THE IRANIAN THREATS TO THE SECURITY OF THE ARABIAN GULF REGION

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Abstract

Since Khomeini’s revolution in 1979, the rise of the Islamic Republic of Iran has created complex interconnection of sustained conflicts and instabilities in the Gulf region (Abdulla, 2016). Iran’s aggressive behaviour and regional ambitions have been portrayed as the principal contributors of regional insecurity to the Gulf States. Cognizant of the pervasive mistrust from its neighbours, Iran still prevails to expand its hegemony to become the regional power (Cerioli, n.d.). The US invasion in Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime in 2003 produced significant security transformations in the Gulf region (Shayan, 2017). The most noticeable was the expansion of the Iranian influence, which led Iran to intensify the hostility and rivalry with Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf States (Downs, 2012). This literature-based dissertation aims to identify specifically the Iranian starting points (sources) of threats appertaining to the security and stability of the Gulf region. It takes into account the Regional Security Complex as a theoretical framework to provide a better understanding of the underlying dynamics of growing regional insecurity caused by Iran. The key findings of this inquiry and analysis elucidated that Iran’s ideology and its expansionist strategies, namely: the Shia geopolitics strategy; sponsorship of terrorism; and the nuclear programme are the main sources of threat to the security of the regional countries. The Iranian threats have been escalated in the recent years. This can be noticed from increasing its meddling involvement and sponsorship of terrorist groups in Bahrain. Iran is palpably more dangerous now than it was in the previous decades. Iran, in all probability, will persist in its menacing policy to destabilise the Gulf States, and its regional strategy will not draw to a close because its ambition is likely to linger on.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Over many centuries, the Arabian Gulf has always referred to the eight countries with a coastline on the Arab Gulf. These countries are as follows: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Iraq, and Iran (Sadeghinia, 2011). Its geostrategic and geo-economic importance has notably aroused the attention of Western colonial powers to seize hold of these regional countries, with the intention to expand their colonies and to bring this region under their domination (Sadeghinia, 2011). For instance, the Portuguese started to subjugate this region in the beginning of the sixteenth century; thereafter, the Dutch came next, then the Ottomans, the French, and last were the British (Altaie, 2013; Binhuwaidin, 2015). In the modern history, the Gulf region is regarded as the world biggest single source of oil in the world, with a rough calculation of more than 25 per cent of the world’s oil production, while holding more than the half of the world’s proven oil reserves (Kostiner, 2009; Ashrafpour, 2010; RAND Corporation, 2017). For this reason alone, the security and stability of this region is vital to the health of the global economy (Kostiner, 2009).

In spite of these vital economic and strategic factors, the Gulf region has been viewed as the most volatile or liable to change rapidly and unpredictably, due to past devastating wars alongside the chaotic, unstable and turbulent events that have taken place recently (Kostiner, 2009). On one hand, the region has been dominated by external powers due to the abovementioned factors; conversely, it has also been destabilised due to the growing tensions amongst the regional countries, which are based on geographic, political, economic and ethnic factors (Sadeghinia, 2011; Bojarczyk, 2012). To cite pertinent examples, the region
has witnessed perilous instability for the past four decades; the most significant are as follows: the Iranian revolution in 1979; the eight-year Iran-Iraq War (1980 to 1988); the Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 that precipitated the Gulf War (1990-1991); the Iraq War in 2003 when the US intervened, and the on-going civil war since Saddam Hussein has been deposed from power (Gause, 2010; Al-Qarawee, 2014; Shayan, 2017). Last but not the least, there were several unsuccessful coup attempts and security instabilities, such as in Bahrain in 1981, 1996 and 2011 (Bassiouni et al., 2011). Yemen, of course, will not go unnoticed because the conflict there has been going on since 2015 (Reeve, 2015).


Iran after the overthrow of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (Shah) and his regime, and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979, the security landscape in the Gulf region has been changed (Kostiner, 2009). Iran since then has played a primary role in destabilising the security and stability of the Gulf region (Abdulla, 2016). Its aggressive behaviour has created a chronic conflict with the neighbouring countries. This conflict has been aggravated after the US invasion in Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime in 2003 (Kishk, 2016). With the recent regional transformations, Iran has become more threatening than any time before since the Islamic revolution, which has led to escalate the tensions with the Gulf States and aggravate their apprehensions toward their security and stability (Abdulla, 2016; Kishk, 2016).

1.2. Significance of the topic.

The importance of conducting this research emanated from the following key factors: firstly is the increasing level of threat that Iran has posed to the Gulf region in the recent
years. Secondly is the need to conduct a holistic analysis on the security of the Gulf region, through applying a theoretical framework, in order to comprehend the current security situation and also the attempt to predict the future security scenario in the Gulf region. Thirdly is the need to fill the gap in the current literature, as the findings of this research may provide an insightful platform for those who will conduct comprehensive related research in the future.

1.3. Research question.

This dissertation seeks to answer the following question: how Iran is threatening the security of the Gulf region?

1.4. Research aim and objectives.

Generally, this research aims to identify the Iranian sources of threat to the security and stability of Gulf countries, since the Islamic revolution in 1979. Specifically, the objectives of this research inquiry are as follows:

a. to apply the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) to the Gulf region;
b. to analyse the Iranian ideology and its expansionist strategies in the region;
c. to demonstrate the Iranian interference and encroachment in Bahrain; and
d. to predict the future security scenario in the Gulf region.

1.5. Outline of the dissertation.

This dissertation is composed of six chapters. Chapter One provides a brief introduction and background about the topic it seeks to investigate, as well as outlining the research question and the research aim and objectives. Chapter Two provides a brief
explanation about the research methodology used in this dissertation. Chapter Three applies RSCT to the Gulf region, in order to comprehend the Iranian hostile behaviour towards the regional countries, particularly Saudi Arabia. Chapter Four focuses on Iran. It examines the Khomeini’s doctrine and the Iranian ideology, with the emphasis on why such ideology is perceived as a source of threat to the Gulf region. The chapter also provides in-depth analysis on the Iranian strategies in expanding its influence in the region. Chapter Five concentrates specifically on Bahrain. It demonstrates the Iranian involvement in destabilising the country, through analysing the past coup attempts and the on-going support to the terrorist groups. Chapter Six includes a summary of the dissertation and the future security scenario in the Gulf region, through the application of RSCT. The succeeding part of this chapter includes the limitations of the study and a list of recommendations to confront the Iranian threats in the region.
2.1. Theoretical framework.

A theoretical framework in a research study is an important aspect, it is considered as the foundation of any academic research to understand and explain a phenomena (Anfara and Mertz, 2006; Grant and Osanloo, 2014). The utilisation of a theoretical framework in a research ‘serves as the structure and support for the rationale for the study, the problem statement, the purpose, the significance, and the research questions’ (Grant and Osanloo, 2014, p.12).

This research applies the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), which is developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver in 2003. It can be used to understand the regional threats posed by Iran and the future security of the region. The value of implementing this theoretical approach in this research is based on three elements: first, RSCT guides the researcher to specify the suitable level of analysis, which is comprised of four levels: the domestic level of states; the relations between states within the region; the interactions between region-to-region; and the role of the superpowers in the region. Second, the theoretical approach is designed to support and organise empirical security studies. Third, there is a possibility of establishing potential security scenarios based on data and factors (Buzan and Wæver, 2003).

2.2. Research strategy and data collection.

Throughout the process of conducting this research, the secondary analysis of the existing literature was used. The underlying reasons to choose this method are as follows:
firstly, the nature and scope of this study necessitated a clear focus on historical events and case studies, such as the Islamic revolution in 1979, and the Iranian plots that have occurred in the region for the past four decades. Therefore, carrying out a fieldwork to obtain primary sources of data collection would not be necessitate and feasible because the secondary data were sufficiently available (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2001). Secondly, if interviews or surveys had been chosen as methods to collect primary data for this research, the participants would have been as Fielding (2000) called them an ‘elusive population’, in other words, difficult to reach them. Thirdly, the researcher’s intention was to perform further investigation and analysis of the existing data, as this analysis would be applied from a different conceptual focus (Heaton, 1998). Not to mention the advantages of choosing this method of data collection, in terms of saving time and money, because conducting interviews, focus groups or surveys in a fieldwork would involve an expenditure of a large amount of money (Walliman, 2011).

The researcher gathered pertinent data from various reading materials, including books, journal articles, security and institutional magazines, newspaper articles, official websites, dissertations, and research reports in both Arabic and English. Most of the academic resources were taken from the University of Leicester library. The researcher accumulated supplementary materials from Bahrain. The collection of data was done with painstaking attention to details, giving special attention to information coming from official and reliable sources written by prominent scholars and researchers who are experts in their domains. Undoubtedly, total dependence on secondary sources of data collection would have some disadvantages. For instance, the available data might not be helpful to answer the research questions. To avert this downside, the researcher harnessed the Arabic sources in
order to strengthen, support and fill the gaps in the examined literature. Furthermore, using secondary data would take into account some concerns regarding the validity and reliability of the information (Kumar, 2005; Crossman, 2017). This being the case, the researcher made an effort to depend only on well-known and reliable sources in this research.

2.3. Data analysis.

The collected data was analysed through the use of critical discourse analysis. This method of data analysis is useful to comprehend the pressing social issues (Van Dijk, 1993; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Van Dijk (1993) contends that the contribution of critical discourse analysis is significantly effective in analysing social and political issues, as it explains the role of language in the form of text or talk in producing dominance and inequality.

In essence, this type of analysis aims to unravel or fathom the ideology that is hidden behind the written texts and oral speech (McGregor, 2003). In regard to the scope of this study, employing this method of analysis would be useful to the researcher to explore and comprehend the Iranian threats. Thorough examination of the Khomeini’s doctrine and the Iranian ideology requires in-depth analysis, because of widespread reckoning that it is the source of threat that the Gulf region has had since the Islamic revolution in 1979.

2.4. Ethical considerations.

This research, albeit a library-based dissertation with only secondary data, still needs to have ethical considerations. The ethical issues can be seen from two perspectives: the first relates to the researcher and the second relates to the subject of research (Walliman, 2011). The first perspective covers honesty, personal integrity and intellectual ownership. The
researcher maintained, in all stages of conducting this research, ethical considerations like avoiding bias and plagiarism. The need to implement good academic and research practices of using citation and acknowledgement was also borne in mind (Walliman, 2011). The second perspective covers the process of collecting data after obtaining the ethical approval from the University of Leicester’s Ethics Committee. As a library-based inquiry, this research did not require the involvement of human participants. Nonetheless, the researcher had to look into other relevant concerns like avoiding harm to persons, groups, nationalities and religions; obtaining information lawfully; avoiding misinterpretation; and reporting accurate information, especially the important materials chronicled in Arabic (Kumar, 2005; Walliman, 2011). Therefore, translation was an important phase, because the process of translating Arabic text to English would necessitate strict fidelity, in which it should be made without distorting the meaning of the source of text (Alwazna, 2014).
3.1. Introduction.

The Structure of international relations has passed through three stages: empires, nation-states, and regions. When the Cold War ended, the regional level became apparent as a robust intermediate level between the national and global levels (Gupta, 2010). Many scholars and researchers have channelled their curiosity by studying and analysing regions, regionalism and regionalisation with the aim to build security in the contemporary world by theorising the current and future structures of global power (Lake and Morgan, 1997; Hettne, Inotai and Sunkel, 2000; Gupta, 2010). Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) is one of the theories that are focusing on the security of regions, which was first conceived and developed in 1991 by Barry Buzan in his book entitled People, States and Fears. This theory was postulated to understand the security issues of the Cold War. In 2003, the theory was further broadened by Buzan and Wæver to elucidate the new international security structure post the Cold War (see Appendix B) (Coskun, 2007).

In all likelihood, the distinguishing application of this theory can be well-suited to the Arabian Gulf, because it can provide thorough examination and explanation of delicate security issues in the region. Therefore, this chapter is divided into two main parts: the first part provides a brief background on RSCT, while the second part applies this theory to the Gulf region, in order to study and analyse the security dynamics that have been occurred in the region.

3.2. Theoretical framework and background.
As a prerequisite to the application of RSCT, one has to have a coherent grasp of the concept of a region. Since the definition of a region is essentially manifold and diverse, the concepts attached to it are expected to be fundamentally different (Albuquerque, 2016). Hettne (2005, p.543) defines a region as ‘a limited number of states linked together by a geographical relationship and a degree of mutual interdependence’. This geographical proximity and relationship between states have apparent ramifications as manifested in the political, military, societal and environmental sectors (Buzan and Wæver, 2003; Fahlander, 2011). Buzan and Wæver (2003) claim that the security analysis is influenced by two levels: national and global. The analysis from the national level may not be meaningful, because the security of a state is inherently connected to other external factors; therefore, it is not self-contained (Buzan and Wæver, 2003; Fahlander, 2011). On the other hand, the analysis from the global level is too extensive and may not be to the point or applicable to the security of the state. Hence, the global security is adjudged as an aspiration rather than a reality. With this in mind, the regional level is deemed to be fitting for analysis because states and their securities are tied to one another and virtually impossible to separate (Buzan and Wæver, 2003). On this account, RSCT is defined as ‘a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another’ (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p.44).

The key concept of RSCT is hinged on the belief that most security threats move within short distances, rather than long distances (Buzan and Wæver, 2003). For this reason, states are more likely to have tangible concerns and worries about the neighbouring states within the region rather than in other regions. As Friedberg (1993) claims that most countries have some apprehensions about their neighbours’ intentions and capabilities. This theory
points out that the best way to understand the amity and enmity patterns between states is to begin the analysis from the regional level (Buzan and Wæver, 2003). This regional level analysis can be stretched to a greater range with global factors. It can also narrow down the level of analysis to concentrate on domestic factors. This amity and enmity pattern is mostly generated within the regional level because of a mixture of historical, political and economic factors (Buzan and Wæver, 2003).

RSCT categorises the power of states into three levels: superpower; great power; and regional power. The superpower state can easily transcend the logic of geographic distances. For this reason, it can have dominant influence on the whole world. The great power state can sneak into several regions only. The regional power state is restricted or finite in power and capabilities; therefore, its interests will be bounded within the vicinities of the neighbouring countries (Buzan and Wæver, 2003; Fahlander, 2011). Lake and Morgan (1997) favour Buzan and Wæver’s (2003) arguments and hold the belief that countries have some concerns regarding the possible threats that may arise from the superpowers. However, they cannot brush aside the threats that may arise from the territorial ambitions of the neighbouring countries because most conflicts emanate from the regional level. Clearly, the future conflicts will be mostly precipitated within regions. To effectuate order and security, measures and actions should be implemented at the regional level (Lake and Morgan, 1997).

3.3. **The formation of the Arabian Gulf security complex.**

The Gulf security complex was formed after the withdrawal of the British forces—the hegemonic great power—from the Gulf region in 1971. The British withdrawal left a power vacuum in the Gulf region and created a triangular rivalry and conflict between Iraq, Iran and
Saudi Arabia to takeover and act as a regional power (Kostiner, 2009; Fahlander, 2011). The United States (US) attempted to extend its control in the region to fill the power vacuum. This was not through sending its troops to the Gulf, but rather adopting a proxy security strategy to create a regional stability (Mirhosseini and Rasouisaniabadi, 2015). This US strategy was formulated by Richard Nixon’s administration, and it was known as the twin-pillar policy: the reliance on Iran and Saudi Arabia as regional powers. This strategy was intended to deter the Soviet influence and protect the oil sources in the Gulf region (Kostiner, 2009; Mirhosseini and Rasouisaniabadi, 2015).

In 1979, the US twin-pillar strategy suffered a disappointing set back when Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (Shah) was deposed and Ayatollah Khomeini was catapulted to power (Kostiner, 1979). Iran became an Islamic Republic, and its foreign policies have changed significantly since 1979. The clerical regime was set in motion to challenge the super power (the US) in the region. From the ideological perspective of Khomeini, the US is the enemy (Kostiner, 2009). The tough-minded policies and ideologies toward the US has become unmistakably glaring by the end of 1979, when around 70 officials were held hostage in the US embassy in Tehran. The victory of the Islamic revolution did not just alter the Iranian ideology and its foreign policies, but it also caused dynamic security changes in the region (Kostiner, 2009; Wise, 2011).

The notion of distribution of power in the region and the penetration of external power, such as the US were unacceptable to Iran, according to Chapter X, Articles 152 and 153 of its Constitution (Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, n.d., p.20; Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2010). Iran has regarded itself as the only regional power. It is worth noting
that Iran has an ambition to become a global power (super power) (Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2010; Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). It considered that to achieve this ambition at the first stage, with its current power and capability, the direction to expand its power geographically would not be to the north, where Russia is located, or to the east where Pakistan, India and China lie, because these are nuclear weapon states. Iran wanted to go to the west, to wield enormous hegemony in the Gulf region (Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2010).

3.3.1. The amity and enmity pattern in the Gulf region.

Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Iran have traditionally been the tri-polar balance of power in the Gulf region (Fahlander, 2011). When Khomeini was catapulted to power in 1979, the tension between the Arab States and Iran was exacerbated. For example, a war of words erupted between Iraq and Iran due to regional ambitions, not to mention the ideological and ethnic clashes (e.g. Arabs versus Persians and Sunnis versus Shias) that fuelled this tension (Kostiner, 2009). Khomeini was eager to destabilise Iraq. On one hand, to reinforce his power in Iran, and on the other hand, to affirm his claim on Najaf and Karbala—the two Shia holy sites in Iraq (Kostiner, 2009). The Khomeini’s new ideology and agenda alarmed and endangered Iraq by exporting his revolution. Whereas, Iraq—during Saddam Hussein’s rule—was keen to maintain the security status quo, as long as Iraq would receive the support from the Gulf States. The disparities between Iran and Iraq escalated to a full-scale war that lasted for nearly nine years (Kostiner, 2009).

Iraq was weakened in the aftermath of the US invasion in 2003 and the collapse of Saddam Hussein. This event has changed the power balance in the region (Shayan, 2017).
Iran has perceived Saddam Hussein as a buffer to expand its regional power (The Reut Institute, 2006). The removal of Hussein’s regime and the establishment of a Shia government did not only enfeeble the power of Iraq, but it also fostered a good relationship between Iraq and Iran politically, economically and socially (Fahlander, 2011). Since then, the amity and enmity pattern between the two countries has been changed. Iran could extend its power in Iraq and subsequently in Syria and Lebanon; thereby the polarity and rivalry remained between Saudi Arabia and Iran (Fahlander, 2011).

3.3.2. The Iranian-Saudi rivalry.

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran before the Islamic revolution was not regionally stretched and felt due to the presence of the British forces in the region, and thereafter the allegiance to the US during the application of Nixon’s strategy (Ighani, 2016). However, after the Islamic Revolution, the rivalry dramatically changed and evolved into various forms, a combination of religious, geopolitical, ideological, ethnic, economic and militarily factors (Cerioli, n.d.; Ighani, 2016).

The overriding concern here is to highlight the key differences between the two states (Saudi Arabia and Iran) in relation to their ideologies and foreign policies. Saudi Arabia is a Sunni Arab state. It is a regional status quo power in the region, and acts harmoniously with the other Gulf countries. Saudi Arabia does not go unnoticed in the Muslim world, because it is the home of the two most important holy sites, Mecca and Medina. It has strong ties with the West, specifically the US (Cerioli, n.d.; Terrill, 2011). In contrast, Iran has become a Shia republican since the Islamic revolution. Iran views itself as the leader and defender of Shias throughout the region. It adopts a revolutionary ideology, and always seeks
to change the ruling systems in the Arab Gulf states. The US is considered as the implacable enemy of Iran (Cerioli, n.d.; Terrill, 2011).

The hostility between Saudi Arabia and Iran became more blatant after the following three events (Downs, 2012). First event occurred when Khomeini affirmed his ambition to export the Islamic revolution to the neighbouring countries. Of course, Saudi Arabia was his main target (Marschall, 2003; Kostiner, 2009). Due to the Khomeini’s incitements and his intentions to export his revolutionary ideology, Saudi Arabia witnessed a period of turbulence, involving mass demonstrations and violent acts. As Shias radical groups attempted to overthrow Al-Saud—the ruling family—through acts of sabotage (Marschall, 2003). The second event was the failed Iranian coup plot against Bahrain, fomented by the Islamic Front for Liberation of Bahrain in 1981 (this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five) (Downs, 2012). The third event was the Hajj clashes. In 1984, Khomeini called for sharing sovereignty over the two sacred sites in Saudi Arabia—Mecca and Medina (Downs, 2012; Grumet, 2015). In 1987, Khomeini sent more than 100,000 Iranian pilgrims to Mecca during the Hajj with the plan to spread his doctrine (Rakel, 2009). The pilgrims intentionally clashed with the Saudi security forces that resulted in death toll numbering 275 and 303 injuries among the Iranian pilgrims (Amiri, Gholipour and Ku Samsu, 2011). This event had a substantial impact on the rivalry of the both countries religiously and politically. For instance, Hashemi Rafsanjani, the Iranian speaker of parliament, called for revenge against the Saudi regime by toppling the Al Saud ruling family from power in the country (Mohaddessin, 2003, cited in Amiri, Gholipour and Ku Samsu, 2011).
In spite of the escalating tensions between the two countries during that period, Saudi Arabia sought to contain Iran. The former Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud Al-Faisal visited Iran to solve the issues regarding the Hajj events; the Iran-Iraq War; and the Iranian intentions to export its revolutionary ideology. However, the Saudi’s efforts were failed (Alkawaz, 2007). Saudi Arabia regarded the failed talks besides the Iranian plot in Bahrain as motivations and further justifications for giving financial and military support to Iraq during its war with Iran. Making such a decision was to some extent risky, as Saudi Arabia was also concerned regarding the Iraqi’s ambitions. However, Saudi Arabia sized up Saddam Hussein as a lesser regional threat compared to Khomeini of Iran (Alkawaz, 2007; Downs, 2012). As expected, the inception of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981 succoured Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf States (except Iraq) to confront the Iranian threats and the turmoil of the Iraq-Iran War. The establishment of this Council was the main buttress of small Gulf States alongside with the Saudi Arabia for survival (Koch, 2010; Downs, 2012).

After a decade of the Islamic revolution, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry fluctuated, especially after Khomeini’s death in 1988 (Downs, 2012). Iran changed its foreign policy from ideological to a more pragmatic one. This can also be understood due to the devastating consequences of its war with Iraq (Downs, 2012). This change became more apparent during the presidency of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammed Khatami. The both leaders adopted more open foreign policies and not reverting to the rigid revolutionary ideology of Khomeini (Downs, 2012). Iran, surprisingly enough, stopped exporting the revolution-related agenda. In actual fact, this did not mean that they abandoned their roles in supporting the Islamic revolutions in other countries, or attempted to end the hostility with Saudi Arabia (Cerioli, n.d.; Downs, 2012).
After that time, two major regional shifts occurred and had a significant impact on the rivalry between the two countries (Ighani, 2016). The first was the war on terrorism following the 9/11 terrorist attacks prompting the US to invade Iraq and to overthrow Saddam Hussein. The second was the Arab Spring in 2011 that caused the upsetting of the stability in three Arab countries, these are: Syria, Egypt and Bahrain. The elimination of Iraq, Egypt and Syria as important regional powers in the Middle East arguably led to further estrangement or rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran (Ighani, 2016). Most recently, in 2016, Saudi Arabia execute 47 people for terrorism acts, including the prominent Shia cleric Nimr Al-Nimr. As a retaliatory onslaught, Iranians stormed and burned the Saudi embassy in Tehran and also attempted to attack the Saudi consulate in Mashhad. These attacks led Saudi Arabia to cut its diplomatic ties with Iran (Ighani, 2016).

Iran introduced radical changes in its rivalry with Saudi Arabia. It started to intensify its support for proxy terrorist groups across the region, aiming to weaken the power of its rival by destabilising the interior security of Saudi Arabia and its allies in the Gulf (Ighani, 2016). Another centre of interest is the Iranian nuclear programme that has been the main area of contention between Saudi Arabia and Iran (these will be explored in more detail in the next Chapter) (Terrill, 2011).

3.4. Conclusion.

RSCT provides a comprehensive analytical tool to study the security of regions. It helps to comprehend and analyse the security dynamics within the region (Coskun, 2007). All things considered in this analysis, it is evident that the Gulf can be regarded as a regional security complex, according to Buzan’s characterisations. The emergence of the Islamic
revolution in Iran has caused the Gulf region to pass through fundamental security shifts (Abdulla, 2016). The justification is seen in what happened to Iraq and Iran in terms of the amity and enmity pattern, or the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Arguably, the emergence of bi-polar Gulf is not the key issue to destabilise the region. The Iranian ideology and its ambitions in the region are the primary factors to cause such conflicts. Therefore, the next chapter analyses the Iranian ideology and its behaviour in the region, specifically post the Islamic revolution, in order to identify the main sources of threat to the security and stability of the Gulf region.

Chapter Four

The Iranian Threats in the Gulf Region

4.1. Introduction.
Iran believes that its geographical, geopolitical and historical civilisation features would give high-handed position to its current delusion of grandeur as a regional power (Cerioli, n.d.). The Iranians’ assertiveness to their historical superiority in the region during the Persian Empire era seems to bolster such uncompromising assertion. Thus, this false sense of historical greatness, with all its innumerable flashback from an ancient empire, may prompt Iran leaders to re-establish the bygone glory of its history by adopting expansionist strategies (Cerioli, n.d.; Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). Such strategies have become palpable after-effects of the Islamic revolution in 1979. When Ayatollah Khomeini transformed the identity of Iran to become a Shia Islamic Republic, he attempted to elevate the Islamic Republic as the leader of the Islamic world (Cerioli, n.d.). After some time, he started to exploit its religious credentials to advance his reginal ambitions (Cerioli, n.d.). Exporting the revolution was a clear example, when he made this mission as a religious obligation (Takeyh, 2009). Since the Islamic revolution, Iran has become a rogue nation adopting reprehensible strategies to achieve its regional ambitions. Its destabilising misbehaviour in the region alarms its rivals (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). This chapter, firstly, aims to investigate the Khomeini’s doctrine and the Iranian ideology (post the Islamic revolution); secondly, it seeks to analyse Iran’s strategies in expanding its influence in the Gulf region. In all important respects, this chapter zeroes in on Iran’s twisted strategies threatening the security of the neighbouring countries. For all intents and purposes, the key concepts of RSCT would be elucidated in line with Iran’s security threats and hostile actions in the region.

4.2. The Khomeini’s doctrine and the Iranian ideology.
The Islamic revolution reshaped the ideology and identity of Iran after the downfall of Mohammed Reza Pahlavi in 1979. When Ayatollah Khomeini was catapulted to power, he created a theocratic regime based on the beliefs of Wilayat al-Faqih or ‘the guardianship of the jurisconsult’ (Kostiner, 2009, p.47). In consonance with Khomeini’s vision, the Islamic region should not have geographic borders; should be brought together under the umbrella of Shia Islam; and should be led by an eligible jurisconsult (Kostiner, 2009). He undeniably exhorted his followers about the importance of exporting the Islamic revolution to the neighbouring countries; and eliminating the notion of Muslim societies being run by hereditary monarchies (Cerioli, n.d.; Kostiner, 2009). He reckoned the neighbouring countries were depraved and corrupted, and their system of government must be destroyed. Therefore, he regarded the act of exporting the revolution as a religious duty (Takeyh, 2009).

Khomeini’s doctrine has served as the cornerstone of Iran’s constitution in 1979 when it changed its foreign policies. Based on Wilayat al-Faqih theory, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution has the ultimate authority to shape the domestic and foreign policies of Iran (Rakel, 2007). In Chapter X Article 152, it states that ‘the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon [...] the defense of the rights of all Muslims, nonalignment with respect to the hegemonist superpowers’ (Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, n.d., p.20). Also, in Article 154 of the same Chapter, it clearly explains that ‘the Islamic Republic of Iran [...] supports the just struggles of the freedom fighters against the oppressors in every corner of the globe’ (Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, n.d., p.20; Noi, 2013). Suffice it to say, Iran vigorously started to export the revolution, and the mastermind (Khomeini) laid the groundwork to spread his revolutionary ideology and teachings across the Gulf States. With the help of his religious emissaries, the plan was intended to support and encourage
the local (subversive) movements in different regional countries to overthrow the anti-Islamic regimes (Kostiner, 2009).

After the Islamic revolution, the Iranian ideology has become multifaceted. These faces are changeable based on the Iranian interests (Bar, 2009). For example, Iran established an Islamic government in order to convince all Muslims that Iran is embracing the genuine laws of Islam (Bar, 2009). Beneath this layer is the Shia identity, that Iran is the only Shia Islamic government protects and defends all Shia Muslims; while, the core layer is enshrouded with Iranian nationalist identity. The adoption of this strategy would help Iran to achieve its ambition to become a leading power in the Muslim world (Bar, 2009). The caveat here is that the Khomeini’s doctrine does not aim to reform the neighbouring countries as he claimed, but rather to achieve the Iranian expansionist ambitions (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016).

4.3. The Iranian strategies to expand its regional hegemony.

The pragmatic approach to politics was a noticeable shift adopted by Iran after the Khomeini’s era, despite of the fact that its regional ambitions and long term foreign policy remain essentially the same (Long and Koch, 1997). The Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs, Adel Al-Jubeir, remarked that Iran’s aggressive behaviour in the region since the Islamic revolution has remained constant (Al-Jubeir, 2016). Indeed, Iran has become the source of threat and instability in the region, especially after adopting the following expansionist strategies to attain its ultimate goal (Abdulla, 2016).

4.3.1. The Shia geopolitics strategy.
Iran began to politicise the Shia ideology and put in place the Shia geopolitics with the sole purpose to spread its hegemony and bring to fruition its regional expansionist objectives. The Shia geopolitics strategy emerged coinciding with the collapse of Saddam Hussein in 2003 (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). This strategy can be considered as a decisive turning point in relation to Khomeini’s concept of exporting the Islamic revolution, after the Iranian leaders realised the difficulty of its implementation. Thus, the Iranians were naturally constrained to adopt the Shia geopolitical project with the aim to extend its influence beyond its geographic boundaries. Since then, Iran has adopted the principle of Lebensraum used by Hitler in the Second World War (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). Adopting this principle would assist Iran to expand its influence geographically through using the Shias in the targeted countries as a means to form the so-called the Shia Crescent (see Appendix C) (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). Creating this Crescent gives Iran a vast influence in the following countries: Lebanon, where Hezbollah (the Iranian-backed Shia terrorist group) is dominating the country; Syria, where an Alawite (an offshoot of Shia) regime is ruling the country; and finally Iraq, where a Shia government is controlled by Iran (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016).

As previously mentioned, the war on Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein in 2003 foreshadowed Iran’s regional power expansion. Clearly, this brings to mind why the amity and enmity pattern has been changed between the two countries, especially after establishing an Iraqi Shia government (Barzegar, 2008). In 2004, Jordan’s King Abdullah II had predictably warned the international community of the emergence of the Shia Crescent. He anticipated in advance that the Iranian expansion would destabilise the Gulf region, and would also disrupt the regional power balance (Ma’oz, 2007; Haddadin, 2017).
The Iranian Shia geopolitical Strategy was officially drawn up in 2005 coinciding with the adoption of the Iranian future plan called Iran’s 20-year Economic Perspective (Amuzegar, 2009). The plan was not only for economic development but also for political, social and cultural factors as well (Amuzegar, 2009). This plan aspires to position Iran as the regional power over a twenty-year period (i.e. 2025), as Iran seeks after forming the Shia Crescent to establish the Full-moon (see Appendix D). Iran has particularised the neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, the GCC States and Yemen) as the first important dynamic domain due to its proximity and the presence of Shia. The second and third dynamic domains will be the Central and North West Asia, and Africa, respectively (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016; Majidyar, 2017). The concept of Shia Full-Moon became more indisputable when Ali Akbar Velayati, the advisor to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, stated that ‘the Southern costs [sic] of Iran, the Gulf, Hormuz Strait, and Ajman are our strategic borders and of great importance to shape the Shiite Badr (Full Moon)’ (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016, p. 41).

Iran has partitioned the Shia geopolitics strategy into four key stages that are to be implemented in each targeted country separately, considering the time and circumstances. For instance, some countries are still in the first stage, while others are at the last stage, such as Iraq (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016; Haynes, 2016). The first stage is Soft Shiism (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). This stage has the same notion of soft power. Iran at this stage endeavours to exert influence on the Gulf region by disseminating and promoting the Shia ideology through cultural and economic means (Algharbi, 2015; Makkawi, Suhaib and Badawi, 2015; Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016).
The second stage is Politicized Shiism (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). This stage aims to politicise the Shia doctrine in the targeted countries deemed necessary to achieve Iran’s objectives. At this stage, Iran incites those Shias to betray their nations and move as Iran’s proxies in their countries (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). This is achieved after opting for the isolation strategy. Simply put, isolating the Shia communities from their original countries, and moulding their perceptions that they are deprived and discriminated by their governments are the main gists of the isolation strategy. The expected outcome is that hostility would be agitated, and their loyalties would eventually shift towards Iran rather than to their countries (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). This is what the former President of Egypt Hosni Mubarak observed in 2006 when he pointed out that most Shias are bound by loyalty to Iran, not to their states (Nasr, 2006).

The third stage is Hard Shiism (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). This stage aims to radicalise and militarise the Shia populations in the targeted countries, by providing various means of support like enlistment, training, money and weapons, which are all considered imperative to establish Shia militias and military organisations (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). This stage is about grabbing the power or at very least, weakening the country, through destabilising and creating internal sectarian conflicts (Sunnis versus Shias). Needless to say, the targeted country will be impelled to think twice before confronting Iran. Since the Islamic revolution, Iran has vigorously militarised Shia groups in countries like Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. The Gulf countries are not spared, either. Bahrain considers Iran as a thorn on its side (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016).
The fourth and final stage is Merging Shiism. Iran at this stage sets its sight on legalising the Shias militias and consolidating them into the national army of the targeted country (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). The objective is to follow the Iranian orders and implement its expansionist objectives. Iraq is a typical example. The Iranian regime has exerted its influence on Iraq, and could successfully legalise the Shia forces known as a Popular Mobilisation Forces and merged them into the Iraqi army (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016).

4.3.2. The sponsorship of terrorism.

Since the Islamic revolution, Iran has been persistently involved in terrorism (Manni, 2012). It has created strong ties with militias and terrorist organisations, such as Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, Badr Brigade and al-Houthis to advance its regional agenda (Indyk, 2017). The Iranian regime has adopted the use of terror in its foreign policy both as a tactical weapon to confront its enemies like the US and its allies, and as a strategic tool to exert considerable pressure on the Arab countries (Bar, 2009; Byman, 2012). Over the last three decades, Iran has established, trained, armed, and financed dozens of terrorist groups to the point of becoming ‘the foremost state sponsor of terrorism’ since 1984, according to the US Department of State’s annual report on terrorism (Byman, 2008; US Department of State, 2016, p.10).

According to Byman (2015), in the past Iran believed that sponsoring Shia militias and terrorist groups would help to spread its revolutionary ideology. But now, it resorts to terrorist groups for other strategic purposes. Firstly, Iran supports terrorist groups as an instrument to promote its regional interests, and to weaken or undermine the targeted countries like those in the Gulf region (Byman, 2012; 2015). Secondly, although Iran has
limited military and economic capabilities, it has positioned itself as the regional power. It is convinced that sponsoring terrorist groups and working with them as allies would help to expand its influence far beyond its territorial boundaries (Byman, 2012; 2015). Thirdly, Iran uses terrorism as a tool to take reprisal against any country that may pose a threat to it (Byman, 2012; 2015).

The Iranian support of terrorism is managed and directed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) (Manni, 2012). In the aftermath of the Islamic revolution, Khomeini established the IRGC to become one of the most important and dominant government agencies in Iran. According to Article (1) of the IRGC Charter, the IRGC has the responsibility of ‘strengthening the defensive structure of the Islamic Republic through cooperation with other armed forces and military training and organisation of popular forces’ (EIFA and ISJ, 2017, p.8). The IRGC and its elite branch called the Quds Force have proliferated perilously in the region, and have hatched and sponsored sizeable number of terrorist affiliates and networks in more than 12 regional countries (Brian, 2009; EIFA and ISJ, 2017). The IRGC has set up several specialised military training units in Iran, such as Imam Ali Military Camp, Amir Al-Mo’mineen and Mirsad (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). These military units are in control of providing military training for terrorists and foreign fighters. The aim of establishing such units is to reinforce the capabilities of those terrorists and foreign fighters in waging war and plotting terrorist hostilities, as well as advancing the Iranian agenda in the targeted countries (Brian, 2009; EIFA and ISJ, 2017).

Iran’s meddling in the neighbouring countries is openly incontrovertible. In Iraq, since the US invasion in 2003, the Iranian regime has widened its intrusive political and military
meddling (EIFA and ISJ, 2017). It has deployed the IRGC, Quds Force, and Hezbollah to abet the Shia militias, such as al-Mahdi Army, Asa‘ib Ahl Alhaq and Popular Mobilisation Forces to take control of the country. Iran is supporting those militias with millions of US Dollar and large amounts of arms (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). In 2016, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei praised members of the IRGC and Quds Force who have been killed in Syria and Iraq by consoling them: ‘they have sacrificed their lives there in order to prevent the enemies from arriving [in] Iran, without them, we would have obliged to encounter those enemies in Kermanshah and Hamadan’ (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016, p.51).

In Yemen, the situation is similar. Iran exploited the presence of Shia minority and established a proxy group called Ansarullah, also known as al-Houthi. In 2004, al-Houthi movement became an armed organisation, as a Shia militia with an Iranian ideological perspective (Zweiri, 2016). Coinciding with the Arab Spring wave in 2011, an uprising broke out in Yemen. Iran exploited this situation to provide all means of support to reinforce the Houthis movement, to enable it to take de facto control on the country (Wyss, 2016). To this end, Iran would be able to exert its influence in Yemen. The Iranian regime regards Yemen as a vital base to push its influence to its implacable rival: Saudi Arabia (Wyss, 2016). This explains why Saudi Arabia and its allies had a military combat operation called the Decisive Storm in Yemen in March 2015. The purpose was to confront and stop the Iranian regional expansionist ambitions (Zweiri, 2016).

The GCC States still endure hardship and sporadic unrest perpetrated by Iran in its endorsement of terrorism. After the success of establishing Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Iranian regime had aspired to repeat this experience in three countries, namely: Bahrain (this will be
focused in more detail in Chapter Five), Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait (Modell and Asher, 2013). In Saudi Arabia, Iran created Hezbollah al-Hijaz to act as its proxy group to advance its agenda and create mayhem throughout the country. Under the close supervision of the IRGC and Quds Force, this group comprising of Saudi Shias received rigorous military trainings in a military camp in Qum—a city in Iran (Modell and Asher, 2013). During the 1980s, this group carried out several terrorist attacks targeting petrochemical plants and other places in Saudi Arabia, not to mention the assassination attempts against Saudi diplomats in Turkey and Pakistan (Matthiesen, 2010; Levitt, 2016). In 1996, another terrorist attack inflicted serious damage using thousands of kilograms of TNT explosives to the US military housing in Khobar in Saudi Arabia (Modell and Asher, 2013; EIFA and ISJ, 2017). Worth including here is Iran’s way of exploiting the Hajj (pilgrimage) season to create pandemonium and turmoil, similar to the plot that occurred in 1987 (Amiri, Gholipour and Ku Samsu, 2011).

In Kuwait, the Iranian regime is also behind the creation of another terrorist network affiliated to Hezbollah: al-Kuwait (Modell and Asher, 2013). Over the years, Kuwait has witnessed several terrorist attacks. For instance, in 1983, a series of coordinated terrorist attacks had been carried out targeting the US and French embassies, and other Kuwaiti installations like the airport, oil refinery and power station (Levitt, 2012). Two years later, there was a failed attempt to assassinate the Emir of Kuwait by means of a suicide bomb intended for the Emir’s motorcade. The attack was carried out by a member of an Iraqi Shia terrorist group, Known by al-Da’wa in coordination with Lebanese Hezbollah (Levitt, 2012; 2013). In 1989, sixteen Kuwaiti and Saudi Shias—members of Hezbollah al-Kuwait—were arrested and executed for smuggling explosives into Saudi Arabia (Matthiesen, 2010; Levitt, 2013).
The most disquieting discovery of a dangerous Iranian-backed terrorist cell in Kuwait was in 2016, when substantial amounts of arms, including: rocket launchers, machine guns, grenades, highly explosive materials and thousands of kilograms of ammunitions were found concealed in a massive secret cache in a farmhouse in Adbili—a city in Kuwait (Al Habtoor, 2015; Kuwait Times, 2015). The accusing finger was pointed to Hezbollah. The 25 members of this terrorist group had all received military trainings in Hezbollah camps in Lebanon, and they had been waiting for the Iranian go-ahead signal to strike and destabilise the country (Al Habtoor, 2015; Kuwait Times, 2015).

4.3.3. The nuclear programme.

The Iranian regional threats are not only within the scope of sponsoring terrorism and exploiting the Shias. Beyond doubt, its nuclear programme is a grave threat to the stability of the Gulf region. Iran believes that a nuclear warhead is a doomsday machine that can advance its regional ambition to become the most powerful state (Al-Shbool, 2013). No doubt, Iran with a nuclear weapon would mean an outright hegemony in the region (Tsoran, 2007).

In retrospect, the Iranian aspiration to acquire nuclear power capability can be traced back to the early 1950s during Pahlavi’s era (Huang, 2016). In those days, Iran received unexpected assistance from the West to build its first nuclear reactors. The Iranians had to justify its importance and what it was for: peaceful purposes. Immediately after the Islamic revolution, the situation dramatically changed (Huang, 2016). The US administration became reluctant to offer further nuclear assistance to Iran, as it had some doubts about Iran’s real intentions for its nuclear programme. The US was wary of the military dimension of the
programme (Samore, 2015). What transpired later became unpropitious time for Iran when the US, France and Germany stopped giving help to build Iran’s nuclear facilities. With this dismal failure in its nuclear acquisition, Iran sought the backing of Russia, North Korea, and China in its nuclear dream (Huang, 2016). Iran’s intention to have a nuclear programme became more alarming in 2002, when the Council of Resistance of Iran announced that Iran had covertly built two nuclear sites—a uranium enrichment and heavy water facilities—without notifying the International Atomic Energy Agency (Huang, 2016). Due to Iran’s refusal to comply with the international community’s pressure to suspend its uranium enrichment activities, the Iranians received punitive economic sanctions in 2011 (Huang, 2016).

After years of negotiations, on July 2015, Iran and the P5+1 (the US, the United Kingdom, China, France, Russia plus Germany) had to strike a nuclear deal. In exchange for lifting the economic sanctions, Iran agreed to reduce its enrichment activities with a promise not to acquire nuclear weapons for 15 years (Pasha, 2016). However, at a regional level, this deal has negative implications on the Gulf countries. Accordingly, the GCC members became intensely exasperated after the sanctions relief was given to Iran (Einhorn and Nephew, 2016). The concomitant reaction of the former Saudi Ambassador to the US, Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, was quite negative when he said such deal would exacerbate the problems in the region, because Iran is the leading malefactor in destabilising the Gulf (Al Arabiya, 2015).

The apprehensions of the Gulf countries’ sprang from three alarming points. One, the Gulf countries view this nuclear agreement will not prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. It will only cause delay for its nuclear project (Einhorn and Nephew, 2016). Two,
this deal will aggravate the security situation in the Gulf region (Einhorn and Nephew, 2016). Although the Gulf countries are not worried about the Iranian acquisition of nuclear arms in the short duration (15 years), the major concerns are shifted towards the economic sanctions relief and Iran’s future behaviour (Cordesman, Markusen and Jones, 2016). Lifting sanctions means that Iran can recover USD 100 Billion from its frozen assets, which is frighteningly enough to boost its economy and military capabilities (Phillips, 2016). Inevitably, the regional power balance may shift towards Iran. This means Iran can now adopt further aggressive foreign policies and heighten its meddlesome ways in the neighbouring countries (Mohseni, 2015; Einhorn and Nephew, 2016; Phillips, 2016). And finally number three, Iran’s support to Shia militias and terrorist groups will be all out intensified (Einhorn and Nephew, 2016). In the ensuing developments, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ali Khamenei ordered an increase to the defence budget by 5 per cent (Hoff, 2015). Increasing the defence budget means increasing the budget allocation for the IRGC. Accordingly, the IRGC will be able to intensify its widespread terrorist operations and can cause violent agitation and instability throughout the region (Hoff, 2015). For this reason, Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary General of Hezbollah admitted that while Iran was under sanctions, it did not stop supporting and funding its allies in the region. Now after sanctions relief, Iran will be loaded with money, and this implies it can unremittingly provide support to its allies (Levitt, 2015).

4.4. Conclusion.

From the foregoing analysis, it is evident that the Iranian ambitions in the region have threatened the stability of the neighbouring countries. After the Islamic revolution, Khomeini
changed the identity of Iran to become a Shia Islamic Republic based on *Wilayat al-Faqih* theory. Khomeini earnestly appealed to all Muslims that the Islamic Republic is the genuine Islamic state, and his intention was to build a Muslim nation (Cerioli, n.d.; Al-Sulami and Elghonemi, 2016). In reality, embracing this ideology would mean legitimising his practices in order to flaunt Iran’s hegemony. After the Khomeini’s era, the Iranian leaders decided to change the expansionist strategy, specifically after realising that the strategy of exporting the revolutionary ideology was inutile and not producing the desired effect (Al-Sulami and Elghonemi, 2016). Iran has opted to adopt other strategies that can help in wielding hegemony and achieve its ultimate regional objectives. Iran’s strategies include: exploiting the presence of the Shia populations in the neighbouring countries to advance its regional objectives; sponsoring the terrorist organisations to act as its proxies with the aim of destabilising the targeted countries; and aspiring to acquire nuclear weapons to ensure ultimate regional power (Tsoran, 2007; Algharbi, 2015; Al-Sulami and Elghonemi, 2016).

Regrettably, the nuclear deal with Iran did not solve the problematic issues. On the contrary, the nuclear deal enraged the Gulf countries (Einhorn and Nephew, 2016). From this seething reaction, one can surmise that all Gulf States are alarmed by Iran’s aggressive and disturbing practices just to promote its regional expansionist ambition (EIFA and ISJ, 2017). As Al-Jubeir (2016) stressed that ‘Iran is the single-most-belligerent-actor in the region’. All things considered, this analysis affirms the key concept of RSCT highlighted in the previous chapter that most threats moved within short distances. This explains why most regional countries have been threatened and affected by Iran’s aggressive behaviour and its expansionist strategies. The next chapter focuses on Bahrain. It seeks to analyse and demonstrate the role
of Iran in destabilising the security and stability of Bahrain, through analysing the previous coup plots.
5.1. Introduction.

Iran’s meddling in Bahrain is not a modern day spectacle or fact. It can be traced back even before the Islamic revolution (Derasat, 2015). The era of Shah was full of fabrications and false claims, and all were centred on Iran’s ambition to claim Bahrain (Derasat, 2015). As early as 1919, there was a move to appoint Bahrain’s representative in Iran’s parliamentary seat. In 1946, the Iranian parliament passed a resolution stating that Iran would invoke its sovereignty over Bahrain. Surprisingly enough, in 1975, the Iranian government enacted a new resolution claiming Bahrain as the 14th province that rightfully belongs to Iran (Derasat, 2015). These are just few examples of the Iranian’s emphatic insistence that Bahrain belongs to them. After the Islamic revolution, Iran’s interventions and aggressive foreign policies towards Bahrain gained renewed strength (Derasat, 2015). According to Al-Hassan (2016), between 2011 and 2015, the Iranian senior officials had issued around 173 antagonistic statements against Bahrain. Iran has regarded Bahrain as the gateway to impose its hegemony on the west side of the Gulf, in an attempt to tilt the power balance in its favour (Belfer, 2014). To this end, Bahrain has been overwhelmed by Iran’s interventions and the on-going attempts to destabilise its security and stability (MAITIC, 2013). This chapter seeks to study and demonstrate the Iranian attempts to impose its influence over Bahrain, through describing and analysing the key security events. Iran’s push for hegemony over Bahrain eventuated in failed coup plots in 1981, 1996 and 2011 (Rivera, 2015). It is worth to mention here that the chapter focuses in more depth on the 2011 plot than the previous two coup attempts, due to its level of impact on the security and stability of Bahrain. This chapter further delves into Iran’s involvement in the terrorist groups after the 2011 unrest and its media smearing campaign directed against Bahrain. These developments have been
unfavourable for Bahrain, and arguably Iran has evolved its hostile strategies over the years. Such destabilising move of Iran on the security and instability of Bahrain has reached an alarming level, notably since 2011 and afterwards.

5.2. The failed coup attempt by the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain in 1981.

It should be clear from the foregoing chapter that, soon after the victory of the Islamic revolution, Iran has put in place dozens of terrorist cells and networks as part of the blueprint of Khomeini’s revolution and ambitions (Manni, 2012). Bahrain’s proximity to Iran convinced Ayatollah Khomeini that his Islamic revolution could be exported easily across sea borders (Kostiner, 2009). In 1981, the Bahraini government exposed an Iranian plot, and arrested 73 people who were linked to the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB). This group planned to carry out a coup d’état aimed to dethrone and oust the ruling family by establishing an Iranian-style Islamic Republic (Alhasan, 2011; Mabon, 2012). Bahraini officials stated that the IFLB possessed a stockpile of advanced weapons and had undergone arduous military training in Iran (Cody, 1982). The figureheads of this group were unmistakably all influential Shia clerics, and were led by Hojjat al-Islam Hadi al-Modarresi—the one who obtained the trust from Khomeini to act as his representative in Bahrain—despite of being an Iraqi-born. Modarresi was wheedled by Khomeini to export the revolution to Bahrain (Alhasan, 2011).

Although Iran attempted to play a covert role in this conspiracy, there were several indications of its involvement, and they are as follows: firstly is the revolutionary ideology that had been adopted by the IFLB and the avowal of their subordination and allegiance to the Khomeini’s regime (Alhasan, 2011). Secondly is the Khomeini’s pre-eminence and control
which were noticeably revealed from the IFLB’s publications and from the regular visits of its members to Iran, to meet Khomeini and other prominent clerics (Alhasan, 2011). Thirdly is the Iranian media’s backing of the IFLB. The Iranian regime laid the foundation for media centres to support the IFLB’s movements, and disseminated its propaganda materials. The Iranian radio stations and newspapers got enmeshed by providing press coverage of the IFLB’s activities in Bahrain. Fourthly is most members of this group were militarily run-through in Iran by the IRGC (Alhasan, 2011).

One must not be unmindful that this coup was entrenched behind Khomeini’s religious precepts intended to send forth the revolution to bolster the Wilayat al-Faqih’s creed (Kostiner, 2009). When the Khomeini’s ideology was in its infancy stage in the early 1980s, the IFLB had a little local support from the Bahraini Shia clerics to advance its agenda. The lack of internal well-grounded base was one of the main reasons that led the IFLB to flounder this plot (Canavan, 2013).

5.3. The turbulence during the 1990s and the involvement of Hezbollah al-Bahrain.

The second Iranian conspiracy in the early 1990s got more menacing in comparison with the previous plot. The Iranian leaders subscribed to a new strategy that was entirely different from the earlier concept of exporting the revolution. This newly contrived strategy was divided into three stages (Alayam, 1996b). The first stage was to create a Shia mass movement, to call for political, economic and social reforms (Alayam, 1996b; Bahry, 1997). This came to pass when Bahrain was experiencing economic recession brought about by falling oil prices in the world market and the after-effects of the Gulf War (1990-1991) (Sosebee, 1996). The Iranians tried to spread around the false notion to the Shia population
that the (Sunni) Bahraini government was deliberately bringing into play economic deprivation and social discrimination against them (Bahry, 1997; Peterson, 2004). To this end, prominent Shia clerics, such as Abdulamir al-Jamri and Ali Salman—who had strong ties with the Iranian regime—started to agitate the Shias by using religion as a political modus operandi to arouse large numbers of Shias (Bahry, 1997; Peterson, 2004). The second stage was to weaken the security and create instability throughout the country through subversive activities and terrorism. The plan was also aimed to bring the economy of Bahrain to its knees (Alayam, 1996b). This became unmistakably irrefutable when the radical Shia groups started to carry out series of subversive activities and terrorist attacks, targeting hotels, restaurants and shopping centres, as well as attacking police patrols and obstructing vital roads (Bassiouni et al., 2011). The third stage was to have decisive seizure of the governmental power: coup d’état. But the Bahraini security uncovered the plan of Iran-backed group called Hezbollah al-Bahrain (Alayam, 1996a; Darwish, 1996). In June 1996, around 44 people who underwent military training in Iran and Lebanon were arrested. The clear-cut mission was to militarise 3,000 people in order to carry out illegal seizure of Bahraini government (Alayam, 1996a).

By analysing this conspiracy, it can be traced that the Iranian leaders contrived to boost their strategies and schemes. After realising the inefficacy of exporting the revolution, Iran shifted its strategy to exploit the political and economic situations in Bahrain in order to create a well-grounded internal base, to be used as a tool to advance its agenda in the country (Alhamar, 1996; Sosebee, 1996). In addition, the Iranians capitalised the presence of Bahraini Shias who were studying Islamic and Juristic studies in Qom—a holy Shia city in Iran. These students were recruited and brainwashed to turn against their government (Alhamar,
Most of the plotters who had been arrested revealed that they underwent training in military camps in Iran and Lebanon under the supervision of the IRGC and Hezbollah, respectively (Alhamar, 1996; Rivera, 2015). Not to mention the complex tactics and methods that had been used by those plotters in coordination with the Iranian intelligence services to smuggle arms, ammunitions and explosive materials into Bahrain (Alhamar, 1996; Rivera, 2015). Given these three stages concocted by Iranian leaders, the fruition or the realisation of the scheme would take several years. Notwithstanding, it became evident that the scheme was more organised and more dangerous than the one adopted by the IFLB (Alhamar, 1996).

5.4. The 2011 conspiracy.

The Iranian conspiracy in Bahrain in 2011 reached a new height with the emergence of the Arab Spring revolutions that occurred in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. The Iranian regime regarded that this wave of upheavals was the best opportunity to advance its agenda and plant its feet in Bahrain (Rivera, 2015). One must not lose sight of the fact that Iran had covert roles prior to 2011. On 14 February 2001, Bahrain witnessed a new era of political and social reforms, when 98.4 per cent of Bahraini citizens voted in favour to the new constitution of Bahrain—the National Action Charter—that was declared by the King of Bahrain (Bassiouni et al., 2011). Part of the manifestations of this reform was the unconditional remission of convictions of a large number of political prisoners, as well as allowing the exiled Shia religious and political figures to return to Bahrain who had led the Iranian previous plots. Prominent Shia clerics like Ayatollah Isa Qassim and Sheikh Ali Salman topped the list (Bassiouni et al., 2011).
Iran and its proxies in Bahrain have exploited this new political environment and established several political parties and movements like *al-Wefaq* Islamic Society, the *Haq* Movement, *Amal* Political Society, Bahrain Freedom Movement and *Wa’ad* Movement (Al-Amer and Hijres, 2011; Rivera, 2015). These parties had covert missions to implement Iran’s agenda and carry out the Shia geopolitics strategy by politicising the Bahraini Shias, in order to alter their ideologies, to have re-orientation, and to shift allegiance to Iran (Rivera, 2015; Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016; Nasser, 2017). Coinciding with the Arab Spring revolutions, leaders of these political (Iranian-backed) parties started to incite the Shias to demonstrate and to call for their political and social demands (Bassiouni *et al.*, 2011). On 14 February 2011, the Iranian plot began, and stages of the Shia geopolitics strategy were well underway.

5.4.1. Phase 1: Calls for social and political reforms.

The Iranian backed political parties along with the prominent Shia clerics, who have close ties with the Iranian regime, instilled the idea that tumultuous demonstrations would mean dire needs for political and social reforms (Bassiouni *et al.*, 2011; Makkawi, Suhaib and Badawi, 2015). Accordingly, on 14 February, thousands of protesters trooped to the GCC roundabout—the epicentre of demonstrations in Manama—where they called for social, economic, and political demands (Bassiouni *et al.*, 2011; Belfer, 2014). The political parties were glad to see that the gathering of protesters at the GCC Roundabout swelled to thousands. The Iranian tool of politicising the Shias (the second stage of the Shia geopolitics strategy) was seen being used in the month-long protest movement. The political and religious figures took advantage of this suitable environment to further politicise and radicalise the Shia demonstrators, hinting that they should turn against the government (Al-
Amer and Hijres, 2011; Belfer, 2014). Because of the ascendancy of these religious leaders over the demonstrators, the orientations and demands shifted from political reforms to regime change (Belfer, 2014). For instance, Ayatollah Isa Qassim declared that they wanted to establish an Islamic republic based on the concept of Wilayat al-Faqih, and to have a Prime Minister similar to Ayatollah Khomeini (Al-Amer and Hijres, 2011). At the subsequent time, three political parties (the Haq, Wafa’a and Bahrain Freedom Movements) announced the establishment of ‘The Coalition for the Republic’ (Bassiouni et al. 2011, p.115). Thus, the Shia demonstrators were galvanised into taking drastic action and started to raise slogans of indicating regime change (Bassiouni et al. 2011).

The role of the Iranians at this stage served as the smoking gun in inciting the Shias in social and political upheaval. The Supreme Leader of the Iranian Revolution, Ali Khamenei was quick to claim that the Bahraini people were being oppressed. He added further that the revolution in Bahrain is similar to the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions (Al-Hassan, 2016). He also related this uprising to the Iranian revolution in 1979, and stressed that the victory of the people of Bahrain is forthcoming (Al-Amer, 2013; Zarrabi-Kashani, 2014).

5.4.2. Phase 2: Sectarianism, radicalisation and terrorism.

The formidable resistance of the demonstrators was fraught with violence against the police forces. The widespread confrontations resulted in two dead protesters (Bassiouni et al, 2011). At this stage, Iran’s got embroiled in the unrest by adding fuel to the fire. For instance, Ahmed Jannati, the Secretary of the Guardian Council, in his inflammatory speech to the Bahraini Shia protesters, said: ‘You should either get martyred or win. This should be your slogan’ (Segall, 2011). The Iranians also sought to create wide scale sectarian dissension,
because they believed that one of the tactics that led Iran to exert its hegemony on Iraq was through the creation of internal sectarian strife (Sunnis versus Shias) (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2016). They imagined that moving to the third stage of carrying out a coup d’État would not happen without creating a conducive environment for destabilising the security and stability of the country (Al-Nahham and Al-Ghoul, 2017). For this purpose, the Iranians started to stir the sectarian discord and incited the Shias to fan the flames of protest movements throughout the country (Al-Amer, 2013). For example, the charge d’affaires of the Iranian Embassy in Bahrain met with the leaders of the political parties, and instructed them to foment civil unrest and disconcert the government with more confrontations. He also encouraged them to decline the invitation of Bahrain’s Crown Prince for a national dialogue (Al-Amer, 2013).

The protest movement turned down the national dialogue; moreover, it became more radical and sectarian than previously presumed (Al-Amer and Hijres, 2011; Dunlop, 2011; Al-Amer, 2015). During the takeover of the Salmaniya Medical Complex, the main public hospital in Bahrain by Shia radical groups, many Sunni patients experienced discriminatory treatment that further compounded sectarian divide in Bahrain. Another unsettling event was when hundreds of Shia provocateurs in the University of Bahrain clashed with Sunni students (Al-Amer and Hijres, 2011; Bassiouni et al., 2011). The sudden upsurge of protesters was a goad to the declaration of civil disobedience, use of violence against the police forces, and clogging of the hub of the Kingdom’s business district: the Financial Harbour (Bassiouni et al., 2011; Katzman, 2017). The escalation of unrest was a golden opportunity for Iran to move to the next and final stage: coup d’État.
5.4.3. Phase 3: the stage of coup d’état.

Iran sought to implement the third stage of its Shia geopolitics strategy—militarising the Shias. According to Al-Amer (2013), the Bahraini intelligence found out that the IRGC contacted the leaders of the opposition groups to ver, Ayatollah Hussein Noori-Hamedani, one of the most prominent Shia clerics in the Islamic Republic met with a group of Bahraini Shia religious figures in Qom, and prodded them into declaring jihad (Al-Amer, 2013). These alarming developments prompted the Bahraini government to declare a state of National Safety to restore security and stability (Bassiouni et al., 2011; Al-Amer, 2013). The proactive move of the government was to request for the GCC’s joint Peninsula Shield Force (which is a part of the Joint Defence Agreement among the GCC States) (Bassiouni et al., 2011). This immediate action to deploy Peninsula Shield Force was imperative to provide assistance to the National Guard units assigned to protect vital installations across the country. Also, in preparation for unforeseen event like foreign intervention, the Peninsula Shield Force was a stand-by contingency to confront the lurking shadow of Iran (Bassiouni et al., 2011).

As expected, Iran vehemently denounced the participation of the GCC forces. On 16 March 2011, the former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad said that ‘this [Saudi] military invasion was a foul and doomed experience. Regional nations hold the US government accountable for such a heinous behavior’ (Nikou, 2011). In addition, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Akbar Salehi stated that the Islamic Republic would not stand idly by the Saudi intervention in Bahrain. The next day, the President of al-Shura Council, Ali Larigani warned that this military intervention would not be overlooked, and they would have to pay the cost (Al-Amer, 2013).
Bahrain with the assistance of the GCC support could foil the Iranian most menacing coup attempt. The King of Bahrain said that this external plot (in refer to Iran) had been prepared two to three decades earlier, and it was implemented when the ground was ripe for such hostile acts (Murphy, 2011). It is worth noting that the Iranian hostility to Bahrain and its ally—Saudi Arabia—after this plot has been increased (Levitt and Knights, 2017). Iran’s reaction to the involvement of the GCC forces in Bahrain led the Iranians to hatch a plot to the Saudi Ambassador to the US, Adel Al-Jubeir in October 2011 (EIFA and ISJ, 2017; Levitt and Knights, 2017).

5.5. The development of terrorist acts after the 2011 conspiracy.

As a result of the failed plot in 2011, Iran has expanded its meddling and support to the terrorist groups in Bahrain (EIFA and ISJ, 2017). The IRGC and its affiliated networks like Hezbollah and Popular Mobilisation Forces intensified their roles in enlistment, training and armament the Bahraini Shia terrorist groups (Levitt and Knights, 2017; Shay, 2017). Since 2011, some religious Shia figures have also played a prominent role in supporting terrorism (Al-Amer, 2013). For instance, in 2012, Ayatollah Isa Qassim delivered a hostile message from his pulpit and declared a fatwa (an Islamic religious ruling issued by a recognised and authorised religious leader) to crush the policemen (Al-Amer, 2013; DT News, 2016; Huda, 2017). Since Qassim’s fatwa, Bahrain has witnessed a dramatic increase in terrorist attacks (Al-Amer, 2013; DT News, 2016). According to the Bahraini Chief of Public Security, Major-General Tariq Al Hassan, since 2011, more than 20 policemen have been killed and 3,300 injured as a result of Iran-backed terrorist groups (DT News, 2017).
There has been an upswing of terrorist acts using ultra-modern lethal methods since 2011. A crude incendiary bottle filled with petrol (Molotov cocktail) has undergone sophisticated improvisation (Al-Hassan, Hafez and Jalal, 2013). The rampant increase of terrorist acts has become more crippling and more disastrous to society and economy of Bahrain (Al-Hassan, Hafez and Jalal, 2013). Worst, the Iranian-backed terrorist networks mushroomed rapidly. In the recent years, the Bahraini authorities have dismantled dozens of such networks like al-Imam Army, Saraya Al-Ashtar, Saraya al-Mukhtar, and Coalition of February 14th Youth (Al-Amer, 2013; Weinberg and Toumaj, 2017). On the face of it, the potential targets of those networks have reached the alarming level (Al-Hassan, Hafez and Jalal, 2013). For instance, the uncovered terrorist networks confessed that they had planned to carry out terrorist attacks against vital government installations like Bahrain International Airport; King Fahad Bridge (which links Saudi Arabia and Bahrain); the Ministry of Interior; the Bahrain International Circuit; and the Saudi Embassy, as well as plans to assassinate senior government officials (Al-Hassan, Hafez and Jalal, 2013; MAITIC, 2013). Another and clearer alarming indication of the seriousness of the Iranian threat to Bahrain’s security was the discovery of bomb-making facilities and weapon caches (Levitt and Knights, 2017). The enormity of these cache discoveries was unprecedented in Bahrain due to the magnitude of the advanced weaponry, including rocket launchers, mortars, assault rifles, machine guns, and high-grade explosives (e.g. TNT, RDX and C4) (Bahrain News Agency, 2015; Ibrahim, 2017; Levitt and Knights, 2017).

5.6. The Iranian media campaign.
Iran has never underrated the value of media in its regional expansionist project. This explains why the Islamic Republic has put the state media, the military (the IRGC and Police), and other significant divisions to be under direct supervision and control of the Supreme Leader, according to Article 175 of the Iranian Constitution (Khalaji, 2012; Khalil, 2017). The Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei drew an analogy between media and atomic bomb, showing semblance of destructive capability for both (Khalil, 2017). Thus, Iran decided to depend on media as an indispensable tool to be harnessed in its expansionist strategy (Alslami and Elghonemi, 2016).

In regard to Bahrain, the role of the Iranian media has been unmistakably detectable. The Iranian media machine has been actively intensified since 2011. During the height of turbulence in Bahrain, it sought to inflame the sectarian divide (Al-Amer and Hijres, 2011; Rivera, 2015; Al-Hassan, 2016). Iran has mobilised dozens of satellite channels, such as Fars, the World News Agency, al-Manar and al-Alam in order to advance its agenda (Al-Hassan, 2016). The former Minister of Information in Bahrain, Sheikh Fawaz bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa stated that there are 40 satellite channels being used by Iran, especially those with anti-Bahrain reportage (Alayam, 2012). Indeed, the Iranian radio stations, newspapers, official websites and social media platforms have also contributed to this destabilising media campaign (Rivera, 2015).

No doubt, Iran by employing this media campaign has endeavoured to incite the Shias; disseminate and promote the Iranian ideology; defame Bahrain; and fabricate the facts in a way that would serve its agenda and undermine the sovereignty and stability of Bahrain (Alhamamasi, 2016). It can be argued that Iran has implemented the strategy of Joseph
Geobbles, Hitler’s Propaganda Minister, who said: ‘If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it’ (Guzman, 2017). During the unrest in 2011, the Iranian media exploited the misleading number of causalities among the Shia protesters against the security forces. The Iranians believed that these biased cases would promote a political cause to achieve their agenda (Al-Amer and Hijres, 2011). Intensifying the media disinformation was meant to appeal for the sympathy of the international media, to attract the human right organisations, and call international parties which might intervene and exercise pressure on the Bahraini government (Al-Hassan, Hafez and Jalal, 2013).

5.7. Conclusion.

Over the years, Bahrain has always been a preferred target by Iran to wield its hegemony and expansion plan in the west side of the Arabian Gulf (Belfer, 2014). Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, Bahrain has witnessed three coup plots which had been stirred up by Iranian proxies (Rivera, 2015). Iran had devised different strategies in each conspiracy. The first failed coup d’état in 1981 was aimed to export the Islamic revolution (Kostiner, 2009). In the second plot in the 1990s, the strategy had undergone transformation. The Iranians exploited the political and economic situations in Bahrain, to incite the Shia population against their government (Bahry, 1997). Indeed the plan was likely to cause more adverse consequences in comparison with the first coup attempt. The Iranians objective of spreading chaos in Bahrain was to stage a coup d’état by its proxy, Hezbollah al-Bahrain (Alayam, 1996b). However, by analysing the third coup conspiracy in 2011, it becomes evident that the Iranian threats have grown to a strikingly large extent and reached an alarming level. Since the adoption of the Shia geopolitics strategy, Iran has openly implemented the first two
The events of 2011 were a clear indication of the effectiveness of politicising the Shia population, and this was manifested by countless number of Shias who participated in the conspiracy and acted as Iranian proxies. On top of that, the third stage has been visibly felt since 2011 when Iran began militarising the Shias (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016).

Iran has also openly revolutionised the second strategy to expand its hegemony by means of terrorism sponsorship. Reinforcing the Shia terrorist cells and their terrorist operations has become intense over a period of time (Al-Hassan, Hafez and Jalal, 2013). The rampant flourishing of bomb-making facilities and arms caches discovered in the recent years is a clear indication (Levitt and Knights, 2017). The role of the Iranian media should not be overlooked, because Iran has vigorous crusade to stamp Bahrain’s security and stability (Alayam, 2012). From the previous analysis, innumerable proofs were presented that Iran’s threat to Bahrain would pose clear and present danger. Iran has intensified its threats to achieve its expansionist ambitions. It can be argued that Iran’s threats to Bahrain have increased since the Islamic revolution, and these threats are likely to increase in the future, in order to achieve its ultimate goal. The next chapter summarises the key findings of this dissertation and also includes the future scenario for the Gulf region’s security. The succeeding part of the chapter provides some recommendations.
6.1. Summary

This research aimed to identify the Iranian sources of threats to the security and stability of the Gulf countries. The main objectives were as follows: to apply the Regional Security Complex as a theoretical framework; in order to study the security dynamics in the Gulf region; to analyse the Iranian ideology and its expansionist strategies; to demonstrate the Iranian role in destabilising the regional countries, therefore, Bahrain has been chosen as an example, to comprehend the overall pattern of the Iranian regional threats; and lastly to predict the future security scenario in the Gulf region.

Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, the Gulf region has become one of the most unstable regions in the World (Bojarczyk, 2012). This perilous instability emanated from the eruption of the three wars and the ongoing conflicts between the regional countries (Kostiner, 2009). The analysis in Chapter Three on the Gulf region revealed and emphasised the key concept of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), in terms of that most security threats moved within short distances, like the Iranian regional threats. The analysis also showed the patterns of enmity (e.g. Iraq-Iran War and the Saudi-Iranian rivalry) and amity (e.g. the formation of the GCC in 1981, and the Iraq-Iran relations post the US invasion in 2003) that occurred in the region (Buzan and Wæver, 2003; Kostiner, 2009).

The analysis in Chapter Four on Iran demonstrated that after the Khomeini’s revolution, Iran has become the primary source of threat to the security and stability of the Gulf region (Kostiner, 2009). Iran has attempted to shift the power balance to its favour to
become the regional power by adopting various strategies (Cerioli, n.d.; Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2010). Changing the identity of Iran to become an Islamic Republic was deemed a well thought move to appeal and announce to all Muslims that the Islamic Republic is the only country that has the transnational responsibility of all Muslims; regardless its geographic borders (Cerioli, n.d.). Thus, Iran has positioned itself as the leading Islamic country at the expense of Saudi Arabia, where the two Islamic holy cities are located, Mecca and Medina (Cerioli, n.d.; Altoraifi, 2012). No less than the Saudi Deputy Crown Prince and Defence Minister, Prince Mohammed bin Salman when stressed that the ultimate goal of Iran is to control the Islamic world (Hubbard, 2017).

Iran’ desire for regional dominance prompted its leaders to export the Islamic revolution to the neighbouring countries in the 1980s (Kostiner, 2009). However, after Iran became fully aware of this inutile strategy, Iran transformed its strategies in order to achieve its regional ambitions (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). Iran started to exploit the presence of Shia populations in the neighbouring countries as a contrivance to reach its ultimate goal. Needless to say, Iran opted to adopt the Shia geopolitics strategy (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). Sponsorship of terrorism has become a way of ensuring that the Iranian strategies are underway to expand its hegemony in the targeted countries (Bar, 2009). Therefore, it has created dozens of terrorist groups, and Hezbollah is a plain and straightforward example (Byman, 2012). In addition, the Iranian nuclear programme must not be left unnoticed, because the Iranians have clandestine plan to whisper nuclear-related threat to the security of the Gulf region. No doubt, Iran believes that its persistent effort to acquire nuclear weapons will help to expand its leverage and position itself as the regional power (Tsoran,
Clearly, the nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1 in 2015 did not solve the issue, but it rather amplified the regional countries’ apprehensions (Einhorn and Nephew, 2016).

The focus on the case of Bahrain in Chapter Five demonstrated that the Iranian threats are escalating and becoming more dangerous to its security. In 1981, Bahrain encountered an Iranian attempt to export its revolution through its IFLB (Alhasan, 2011). In the 1990s, Iran expanded its strategy to become more menacing to the security and stability of Bahrain. Iran exploited the economic and political situation in an attempt to mobilise internal Shia movement (Bahry, 1997). The agenda of Iran is hinged on religion, and it serves as a political tool in Bahrain (Bahry, ). The salient examination of the Iranian plot in 2011 showed that the Iranian threat to Bahrain reached an alarming level owing to the implementation of the Shia geopolitics strategy and the exploitation of the sectarian factor (Al-Amer, 2013; Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016). The analysis brought out that intensifying the Iranian support to the terrorist groups in Bahrain since 2011 has led to a rapid increase of the terrorist operations (Al-Hassan, Hafez and Jalal, 2013; EIFA and ISJ, 2017). The study on the Iranian involvement in Bahrain since the Islamic revolution also brought to light that Iran orchestrated a coup plot in each successive decade (1981, 1996 and 2011). Apparently, Bahrain managed to pull through a cycle of Iranian plots. By considering all the indications and based on the future scenario in the Gulf region, this cycle is very likely to remain ongoing in the future. Within bounds of possibility, Bahrain is likely to confront another Iranian coup plot.

Above all, Iran is threatening the security of the Gulf region by its ideology and regional ambitions. The adoption of the three strategies, these are: the Shia geopolitics
strategy; sponsorship of terrorism; and the nuclear programme are the main sources of threat to the security of the neighbouring countries. The case of Bahrain was a clear example on how Iran has employed its hostile strategies, to expand its influence and in order to achieve its regional ambitions.

6.2. Predictive scenario in the Gulf region.

RSCT provides three possible options which based on them predictive scenarios can be generated. The first option is maintenance of the quo, which implies that there are no significant changes likely to occur, hence, the security situation and the amity and enmity pattern would remain the same (Buzan and Waever, 2003). The second option is internal transformation, which means that significant changes occur within the region. This type of transformation occurs due to changes to the following factors, these are: anarchic structure; polarity; and pattern of amity and enmity due to changes in states’ leaderships or ideologies (Buzan and Waever, 2003). The third and last option is external transformation, and this refers to changes to the external boundaries, whether expanding or contracting (Buzan and Waever, 2003; Fahlander, 2011).

After studying the security of the Gulf region through applying RSCT, and analysing the Iranian ideology and its regional ambitions, it can be plausible to argue that the future situation in the Gulf will go towards the first scenario (maintenance of the status quo). As long as there are no indications of changes in the amity and enmity patterns in the region, this signifies that the rivalry and hostility between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the other GCC States will continue to prevail. By considering the current situations in the region, Iran will aggressively keep up its perilous ventures to expand its regional influence; will intensify the
implementation of its expansionist strategies; will increase its intervention in the foreign affairs of the neighbouring countries; and will continue orchestrating plots in the GCC states. The emphasis here lies in Bahrain as a background in the hegemonic ambition of Iran in the region. In contrast, Saudi Arabia and other GCC States will endeavour to bolster the regional stability and maintain the status quo. Saudi Arabia is not expected to stand idly by to the Iranian attempts to expand its influence in the Arabian Peninsula, because this means a flagrant threat to the survival of Saudi Arabia and the GCC in general. Due to such behavioural and ideological clashes, the conflict between Iran and the GCC States will continue, and it may even be intensified in the future (Ighani, 2016). To prove a point, the Saudi Deputy Crown Prince and Defence Minister have categorically ruled out the possibility of opening a dialogue to resolve the problem with Iran, due to its extremist ideology and regional ambitions. He further averred: ‘We won’t wait for the battle to be in Saudi Arabia. Instead, we’ll work so that the battle is for them in Iran’ (Hubbard, 2017).

6.3. Limitations of the study.

Throughout the process of conducting this dissertation, the stage of data collection was dauntingly challenging. It was apparent that the bulk of the extant academic studies focus on the Iranian-Saudi rivalry. The dearth of academic and empirical inquiries into the threats posed by Iran on the other GCC countries, specifically Bahrain, became the anticipated constraint of the study. This parameter has some implications on the scope of the analysis in the chapter about Bahrain. The deficiencies in the available academic literature were all remedied by utilising prominent websites and newspapers articles (in both languages: Arabic and English), to extract and analyse some data. Given these admitted
shortcomings, further academic and exhaustive studies on the security of the Gulf region and the Iranian role in destabilising the regional countries are significantly desired. This research can be regarded as a first step for future comprehensive studies.

6.4. Recommendations.

a. In order to create a regional power balance, the GCC should move from the phase of cooperation to the phase of unity. The GCC has shown some real examples of overcoming some of the regional security dilemmas; nevertheless, this level of cooperation is not solid enough to confront major regional security issues and threats that may arise in the future (Koch, 2010).

b. The GCC should have a clearer defence and security framework that would achieve the concept of balance and deterrent power in the Gulf region (Abdulghaffar, 2015). It is also essential to develop and enhance the joint security and defence mechanisms, and this means strengthening the capabilities of the Peninsula Shield Force, and establishing joint naval force, and a fast intervention force specialised in counterterrorism (Kishk, 2017).

c. To confront the growing Iranian power and its threats in the region, the GCC may need to forge a diplomatic and military coalition that goes beyond the geographic borders of the Gulf region. This includes, for example, the concept of 6+2, that is, the GCC States and all of Jordan and Egypt in order to achieve a power balance in the region (Abdulghaffar, Al-Obaidli and Mohammed, 2014).

d. The GCC may need to cultivate the establishment or resumption of harmonious relations in order to achieve lasting rapprochement with Iraq. The GCC should reintegrate Iraq into the Arab fold, through the implementation of con-gagement strategy (Regab, 2013).
This strategy deals with the containment of the Iraqi threats, primarily from the Iranian backed Shia militias. This also includes engagement with the Iraqi government in order to increase the GCC’s leverage and limit the Iranian influence in Iraq (Regab, 2013). The US Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates, emphasised the significant role of Iraq to the security of the GCC. He stated that the interests of the GCC and Iraq are aligned. Such alignment is important to counter the Iranian growing influence in the region (Kaye and Wehrey, 2009).

e. The GCC States should pursue the internal development, and reinforce their home fronts against any Iranian penetration and intervention. There is a need to strengthen the loyalty and sense of belonging of their people (Sunnis and Shias) to their homelands (Al-Ketbi, 2016).

f. The GCC States should pay more attention to the role of the media in confronting Iran and its massive hostile media campaign. They are required to formulate a joint media strategy with a clear vision to avoid any potential failure in the media arena in the future. Such failure is bound to have significant political and economic implications (Al-Ketbi, 2016).

g. The GCC States should also focus on increasing its investment in military manufacturing and develop a modern national industry in this field. This is in the context of an integrated strategic plan to achieve a high rate of self-industrialisation, and to enhance defence capability from any regional threats. This strategy will help to decrease the reliance on foreign military suppliers, and also exploit the massive budgets that would be allocated and spent on arms in other development projects (Al-Ketbi, 2016; Vats and Serrano, 2016).
h. The role of the super powers should not be disregarded on the security of the Gulf region. Therefore, the GCC should employ its economic, financial and diplomatic powers to gain further US and European support, especially in the fields of politics, military, media and research centres (Al-Ketbi, 2016).

i. The think tanks in the GCC States should conduct further studies and detailed analyses on the Iranian ambitions and its foreign policies, especially after the nuclear deal. This should cover the implications of lifting the economic sanctions on the security of the Gulf region.
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Appendix A

Ethics Approval

University Ethics Sub-Committee for Sociology; Politics and IR; Lifelong Learning; Criminology; Economics and the School of Education

04/04/2017

Ethics Reference: 11342-aamam1-criminology

TO:
Name of Researcher Applicant: Ammar Almahmood
Department: Criminology
Research Project Title: The Iranian Ideology and its Impact on Bahrain
Module Name or Course: Dissertation 2016/2017, MSc Terrorism, Security and Policing, Department of Criminology
Supervisor’s or Module Leader’s Name: Gina Fox

Dear Ammar Almahmood,

RE: Ethics review of Research Study application

The University Ethics Sub-Committee for Sociology; Politics and IR; Lifelong Learning; Criminology; Economics and the School of Education has reviewed and discussed the above application.

1. Ethical opinion

The Sub-Committee grants ethical approval to the above research project on the basis described in the application form and supporting documentation, subject to the conditions specified below.

2. Summary of ethics review discussion

The Committee noted the following issues:
Thanks for this.
If the subject matter changes dramatically then this will need to be revised.
All the best,
Gina

3. General conditions of the ethical approval

The ethics approval is subject to the following general conditions being met prior to the start of the project:

As the Principal Investigator, you are expected to deliver the research project in accordance with the University’s policies and procedures, which includes the University’s Research Code of Conduct and the University’s Research Ethics Policy.

If relevant, management permission or approval (gate keeper role) must be obtained from host organisation prior to the start of the study at the site concerned.
Appendix B

Regional Security Patterns

Figure 1: Regional security patterns after the Cold War (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. xxvi).
Figure 2: Shaping the Shia Crescent stretches from Iran to Lebanon, comprised Iraq and Syria (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016, p. 35).
Figure 3: The formation of the Shia Full-Moon covers the countries that are located on the west side of the Arabian Gulf, in addition to Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon (Alsulami and Elghonemi, 2016, p. 41).