

IS IRANIAN SHIITE EXPANSIONISM A THREAT TO THE ARAB COUNTRIES?

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I. Introduction

1. Foreword

On 6 March 2009, Rabat severed diplomatic relations with Tehran. This kind of measure is extremely grave and is taken comparatively rarely in relations between states. It followed from a crisis which flared up three weeks earlier when a key Iranian leader stated that Bahrain 'belonged' to Iran. Far from being anecdotal, the break between the two Muslim countries shed light on the destabilising role which Iran has played vis-à-vis the Arab world for the past thirty years. Not content with seeking to promote its political pawns in Iraq or in Lebanon and going well beyond the determination to build a 'Shiite crescent' in the Middle East under its leadership, which was sometimes attributed to it in the past, ever since the accession to power of Ayatollah Khomeiny Iran has pursued an aggressive policy towards all the Arab countries.

The Shiite movement now is present as one of the unavoidable features of the geopolitics of the Near and Middle East. These past few years we have witnessed a veritable renaissance of this branch of Islam, which was in the minority and marginalised for centuries. Its renewal raises questions, fears and concerns. The advent of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the arrival in power of the Shiites in Iraq (where Iran meddles daily in the domestic affairs) in a context of interfaith warfare, the Shiite support to terrorist groups such as Hamas in Gaza, the pro-Shiite 'entry card' of Iran in many moderate Arab countries are all facts which feed the now justified fears. The break in diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Islamic Republic offers an interesting textbook case but it is one which can be understood only in the context of a global approach.

The colossal sums allocated by the regime of the Mullahs to support their pro-Shiite diplomacy (with a good part of the Arab world) and to ensure if not supremacy, then at least the strengthening of the Shiite axis, no doubt enable the Islamic Republic to make its voice heard, a voice which claims to be that of an 'Islam of the oppressed.' Everywhere in the world Tehran tries to bring together both the anti-imperialists and the anti-Americans as well as

those who are opposed to the 'corrupt regimes' which govern the region. In a word, the country of the Mullahs now plans 'to shine in the world like a beacon of resistance.'¹

We shall try in the course of this study to prepare an 'inventory' of the Shiite movement in the Muslim world and to analyse the weight and the influence which the Islamic Republic of Iran exercises over its communities, but also over the non-Shiite Arab states. We shall also attempt to understand how this influence is organised.

Iran as we know it today – the Islamic Republic of Iran we should say – entered the community of nations in a brutal manner. One recalls the hostage taking at the American Embassy in Tehran the day after the Revolution and Iranian arrogance during the crisis over Western hostages in Lebanon during the 1980s and 90s. One will also note the Shiite rites – at times violent – which are an assault on Western public opinion. The involvement of the Iranian regime in support of terrorism no longer has to be proven. The unacceptable statements of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad regarding the Holocaust and his desire to 'wipe Israel off the map' have shocked the world. And one cannot, to be sure, avoid mentioning the deplorable situation of human rights, the fate reserved for women, homosexuals, and political dissidents, the strict application of *Sharia* and the nuclear dream, pursued at any price, which put all of present-day Iran in a disturbing light.

The Iran of yesterday and of today is experiencing a pivotal year in 2009. This country is considered as central given its geographic situation. With the arrival of the Obama administration in the White House, a new diplomacy could be born between Tehran and Washington. Meanwhile in the beginning of 2009, they celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution which brought Ayatollah Khomeiny to power.

The chancelleries of the whole world hoped that the presidential elections of the month of June would bring to power a 'moderate,' someone keen to restore the image of Tehran in the world and to reestablish 'normal' diplomatic links with the international community. But nothing came of it and the protests which followed the contested reelection of Mahmud Ahmadinejad ended in a challenge which was savagely suppressed. All the fears are once again justified. And the question remains: will 2009 be a pivotal year for Iranian expansionism in the Arab countries?

2. Some successes, many open questions

Iran occupies a strategic location at the geographic junction between the Arab world, the Turkish world, the Indian sub-continent, Central Asia and the Caucasus world. The first Shiite Islamic state in the world,² the country is also proud of its Persian past and possesses some specific things which other nations of the region would dream of having: major fields of oil³ and gas⁴, large reserves of water and a steady growth of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Ever since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran has been the subject of many judgments, of a multitude of studies, thousands of books, tens of thousands of articles, but paradoxically this country nonetheless remains poorly understood and is the target of many prejudices which have been magnified by the present crisis over the nuclear question. These discussions may be explained as much by the domestic course which the Republic has followed as by the central position which it occupies in a complex and volatile region, as well as on the world level. To begin with, there are the considerable energy riches of Iran, as well as its strategic geographic position: as the number two world exporter of oil, owner of the second largest

¹ Fars News Agency, 'Iran's Foreign Policy Based on Wisdom, Resistance,' 20 March 2008.

² 80 % of the population of the country is Shiite, while in Iraq, for example, they constitute 60 to 65 % of the population.

³ Iran holds 11% of the world reserves of petroleum.

⁴ Iran holds 16% of the world gas reserves.

reserves of natural gas, the link between Asia and the Middle East, bordering the Caspian and the Persian Gulf,⁵ the country is at the centre of the crucial energy issues of this 21st century.

Next, the nature of the regime shapes the critiques and the discussions. Ever since 1979, the Iranian regime has been decried, considered as an expression of arbitrary and totalitarian government.

Even if Iran is not a democracy – the manipulation of the elections of June 2009 have once again reminded us of this –, the reality is nonetheless more complex. Far from being a monolithic state rallying behind the figure of its spiritual leader, Ali Khamenei, and President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, Iran is the theatre of bitter domestic fights between reformists and conservatives but also within these two most visible currents.⁶ Notwithstanding the criticisms leveled at it, the Iranian regime also has the characteristic of basing itself on popular support via consultations which have been regularly organised since the Revolution, and this is something which is exceptional in the Middle East. Finally, a population of 70 million inhabitants – of whom 80% are illiterate – makes it the most populous country in the region, with a GDP placing it once again in second place in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, alongside these strengths and successes, Iran often projects a negative image in the world, tarnishing or reducing to zero what could be positive factors of change. Since 1979, the country has been suffering from a flagrant lack of investment in its energy infrastructures which oblige it to import most of its requirements for fuel despite the enormous energy resources at its disposal.⁷ Furthermore, under embargo and banned by nations for its support to Hezbollah and for its suspicious nuclear programme, Iran is working hard to find its place in a Middle East which is in total turmoil. Finally, despite the regular holding of elections at all government levels, Tehran does not apply the international conventions with respect to human rights which it has ratified, and it does not hesitate to throw in prison or even execute anyone opposing its policies or any criminal found guilty of a ‘crime against Islam,’ even going as far as executing minors. In 2008, 346 persons condemned to death were executed, of whom eighteen, perhaps more, were aged less than eighteen years old at the time when the deeds for which they were charged took place.⁸

The country has also been at the centre of a major diplomatic crisis since 2003, following the revelation of the existence of suspicious nuclear sites at Natanz and Arak despite the ratification by Iran of the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and despite its having approved the principles of the IAEA.⁹ Six years of negotiations have not made it possible to understand the nature of the Iranian nuclear programme because the extent of concealment was widespread. Iran, of course, has the legitimate right to develop nuclear energy insofar as it is committed to use it for civil purposes.¹⁰ Thus, a great many questions exist and they highlight the risks of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East.

⁵ Denis Bauchard, Clément Therme, *‘L’Iran, une puissance énergétique (ré)-émergente*, [Iran, a re-emerging energy power] Paris, IFRI, 2007, p. 5.

⁶ Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud, *‘Iran between sanctions, destructions and negotiations,’* in *L’Iran, plaque sensible des relations internationales* [Iran, sensitive plate of international relations], La Revue internationale et stratégique, n° 70, Paris, Dalloz, 2008, p. 82-83.

⁷ Clément Therme, *‘L’Iran, exportateur de gaz ?,’* [Iran, exporter of gas ?] Paris, IFRI, 2008, p. 3.

⁸ Amnesty International, *‘La situation des droits de l’Homme dans le monde,’* – [The situation of human rights in the world] - rapport 2009, ÉFAI, 2009, p. 237-241.

⁹ International Atomic Energy Agency.

¹⁰ Jean-Claude Chagnollaud, *‘Iran and the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT)’* in *L’Iran réel – revue française de géopolitique* n°5, [The real Iran – French review of geopolitics no. 5] Paris, Ellipses, p. 34.

II. Portrait of a 'revolutionary' regime

1. The Iran of the Mullahs

In order to understand where we are today with the regime of the Mullahs, we must show the linkage between the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the contradictions within the Islamic nation and the present state of Islam inside this nation.

With the overthrow of the constitutional monarchy (genuinely reforming but authoritarian) of the Shah, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 established an Islamic Republic, the first of its kind in modern history. Without any doubt, the revolution found its origins not so much in the 'abuses' of the regime as in the fierce determination of the Shiite clergy to preserve its interests while protecting its immense land holdings. Far from advertising its wish to establish a religious state, the clergy had the intelligence during the growing disturbances which marked the year 1978 to ally itself with the Left, the Extreme Left and the 'Progressive' intellectuals. This broad front enabled it first to remove the Pahlavi dynasty and then to bring to power Ayatollah Khomeiny on 11 February 1979.

The impact of the revolution and of the establishment of the Islamic Republic was enormous within the Muslim world, where certain anti-establishment currents saw in it the first political success of Islam in centuries. The Mullahs very quickly understood the aura which surrounded them and chose to export their revolutionary project. But the supremacy of Sunni Islam in the neighbouring countries, as well as the excesses of a bloody revolution marked by ruthless suppression of ancient elites close to the government led inexorably to Tehran's isolation.

2. Frustrated ambition for the *Umma* as a whole

From the beginnings of the Islamic Republic, certain American and European analysts saw in it the *Deus ex machina* of a possible worldwide Islamic revolution. But Iran could not be the spearhead of this movement for one simple reason. Shiism enjoys such a majority in Iran that it is taken to be the leader of all Shiite communities in the world (wrongly in the eyes of some). But Shiism is not only a minority within Islam generally, representing between 12 and 15% of all Muslims. It is also considered as schismatic, a deviant sect, even heretical by the rest of the *Umma*, the community of believers.

It is nonetheless true that the Iran of Khomeiny has provided grounds for the fears of the Americans by doing everything to avoid presenting the Islamic Revolution as purely and exclusively Shiite. This determination was even clearly expressed in the Iranian constitution.

The 107th principle [article] of this constitution thus defined '*The Grand Ayatollah Imam Khomeiny*' as '*Supreme Guide of the worldwide Revolution of Islam [and] founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran.*' One of the three '*Conditions and qualities of the Guide*' (109th Principle) is to have the '*fairness and virtue necessary to guide the people of Islam.*' The 11th principle meanwhile stipulates: '*According to the prescription of the verse: 'Certainly this community which is yours is a unique community and I am your Lord. Therefore, worship Me.' All Muslims constitute a single community and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is obliged to set its general policies on the basis of the alliance and of the union of Islamic nations and to deploy other efforts in order to realise the political, economic and cultural unity of the world of Islam.*' Finally, the 16th and last paragraph of the 3rd principle of the constitution states that the foreign policy of the country is developed: '*On the basis of*

*the criteria of Islam, the fraternal commitment to all Muslims and the unreserved support of the destitute of the world.*¹¹

'World revolution,' 'unique community,' 'union of Islamic nations,' 'fraternal commitment to all Muslims': each of these expressions evidently supports the fear of seeing Iran embody a model which could serve the entirety of the *Umma*. One could not say more clearly that in the view of the Imam Khomeiny and his adulators, the Islamic Revolution of Iran clearly had the calling to go beyond the frontiers of the country and to form the avant-garde of a worldwide Islamic Revolution, a bit in the way that the Soviet Union of Stalin saw itself as the avant-garde of the worldwide 'proletarian masses' in the march towards communism.

But no constitution is stronger than reality. The Iranian Revolution took place in the heart of the Shiite world and it could not get rid of this original distinction. The reality was thus what we have stated: being a minority and often detested, Shiites could not claim to brandish the standard of the revolt intended to rally all Muslims. The pious wishes of Ayatollah Khomeiny could do nothing about that, nor could the writings in marble of the constitution.

The worldwide revolutionary ambition of Tehran thus had a long way to go, even if the revolution aroused undoubted enthusiasm in the Muslim street. To be sure, we witnessed more or less massive conversions of Sunnis to Shiite Islam, essentially in the Arab communities living in Europe. We also saw certain extremist Sunni groups look sympathetically upon the new regime. These tendencies were rather important in any case in arousing concern among the Moroccan, Algerian and to a lesser extent Tunisian authorities, as well as in certain European countries. But they remained marginal and as Olivier Roy emphasises: *'The failure of the revolution to export itself in a sustainable way outside the frontiers of Iran is explained [...] by two factors: it was unable to seriously get around the opposition between Shiites and Sunnis and remained profoundly Shiite [and] the revolution did not achieve unanimity in the Shiite milieu, even if the majority of non-Iranian Shiites felt solidarity.'*¹²

Overall, the Sunni world did not follow the movement. As for the non-Iranian Shiite world, it trembled, to be sure, and certain subversive organisations rejoiced and felt reinvigorated by the success of the revolution. But, as we shall see further on, it was only in one country, Lebanon, that Tehran succeeded in exercising its influence on the Shiite community massively and durably.

3. A revolutionary regime

In order to understand the present situation, it is not enough for us to specify what the Iranian regime was not and is not or to delve into its failures: we also must define, before we go much further, what are the ambitions of Iran and what is the nature of its regime. Then we can better appreciate its foreign policy.

The Iranian regime has the dual characteristics of being revolutionary and Shiite. And it is these things in a geographic and political environment which is often extremely conservative (as are Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies, Iran's immediate neighbours) and Sunni (in any case, at the level of the authorities in place). The Iranian 'Revolution' of 1978 resembled more, in fact, a counter-revolution than a revolution in the sense that the regime of the Shah which was committed to modernity and social change while two of the profound motivations

¹¹ One can read the complete text of the Iranian Constitution (adopted on 24 October 1979, entered in force on 3 December 1979 and revised on 28 July 1989) on the site of *Jurispolis* at the following address: http://www.jurispolis.com/dt/mat/dr_ir_constit1979/dt_ir_constit1979_index.htm

¹² Olivier Roy, *'The impact of the Iranian Revolution in the Middle East,'* in *Les mondes chiites et l'Iran* (sous la direction de Sabrina Mervin) [The Shiite worlds and Iran (under the direction of Sabrina Mervin)], Paris, Karthala-Ifpo, 2007.

of a part of the clergy to commit itself in the camp of those who wanted to overthrow the dynasty – a commitment which was decisive and without which the regime of the Shah would not have been beaten – were to oppose change and to preserve their economic interests. The agony of 1978-1979 thus does not mark definitively anything more than the final victory of the *Black reaction* over the *White Revolution*. But the profoundly reactionary regime (as seen, for example, in the situation of women and the general attitude of the Iran of the Mullahs with respect to mores) which established itself in Tehran in 1979 adorned itself in the showy rags of a revolution on the (non-exclusive) grounds that it was born in blood and brought down a repressive government but also, to be sure, because it was the bearer of a plan for society which marks an open and total break with everything which preceded it.

All the speeches of the regime appealed to this revolutionary phraseology and to its customary clichés: exalting and mythologising the struggle which led to the ‘liberation,’ exaltation of the ‘martyrs’ and the internationalist commitment. Moreover, it is not just a matter of appearances and slogans. Shiite Islam is definitely, in part, a religion of the destitute.

4. A Shiite and messianic regime

The Iranian regime is Shiite. That is a truism which should be remembered. Behind it lies something very important if one wishes to understand the psychology and the modes by which contemporary Iran functions and those who direct it.

Shiism was born in the 7th century, in the tumultuous period which followed the death of the Prophet Mohammed. Ali, his cousin and son-in-law (he was the spouse of Fatima Zahra, daughter of Khadija, the first wife of Mohammed), was the fourth successor of Mohammed (after Abu Bakr, Omar Ibn al-Khattab and Uthman Ben Affan). Since his authority was challenged, he had to go into battle in 657 in Siffin, on the banks of the Euphrates, against Muawiya ibn Abi Sufu-yan, governor of Damascus (Muawiya was the descendant of Omayya, the great uncle of Mohammed). After fighting which resulted in 40,000 deaths in two days, Ali, whose forces were numerically inferior, accepted an arbitration which ruled against him and this ended, three years later, in 661, in his murder by one of his former warlords who condemned the arbitration to which he submitted.¹³ But his supporters then regrouped in a ‘Party of Ali’ (*shī’at Ali*, hence the term ‘Shiites,’ derived from the Arabic word used to designate ‘partisans,’ who agreed that only a descendant of the prophet or member of his ‘house’ could lead the Muslims). They appointed Ali’s son, Hassan, to succeed him, but he could not impose his rights and tried to join with Muawiya, who, for his part, founded in Damascus the dynasty of the Omayyads (descendants of Omayya). It was taken badly: the master of Damascus had him poisoned. Ali’s second son, Hussein, then took over from his brother Hassan and broke with the Omayyad Caliph.

On 10 October 680 (10 Muharram 61, according to the Muslim calendar) the battle of Karbala took place in which a powerful Omayyad army confronted an army of Hussein consisting of 72 men and children. The event obviously turned into a massacre. Hussein, two of his sons aged 10 and 1 and all of their companions were killed. The only male to escape the slaughter was Ali, another of Hussein’s sons, aged 22, who was ill and did not take part in the battle. The battle of Karbala is one of the founding events of the Shiite movement and marks the definitive separation between Shiites and Sunnis. For this reason, it is commemorated by

¹³ This was the first split within the Shiite movement, which experienced many of them in the course of its history: some radical supporters of Ali insisted that he had been appointed Caliph by the will of Allah and thus could not put this selection in question by accepting a human arbitration. This is how the *Kharidjite* current was born. Especially puritanical, this wing of the Shiite movement was in turn divided into many families, the *azraqites*, the *najadat*, the *ufrites* and the *ibadites*. Nowadays one finds Kharidjite communities from Algeria and Djerba (Tunisia), to as far as Oman (where they are in the majority) and Zanzibar.

the holiday of *Ashûra* during which the faithful whip themselves to the point of bloodshed to remember the massacre. Then there are forty days of mourning lasting till the *Arbaïn* (literally the 'fortieth') which gives rise to new excesses of sorrow. Shiism was thus born largely in the drama of the battle of Karbala, but its entire history was a succession of dramas: after Ali, Hassan and his brother Hussein, eight Shiite Imams (each the son of the preceding one) went through persecution, prison and often death for their beliefs. Finally there was the 12th Imam, Muhamad Abu Qasim, born in 868. We don't know much about him, historically speaking, other than that he lived in hiding for a large part of his childhood and that everything possible was done to conceal his birth from spies and oppressors to spare him the dire fate of his father.

Nonetheless, he died in 874, the same year as his father, no doubt murdered in his turn. But this new fatal blow was too cruel for the Shiites, who then created the myth of the *hidden Imam* or, more precisely, the *concealed Imam*. The legend was spread that Muhamad Abu Qasim lived hidden somewhere, no doubt in a grotto. The Shiites believe that for 65 years he continued to communicate with the faithful by means of four successive representatives called the *Portes (gateways)*: this is what was called the '*Lesser Occultation*' (874-939). It was followed, in 939, by the *Greater Occultation*: starting from this date, no one represented the Imam. The Shiites who live still in the *Greater Occultation* believe however that the 12th Imam is still alive. For them, he is the *Mahdi*, (meaning *the man guided* by God) whose return to Earth will mark the end of the *Greater Occultation* and the establishment of a reign of justice and peace, hence, no doubt, the end of time and the last judgment.¹⁴

Shiism is not united. Acknowledgement of the line of twelve Imams and of the incarnation of the *Mahdi* in the twelfth of them defines what is called *Duodecimal Shiism*, present in Iran, in Iraq and in Lebanon, among other places, and now the majority current. But other branches of Shiism also exist: *Zeydism* (present today in Yemen), *Septimanic Shiism* or *Ismaelism*, itself divided into many trends, as well as the *Kharidjite* current.

Although Shiism was the state religion in Persia as from the 16th century, in the rest of the Muslim world it essentially underwent persecution. Considered as heretics, the Shiites were forced to conceal their faith. This constant repression was obviously a restraint on the social development of their community (outside Iran) and pushed many Shiites to take refuge in regions which were more or less inaccessible, often in the mountains. Born of the rejection of arbitrariness, the Shiite movement quite naturally built its identity, generation after generation, as a religion of the excluded members of the population and of pariahs.

Persecution also obliged the Shiites to develop the art of *taqiya* (circumspection) which consists in concealing from other Muslims the fact that one is a Shiite by pretending in public to observe the Sunni rites. As for a plan of society, we will not speak about it at length since it is obvious: the ayatollahs in power in Tehran have built an *Imamat*, the Shiite equivalent of the Sunni *Caliphate*.¹⁵ Society is guided and directed by religion and everything follows from reading the Quran and from the interpretation which the clergy make of it. Not all Shiites share this vision of the world; but, unfortunately, it is clearly the vision of the masters of Tehran.

¹⁴ One should note that the Sunnis also believe in the *Mahdi*, but say that he has still not been incarnated and will appear on Earth several days before the end of time.

¹⁵ On the Sunni notion of the Caliphate, one should refer in particular to two works by Claude Moniquet: '*La Guerre sans visage*,' [*The War without a Face*] Paris, Michel Lafon, 2002, and '*Le Djihad, histoire secrète des hommes et des réseaux en Europe* [*Jihad, the secret history of the men and networks in Europe*], Paris, Ramsay 2004.

5. The attempt to export the revolution

In the period immediately following the Islamic Revolution, Iranian diplomacy was characterised especially by a tendency to 'export' its revolution, above all to the Arab world. In the years which followed, Tehran supported in particular an attempt to overthrow the government of Bahrain and gave assistance to terrorists who were organising attacks on Western embassies in Kuwait in 1983. Tehran probably also went much further, since for many years in a row the Iranian secret services organised disturbances during the pilgrimage to Mecca, disturbances which degenerated to the point where they caused bloody rioting in 1987. This tendency was aggravated by the war against Iraq. The entire Arab world supported Baghdad with the exception of Syria, where the minority in power is Alawite and is thus linked to Shiism.

At this time, a new slogan appeared in the Iranian streets: '*the road to Jerusalem passes through Kerbala.*' This expression can be understood variously. In the first place, it means that the destruction of Israel remains the number one objective of Iran but that this can only be achieved once the Shiites are 'liberated' (Kerbala being one of the most important holy places of Shiism). Another possible interpretation is that Israel can only be defeated once the Arab regimes which have betrayed the Palestinian cause have been overthrown.

But in 1989, after criminal prevarication which caused human loss on both sides of the Shat-el-arab, Khomeiny finally accepted a cease-fire. Abandoning the final and definitive victory which in any case was beyond its reach, Tehran henceforth steered its policies based on the principle of realism which led it to prioritise its national interests. When the Iraq of Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, Tehran observed a sort of neutrality which was relatively favourable to Baghdad: to be sure, Iran did not want an Iraqi victory, but neither did it want a total defeat which would have signified sole United States control over the region and the possible dismantling of Iraq. If it seems that the Mullahs do not want a strong Iraq, they want still less for it to be too weak and thus unstable, which could result in an upsurge of Sunni extremism and also above all a return of the *Kurdish question*. In fact, Kurdistan extends over the territory of four countries (Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria), but nearly 39% of its land surface (195,000 km²) is situated in Iran, where it represents approximately 12% of the total national territory...

Export of the revolution, at the time when it was still news was done not only via 'traditional' diplomacy but also by means of myriad organisations and committees which evaded state control and came under the purview of the religious authorities. This export apparatus was also very close to the security services and the Revolutionary Guard. Far from obtaining the expected results, these manoeuvres, which were at times rather crude, essentially had the effect of persuading Iran's Sunni neighbours that they must be careful with it like the plague. Not only did the revolution fail to expand, but it found itself encircled and isolated. In addition, except in rare cases, this agitation did not elicit any response in the Sunni street: in Bahrain just as in Mecca or in Kuwait City, it was the Shiites who were mobilised, used and manipulated like tools. The Iranian Revolution wanted so much to pass for an 'Islamic' revolution but found itself reduced to what it was in reality: a purely Shiite movement.

Only one country allowed Tehran to experience some success from its aggressive policies: Lebanon, where there were the special conditions of civil war, political under-representation of the Shiites and Israeli occupation of the south of the country – and here Hezbollah, nearly completely put together by Tehran and enjoying Iran's unfailing support, managed to influence the local political life in a substantial manner (and continues to do so).

6. The security apparatus, international vector of the revolution

Alongside the religious hierarchy, the military was not left untouched. Unlike nations such as Turkey and Pakistan where the political authority of the armed forces is recognised constitutionally, the Iranian situation is more vague. With the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the powerful Army of the Shah fell into the hands of the ayatollahs and, after a bloody purge, it was marginalised.¹⁶

The Islamic Revolution's own security apparatus was put in place beginning in 1979 but in a certain disorder. A number of elements of the SAVAK (the Shah's security and intelligence services) were incorporated into the new service, as the regime did not want to go without their talents, but it seems obvious that these transfers concerned only very few of the high level officials: many dozens of high ranking officials of the SAVAK figure among the military officers identified as '*henchmen of the Shah*' and executed in summary fashion in the first months of the revolution, i.e., between February and September 1979. In addition, out of a total staff estimated to have been 15,000 persons, around 3,000 officials were the victims of reprisals, removed from their duties and imprisoned. It is still extremely difficult to have a clear vision of the extent of the 'transfers' between the security services of the old regime and those of the new regime.

The first head of the SAVAMA¹⁷, the new intelligence service reporting to the Supreme Guide, was none other than General Hossein Fardoust, an associate of the Shah of Iran with whom he had been close from their years together in school in Switzerland beginning in 1931. Trained by the British secret service, Fardoust enjoyed the full confidence of the monarch: when he was the deputy director of SAVAK, he was named to head the *Imperial Inspection*, a force of two hundred officers especially charged with the task of monitoring the directorate of the service. This hardly prevented Fardoust from rallying the new regime to the Revolution. On the contrary: we can imagine that the information which he had gathered over the years on his own colleagues was the key to gaining acceptance. At the end of 1979, Ali Tabatabai, who had been press secretary in the Iranian Embassy in Washington and now directed an organisation opposed to the new regime in exile, the *Iran Freedom Foundation*, declared that '*Many members of the old SAVAK belong to the new organisation, and with the exception of the Bureau Chiefs, the whole organisation still seems to be intact.*' This was true to such an extent that Tabatabai defined the SAVAMA as a '*carbon copy*' of the SAVAK, with the same distribution of the same personnel within its offices charged with the same assignments as in the times of SAVAK. Even so, Hussein Fardoust, did not remain for very long at the head of SAVAMA: in December 1985, he was accused of being a Soviet agent who was duly paid by the KGB and was stripped of his duties. He died two years later, apparently from a heart attack.

But as from 18 August 1984, the intelligence services underwent fundamental reorganisation under the leadership of Mohhammad Rayshahri, at the time the president of the Revolutionary Court of the Armed Forces. He was raised to the rank of Minister in his own right over what was now called VEVAK¹⁸ (in our day, VEVAK is frequently shown under the English acronym, MOIS standing for *Minister of Intelligence and Security*).

¹⁶ Ahmad Naghizadeh, '*Soldiers and politics in Iran*,' Défense nationale et sécurité collective, janvier 2008 [National Defence and Collective Security, January 2008], Paris, p.130

¹⁷ An Iranian acronym standing for *Sazeman-e Ettela'at va Amniyat-e Melli-e Iran*, Organisation for Intelligence and the Security of the Iranian Nation.

¹⁸ Iranian acronym for *Vezerat-e Ettela'at va Amniyat-e Keshvar*, Ministry of Intelligence and National Security.

Just like *SAVAMA* in the past, the *VEVAK* is placed under the direct authority of the Supreme Guide. It can only be directed by a *mujtahid*.¹⁹ Rayshahri, who was to become the First Minister of Intelligence, drew attention to himself by disarming in the summer of 1980 a coup d'état in the making. The plot of Nojeh developed in Army and intelligence circles, apparently under the inspiration of Chapour Bakhtiar, who had received the support of King Hussein of Jordan and of Saddam Hussein. Later he played a rather important role in the discovery of another coup d'état, directed this time by Sadegh Ghotzadeh.

From the time of its creation, the *VEVAK* has not only been a central instrument in the repression of all organised opposition and of all intellectual dissidence in Iran, but also a tool used to hunt down and murder opponents who took refuge abroad. Some of these abuses have been criticised in Iran itself under the direction of the 'reformer' Mohammad Khatami : in the struggle against the most conservative fringe of the clergy, President Khatami created a commission of inquest charged with the task of casting light on many dozens of murders of opponents committed within Iranian borders. The affair degenerated into an open political crisis when Khatami used it to force the resignation of the Minister of Intelligence who had been imposed on him by the conservatives, Qorbanali Dorri Najafabadi.²⁰ The involvement of the *VEVAK* in the base deeds of the regime and in the assassination of opponents has never been denied. That has been so whoever was in charge of intelligence.²¹

If surveillance of opponents in exile is crucial for the regime, then as an official German report underlines: *'The Iranian intelligence service wishes to obtain information as quickly as possible on the activities of the anti-regime organisations... The reason for this fear is that the reputation of Iran abroad can be tarnished by anti-regime propaganda of the opposition which reproaches the Iranian leadership for massive and permanent violations of human rights and the opposition in exile might [nda: by its actions] win influence over domestic affairs.'*²²

In the end, it is the *VEVAK* which provides surveillance of the officially recognised religions in Iran (like Christianity and Judaism), as well as the repression of the religious minorities which are not recognised and considered to be heretical, such as Baha'is.

7. Berlin and Paris, centres of the *VEVAK* in Europe

The *VEVAK* is thus not content to be a simple service of intelligence and internal security: it occupies a central role in the gathering of intelligence required for actions of elimination and of terrorism carried on abroad by the regime and frequently lends its support to killers charged with these murders, even when they are not directly linked to the special services. Thus, in many concrete cases it has been proven that the arms or explosives used by the killers as well as the instructions or money was given to them by agents of the *VEVAK* in the country where they had to act, at the same time as intelligence on the habits of their targets. In order to carry out this mission which the regime considers to be essential, the *VEVAK* has deployed many hundreds of its intelligence officers in the embassies and consulates of Iran across the world.

¹⁹ A *mujtahid* is a member of the clergy who is able to make a ruling based on a personal interpretation of an Islamic point of law.

²⁰ The latter later became State Prosecutor of the Islamic Republic.

²¹ Between 1984 and 2007, five ministers of intelligence succeeded one another at the head of the *VEVAK*: Mohammad Reyshahri , Ali Fallahian, Ghorbanali Dorri-Najafabadi, Ali Younessi and finally Gholam Hossein-Ejehei.

²² *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, Annual report for Protection of the Constitution, 2000*, page 232.

The Iranian Embassy in Bonn was long considered by Western intelligence services to be the nerve centre of Iranian espionage in Europe. The one which later was opened in Berlin shares the same nefarious reputation. The choice of Germany as its principal operational base owes nothing to chance: Germany harbours the largest community of the Iranian diaspora in Europe, and, therefore, the largest concentration of opponents to the regime. But there is more to it: despite the atrocious methods of the VEVAK and its proven involvement in supporting international terrorism, the Federal Republic of Germany has not hesitated, since the start of the 1990s, to sign agreements on intelligence sharing with Tehran.

Thus, on 7 and 8 October 1993, Ali Fallahian, at the time Minister of Intelligence, was officially welcomed in Berlin. To the great displeasure of a number of German politicians but also of such foreign capitals as Washington, London and Jerusalem, which accuse the Germans of rolling out the red carpet to the *'manager of Iranian terrorism.'* It should be said that Germany thus broke with the policy of isolation decided upon by Europe, which has wanted to make any progress in its relations with Tehran conditional upon the raising of the *Fatwah* against Salman Rushdie and improvements in the domain of human rights. To tell the truth, there is nothing astonishing in the position of Berlin: the Federal Republic of Germany was and remains to this day one of the best advocates of Tehran on the international scene. As the principal trade partner of Iran, Berlin has till now often opposed the adoption of sanctions it considers too painful against its Persian friend.

Facing a scandal, the German authorities tried to posit the idea that this visit had a purely humanitarian objective: to talk about the fate of foreigners detained in Iran. This version was at the time put in doubt by the very serious magazine *Spiegel*, which did not hesitate to criticise it as a *'pure lie,'* emphasising that the cooperation between the FRG²³ and the VEVAK was extremely close and that many Iranian intelligence officers had undergone training courses lasting many months in Germany. To tell the truth, the fact that Germany assumed expenses to receive Fallahian was still more shocking given that this visit came several weeks before the opening of the trial of an Iranian and several Lebanese accused of having murdered, in 1992, several Kurdish leaders in a restaurant in Berlin. The German prosecutor's office had formally accused the VEVAK of being the originators of these murders, which had been prepared on the third floor of the Iranian Embassy in Germany.

The Germany Secretary of State in charge of intelligence, Bernd Schmidbauer, did what he could to minimise the importance of this visit, but its programme, made public by the German press, leaves no doubt whatsoever as to the very special importance which this trip had in the view of the German side. On 6 October at 19.00, Fallahian was received in the Chancellery for an official dinner ; the next day he visited the BKA²⁴, and then, after a tour of the city of Cologne, the BfV²⁵, before returning to Bonn to be received there in the Chancellery. In the evening, finally, he flew to Munich to visit there the BND. We now know that at least four times in the course of these official meetings Ali Fallahian asked his German hosts to stop the legal action being taken against the assassins of the Kurdish leaders.

If the German intelligence and security services could in this way compromise themselves with their Iranian counterparts, it is obvious that they were knowingly acting in phase with their government. And, in fact, the lead came from on high. Several times during the 1980s, Tehran set about things directly in Germany : by making explosives intended for attacks in other European countries pass by there (including France), by having Hezbollah kidnap German citizens in Beirut and by assassinating in cold blood and premeditated manner its opponents who were refugees in Germany. But none of this ever altered the superb optimism of the German leaders, who always thought it was better to close their eyes to these 'incidents'

²³ *BundesNachrichtenDienst*, the German foreign intelligence service

²⁴ *BundesKriminalAmt*, German Federal Police.

²⁵ *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*, Federal Office of Protection of the Constitution, Counter-espionage and the domestic security service.

rather than risk compromising by ill-considered reactions the commercial exchanges which have made the FRG the number one trading partner of Iran of the Mullahs.

These excellent relations do not prevent Iranian intelligence from feeling perfectly relaxed in Berlin, as we hear from German counter-espionage: *'One of the pillars of the Iranian intelligence service in Germany is the Iranian Embassy in Berlin, where many intelligence officers work under diplomatic cover. Some officers operating from the embassy but also from general staff recruit persons for espionage activities in Germany, transmitting to them their instructions and receiving their reports in writing, by telephone or via the Internet.'*²⁶ Physical meetings are limited insofar as possible in order to better protect the security of the local agents and their Iranian handlers and, when it becomes necessary, *'they absolutely must take place in a third country [a country other than the one where the agent carries out his duties and the officer is posted] or in Iran.'*²⁷

At present, while Germany is continuing to play a central role within Europe for the Iranian intelligence apparatus, the operational capabilities of the VEVAK in France have also been strengthened. The Iranian diplomatic mission in France is thus charged with intelligence assignments which go beyond the borders of the Hexagon and can extend into neighbouring countries including Belgium, which is host to the main European institutions and to NATO.²⁸ One will also note that the Scientific Counsellor of the Iranian Embassy in Paris is a post which is often held by an intelligence officer charged with industrial and scientific espionage. He performs this function for the entire European Union with the exception of Great Britain. In 2006, a half-dozen intelligence officers from the VEVAK thus coordinated many intelligence operations across all of Europe from their location on the Avenue d'Iéna, a stone's throw away from the Champs-Élysées.

8. Substantial resources for effective services

The VEVAK today comprises some 20,000 civil servants divided into sixteen main Directorates and a certain number of specialised Offices. The three main Directorates are those for *External Affairs*, *Intelligence Abroad and Liberations Movements*, and lastly the *Security Directorate*.

External Affairs oversees all the other departments of the VEVAK and is more particularly responsible for operations conducted abroad against the organisations of the opposition ; it is under the direction of Mohammad Reza Iravani, the 'number two' of the Ministry who has been mixed up in all the abuses of the regime since the 1980s. *Intelligence Abroad* is devoted to the more classical operations of intelligence gathering, but also maintaining contacts with local terrorist movements. Finally, the department of *Security*, contrary to what its name might indicate, is concentrated also on offensive actions conducted essentially outside the Iranian frontiers. A dozen other directorates share the more customary assignments of an intelligence service, such as counter-espionage, intelligence via technical means and protection of official communications. Operations taking place in the two countries bordering Iran are often directed from regional Offices which report to the directorate of External Affairs and are based not far from the borders.

Since 1987, the VEVAK has had its own school, the Imam Baqer University, where its staff is trained. Still more important, the service manages its own prison, at Evin, a detention centre with a sinister reputation where, for many years, opponents, 'saboteurs' and other 'spies' have been savagely tortured and sometimes executed. The international reputation of the

²⁶ *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 'Annual report, 2005, on the Protection of the Constitution,'* page 274.

²⁷ *Idem, 2002 report, page 217.*

²⁸ Dr Ali Ahani, who was ambassador to France in 2007, had previously been posted in Belgium. This was his second tour of duty in Paris since he had already been ambassador there from 1988 to 2003.

Evin prison was further tarnished when the Iranian-Canadian photographer Zahra Kazemi was detained there in June 2003 after having photographed the families of imprisoned students who demonstrated in front of the building. According to many sources – including the testimony of the Iranian doctor and jurist who examined her body and then asked for political asylum in Canada – Zahra Kazemi had been raped and beaten. She died on 11 July 2003 in the hospital of a military prison.

It is nearly impossible to determine the budget of the VEVAK. On the one hand, this budget is decided outside of any parliamentary control. It is the subject of an annual negotiation between the Minister of Intelligence and his counterpart at Finance. But in addition, it can grow considerably through contributions coming from secret funds allocated to the Office of the Supreme Guide or to the Presidency of the Republic. More than 50% of the value of property seized by the Ministry during its operations within Iran (for example, buildings belonging to convicted opponents) is passed along to the budget of the Ministry.

Aside from its officers posted in the central administration or placed under diplomatic cover abroad, the VEVAK, like any other self-respecting ‘offensive’ intelligence, has a multitude of structures capable of harbouring its Officers without official cover (*Non Official Cover* or NOC, to use the Anglo-Saxon terminology). These range from commercial Iranian companies active in the domain of hydrocarbons or transport right up to cultural associations, phony dissident movements or just companies created abroad. These various entities procure not only covers for agents and operations of the VEVAK, but can also make it possible, when they are profitable, to finance certain networks or furnish necessary logistical support (supplies, flats, vehicles, means of communication) to operations directed from Tehran.

Many dozens of structures of this type exist today in Europe. Certain agents of the regime have created as many as three or four associations and as many commercial companies as needed. These officers recruit their agents especially in the organisations of opponents whom they are charged to monitor as we learn from German counter-espionage experts: *‘In most cases, the recruitment effort is made when the targeted person makes a visit to Iran. On this occasion, the service exercises strong pressure on the targeted person, using, among other devices, the threat of reprisals against their relatives still living in Iran. Those who do not come to Iran are approached by telephone from Iran.’*²⁹

And one should not forget, of course, that the Ministry also has plenty of other possibilities to camouflage its agents: they may get themselves recruited as local agents of embassies or foreign companies in Iran, then request immigration to the countries concerned; or they may pass themselves off as journalists, employees of *Iran Air*, students or businessmen. And VEVAK does not concentrate all its efforts just on the opposition in exile, even if this remains one of the *bêtes noires* of the regime. It also engages in more traditional activities which can function quite well. While most of them remain unknown to this day or cannot be cited for a number of reasons, we nonetheless can recall several notable successes of Iranian intelligence.

In June 1986, an administrative secretary in the diplomatic unit of the French Prime Minister in Hôtel Matignon was questioned by the DST (Directorate of Surveillance of the Territory) which had been watching her for several months. Martine X.³⁰, who was in her 40s, took to an Iranian ‘friend’ residing in Germany and using the operational alias of Mohamed Ansari, some confidential defence documents which she had been tasked to archive or destroy. Her interesting comings and goings between Paris and Frankfurt had attracted the attention of the French special services. Mohamed Ali Hansari lived in Frankfurt, where he represented

²⁹ *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2004 Annual Report of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution*, page 259.

³⁰ Twenty one years have passed since then. It must be understood that we will not cite the last name of the person involved and that we have changed the first name.

an Iranian oil company but he seems above all to have used his seductive talents to recruit single and vulnerable women as paid agents of Iran. This technique is as old as the world itself, but it was used at the time by the intelligence services of the Soviets and their allies, often with success.

In Germany in May 1992, a federal civil servant was indicted for having transmitted to Tehran diplomatic telexes coming from various German embassies in the Middle East. Much more recently, we note the arrest and indictment in December 2006 of a corporal serving with the British forces in Afghanistan, Daniel James. The case is far from being minor since the soldier, of Iranian origin, was the personal interpreter of General David Richards, commander-in-chief of the NATO expeditionary force. Other cases of this same type took place in Canada or other developed countries where the networks of the *VEVAK* are especially active in the deployed by Tehran to obtain the technologies essential for its nuclear programme but also for the development of its missile systems.

The *VEVAK* apparatus has nonetheless gone through a recent crisis: it seems in fact that the ascent of Mahmud Ahmadinejad to the presidency in 2005, pushed a certain number of experienced officers linked to the reformist Khatami to fear reprisals which might be directed against them and to make moves accordingly. To be sure, in the past twenty years, the Ministry of Intelligence has witnessed other crises as well, but the defections came at a bad moment, when the regime was passing through a period of acute paranoia. Since 2006, the arrests of 'foreign spies' accused of having wished to gain information about Tehran's nuclear programme have grown considerably. The best known case is that of Hossein Mousavian, the former ambassador of Iran to Germany and member of the team of Iranian negotiators until 2005. Another celebrated case is that of the Iranian-American university instructor Haleh Esfandiari, who was suspected of being linked to a network aiming to overthrow the regime. Other cases which have received more or less media attention have affected citizens of Canada, China, Sweden, as well as Iranians accused of working for the American or Israeli intelligence services. In March 2007, many journalists were criticised by *VEVAK* for having '*taken foreigners' money to publish articles contrary to the interests of National Security*,³¹ and they were incarcerated, in turn.

The most surprising manifestation of spy mania which seems to have ravaged the *VEVAK* organisation was no doubt the *arrest* in July 2007 of some fifteen... squirrels which, according to the official news agency *Irna* '*were transporting espionage material belonging to foreign agencies*'. We don't know if the cute rodents were detained in the Evin prison, but one may fear the worst, especially if they had Jewish features, which would undoubtedly have proven their belonging to the *MOSSAD*...

9. The *Pasdaran*, the military wing of the regime

The regime was not satisfied just to inherit the intelligence services of the former regime and transform them. It also built an entirely new security apparatus which is its own: the *Pasdaran*³², or *Revolutionary Guard*.. The *Pasdaran* may be compared with what the SS was for the Nazi regime. Here as well, what we are talking about is a purely ideological army which duplicates official services of the state and in case of serious problems will be the last defence wall of the government – its veritable state within a state. Created on 5 May 1979 and reporting directly to the Supreme Guide, the corps of *Pasdaran* today has its own terrestrial army, air force, navy and a specialised unit charged with operations abroad: the *Force al-Qods*.

³¹ Dépêche AP, 5 March 2007.

³² The official name of the *Pasdaran* is *Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Islami*: Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution.

However, it would be wrong to believe that the *Corps of the Revolutionary Guard* was built in opposition to the *Artesh*, the regular army: it began, in fact, by compensating for the regular army's weaknesses before its growth was encouraged by an army which drew all the benefits which it could extract from the existence of this force.³³ Resignations, desertions, forced retirements and summary executions had greatly weakened the framework of the *Artesh* which was then Islamised thanks to the ideological and political Directorate which was created in its midst. However, it turned out to be impossible to make the regular army into a purely ideological tool capable of serving within the frontiers as well as defending the borders. That is how the *Pasdaran* came into existence.

In the beginning, the corps of *Pasdaran* numbered barely 10,000 men, but war made its staff balloon out enormously: from 50,000 fighters in 1982 to 150,000 in 1983, then 250,000 in 1985 and, finally, 450,000 in 1987. The *Pasdaran* distinguished themselves especially during the war against Iraq, training and sending off to the slaughter whole battalions of young adolescents who underwent minimal military education and who served as the cannon fodder of the *Artesh*, when they were not purely and simply sent to enemy mine fields to open a passage for the regular troops. The first head of the *Pasdaran*, Mostafa Chamran Savei, was a kind of 'professional revolutionary' born into a modest Tehran family who turned to terrorism after receiving an engineering degree in the United States. He took part in the training and establishment of various groups of terrorist cells in the Middle East (including in Egypt, in Lebanon – where he was one of the founders of the Amal Shiite militia, then of Hezbollah – and in Syria) before returning to Iran at the start of the Islamic Revolution. Named as Minister of Defence and special military adviser to Ayatollah Khomeiny, he headed up the *Pasdarans* from the day of their creation and he died in battle on 21 June 1981³⁴.

The *Pasdaran* have changed over time from the time of their birth, following two distinct but complementary paths: military, of course, with Savei and his two successors, but also political, with Mohsen Rafighdoust, a curious figure who was not an obvious candidate to play one of the leading roles in politics. Thrown out of primary school for unruliness, Rafighdoust was no stranger to the prisons of the Shah when he worked within the *Islamic Coalition*, a party which brought together religious officials and the bazaar merchants. He earned a living selling fruit behind a stall in the wholesale market of Tehran where he said he built up many debts – before seizing his chance in February 1979, at the age of 39, during the return of Khomeiny: he drove the car which took the Ayatollah from the airport to the place of his first speech and was then named as head of his personal body guards before being propelled to the post of Minister of the *Revolutionary Guard*.

The year 1987 was a turning point for the *Revolutionary Guard*, who were initially seen as an undisciplined force, difficult to command and thus to use and good only to be employed domestically in operations of repression or to be launched, in the context of the war with Iraq, in quasi-suicide operations and those where the rate of losses would in any case never have been sustained by more classic units. While the war was becoming permanent and the country was bled white and was isolated and the army was cut to pieces, the sacrifices made by the *Guard* convinced the masters of Iran it had better things to do than waste them in hopeless clashes. In 1988, the *Pasdaran* were totally reorganised, given heavy equipment and new command structures.

10. A *Pasdar* network which controls large segments of society

Collaborating closely with the army, which had long pleaded for professionalism in their corps (the two entities met daily within a joint command headquarters), the *Pasdaran*

³³ See, in particular, Daniel Byman, Shahram Chubin, Anoushivaran Ehteshami and Jerold D. Green: *Iran's security policy in the post-revolutionary era*, Rand Corporation, 2001.

³⁴ The successors of Mostafa Chamran were Mohsen Rezaï (1981-2004) today Secretary of the Council of Discernment, and Yahya Rahim Safavi, who remains in this post as we write.

benefited however from a 'competitive advantage' which was totally inaccessible to the *Artesh*: not content just to provide elite warriors who were fanatically devoted on the front lines, the *Guard* were indeed able to use their force within the country to rally society and provide backbone to the economy of war. Thus, while the country was the victim of an international embargo and was forbidden to procure the weapons it needed, the *Pasdaran* started up its own factories producing arms. These factories produced in particular the mini-submarines used for operations in the Gulf, mines and also copies of the Chinese *Silkworm* anti-ship missiles.

Little by little, successes won both abroad and domestically enhanced the influence of the *Guard* who, beginning in the late 1980s, were consulted more and more often in setting the general strategy of the regime.

Like everything concerning the Iranian security apparatus, there are no credible and verified details regarding the exact structure of the *Pasdaran* and their mode of operations. Nevertheless, it is certain that their influence remains considerable. Their devotion has indeed enabled them to occupy a special place in the Iranian security galaxy. First of all, the leadership of the corps of *Guard* is extremely stable: the number of directors and high officers of the *Pasdaran* are known since the 1980s and come to a couple of dozen, all of which reinforces still more the cohesion of the machine. The investment of the *Pasdaran* in key sectors of the economy – arms, first of all, but also electronics and hydrocarbons, then import-export – has augmented their power still more, because the *Guards* who are at the head of these enterprises or in their senior management retain close relations with their original unit. Thus an extensive and very flexible network of relationships forms, passing from the military and security sphere to technologically advanced industry and business all the way over to the political world. It should be remembered that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is a former *Pasdar*.

But as soon as you take up the question of numbers, everything becomes fuzzy. It is believed that in 2005 the manpower of the *Pasdaran* numbered between 130,000 and 250,000 men distributed among dozens of units spread across the country. Experts suggest that their navy has nearly 20,000 men. It controls a flotilla of rapid patrol boats, many of them built to Swedish design and equipped with powerful *Volvo* engines which make them especially high-performance, with sea-to-sea missiles and light artillery – as well as naval frogmen. Created at the start of the 1980s and considerably reinforced in 1987, this force was especially used during the Iran-Iraq War to lay mines in the Persian Gulf and the Straits of Ormuz in order to prevent or at least harass the shipping of oil tankers which had just taken on Iraqi crude. It was one of these mines which, in July 1987, exploded upon contact with the Kuwaiti tanker *Bridgeton*, flying the American flag and escorted by the *US Navy*. On 27 July 1987, the commander of the *Pasdaran*, Mohzen Rezaï, who was received by Khomeiny at his private residence, rejoiced that *'the prayer of a billion Muslims has been answered.'*³⁵

The little that we know about the background of the person responsible for this attack, the *brother* Mohamad Alai, commander of the naval base of the *Pasdaran* set up at Bandar Abbas on 26 April 1987, it is especially representative of the profile of other senior officials of the *Revolutionary Guard*. Aged 43, Alai was a supporter of the Islamic Revolution from the very first day. At the start of the 1980s, he was put in charge of operations of propaganda and intelligence in various Gulf Emirates. In the summer of 1987, he commanded 1500 men and a fleet of 40 fast patrol boats.

During the underhanded war conducted against the oil tanker convoys, the navy of the *Pasdaran* was more present and more effective than the regular navy. Much more recently, it

³⁵ AFP dispatch dated 27 July 1987, 16.20.

was naval units of the *Guard* which took fifteen British sailors hostage in the *Shatt-el-Arab* in March 2007.

One should mention the fact that the *Pasdaran* had a setback at the end of the winter of 2007 which could turn out to be serious: the defection of General Ali Reza Ashgari, who disappeared under incredible circumstances in February 2007. After being sent on an assignment in Syria, he went to Istanbul, where the Iranian Embassy had reserved a suite in his name at the hotel *Ceylan Intercontinental*. Once arrived in Istanbul, he said that for reasons of security he preferred to move into the Hotel *Guilan*, where he left his luggage before disappearing slightly after 18.30. The regime quickly dispatched an investigative team to Turkey, stating loudly that the general had been either kidnapped or murdered. In fact, neither was the case: Ali Reza Ashgari had taken the precaution to discreetly get his family out of Iran in the days preceding his voyage to Damascus, thus sparing his wife and children the unenviable fate which awaits those close to defectors, all of which clearly indicates that he knew he was leaving on a one-way trip.

General Ashgari was not a newcomer. After having served for a long time in a post in Lebanon where he supervised the activity of Hezbollah, he returned to Tehran where he was particularly in charge of production of short and medium range missiles before, as sources close to the opposition tell us, he became busy with certain sensitive procurements within the context of the nuclear programme. For three years he also headed the *Force al-Qods* (see below), the 'international' department of the *Pasdaran*. When he was Deputy Minister of Defence until 2005, was Ashgari a 'local agent' (an agent recruited by a hostile service who kept his position so as to be able to deliver intelligence) for many years, as many sources, including Israeli, state?

Involvement by *Mossad* or the *CIA* has been mentioned, one after another, but within the intelligence community we hear rather insistently that it was in fact the British SIS which was behind this operation. In any case, the defection of such a high level person is always a hard blow for the institution which experiences it. Obviously it will not be fatal for the *Pasdaran*, but it will cause a lot of harm and certainly oblige them to modify the organisation chart, to suspend or halt operations under way, to recall agents from abroad and to change the methods of communication and the codes. In a word, there will be lost months just when Iran is short of time. Without taking into account the stress and the doubt which a defection introduces into the mind of each person: are there any other moles? Are there any other betrayals under way or in the making? In the given case, General Ashgari was not alone, because among the *Pasdaran* just as in the *VEVAK*, the ascension to power of Mahmud Ahmadinejad – even if he was a 'former member of the house' – prompted several desertions.

11. The *Force al-Qods* : tool of the *Pasdaran* abroad

But in the framework of this study, it is above all the activity of terrorism and subversion of the *Pasdaran* on the international level which commands our attention. These especially secretive operations of the *Revolutionary Guard* are carried out via the *Department of External Security and Intelligence* and the *Department for External Operations* of the *Pasdaran*. These two committees of the *Pasdaran* are among other tools, though certainly they are most important ones held by the *Force al-Qods*.³⁶

The *Force al-Qods* was created in the 1980s and brings together especially well trained elements of the *Pasdaran*. It fought on the Iraqi front during the 'Imposed War' but rapidly was directed towards other tasks, namely to help the regime to export the Islamic Revolution. This organisation is even more secretive than the *Pasdaran* and both its operation and its resources are covered by a thick veil of shadow. While its headcount is secret – the press most

³⁶ Al-Qods is the name, in Arabic, of the city of Jerusalem. The Persian name of the *Force al-Qods* is *nirui-e-quds*.

often cites fantastic numbers ranging from 3000 to 50,000 members – , the most recent estimates by Western intelligence services to which we have had access put the number at ‘*several thousand men,*’ without doubt between 2,000 and 5,000 (but certainly not more than 10,000 if one considers what we today take the whole of the *Pasdaran* to be) including at least one half based permanently abroad.

We also know that apart from a *Department of Intelligence* belonging to it, the *Force al-Qods* (whose headquarters was set up in the premises of the former Embassy of the United States in Tehran) is probably organised around eight Directorates, each devoted to a part of the world or to a more or less consistent geopolitical ensemble: the Western countries (United States and Europe); Iraq; Afghanistan, Pakistan and India; Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan; Turkey; North Africa (including Egypt and the Sudan); the Arabian peninsula and finally the former Soviet republics.

Many hundreds of *Pasdaran* belonging to the *Force al-Qods* have long been present in the Bekaa plain in Lebanon, where they train the Hezbollah forces, around Baalbek, and they organise transfers of arms to this movement, especially across Syria. Many hundreds of others are also present since 2003 in Iraq, where they assist certain Shiite groups, including Moqtada al-Sadr’s *Army of the Mahdi*. Several of those it has sent out were arrested in Iraq in December 2006. A contingent of unknown number is also active in Afghanistan, where, in the past, the *Force al-Qods* gave support to the *Northern Alliance* of the Shiite Ahmed Shah Massoud who fought against the Taliban. Finally, other members of the *Force al-Qods* are set up abroad, often – but not always – under diplomatic cover and they conduct there assignments of maintaining contact with the local terrorist organisations, giving them financial support, arranging the training of their members and running intelligence operations resulting in ‘*actions*’: this is by no means the kind of general intelligence performed by *VEVAK* but instead to discern the targets of possible attacks, whether opponents of the regime or local infrastructures.

Every year the *Force al-Qods* handles hundreds of millions of dollars which are then distributed as arms and equipment or manpower to the various organisations with which it is in contact when it does not itself purely and simply head them up. At present the main beneficiaries of this assistance are Hezbollah, the Badr Division (a force consisting of Iraqis bracketed by *Pasdaran* created during the war against Iraq but still active today against the Americans and the British) and the Army of the Mahdi.

The exact degree of independence of the *Force al-Qods* vis-à-vis the *Revolutionary Guard* is a matter of debate among experts, but it seems that it may receive orders directly from the Supreme Guide and that, in addition, its leader sits at the side of the leader of the *Pasdaran* in many high level commissions where questions of ‘security’ are discussed. Indeed, we may conclude that the *Force al-Qods* commanded by General Qassem Suleimani, a close associate of the President of the Security Council Ali Larijani, is in charge of all special operations of the *Pasdaran* abroad, from support to local actors friendly to Iran to subversive and terrorist actions.

III. Iran and the Shiite crescent

1. ‘The return of Shiism’³⁷

The Muslims today number nearly one billion followers around the world and will be nearly 2 billion in 25 years according to present projections. In order to understand the complexity

³⁷ Title borrowed from the first chapter of François Thual’s book, ‘*Géopolitique du chiisme*’ [Geopolitics of Shiism], Edition Arléa, 2002.

of the Muslim world and of one of its essential components, Shiism (even ‘the Shiisms’) – a dissident branch of Islam –, it is necessary to deal with the problems of modern geopolitics in the Middle and Near East, but also in the planet generally. One such analysis also enables us to better grasp the weight and influence of Iran – constantly mounting – over the large fringe of some 140 million Shiites around the planet (i.e., 10 to 12% of the worldwide Muslim population). Out of these 140 million believers, 80 to 90% are duodecimal or ‘Twelver’ Shiites.

As we shall see further on, the geography of Shiism in fact allows us to draw a ‘Shiite crescent’ which goes from Iran up to Lebanon and surrounds Alawite Syria – and Iraq. While this crescent constitutes the ‘nerve’ – the principal target – of Iranian influence, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Turkey, the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia and Tajikistan are also countries where Shiites play an important if not preponderant role. The Shiite populations of these countries are also in the field of action of ‘Iranian diplomacy,’ which: *‘takes root in the defence and the spread of Shiism.’*³⁸

Let us concentrate our analysis on the ‘return of Shiism’ beginning with the civil war in Lebanon (1975) and the Iranian Revolution (1979) and going up to the present. In the course of the last 30 years, Shiism, as Pierre Pahlavi stresses, has experienced: *‘an unprecedented renaissance of identity and politics as we see from the religious and political dynamism of the communities in Central Asia and the Middle East.’*³⁹ We shall see the details in the next few pages, particularly as we review the various countries of the ‘Shiite crescent,’ as well as in many Arab countries of the Near and Middle East. And though it is still too early to speak about the ‘success’ of this ‘Shiite crescent,’ it is nonetheless time to ask questions about the extent of the Iranian influence on the countries of the region and on its ability to destabilise others.

2. Pan-Shiism and the tools of propaganda

After the revolution, the country prioritised religious solidarity in the 1980s to encourage the creation of fundamentalist states. This was a vain attempt in societies mainly Turkish speaking or Sunni. Iran then adopted a more pragmatic approach which consisted in: *‘depoliticising its religious policy and highlighting its other ethno-cultural advantages.’*⁴⁰ Put another way, Iran set up various associations and developed some initiatives aimed at positioning itself as a model of Shiite development. This diplomatic and religious machine has now been taken in hand by the Ayatollah Khamenei using different tools.

The system of the Bonyad : these are consortiums of companies created the day after the Islamic Revolution (constituted in large part thanks to property confiscated from persons close to the royal family), which – though taxable – are in fact exempted from taxes and which serve to finance pro-Iranian political and paramilitary activities. They report directly to the Supreme Guide. The Bonyad have a plethora of staff, often corrupted. In the absence of official figures, it is difficult to gauge their influence but the lowest estimates speak of around 20% of Iranian GDP. The best example of success of the system of Bonyads is certainly the ***Foundation of the Destitute*** which has become one of the richest in the country and which operates *‘like a multinational holding company owning banks, luxury hotels, the factories of Zamzam, the local soda, with a near monopoly on most of the mineral water and other beverages sold in the country, not to mention the many kinds of business carried*

³⁸ Op. cit. p.14.

³⁹ Pierre Pahlavi, *‘The place of Shiism in Iran’s grand strategy,’* Géopolitique de la mer Noire : enjeux et perspectives, Défense nationale et sécurité collective, août –septembre 2008 [Geopolitics of the Black Sea :issues and prospects, National Defense and collective security, August-September 2008].

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

on with the outside world.⁴¹ **The Foundation Astan-e Qods-e Razavi**, for its part, has the task of maintaining the sanctuary of the Imam Reza who controls a hundred companies active in the food industry, textiles, pharmaceuticals and petrol. Initially intended to help the oppressed and destitute, these foundations have nowadays forgotten about them. Meanwhile, the foundations are real obstacles to free competition and undermine the financial and banking system.

Other institutions under the authority of the Supreme Guide: the Organisation for Culture and Islamic Relations (OCIR) – which was put to sleep under Khatami after having served as cover in Bosnia during the 1990s – was reactivated in 2006. It has been especially active in Iraq, where it brings together both ‘humanitarians’ and the intelligence services and can count on thousands of Iranians from the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala (*see the chapter on Iraq below*).

The official media: they play a key role in spreading the ideology of the regime, ‘promoting national unity’ and ‘Islamic solidarity.’ According to the director of the news agency *Fars*: ‘We need powerful media to be able to fight against the cultural invasion of Western countries and their media. They want to expand by this means their cultural and economic domination of the world and in such circumstances, our media have a serious and grand duty to perform.’⁴² But the official media are also given the task of communication with the outside world: the satellite stations *Press-TV*, *Al-Alam* and *Al-Kawthar* carry the proselytism of the authorities beyond the borders of the Islamic Republic. Thus all radio and television broadcasting from Iranian territory is controlled by the government.

The schools of theology: they study in particular the question of ideological, theological and political relations of Iran with the Shiite worlds. They seek to weave a network of transnational solidarity between the Iranian rulers and their counterparts of the region. In Iraq, the historical centre of Shiism, the theology schools controlled by Iran seek to perpetuate a predominance which now has great resonance. And, as P.-J. Luizard explains,⁴³ the terrorist movement of Moqtada al-Sadr is both a challenge to the American occupation and a magisterium (*marja’iyya*) of great Ayatollahs who are often quietist and from Iran, even if Qom remains the refuge of most of the anti-establishment Shiite leaders and a central place.

Thanks to his status as regent of Shiism, the Supreme Guide has a key political and religious position which enables him to spread Iranian influence beyond its borders. What we mean is an informal system which, as Pierre Pahlavi explains: ‘rests on the central institution of the *marja’iyya*, or spiritual direction, via which the message of Tehran is spread to the entire duodecima Shiite clergy without passing through official channels.’⁴⁴ But Iran is also the protector of these minorities over which a veritable fascination exists. At the time, the Shah of Iran also presented himself as the defender of the believers. We may conclude by mentioning the fact that over the past few years Iran never stopped developing cultural agreements, introducing associations of friendship and signing commercial accords with a certain number of Arab states.

3. A vector necessary for Iran to break out of its isolation

If, as we shall see in the next chapter, a goodly number of Shiite minorities seek to find in Iran an ally and a partner, the same is true of Iran: it is also desperately seeking allies! Iran is

⁴¹ Delphine Minoui, ‘*The opaque Islamo-business of Iranian foundations*,’ in *L’expansion.com*, 1 October 2006.

⁴² International agency of the Quranic press, Tehran, 25 May 2007.

⁴³ Mervin Sabrina (dir.), ‘*Les mondes chiïtes et l’Iran*,’ [*The Shiite worlds of Iran*] Paris / Beyrouth, Karthala/IFPO, 2007.

⁴⁴ Pierre Pahlavi, *op. cit.*

ideally positioned in this region of the globe. It is at the crossroads of three zones: the Middle East, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf. And, as Thierry Dufour explains: *'the country is called upon to shine in the whole Muslim world. For centuries it has been one of the leading countries of Muslim culture, one of those which gave to Islam its greatest scholars, intellectuals and artists (...). The history of two millennia of Persia gives to Iran the status of a very old civilisation.'*⁴⁵

A very old civilisation which today unquestionably has need of Shiite communities. The latter offer opportunities to break out of the encirclement on the international scene which Iran has had to confront for many years. This is an isolation which Iran has in part drawn upon itself and which is experienced badly not only by the political and religious establishment but also by the population itself. We mentioned in the foreword that on the day after the revolution the Islamic Republic did nothing to attract the sympathy of the international community. On the contrary, the new Islamic theocracy has from its very first days defied the Western world by displaying its scorn for the international rules and its determination to export its revolutionary model. Finally, we stress that the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), which followed directly after the revolution, traumatised the 'young regime.' The nearly unconditional support of the international community to the regime of Saddam Hussein all during the conflict was very difficult to live through.

Nowadays this situation of isolation still persists and is perceived as a threat not only to the identity but also to the independence of Iran. Many examples illustrate this 'putting in the dock' by the world's nations, including within the Muslim world.⁴⁶

Diplomatic isolation is accompanied by isolation within a goodly number of international organisations, both political and economic:

WTO: after an initial request for membership in 1996 followed by 21 other unproductive attempts, the candidature of Iran at the WTO was finally accepted thanks to the United States lifting its veto in November 2006. This veto was imposed for reasons linked to the Iranian nuclear programme. However, Iran is not yet a full member of the organisation because the process is long and complicated. Furthermore, the issues relating to the nuclear question and Iranian intransigence render Iran's definitively joining the WTO still more uncertain. Yet Iran clearly has need of membership to emerge step by step from the sclerosis of an economy which is too dependent on oil and subsidies, and which is missing real internal dynamism.

OPEC: while Iran was one of the initiators of the creation of OPEC⁴⁷ in 1960 and is thus an historic pillar of the organisation, the Islamic Republic has often been marginalised within OPEC, where it is a backer of expensive petroleum. Iran has for years tried to make its voice heard over the objections of a Saudi Arabia which is solicitous of protecting the Western world from too great a jump in the price of a barrel of oil. Meanwhile, in September 2007, Iran won a small victory when OPEC members finally refused to follow the recommendations of the International Energy Agency (IEA), which represents the energy interests of the industrialised countries. Iran had called upon them not to vote for an increase in production

⁴⁵ Thierry Dufour, *'The influence of Iran through Shiism – Modus operandi, success and limits of Iran's pro-Shiite policy,'* www.diploweb.com, October 2006.

⁴⁶ In this regard, see the episode of the island of Abou Moussa and the small isles of the lesser and greater Tomb, near the Straits of Ormuz, Chapter IV, - point 7)

⁴⁷ The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was created on 14 September 1960 during the Conference of Baghdad at the initiative of the Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and of Venezuela. At the start, the organisation had 5 member countries: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait and Venezuela.

as proposed by the IEA. The rise in production requested by the IAE was equivalent to the present production of Iran.

Many OPEC members from the Persian Gulf fear terrorist reprisals of the Mullahs against themselves and thus decided not to follow the recommendations of the IAE. This episode is a small victory for Tehran but a major setback for Saudi Arabia, which had otherwise succeeded in countering the regime in another attempt to make the price of oil rise to \$500 in January 2007!

4. How Shiite movements and populations react to the Iranian foreign policy

a. In Lebanon

The country was occupied by Great Britain and France in 1941, following the frantic retreat of the Vichy regime which allowed the Axis Powers to occupy Lebanon and Syria. Free France ended by proclaiming independence on 22 November 1943. Nonetheless, it took until the 'national pact' concluded between the Maronite Christians and the Sunni Muslims for independence to take effect. The national pact had two main conditions. First, the Christians had to renounce French protection and accept independence, while the Muslims had to forsake Arab unity and, above all, the dream of a 'greater Syria.' The second condition was the maintenance of the religious communities. The pact provided that the presidency of the Republic would go to the Maronites (majority of the population), the presidency of the Chamber would go to the Shiites and the presidency of the Council would go to the Sunnis. The other less substantial communities obtained various secondary posts.

This fragile equilibrium was repeatedly broken, especially during the regional and national crisis of 1958 when the Lebanese President, Camille Chamoun, opposed the policies of Nasser (in his conflict with the West). The Palestinian presence (thousands of Palestinian refugees came into the country of cedars after the 1948 war of independence) in Lebanon quickly became the stumbling block of political life: the 'pro-Lebanon' faction, who demanded the suspension of fedayeen operations as well as the restoration of the state authority, were opposed to the 'Arabists,' who were in solidarity with the resistance which bound their destiny to that of their 'brothers' who had taken refuge in Lebanon.

On 13 April 1975, an attack on a bus resulted in thirty or so victims (essentially Palestinians). Reprisals and counter-reprisals followed and the whole country soon was caught up in the conflagration. The Lebanese civil war had begun.

▪ The 'revenge' of the Lebanese Shiites

After having been the religious minority of the land of cedars for centuries, the Shiites saw their position strengthened the day after the outbreak of the civil war. But this change began several years beforehand. In fact, during the 1960s demographic growth pushed the population to move to Beirut, the capital and the centre of power. Little by little the city saw the emergence of a Maronite and Shiite majority. Dropping Nasserism for a political line more marked by Shiism also reinforced the position of the Shiite community in Lebanon. As Georges Corm explains: *'the rise in demographic power of the Shiite community was accompanied by a revitalisation of its identity, focused on duodecimal Shiism and, precisely, around the Shiite high clergy.'*⁴⁸ This return of strength was accompanied by a rapprochement between Lebanese Shiism and Iranian Shiism and all of this happened well

⁴⁸ Georges Corm, *'Le Liban : les guerres de l'Europe et de l'Orient [Lebanon : the wars of Europe and of the Orient]*, Gaillimard, Folio, 1992.

before the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Though no official census was carried out since 1932 (in order not to exacerbate the community tensions), it is generally assumed that the Shiites numbered more than one million and represented around 30% of the population. This is also the community which had the highest birth rate.

- **The Amal movement and Hezbollah**

Amal: the Amal movement, founded in 1975, has as its first objective to raise the economic and political role of the Shiites so as to be able to respond appropriately to Palestinian domination of the political and social scene, including in South Lebanon. The Amal movement, unlike the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation), wishes to be the bearer of a Lebanese legitimacy, though it supports the Palestinian cause, and cannot accept infiltration of Shiite villages basically serving Palestinian resistance and carrying out operations of terrorism against Israel. The concentration of Palestinians rapidly constituted a threat for the Shiite community seeking political emancipation.

The war of 1982 gave Amal the long-awaited opportunity to show its power in the Shiite areas which were previously controlled by the PLO. However, despite the support of Syria, Amal showed that it was too weak to take over the Palestinians. The battle of 1985 against the Palestinians of South Beirut and the substantial losses of the Shiite side caused a major turning point for the Shiite movement, which was marginalised. The misfortune of Amal may be explained in part, as we shall now see, by the emergence of its rival, Hezbollah.

Hezbollah: the Lebanese Hezbollah (party of God) was up to the mid-1990s considered both by public opinion and by the Arab countries to be '*an Iranian community in Lebanon as well as a tool of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Near East.*'⁴⁹ Founded in 1983 by a gathering of many Shiite fundamentalist factions to struggle for the liberation of South Lebanon, it was supported by Syria and, of course, by Iran which inspires its ideology and its forms of organisation. While it played a capital role in the clashes for which Lebanon was the theatre, notably in the taking of Western hostages, its struggle was oriented towards other objectives. Since 1985, it truly replaced the PLO in the fight against the State of Israel.

At the time, Hezbollah shared with the Palestinian forces not only its condescension for the Lebanese State but also the wish to use the South of the country as a base for attacks on the State of Israel. Amal shared with Hezbollah the rejection of the Zionist occupation of Lebanon. Otherwise the two movements disagreed essentially on two points. Firstly, Hezbollah intends to conduct the struggle right up to the destruction of the Jewish enemy and the reconquest of Jerusalem. For its part, Amal, as protector of the Shiites, has a more moderate vision than its rival and intends to lead the struggle against Israel within the frontiers of Lebanon. Secondly, religious fundamentalism and the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Lebanon are in total contradiction with the ideology of the Amal movement, which bases its action on the renewal of the state institutions and which tries to accord a larger place to the Shiite community in Lebanon. In the first few years, these 'ideological-political' considerations were concealed in order to lead the fight against the Army of South Lebanon and Israel.

The organisation of Hezbollah is pyramidal: at the top there is a council of 7 members (*choura el-qara*), a politburo and an executive council. Then come the regions, the sections, the labour unions and, to be sure, the popular mobilisation at the base. Since the end of the civil war, faced with the shortcomings of the Lebanese State, the organisation has built up the number of neighbourhoods and regions of the local missions. The successes of the latter have largely contributed to the development of its influence. Thus, Hezbollah acts in numerous domains such as education, water and electricity infrastructures, the hospital sector, etc.

⁴⁹ Al-Nahar, on 15 March 2000.

Hezbollah divides up into many 'wings' which support one another. The social wing in South Lebanon assisted the military branch to establish a recruitment network, while the political wing took advantage of the ambient institutional chaos to present itself as a political party and finally assert itself as an unavoidable force on the Lebanese political scene.

- **Hassan Nasrallah, the undisputed leader of Hezbollah**

From the 1940s to 1960, the nationalist Arab ideas and ideas of the Left became organised and they seduced an entire generation. Hassan Nasrallah was born in 1960 in the suburbs of Beirut. His family was originally from the village of Bazourieh, near Tyre in South Lebanon. While still a student in the secondary school of Tyre, he was an activist in the ranks of the Amal movement for whom he then became the local leader in in Bazourieh. After receiving religious training in Iraq, he was expelled in 1978 due to his religious activism among the Khomeyni supporters. He left Amal after the Israeli invasion and founded Hezbollah together with other fighters.

Hassan Nasrallah was able to establish himself as the head of the resistance. He also succeeded in arranging a mobilisation which transcended the Shiite community and extended over the whole of Lebanese society, so that resistance became the cement of national unity. In 1997, he created the Lebanese Brigades for Resistance to the Israeli Occupation (L.B.R.I.O.), a non-faith and non-partisan structure which proposed both to the Shiites and to the Lebanese of other religions that they incorporate a military structure in order to conduct armed struggle against Israel. As Caroline Donati emphasizes: *'While the relative success of this formula attests to the limits of the capacity for opening up of a party marked by its ideological and religious relationship to Shiite Islam and to Iran, for all that Hezbollah enjoys a real ascendancy over the Lebanese population.'*⁵⁰

These last few years, Hassan Nasrallah has abandoned the project – at least in his speeches – of an Islamic Republic in order to insert his party into the political system of Lebanon, while maintaining the unity of the Shiite community and reinforcing its influence over them.

b. In Iraq

Iraq is the cradle of Shiism, since it is where its main holy places are concentrated. The Second Gulf War relieved Iran of its worst enemy and allowed it to recover in Iraq its ability to act which no other country in the region could take advantage of. Indeed, while during the first three years of the conflict Iran proclaimed itself to be 'neutral,' one did not have to wait very long to see the infiltration of Iraqi opponents in Iran and Iranian agents towards Iraq. As Mahammad Reza Djalli stresses: *'the intermixing of the fates of Iran and Iraq is explained by the conjuncture of a certain number of geographic, historical, religious and historical factors'*,⁵¹ and, after many centuries, the domination of the Shiite holy places in Iraq is a major issue for the two countries. Every year they attract thousands of pilgrims. Many Iranians are otherwise living in Iraq. The tensions between these two countries have crystallised around the border marking the separation between the former Ottoman Empire and the Persian empire. The border line, which is nearly 1500 km long, is now the result of the correlation of forces between Iran and Iraq.

Since 1932 (the date of independence of Iraq), the two countries have almost never had cordial relations. However, the situation degenerated only after the fall of the Shah and the arrival of the Mullahs in power in 1979. In 1980, Saddam Hussein, pushed or supported by France and the United States, launched Iraq into a fratricidal war against Iran which lasted 8

⁵⁰ C. Donati, 'South Lebanon: the Israeli retreat' in Maghreb-Machrek, Paris, April-June 2000, n°168, p. 131.

⁵¹ Mahammad Reza Djalli, 'After Saddam: Iranian hopes and uncertainties,' Politique étrangère 3-4/2003, p.568

years and ended up costing hundreds of thousands of lives and an exorbitant amount of money.

- **Iranian interactions in Iraq**

In order to understand the question of Iranian interference in Iraq, we have to look at the way in which a multitude of Iranian decision centres interacted (the President, the Supreme Guide, the grand Ayatollahs, the Revolutionary Guard, etc.)⁵² There are so many actors who do not always have the same political agenda and who can even sometimes neutralise one another. However that may be, since the unleashing of the Second Gulf War, the influence of Iran in Iraq is unquestionable and that is so in many different ways. This influence as described in many American and British military reports, by the testimony of Iraqi and Iranian agents, appears to have been minutely planned well before the American invasion.

As we have already underlined, Shiism is undoubtedly the natural lever of action of Iran in Iraq since the Iraqi population is around 60 to 70% Shiite. Yet the latter have always been in the situation of a political minority in Iraq. This privileged link – which was strengthened during the past two decades – reached its paroxysm today. The very influential Ayatollah al-Sistani, who was born in Iran and who lived there for many years, is just one example of the permanent collusion between Iran and a goodly number of the Shiite religious leaders in the region of Basra. Juliana Daoud Yusu, editor-in-chief of the daily *al-Manar* in Basra explained in 2005 : *'We see the interference of Iran in all sorts of affairs; the closing of night clubs, the disappearance of liquor stores (...) They take advantage of the absence of government, and they do it in a very well planned manner.'*⁵³ The 'religious leaders' also proceeded to take permanent control of the mores (make-up, dress code, restriction of the rights of women, etc.). There is a veritable Shiite propaganda around the holy places which operates through Iranian flags sitting atop the mosques, the distribution of religious materials (books, CD-roms) and the promotion of the Persian language.

There are tens of thousands of Iranians living in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala and the hundreds of thousands of others who, each year, make the pilgrimage to the holy Iraqi places : pilgrims, intelligence agents or Iranian terrorists – the permeable Iran-Iraq border makes possible all types of infiltrations. Once they are established in Iraq, these 'Iranian agents' – who already have a substantial pool of potential collaborators among the 'dual nationals' and among the Shiite Iraqis – have largely proceeded these past few years, whether by retribution or by force, to recruit Iraqi helpers to ensure their domination. As for the Iraqi police, who are powerless given the extent of this influence, it very often has no alternative to watching and waiting despite the relative restructuring of its departments.

Since the period just after the Iran-Iraq War, the Revolutionary Guard has acquired an important role on the Iraqi political scene both through propaganda operations and by violent actions on the ground. Just before the American invasion of March 2003, the Revolutionary Guard repositioned itself in order to reinforce the border with Iraq and then occupy the vacuum left by the collapse of the regime. Operating thanks to diplomatic or humanitarian cover (NGO, Red Cross, etc.), the Guard provides for the military training and logistical support of Hezbollah and the Iraqi insurgents.

These past few years, this 'collaboration' has resulted in military equipment and communications being supplied to Shiite terrorist groups such as the group of Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani which was created completely by the Revolutionary Guard and heads a network of insurgents which during 2005 and 2006 made large scale attacks using, among other

⁵² See above: the Iran of the Mullahs

⁵³ Tob Robberson, *'Iranian influence raises anxiety in southern Iraq,'* The Dallas Morning News, August 3, 2005.

things, legal weapons till then not used by the insurgents. Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani has figured on the black list of the United States since January 2008.

- **The Iraqi Hezbollah**

As Laurence Louër explains: ‘Some small groups whose nature remains difficult to discern have regularly claimed the label “Hezbollah” ever since the 1980s, but this is not the case of any central actors in the Shiite Islamist field.’⁵⁴ However, there is well and truly a group presenting all the characteristics of an Iraqi Hezbollah. It was created in 1982 at the instigation of Iran. It was initially devoted to uniting the various movements of Iraqi resistance. Its internal organisation, the training of its leaders and of its militia are all provided by the Pasdarans and its acknowledgement of the authority of Ali Khamenei makes it a movement very similar to the Lebanese Hezbollah directed by Hassan Nasrallah. By means of terrorist operations, and always at the request of Iran, the Iraqi Hezbollah has never stopped working to neutralise the operations of coalition forces aimed at creating an opposition movement to Iran in Iraq. The Army of the Mahdi, organised differently from Hezbollah – with a floating authority– was also aligned with Iran, and its leader Moqtada al-Sadr said in 2004 that his movement was allied with the ‘leadership of Iran.’ However that may be, the pro-Iranian terrorist movement is not content to engage in violent actions. Following the tactics used in South Lebanon, it has attracted and recruited a population in desperate straits by means of charity or incited attacks through the television channel *al-Manar*.

c. In Syria

Syria displays great ethnic diversity even if its majority is Sunni. Nearly 80% of the population obeys Sunni Islam, with minorities of Druze and Alawites at their sides. Syrian Islam remains tolerant and the Christians are not worried. Moreover, the 1950s and 60s saw a movement of secularisation of the city folk and of the country’s educated classes. Damascus was long under French influence and it had to wait until 1946 to declare its independence. In fact, it was not the first parliamentary elections which freed Syria in 1932 since the candidates were chosen in advance by Paris. The days following independence were marked by constant political instability which ended only with the accession to power of the late Hafez El-Assad during a coup d’état in 1970. Once he became chief of state, Assad decided to establish the bases for institutional stability through a constitution and an assembly of the people.

Syria’s foreign policy is mostly focused on its neighbours in the region. Its relations with Tehran really took shape only during the period of tensions in the middle of the 1970s between the Syrian President and the Rais of Baghdad, Saddam Hussein.

In the space of just a few years, what was at first a strategic relationship between Damascus and Tehran was rapidly transformed into a relationship of lord and vassal. To be sure, the Alawite regime of Bashar El-Assad is economically dependent on its big Iranian brother, but this dependence very quickly opened the door to an omnipresent ideological domination throughout all of Syria by means of Iranian cultural and religious institutions. The *Pasdaran* also infiltrated the Syrian army.

While Iran plays a grand role of support to Hezbollah, Syria does the same. In this way its political and military support have over the years become a necessity for the activities of Hezbollah in South Lebanon.

⁵⁴ Laurence Louër, ‘*Shiism and politics in the Middle East – Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, the Monarchy of the Gulf,*’ Collections Mondes et Nations [World and Nations Collections], Editions Autrement, 2008, p. 66.

In its relations with Syria, Hezbollah enjoys 3 advantages:

- Its integration within the Shiite community and its ability to mobilise resources thanks to its discipline and its methods of clandestine implantation.
- Israel's interdiction of the presence of the Syrian Army south of the Litani.
- The support of a large part of Iranian leadership with whom Syria does not wish to clash.⁵⁵

In addition, Hezbollah depends on Syria in various ways. In fact, the main path of access which makes it possible to transport arms passes via Syria. And Hezbollah owes a large part of its legitimacy in Lebanon to Syria. It has been Syria which dissuaded the Lebanese government from curbing the political predominance of Hezbollah. Finally, it benefits from assistance and political support from the authorities in Damascus.

While Syria has supported the 'party of God' ever since the Taëf Accords⁵⁶, they nonetheless have not always shared the same positions. Thus, during the wars of the camps (1984-1987), Hezbollah went as far as to clash with the Syrian Army supporting the Amal movement. However that may be, this dependence allows Syria to use Hezbollah for its own purposes, even though many ideological divergences can lead these two actors to disagree over the goals, the strategy and the tactics.

In fact, the ideological platforms are almost antagonistic. The doctrine of Hezbollah is based on extreme religious fundamentalism, whereas the Syrian establishment is atheistic, socialist and nationalistic.

Syria prefers to reach a more pragmatic goal (the retreat of Israel from the Golan Heights) by negotiation while recognizing the danger of escalation of the conflict to the regional level. These are the differences which, in the opinion of Shmuel Gordon still explain the risks taken by Hezbollah in its dependence vis-à-vis Syria.

On the other hand, frictions have also appeared between the two protectors of the Shiite movement. In 1999, the government of Damascus, which wanted a truce to allow the government of Ehud Barak to relaunch the peace process, reacted in a muscular fashion to Tehran which was at the time inciting Hezbollah to escalation. The latter meanwhile caused the Israelis to undertake violent reprisals against Lebanese targets.

During the last few months, the two nations have opted for a 'critical dialogue.' Syrians and Iranians have counted on the victory of Barack Obama, because the Democratic candidate stood for an opening after a period of demonisation generated by the Republicans. However, Tehran remains very critical regarding the diplomatic overture made by the Americans to Damascus because the Iranians would lose one of their most precious allies in the region. The recent statements of the Iranian Vice President Parviz Davoudi, who called upon Syria to show more prudence vis-à-vis the enemies are not innocent and come at a moment when Syrian foreign policy has seen a sort of sign of recovery: establishing contact with Saudi Arabia, at least relative reconciliation with Egypt and the wish of the Americans to test the

⁵⁵ E. Kheir, *'The long march of Hezbollah: from global rejection to integration'* in *Le Débat Stratégique*, mars 2000, n°49, [The Strategic Debate, March 2000, no. 49] CIRPES, Paris, p. 2.

⁵⁶ The agreement of Taëf signed on 22 October 1989 abolished the national pact of 1943 and reduced the powers of the chief of state, of the prime minister and of the president of the Assembly. This agreement set down the abandonment of the pre-existing community policy as the essential national policy. It involved disarming the militia and regrouping the Syrian troops on the Bekaa plain.

good will of the Syrians.⁵⁷ One can say very clearly that Iran does not want the ‘international overtures’ towards Syria to isolate it still further.

IV. Revolutionary Islam, state terrorism and terrorism

1. State terrorism

As we mentioned in our introduction, right after the Islamic Revolution the regime of the Mullahs did not stop ‘pouring oil onto the fire’ at the international level. The episode of hostage-taking at the American Embassy and the hostages held in Lebanon are very revealing in this respect. After having shown that Hezbollah was in the end just an armed wing of Iran charged with the task of performing terrorist missions which Tehran could not itself assume without risking still more being banished from the international community, it seems to us interesting to present here below a non-exhaustive list of the attacks perpetrated by the party of God (and (in)directly by Iran) during the 1980s and 90s⁵⁸ :

- **23 October 1983** in Beirut: suicide attacks against the multinational force of intervention which is trying to put an end to the war: 248 American marines and 58 French parachutists are killed.
- **March 1984**: targeted kidnapping of the CIA bureau chief in Beirut. William Francis Buckley dies after 15 months of detention and torture.
- **January 1985**: murder of two French noncommissioned officers in Beirut;
- **1985**: start of the campaign of kidnappings which will be called generically in the Western media the affair of the Hostages in Lebanon and which concerns, among others, American, French and British journalists, diplomats and researchers. The journalist Terry Anderson remains the hostage held for the longest period of time: kidnapped on 15 March 1985, he was freed only in December 1991.
- **14 June 1985**: hijacking in Athens of a Boeing airliner belonging to TWA on a flight between Athens and Rome. American citizen Robert Stehem is murdered in the course of this hostage-taking which ends on 30 June.
- **1985-1986** : a campaign of attacks in France, ordered by Iran, coordinated by Hezbollah and carried out by a local cell (Fouad Saleh group) causes 10 deaths and 40 injuries. At the end of his investigation, the anti-terrorist judge Gilles Boulouque identified and indicted 17 members of Hezbollah.
- **13 January 1987**: arrest of Mohammed Ali Hamadé in Frankfurt with 9 litres of a powerful liquid explosive, methyl nitrate.
- **17 and 20 January 1987**: kidnapping in Beirut of two German citizens, Rudolf and Alfred Schmidt (both freed in 1988).
- **26 January 1987**: arrest at Frankfurt Airport of Abbas Hamadé, brother of Mohammed, who also was in possession of many litres of methyl nitrate.

⁵⁷ Tariq Al-Homayed, ‘*Rififi between Damascus and Tehran*,’ *Courrier International*, Thursday, 12 March 2009, p.25

⁵⁸ This list is taken from an analytical article written by Claude Moniquet and Dimitri Delalieu: ‘*Hezbollah, a terrorist organisation and armed wing of Tehran in the Near East*,’ *Analysis*, ESISC, 23 July 2006 in www.esisc.org

- **17 February 1988** : hijacking of *Kuwait Airways* flight 422 as it departs from Bangkok. The hijacking lasts 16 days and costs the lives of two passengers.
- **17 March 1992**: suicide attack against the Israeli Embassy in Buenos-Aires (29 dead and 220 wounded).
- **18 July 1994**: suicide attack against the Jewish Community Centre of Buenos Aires (86 deaths and 250 wounded).
- **27 and 28 July 1994**: attack against the headquarters of Jewish organisations and against the Israeli Embassy in London (20 wounded).

In May 2003, Louis Freeh, the former director of the FBI gave the *Wall Street Journal*⁵⁹ some details on the investigation into the booby trapped lorry attack on the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia which killed 19 Americans on 26 June 1996. According to him, the operation was organised, financed and coordinated in Iran by the security services, the *Revolutionary Guard* and the Ministry of Intelligence.

As for attacks carried out in Turkey, the *Daily Telegraph*⁶⁰ reported in 2003 that one of those who planted the bombs used in two terrorist attacks in Istanbul which caused 24 deaths had traveled many times to Iran to get training there in explosives.

The war on terror launched by the Americans and their allies right after the attacks carried out by al-Qaeda increased somewhat further the feeling of isolation which we have already described above.⁶¹ In fact, a quick glance at the map of the region indicating the various American military bases will suffice for any observer to appreciate to what extent Iran is literally encircled. From the massive stationing of American troops in Iraq and in Afghanistan to the military agreements on defence which Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates have signed with the United States, the encirclement of the Islamic Republic is a reality.

But isn't this situation just the consequence of a foreign policy focused on defiance to the Western world and the obsessive determination to attack which accompanies it, focused on the practice of state terrorism and finally on promotion of terrorism via various movements?

2. Suicide attacks: an Iranian model widely 'exported'

On 29 September 2005, the new Iranian Minister of Defence General Mostafa Mohammadi-Nadjar officially announced what everyone had long known: Iran is training kamikazes! During a meeting of the *Pasdaran* in Tehran, the man who was the first commander of the Middle East force of the *Revolutionary Guard* during the 1980s and who personally supervised the suicide attack in Beirut in 1983 which cost the lives of 241 American soldiers said: '*A nation having a spirit of devotion, sacrifice and martyrdom has no need for atomic arms and can use its dedicated forces to resist the enemy and neutralise its threats.*'⁶²

In October 2005, it was a high official of the *Revolutionary Guard*, General Mohammad Kossari, who explained: '*We know all the sensitive points of the enemies and what we must do to them. Today we have volunteers for martyrdom who are ready to strike against these sensitive points.*'⁶³

⁵⁹ Wall Street Journal, 20 May 2003.

⁶⁰ Daily Telegraph, 1 December 2003.

⁶¹ See Chapter II, paragraph 3: A necessary axis to break out of isolation.

⁶² '*The Ministry of Defence confirms that Iran is training the Kamikazes*' in Iran Focus, 29 September 2005.

⁶³ News agency ILNA, 11 October 2005.

Since then, statements by high military officers or Iranian politicians along these lines have been repeated many times over. As Laurent Artur du Plessis stresses: '*The Iranian state is, after the defeat of Japan in 1945, the first state to officially advocate this form of attack and to recruit apprentice kamikazes on a large scale and train them*'.⁶⁴ He predicts that: '*Iran will occupy a leading position in the war between Islam and the West in its capacity as a state sponsor of kamikaze terrorism*'.⁶⁵ Nowadays Tehran has a school of martyrs as well as a museum dedicated to the cult of kamikazes!

V. The neighbourhood policies chosen for the Arab countries

After having renounced exporting its revolutionary model by seeking wide support of the 'Muslim masses,' the regime in Tehran has nonetheless not turned its back on its policy of destabilising the Sunni Arab world, which it considers to be a threat to itself. Using the arms of terrorism and of subversion all at once or alternatively, for thirty years Tehran has tried in an uninterrupted manner to undermine the authorities in a number of Arab countries.

1. The example of Morocco

a. Iran/Morocco: two conceptions of foreign policy – From an antagonism to an opposition and an attempt at destabilisation?

We have emphasised a number of times already that Iran has been particularly active these past few years in promoting its theocratic republic. In the Maghreb and especially in Morocco, a dialogue was set up between the political parties and the official representatives of the Mullahs. This 'activism,' which is more political than religious, was tolerated by the authorities insofar as it did not threaten the fundamental interests of the kingdom. As we shall see further on, the episode in Bahrain in March 2009 finally led to the breaking of diplomatic relations between Iran and Morocco. While this decision is without doubt the consequence of the '*disrespectful attitude*' of the Islamic Republic towards it, it also appears that Morocco is '*infuriated by the unacceptable and continuous meddling by Iran in its internal affairs*.' It seems the Moroccan authorities have seized upon this opportunity to free themselves from a relationship which has now become dangerous.

The Kingdom of Morocco maintained special relations with Iran going back to the period of the Shah and lasting up to his overthrow in 1979. After the Revolution, the Moroccan authorities took a long time before they recognised the Islamic Republic of Iran. Relations finally were normalised only towards the end of the 1990s when they exchanged ambassadors. In February 2008, Morocco and Iran made official their mutual '*links of friendship and agreements on cooperation*.' However, for many years the intelligence and security services of Morocco pointed their finger at the connections between Iran and the fundamentalist networks which threaten the country. The *force al-Qods* has been charged with recruiting and sending to Iran Moroccans who, following their return to their country after their training in Iran, engage in spreading there the ideology of the Mullahs.

The *modus operandi* of Iran in Morocco, as in other countries of the Maghreb, is relatively 'simple' and effective. First of all, Tehran tries to re-launch bilateral relations by putting the accent on favoured links which unite their two countries. The regime then underlines the importance of organising tourist exchanges, of developing cultural and economic relations. Finally, it infiltrates forces which will develop fundamentalist networks and will see to it that

⁶⁴ Laurent Artur du Plessis, '*L'Iran dans la 3^e Guerre mondiale [Iran in the 3rd World War]*', Jean-Cyrille Godefroy, 2005

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

the ideology is spread. Morocco is, of course, a formidable 'entryway' for agents of the Mullahs heading for France and, more generally, towards Europe.

In Morocco as elsewhere, terrorism has been used by the Mullahs.

In July 2007, during a raid in Casablanca, the Moroccan police arrested Saad Al-Hosseini, known as 'the chemist' and suspected of having played a role in the May 2003 attacks in Casablanca. Linked to al-Qaeda, al-Hosseini passed through Afghanistan but also had spent time in Iran with many members of his network.

In 2008, the Moroccan authorities dismantled a vast Islamist network whose chief, Abdelkader Belliraj, held Moroccan and Belgian nationality. He was apparently involved in many assassinations in Belgium at the end of the 1980s and also played a key role in preparing terrorist attacks in North Africa. Linked to the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Groupe (MICG), the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Algerian SGPC) and the Abdelkader Belliraj Movement, he also was in close contact with the 'moderate' Islamist leaders of the al-Balil al-Hadari party. The latter 'Alternative Civilisational' party was created in 2002 and won official recognition by the authorities in 2005. It was the first Islamist political party created in Morocco and it maintained relations with Iranian Shiite circles. An investigation into the Belliraj network finally led the Moroccan authorities to dissolve the party in February 2008. In the end, the death penalty was requested by the prosecutor in the anti-terrorist court of Salé, near Rabat, against Abdelkader Belliraj, who was accused of having directed a terrorist network consisting of 35 members in Morocco and abroad.

b. The breaking of diplomatic relations

In mid-February 2009, on the occasion of the commemoration of Iran's Islamic Revolution, Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri, the former president of the Iranian Parliament and present adviser to the Supreme Guide, said that Bahrain belonged to Iran by describing it as the '*14th Iranian province.*' This incident, which is reminiscent of the Iraqi declaration which preceded the invasion of Kuwait, prompted a general outcry of protests around the world despite a message intended to reduce tensions which was sent shortly after the incident by Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad to the King of Bahrain, Hamad Bin Aïssa al Khalifa.

The divorce with Morocco was pronounced on 6 February, ten days after the recall of the interim chargé d'affaires in Tehran for consultations. The official press release explains: '*The Kingdom of Morocco has decided upon a break in diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran beginning this Friday.*' But this decision cannot be explained just by the tensions arising between Tehran and Bahrain.

In fact, in the gradation of diplomatic relations,⁶⁶ breaking them between two States is an extreme act which occurs generally just before a declaration of war. And while Morocco well and truly recalled its head of mission for 10 days, it remains a fact that it still had a whole panoply of ways to get its message across to Tehran without breaking diplomatic relations. This was a strong act intended to show Morocco's determination in the face of what many Arab countries now define openly as the 'Iranian challenge.'

c. Challenging the King of Morocco's role as Commander of the Believers

In Morocco Islam is the state religion and the King assumes the role of Commander of the Believers (*Amir Al Mouminine*). This magisterium, which distinguishes him in the Islamic world, arises from a prerogative which is both religious and constitutional, and which consecrates the sovereign as guarantor of the spiritual balance of his country. While Iran

⁶⁶ Jean Salmon, '*Manuel de droit diplomatique* [Manual of diplomatic law], Bruylant, Editions Delta, 1996.

tried to strengthen its relations with Morocco in the name of the 'Islamic *Umma*,' it remains true that the constitution of the Mullahs does not recognise geographic borders.

Since 2004, we have witnessed a veritable Iranian policy of entryism and intervention in the affairs of Morocco. The resumption of activism by Iranian diplomacy whether directly or indirectly in order to encourage the spread of Shiism (publications and dissemination of works, promotion of cultural centres, etc.) has had great resonance. This Shiite interference and religious proselytism which has been established in Morocco little by little has been perceived as threatening because it competes directly with the Sunni Malekite rite which has been practiced in Morocco and is embodied by the sovereign.

A communiqué from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Morocco the day after the breaking of diplomatic relations mentions: 'the attempt by *Iran to threaten the unity of the Muslim faith in Morocco and the Sunni Malekite rite whose guarantor is King Mohammed VI.*' 'This type of action (...) constitutes unacceptable meddling in the internal affairs of the kingdom and is contrary to the rules and ethics of diplomatic activity,' says the official communiqué published on the internet site of the official news agency MAP.

2. The example of Tunisia: Bourguiba, a man to bring down?

In March 1987, the Tunisian government broke relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran because of 'subversive activities' led by the Iranian Embassy in Tunis. At this time, the authorities in Tunis accused the Iranian diplomatic representation of supporting Islamists who were opposed to President Bourguiba. Bourguiba was resolutely oriented to the West. Beginning in 1956, he promulgated an avant-garde code on personal status which prohibited polygamy and replaced simple repudiation of a spouse by a procedure of divorce through the courts. He then legalised the contraceptive pill and abortion, doing so well in advance of a good number of European countries. Islamic circles and conservatives (Iran among those in the front ranks) feel threatened by the modernity and flexibility of this statesman vis-à-vis Islam. Relations between the two states were renewed only in September 1990 in the name of 'Islamic solidarity and the charter of the United Nations.' At this time, Tunisia was not the only country to break its relations with Iran. Mauritania and Senegal also ended their relations with the Islamic Republic in the middle of the 1980s over 'interference in their internal affairs.'

3. The example of Saudi Arabia

a. The new diplomacy of Riyadh with respect to Tehran

These past few years, relations between these two nations have been marked by Iranian attempts to influence the decisions of Riyadh. Tehran regularly sends clear signals to Saudi Arabia. One thinks, in particular, of what occurred during the conference in Annapolis in November 2007 when President Ahmadinejad asked King Abdullah not to participate in the negotiations. During the pilgrimage to Mecca of 2007, Ahmadinejad made history since it was the first time that an Iranian chief of state traveled to the holy city.⁶⁷ The best known activity of Saudi diplomacy dealing with Tehran happened thanks to the agreement of the Arab League to bring Iran into its organisation with observer status.

Otherwise, the Tehran-Riyadh pairing grew stronger beginning with the time when they decided to act in concert in order to stabilise the Lebanese crisis in 2007 as tensions between Shiites and Sunnis had reached new heights.

⁶⁷ At the invitation of the Saudi King.

As we see, Saudi Arabia acts as a buffer in the region while also serving American interests in the Sunni – Shiite split. In fact, during these past few years the Americans⁶⁸ have considered that the Saudis form a bloc making it possible to polarise the Sunni nations (Jordan and Egypt) and to help the Sunni groups in those nations which are called mixed (like Lebanon).

Alongside these American visions, the Saudis have understood very well the importance of renewed relations with Tehran since many economic accords have been signed since the accession to power of the fundamentalist Ahmadinejad. These accords provide in particular that the Saudi banks may open branches in Iran and vice versa. Ever since the Saudis have taken into account that they are no longer simple suppliers of oil to the Americans, Riyadh has developed a prudent economic diplomacy with its neighbour Iran.

This new bilateral relationship cannot conceal the stumbling blocks of the past. As we are going to see further on, the two Middle Eastern nations have historically been opposed to one another. In Lebanon, the Saudis have decades-long links with the family of former Prime Minister Hariri and they invested colossal sums in the reconstruction of Beirut.

Finally, we point out the speech which Prince Saud Al-Faysal made on 3 March, when he called upon the Arab countries in the Union to face up to the '*Iranian challenge*' at the opening of a meeting of the Arab Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Cairo. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom declared: '*In order to consecrate the Arab reconciliation, we need a common vision on questions relating to Arab security and in order to face up to the Iranian challenge.*' This sally by the Saudi Minister clearly appeared to be a signal to re-launch the discussion of the Persian threat at a moment when in the United States the new Obama administration had not yet decided on its plan of action vis-à-vis Iran.

b. The casus belli of Jeddah

In August 1987, some clashes occurred in the Great Mosque of Mecca during the annual pilgrimage in which millions of Muslims participate. These clashes involved Iranian pilgrims who demonstrated to proclaim Imam Khomeiny (Supreme Guide of the Iranian Revolution) spiritual leader of all Muslims. Iran had sent 'false pilgrims' intending to create trouble for the pilgrimage. The Iranian demonstrators corresponded to a plan by Tehran which foresaw in particular the destruction of certain buildings in Mecca. In the end, the confrontations between the Iranians and the Saudi law enforcement forces resulted in 402 deaths and 649 injured.⁶⁹ Several days later, the Saudi Embassy was sacked and 4 diplomatic officials were kidnapped under the passive watch of Iranian forces of order. A political confrontation followed between these two nations when Imam Khomeiny expressed his doubt that the Saudi dynasty would be able to ensure the security of the holy places. These words very clearly were questioning the activities of King Fahd who, in October 1986 had asked that his title of majesty henceforth be replaced by that of 'servant of the two holy places': Mecca and Medina.⁷⁰

Arab reactions to the carnage in Mecca were not long in coming. Egyptian President Mubarak confirmed his full support for the Saudi royal authorities as protectors of the Islamic holy sites. In Jordan and in Kuwait, King Hussein and the Emirs vigorously condemned the Iranian attitude. In Morocco, King Hassan II said he was concerned that the press in Tunisia was taking up the Iranian heresy.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Under the administration of Bush Jr.

⁶⁹ AFP, '*The plan of the Iranian demonstrators of Mecca,*' 4 August 1987.

⁷⁰ Pierre Taillefer, '*The confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran takes a political turn,*' AFP, 4 August 1987.

⁷¹ AFP, '*Allies and adversaries of Iran,*' 2 August 1987.

c. Birth of the Hezbollah of Hijaz

A Saudi branch of Hezbollah, known under the name Al Hijaz, is active in various nations such as Lebanon, Kuwait and Bahrain. This group was formed in the Iranian and Lebanese camps and is considered to be a terrorist organisation by the Saudi and American authorities. In 1996, activists of Al Hijaz participated in the attack on the Khobar Towers in which 19 American soldiers were killed.

The Lebanese crisis of 2006 allowed the Saudi Hezbollah to return to the front of the stage with the publication of a fiery communiqué denouncing the statements of the Al-Saud traitors.⁷² This was obviously a direct response to the condemnation by the Saudi regime of the disastrous consequences of the adventurism of the Lebanese Hezbollah and of their foreign supporters, a lightly veiled reference to Syria and, above all, to Iran.

The Hezbollah Hijaz has a small popular following. It lacks a clear political vision and relies only on terrorism as a propaganda tool thanks to support from Iran. In this sense, the tiny grouping is not participating in the process of reconciliation between Al-Saud and the Islamists and this proves once again that Iran has its instruments dispersed everywhere in order to strike against Western interests in crucial areas. In fact, the Hijaz group is established mainly in the western province of Saudi Arabia which is strategically sensitive and where most of the oil resources of the kingdom are concentrated.

4. The example of Jordan

a. The concerns of King Abdallah II over the emergence of the ‘Shiite crescent’

While the advent of Iranian entryism has had and will continue to have enormous consequences in Iraq, it is also true for Jordan, which now feels threatened by the efforts of the Islamic Republic to spread Shiite influence. In December 2004, the *Washington Post*⁷³ published an interview with King Abdallah II in the course of which the sovereign said he was concerned by the emergence of a ‘Shiite crescent’ and explained that the pro-Iranian changes in Iraq will have consequences for regional geopolitics. According to the sovereign, the modifications in the correlation of political forces between the Shiites and the Sunnis could result ‘*in new problems which would not be restricted to the borders of Iraq.*’⁷⁴

Shortly after the assassination of Rafic Hariri on 14 February 2005, the King said once again he was concerned over the advent of Iran in the region. In Washington, where he met the representatives of the Jewish community, he said: [Hezbollah, Syria and Iran] *encourage the terrorist attacks on Israel in order to divert the attention of the world from the events in Lebanon.*⁷⁵

However, the sovereign has tried repeatedly to call for a negotiated settlement of the conflict between Iran and the West over its controversial nuclear programme. In January 2006, during a meeting with the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the King explained the reasons for that appeal. He said that recourse to force would have grave repercussions on the stability and the security of the region. Does the sovereign have any choice? Does the Jordanian regime which feels itself threatened by the expansionism of the Mullahs think it is able to

⁷² Laurence Louër, ‘*The Hezbollah movement, international phenomenon with links to Iran,*’ electronic publication http://www.telos-eu.com/fr/article/la_mouvance_hezbollah_une_internationale_liee_a

⁷³ Washington Post, 8 December 2004.

⁷⁴ Ididem.

⁷⁵ David Rigoulet-Roze, ‘*Ethnic and faith-based geopolitics of the Middle East,*’ Diploweb, September 2007.

counter the Iranian advance on its kingdom by recognising the right of the Islamic regime to develop nuclear energy?

However that may be, the stability of the kingdom has been harmed, particularly when Katyusha type 107 rockets made in Iran are seized in a Hamas hiding place in Jordan or during the dismantlement of a recruitment branch of the Islamist Palestinians who were on their way to Iran and Syria via Jordan to receive military training.

5. The example of Egypt

a. The fears of President Hosni Mubarak regarding the rise in power of the 'Shiite crescent'

The Hashemite sovereign is not the only leader to worry about Iranian influence on the various Shiite communities in the Arab countries. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has repeatedly drawn the attention of the Americans and of public opinion to the dangers of Iranian entryism. In March 2006, he drew the attention of the Americans to a possible attack on the Iranian Republic. According to him this would poison still more a situation which was already quite difficult: *'Iran is generously assisting the Shiites of all countries and these people are often ready to do anything if Iran is attacked.'*⁷⁶ Following the example of the Jordanian sovereign, the Egyptian rais has often reiterated this idea, especially in an interview he granted to the station *al-Arabiya* in the course of which he denounces Iranian interventionism.

In December 2007, the visit to Egypt of the boss of the Iranian Supreme Council of National Security, Mr. Larijani, had as its stated objective to 'warm up' relations between the two countries. This was an unofficial visit, 'private and for family reasons,' which aroused fierce opposition especially from the party in power, the PNB, directed by the son of Hosni Mubarak, who believes in fact that any rapprochement with the Islamic Republic would not serve the interests of Egypt and would risk worsening relations with the United States and the European Union. And while meetings did take place during the visit of the Iranian envoy, they led to nothing.

Along with its fears, Egypt decided to re-launch a military nuclear programme (abandoned more than 20 years ago) in order to join the group of countries having nuclear energy. Egyptian President Mubarak has said that his country believes that it should remain a peaceful nuclear country, and his decision received the support of Washington and of the Sunni Arab countries. Recent regional turmoil may explain the shift in Washington. If Iran continues its nuclear programme, it should consider the nuclear potential of the Sunni Arabs. After having supported the Israeli 'exception,' the White House might favour a Middle East supplied with many 'dissuasive poles.'⁷⁷ Cairo's nuclear programme would only see the light of day in 2020 but it could modify the intra-Arab geopolitical equilibriums. The Egyptians have the human means to succeed with this project and Saudi Arabia and the countries of the Gulf seem ready to pay a part of the bill in order to make these facts a reality.

b. Hezbollah established in Egypt

While terrorism is obviously not a new thing in Egypt, the establishment of Hezbollah on Egyptian soil is relatively recent. In April, the security services dismantled a Hezbollah network which, according to the newspaper *Al-Ahram*, had begun its activities in 2007 when Sami Shihab, a Lebanese living in the Shiite suburbs of Beirut moved into Egypt on a false

⁷⁶ Gerard-François Dumont, *'Iran and the 'Shiite crescent': myths, realities and prospects,'* Revue Géostratégiques, n°18, janvier 2008 [Geostrategic Review, no. 18, January 2008]

⁷⁷ Cécile Hennion, *'Confronting Tehran, Washington and the Sunni Arab countries support a nuclear Egypt,'* Le Monde, Sunday, 25 March 2007, p.9.

passport. It was his arrest in November 2008 which led to the dismantling of the network. According to many Egyptian and Arab media, the network was intended to carry arms and money for Hamas using the smugglers' tunnels near Rafah (a border post between Gaza and Egypt). But the network also planned terrorist attacks in Cairo and in Sinai, particularly against sites frequented by Israeli tourists.

The Egyptian response to this affair did not take long in coming. The media and the political class denounced Iranian interference in Egyptian affairs. After having promised his Lebanese counterpart during a telephone conversation that those responsible would be brought to justice, Hosni Mubarak said: *'We will not allow anyone to damage Egyptian sovereignty or to threaten its stability.'*⁷⁸ For his part, the chief of Iranian diplomacy in Cairo was summoned as a sign of protest against: *'the meddling of Tehran in the internal affairs of the country.'*

As regards the chief of Egyptian intelligence services, Omar Suleiman, he visited King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia in order to discuss with him the subversive activities of Iran and of its military wing not only in Egypt but also in a good number of countries of the Middle East.

In this affair Iran kept a relatively low profile in the media. Tehran denied the involvement of Hezbollah which it said was involved only in supporting the Palestinian cause and that Egypt and the Arab countries were spreading false propaganda about the pro-Iranian Shiite movement. Ali Larijani, president of the Iranian Parliament, said that: *'the governments [Egyptian and the Arab countries] are accused of collaboration with Israel during its war in the Gaza Strip. They are spreading propaganda in order to restore their status.'*⁷⁹

However, the leader of Hezbollah himself acknowledged the involvement of his terrorist organisation in smuggling arms and militia from Egypt to Gaza during the recent operation 'Cast Lead.' Hassan Nasrallah denied though that Hezbollah was involved in planning terrorist attacks in Egypt.

6. The example of the Gulf states

Just after his accession to power, Ayatollah Khomeini stated his intention to expand the Islamic Revolution across all the Middle East. The states of the Persian Gulf were the first to be targeted and the example of the coup d'état in Bahrain is just the most visible example. In fact, in 1981 some militants from the Islamic Liberation Front of Bahrain having links with Iran attempted a coup d'état which was thwarted by the security services. This example demonstrates the subversive intent of Iran in the region and the fault line between the Shiites and the Sunnis. Other subversive actions such as the hijacking of a *Kuwaiti Airlines* flight between Bangkok and Kuwait City in 1988, which was the work of Shiite militants, did not calm relations between Iran and its neighbours in the Gulf.

Well before these events, in 1971, the Army of the Shah took control of Abou-Moussa and of the islands of the greater and small Tomb, near the Straits of Ormuz, after the departure of the British forces from the Gulf and several days after the declaration of independence of the United Arab Emirates. Iran has always rejected the claims of the Emirates to these small territories. The island of Abou-Moussa (12 km²) is located nearly at equal distance between Iran and the Emirates. Its strategic position and its possible reserves of oil make it a major bone of contention. In 1992, Abu-Dhabi criticised Tehran for jeopardising the status quo which prevailed until then by strengthening its military presence on the island. In 2002, during the Arab League Summit in Beirut, the question of the sovereignty of these territories was definitively settled by a resolution passed unanimously by the participating states.

⁷⁸ Muhit, 13 April 2009.

⁷⁹ Al-Jazeera TV, 13 April 2009.

This reveals the growing anxiety of the six Arab monarchies of the Gulf as they confront growing Iranian influence in the region. It was such that in September 2008 the countries decided to turn to other regional powers in order to create a counterweight to Tehran. An agreement aimed at reinforcing cooperation in the political, military and economic spheres was signed between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)⁸⁰ and Turkey. This memorandum of understanding, which was described as a strategic partnership by Sheikh Hamad Al Thani, chief diplomat of Qatar, was signed in the presence of the chief of Turkish diplomacy Ali Babacan. During this meeting, the representative of the GCC and the Turkish representative had a long discussion on Iran's opening of two administrative offices on the island of Abou-Moussa. The Iranian action provided grist for an old disagreement going back decades which is considered by the United Arab Emirates as a violation of an agreement on joint administration of this territory.

The Gulf states, which have Sunni majorities and are traditionally allied with the United States, are worried over the growing influence of Shiite Iran in the region. The prospect of a neighbour eventually having a military nuclear capability also disturbs them. The worst nightmare would be that American pressures provoke an uncontrollable regional conflagration whose consequences they would be the first to feel.⁸¹ This is why the opening of a dialogue with Iran by the new Obama administration can only be reassuring to the Persian Gulf states.

The attitude of Tehran vis-à-vis these nations is rather ambiguous and the words of former Iranian diplomats feed these suspicions. In fact, the former ambassador of Iran to the United Arab Emirates, Adel Al-Assidi, who now lives in Sweden under the status of a political refugee, maintains that Tehran has maintained a vast network of agents in the six Arab petromonarchies of the Gulf. These agents are ready to destabilise the countries at any moment and are part of the *Revolutionary Guard*, a militia close to the conservatives and to the current President of Iran.⁸²

VI. What are the prospects for the Shiite crescent and for the Arab world under Iranian influence?

1. From pan-Shiism to pan-Islamism?

The Iranian Revolution awakened Shiism from many centuries of lethargy. Today as we have seen in the course of this report, Iran continues to strengthen its position, going so far as to frighten certain Arab countries no longer with the emergence but with the long lasting reinforcement of this 'Shiite prosperity.'

Despite the differences between Sunnism and Shiism, the religious authorities of Tehran have redoubled their efforts to develop an inter-Islamic rapprochement. From the authorisation given to Shiite loyalists to pray behind the Sunni Imams, to the crisis of the caricatures of Mohammed and support for the Palestinian cause, the Iranian leaders prioritise this inter-Islamic convergence by unifying themes such as anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism. And it has to be said that in many cases this 'pan-Islamic diplomacy' – to borrow the term coined by Pierre Pahlavi⁸³ – has functioned well within the Sunni world.

⁸⁰ The GCC brings together the 6 monarchies of the Gulf: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman.

⁸¹ Delphine Minoui, 'The monarchies of the Gulf urge prudence with Tehran,' *Le Figaro*, Wednesday, 16 January 2008, Paris, p.4

⁸² Farah Stockman, '*Subversion: the sleeping agents*,' *Courrier International*, Thursday, 25 September 2008, Paris, p.8

⁸³ Pierre Pahlavi, *op. cit.*

It is this in particular which prompts the moderate Arab countries to exercise the greatest prudence because the original calling of revolutionary Islam is to bring along in its wake the various Shiite communities in: '*a revolution whose future is the general Islamisation of the world and the triumph of Shiite truth.*'⁸⁴ This decidedly utopian wish to export the revolution has had some successes and is still considered to be a threat.

Pan-Shiism remains a difficult objective, because the 140 million Shiite believers do not constitute a homogeneous whole with whom one can operate easily. Some successes of the Iranian foreign policy in the Shiite crescent are certainly incontrovertible, but they are not sufficient to truly join together the various populations as a whole. On the other hand, a goodly number of Arab states have redoubled their efforts to 'integrate' the Shiite populations. This is so especially in Bahrain, where the Shiite leaders – after having been exiled in the 1990s following clashes with the authorities – returned to the country and opened a dialogue with the authorities who allowed them to obtain economic and political benefits in exchange. As for Saudi Arabia, it has put in place a national dialogue in view of reforming the kingdom and it invited the Shiites to take part. The emirate of Qatar has, for its part, decided to grant specific rights to the Shiite minority.

Iraq embodies a considerable challenge for Iran because it has the ability to assume the leadership of the Shiite world. It is surely because the authorities in Tehran are aware of this risk that they have redoubled their efforts to keep Iraq under control. We have stressed in the chapter devoted to Iraq that the main holy places of Shiism are located in Iraq and all the Imams recognised by the Shiites are Arabs. Khomeiny himself lived for more than a decade (1965-1978) in the holy city of Najaf in Iraq whence he prepared the revolution.

However, the Iranian ambitions run far beyond the Shiite crescent and even beyond the Muslim world. Indeed, these past few years, Iran has appeared to be particularly active in strengthening its political, economic and military relations with a goodly number of states all around the planet.

2. Beyond the frontiers of Islam ?

Within the United Nations Security Council, Iran has always tried to keep up relations with China and Russia. With China we might define the relationship as an unfinished alliance. With Russia, it could be described as an opportunistic entente.⁸⁵

a. The unfinished alliance with China

During the 1990s, the military relations between Iran and China reached the kind of peak which only bilateral Sino-Pakistani and North Korean relations surpassed by a bit. Historically it was above all during the Iran-Iraq conflict that Beijing provided military materiel to Tehran. These sales collapsed at the end of the war and only recently have they returned to the summits. The Chinese have always wished to maintain relations with Iran, seeing the preponderant influence of the United States and of Russia over the remaining oil states of the region.

One other issue characterises the bilateral relations: energy routes. The Chinese leaders became aware of this only recently, going back to 2003, when the Americans entered Iraq, acquiring the ability to control the Iraqi energy resources. This was added to their presence in

⁸⁴ Thierry Dufour, '*The influence of Iran through Shiism – Modus operandi, success and limits of Iran's pro-Shiite policy,*' www.diploweb.com, October 2006.

⁸⁵ Collective, 'The real Iran,' *Revue française de géopolitique* [French review of geopolitics], Ellipses, p.192

Afghanistan, near the resources of the Caspian Sea and of Central Asia, not to mention the Arabian Peninsula. China thus has tried to turn its links with Iran into a protected domain.⁸⁶

The Sino-Iranian rapprochement shows its limits, however. Some emblematic examples such as the absence of the Iranian President from the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008 demonstrate that the alliance is not optimal. Otherwise, the setback of the request of Tehran to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation just reconfirms our analysis. Thus we can say that Tehran and Beijing draw benefits from their relationship, especially Iran, which can count on the Chinese veto right in the Security Council to enjoy a precious support versus Washington. The bilateral relations are going to develop while maintaining a certain limit of which the pair is amply aware.

b. An opportunistic entente with Russia

Historically, the Iranians benefited a fortiori from having Russian military materiel during the Iran-Iraq conflict. Relations during the 1990s continued to expand even though at the beginning of the 1980s Russia had conducted a war against Muslims in Afghanistan and, more recently, against the Muslim Chechens. In other words, the Iranians applied a sort of Realpolitik to advance their interests at the expense of ideology.

With the fall of the Soviet empire, Iran continued to develop its relations with Moscow. This attitude has always been conditioned by a bilateral desire to reduce the American influence in the region. Iran even wished to increase its influence in the Southern Caucasus. Iran and post-Soviet Russia have always cultivated harmonious relations at all levels, especially due to their shared vision of a multipolar world. From an economic point of view, their commercial exchanges went from 600 million dollars in the middle of the 1990s to 2 billion in 2004⁸⁷.

The future of bilateral relations will depend on Iranian management of the nuclear issue. So long as this problem is not settled, Tehran cannot expect unswerving Russian support.

VII. Conclusions

Iran remains an enigma. As a revolutionary regime, the Islamic Republic intends to position itself on the world chessboard as an unavoidable regional power. Iran is and will remain the preeminent Shiite nation, acting in such a way as to establish its dominant position in the Shiite crescent, to maintain and consolidate it still more. In fact, a rapid examination of the evolution of the situation in Lebanon and in Iraq suffices to convince us that Tehran has not stopped influencing this area, nor has it halted its efforts to infiltrate the moderate Arab countries.

The renewal of Shiism and the political successes which Iran has won over the past few years give us reason for concern. It is likely that Tehran will continue to support destabilisation and misunderstandings, to arouse fear and fascination, in order to reach its ultimate objective of promoting revolutionary Islam. For this purpose, it is well and truly a 'multidirectional' policy which Tehran has put in place so as to reach its objectives and break out of the isolation which saps its strength.

In this context, the 'Arab policy' of Tehran appears both a tool intended to promote its vision of Islam as well as a tactical choice permitting it, in case of grave crisis with the international community – for example over its nuclear programme – to have the means of destabilising

⁸⁶ François-Régis Dabas, '*Iran-China: an unrealised alliance*,' in 'The real Iran,' Revue française de géopolitique [French review of geopolitics], Ellipses, p.107

⁸⁷ Jonathan Piron, '*Iran-Russia, an opportunist entente*,' in 'The real Iran,' Revue française de géopolitique [French review of geopolitics], Ellipses, p.113

the whole Middle East and North Africa with a view to transforming a clearly defined and limited problem into a major regional crisis which could paralyse the great powers in the Security Council and prevent their reacting in an appropriate manner.

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