (Juneau, 2016: 651). Furthermore, Zaydi Shiism also differs from that of Iran's Twelver Shiism in that the former does not choose any ayatollahs, and their political alliances are formed along clan, tribe, and family lines rather than religious affinities (Rugh, 2015: 143). It is noted by Rugh (2015: 143) that "even

[10] The Houthi movement in fact first began in early 1990s due to the afore-mentioned Saudi's Wahabi activities in North Yemen. Hussein al-Houti was first noticed by then President Saleh at this time, and supported al-Houthi for his fight against the Hashid tribe, which was backed by the Saudis. President Saleh's support for al-Houthi lasted between 1993-1997 when the latter was also a parliamentarian (Rugh, 2015: 143-144).

[11] Hussein al-Houthi was killed by Yemeni military in 2004, but his family continued his fight, and between 2004 and 2010, the Houthi rebels carried out six insurgencies.

some Sunnis supported the Houthis", a claim that verifies political activities through inter-tribal connections.

In addition to these, "[l]ocated almost exclusively in north-west Yemen, Zaydis represent 30–35 per cent of the country's population" (Juneau, 2016: 651). The remaining of the population are Shafi Sunnis. Burrowes (1991: 484) underlines that

> The Zaydis, in the minority but often socially and politically dominant, have long occupied the highlands, whereas the more numerous Shafi'is have dwelled in the southern uplands and on the coastal lowlands. While the Zaydis tended culturally to turn inward and to isolate them- selves, the Shafi'is were more open to the changing outside world, to Aden and beyond.

The Arab Spring movement, which started in Tunis, was soon taken up in the other Middle Eastern and Gulf States. Yemen, therefore, has been another country whose leadership was influenced from these popular movements in January 2011. Following defections from his government and military (Rugh, 2015: 145), President Saleh announced that neither he nor his son would run for 2013 elections (Arab Spring Guide-Yemen), but also refused to resign. Clinging to power until November 2011, President Saleh eventually accepted to transfer power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi.

Since coming to power, President Hadi has been dealing with a number of issues in the country, most of which have already been there long before he assumed power. Country-wide poverty, food-shortages, deep economic problems, a secessionist south, and Houthi rebels in the north are the ones that have already

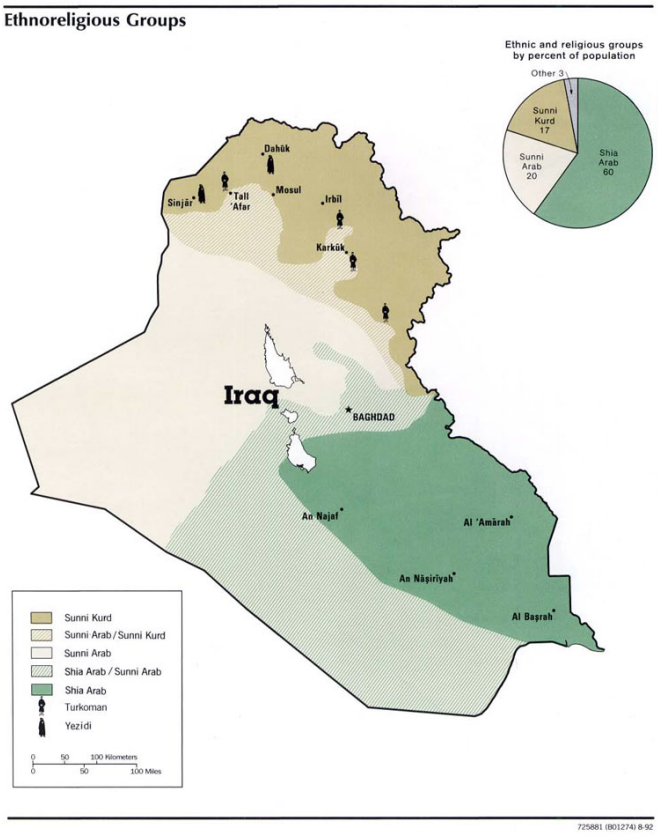
existed before. In addition to these, President Hadi has also been dealing with the Islamist insurgencies led by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and more recently, possibly ISIL (Rugh, 2015: 151).

To sum up, even though there are traces of sectarian cleavages and discontent among rival groups in Yemen, the very basic problems that the country faces does not primarily emanate from a Shia-Sunni rivalry, or to be more precise and correct, Zaydi-Shafi conflict. Furthermore, the form of Shiism in Yemen largely differs from that of Twelver Shiism of Iran. Saudi and Iranian involvement in Yemeni affairs owes principally to the insecurity of Saudi Arabia due to a largely non-demarcated Saudi-Yemeni border, and the Iran-Saudi rivalry in the Middle East at large.

3.2.b.vi. Iraq

The Iraqi case represents the Baath repression of the Shia until the downfall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Where Shia Muslims make up around 60 percent of the Iraqi population, Iran's influence among the Shia in Iraq can said to have been very little especially until 2003. Most of Iraqi Shias were from Sunni Arab clans until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and became Shias in towns they lived. Iraqi Shias mainly live in Basra, Najaf and Karbala, and other southern cities, plus Baghdad and Diyala.

Map 3.1. Map of Iraq (The General Libraries, University of Texas-Austin, 1992)



Under the rule of Saddam Hussein, the Shia were feared to switch sides during the prolonged 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. However, this did not happen, and the Iraqi Shia proved to be loyal to their homeland. The main reason for Iraqi Shia opposition's resentment emanated from the fact that they were not subject to equal rights as Iraqi citizens. Hence, Iraqi Shia opposition came to form either a secular communist party or a religious, conservative *Dawa* Party. *Dawa* Party has become a blending group of Islamic "scholars and non-scholars within a political organisation that supports technocratic rule in accordance with the tenets of Islam" (Shanahan, 2004: 944). In this regard, as Shanahan notes, Iraq departs from other models of Shia movements in the region. For Shanahan (2004: 943-944)

> [the] concentration on the political role played by the Shi'a '*ulama*, however, disguises the fact that political leadership does not rest solely with them. Rather, political representation among the Shi'a community within the Middle East has generally been characterised by one of three models: clerical political leadership as exemplified by the Iranian model based on Ayatollah Khomeini's notion of *wilayat al-faqih* (governorship of the jurist); non-clerical control of sectarian organisations such as Nabih Berri's Amal Movement in Lebanon; or participation in secular parties advocating radical changes to the political and economic status quo, often represented by leftist groups such as the communist party.

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, "the most powerful Shi'ite cleric in Iraq, regards it *[velayat-e faqih]* as a purely Iranian model" and does not give much credit to this type of ruling (Rahigh-Aghsan and Jakobsen, 2010: 563). Another author to comment on the Shia in Iraq is Haddad. For Haddad (2014: 80), prior to the invasion of Iraq "…Sunni Arabs saw themselves as "simply Iraqis" whose viewpoints, like the white one alluded to above, was not a Sunni Arab one but a universally valid one; in other words they were "sectless" in a manner similar to the "raceless" whites."

The Iraqi case is different than any other state in the region given that the Shias' coming to power in the country did not happen as a result of a popular uprising and the overthrow of the regime by hands of the Shia Muslims. It was an external power that turned the tide. Moreover, there is no record of Shia uprisings in Iraq except for the brief events as a result of the Baathist government's killing of Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr in 1999 (Gleave: 2007: 64).

In the post-2003 period, the Shia majority of Iraq took political power following the US invasion of the country and toppling of Saddam Hussein. Sectarian divisions, after this time, started to sweep the country. Sunni Muslims in Iraq point to Iran's support for the Shia Muslims, and therefore, accuse it of igniting sectarianism in order to achieve its wider regional goals. Further evaluation of the post-2003 era, in this regard, is made in the next chapter.

3.2.b.vii. Lebanon

Lebanon is yet another case where anti-Shiism presents itself at the state-level. Formerly a French mandate, Lebanon gained its independence in 1943. The state apparatus was organized along sectarian lines in the country, and this organization was based on the 1932 census (which was the last census ever carried out in the country) (Maktabi, 1999: 219)[12]. According to the results of this census, there had been 18 religious sects which generally belong either to Christianity or Islam, and the three major sects were defined as Maronite Christians (28.8 percent), Sunni Muslims (22.4 percent), and Shia Muslims (19.6 percent) (Faour, 2007: 909)[13]. Hence, the state apparatus was established in a manner to empower a Maronite Christian as president, a Sunni Muslim as prime minister, and a Shia Muslim as the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies (the Parliament). Moreover, seats of the Parliament and other government positions were distributed among Christians and

[12] For a more detailed discussion on the 1932 Census in Lebanon that is based around key questions such as "why does the census pay significant attention to Lebanese emigrant population? Why is the date 30 August 1924 central in the census? How is the category 'foreigners' defined? Why are foreigners not specified according to religious affiliations as the category 'emigrants' and 'residents' are? And finally, why has no census been carried out since 1932?", see Maktabi (1999).

[13] Although the 1932 Census was the last official census conducted in Lebanon, there are available estimates that demonstrate changing trends among populations of Christian, Sunni and Shia Muslim sects in Lebanon between 1932-2005, which can be accessed in Faoud's article 'Religion, demography, and politics in Lebanon' (2007: 912). According to these estimates, Shia population's size exceeded that of Sunnis.

Muslims on a six to five ratio, respectively (Faour, 2007: 909). Christian domination over the state institutions in Lebanon was altered and reduced to fifty percent (that is one to one ratio) with the 1989 Agreement of National Reconciliation (known as the Taif Agreement) that came after the Civil War (1975-1990) (Maktabi, 1999: 220).

While Dabashi (2011: 305) links the entry of militant Shia groups into Lebanese political life with the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Brunner (2009, 147) argues that the political mobilization of the Lebanese Shia took place in the 1960s and 1970s, with the arrival of Imam Musa al-Sadr in 1959 to Lebanon from Iran. Musa al-Sadr was a critical figure not only for the politicization of the Lebanese Shiites, but also for the Alawite regime in Syria, which is going to be elaborated below. Musa al-Sadr, the spiritual leader of the Lebanon's Shia first established the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council (also called Higher Islamic Shiite Council) in 1967, and later the Movement for the Deprived (*Harakat al-Mahrumin*) in 1974 as well as the militia group Amal in 1975 (Byman, 2005: 82: 147; Deeb, 1988: 683-684). The aim of Musa al-Sadr in forming these groups was to start a movement, which would help alter the political system in Lebanon in order to be inclusive of all confessional sects in the country. Essentially, Movement for the Deprives was a secular movement despite its founder, yet the outbreak of the civil war 1975 swiftly altered the role of the movement and turned it into a Shia movement with Amal taking the lead role while the Movement for the Deprived being terminated (Siklawi, 2014: 287). While on a trip to Libya, Imam Musa al-Sadr disappeared, and the then deputy Nabih Berri became the president of Amal in 1980, decided "to work with the Israeli-backed National Salvation Authority[14] in 1982 – and [refused] Iran's

[14]Israel aimed to form an amicable government in Lebanon through the National Salvation Authority.

"guidance" that it sever ties with the Authority –led Tehran to work actively to undermine the movement" (Byman, 2005: 83).

It was against this background plus the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979, and the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon that Hezbollah emerged in the early 1980s, and officially announced its establishment in 1985. Hezbollah movement was created in order to fight for the defense of Islam against the policies of the US and the Soviet Union, as well as Israel's existence in the region. The civil war ended in 1989 with the Taif Agreement, and the result was the return to the 1943 political establishment based on the sectarian divisions (Brunner, 2009: 147). Throughout the 1990s, the Shia Hezbollah movement gained power both by serving as a 'state within a state' through its social services in the country, and turning itself into a political party taking place in the elections since 1992, and finally entering the parliament for the first time in the 2005 elections (Brunner, 2009: 147). While Amal chose to disarm, Hezbollah refused to do so.

Mainly Amal and Hezbollah have represented the Shia of Lebanon in the government. Since the end of the presidential term of Michel Suleiman (Maronite Christian) in May 2014, Lebanese parliament has failed to elect a new president, and currently Tammam Salam (Sunni Muslim) serves as the acting president, and the prime minister of the country. The political turmoil inside the Lebanese parliament owes today largely to the existence of different sects, and their different –and mostly-conflicting agendas over the state. Overall, Lebanon is a country that is technically sectarianist, and very much prone to undergoing civil war for the very same reason as well as the existence of an armed political party such as Hezbollah.

3.2.b.viii. Syria

Perhaps Syria represents the most interesting case among the Arab countries with its situation of sectarianism in the manner this work is interested. According to Heydemann (2013: 64), prior to the civil war, approximately 70 percent of the total population was Sunni Arab, 10 to 12 percent was Sunni Kurdish, 10 to 12 percent was Alawite, and the remaining 10 to 12 percent was Druze, Christian, and other non-Sunni minorities. Alawites have ruled the country since the 1966 *coup d'état*, and the Alawite Asad family has been in power since Hafez al-Asad took over in 1970, ruling through the Baath Party. Aleppo and Homs are the two cities where Alawites dominantly live in Syria. The shoreline of Lattakia is another area where Alawites reside given that the majority of them work in agriculture (Balbay, 2006: 139).

What makes the Syrian case conspicuous in terms of Shia sectarian issue is a twofold one. First lies in the history of situation of the Alawite in the country. Syria became independent in 1946, and the society at that time was far from becoming a nation-state unified around commonly shared interests due to population's multi-ethnic and sectarian differences. "The pull of supranational identities, whether Arab or Muslim, and subnational identities, either to minority sects or non-Arab ethnicity, has complicated the consolidation of a stable state or a genuinely national Syrian identity" (Leverett, 2005: 4). A similar point is also underlined by Hinnebusch (2015: 108) who argues that

> to be sure, Ba'athist Arabism is, in important respects, compatible with Syrian state identity, both in its secular inclusiveness of minorities and its discourse on Syria's special status as the 'beating

> heart of Arabism'. However, the continual reproduction of sub- and supra-state identities in regime-opposition power struggles has retarded consolidation of congruence between state/territory and identity/nation.

Furthermore, the former mandatory power of Syria, France, followed divide-and-rule strategy, and as a part of this strategy, "Alawites were granted autonomy… vis-à-vis Arab nationalism" (Fildis, 2012: 150). However, with the independence, the Sunnis, who came to strip Alawites and Druzes off their governmental positions as well as jurisdictional rights, and abolished their seats in the parliament, dominated the Syrian government (Fildis, 2012: 150). The consequence of these actions had been the politicization of Alawites[15], which eventually culminated in Alawite's filling military positions gradually, and starting to rule the country in 1970 (Fildis, 2012: 150; Proctor, 2008: 35).

Second factor that contributes to the conspicuousness of the Syrian case is that Alawites had previously been regarded as heretics by the two mainstream sects of Islam, namely Sunnism and Shiism. However, in a 1973 fatwa issued by Musa al-Sadr, Alawi was declared a sect of Shia Islam (Proctor, 2008: 36)[16]. The fatwa was necessitated because of the growing sectarian tension within the country between the Alawites and the Sunnis. Still, however, sectarian tension continued in the country despite the secular rule of the Asad family (Proctor, 2008: 36).

[15] An in-depth discussion of the history of the rise of Alawites in Syria can be found in the 2012 article of Fildis' article "Roots of Alawite-Sunni Rivalry in Syria".

[16] Abukhalil discusses that while the Asad regime needed al-Sadr for its own political ends, al-Sadr also needed the Asad regime for supporting his political initiatives of 'Movements of the Deprived' and 'Amal' (1990: 9). This would partially explain the reason why the Asad regime supported Amal during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon by Israel, and the regime's continuous avoidance (when possible) of supporting Hezbollah.

Aware of its own secular sensibilities, the Asad regime follows a secular domestic policy, at times cooperating with Sunnis who have not opposed the regime (Leverett, 2005: 25), and a foreign policy that pays close attention to Sunni-Shia rivalry in the region. The Asad regime does not desire the ascendance of either Sunnis or Shias. In this regard, Lebanon represents the best case where Syria's pragmatic foreign policy can be observed. For instance, during the Lebanese civil war, Asad regime chose to support the secular Amal movement instead of Iran-backed Hezbollah[17] (Proctor, 2008: 37), thus not wanting to lose its influence in Lebanese politics to Iranian hands. Nor did Syria desire to see the impact of the Iraqi Baathist rule in Lebanon (AbuKhalil, 1990: 4).[18]

With a population dominated by Sunnis, amidst a region where Sunni-Shia rivalry has been ongoing for decades, minority ruling Asad regime has dragged the country into a conflict since March 2011 that can be called a sectarian civil war. What started as a pro-democracy movement in the country in 2011 quickly escalated, and the regime today is fighting against not only Sunni rebels, but also the terrorist organization Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. During its fight, the Asad regime receives extensive support from Russia, Iran, and the Lebanese Hezbollah.

3.2.b.ix. Iran

Shiism became the main religious practice in Persia in the 15th century with the foundation of the Safavid dynasty; yet, divisions began to appear among the

[17] This is not to suggest that Syria did not or does not support Hezbollah. It was Syria that helped Iran during the birth of Hezbollah by "allowing Iranian units to enter Lebanon to provide organizational, logistical, and operational support for guerrilla operations (El-Hokayem, 2007: 36)

[18] The Baath party was divided in 1966 between Syrian and Iraqi branches, each claiming to be the authentic Baathist movement, and Lebanon's leading Baathists chose the Iraqi version (Abukhalil, 1990: 4-5).

Twelver ulama with the arrival of the 18th century. The divisions occurred mainly due to different interpretation of Shiism, and the two prominent schools in dispute were the *Usuli* and the *Akhbari* schools (Cole, 2002: 66). "[T]he Usulis are ordinarily understood as the "rationalist" or even the "progressive" jurists, whereas the Akhbaris are thought to be "traditionalist," "literalist," or even "scripturalist."" (Dabashi, 2011: 169-170)[19]. The *Akhbaris* and *Usulis* were divided mainly on the topic of exercising religion whether strictly based on the "Quran and the oral reports of the prophet and imams", or "the consensus of the jurisprudents", and "the independent reasoning (ijtihad) of the jurist" (Cole, 2002: 66). As aptly put by Dabashi (2011: 170-171), for the *Akhbari* ulama, interpreting Quran [as did the *Usuli* school] meant "a self-propelling hermeneutic that empowers the person who (and the institution that) thus uses that instrumental reason and disregards the masses (the potential public) at the receiving end of that reason." While the *Usuli* School became dominant in Iran, Lebanon as well as Iraq, the *Akhbari* School prevailed in Bahrain and Qatif (Saudi Arabia) (Cole, 2002: 66-69). Thus, the prevalence of the *Usuli* School in Iran paved the way towards the rise of the clergy in political matters in the following decades.

The politicization of the Shia clergy in Iran revealed itself for the first time directly in the late 19th century and the early 20th century during the rule of the Qajar dynasty. The Shia *ulama* issued a fatwa forbidding the use of tobacco because of the Western influence over the Iranian economy in general, and the British monopoly over the marketing of Iranian tobacco in particular. This incident came to be known

[19] For more information on the *Akhbari-Usuli* schools, and conflict between them, please refer to Chapter Six in Robert M. Gleave (2007) *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbari Shi'i School.*

as the Tobacco Revolt of 1890-1892. Moaddel (1992) argues that the merchant mobilization in the Tobacco protest movement happened not due to the organizational skills and resources of the merchant class, but to the Shia discourse adopted by the clergy. The Tobacco movement is deemed as an important event because it paved the way to the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 in that the former event represents a case where a successful alliance between various groups (such as the merchants, clergy, the discontent population as well as the reformers) was made possible, and it was repeated during the latter movement (Keddie, 1966: 1).

The Pahlavi family ruled Iran from 1925 until the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Despite the Constitutional Revolution of 1905, political turmoil inside the country and in the region, together with the World War I proved any effort toward democratization futile. The Pahlavi dynasty began ruling Iran in 1925, and discontent within Iranian society gradually became extensive as socio-economic situation deteriorated in the country, and the discontent finally culminated in the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and Ayatollah Khomeini declared the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This event marked the first time that an Islamic republic was founded, and a Shia-ruling state was established in the Middle East.

The new republic's Iranian and Shia credentials, however, have most of the time superseded the revolution's internationalist claims to be a Muslim state (not seeking any sectarian difference) that claimed responsibility for the whole *umma* (regardless of their ethnic identities). An in-depth study of Iranian foreign policy would reveal that even the radical factions within the Iranian ruling circle at times chose to pursue pragmatic foreign policy options that were compatible with, first and

foremost, national interests of the country.[20] This is not to suggest that Shiism does not play any role in the making of Iranian foreign policy. However, it can be claimed that Shia discourse is used as a masquerading instrument in the toolbox of Iranian foreign policy, which is conducted by either of the two mainstream factions in Iranian political life.

These mainstream factions are the radicals, and moderates. Foreign policy making in the hands of radical faction in Iran has had a hostile tone towards the US, aimed to export the Islamic revolution, and based on the motto of "*na sharq na gharb*" (neither East nor West). Additionally, for the radical faction, the version of Islam as practiced in Iran is claimed to be the authentic form of the religion, and hence, Iran is the protector of the entire *umma*. Moreover, achievement and maintenance of economic self-sufficiency is of vital interest for the radicals.

The faction called "radical" in this study is categorized as "conservative" by Rakel (2009: 51). Yet, this study argues that after all, moderates can be as much conservative as radicals with regard to the representation of Islam in foreign relations of Iran. For instance, both radicals and moderates of Iranian political elite did not rush to mend relations with the US, and starting with Khomeini, they underlined Iranian nationalism (Halliday, 2001: 44-45). These similarities should not be interpreted as though both factions demonstrate identical approaches to foreign policy. Moderate faction regards radical idealist policies as causing isolation of the state from world affairs. This is the reason why they acknowledge interdependence among states, and the importance of setting and maintaining diplomatic, political, and economic relations with other countries, especially when Iran sits on vast oil and natural gas resources and has remarkable geopolitical importance. In other words,

[20] For a more detailed discussion on the issue, please see Tekin (2010).

moderates simply ignore the principle “neither East nor West” because by blocking interaction channels with the others, there remains no way to protect and expand either the Islamic values beyond Iran’s territory or the interests of the country.

To sum up, the two preceding sections made a genealogy of the two separate terms “crescent” and “Shia”. This genealogical survey helps to form an understanding of what the two terms mean when they come together and form “Shia Crescent”. To begin with, this genealogical inquiry revealed that neither of the terms’ meaning has remained constant over the course of time. In its first appearance, the term “crescent” was dominantly used in the early 1900s to refer to areas (mostly in today’s Middle East) that had been regarded fertile in irrigation, agriculture, and trade.

Furthermore, the following years witnessed political debates between Mackinder’s heartland and Spykman’s rimland theories, the latter theory making an emphasis on a crescent that surrounded the politico-militarily significant Eurasian heartland. 1940s rimland (or crescent) was significantly different than post-Cold War’s crescent. While Eurasian rimland was used to refer to an area that stretched from Arabia to Korea, 1990s crescent was openly used to indicate an Islamic crescent of two geographies –northern and southern, each identified according to their ideological attachments to the then-superpowers. The genealogy of the concept of “crescent” demonstrates that in less than a century, the term has taken several meanings from archeological understandings to politically salient characteristics.

A genealogical look into Shiism in the Middle East has also revealed how Shiism has come to take on changing meanings in the eyes of Sunni Arabs of the region. While they were seen, in the beginning of the last century, as purely another

sect with not such political importance attributed to them, this changed later in particular after the emergence of Islamic movements –not even Shia movements at first- in the 1960s. Domestic politicization of the Shia was rather made by the hands of the ruling elite of Sunni Arab regimes principally to divert public attention from socio-economic as well as political ills that were embedded within their respective states. International politicization of Shiism took shape when balances in the Middle East began to shift towards the benefit of Iran.

CHAPTER IV

"THE" SHIA CRESCENT DISCOURSE

This chapter studies the interview given by King Abdullah II of Jordan in December 2004, in which he used the term 'Shia Crescent'. Ever since December 2004, a growing body of literature has discussed the King's discourse, and claimed either that a Shia Crescent formation has been taking place or that Iran is not after the creation of any formation based on sectarian affiliations. Hence, following the interview of the King and the context the interview was given, the chapter continues with the examination of the two lines of literature on the famous Shia Crescent discourse.

4.1. Inception of an ''Unintended'' Discourse in the Post-2003 Era

King Abdullah II of Jordan (who claims that he is a direct descendant of Prophet Mohammad) introduced the term "Shia crescent" in late 2004, pointing to the east of the Middle East, in which Iraq could be involved given its Shia population and growing Iranian activities in the country, and the threat could even reach Saudi Arabia, at which point the Saudi Kingdom would find itself in a difficult position not to be influenced (The Washington Post).

The claim by King Abdullah II of Jordan that the Islamic Republic of Iran had the intention to create a Shia Crescent in the Middle East arrived in December 2004. Studying the context in which this claim was made could reveal significant clues to evaluate its possibility. Therefore, the interpretation of the context of 2004

needs to be made considering actors other than King Abdullah II of Jordan as well. It is important to adopt a multi-dimensional approach to the question of context since this study aims to cover the issue from all related angles possible.

This study regards the word "context" not as "a pure original point, an objective space/time coordinate, or a final resting place", rather as "an open structure, the limits of which are never absolutely determinable or saturated" (O'Tuathail, 1996: 56). The context for one, thus, is the perception of events that has been formed in a particular time and under certain circumstances, which are not only dynamic, but also relative to one's own understanding and interests. Hence, this might essentially differ from the perspective of another.

From the perspective of King Abdullah II of Jordan (as well as other pro-Western Sunni Arab states' leaders), the events not only in Iraq, but also Afghanistan began to reveal the unpreparedness of the United States as to what to do for state building in both of these countries in 2004. This meant the emergence of a power vacuum in the immediate neighborhood of the Sunni monarchs in which the gravity of power was to change dramatically. Put differently, a shift in the *status quo* of the Middle East that was to be for the benefit of Iran would render the Sunni leaders resentful. The interview of *The Washington Post* dated December 8, 2004 with the King, hence, reads:

> It is in Iran's vested interest to have an Islamic republic of Iraq […] and therefore the involvement you're getting by the Iranians is to achieve a government that is very pro-Iran," Abdullah said. If pro-Iran parties or politicians dominate the new Iraqi government, he said, a new "crescent" of dominant Shiite movements or governments

> stretching from Iran into Iraq, Syria and Lebanon could emerge, alter the traditional balance of power between the two main Islamic sects and pose new challenges to U.S. interests and allies.

An influential Iran in the Middle East, for King Abdullah II and other Sunni monarchs, would mean its rising significance and effect within the Shia populations of the Middle East given the immediate aftermath of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. This concern of the King could be read from his following statements (The Washington Post, December 8, 2004):

> If Iraq goes Islamic republic, then, yes, we've opened ourselves to a whole set of new problems that will not be limited to the borders of Iraq. I'm looking at the glass half-full, and let's hope that's not the case. But strategic planners around the world have got to be aware that is a possibility […] Even Saudi Arabia is not immune from this. It would be a major problem. And then that would propel the possibility of a Shiite-Sunni conflict even more, as you're taking it out of the borders of Iraq.

Whether or not King Abdullah II's fear that Iran could gain leverage from this situation was based on solid evidence, it is understandable that a revolutionary Iran was perceived from this vantage point as it differs from the rest of the Middle East doctrine- and regime-wise. While the context for King Abdullah II of Jordan was of a formidable one, it is observed that the King chose to speak not only on behalf of his country, but also for the US and "its allies" in the region. This means that the US and its allies in the Middle East also shared views similar to those of King Abdullah II.

Despite the vagueness of what is exactly meant by a Shia crescent, what can be inferred at best from King Abdullah's interview and the context that he faced back in 2004, the emergence and dominance of pro-Iran Shia parties in the new Iraqi government would propel other pro-Iran Shia movements (i.e. *Hezbollah*) and incite Shia minorities in Arab countries to follow the same path and cause the emergence of proselytizing Shia movements which could pressure Arab monarchies and their regimes.

This is not the first time that such links have been identified between Iran and Syria and some Shia movements/minorities. For example, Iran-Syria rapprochement in the wake of the Islamic Revolution is interpreted as "something quite new in the region –a Shi'a axis from Tehran through Damascus to South Lebanon" (Seale, 1990: 351). Another example is Bahrain's explicit accusation of Iran to be behind the 1981 *coup d'état* attempt to overthrow the incumbent al-Khalifa dynasty (Jones and Ridout, 2012: 162). The analysis offered by Ramazani that the Islamic Revolution of Iran catalyzed November 1979 and February 1980 uprisings in Saudi Arabia is yet another instance that points to Iran and its influence (2013: 253-254). When looked at closely, however, reasons of dissidence among the Shia minorities in Arab states appear to exist well before the advent of the Islamic revolution, and mainly emanate from the mistreatment of their respective Shia populations (Ramazani, 2013: 258).

What, then, makes today's discussions different on this matter than before? The main reason for this matter to attract such vast attention today is the fact that the interview of Jordan's King Abdullah turned into a practical geopolitical discourse which came to be acknowledged by certain academics, hence, turning it into also a formal geopolitics discourse. As these two discourse types are compounded, discussions on the matter came to be made more seriously than before. Hence, it can

be said that it is the first time that Shia politics have been discussed along the lines of a political discourse.

Contrary to pro-Shia crescent arguments, there also exists a growing critical body of scholarly work that argues against the possibility of formation of a Shia crescent (bases of which will be substantiated below). Both of these two lines of literature focus primarily on Shiism in the Middle East, and Iran's foreign policy: whether Iran is compatible to influence the Shia of the region (especially Iraq and Hezbollah). Therefore, interpretation and implications of a Shia crescent differs according to how one reads Shiism and foreign policy of Iran.

Soon after the interview of the Jordanian King, the Saudi foreign minister called the result of the US intervention in Iraq as "a handover of Iraq to Iran" in September 2005 (Ruthven, 2012: 171). These remarks were followed later in November 2006 by Nawaf Obaid (the security advisor of the Saudi King) who stated that there was an urgent need for Saudi Arabia to intervene in Iraq so as to align with Iraqi Sunnis (Haji-Yousefi, 2009: 117). Bröning notes (2008: 62) that there have also been concerns on the Israeli side as the Israeli General Staff called "the" Shia Crescent as "one of the main driving forces of radicalism and extremism in the region."

In addition to these, the then President of Egypt Hosni Mobarak supported the King's claims on a possible Shia Crescent, and in April 2006, he gave an interview to Dubai-based Al-Arabiyya TV where he said: "There are Shias in all these countries [of the region], in significant percentages, and Shias are mostly always loyal to Iran and not the countries where they live… Naturally Iran has an influence over Shia who make up 65 per cent of Iraq's population" (Ehteshami and

Zweiri, 2007, 133). These remarks of President Mobarak were met with severe criticism on the Iranian media.

For instance, Mehr News Agency, right after the release of President Mobarak's interview, posted the news that noted how this interview "sparked anger across the region", citing Iraqi Transitional Government's Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari's condemning remarks:

> The comments have upset Iraqi people, who come from different religious and ethnic backgrounds, and have astonished and discontented the Iraqi government… [and these] accusations against our Shia brothers are baseless, and we have asked our foreign minister to talk to Egypt about this (The New York Times, 9 April 2006).

Furthermore, Mehr News Agency also cited Kuwaiti Shia parliamentarian Hassan Jowhar who said "We are not begging for certificates of loyalty to our countries from Mubarak or others. These are irresponsible statements… and only serve to incite sectarians rifts." Last, but not the least, the same news agency also quoted from one of *Hezbollah's* members, Sheikh Mohammad Yazbek: "These are dangerous and false words that reveal fanaticism and sectarianism aimed at sowing discord wished for by America."

The aforementioned remarks made by the Jordanian, Saudi, and Egyptian leaders primarily focus on the Iraq's situation and reflects the discontent that these leaders have shared about the new political realm in Baghdad and beyond. Additionally, another common point of the three statesmen revolves around the question of Shia loyalties to Iran, and not to their very home countries and societies.

4.1.a. Pro-Shia Crescent Thesis Literature

For Vali Nasr (who is Iranian-American), perhaps the most "prominent" of academics who warned against a Shia Crescent danger in his book *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (2006), takes the invasion of Iraq by the US as a milestone and argues that its result has been to produce an Arab Shia government in the country, and that this has happened for the first time in history. Therefore, he notes that "…all [the Iraqi Shias' ascendance to power, and the Iran-backed Hezbollah-Israeli War of 2006] connected to the broader Shia revival and the Sunni reaction to it apparent in the sectarian conflict in Iraq" (Nasr, 2007: 13).

Son of a family who fled Iran because of the Islamic Revolution, Nasr argues (2006) that Iran is at the core of the sectarian conflict in Iraq, and this conflict is likely to spread throughout the region, and hence, the US needs to revise its policies in a way that concerns this tender situation in Iraq. Hamid Dabashi, who is highly critical of Nasr in his book *Shiism: A Religion of Protest*, writes (2011: 277):

> Employed by a military academy committed to "provide relevant and unique advanced education and research programs in order to increase the combat effective- ness of U.S. and Allied armed forces," Vali Nasr had written *The Shia Revival* to explain to his students and those in the U.S. military and indeed to the American public at large that the fall of Saddam Hussein had acted as a catalyst, releasing the Shi'is from the Iraqi warlord's tyranny and also creating a "Shia Crescent" that stretched all the way from Lebanon and Syria to Iraq and Iran, through the Persian Gulf, and as far east as Pakistan and India.

Dabashi further adds (2011: 279, 281):

> *The Shia Revival* was strategically instrumental in redirecting public opinion from the principal and actual source of violence and of the mayhem that the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq had caused, namely George W. Bush's neoconservative ideology, which informed so much of his presidency. The Bush administration was anxious to find a sectarian scapegoat to justify their catastrophic actions in Iraq to an increasingly disbelieving U.S. public [...] Nasr in effect informed his American audience that bloodshed in the region was not the result of an unjustifiable invasion and occupation by the U.S. military of a sovereign nation-state, but the expected result of internecine sectarian violence between the Sunnis and the Shi'is—domestic to Iraq and its neighboring countries […] and as an analyst make a lucrative career out of that self-alienation, nations at large suffer the consequences.

Nasr's thesis, this study also argues, has only helped reduce both the image of the destruction that the US caused in Iraq, and image of Shiism from a multi-focal religious practice to one that is shallow and conflictual. Therefore, Nasr's thesis exemplifies very well how the US backed the claim of a Shia Crescent fear in the minds of Sunni rulers throughout the Middle East.

According to Walker (2006: 17), King Abdullah of Jordan feels that an overwhelming Shia population in the east of his country encircles his state. This is one way that forms the King's thinking. Walker (2006), in his assertively titled article *The Revenge of the Shia*, focuses on the then ongoing civil war in Iraq, and

views it as a pure sectarian conflict. For this, Walker (2006: 18) points to the attack against the Shia shrine in Samarra, Iraq back in February 2006.

Taking on his discussion from here, the author estimates that Sunni leaders of the Middle East and North Africa (namely Jordanian, Egyptian, and Saudi regimes) expect an all-out sectarian strife that could erupt in the region mainly because of the Shia (pointing to the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988) (Walker, 2006: 18). In general, Walker's argument (2006) is more in the form of a warning for a possible Shia-Sunni clash in the future, since the Iraqi Shia are now liberated, and empowered, and this is likely to change the balances of power not only in Iraq, but also in the region in general.

Ely Karmon, an Israeli political scientist, is another scholar to comment on the possibility of a Shia Crescent (2007). Although Karmon does not give full credit to the idea, he does not entirely rule out the fact that Iran is indeed utilizing its Shia power in politicized groups in different countries across the region. For instance, Karmon, drawing on Nasr's arguments (published in his 2004 article), notes that the latter discussed that it was the Sunni extremism that was dangerous (obviously, for the US foreign policy in the region), and not the Shia. However, Karmon argues (2007: 274) Nasr's accounts did neither, back in 2004, include the presidential term and deeds of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the nuclear issue of Iran, nor the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006. Furthermore, Karmon (2007: 289) also notes the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah advised the Iraqi opposition in February 2003 to sit down and shake hands with then Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein so that they would come to terms towards democratization, and how Iran strongly opposed this idea.

Although Karmon accepts that the Sunni extremism existed well before recent sectarian conflicts, he argues (2007: 274) that Sunni militancy has been "invigorated and emboldened" only as a response to the Shia unrest, and thus, concludes that the conflict in Iraq (which he regards of sectarian nature) following the US invasion is not the product of the events that occurred in the post-invasion era, but it has its roots back in history (i.e. anti-Shia campaigns carried out by the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in the 1990s).

Furthermore, Karmon cites (2007: 289-290) Iranian Secretary of the Expediency Council Mohsen Rezai's words that read:

> America's arrival in the region presented Iran with an historic opportunity. The kind of service that the Americans, with all their hatred, have done us –no superpower has ever done anything similar. America destroyed all our enemies in the region. It destroyed the Taliban. It destroyed Mr. Saddam Hussein. It imprisoned the hypocrites [Mojahedin-e Khalq] in France. It did all this in order to confront us face to face, and in order to place us under siege. But the American teeth got so stuck in the soil of Iraq and Afghanistan that if they manage to drag themselves back to Washington in one piece, they should thank God. Therefore, America presents us with an opportunity rather than a threat – not because it intended to, but because its estimates were wrong.

This account made by Karmon serves to point out the growing interest of Iran in Shia-populated territories, hence giving some credit to the idea of a Shia Crescent. Karmon, however, attempts to strengthen his claims (2007: 290) via also suggestive

instances such as how Iran filled the power vacuum that occurred in Lebanon through Hezbollah, following the withdrawal of Syria; and how it also supported Palestine when it was in dire straits due to international cut off of funding. Karmon's claims blur at this point where the author includes the case of Iranian support to Hamas and Palestinians, who are not Shia but Sunni. Together with an account of the dual policy which the author explains (2007: 289) Iran is following in order to counter the US presence in the region in the post-9/11 era, overall, Karmon's article can be read as a weak attempt to prove that there might very well exist a Shia Crescent which Iran would be happy to take advantage of. It is a weak attempt since the article also points out (a) how on realist and pragmatist grounds Iranian foreign policy is made and conducted, (b) admits that Sunni extremism is not a direct consequence of Shia discontent, (c) Iran's existing ties to support Muslims other than the Shia, which it pledged to do so already in its revolution.

Cenap Çakmak is another author to contribute to the formal geopolitical reading of a Shia Crescent. The gist of Çakmak's article (2015: 52) is that "the Shiite Crescent can be used by Iran as a framework to fulfill its foreign policy goals and that the Arab Spring can serve as a facilitator in this process." While so claiming, Çakmak (2015) bases his argument on the transnational identities that exist in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions, and identifies the lack of successful formation of national identities in these regions as the main reason for the existence of those transnational identities.

By transnational identities, Çakmak points to the religious, sectarian, and even tribal connections with which the MENA societies affiliate themselves. To support this identification, Çakmak give the example of Azerbaijan (2015: 54), which is a Shia-dominated country, but at the same time, which Iran cannot penetrate

into because of strong nationalism there. This situation, coupled with America's decadence in the region since the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Arab Spring movements, Çakmak argues that it is now Iran's moment to exert its power in the affairs of the region, and manipulate the power gap, which Sunni Arabs obviously can no longer achieve to do, through its Shia soft power.

Notwithstanding these, similar to Karmon, Çakmak also recognizes (2015: 57) how pragmatic and ideological Iran's support to the peoples of Arab Spring[21] (who are predominantly Sunni), in their chanting against their respective regimes, has been. Overall, Çakmak sums up his argument on why Iran's interests would be served through a Shia Crescent in three points: (1) Iran is the center of "the" Shia Crescent; (2) Shia Arabs demonstrate alienation and lack of allegiance to their respective regimes; and (3) lack of national sentiments and identities (2015: 60-61).

Even though at first glance, lack of national unity and democracy in the Arab world appears to provide strong bases for Iran to systematically formulate and maintain a sort of sectarian foreign policy, Çakmak's thesis falls into the fallacy for it does regard Shiism as a monolithic religious culture –which does not differentiate across peoples and spaces, be them motivated along tribal ties such as Yemeni *Zaydis*, or *Baharna* Shias who are different from and discontent with *Ajam* Shias of the same country.

Moreover, it would be incomplete to suggest that Iran supports the Arab Spring, or any other incident that could lead to the fall of Sunni Arab leaders/regimes only because it could eventually realize a Shia-based policy. Just as Çakmak himself recognizes (2015: 59), Iran has relatively completed its nation-building, thus, Iranian

[21] With the exception of Syria, Iran's policies towards which has been strategic.

nationalism, not sectarian affiliations, prevail in Iranian foreign policy. Hence, it would be over-simplistic to assume that Iran would highlight its foreign policy in the Arab world through a propaganda of Shiism, or to expect that Shia Arabs would welcome it (i.e. Hezbollah does occasionally voice its disturbance towards Iran's meddling in its affairs; or that Arab Shias living in Sunni-dominated regimes would not prefer their leaders to think more ill about themselves than they do already).

Last but not the least, even Çakmak recognizes Iran's ideology-based foreign policy (2015: 55), and hence his thesis contains contradictions in it. For one thing, lack of national sentiments in Arab countries per se cannot constitute the crux a multi-faceted and much complicated Iranian foreign policy. It is in Iran's vested interest to embrace all Muslims if its ideological stance is still critical of the US in particular, and which actually is. Finally, even though Çakmak's article comes to arrive at the conclusion that, as mentioned above, Shiism could be used by Iran as a tool in its foreign policy among many other of its tools that let Tehran maneuver successfully in its pragmatic view of world affairs, it nevertheless reads as an overly enthusiastic telling, which at the end of the article sounds more akin to a verbalism for both its contradictions, and popularization of Shiism as a mono-block transnational identity. One last critique of this study would question Çakmak's article in that it does not provide in particular which foreign policy goals of Iran would be best served by a Shia Crescent-based foreign policy. This is a serious flaw since Iran's foreign policy toolbox is a well-equipped one, which could simultaneously use multi-instruments to reach its goals (i.e. supporting both Shias and Sunni Kurds in Iraq).

To sum up in addition to the Jordanian, Egyptian, and Saudi statesmen who stressed and warned against a Shia Crescent, the literature that discusses the same

possibility of the existence of a Shia Crescent converge in certain points in their claims and accusations against Iran. First of all, all of these actors view Shiism as a monolithic religious culture by claiming that Iran could influence Shia masses throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Furthermore, they also point to Iran's support of the Iraqi Shia, and also view Hezbollah in Lebanon operating as a pawn of Iran. Last, the argument is also made on transnational identities of Shia in these regions, claiming that Iran could very well manipulate them (Çakmak, 2015).

4.1.b. Anti-Shia Crescent Thesis Literature

The following is a brief summary of the literature, which gives little to no credit to a Shia Crescent idea that emerged following the Jordanian king's discourse. In fact, one can come across more convincing and well-articulated arguments on this side of the literature than the previously discussed pro-Shia Crescent idea one. In this regard, Graham E. Fuller is one of the authors who discuss this trend in light of Sunni Arab regimes and the fear they have developed about their own Shia citizens (2006). In his argument, Fuller underlines (2006: 35) that Shia populations (and even Sunnis) might grow a tendency to protest their governments not because sectarianism could make a peak, but because Iran, Hezbollah, as well as Hamas could inspire masses to stand up against the US and Israel in the region. Hence, such a move would be, at best, reflective of an all-out discontent with the power play of extra-regional states.

By touching upon these remarks in general, Fuller makes the statement (2006: 36) that reads "Sunni-Shitte tensions are much exaggerated by the outside world –a kind of lazy man's political touchstone for handy policy manipulation",

pointing to the Bush administration's wrong policies in Iraq, and hence, how they come to support the arguments that accuse Iran of being the master problem-maker in the region.

Maximilian Terhalle is another author to contribute to the literature with his essay titled *Are the Shia Rising?* (2007). In this study, Terhalle argues (2007: 69) that Sunni Arabs claim that Shias are rising only to empower their Sunni-led regimes, and to make them more legitimate. This drive, Terhalle notes (2007: 69) is also affiliated with the Islamic Revolution that took place back in 1979: in order to stigmatize Iran, "a new label had to be found that targeted Iran." Therefore, "the Shia Crescent" idea has come to be defended, however, in a manner that "lacks both the political and religious cohesiveness of what is conceived of as a monolithic Shia bloc with Iran as its driving force" (Terhalle, 2007: 70).

For Terhalle, there are four factors that render the arguments of a Shia Crescent weak: domestic politics, international politics, nationalism and economics (2007: 70). As far as domestic politics of the Gulf States are concerned as a factor, Terhalle points to these regimes' (providing the instances of Saudi and Bahraini states) treatment of their own Shia populations. In Saudi Arabia, governments went through using "force, incorporation, adaptation and cooptation" towards their Shia minorities, whereas in Bahrain, Shias have been loyal to the Bahraini unity, but wanting more justice and equality (2007: 71-73). Hence, Terhalle finds no "danger" that come from these states' Shia populations against their regimes.

On the international politics dimension, the author points (Terhalle, 2007: 73) to the foreign policy of Iran prior to and following the 1990-91 Gulf War, and how this country was constrained. Whereas following the fervent of the Islamic

Revolution, Iran indeed had an agenda of exporting its revolution, the devastating war with Iraq, and later the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and Rafsanjani's presidency largely influenced the post-1990 foreign policy of Iran towards the Gulf countries. Iran went from a conflicting phase in its foreign policy towards a more conciliatory one, and aimed to establish amicable relations with the Gulf States (Terhalle, 2007: 73-74). What became more important for Iran was to remedy its low economic performance, which predicated on a more nationalist foreign policy (Terhalle, 2007: 74).

For nationalism as a factor that hinders Shia Crescent arguments, Terhalle explains that, again, during the devastating war Iran fought against Iraq, Iraqi Shias fought the Iranians [and vice versa]; and later, after the Gulf War, when the Iraqi Shias rose against the rule of Saddam Hussein, and were massacred, Iran opted not to meddle in these problems. Thus, with these instances Terhalle demonstrates the strength of nationalism present in both countries (2007: 74). To draw a further picture of the strength of nationalism, and how, in line with this, strategic concerns play role in foreign policies, Terhalle notes (2007: 74-75)

> First, the acceptance of Iranian influence [in Iraq] is explainable less by the common bond of being Shia than by the complete breakdown of the state… Iranian influence does exist in Iraq, though it is not founded on the basis of a common belief. Rather, it is the political weakness of one state that allows for interference by another state for its own self-interest, notwithstanding the fact that this is underpinned by Shiism.

Last, Terhalle gives economics of Iran as a reason that complicates any argument for a Shia Crescent. Iran's marginal trade volume with the Gulf States because non-oil trade goods are very low; and thus, Gulf countries prefer rather to trade with the OECD states. For Iran, therefore, Terhalle notes (2007: 76) "this means that its Shiism is undermined by both economic considerations and political concerns [due to Tunbs islands issue between Iran and the United Arab Emirates], which together lead to a minimizing of regional cooperation."

On the grounds of religion, Terhalle notes (2007: 76) that there exist two differences between Iran and Iraq, which complicates a "transnational Shii structure supporting Iranian dominance. The first is a rejection by the majority of Iraqis of the rule of the jurisprudent. The second involves the differences emanating from the complicated structure of the *marjaiyyat*." Iraqi clerics criticize the rule of the jurisprudent that is referred to as *velayet-e faqih* in Persian, for its "politicizing religion and stripping it of its transcendental character" (Terhalle, 2007: 76). As far as the source of emulation, which is *marja at taqlid al mutlaq* in Persian, is considered, Terhalle offers a few apt points in clarifying the limits of Iranian influence on the Iraqi Shia.

First, there are different sources of emulation in the Middle East, which precede the establishment of the nation states in the region; hence, this situation causes complications and rivalries between transnational Shia groups (Terhalle, 2007: 78). Second, Shia identities are divided along nation states, and this causes the localization of the sources of emulation (Terhalle, 2007: 78). Third, national political power supersedes sectarian politics since what becomes significant for a *marjaa* is to gain power through building upon "national Shiism and a national marja", a fact which further delimits Iran's penetration among Iraqi Shias (Terhalle, 2007: 78).

Terhalle also notes (2007: 79), in connection with these, that Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, despite political quietism[22] he adheres to, is very powerful among Iraqi Shias due to support he gives Shia citizens as the state is unable to support them (economically).

To sum up, Terhalle's study discusses the underlying reasons that yield a slippery ground for a Shia Crescent that Iran would lead. For doing this, Terhalle predicates his arguments on political and religious dimensions that constrain Iranian foreign policy in this manner. On the political ground, domestic factors of the Gulf States, the international factors that surround Iran, nationalism in Shia populated areas as well as Iran, and economic relations of the Middle East are discussed. On the religious ground, the incompatibility between Iranian and Iraqi versions of Shiism is explained through differing interpretations of the *velayat-e faqih* and *marjaiyya* in Iran and Iraq.

Bayram Sinkaya, in his 2007-dated article titled *Şii Ekseni Tartışmaları ve İran [Shia Tier Arguments and Iran]* adopts a multi-dimensional approach in his analysis towards the feasibility of a Shia Crescent. For one thing, Sinkaya discusses (2007: 53) that the Shia Crescent arguments empower Iran's power in the region. This empowerment does not occur due to Iran's Islamic-inclined or nuclear policies, but its geopolitical situation and the relative power gap in the region (Sinkaya, 2007: 53).

Notwithstanding these remarks, Sinkaya argues that (a) Iran could not change the Sunni-Shia balance during Ayatollah Khomeini's lifetime, and eventually quit this policy (2007: 40); (b) focusing on sectarian conflicts overlooks the region's

[22] Ayatollah's political quietism, that is neutrality towards political matters, is the opposite of what Ayatollah Khomeini adopted in Iran.

economic and political problems (2007: 44); (c) Syria is an Arab socialist state that cannot be identified with its religious identity (2007: 44); and (d) last, but not least, despite Hezbollah-Iran relations, Hezbollah is not under direct Iranian control, and strives to change this look through adopting not a Shia, but Lebanese, Arab nationalist, Islamic and anti-Israeli discourse (2007: 44-45).

Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, a Lebanese political analyst, wrote an opinion paper for Egypt's Al-Ahram Weekly in 2007, and mainly questioned Shia Crescent in that whether or not such an idea would attract Hezbollah. For Saad-Ghorayeb (2007), Hezbollah's main concern is to form a resistance policy against the "US and Western diktat" in the name of defending Lebanon's interests. Moreover, citing from the results of a poll conducted in March 2007 by Beirut Centre for Research and Information, Saad-Ghorayeb notes (2007) that "98 percent of Shia respondents claimed they would refuse to disarm the resistance in exchange for more political power for the Shia community should such a trade-off ever be proposed", and she interprets these findings' as demonstrative of threat perceived from the US and Israel against Lebanese sovereignty and independence. In other words, had Hezbollah chose to disarm; Shias could view this as disempowerment and submission to the US demands.

With regard to Iraqi Shias, Saad-Ghorayeb (2007) makes a few points. The first is that "the domination of Iraqi Shias in the Iraqi political system today has merely substituted oppression under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship for subservience to the US-led occupation" (Saad-Ghorayeb (2007). In other words, Iraqi Shias had to welcome the presence of the US in exchange for Saddam's overthrow.

A second point is about Iran and its policies towards Iraq. For Saad-Ghorayeb (2007), Iran is mainly concerned with finding allies to confront the US presence in its immediate neighborhood, and does so through exerting its soft power through Shiism, However, for the author (2007), this does not count as "a cultural or sectarian axis" which Iran aims to achieve: "The endeavour to exert soft power is essentially a political, not a cultural, exercise in ideological infiltration; exporting political Shiism -- that is, Shiism as a political identity -- rather than cultural proselytisation."

Having said these, Saad-Ghorayeb also recognizes cultural ties forged between Iran and certain prominent Shia groups and individuals in Iraq, she notes (2007) that this is only the part of Iran's strategic calculations, and "not an end in itself." In order to support her argument, the author illustrates Iran's ties with Hamas, and "predominantly Sunni Syria". Zalmay Khalilzad, former US ambassador to Iraq, views Iran's Iraq policy as a "schizophrenic" one as Iran both supports Iraqi Shia government, and Sunni insurgency groups, whereas Saad-Ghorayeb (2007) argues that this is rather a "calculated ambivalence" policy for Iran as it seeks Iranian national interests in Iraq and beyond vis-à-vis the US and its regional allies.

Yamani (2008) regards the Shia threat viewed from Riyadh one that intrinsically bears the problem of legitimacy. In other words, it is a matter of ideology that concerns the Wahabi regime, which is "itself a minority in the country" (Yamani, 2008: 151). Hence, a Shia revival would only serve to deepen the already existing problems between the Wahabi rulers and the Saudi population at large (Yamani, 2008: 151).

Furthermore, Yamani notes (2008: 151-152) that even though King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia puts considerable effort into changing the regime's image in the eyes of its Shia population through, for instance, meeting Iranian President Ahmadinejad and shaking hands with him, he is unable to stop discrimination against the Shia at home. In Yamani's view (2008: 152) "Abdullah's problem is not with Ahmadinejad or Nasrallah, but with his own local Wahhabis."

Furthermore, at a time when Riyadh's prestige was shaken by September 11 attacks in the US, joining the camp that blamed Iran (for Tehran's support to Iraqi Shias, Hezbollah, and Hamas) became a lucrative move for the al-Saud family to regain its regional reputation through diverting attention from themselves (Yamani, 2008: 153). To sum up, Saudi Arabia's concerns towards the Shia in general does not stem from its own restive Shia population, but its very treatment of those Shias by the hardline Wahabis.

Pat Proctor (2008) also summarizes what proponents of a Shia Crescent discourse claim and analyzes those points in his article *The Mythical Shia Crescent*. Of the arguments of adherents of this discourse, most popular ones are Syria-Iran closeness, Iran's support for Shia in Iraq, and Hezbollah-Iran alliance (Proctor, 2008: 31). However, to counter these arguments, Proctor proposes that (2008: 31)

> In Lebanon, for example, the power of Hezbollah is by no means absolute, and Shia do not dominate the government. In Iraq, cultural enmity and the scars of eight years of war with Iran make an Iran-Iraq alliance unlikely. And in Syria, the government is not nearly as Shia as it might appear.

These counter-argumentations are usually ones that have been underestimated by the proponents of a Shia Crescent discourse since they serve to undermine the practicality of it.

Additionally, it is also noteworthy to cite the very own accounts of King Abdullah II of Jordan in his book *Our Last Best Chance: The Pursuit of Peace in a Time of Peril*. In this book dated 2011, the King feels the need to explain himself in order to correct misunderstandings that he caused domestically and internationally while he warned of an emerging Shia Crescent back in December 2004. The King writes (2011: 280-281):

> In those days I often expressed my concerns about the area covering the old Levant and the Fertile Crescent, an area stretching from Syria and Lebanon to Iraq and Iran. During that interview with Chris Matthews, the image of a crescent popped into my head as a good metaphor for the potential spread of Iranian influence. "If it was a Shia-led Iraq that had a special relationship with Iran, and you look at that relationship with Syria and Hezbollah and Lebanon," I said, "then we have this new crescent that appears that will be very destabilizing for the Gulf countries and for the whole region."
>
> After that interview, all hell broke loose. I was criticized by many people for being anti-Shia… The controversy illustrates some of the difficulties of speaking to the media. I was talking politics, not religion, but my comments were deliberately distorted. My concern was that some Iranians were trying to invoke sectarian sentiments to serve their own agendas, thus creating conditions that could lead to

> Sunni-Shia confrontations across the Muslim world. I accept and respect the Shia as one of the legitimate branches of Islam and strongly believe that it is not acceptable to judge people according to their faith. Shias have made an enormous contribution to Arab and Muslim culture as well as to the defense of the Arab nationalist cause, and they have been loyal to their countries, whether in Lebanon or Iraq. I never meant to suggest that they would, by virtue of their faith, automatically align with Iran —only that the Iranian government would manipulate the situation to its advantage and foment divisions. In fact, Iraqi Shia fought valiantly in defense of their country in its war with Iran in the 1980s.

Hence, as clearly indicated by the King himself years later, his discourse was all about politics, and not religious values of other people (be them minorities or majorities) in the Muslim world. The King's main concern has not been whether Iraqi, or Lebanese, or other Shias in the Middle East in particular would align themselves automatically with Iran, a fact which he himself regards unrealistic. Rather, the King has been concerned with a growing Iranian influence throughout the region, and that Iran could very well use its Shiism card as a tool in the advancement of its foreign policy.

To sum up, the period between the inception of the King's Shia Crescent discourse and the Arab Spring, much has been discussed both in academic and policy circles. By looking into various factors, this chapter explored those argumentations that are for and against the realization of Shia Crescent discourse. The supporters of this discourse underestimate the sophisticated foreign policy making of Iran, and argue that Iran could in fact blindly meddle itself with the affairs of states with Shia

populations where they are either minority or majority; that the Shia of the Middle East are destined and willing to be under the influence of Iran (whose reasons are not well-substantiated); and that Shia-majority/politically dominating states would cooperate with Iran to the extent that they would become pawns of Iran. The opponents of the same discourse, however, counter all these arguments on well-established grounds, pointing to the very differences not only within Shiism itself, but also to different factors that are at play when transnational politics are to be analyzed (such as those between Syria and Iran, or Iraq and Iran).

CHAPTER V

POST-ARAB SPRING AND AN EVALUATION OF "THE" SHIA CRESCENT

This chapter first studies the post-Arab Spring era, and the rise of ISIL, and how these incidents translated into the Middle Eastern politics and Iranian foreign policy making. Following these, the chapter continues with an evaluation of the discourse on Shia Crescent, and reviews the cases studied in Chapter 3 in order to make an analysis on the possibility of the formation of a Shia Crescent between Iran and the Shia in these countries.

5.1. Post-Arab Spring, ISIL, and Iranian Foreign Policy Making

The Arab Spring is viewed as a series of revolutionary movements by a large proportion of media and academia. However, what the Arab Spring in fact was a series of uprisings that started in Tunisia in December 2010, and with domino effect, spread to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. There have also been smaller scale protests in other countries such as Oman, Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. In all these aforementioned authoritarian regimes, main drivers behind Arab Spring mass protests have been bad economic conditions, corrupt governance, and lack of basic human rights and freedoms (Joffe, 2011).

While the aim of the protestors was to bring down their respective regimes, the protests lacked, to begin with, clear leaders who would take over in case of

regime downfalls. This is the main reason why it can be suggested that at best these movements were violent uprisings, but not revolutionary moments, at least not yet. As of 2016, the end result is an ongoing political instability in Egypt with a democratically elected president ousted by a *coup*, landing of Saudi and Gulf troops in Bahrain to subdue Shia protestors who rebelled against the government in pursuit of more political freedom and equality, civil wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, and the terrorist activities of the militant Sunni organization called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) mainly in Iraq, Syria, and Libya.

The reasons, that were mainly economic, that sparked the Arab Spring movement and the unfolding of events during the last five years reveal that the former paved the way for certain intra-societal, and state-society cleavages to come to surface. Egypt, Syria, and Bahrain are good examples of this. Once Mobarak stepped down in Egypt as early as February 2011, the free elections resulted in Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Mohammad Morsi to win as president in May 2012. Yet in November the same year, Mohammad Morsi is faced with protests as he granted himself with unlimited powers over to legislate without any judicial oversight of his acts. While this move was made with the intention to protect the committee that was in charge of drafting a new constitution from judges who were installed to power in the period of Mobarak, it resulted in July 2013 *coup d'état* leaving Morsi deposed as president.

While there have been no sectarian cleavages in Egypt, religious, leftist, and liberal factions have composed the political spectrum during the Arab Spring movement. It is argued that Morsi used his presidency to eliminate these groups that were Muslim Brotherhood's bedfellows during the uprisings (Lesch, 2014: 70). It has been this alienation that brought about divisions in the Egyptian society in the

post-2011 era. Ex-army chief Abdel Fateh el-Sisi was elected as the president in 2014, and his tenure faces severe economic problems in Egypt, however, he has not faced serious protest so far. Notwithstanding these, the immediate post-Arab Spring days have shown the existence of divisions that run deep in the Egyptian society although they have gone dormant as the revolutionary fervor has diminished.

In Syria, what has started as an uprising against the rule of Bashar al-Asad in 2011 escalated into a multi-sided and internationalized civil war in which the main actors have been the Syrian government, Syrian rebel groups (gathered under Free Syrian Army), Salafi groups, Syrian Democratic Forces, and ISIL. In addition to domestic belligerent sides, foreign states have also taken place in the civil war. While Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah supports the Syrian government, Syrian rebel groups receive support from the US, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and recently Turkey. Syrian Democratic Forces receive support from both the Iraqi Kurdistan and the US. Combined Joint Task Force that is led by the US, and aided by the Western powers as well as certain Middle Eastern countries also undertakes missions in Syria against the Asad regime as well as ISIL. The involvement of international actors in the Syrian Civil War's two opposing sides renders it both a prolonged, and in a way, a proxy war.

Whether or not Bashar al-Asad remains in power, the Syrian Civil War demonstrates that Iran - Saudi-led Sunni monarchies' rivalry on a regional scale has been taking place in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. On a broader scale, Russia and the Western powers compete to exert their influence in the region. At this point, it would be misleading to interpret Iran's involvement in defense of the Asad regime based purely on a sectarian logic. Given vast differences between Alawites and Shias, it can be asserted that sectarianism in Iran's support for the Asad regime does

not even play a single role. What Iran aims to achieve is to keep Asad in power in order to maintain its alliance with this country in a region where it finds itself in constant power rivalry with Turkey and the Arab monarchies. In other words, if the Asad regime comes to a halt, Syria is going to be dominated by a Sunni-rule, and this would be undesirable for Iran. Furthermore, Syria also serves as a channel for Iran to support Hezbollah, and hence, balance against Israel.

Bahrain is a case in which state-society cleavages are revealed in a sectarian form. However, it would be difficult to conclude the extent of the role sectarianism played in 2011 uprisings in the country given that both Western and Arab media are likely to narrate the cause of uprisings from this angle. Protests never reached a level of civil war in Bahrain. Pointing at the Shia, al-Khalifa family cracked down on protestors, banned Shia political parties in 2011, and has continued "systematic harassment of its Shia population" (UN News Centre). The US and Saudi Arabia dispatched troops in March 2011 to Bahrain to suppress the uprisings, hence adding up the sectarian element to what was otherwise a movement against the socio-economic ills of the state.

These three cases reveal that sectarianism played very little, if any, role in the Arab uprisings. The main drivers of the Arab Spring have been bad socio-economic conditions, unemployment, corruption, and government unaccountability. Coupled with the Arab Spring was the withdrawal of the US from the region in 2010. Unable to create a regional order, the US withdrawal and the following Arab Spring served as the beginning of a transition period for the Middle East. It is in this transition period in which rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia has come to surface most prominently in Bahrain and Yemen by 2014 (Hazbun, 2015: 64), and began to gain sectarian tone.

At first, Iran welcomed the Arab Spring, hoping that it would turn the regional tide to its benefit, but opposed it when similar uprisings began to inflict Syria (Dalacoura, 2013: 84). The support that Iran gave to the Arab Spring movements across the region (and opposition to one in Syria) was not based on any sectarian reason. Instead, Iranian support for the uprisings was for pragmatic reasons such as the possibility to increase its prominence in the region's affairs, challenging the status quo and regimes backed by the West, and the possibility of "strengthening of Islamist forces in the region [that could] reanimate hostility toward Israel" (Chubin, 2012: 16).

However, as Saudi Arabia and Iran have confronted each other in Bahrain and Yemen, sectarian language has been introduced to this rivalry. At this point, it is important to recall that this sectarian language has always been produced by the Sunni monarchs, and not by Iran. Hazbun argues (2015: 64) that the main reason for this is the ever-existing social, political, and economic problems in societies of the Sunni monarchies, and their desire to divert attention from these problems and to mobilize people through the adoption of such sectarian languages.

Formerly ISIL was adhered to al-Qaeda, but relations between the two came to an end in 2014 when the latter disavowed the former. Since then, ISIL has made progress in a very short time, and captured territories in Iraq and Syria. Moreover, ISIL not only aims to establish an Islamic caliphate over Iraq and Syria, but also vows to annihilate the Shia (an agenda that differs from separatist aims of other radical Sunni movements in the region) (Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 2015: 2). These are the reasons why Iran has been feeling highly threatened by the group. It also helps to explain why Tehran devotes so much energy to Iraq and Syria. In Iraq, Iran has armed and trained certain groups, and these groups are mainly Kurdish and Shia

(Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 2015: 7). By supporting actors other than the Shia, it is clear that Tehran is not following a sectarian-based foreign policy in Iraq. It rather seeks to maintain the territorial integrity of Iraq.

According to Mohammad Zarif, "ISIS is the product of two things. First is the US invasion of Iraq, and the foreign presence that creates a dynamic of resistance. Second is the feeling of disequilibrium, which has prevailed in some countries in the region since the fall of Saddam" (Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 2015: 6). By these remarks, Tehran reaffirms its discontent with the Western presence in the region, and points to the inability of the West to bring any sort of order that would install peace in the region. In the case of Syria, it is clear that there is an unfolding Saudi-Iran rivalry. On the one hand, Saudi-led camp has aided anti-Assad rebels with a further aim to counter and weaken Iran and Hezbollah (Berti and Guzansky, 2014: 28). Iran, on the other hand, supports the Asad regime to preserve its larger national and regional interests.

Considered within such a context where instability has been intensified in the region following the Arab Spring and the advances of ISIL, foreign policy of Iran has been made in accordance with its national interests and values. With the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran has adopted certain foreign policy tenets, which are reflective of not only Iranian nationalism, but also Islamic values. These tenets can be summarized as anti-Zionism, self-sufficiency, independence, anti-imperialism, and support for the *mustazafin*.[23] These foreign policy principles of revolutionary Iran are derived from the speeches, and deeds of Ayatollah Khomeini, as well as the Constitution of Iran. While these principles are self-explanatory in meaning, it is useful to briefly explain the last principle. Support for the *mustazafin* means,

[23] For a more detailed account of this analysis, see Tekin (2010).

regardless of any sectarian differences, Iran is ready and willing to extend its help to any oppressed Muslim society in the world, hence reflecting its pro-*umma* character.

To be sure, the aforementioned foreign policy principles remained largely in theory, and Iran abandoned them at different times, in different contexts. It is not within the scope of this study to elaborate on those circumstances where Islamic revolution's principles were forsaken, however, suffice it to say that military weakness, economic insufficiencies, national interests, and factional politics were among the main reasons for times when Iran pursued less ideological, and more nationalist and pragmatic foreign policies.[24]

Hence, it is in line with these foreign policy considerations that Iran supported the uprisings at the beginning, yet began to treat the one in Syria more cautiously. Still, however, Iran sought to maintain a delicate balance in its bilateral relations during the Arab Spring uprisings. Barzegar (2011) aptly discusses how national interests of Iran were at the forefront in its dealings with Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Jordan; while national interests plus ideological values were accountable for directing its relations with Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Despite the fact that Iran also sought the realization of its values in the cases of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, and feeling sympathy towards their Shia populations, Tehran still followed policies that would shun hurting its relations with the countries' respective governments, and causing Shia-Sunni rivalry (Barzegar, 2011).

After all, as Guzansky and Berti (2013: 143) argues, "the heightened Shiite-Sunni tensions are not useful to Iran –which advocates focusing attention on Israel and diverting attention from the Sunni-Shiite struggle –in its attempt to position itself

[24] Ibid.

as a regional hegemonic power." In each of these countries, Iran has certain strategic interests, which are not only about its bilateral relations per se, but also about regional security considerations that further complicates matters especially when extra-regional powers, such as the US, exert their influence.

Although Arab Spring movements emanated from reasons outlined above, Guzansky and Berti (2013: 150) discuss that:

> [t]he vaguely-defined demands of the protests, the lack of a cohesive civil society, and the obvious difficulties that the regimes face in responding to such demands, have all led to situations in which protest movements are increasingly resorting to sectarian identities as a means to promote cohesion and unity of purpose.

Instead, this study argues that this generalization of Guzansky and Berti (2014) does not apply to all countries that underwent Arab Spring uprisings, and when it does, it was only restricted to Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. These represent the two cases where, once again, demands of the Shia populations were in line with those demands made by larger society (i.e. better economic conditions, or more political freedoms).

Propagators of the Shia crescent discourse point to, to begin with, Iran, and then Iraqi Shias, Syria, and Lebanon, as the possible parties comprising a Shia alliance. Bröning notes (2008: 61) "the theory was soon taken up, however, and in the process amplified and amended. Versions have since emerged that understand the Shia crescent to constitute a geopolitical axis of Shiite power extending to Pakistan, Azerbaijan, and "the poppy fields of Afghanistan."" Among the parties that would contribute to the formation of a Shia Crescent takes also place, albeit tacitly implied,

movements such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Islamic *Dawa* Party in Iraq. This is the list of parties involved in the alleged Shia crescent as also recognized by the international relations literature (Ayoob, 2011; Barzegar, 2008; Proctor, 2008; Mahdavi, 2013). As possible targets of a Shia tier, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and perhaps Kuwait are named as regional actors who could be directly exposed to threats that a Shia stronghold would cause, while indirectly the US (and Israel as noted by authors along with the US) would also be influenced (Nasr, 2006; Walker, 2006; Ehteshami, 2006).

Looking at the Shia crescent discourse in terms of the sides, which make up the alleged crescent, except for Iran and Syria, the remaining actor is not a state, but a movement, namely *Hezbollah* in Lebanon. Such variety of actors truly necessitates Iran to formulate and follow a coherent and applicable strategy specific to each party if a Shia crescent is to become "the" Shia crescent. In a similar vein, a possible Shia crescent would be in need of different strategies as to how to balance or dominate its targets, namely Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, as well as the extra-territorial superpower, the US.

Furthermore, a possible Shia Crescent would also require not only military, but also vast economic capabilities on the part of Iran. Considering that Iran's economy is at dire straits, and only recently started to heal thanks to the lifting of economic sanctions as a result of the US-Iran talks on the latter's nuclear programme, it would be nothing other than wishful thinking to claim that Iran holds sufficient financial power to back Syria, Iraqi Shias, Hezbollah and other Shias in the Middle East.

Last, but not the least, even if the above-mentioned conditions were met, it would still be difficult to form a Shia Crescent without Shia unity in the Middle East, and the Shia will to join the formation. Chapter 3 discussed Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria in the context of the situation of the Shia under these states, as well as the Shia agendas and interests in these countries. The following pages therefore make an assessment of whether the realization of a Shia Crescent is possible or not between Iran and the Shia in these countries.

5.1.a. Bahrain

In Bahrain, majority of citizens are Shias Muslims and the clergymen were trained in the Iranian city of Qom. Shias are composed of the *Baharnas* and *Ajams*, with the latter having ties to the Al-Khalifa family. Active Shia movements in the country have been the Islamic Dawa of Iraq (started in the 1960s), the IFLB (1976), and the Shiraziyyin. The main agenda of these movements was to make certain that influence of secular Arab nationalist and Marxist opposition groups were reduced through their re-Islamization attempts. However, following the dissolution of the Bahraini parliament in 1975, the IFLB began to follow radical moves calling for the toppling of the Al-Khalifa family.

It is argued by scholars (Gause III, 1997; Bengio and Ben-Dor, 1999) that Shia movements in Bahrain has so far shared the common motive of a return to the democratic practices through which they can be treated as equal citizens with the Sunnis, and that their socio-economic difficulties are hence lifted. It appears as though the issue is both a sectarian and a non-sectarian one at the same time. This conundrum, however, is difficult to be solved given that every time Shias express

their grievances, as happened during the Arab Spring in 2011, it is taken by the government in sectarian terms, a fact which the Bahraini Shias oppose.

Overall, it can be argued that Bahraini Shias first lack unity among themselves to stand up against the Al Khalifa regime and to join a Shia Crescent given the existence of vast differences between the *Baharnas* and the *Ajams*; and second, their goal is to live under a more inclusive and equal regime. Therefore, it appears that Bahrain's inclusion in a probable Shia Crescent is rather difficult. In addition to these, as noted in previous pages, the Arab Spring uprising in Bahrain was met with decisive suppression not only by the Al Khalifa family, but also by a Saudi-led coalition. This was a message also to Iran noting that Saudi Arabia would not permit any sort of Shia uprising in the country.

5.1.b. Kuwait

In Kuwait, the Shia are not only dispersed throughout the country, but also they originate from different locations: while some of the Shia are the *Ajams* from Iran, others are the *Hasawiyyin* from Hasa in Saudi Arabia, and the *Baharna* of Bahrain. Therefore, given this ethno-sectarian multi-composition of Shias of Kuwait, and the lack of their geographical unity, it would be difficult to claim that Kuwaiti Shias could be well organized under a possible Iran-led Shia Crescent. Furthermore, Kuwait is also geographically distant to Iran, and this fact could serve as a challenging factor for Kuwaiti Shia to actively take place and contribute to a Shia Crescent. Moreover, different than Bahraini Shias, Kuwaiti Shias do not lay claim to the state arguing that they are territorial natives. Last, but not the least, Shias claimed equal representation rights and voiced this through *al-Dawa*. However, other than

this, Kuwaiti Shias do not express any intention against the Kuwaiti ruling elites. Therefore, for the reasons stated above, it would not be very realistic to expect a Kuwaiti Shia participation in a possible Shia Crescent.

5.1.c. Jordan

Perhaps Jordan is the most interesting case among other Sunni-ruled Arab countries, because while the Shia in Jordan is only a very small minority in the entire population (according to the US Department of State), it was the Hashemite king Abdullah II who voiced concerns over a possible Shia Crescent in the region. It is highly likely that the concerns of the king were based on conversions to Shiism in Jordan in 2006. Those conversions might be linked to the success of *Hezbollah* during the Israel-*Hezbollah* War in the summer of the same year, as well as the Iraqi Shia influence on Sunni Muslims in the country. King Abdullah II was concerned about the possibility of changing balances in the region while making his accusations against Iran in 2005. Still, it can be argued that the Hashemite kingdom has no solid reason to perceive extensive threat against its rule from the country's indigenous Shia population given that they are far outnumbered by Sunnis in the country.

5.1.d. Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, where Shias compose 15 percent of the total population, Shia minorities are of Bahrain's *Baharna* descendants, and not the Iranian *Ajams*. Although they are dispersed across the country, they sit on various oil field regions, and this causes an understandable concern for the Al Saud family. State-sponsored

sectarianism has still been active in the country where the ruling elite embrace *Wahabi* teaching that rejects any other interpretation of Islam, including Shiism. For the kingdom, Shias are heretics. There have been two Shia movements in the country so far, and they were OIRAP and *Hezbollah al-Hijaz*. While OIRAP did not associate itself with the regime of Iran, and even denied it due to ideological interpretations as to how to exercise Islam in state institutions, *Hezbollah al-Hijaz* adopted a view that was supportive of Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran. Both of these movements were later dissolved as a result of the rapprochement between Tehran and Riyadh.

Similar to Shias in Bahrain and Kuwait, Saudi Shias' main concern has been to gain more rights and recognition in Saudi Arabia where they could carry out their basic religious activities. Moreover, it is also difficult to conclude that Shias of Saudi Arabia are unified by any means. Following the death of Shirazi, Saudi Shias preferred to follow Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani rather than Shirazi's successors, Ayatollah Sadeq Shirazi based in Qom or Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mudarrisi in Karbala. The ultimate goal of the Shia, in a country where they have been under outright rejection from many spheres of public, economic, and political life, is to seek a place for themselves while needing a clear definition for their identification and culture. These demands were also voiced when Shias took to the streets in Qatif only to meet with violent suppression from Saudi forces back in 2011, and with the execution of Shia Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr in January 2016 (BBC News, January 2, 2016).

Thus, given these factors as well as Saudi Kingdom's economic and military power, it would not be plausible for Iran today to seek sectarian support among Shias of Saudi Arabia as part of a Shia Crescent.

5.1.e. Yemen

It was discussed in Chapter 3 that the rebellious group Houthis in Yemen belong to Shiism's *Zaydi* branch. Even though a branch of Shiism, *Zaydis* are the followers of the Fifth Imam, and the differences between *Zaydis* and Shias of Iran are vast. It is also argued that Yemen's *Zaydism* is closer to Sunni Islam than to Twelver Shiism of Iran. It is also important to note that not all *Zaydis* in Yemen are Houthis, nor do they support them.

The crisis in the country that started as a part of the Arab Spring movement in 2011 continues today. President Hadi escaped first to Aden, and then to Saudi Arabia, while the Houthis advanced into major cities and captured Sanaa, Taiz, and Aden by 2015 April. A Saudi-led Arab coalition, with the backing of the US, began military operations against the Houthis. It is claimed that Iran supports the Houthis, and Ali Shirazi, who is Ayatollah Khamanei's representative to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Quds Force, told in January 2015 "Hezbollah was formed in Lebanon as a popular force like Basij (Iran's militia). Similarly popular forces were also formed in Syria and Iraq, and today we are watching the formation of Ansarollah in Yemen." (Al Monitor). Although there is no reliable intelligence on any arms or financial support from Iran to the Houthis, the Houthis are considered as an Iranian proxy, and the above-cited remarks by Shirazi work towards confirming these considerations (Ricotta, 2016: 150). Therefore, the case of Yemen reveals that Iran has been trying to be influential over this country. However, whether the extent of this influence would culminate in the formation and aiding of a Shia Crescent together with Yemen is a difficult conclusion to make because Yemen, similar to Bahrain, serves as a battleground on which Iran and Saudi Arabia continue to challenge each other for regional supremacy. Beydoun and Zahawi (2016: 49) argue

that Saudi Arabia's viewing Iranian support for the Houthis based on sectarian affinity "illustrates yet another dimension of how sectarianism in the region provides a popularly resonant tactic, and potent state strategy, for carrying the rational interests of nation-states forward." Furthermore, it should be recalled that Houthis are *Zaydis*, but not all *Zaydis* support Houthis, and even so, *Zaydism* and Iranian Twelver Shiism are two distinct forms of the same sect. This would also complicate relations between Iran and *Zaydi* Yemenis had there been a Shia Crescent.

5.1.f. Iraq

Iraqi Shias' situation also resembles the afore-mentioned Shia populations in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia in that prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Shias had been uncomfortable under the Baath regime where they had been largely discriminated and were not given equal rights as Sunni Iraqi citizens. Harmes (2016: 20) notes that:

> After the 2003 U.S. invasion deposed Saddam and removed many Sunnis from positions of power through a process of 'de-Baathification', the Sunnis became the most disaffected group and constitute the bulk of the insurgents. Key among these are the more fundamentalist Sunnis associated with Al Qaeda and its local offshoot the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

Therefore, Iraqi Shias started enjoying considerable political power in the Iraqi parliament. Both December 2005 and 2010 elections resulted in a Shia-dominated Iraqi parliament. It is still worth noting that in December 2005 elections, Iraqi Shias were gathered under United Iraqi Alliance, whereas in 2010 elections,

defections from United Iraqi Alliance ensued the formations of State of Law Coalition and Iraqi National Alliance, under which Shias joined the elections. This can be interpreted, as there exist certain disagreements among the Shia of Iraq.

Given its geographical proximity to Iran, and 60 percent of Shia population size, Iraq-Iran relations need to be scrutinized in order to assess Iran's share in the activities of Iraqi Shias. Relations between Iran and Iraq were tumultuous until the US invasion of the latter in 2003. The issues that caused animosity between the two states were rivalry over the Gulf region, Shatt al-Arab boundary dispute, the Kurdish question in Iraq, the 1975 Algiers Agreement and the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) (Abdulghani, 2011). As Ehteshami argues (2003: 121), despite the fact that the two neighbors' relations were strained due to a number of geopolitical realities, Iran and Iraq (during the Saddam era):

> demonstrated a remarkable capacity […] for bilateral cooperation in pursuit of each of their interests in Gulf security since the end of their war in 1988. The two countries reestablished diplomatic relations, rebuilt some of their old economic ties, and broadened intergovernmental exchanges during the 1990s on the issues of war reparations, their common border, and prisoners of war.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 served as a game-changer for the course of relations between the two countries. In this regard, former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's proactive and pragmatic foreign policy focused on securing national interests of Iran in the region, expanding the country's influence in Iraq, and seeking grounds for cooperation with the US. Tehran has been cautious not to anger other regional actors such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the post-2003

period, and hence, sought cooperation with these states (Barzegar, 2010: 173), supporting the empowerment of Shias in Iraq since 2005 (Rahimi, 2011: 26), and signaled that it was willing to establish talks with the US (Barzegar, 2010: 173).[25]

In the post-transitional period that started in 2005, relations between Iran and Iraq entered into a new era when Saadoun al-Dulaimi, then defense minister of Iraq, visited Iran, and apologized from Iranians for all Saddam Hussein had done to Iran, and thus Iraq's apology opened the way for a number of trade and cooperation agreements (Takeyh, 2007: 22). Furthermore, "Tehran's primary objective was to promote democratic processes in Iraq, especially in electoral politics, and enhance ties with various political factions" (Rahimi, 2011: 27). Iran sought to actively engage itself in Iraq also through enhancing economic relations. To serve this end, the $1 billion credit for Iranian exports to Iraq in 2008 rose to $8 billion in 2010. Iranian investment in Iraq has also been significant as it mainly served to build infrastructure as well as power plants, schools, and hotels in the country.

To sum up, there are a number of factors that need to be taken under consideration in the case of Iraq with regard to a possible Shia Crescent influence. Iraqi Shias constitute a political majority in a state where they previously had never been represented. This political freedom, therefore, automatically turned into Shias' joining political competition in order to represent and defend their rights and interests. This situation can be interpreted to have given Iran a 'second chance' in order to advance its post-revolutionary goal of spreading its influence into Iraq. Both Iran and Iraq follow the *Usuli* School of Shiism, which is yet another feature that

[25] This overture was first made by Iranian President Sayyed Mohammad Khatami when he agreed for an interview in January 1998 by the CNN correspondent Christiane Amanpour. At the opening remarks of this interview; and reiterated also by Ahmadinejad's successor, Hassan Rouhani –elected in 2013, who telephoned US President Barack Obama in September 2013, thus taking the first step toward the establishment of relations with the US.

might bring interests of the two more in line. Apart from these, there is also the geographical proximity that allows Iran to extend its influence into Iraq. Having viewed the situation from this perspective, it appears possible that Iraq can be an actor within a Shia Crescent's reach. Still, however, it also needs to be remembered that Iraqi Shias have been divided among themselves as shown in the cases of 2005 and 2010 elections, and there are also secular and non-sectarian Shia and Sunni formations of political parties (i.e. Iraqi National Movement led by Iyad Allawi, won 91 seats in 2010 elections).

What can be read from this situation is that in post-conflict Iraq, formation and development of political parties are still taking place, and further splits and newer formations are possible to take place be them sectarian, secular, or non-sectarian, and non-secular ones. As discussed extensively by Harmes (2016: 22), political system in Iraq was changed "from a party-centred 'closed-list' to a candidate-centred 'open-list.'" The most important reflection of this shift is expected to reveal itself in the formation of coalitions after elections are held. In other words, "t]his change has given incentives to political parties to run individually rather than in the framework of broader lists which used to garner as many votes as possible in order to gain power" (Harmes, 2016: 23). Hence, political parties are likely to determine their agendas no longer through sectarian-based rhetoric, which serve as quick and easy mobilizers in political rallies. This would change the face of upcoming parliamentary elections in Iraq. Furthermore, although Shias constitute the majority of the population and win majority of seats in the parliament, there are many other non-Shia, non-sectarian, as well as secular groups that could work well against the influence of Iran, and its extra-territorial political goals within Iraq.

Another point which is elaborated while alleging that Iran aims to revive a Shia Crescent, and Iraq is a part of it is Tehran's continuous financial and military support for Iraqi Shia proxy groups in fight against ISIL (Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 2015: 7). For Iran, Iraq's territorial integrity has been a prerequisite for its own security since the US invasion of 2003. In this regard, viewing Tehran's support only for the Iraqi Shias would be a grave mistake as also Iraqi Kurdish (*peshmarga*) groups also receive support from Tehran in fighting against ISIL. As aptly explained by Esfandiary and Tabatabai (2015: 7):

> From Tehran's perspective, Iraq's partition into three smaller states would shift power dynamics in the region and threaten regional stability. Iraq would no longer be a majority Shi'i state with a central government friendly to Iran; this would clearly diminish Iran's area of influence. An independent Kurdistan would have implications for all three other regional states with Kurdish populations—Iran, Syria and Turkey—forcing them to recon- sider their policies towards their Kurdish regions and populations. In Iran, since 1979, systematic short-sighted neglect of minorities has resulted in Kurdish areas being underdeveloped. Iraqi partition would therefore have an impact on Iran's own Kurdish areas. An independent Sunni country would be likely to align itself with Saudi Arabia, and potentially to harbour many individuals affiliated to the former Ba'athist regime.

At this point, two inferences can be made. Firstly, while yearning to preserve Iraqi territorial integrity, Iran does not follow an ideological foreign policy, but a realist one. For Tehran, fighting ISIL in Iraq (and Syria as will be discussed below) is an indispensable part of its own national (not ideological or sectarian) interests.

While doing so, Tehran not only supports Iraqi Shias, but also Kurdish groups as well. Second, the recent opening of talks between the US and Tehran need also to be viewed from a similar angle. Although Iran signaled throughout the last two decades or so its willingness to establish ties with the US, Iran's coming to terms with the US today took place in a time and context that reflects the alarming nature of events unfolding in the region regarding ISIL. While previously condemning the presence of the US in Iraq, Tehran has shifted its stance today, and has both the will and need to work with the US (and Saudi Arabia) in fight against ISIL (Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 2015: 1). Therefore, Iran could calculate that any move in establishing a Shia Crescent as the main aim of its foreign policy would endanger its already fragile relations with the US, and would turn the currents against itself. Iran's fight against ISIL takes place through supporting both Shias and Kurdish groups in Iraq, and this is a move for its own national security.

5.1.g. Lebanon

Lebanon is a state where the state constitutionally encourages political representation along sectarian lines. Under a Christian president, a Sunni prime minister, and a Shia speaker of the parliament, Lebanon is technically a fully sectarian state with its apparatuses. The chief Shia representative organization in Lebanon is *Hezbollah*, and it won 10 of a total of 27 Shia seats in the parliament in 2009 elections (Council on Foreign Relations). This translates into almost one fourth of total parliament seats. Hence, not only political representation of Shias is strong in the country's parliament, but also *Hezbollah* is a significant party in the Lebanese political arena. In addition to this, *Hezbollah* has also its own militant group with which it had successfully fought Israel in the summer of 2006.

What makes *Hezbollah* an important player in Lebanese and regional politics owes also largely to extensive support it receives from Iran and Syria. This is also another reason why Lebanon is feared to be under the influence of a possible Shia Crescent. Taking up arms against Israeli forces that aimed to expel Palestinian militants in southern Lebanon, *Hezbollah* initially aimed to create a state with Islamic credentials akin to that of Iran. Sinkaya argues that (2007, 45):

> In spite of this solid and organic relationship, Hezbollah is not under direct command of Iran. It has developed its own financial resources during the last decade… Although Hezbollah considers Khamanei as the source of emulation, it distinguishes between religious and political issues; it resists Iran's involvement in political issues. Furthermore, Hezbollah also cooperates with Christian parties in order to strengthen its own Lebanese nationalist vision. What dominates Hezbollah's political discourse is not Shiism (sectarianism); but being Lebanese, Arab nationalism, Islamism, and illegitimate existence of Israel.

Hence, at first look, Lebanese Shias, and most importantly *Hezbollah*, demonstrate an approach that supports a possible Iranian backed Shia Crescent; however, looking into the details of this approach, it could be read that *Hezbollah* in fact prefers to operate on its own terms, with financial resources it has generated on its own, and does not desire to be under direct control of Iran. Last, but not the least, geographical distance might operate as yet another reason that would once again complicate an argument that Lebanon would emerge within a Shia Crescent given that Iran's access to Lebanon is possible only through Syria, which is going to be examined next.

5.1.h. Syria

Historically, Alawites of Syria had been the most under-represented and discriminated group up until the 1960s. Alawites ascended to power within the Baath party, yet chose to keep sectarian differences at check through following (officially declared) secular and non-sectarian state policy. Furthermore, although admitted as a sect of Shiism in the 1970s, it should be noted that there exist vast differences between interpretation and practices of Islam between Alawism and Shiism. Having noted these, claiming that Syria would back, or even take part in a possible Shia Crescent formation is also challenging for a number of additional reasons.

At first sight, relations between Syria and Iran might be interpreted, as the latter is highly influential in the former's policies. Notwithstanding this, there are a number of issues on which relations between Syria and Iran have had convergence and undergone divergence. Relations between Hafez Asad and Khomeini were well underway throughout the 1970s, and they were in the form of Asad's financial as well as training support to anti-Shah groups (including the leftist opposition groups in addition to Khomeini and his aides) since "[Musa] Sadr and Khomeini played important roles in shoring up the regime of Hafiz Asad in the early 1970s" (Ganji, 2006: 38). Hafez Asad's recognition of the Islamic revolution of Iran and his will to pursue close ties with the newly born Islamic Republic in 1979 were also based on reckoning interests of his minority-based regime. Areas of convergence between Syria and Iran back in the wake of the Islamic revolution were the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, and Syria's perception of Iran as a balancing force against Israel); Syria's ongoing ideological confrontation with the Baathist regime in Iraq; as well as economic interests (Hunter, 2010: 207; Seale 1990: 353-354).

Relations between the two actors became strained starting from early 1980s until 1997. Competition over Lebanon became visible while Asad supported Amal and Iran supported Hezbollah (Hunter, 2010: 207). In addition, Syria's backing UAE on the disputed island issues vis-à-vis Iran, and divergence between Tehran and Damascus over the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the latter's joining the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference with the anticipation of recovering its lost territories to Israel (Hunter, 2010: 207). With Syria's dismay as negotiations broke in 1997 when the Middle East peace process broke down as the Arab League called for a boycott against Israel, it moved closer to Iran. Post-9/11 can said to have drawn Syria and Iran closer as George W. Bush included the two in the "axis of evil".

Hunter notes (2010: 209) that "Throughout their 30-year cooperation, Syria has not sacrificed its Arab connection for Iran's sake . . . It has also used its relations with Iran to get financial assistance from Arab states and has enhanced its value for Arab states as an intermediary between them and Iran." However, looking at the contentious conjuncture of the post-Arab Spring environment, it can be derived that Asad regime's value for Arab states has been lower than what Hunter analyzed perhaps due to Syria's close relations with Iran.

However, Syria rather maintains a foreign policy as much independent as possible from Iran and its ideology. Given its Arab and secular credentials, Syria aims to distance itself from Iran. For instance, albeit unsuccessful, Syria and Israel held peace talks throughout the 1990s. Furthermore, Asad regime backed the secular Amal movement during the Lebanese civil war; thus, not following a kind of foreign policy that would resemble that of Iran, which supported Hezbollah. This act also shows that Lebanon is not an area of convergence, but rather, an area of divergence where Iran and Syria situate themselves in rival positions. Moreover, as also noted

above, geographically, Iran needs a Syrian corridor route to extend continuous influence into Lebanon, hence Lebanon serves as a leverage point for Syria in its relations with Iran.

Overall, a number of factors ranging from state ideology and politics to wider regional foreign policies of Iran and Syria, an analysis in favor of Syria's taking place in a Shia Crescent becomes difficult to make. Furthermore, ongoing civil war and violent actions of ISIL in Syria has continuously been condemned by Iran, and the latter extended its support to Syria. The Iranian support for the Asad regime recently, however, is not based on a commonly shared ideological affinity. Unlike other Sunni extremist movements that posed relatively smaller threat to Iran (i.e. *Jaish al-Adl*), ISIL "seeks the annihilation of Shi'is and the establishment of an Islamic state in accordance with a fundamentalist reading of sharia law" (Esfandiary and Tabatabai, 2015: 2). When viewed from this perspective, main drive behind Iran's support for Asad's regime stems rather from its own security concerns within a tumultuous region, and not because Iran wants to create a Shia Crescent.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This study has put in question the existing structures of power and knowledge pertaining to "the" Shia Crescent discourse, which was produced by Jordan's king Abdullah II. Departing from this discourse created in December 2004, the thesis has adopted a critical geopolitics approach. Ontologically, critical geopolitics contests the existence of an objective reality that is out there, and notes that without paying attention to factors that form a particular context, the reality cannot be discerned. Hence, this thesis studies and argues that reality changes across time and space just as the contextual realities of 1979 and 2004 are not the same either for King Abdullah II (and other Sunni-led regimes in the Middle East) or for Iran.

This is not to suggest that it is impossible to theorize on any social phenomena. Critical geopolitics warns that one should not have the luxury to 'take the world as it finds it' (Cox, 1986: 208). Hence, critical geopolitics offers means to developing a more in-depth approach to studying such phenomena. Social issues, such as a Shia Crescent formation, are not products of mere geographical considerations, but they bear ideological and political elements in them. Therefore, such an in-depth approach enabled this thesis to elaborate the concepts of Shiism, crescent, and sectarianism. How understandings and representations of these concepts have evolved over time, and what they came to mean for a Shia Crescent have also been discussed. By so doing, this study aimed to move beyond the visible realities.

While doing this, it also undertook problematizing efforts so as to understand security concerns of states studied in scope of this thesis, as well as identity structures and marginalized actors. Hence, geographical contexts are concepts that are scrutinized through activating the afore-mentioned questions with the aim to understand what is the "objective" knowledge in this Shia Crescent discourse produced by King Abdullah II. This is also the reason why this study has shunned expressing "Shia Crescent" idea through the article "the", but rather it refers to it as "a" Shia Crescent. Just as how the article 'the' changes the meanings attributed and endows one with a permanent position, 'a' removes that position and renders it open to discussion, comprehension, deliberation. When ideologies and interests are naturalized and accepted as given and constant knowledge, then discourses such as "the Shia Crescent" are produced, and this study aims to serve as a challenge against capitalizing on such creations of power-knowledge nexuses which could in return further marginalize not only Iran, but also Shia populations in the region and render conflictual those Sunni regimes with their considerable numbers of Shia citizens.

Agnew and Corbridge note (1995: 48) "the practical geopolitical reasoning of political élites is the link between the dominant representations of space and the geopolitical order of dominant spatial practices." It is these dominant representations of space and spatial practices upon those spaces that consider politics in a manner that attempt to reduce them into monolithic structures, disregarding the differences, and drawing on the commonalities for all-encompassing generalizations so that states' interests become justified through such legitimized policies. The attempted Shia crescent discourse in practical geopolitics does exactly the same. It attempts to melt Iran, Syria, Shias in Iraq and Lebanon within the same pot and disregards their intra-sectarian differences; domestic policy issues and national interests that keep

them together or tear them apart; and ethnic differences, while it rather appears (given the Sunni-led Arab regimes domestic and international issues) that this discourse rather serves as a justified disguise in pursuing the interests of the Arab monarchies for the continuing rivalry for regional dominance.

Considering Iran's regional influence and reach, it is easy to conclude that a Shia Crescent would be aspired and even realized had Tehran wished to do so. However, a closer look at certain factors has revealed that this is not the case. This thesis has attempted to scrutinize those factors in the previous four chapters. It first studied geopolitics and critical geopolitics so as to carve out how to make a critical geopolitics analysis on the issue at hand.

Classical geopolitics successfully homogenizes global space (Agnew, 1998: 113). It offers heuristic ways of seeing and interpreting the world. Making sense of the world through geopolitical heuristics, in return, renders differences of local geographies and people living in them less or even unimportant. The end result is the disappearance of spatial and temporal variations, and the production of knowledge that is claimed to be the reality. In order words, classical geopolitics produces power through claiming ownership to a kind of reality that is seen through the eyes of particular people.

Classical geopolitics authors discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, namely Mahan, Ratzel, Mackinder, Haushofer, and Spykman, all have their own unique interpretations of world politics and survival within that arena. However, the single most striking common point of all these men lies in the strategies that they suggest: that states need to acquire territory or resources, and hence, power. To sum up, this study came to view classical geopolitics as serving two ends: one is to produce

knowledge, and second is to produce actual policies. In what followed, a study of critical geopolitics took place in the same chapter, and it has guided this thesis to stimulate an inquiry into the phenomenon studied. Critical geopolitics can be seen as an attempt to deconstruct what classical geopolitics constructs and makes homogenous. In this sense, it is indeed a "problematizing theoretical enterprise" (Ó Tuathail, 1999: 107) that delves into the concepts, terms, and representations produced by classical geopolitics. At its final point, it is an attempt to unravel that knowledge produced by classical geopolitics and interpret practical implications, as well as their consequence.

It has been this inquiring method that culminated in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Chapter 3 has been an attempt to make genealogies of the terms "crescent" and "Shiism". Early uses of the term "crescent" emerged in the 19th century. In this century, the term is used predominantly in two, non-political, meanings. On the one hand, "crescent" is attributed to areas where Islam was exercised as a religion, and on the other hand, it is used to mark a geographical place that was productive for agriculture purposes, therefore taking the prefix fertile. With the turn of the century, the term begins to take its place within the geopolitical theories of Mackinder and Spykman, and geographically their usage of the term is not restricted to Muslim areas. It also covers non-Muslim places such as Eastern Europe, or India.

Following the end of the Cold War, "crescent" is related to Islam, and the popular usage of the term in the literature became "Islamic crescent". In all those views of the concept of Islamic crescent, we come to see that it has been given a negative connotation, affiliating Islamic crescent with terrorism, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the changes that took place in the international system in the same decade. Moreover, in majority of the afore-cited studies in Chapter 3, the

Islamic crescent is depicted as an area as though it is homogeneous: starting from one geographical place and ending in another, and as though all the territories and entities on them share identical characteristics pertaining to Islam. What differs in the literature as to the usage of the "crescent" after around 2005 is that the concept began to be used for underlining sectarian rift within Islam, and the claims that a geographical area this rift has created. In this sense, the term "Shia crescent" has been used popularly in the literature since the interview of King Abdullah II of Jordan in December 2004.

'Shiism' as a concept has also undergone different interpretations over time. With the advance of the Islamic movements in the 1960s, Shiism has also come to be seen, in the eyes of the Sunni Arabs monarchies, as a defiant political sect whose agenda is to challenge and if possible, topple their own regimes. As far as domestic and regional politics are concerned, being a Shia in Sunni dominated states came to be interpreted as though those Shia minorities were always ready to fall into the sphere of influence of Iran.

Of 1.3 billion Muslims in the world, around 15 percent are Shia, which corresponds roughly to 150 million Shia; majority of Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain are Shia, and approximately 70 percent of total Gulf Persian states' populations belong to this sect of Islam (Haji-Yousefi, 2009: 115). Within Gulf States, Shias "primarily reside on oil-rich areas that constitute about 75% of the world's oil resources" (Haji-Yousefi, 2009: 115-116).

According to Helfont (2013), imperial border-demarcation prior to the First World War has been responsible for the geographical Shia-Sunni divisions in the Middle East –while the Sunnis largely resided in the Ottoman Empire, the Shias

comprised majority in the Iranian empires ruled by different Shia dynasties. As Helfont (2013) briefly summarizes:

> […] many of the Shi'i areas of the former Ottoman Empire were found in geographically isolated territories or in border regions, which allowed them to resist homogenizing imperial trends. Thus, today, Arab Shi'is are found in the mountainous terrains of northern Yemen and southern Lebanon as well as along the old imperial boundaries between the Ottomans and Iranians in southern Iraq and on the western shore of the Persian Gulf. The clear demographic and political center of Shi'ism today remains Iran.

As a result of this geographical dispersal, Shias in these different locations, ever since, have grown apart from each other as discussed in the chapter 3. In addition to this, Shiism has also evolved one from being a part of a cosmopolitan culture, which indigenized learning and humanism at its core, to one that has needed to:

> […] compete with Third World socialism and anticolonial nationalism for the soul and trust of millions of disenfranchised masses to stand and oppose their tormentors […] And yet, as on battlegrounds extended from Iran to Iraq to Lebanon, Shi'ism is identified with violent uprisings and militant resistance against an imperial domination of the globe (Dabashi, 2011: 24-25).

One reason for this tremendous as well as unfortunate transformation can be seen as Shias' being repressed under the regimes that they have been living in the post-colonial era. Put it differently, in countries where this study covers (other than

Iran and Alawite Syria), Shias have systematically been treated in a discriminatory manner with regard to exercising not only their religious freedoms, but also their very beings as citizens in countries where they live. Shia psyche has been mostly under Sunni regimes' domination, a fact that, by extension, has come to bear considerable impact on such transformation of Shia identity. Yet, it is a requisite to remind what the Shia of the Middle East wish to achieve is not toppling regimes of their respective states (not even through expostulating "an imperial domination of the globe" as Dabashi has put it), but seeking certain social and political; ergo economic gains for better conduct of their daily lives.

With insights interweaved from Chapters 2 and 3, Chapter 4 goes on to study the discourse of King Abdullah II of Jordan. The King's discourse on a Shia Crescent was an important turning point in academia since it attracted the attention of numerous scholars, who either criticized this discourse or supported it. Hence, this chapter has elaborated these two lines of stances toward the Shia Crescent discourse, and laid out the reasons written in the literature why such a discourse is possible to be realized or not. This chapter is important because it shows how the King's discourse turned into both practical and formal geopolitics discourses.

Hence, an analysis of the pro- and anti-Shia Crescent thesis literature revealed certain factors that are also found in the cases revisited in Chapter 5. To begin with, proponents of a Shia Crescent discourse determine the invasion of Iraq as their baseline, and note that Iraqi Shias, now free from any political repression, are going to align themselves with Iran. Furthermore, the same line of literature also views Shiism as a monolithic structure, and suggests that the transnational identities render Shiism as a significant bonding element. This literature also points out Iran's amicable relations with Syria's Asad regime, and the support Tehran gives to

Hezbollah. However, this literature overlooks many other factors, which are discussed in detail in the literature that argues against a Shia Crescent thesis. To begin with, this literature does not view Shiism as a monolithic sect within Islam, and stresses that transnational Shia identities make it difficult for Shias to come together. Furthermore, it is also argued that the discourse of a Shia Crescent emerged not because of Iran's policies, but because of the power gap that emerged in the region, the geopolitical issues, as well as the deteriorated image of the Sunnis in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks. Eventually the same line of literature also discusses that Iranian foreign policy is relist, pragmatist, and even nationalist, and Shiism is used as its soft power, but not for cultural ends; instead, for political ends.

Finally, Chapter 5 included the post-2011 Arab Spring context into the picture, and offered an evaluation of the possibility of formation of a Shia Crescent. With the Arab Spring, certain leaders of the region were toppled, and others' authorities have been questioned. In this period, it was thought that Iran could be a state that would benefit the most from the power vacuum that emerged in the Middle East and North Africa regions. Hence, this chapter also attempted to understand whether Iran would use Shiism as a primary foreign policy goal to be achieved, or only as a foreign policy tool. The conclusion of this thesis has been one that Iran is a state with a high record of experience in its history, and this experience would prevent her from succumbing into adventurous policies such as spreading Shiism around the region, or aiming to form a Shia union of any formal or informal type. If anything, Shiism could only be a card for Iran to be activated as a tool in its foreign policy making.

The cases covered in Chapter 3 have been revisited in this chapter for analytical purposes. Eventually, this study has reached certain conclusions that work

negatively towards a Shia Crescent. In Bahrain, Shias lack unity, and when they voice their concerns towards the regime, it is only to live in a more inclusive state, and not to topple the regime or to align themselves with Iran. Similar accounts have been found also for Kuwaiti Shias. Saudi Shias also demand more political rights, and religious rights where they can carry out their religious activities. In Yemen, Yemeni Shias, namely Zaydis, receive Iranian support, however it is still difficult to reach a conclusion that is suggestive of a Shia Crescent because of two reasons. First, Yemen is a battle ground on which Iran and Saudi Arabia contest each other, and second, Zaydism and Iranian Shiism are two distinct forms of the same sect. The case of Iraq revealed too many connections between Iran and Iraqi Shias, and at first glance, it appears as though Iranian influence over Iraqi Shias aims to create a Shia Crescent starting with Iraqi Shias with whom the geographical proximity also renders relations easier to conduct. However, when studied in more depth, the case reveals that Iraqi Shias lack unity among themselves; Iraqi political formations are still taking place; and eventually, Iraq's territorial integrity is vital for Iran. In the case of Lebanon, Hezbollah is known to be recipient of Iranian support, however, it is also vastly argued that Hezbollah resists going under direct Iranian influence. Furthermore, Lebanese politics are not defined by sectarianism (or Shiism, to be more precise), but rather Lebanese and Arab nationalisms, Islamism, and illegitimate existence of Israel (Sinkaya, 2007: 45). Eventually, this thesis studied Syria, and demonstrated that Iran and Syria have multiple issue areas where their foreign policies diverge. Moreover, Syria is a secular Arab country, a fact that further divides Iran and Syria, and Lebanon is an area of competition for Iran and Syria. An amalgam of all these factors make it difficult to conclude that a Shia Crescent may be formed between Iran and either of these countries.

To conclude, for Iran, exportation of Shiism has never been a direct foreign policy goal. Instead, Iran vowed in its revolution to defend and protect all Muslims regardless of their sects. It is true that Iran uses Shiism to form alliances with certain groups or countries in the region. Hezbollah, Yemeni Houthis, Bahraini Shias, the Asad regime, and Iraqi Shias are good examples of this. What is important to distinguish at this point is that Iran uses its Shia credentials in order to influence the course of events taking place at a regional scale, and not attempting to create a Shia Crescent.

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