



# **JOURNAL FOR IRANIAN STUDIES**

## **Specialized Studies**

A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly Periodical Journal

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Year 2, issue 6, March 2018

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ISSUED BY



**RASANA**  
المعهد الدولي للدراسات الإيرانية  
International Institute for Iranian Studies

# The Doctrinal Tendency in Iran's Foreign Policy and its Implication for Algeria's National Security

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Since Khomeini came to power in 1979, significant changes in Iranian foreign policy have been witnessed. Most notably, the role of the religious hierarchy, and how it has defined Iran's foreign policy and steered it towards supporting the oppressed and exporting Shiism. Some believe, however, that Iran's foreign policy stems from its tendency towards racial prejudice going back to the time of the Safavid's, who were hostile to their Arab-Sunni neighbors.

The objective to export the 1979-revolution has been one of the most significant political transformations in Iran's foreign policy, and this has had implications for the wider Arab world. As a result of its interventionist strategy, Iran has entered into direct confrontation with Arab states. Iranian-Algerian relations fall into the Iranian perspective towards the Arab world. Since Reza Pahlavi's reign till a period post-1979-revolution, Algeria and Iran cooperated with each other on many occasions, such as in the Iranian hostage crisis and Algeria played the honest broker role in Iran-Iraq War—Algeria paid a high price by the death of its former Foreign Minister Mohammed Seddik Benyahia in a plane-crash in 1981. Also Algeria represented Iran in the United States during a time when their relations were frozen. However, Algeria has never been out of Iran's plan of exporting its Shiite doctrine; Iran sought to target Algeria's doctrinal integrity through creating sectarian minorities to spread its influence and ensure entry for future interventions—if necessary. This reality raises many questions about the background of Iranian “interventionist tendency” in the Arab world; its consequences on Algerian national security and religious cohesion, as well as to what extent doctrine controls Iran's foreign policy in the post-revolution period, and how the Shiite *marja'*<sup>(1)</sup> define foreign policy alignments and priorities. This study aims to unfold the ramifications of the Iranian philosophy of “exporting the revolution”; and how Iran creates minority proxies across the Arab world including Algeria, with the aim of transforming these minority enclaves into destabilizing forces inside Algeria. The study hypothesizes the integral role of doctrine in Iran and the supremacy of the theocratic leadership in decision-making, who define the major framework of Iran's foreign policy. Also, the study explains how the influence of the Iranian Supreme Leader increases simultaneously with the growing role of “exporting the revolution” in Iran's foreign policy—resulting in the voice of the revolution being louder than statehood itself. Iran seeks to change the doctrinal map of Algeria through encouraging Shiism. This is reflective of the Iranian elites' perspective of forging relations with Arab neighboring countries. Finally, the study concludes that if Shiism is expanded in Algeria, because of exporting the revolution, sectarian disputes would break out threatening Algeria's national security. The study tackles the following research questions:

### **The influence of Iran's belief system in defining its foreign policy alignments**

The Iranian revolution was ideological stemming from the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih*. The theoretical approach of the study looks at the influence of Iran's *belief system* in shaping its foreign policy alignments, especially Iran's policy toward its Arab neighbors-, which the study specifically explores. It is worth mentioning that several scholars such as Werner Levi and Lloyd Jensen have analyzed the religious dimension in Iran's foreign policy, as “those belief systems might be driven from the ideology of statehood or from the beliefs<sup>(2)</sup> of its people.”<sup>(3)</sup>

Often, the study of the religious dimension and its influence in foreign policymaking is carried out within the framework of values, as it is the general framework of attitudes, observations and event-evaluation. The religious dimension directly influences international relations in general, and foreign policy. Religion is one of the key fundamentals impacting the belief system in any country, therefore, it directly influences policymaking. However, the doctrinal dimension has not yet been tackled by western scholars rigorously; it is more narrow than the religious dimension and it is under this that a certain doctrine is defined and affiliated, i.e., doctrinal dimension is a part of the religious dimension.<sup>(4)</sup> The belief system of the political leader gradually evolves through a long-term process influenced by the political and social upbringing of the leader, in addition to religious drives, personal and educational experiences. These factors build a comprehensive political belief system that is generated from the surrounding environment. For the political leader, the belief system has two major missions: First, to help the leader to realize the information acquired from the surroundings, and second, to offer a decision-making approach.

Lloyd Jensen argues that the belief system of state can influence its perspective towards what is going in the international system. It becomes like a realization platform in which some incidents are neglected or re-explained in accordance to the belief system to maintain a stable foreign policy. National belief systems are used as a pretext to justify certain foreign-policy options, as these options are, usually, generated from national interests. Moreover, belief systems are used as 'propaganda' to justify the implemented policy and to convince others it is right. Also, it is used to support national cohesion; therefore, it is one of the most significant factors in the formation of national identity, especially in developing countries.<sup>(5)</sup> Jensen's argument is not only confined to developing countries, but it is apt for those countries adopting modernization, where influence of religion is still active such as in the United States, a highly modernized country.

In the same context, Levi states that there are two cases in which the belief system largely influences foreign policymaking. The first emerges in a revolution while the second one is when the decision-making process of a political system is in the hand of a minority, especially if this minority believes in a revolutionary ideology.<sup>(6)</sup> This can be used as an approach in studying Iranian foreign policy in the post 1979-revolution period, as it is greatly grounded on the "doctrinal" determinant.<sup>(7)</sup> Jensen confirms this saying "when Khomeini came to power in 1979, the role of clerics in foreign policymaking has become clearer," and more instrumental in shaping its alignment. The doctrinal dimension is deeply rooted in Iran through its constitution, which confirms the "export of the revolution" shall be ingrained in Iranian foreign policy, and the Twelver Ja'fari school of [shi'i] religion shall "remain eternal unchangeable", Article 12. This article shows how deep

and instrumental the doctrinal dimension is in Iranian foreign policymaking post 1979. It reveals Iran's desire to stand out, by its own doctrine, against other Islamic schools of thought. The perspective of religious leaders, has always expressed Iran's distinctiveness amongst the Arab countries, as their schools of thought are not viewed to be compatible with Iran's Ja'fari school, and are included within the circle of "oppression", according to Iran's perspective. This has led to a dichotomy in Iran's foreign policy with tension existing between the logic of ideology and statehood. However, its bedrock is doctrine, which is compliant to "religious and doctrinal ideology insist[ing] to interfere in other country's domestic affairs through supporting Shiite minorities in these states and the opposition-Islamic movements and organizations."<sup>(8)</sup> The doctrinal dimension has marked Iran from other Islamic-Sunni states, and it is the window from which Iran sees its regional surroundings. This dimension has influenced Iran relations with the Islamic-Sunni world, believing this 'world' is its first rival. Yet categorizing doctrines has never interested those outside the Islamic world. The review of literature, in this field, indicates the influence of this dimension on the basic components, issues, and determinants of foreign policy, and how these components are intersected. According to Iran, the doctrinal dimension is highly important and considered the most central factor in its ideological sphere. That is why the doctrinal determinant is one of the most active factors in sharpening Iran's national identity, defining its political system, and granting its 'statehood' international status. The doctrinal determinant has been very instrumental in shaping Iran's foreign policymaking and in constructing the ideological and emotional thought process of Iran's politicians. There is no doubt, that doctrine plays a significant role in Iranian foreign policy issues through "religious influence in forming the statehood policy and alignment towards many issues, which is used as a benchmark in forming these policies and as an instrument to implement these policies and achieve their goals."<sup>(9)</sup> And it is a source for many new issues imposed on the political agenda. It becomes more notable and stronger when the state backs missionaries or spreads a certain ideology to achieve international status. The religious influence, in the Iranian case, is dominated by the doctrinal dimension, which has been very decisive in promoting Iranian ideology abroad and Iran has utilized all required instruments needed to achieve this goal like propaganda campaigns, encouraging uprisings, supporting Shiite's, their movements and parties such as Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Finally, the doctrinal dimension has been very pivotal and instrumental in shaping Iran's policymaking, mirroring its perspective and role, such as being the regional shield, supporting liberation movements and fighting occupation. Iran's doctrinal role is most prominently noted as a "defender of belief,"<sup>(10)</sup> therefore, if it neglects this role for the sake of other goals, it will be questioned. The aforementioned clarifies the significance of the doctrinal dimension in Iran—and its religious dimen-

sion in general—and the related concepts underpinning its foreign policy. However, apparently, it is difficult or might be impossible to interpret the foreign policy of any country based on, solely, its doctrinal, religious, or interest dimension. There are several intersected dimensions in foreign policy, and usually the religious and doctrinal dimensions are exploited to serve other interests.

### **Aspects of Iranian foreign policy post-1979 revolution**

Since the 1979-revolution, Iranian foreign policy has engrained a new policy alignment suitable for a post-Khomeini revolution era. It started by stating that religion was a key determinant in steering policy and by presenting the *Velayat-e Faqih* position [Supreme Jurist Leader], who completely controls policy according to the perspective of Khomeini, the godfather of the Iranian revolution. Upon his religious standing, Khomeini made the religious perspective the major driver behind Iran's foreign policy under the pretext of 'exporting the revolution', to Sunni neighboring countries.

#### **» Doctrinism as a determinant of Iranian foreign policy**

Doctrine highly dominates Iranian foreign policy. The success of the 'Islamic' 1979-revolution generated a theocratic and 'doctrinalized' political system. Consequently, an unconventional institution emerged, the institution of the Supreme Leader, in which he wields, almost, absolute and wide powers granted by the constitution. His powers, intertwined with the three organs of the state; executive, legislature and judiciary, results in him completely controlling the decision-making process. It is an authoritarian institution distinguishing the Iranian political system from others worldwide. Iran used *Velayat-e Faqih* in forging two parallel ruling powers imitating the ideological and institutional tradition of the Safavid dynasty. First, the Supreme Leader represents religion, whereas the President represents civilian authority. Iran is good at moving softly from ideological-revolutionary power to civilian authority, putting doctrinal interests above all else. The Supreme Leadership plays an integral role in defining all government policies, as well as, foreign and defense policy as stated in the constitution. Iranian foreign policy is universalized as stated in the constitution, Article 152, "the defense of the rights of all Muslims" and Article 154, "it supports the struggles of the oppressed for their rights against the oppressors anywhere in the world". These articles confirm Iran's 'Islamic project'—as Khomeini said. So Iranian policy expands to squeeze all Muslims under one flag; 'the flag of the Supreme Leader'. Larijani confirmed this concept in his book "*Umm al-Qura*".<sup>(11)</sup> This article [152] grants Iran the right to interfere in other states'; however, it excludes states beyond the Islamic world. But Article 154 includes the oppressed anywhere in the world.<sup>(12)</sup> By thoroughly studying the Iranian Constitution, it is apparent that Iran's foreign policy and its expansionist project emerged from a revolutionary ideology adopted by the

new religious elites. The religious ‘doctrinal’ language and the viewpoint of ‘exporting the revolution’<sup>(13)</sup> are the cornerstone of Iran’s behavior with the Arab and Islamic world with attractive slogans motivating the oppressed, who are looking for a revival “project” to strengthen cooperation after successive national failures.<sup>(14)</sup> The slogans were mostly attractive for geographically, culturally, and doctrinally distant people like those in the *Maghreb*.<sup>(15)\*</sup>

#### » **Role of the Supreme Leader in defining Iran’s foreign policy**

The Iranian constitution grants the Supreme Leader a significant status in shaping foreign policy as he tops the supreme ‘theocratic’ leadership in Iran. The Supreme Leader has the right to make major and decisive decisions. It is worth mentioning here that *Velayat-e Faqih* is the bedrock and the ideological framework of *Hakimiyyah* [the sovereignty of God]. This widens the power boundaries of the Supreme Leader because, according to *Hakimiyyah*, he is not confined to the constitutional or legal system. His powers surpass beyond what the constitution defines. This can be clearly noticed in Khomeini’s writings. In his book “*Velayat-e Faqih and Islamic Governance*”, Khomeini stated that the powers of the Supreme Leader are boundless and the constitution does not confine, restrict or limit his powers. And the Supreme Leader is above the constitution in which he can add, delete or amend whatever he believes to be necessary. The Supreme Leader has the absolute power in guiding foreign policy. Some researchers assume that Iranian political history and cultural heritage has boosted the boundless power of the Supreme Leader. They confirm that the decision-makers have always been kings, who conquered and geared foreign policy according to their own personal attitudes without studying any decision out of their personal domain. This clarifies why the Supreme Leader has been granted a pivotal role in foreign policymaking. Article 57 and Article 110 confirm that the Supreme Leader supervises the three state organs.<sup>(16)</sup> Khomeini identified, in December 1988, the absolute power of the Supreme Leader “... I must clarify that government is a branch of Prophet Mohammed (may peace be upon him) absolute guardianship, it is one of the preliminaries of Islamic provisions and above all sub-provisions including prayers, fasting, and Haj... The government [Supreme Leadership] can unilaterally decertify legitimate agreements with the people if it is believed (by the Supreme Leadership) to conflict with the national interests or Islam. The government can temporarily suspend – if it believes to be necessary when it contradicts with national interests and Islam— Haj which is obligatory for Muslims.”<sup>(17)</sup>

#### » **Exporting the evolution and Shiism as an instrument in Iranian foreign policy**

Iranian foreign policy has been adhesively bound to exporting the revolution since 1979. It implicitly means exporting the Iranian Shiite model abroad, especially within the Islamic world: Iran’s main target is to spread Shiism. Iran believes its

revolution is a translation of the long-aspired Islamic state and sees itself as a role model for Muslims, so it must lead the Islamic world.<sup>(18)</sup> Iranian foreign policy is geared by two premises; the premise of statehood in dealing with the West, and the premise of revolution in dealing with the Islamic and Arab world. Iran's regional proxies, supported by its revenues, follow the commands of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, and they use slogans, such as defending the oppressed and protecting minorities. This policy of exporting the revolution is derived from Khomeini's saying in 1980, "We, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, will work hard to export our revolution to the world. We can challenge the world with our ideology."<sup>(19)</sup> This declared Iranian policy paved the way for Iranian doctrinalized foreign policy. The export of the revolution has been the cornerstone of revolutionary theorists.<sup>(20)</sup> This can be seen on the ground through direct and indirect interventions in neighboring countries: Lebanon, Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia Afghanistan, Sudan, and Bosnia. The Iran seeks to spread across the whole Islamic world beyond the boundaries of Shi'ite territory.<sup>(21)</sup> It provokes Shi'ite minorities in the *Mashriq*<sup>(22)</sup> to acquire political rights. The Iranian constitution confirms explicitly the legitimacy of foreign interventions. Article 3 states, "the organization of the nation's foreign policy based on Islamic criteria, fraternal commitment to all Muslims, and unrestrained support for the impoverished people of the world." Article 154 states, "The Islamic Republic of Iran considers human happiness throughout human society as its ideal. It considers independence, freedom, and the governance of justice and truth as the right of all the people of the world. Consequently, while it completely abstains from any kind of intervention in the internal affairs of other nations, it supports the struggles of the oppressed for their rights against the oppressors anywhere in the world."<sup>(23)</sup> These articles justify interventions in other countries' domestic affairs under the pretext of helping 'the oppressed'. It is a misleading term aimed to provoke the public, particularly Shi'ites, as Iran believes to be their guardian wherever they are in the world. Some argue that Iran's expansionist policy, since the early 1990s-2000s, was curtailed by the blockade on Iran and the ramifications of its nuclear program. However, exporting the revolution has never disappeared from Iran's foreign policy agenda. Iran uses soft and hard power to help in its expansionist project.<sup>(24)</sup>

Apparently, Iran uses sectarian militias as a major proxy for this role.<sup>(25)</sup> It is evident Iran's main goal behind backing militia proxies in the Arab world, under the pretext of exporting the revolution, is to weaken Arab states.<sup>(26)</sup> These proxies are the main instrument that Iran uses to penetrate regional countries. An example can be drawn here, Lebanon, in January 2016, abstained from voting for the Arab League resolution condemning Iran and Hezbollah for having control over Iraq's decision-making process through sectarian parties and military proxies, such as the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which runs parallel to the Iraqi Army and receives direct commands from Iranian military officials.<sup>(27)</sup>

## **The impact of Iranian doctrinal policy on Algerian national security**

Algeria is a living example of how doctrinal tendency can affect national security. The impact of Iranian doctrinal policy on Algerian national security can be tackled as follows:

### **» Historical dimension of Iran-Algeria relations**

Iran-Algeria relations have gone through many ups and downs. Iran's expansionist project has not stopped at the borders of the Arabian Gulf region, but it has reached up to the Maghreb countries. Since the 1979-revolution, Algeria expressed its support to the new regime. Later, their cooperation was strengthened. In 1982 during the Iran-Iraq War, the Algerian President Chadli Bendjedid visited Tehran. Algeria accepted to be Iran's representative in the United States after U.S. ties with Iran were frozen on April 7, 1980. Algeria had been also very instrumental in releasing American hostages who were captured when the U.S. Embassy was invaded on November 4, 1979.<sup>(28)\*</sup> Algeria brokered during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988).<sup>(29)\*</sup> It paid a high price after the plane of Algerian Foreign Minister Mohammed Seddik Benyahia crashed on the Iraq-Turkey border, on May 3, 1982. Some studies claim that necessity, common interests along with a desire to increase cooperation in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) are the main motives behind Algeria-Iran rapprochement. However, behavioral and political changes in Iranian foreign policy towards the Arab world, including Algeria, provoked Algerian fears and concerns. Reviewing Iran's history, usually Iran's behavior is geared by its own ideology that is harmonized with its pragmatic interests, while giving utmost priority to 'exporting the revolution' when dealing with Arab neighboring countries. Since the 1990s, Iran-Algeria relations have become strained because of Iran's foreign policy perspective —'exporting the revolution'. Algeria recognized Iran's announced support of the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF)— by providing political, media, and official assistance— as an intervention in its domestic affairs. ISF's leader Abbas Madani was officially received in Tehran and met with the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Algeria's concerns grew provoked by the emerging relationship between ISF and Iranian leaders. Iran castigated Algeria's cancellation of election results in 1992, when ISF won, and described it as "*Taught's* [evil power] dogma." Iran described the assassination of the Algerian President Mohamed Boudiaf as the "assassination of *Taught*". The Iranian cleric Ahmed Janati reused this description in a Friday prayer speech in Tehran.<sup>(30)</sup> Algerian concerns increased as Iran promised ISF five million dollars if they won the elections. It is strange how Iran was ready to support a Salafist party, considering it is a bitter rival to Iran's official 'Twelver' doctrine. As a result, Algeria deported seven Iranian diplomats, including the military and cultural counselors, as well as the ambassador's assistant. Later, in 1992, Algeria withdrew its ambassador to Tehran after Iran placed a siege on the Algerian embassy and the Algerian ambas-

sador's house in Tehran.<sup>(31)</sup> This incident shows to what extent Iran's aggressive reaction can reach if it is not countered. In March 1993, Algeria made a decisive decision; cutting completely all diplomatic ties with Iran—during the ruling of the Supreme Council of State co-headed by Mohamed Boudiaf, who was assassinated in 1992 and succeeded by Ali Kafi.<sup>(32)</sup> During the presidency of Ali Kafi and his successor Liamine Zéroual, Iran tried to adjust its relations with Algeria but failed. Algeria insisted on accusing Iran of supporting, with all means, the Islamic armed militia and directly collaborating with it through its regional proxy Hezbollah, whose leaders had direct contact with the Algerian militia's leaders. The security situation, back then in Algeria, did not allow any further naturalization with Iran. Any advanced steps might have been used by Iran to bolster ties with Islamic radicals.<sup>(33)</sup> Algerians positively sympathized with the 1979-revolution. They backed Iran in its war against Iraq, believing that the Iranian revolution mirrored the Algerian revolution, and that they (Iranians and Algerians) all stood up against imperial powers. Inversely, Iran successfully exploited the Algerian emotive attitude in penetrating deeper into the Algerian community. Later, Iran-Algeria relations improved. In 1999, Abdelaziz Bouteflika became the president of Algeria and implemented the "Civil Concord Law", to achieve national reconciliation. Bouteflika was seeking external support for his fragile state. Bouteflika met with the Iranian President Khatami, paving the way for further naturalization and opening the gate for Shiism in Algeria. For the first time ever, Shiite Algerians openly unfolded their presence by publicly celebrating *Ashura* like all Shiites all over the world. Moqtada Sadr called on, what he referred as, "Algerian Shiites" to "Stand up and search for more freedom in this country by practicing Shiite ceremonies."<sup>(34)</sup> This was a dramatic change leading to Iran penetrating Algerian doctrinal cohesion by creating Shiite cells amongst the Algerian Sunni-majority society, who lived for decades in religious harmony.

#### » Iran and Shiism expansion in Algeria

Shia emerged since the Rustamid dynasty (761-908). In the Fatimid Caliphate, Ibn Khaldun stated that Shiism was compulsorily forced on the Maghreb people (Arabs and non-Arabs), who followed the *Maliki* school. In the early fourth century, Shiism was imposed by force by the Fatimids. The Kutama Berber tribe, the pillar of the Fatimid Caliphate, converted to Shiism. The Fatimids sought to spread Shiism across the Maghreb by killing and displacing proponents of the *Maliki* school. Ibn Khaldun argues, in his book "*Muqaddima*" [Introduction], that the people of Maghreb are Sunnis "and Bedouins dominated the Maghreb and Andalusia. They were not suffering the more cultured urban life style that of Iraq. They were closer to *Hejaz* [part of Arabian Peninsula] because they were Bedouins too. That is why the *Maliki* school has been still vivid there."<sup>(35)</sup> This refutes the point that Shiism is deeply rooted in the Maghreb, particularly Algeria, and the pretext Shiite Iranians

have used to revive their Shiite empire in Algeria.

**A review of related literature indicates that Shiism in Algeria has gone through four main stages:**

» **First stage (1962-1979):** Shiism was carried through individual efforts: People who came from the Mashriq to work at educational institutions, particularly in universities and high-schools in the Maghreb, advocated for Shiism. Few people converted to Shiism because of a lack of an institutionalized political or religious cover—setting up blueprints and drawing strategies.<sup>(36)</sup> Therefore, during that period, variant Islamic-Sunni streams emerged in Algeria like the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafism—including its variant organizational spectrums and *da'wah* [advocating for Islam] leaders—while Shiism remained idle.

» **Second stage (1979-2000):** It was marked by a dramatic rise of the Islamic-Iranian revolution model. Movements and slogans were spread wide to export the 1979-revolution, calling on the Iranian revolutionary experience to be duplicated by political Islamic streams; represented by ISF, whose leaders were in direct and personal contact with Khomeini and were welcoming his proponents.<sup>(37)</sup> During that period, Shiism was politicized; an emotive Shiism without ideological-dogmatic foundation. It spread through the shining image of the revolution and through imposing the Iranian experience. Algerians were magnetized by the Iranian revolutionary model resembling their own national revolution.

» **Third stage (2000-2011):** It is the peak of Shiism. The Iranians triggered Algerian sympathy first by the concept of revolution and second by the case of Palestine. The Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon and the 2006-Israeli-Hezbollah war made Hezbollah very popular amongst Algerians. As a result, to seize the moment, Shiism activities increased in Algeria.<sup>(38)</sup> What really made Algerians to be convinced by the Iranian model was the growing Iranian role in the Middle East, its handling of the nuclear file, and Ahmadinejad's threats of burning Israeli—and challenging Western powers. These were very influential and symbolic factors for Algerians.

» **Fourth stage (2011-present):** It is marked by public and open Shiite celebrations. They publicly performed Shiite ceremonies in the Aïn Témouchent Province, South of the Algerian capital. Moqtada Sadr called for respecting Shiite freedom of worship in Algeria and encouraged Shiites to resist. As well as, the Iranian cultural counselor Amir Mousawi was very instrumental in promoting Shiism across Algeria. This was confronted by a furious-public wave rejecting this 'alien' stream.<sup>(39)</sup>

To spread Shiism wider, advocates have been exerting all possible efforts whether by indirect political participation trying to penetrate political parties or by establishing associations and *husseiniyas* [special halls in which Shiite celebrations are held]—though this was temporary.<sup>(40)</sup> Several provinces have had *husseiniyas* to

perform Shiite ceremonies, most notably, in Aïn Témouchent. There are no official statistics of the exact number of Shiite Algerians because they practice *taqiyya* [a term given by Shiites to hide one's true belief to avoid persecution]. They do not reveal their belief until they are strong enough. However, Shiite websites published that their "number may reach 100.000, whereas semi-official sources estimate that their number does not exceed 5000."<sup>(41)</sup> In 2015, Moqtada Sadr criticized Algerian Salafists and called on his followers in Algeria to get up and never surrender to radical Salafists; Shiite bitter enemies.<sup>(42)</sup> As a result, Algerian authorities have overcome their public silence and declared official statements about Shiism. For the first time, the Minister of Religious Affairs and Endowments Ghlamallah undermined the risk of Shiism in Algeria. The Algerian authorities reaffirmed Ghlamallah's statement saying, "Shiism risk must not be magnified."<sup>(43)</sup> It was reported Shiism regressed in Algeria, however, signs of hidden Shiism are still looming.<sup>(44)</sup> The researcher Anwar Malik argues that despite of, what Shiites refer to as, the "insight" of Sunni's to convert to Shiism, a process in which "it starts with a deviation from the *Maliki* school (Algeria's official Sunni school) and ends with the apostasy of the wide-spread Salafist groups amongst Algerians...we have actually neglected this phenomenon to an extent inciting speculations of the Algerian regime."<sup>(45)</sup> This unveils how the Algerian authorities have undermined the phenomenon of Shiism and its ramifications on Algerian national security. Later, scholars, who participated in the Jerusalem conference in Algeria sternly warned that "Algeria adopts the *Maliki* school, leave Sunnis with their own schools." The Algerian Minister of Religious Affairs Mohammed Essa said that Algeria does not accept any religious *marja'* but its Sunni. Despite of the fact that the Algerian Constitution confirms the freedom of belief and *Article 42* states "the freedom of conscience and the freedom of opinion shall be inviolable. The free exercise of worship shall be guaranteed under the respect of law."

#### » **Ramifications of Shiism on Algerian national security**

"Detaining 400 Algerians, returning from Iraq and Iran, after participating in Ashura's ceremonies in Karbala, in Iraq, and in Iran in November 2017 over finding flyers praising Shiite figures and political leaders,"<sup>(46)</sup> opened the debate once again in Algeria over Iran's role in destabilizing its religious cohesion and national security. Old concerns grew again over Shiism stirred by Iraqi and Iranian *marja'*. There are several lines of evidence confirming that Iranian leaders were involved in exploiting the political crisis in Algeria, in the 1990s, serving Iran's agenda. The Iranians had relations with ISF and provided military training to some ISF elements to destabilize Algerian security. Amongst Algerian efforts to counter terrorism and radicalism, academicians and politicians point out to a new looming threat; the spread of the Ahmadiyya movement, Shiism, and Christian missionaries. They, definitely, pose threats to Algerian religious coexistence and social

security. The spread of Shiism and exporting the Iranian revolution to Algeria is far-beyond a doctrinal question or an individual conversion. It runs deep inside Algerian national security. Tearing away the religious texture of Algeria, deeply rooted, variant and yet coherent, indeed threatens Algerian national security. The Iranian experience in Iraq and Syria unveils how Iran exploits its relations with Shiite minorities and militias to spread its influence. The expansion of Shiism is one of the most concerning problems for Algerians. The estimated number of Shiites is about 3000 distributed across Algeria, according to official sources. The Ministry of Religious Affairs in Algeria counters any Shiism activity in Algeria. It also confirms that the only official Islamic-Sunni school to be followed in Algeria is *Maliki*. However, it still has some concerns about disagreements over doctrines or races, which may furiously trigger, according to politician a sectarian war in the region.<sup>(47)</sup> They believe that the dilemma does not stem from Shiism but from ‘political’ Shiism, adhesively loyal to external parties and bound to Iran, regardless of national boundaries. Iran sees itself as the guardian leader of Shiites worldwide similar to the relation between Israel and Jews, regardless of where they live they are loyal to the Israeli state. Thus, Shiites, wherever they reside, are loyal to the Iranian Jurist Leader. Although Shiism and exporting the Iranian revolution are not widely discussed in Algeria, Algerian authorities’ growing concerns, in this regards, are bound to **three dimensions**:

» **Fist dimension:** Expanding Shiism threatens Algerian religious coexistence and its official Islamic-Sunni school, *Maliki*. The Minister of Religious Affairs reaffirmed the government’s concerns and warned about the continuous targeting of Algeria’s religious texture, he said “We remain steadfast to our religious *marja*’, inherited from our old scholars. We do not accept any other new *marja*’ neither we replace it with *marja*’ from the Mashriq or Maghreb.”<sup>(48)</sup> Any change in the religious texture may crack Algeria’s social solidarity that cannot be mended later. Especially, if the new powers at home are bound to external powers; like the Arab Shiites who are loyal to Iran’s Supreme Leader.

Highlighting the risk of Shiism across Algeria will eventually lead to the creation of a doctrinal minority, because Iran intensively focus on the “Berbers”. It provokes Berbers to rebel against their Arab-Islamic community. Here Iran will confront the radicals in the Algerian Berber movement by linking Shiism to Persian identity. Thus, converting to Shiism means giving up on Arab-Algerian identity and culture, which some Berber advocates completely reject. The emergence of cultural and doctrinal premises will deepen the crack in Algeria’s social fabric, smoothing the path for Iranian intervention under the pretext of defending the Shiite minority in Algeria.

» **Second dimension:** Shiism paves the way for Khomeini’s revolutionary-political Shiism. It calls for being loyal to Iran, i.e., the Supreme Jurist Leader, leading

those who convert to Shiism to directly confront Algerian statehood. Previous experiences show that Shiites are more loyal to Iran's Supreme Leader than they are to their own homelands. This is a real dilemma yet an open gate for Iran to use the new Shiites to stir chaos and destabilize Algerian national security. It was previously confirmed by the ISF collaborating covertly with the Iranian regime—despite their divergent doctrines, Iran has not missed any opportunity to attract Salafist leaders and use them as an instrument influencing the Algerian decision-making process. Anwar Malik confirms that expanding Shiism, in Algeria and the northern regions in the Maghreb, is “a hedging Iranian policy to control oil fields — considering the U.S. strategic project—that cannot be achieved without exporting Shiite ideology through which Iran can spread its influence. Just like what is happening now in Iraq and what will happen later in Syria.”<sup>(49)</sup> Moreover, Iran can place a siege coming the Sunni-Arabian-Gulf countries confronting Iran, most prominent among them is Saudi Arabia.

» **Third dimension:** Militarizing Shiite sects by transforming them into militias loyal to Iran's Supreme Leader—this can be clearly seen in Iran's relations with Shiites in Yemen and Lebanon. History repeat itself; Iran starts by spreading Shiism within ‘exporting the revolution’ framework through distributing books about *Ahl Al Bait* [family of prophet Mohammed], which dramatically evolves into forming bloody militias rebelling against their own governments that are categorized, according to Iran's ideology, as regimes allying with symbols of ‘global arrogance.’ Iran presents itself as the guardian of Shiites across the globe; this provokes Algerian concerns about its national security being destabilized by growing Shiism. Anwar Malik says “we have previously confirmed, by tangible evidence, whose holders are still alive, that Iran seeks to have a military presence in Algeria through military armed organizations loyal to the Iranian regional project, which is based on the concept of exporting the Iranian revolution and supporting fundamentalist movements worldwide, and this is confirmed in the Iranian Constitution.”<sup>(50)</sup> In the early 1990s, Algeria suffered ramifications of an armed opposition supported by an external power. Algerians are afraid of re-facing the same crisis; that is why their growing concerns over Shiism are quite justified.

The hidden risk of Shiism has been seriously considered by the Algerian authorities. In depth intelligence investigations were carried out to unveil the true nature of Shiism, its active leaders and their relations with external powers abroad in some Algerian provinces. The Ministry of Education in Algeria suspended 11 teachers who newly converted to Shiism.<sup>(51)</sup> The Algerian authorities try to “deter new Shiites from reaching religious platforms.”<sup>(52)</sup> This clarifies the Algerian growing concern over expanding Shiism, especially in the suburbs and high schools, believing that Iran is establishing its first bedrock of influence in Algeria, duplicating its experience in Syria and Iraq.

## Conclusion

The discussion indicates that Iranian foreign policy based on ‘exporting the revolution’ has provoked Algerian concerns. Iran’s growing influence across the Middle East can be visualized in four Arab states; Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen. It is believed that Algeria will be the fifth state. This does not only jeopardize religious cohesion in Algeria but destabilizes its security—because Arab Shiites are completely loyal to Iran’s Supreme Leader and not to their own governments. Iran has been trying to spread Shiism in Algeria since 1990-2000 through funding, providing military training, advisory services, and establishing direct contacts with Islamic streams in Algeria.<sup>(55)</sup> The Iranian cultural counselor has also been very instrumental in promoting Shiism amongst Algerians. Sadr called Shiite Algerians to speak up and never be submissive to “stray groups”, referring to Algerian Salafists. Iran targets the linguistically marked tribes in Algeria, i.e., Berbers. If it managed to spread its influence amongst Berber tribes, it would win a new bargaining chip and an effective instrument to steer Algerian foreign policy. In the early 1990s, Iran pragmatically and ideologically managed to penetrate the ‘Sunni’ ISF, so supposedly, it would be easier to gear its loyal Shiites in Algeria. Iran believes that the new Shiites in Algeria have become an influential power that can be used to serve Iranian interests more than the Algerian government can ever do. It is the bedrock of its expansionist project in the Maghreb region. Reviewing Iranian history in the region foretells that Iran is eager to forge relations with opposition forces in any Arab country to entrench its influence. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards and the Iranian proxy Hezbollah had relations with Algerian armed groups during the Algerian crisis in the 1990s. Iran wanted to attract Islamic leaders, regardless of their doctrine and ideological affiliation, to destabilize Algerian national security. In a nutshell, if Algeria does not curb Shiism expansion, led by the Iranian cultural counselor Amir Mousawi, Iran will strengthen its ties with terrorist groups in Algeria, repeating the story as one witnessed in the 1990s. Iran aspires to breed its own armed militias in Algeria, based upon its revolutionary ideology, including even Sunni groups, who believe in the Iranian revolutionary model. Also, Iran seeks to exploit Shiite groups to crack Algerian religious cohesion and destabilize its national security. The Iranian expansionist project is looming ahead in Algeria; it will become a reality if Algerians remain idle.

## Endnotes

- (1) "marja' is an authority who provides religious guidance to lay Shi'is". Jocelyne Cesari, *The Awakening of Muslim Democracy* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2014), 129
- (2) Belief: "A self-probable judgement explicitly or implicitly stated in a saying; when beliefs are systematically connected in the individual mindset they form a Belief System. Beliefs are the drives guiding one individual to a certain behavior, i.e., it has a behavioral function on the physiological status of a decision-maker. It influences his realization of certain issue." See: Mohammad Sayed Salem, *Analyzing Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed. (Cairo : Maktabat Nahda Masryah, 1998), 397-389.
- (3) Lloyd Jensen, *Explaining Foreign Policy* (Pearson Education: California, 1982), 84
- (4) Lloyd Jensen op. cit. p. 84-85.
- (5) Werner Levi, "Ideology, Interests, and Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* March 14, 1970, 1-31.
- (6) Lloyd Jensen op. cit. p. 112.
- (7) \* Doctrinarism indicates having a different doctrine within one religion (according to Islamic studies) Doctrinarism, which means having variant or different doctrines within one religion, means diversity based on different affiliations to Sunni or Shia. See: Walid Mohammad Nassar, "Doctrinarism in Iranian Foreign Policy Toward Middle East 2003-2015," *Democratic Arab Center*, Jan. 18, 2016, [goo.gl/3jhyB6](http://goo.gl/3jhyB6)
- (8) Ibid.
- (9) Adel Ali Abdullah, *Drives of Iranian Foreign Policy in Middle East*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Madarek Publishing House, 2012), 60.
- (10) Ayyad Batniji, "Patterns of Iranian Foreign Policy," *Araa Magazine*, February 20, [goo.gl/LKYTti](http://goo.gl/LKYTti)
- (11) Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran, 1st ed., Tehran: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1409H, 97.
- (12) Mahjoob Zuwairi, "Doctrinal Burden: Ruling Factors of Iranian Foreign Policy Toward Arab World," *International Politics*, March 15, 2017, [goo.gl/dzqinv](http://goo.gl/dzqinv)
- (13) Mohammed Fal, "Doctrinal Dimension in Iranian Policy," *Hayat*, Jan. 18, [goo.gl/ELU8X3](http://goo.gl/ELU8X3)
- (14) Rouhollah Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, 2nd ed. (Ministry of Religious Affairs: Tehran, 1988), 50-51.
- (15) The Maghreb is the region comprising five countries in the northern-west of Africa: Algeria, Tunisia Morocco, Libya and Mauritania.
- (16) Iranian Constitution, op. cit., p. 49 and p. 76.
- (17) Aysawyah Aminah, "Iran Regional Role in Middle-Eastern System after Cold War," M.A. Thesis, (Algeria: University of Batna, 2009-2010), 69.
- (18) "General Aspects of Iranian Foreign Policy," *Alrased*, Sep. 11, 2006, [goo.gl/PnZSMt](http://goo.gl/PnZSMt)
- (19) Mo'amer Kholi, "Doctrinal Dimension In Iranian Foreign Policy toward Mashreq Countries," *Rawabt Center for Research and Strategic Studies*, Jan. 19, 2016, [goo.gl/ZYMCrM](http://goo.gl/ZYMCrM)
- (20) \* Iran drew a group of circles revolving around its orbit to export its revolution, which means nothing but exporting Shiism. The new Iranian elites adopted it as the official doctrine in the state after being officially adopted in 1501—when Safavid dynasty was in direct confrontation with Sunni-Ottoman Empire. See: Aysawyah Aminah, op. cit., p.68.
- (21) Mohamed Nabil, "L'Iran et les pays arabes, une politique ambivalente ," *yabiladi*, [goo.gl/wsk6vX](http://goo.gl/wsk6vX)
- (22) \* The Mashreq is the region in the Middle East located to east of Egypt, it includes: Egypt, Sudan, Israel, Palestinian territories, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia.
- (23) Mo'amer Kholi, op. cit.
- (24) Ayyad Batniji, op. cit.
- (25) Ibid.
- (26) "Lebanon Objects League of Arab States' Statement on Iran and Hezbollah," *Sputniknews*, Nov. 1, 2016. [goo.gl/dkmjmZ](http://goo.gl/dkmjmZ)
- (27) Mo'amer Kholi, op. cit.
- (28) \*After invading the U.S. Embassy in Nov. 1979, the protestors, of Khomeini's proponents, captured 50 American diplomats, who had not been released but after Algeria brokered.

- (29) \* Algeria brokered to end the Iran-Iraq War depending on its previous experience. It had previously convinced the two parties (Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and Iranian Shah Reza Pahlavi) by concluding Algeria's Agreement in 1975, supervised by the Algerian President Houari Boumédiène, about the dispute on Shatt Arab. After Khomeini came to power this dispute rose again.
- (30) Tareq Hasson, "Fundamentalist Movement under Khomeini's Service," *Lebanese Forces*, Dec. 1, 2010. [goo.gl/zXwJ9W](http://goo.gl/zXwJ9W)
- (31) Anwar Malik, "Shiism's Secrets and its Relation with Terrorism in Algeria... Part 5: Iran-Algeria relations, Ups and Downs," *Echoroukonline*, June 30, 2011. [goo.gl/NgsKwh](http://goo.gl/NgsKwh)
- (32) Alsayyed Othman, "Iran-Algeria Relations, Estrangement into Breakthrough," *Iranian Selections* 52, Albainah, (2004): accessed April 3, 2018, [goo.gl/p6YcJ3](http://goo.gl/p6YcJ3)
- (33) Hamdi Bashir, "Iranian Penetration in the Maghreb... Tactics, Consequence, Confrontation Options," (Riyadh: Iranian Gulf Center for Iranian Studies, 2017) 96
- (34) "Al-Sadr Calls on Algerian Shiites to Move and Attacks Salafists," *Assawt*, Nov. 10, 2015. [goo.gl/9phXeA](http://goo.gl/9phXeA)
- (35) "Are Algerians Sunnis or Shiites? Ibn Khaldun Replies to Ayatollah Owyhi, *Tribusalgeriennes*, [goo.gl/f4fDbN](http://goo.gl/f4fDbN)
- (36) Bouzaidi Yahya, "Looking for Self-Identity: Algerian new Shiites and Identity Crisis," accessed March 10, 2017. [goo.gl/cvxG5D](http://goo.gl/cvxG5D)
- (37) Omar Rawayhi, "Shiism in Algeria and Making Minority," *Barq for Research and Studies*, 2016, 2
- (38) *Ibid.*
- (39) Hamdi Bashir, *op. cit.*
- (40) Bouzaidi Yahya, *op. cit.*
- (41) Jalal Munad, "Al-Sadr Calls to Support Algerian Shiites in Entrenching their Rights," *Erem News*, Nov. 18, 2015. [goo.gl/63CUf3](http://goo.gl/63CUf3).
- (42) "Moqtada Sadr Incites Algerian Shiites to Publically Perform their Rituals," *Arab News*, Nov. 12, 2016, [goo.gl/VK8CEc](http://goo.gl/VK8CEc).
- (43) Algerian Minister of Religious Affairs Warns about Shiism Flood hitting his Country," *Alarabya*, Nov. 23, 2016, [goo.gl/HPPsC](http://goo.gl/HPPsC)
- (44) Hamdi Bashir, *op. cit.* pp. 104-107.
- (45) Anwar Malik, "Shiism and Shiites in Algeria: Interesting Facts of Persian Invasion," *DD-Sunnah*, [goo.gl/fjJRmp](http://goo.gl/fjJRmp).
- (46) Abdulslam Sakina, "Algerian Authorities Detain Hundreds of Returners from Karbala and Qom," *Alwatan*, Nov. 23, 2017, [goo.gl/jEmfzQ](http://goo.gl/jEmfzQ).
- (47) Ibrahim Alhawari, "Relation of Interset or Submission to the Stronger," *Sasapot*, Jan. 3 2016, accessed Feb. 1, 2017, [goo.gl/YGFL7n](http://goo.gl/YGFL7n)
- (48) Alter Info: Algérie: «Nous refusons toute référence venant du Golfe arabe ou persique», 09 Apr.2017. [goo.gl/bh1C1s](http://goo.gl/bh1C1s)
- (49) Anwar Malik, *op. cit.*
- (50) *Ibid.*
- (51) "Shiis and Shiites in Algeria : Interesting Facts of Persian Invasion Attempt," *Al-Assr Center for Strategic and Future Studies*, March 28, 2014. [goo.gl/LrLt88](http://goo.gl/LrLt88)
- (52) *Ibid.*
- (53) Bouzaidi Yahya, "Did Iran Support Terrorism in Algeria, » *Alrased*, May 5, 2016. [goo.gl/F5CdJN](http://goo.gl/F5CdJN).