NEOCLASSICAL REALISM, STRATEGIC CULTURE, 
AND IRAN'S POST-REVOLUTIONARY U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

by

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Neoclassical Realism, Strategic Culture, and Iran's Post-Revolutionary U.S. Foreign Policy

Thesis directed by Senior Instructor Thorsten Spehn

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of foreign policy theories applied to Iran's post-revolutionary U.S. foreign policy. I argue that neoclassical realist theory is better able to explain Iran's U.S. foreign policy and strategic culture acts as the intervening variable between the systemic environment and the foreign policy outcome. In order to do this, I explain Iran's reigning ideology, Khomeinism and argue that Khomeinism is Iran's strategic culture. I also survey the theories, their foreign policy expectations for Iran, and the literature specific to Iran's strategic culture, and the neoclassical realist literature. The second part of the thesis is the case study, where I explain the following issues/events: the takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, support of Hezbollah, the Iran-Contra Affair, war between Iran and the U.S. in the Persian Gulf, Iran's support of Shi'ite militias in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan, anti-Semitic rhetoric toward Israel, and development of a nuclear weapons program. I look at what the expectations of both neoclassical realist theorists and strategic culture theorists would have in each foreign policy scenario, explain the policy, and determine which foreign policy has more explanatory power in each situation. I ultimately find that with respect to Iran's post-revolutionary foreign policy toward the United States, neoclassical realist theory has more explanatory power.

This abstract accurately represents the content of the candidate's thesis. I recommend its publication.

Signed _____________________________

Thorsten Spehn
DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my parents who gave me an appreciation for learning and whose love and moral support has made all the difference along the way.

I also dedicate this to my husband, James McDermott, for his love, support, and patience while I completed this thesis.

Lastly, I dedicate this to my brother, James Gibson, and my Aunt Judy for their love and support.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Potential Value of the Thesis

Methodology

Iran’s Political History

Iran’s Post-Revolutionary U.S. Foreign Policy

Conclusion

No other statement embodies post-revolutionary Iranian foreign policy toward the United States like that of the Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini made on November 5, 1979: “Americans are the great Satan, the wounded snake.” In a similar vein, the fourth Iranian president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, said that “[t]he weaker the U.S. becomes, the stronger [our regime in] Iran. We have some scores with America that must be settled one day. And that day may not be far off.”¹ Recently, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made the following statement toward the U.S.: “May the undertaker bury you, your table and your body, which has soiled the world.”² This anti-American rhetoric

¹ Taheri, p.189.
² Dareini, p.1.
characterizes a 31 year old regime that has followed Khomeini’s edicts since he took power in 1979. The Iranian regime is characterized by Khomeinism, a revisionist ideology that rejects Western culture and capitalism while promoting isolation and independence for Iran. Post-revolutionary Iranian leaders have implemented a foreign policy as unique as Iran’s theocratic regime, shunning cooperation with the West and the U.S. while trying to become the regional hegemon. This analysis answers the following two questions: (1) Is Iran’s post-revolutionary U.S. foreign policy primarily a product of Khomeinism, as a strategic culturalist might argue? (2) Or, does culture play a secondary role after the constraints of the systemic environment are considered, as a neoclassical realist would argue? (3) Finally, are strategic culture theories best used as a supplement to neoclassical realist theories?

Neoclassical realism, like neorealist theory, says that states are constrained at the systemic level by an anarchical system, balance of power politics, and relative capability assessment. Neoclassical realism departs from neorealist theory by asserting that foreign policy is influenced by intervening state-level variables such as regime ideology, regime type, elite perceptions, competition among influential domestic groups, nationalism, and the relationship between civil society and the military. Strategic culture theorists argue that foreign policy is primarily a result of the influence of cultural factors on foreign policy elites such as religion, history, geography, and nationalism. Strategic culture theory rejects the idea that factors such
as anarchy and a state’s relative material power in the international system determine foreign policy outcomes. This analysis of Iran’s post-revolutionary U.S. foreign policy argues that neoclassical realist theories are better able to explain Iran’s foreign policy than strategic culture theories. Neoclassical realist theories that deal with the intervening variable of revisionist ideology are particularly salient with respect to Iran’s post-revolutionary U.S. foreign policy. The Iranian regime is a revisionist power in that it seeks to become the regional hegemon to maximize its power (rather than seek security) to ensure that the regime returns to what it sees as its rightful role as protector of the Persian Gulf region and leader of the Muslim community through the Middle East (and, eventually, the world). The analysis demonstrates that Khomeinism acts as the intervening variable between the systemic environment and the foreign policy outcome. In order to support this argument, I describe the key tenets of Khomeinism, the competing foreign policy theories, and the cultural and theoretical literature. The potential value of the thesis and the methodology used in the analysis follows. Also, a brief explanation of Iran’s political history and a description of Iran’s post-revolutionary U.S. foreign policy are given to provide context to the analysis.

**Potential Value of the Thesis**

By analyzing Iran’s foreign policy toward the U.S. during the post-revolutionary period, dominant cultural, unit-level, and systemic variables influential
in the creation of Iran’s foreign policy come to light. Focusing on Khomeinism as the dominant strategic culture in Iran demonstrates that Iran’s foreign policy toward the U.S. is not assessed based on relative capabilities alone. The value of knowing this is that (1) the Western policy maker can create foreign policy based on Iran’s version of credible threats and rationality, and (2) the better understanding there is of Iran’s military doctrine, the better Western nations are able to assess threats from Iran and understand the best ways to interact with Iran. Making this determination using the post-revolutionary era is relevant because of the major shift in foreign policy toward the U.S. and increased tension between Iran and the U.S. since the revolution. This tension has been especially relevant in recent years since the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001, the subsequent American presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, President George W. Bush’s “Axis of Evil” speech, and Iran’s determination to enrich uranium despite American and European efforts to halt Iran’s nuclear program. The findings of this analysis are also relevant to the current debate within international relations theory regarding the best way to understand the foreign policy formulation process.

Methodology

The effect of Iran’s Khomeinist strategic culture as the main independent variable in foreign policy formulation is compared to the extent to which

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3 Glenn, Howlett, and Poore, p.51.
Khomeinism acts as an intervening variable between the systemic environment and the foreign policy outcome. Statements of Khomeini, Khamenei, Ahmadinejad, and other civilian leaders, are analyzed. Specifically, I looked for quotes from government officials that contain language that mirrors those of Khomeini's hostile statements toward the U.S. Also, scholarly articles and books regarding Iran's nationalism, religion, military culture, organizational culture, and foreign policy toward the U.S. are used in my research.

Iran's Political History

Iran's political history until 1978 is a complex story characterized by the rule of monarchies from the 14th to the 20th century, the subjugation and occupation by Great Britain and Russia in the 19th and 20th centuries, cooperation with the U.S. under Mohammad-Reza Shah Pahlavi starting in 1941, and a successful British and American backed coup in 1953 in which Iran's Prime Minister, Muhammad Mossadeq, was assassinated. The 1953 coup had the effect of

\[\ldots\text{destroy[ing]}\text{ labor unions, professional associations, and all independent political parties, and dug a wide, even unbridgeable gulf between the regime and the two modern classes [the modern middle class and the urban working class].}\]

In 1963, the Shah enacted broad social and economic reforms referred to as the "White Revolution," which further widened the gulf between the classes by

\[\text{\textsuperscript{4} Abrahamian (1980), p.22.}\]
implementing policies that disproportionately benefitted the upper class. In the absence of a political structure in which Iranians could have their complaints addressed, the Shah's reforms led to protests partly against the reforms themselves and even more so against the moral laxity that came about as result of the reforms. There was suppression of the riots and the two month arrest of the protest leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who, from Paris in November of 1978, promised the formation of an Islamic Republic in Iran. Khomeini's declaration resulted in massive demonstrations against the Shah in December ultimately forcing him to leave Iran in January of 1979. This tumultuous history, defined in the pre-revolutionary period by the subjugation of imperialist powers, created a collective psychology among Iranians, which fears the meddling of foreign powers in national affairs. The post-revolutionary period, defined by Khomeinism, has further complicated Iran's history in its adversarial approach toward the West, specifically toward the U.S.

Iran's Post-Revolutionary U.S. Foreign Policy

Iran's U.S. foreign policy has two major components: (1) Iran's ambition to become the regional hegemon and (2) Iran's anti-Western sentiment. The major structural factor that reinforces both components is the U.S. presence in the region.

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., pp.24-25.
7 Gheissari and Nasr, p.72.
Iran tries to counter what it sees as U.S. imperialist attempts to physically surround it. Its history throughout the post-revolutionary period of challenging the U.S. presence in the region is due to the influence that Khomeinism has on Iran’s strategic culture, since Khomeinism promotes isolation from Western powers, self-reliance, and anti-Americanism. The regional challenge to the U.S. also helps bolster support for Iran in the region, especially among Shi’ite populations and in countries not closely aligned with the U.S. Iranian foreign policy toward the U.S. in the post-revolutionary period is described in greater depth below starting with the time period from 1979-1989 and followed by the post-Khomeini era.

Four main events took center stage in Iran’s U.S. foreign policy in the first decade after the Iranian Revolution: the takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran; the Iran-Contra Affair; Iran’s strategic support of Hezbollah in Lebanon; and, Iran’s tanker warfare and use of underwater mines against the U.S. in the Persian Gulf. For Iranians, the first decade after the Iranian Revolution was primarily characterized by Iran’s eight-year war with Iraq, a mostly Shi’ite population run by the Sunni president, Saddam Hussein. The U.S. gave considerable aid to Iraq during the war and turned a blind eye to the use of chemical warfare used by the Iraqis against the Iranians. This was a consequence of the impulsive move by radical Iranian students to take over the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, the subsequent consolidation of Khomeini’s rule, and Iran’s financial and moral support of the Shi’ite terrorist group, Hezbollah
(Party of God). The U.S. viewed the Iranian regime as a threat and U.S. policy makers supported other states in the region, such as Iraq and Kuwait, in order to guard against Iran. One of the ways the U.S. was involved in the region was in its defense of Kuwaiti tankers in the Persian Gulf. Aggravated by the U.S. support of Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war and protection of Kuwaiti tankers in 1987, Iran used the American presence in the Gulf for its own warfare against the U.S. This included underwater mine warfare and attacks against patrolling U.S. Army helicopters, a U.S. mobile sea base, Kuwaiti ports, and the U.S.-flagged Sea Isle City. 8

After Khomeini’s death in 1989, the country was led by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Rafsanjani. Khamenei is regarded by other clerical leaders as a weak Supreme Leader because he lacks the religious credentials of Khomeini. There have been three presidents in the post-Khomeini era: hard-liner Rafsanjani; Khatami, considered by some as a reformer on international issues; and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the conservative former mayor of Tehran, former IRGC member, veteran of the Iran-Iraq War, and one of the student leaders of the U.S. Embassy hostage takeover. Under the leadership of these three presidents and Khamenei, Iran’s foreign policy toward the U.S. has continued to be influenced by

Iran’s regional hegemonic aspirations, anti-Americanism, focus on self-reliance, and Khomeini’s call to export the revolution.

Iran’s foreign policy toward the U.S. in the post-Khomeini era has been dominated by the following issues: Iran’s support of Islamic terrorist organizations; Iran’s involvement in proxy wars against Iraq and Afghanistan; and, Iran’s enrichment of uranium to further its development of its nuclear weapons program. Iran’s financial and material support of both Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine is informed by Khomeinism and its goal to export Islam worldwide. Hezbollah and Hamas are also political movements used by the Iranian regime to consolidate power at home and in the region in order to become a formidable power against the U.S. and Israel. The Green Zone, Basra, and Afghanistan are other areas where Iran conducts proxy wars against the U.S. Iran provides Shi’ite militias with training and weapons in Iraq and pays for, arms, and trains Taliban fighters in Afghanistan.⁹

Lastly, the most pressing issue for the U.S. and the international community regarding Iran’s foreign policy is the development of Iran’s nuclear weapons program. In 2003, under President Khatami, Iran allowed inspections by the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) and negotiations with the EU-3

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⁹ Cooper, p.1 and Filkins and Rubin, p.2.
(Britain, Germany, and France). In 2006, Iran re-started its uranium enrichment program under newly elected President Ahmadinejad who claims that Iran’s nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes. In 2010, the five permanent members of the U.N. and Germany held talks with Iran where a deal to export its enriched uranium for processing later fell through. In January 2011, The New York Times published an article detailing what is known about the success of the joint U.S.-Israeli attempt to slow down Iran’s nuclear ambitions. According to the article, the Stuxnet computer worm, “...appears to have wiped out roughly a fifth of Iran’s nuclear centrifuges and helped delay...Tehran’s ability to make its first nuclear arms.”10 The retiring chief of Israel’s Mossad intelligence agency, Mier Dagan, believes that the Stuxnet virus will delay Iran’s bomb making ability until 2015.11 Iran’s nuclear weapons program and export of the revolution through proxies in Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan are major elements of Iran’s foreign policy toward the U.S. These actions are also part of Iran’s ambition to become the regional hegemon by maximizing its power and security in the region. Because Iran’s foreign policy toward the U.S. is created by a mixture of anti-Americanism, regional hegemonic aspirations, revolutionary zeal, and the structural constraints of the U.S. presence in the region, an assessment of whether

10 Broad, Markoff, and Sanger, p. 1.
11 Ibid., pp. 1-2.
Iran's foreign policy is primarily a product of its revolutionary ideology or primarily a reaction to its relative capabilities and place within the systemic environment is a complex venture.

Conclusion

The complex foreign policy formulation process is unique to every state because of each state's specific strategic culture and its relative place within the systemic environment. This analysis begins with an explanation of Iran's strategic culture, Khomeinism; neoclassical realist and strategic culture theory; and the policy expectations of each group of theorists. The explanation of the theories is followed by a literature review, highlighting the most salient explanations for each theory. The paper concludes with a case-study and analysis, ultimately determining that neoclassical realist theories have more explanatory power with respect to Iran's post-revolutionary U.S. foreign policy. The demonstration of the primacy of neoclassical realist theory and the importance of Iran's strategic culture as the intervening variable provides for a better understanding of Iran's post-revolutionary U.S. foreign policy and foreign policy formation in general.
CHAPTER 2
FOREIGN POLICY THEORY

Khomeinism

Neoclassical Realist Theory

Strategic Culture Theory

Strategic Culture as Supplement

Expected Results

Potential Problems

Conclusion

The importance of theory to foreign policy analysis is the ability to explain, and possibly predict, a state’s foreign policy decisions. As previously stated, while this analysis supports the argument that strategic culture is best used as a supplement to realist theories, I also argue that in Iran’s case, neoclassical realism is better able to explain Iran’s foreign policy formulation toward the U.S. in the post-revolutionary time period. This chapter begins with an explanation of Khomeinism since I argue that Khomeinism is Iran’s strategic culture. An overview of realist theory, strategic culture theory, and the policy expectations of each theory follow. The policy expectations serve as a test against which Iran’s post-revolutionary U.S. foreign policy decisions are compared. Then, the argument that strategic culture theories
should supplement neoclassical realist theories is given in more detail. The chapter concludes with explanations of the expected results and problems in conducting the analysis.

Khomeinism

The Iranian Revolution was a response to what was seen as a tyrannical monarchy ruled by the Shah and informally controlled from the outside by the U.S. The conservative clerics were upset over years of secularization policies under the Pahlavis and the Iranian people responded to the failed policies of the Shah’s White Revolution. In the aftermath of the White Revolution, Iran faced social and economic woes and the monarchy was viewed as unresponsive to the needs of the people. Khomeini broke from his quietist tradition of not getting involved in politics to lead the Iranian people in a populist revolution, which spoke to the people’s economic and social grievances that resulted from failed land reforms. Khomeinism centers on velayat-e faqih, or Rule of the Religious Jurisprudent, and exportation of the Islamic Revolution, which has had major implications for Iran’s U.S. foreign policy. Because I argue that Khomeinism is the strategic culture of Iran, it is necessary to explain how Khomeinist ideology is morally and strategically conceptualized.

The central tenet of the Iranian government after the Revolution was Khomeini’s Rule of the Religious Jurisprudent, which became law and was written in the constitution on Khomeini’s orders after the Revolution. According to Ervand
Abrahamian, author of *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*, Khomeini believed that “[o]nly the most learned clerics who had reached the highest level of mystic consciousness could comprehend the true essence of Islam. In short, the Truth was not accessible to everyone, especially to the layperson.”  

Abrahamian explains Khomeini’s belief regarding Rule of the Religious Jurisprudent:

The religious judges…have the ‘same authority’ as the Prophet and the imams; and the term velayat-e faqih meant jurisdiction over believers, all of whom are in dire need of the sacred law. In other words, disobedience to the religious judges was disobedience to God. In presenting his Velayat-e Faqih, Khomeini warned listeners that this ‘true Islam’ might sound ‘strange.’ After all, false ideas spread over the centuries by a conspiracy of Jews, imperialists, and royalists had taken a heavy toll.

According to Abrahamian, Khomeini’s view of human nature as greedy and insatiable also led to his belief that authority was needed so that individuals would not violate the rights of others. The Assembly of Experts appointed by Khomeini after the Revolution to write the constitution believed that they would be creating a government ruled by the people. And, although parts of the government were modeled after the 1906 Constitution (which was modeled after the Dutch constitution and France’s Fifth Republic), Amir Taheri, author of *The Persian Night*, explains that

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13 Ibid., p. 25.

14 Ibid., p. 44-45.
a government ruled by the people did not come about because “[i]n the final days of the assembly’s work, Khomeini instructed [the Assembly] to write the new constitution around the concept of [Rule of the Religious Jurisprudent], ending all democratic illusions among the members.”\(^{15}\) So, while populist rhetoric was used by Khomeini, leftists, and Islamic-Marxists during the Revolution, the government, with Rule of the Religious Jurisprudent as its central tenet, took on an authoritarian form after the Revolution. Abrahamian likens the Iranian Revolution to that of Latin populist movements where the leaders were

\[\ldots\text{revolutionary against the old regimes and conservative once the new order was set up. Khomeinism, strikingly like other populisms, elevated its leader into a demigod towering above the people and embodying their historical roots, future destiny, and revolutionary martyrs. Despite all the talk about the people, power emanated down from the leader, not up from the masses.}\]^{16}

The implementation of Rule of the Religious Jurisprudent in the Iranian constitution ensured that Khomeini’s views and rhetoric regarding both domestic and international issues changed the way in which Iran governed its people and interacted with the U.S.

Khomeini’s foreign policy toward the U.S. is closely tied to his moral conceptualization of the state and collective historical grievances. The fact that the Supreme Leader claims leadership for all Muslims in his concept of Rule of the

\(^{15}\) Taheri, p.43.

\(^{16}\) Abrahamian, p.38.
Religious Jurisprudence provides the moral justification for exporting the Islamic Revolution to other Sunni Muslim states in the region and overthrowing all non-Muslim governments, which Khomeini believed were oppressive. Khomeini believed that the U.S. was oppressive because of its non-Muslim status and because of Iran's collective historical experience with the U.S. Abrahamian explains that leading up to the revolution, "...Khomeini continued to denounce the Shah for supporting the United States and Israel against the Arab world;...making the country increasingly dependent on the West; and using cultural imperialism to undermine Islam and Iran."\textsuperscript{17} Strategically, an anti-Western policy works well on two-fronts for the Iranian regime; it is able to gain support domestically by exploiting the collective historic memory and gain support among Sunni Muslim countries which are also antipathetic toward the U.S. The combination of collective historical grievances and Khomeini's ideology created an anti-Western, antagonistic foreign policy toward the U.S. The language used by Khomeini, Khamenei, and most Iranian presidents communicates a power-politics type of foreign policy toward the U.S. However, a look into historical grievances and religious tradition demonstrates that there is more behind Iran's message than the aims of maximizing power and security, which will be discussed in the section on strategic culture theory. The following describes the main international relations theory, realism, which is characterized by maximizing power and security.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p.25.
Neoclassical Realist Theory

Realism is a structural theory based on the assumption that a state’s foreign policy is dictated by the need to survive in an anarchical world. The insecurity created by anarchy forces states to maximize power or security, which is determined solely by perceived threats and relative capabilities. The realist paradigm can be broken down into several main theories – classical realism, neorealism, and neoclassical realism. Neoclassical realism is an answer to the inability of neorealism, a highly abstract theory chiefly characterized by explanations of the balance of power, to analyze and predict foreign policy behavior. Further explanation of neoclassical realist theory follows.

Like neorealists, neoclassical realists theorize that state leaders assess external threats from other states by calculating relative capability before deciding how to maximize the state’s power and security. However, neoclassical realists see unit level factors, such as regime ideology, regime type, and nationalism, as the intervening variables between structure and foreign policy outcomes, rather than assume that states solely react in a self-help fashion to the international order of states created by anarchy in the system. Randall Schweller critiques Waltz’s balance of power theory and neorealism’s resistance to domestic level variables since structural theory cannot
fully explain state behavior in the international system.¹⁸ Neoclassical realists, such as Schweller, underscore the importance of domestic “...interests, values, ideology, and strategic beliefs...” and, therefore, include unit-level variables in their foreign policy analyses.¹⁹ The term neoclassical realism was first coined in the article “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy” by Gideon Rose in order to describe a theory that challenges neorealism by incorporating sub-systemic factors into an analysis that still sees foreign policy as primarily constrained at the systemic level. In his article, Rose explains that neoclassical realism is an answer to the critics of neorealism by arguing that the neorealist attempt at “black-boxing” the state does not fully explain foreign policy decision making.²⁰ Jennifer Sterling-Folker explains that neoclassical realists believe that foreign policy decision makers are constrained primarily at the systemic level while secondarily constrained at the sub-systemic level.²¹ She writes that the

...[d]omestic process is...a context within a context, acting as a causal variable within a given environment. The anarchic environment encompasses all processes and exerts pressures on them, yet because

¹⁸ Schweller, p.92.
¹⁹ Ibid., p. 108.
²⁰ In “Neoclassical realism and domestic interest groups”, Norrin M. Ripsman explains the term “black boxing”: “Neorealist theory typically views the state as a strong entity that is largely unaffected by domestic pressures when conducting foreign security policy.” Lobell et al, p.174.
²¹ Sterling-Folker, p. 22.
domestic processes will engender their own interests and behaviors over time, their attributes will affect the choices actors make as they attempt to deal with the pressures of anarchy.  

By introducing intervening variables, but still acknowledging the systemic environment, neoclassical realism is able to go further than just describing international relations; it attempts to explain the foreign policy process. 

Through an understanding of what neoclassical realists expect Iran to do in the foreign policy sphere and a comparison of those expectations against Iran’s history, a determination can be made of the extent to which neoclassical realism helps to explain Iran’s foreign policy toward the U.S. Iran’s regional ambitions, along with its reaction to what it sees as imperialist attempts by the U.S. to physically surround it, help to explain how Iran’s regional environment mixed with its regional aspirations produces a power-politics type of foreign policy toward the U.S.; its foreign policy is at once reactionary toward the U.S. and an attempt to win over public opinion at home and Arab opinion in the region. This is why Iran pursues its nuclear ambitions, gives billions in financial support to Hezbollah and Hamas to fight proxy wars in Israel, and why it tries to gain as much influence as it can in Iraq and Afghanistan through financial support to government officials and financial and tactical support of Shi’ite militias and the Taliban. With the recent change to Hezbollah leadership in

\[\text{\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p.20.}\]
Lebanon, Iran has gained influence in the Lebanese government as well, which does not bode well for Israel's security. In sum, one can expect aggressive measures by the Iranian regime in the region toward Israel and the U.S. presence because of its revisionist ideology to become the regional hegemon.

The importance of outlining foreign policy expectations for Iran is underscored by Morgenthau's emphasis on the fact that foreign policy is best made when the motivations of other states are understood. However, many have written about the fact that classical realism, the school to which Morgenthau belongs, and neorealist theories are only able to explain international relations and the interactions of the systemic environment. By not including important factors such as regime ideology, regime type, or military doctrine in their analysis, realist theories stop short of explaining the why of foreign policy and only give a description of the international system. Neoclassical realism escapes this problem by acknowledging systemic constraints while also attempting to understand the domestic factors that affect foreign policy decisions. On the other end of the spectrum from classical realist theory are cultural arguments, which argue that culture is the primary constraint on foreign policy decision making.

23 Morgenthau, p.27.
Strategic Culture Theory

According to strategic cultural theorists, military and foreign policy strategies are made of ideas and beliefs embedded in the culture over centuries, and reinforced by cultural responses to formative historical experiences. Strategic culture is a wide-ranging theory with many sub-theories that focus on everything from bureaucratic organizational culture to military doctrine to how the culture of an entire community affects strategy. Strategic culture theories are a response to what strategic culture theorists see as the downfall of realism and rational game theory to provide cultural context and the need for recognition of the variety of military and foreign policy strategies among different nations. Stuart Poore explains that “...strategic culture approaches identify specific national tendencies that derive from historical experience thus ‘cancelling out the notion of a universal assumed rationality’.” The following explains how strategic culture is defined in this analysis, the policy expectations of a strategic cultural theorist specific to Iran, and the argument that strategic culture theories should supplement realist theories when strategic culture cannot primarily explain a state’s foreign policy decision.

24 Glenn, Howlett, and Poore, 50.

25 Ibid., p.46.

26 Ibid., p.50.
First, a working definition of *strategic culture* is necessary because the term has many different meanings due to the broadness of the strategic culture enterprise. A proper definition of strategic culture should be broad enough that it can be applied to both the decisions of civilian foreign policy makers and the decisions of military strategists. This is especially necessary because of the effect that civilian policy makers have on military institutions. I, therefore, use Jack Snyder’s definition of strategic culture, as cited by Desch: “‘...the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other.’” Snyder’s definition is employed because the ‘instruction or imitation’ that helps create strategic culture is broad enough that it can be applied to socio-cultural factors and decisions made by the elite foreign policy establishment and the military. Specifically, this definition allows for an analysis that demonstrates how Iran’s strategic culture, Khomeinism, influences civilian foreign policy makers as well as military doctrine.

Second, as explained in the section on neoclassical realism, a key part to an analysis of foreign policy is to identify the policy expectations of the theory in

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27 Desch, p.152.

28 Elizabeth Kier believes that “…we should not confuse organizational culture with strategic culture. This is because [organizational culture] refers to military organizations, not to the beliefs held by civilian policy-makers.” While Kier’s definition makes sense within her analysis, it limits strategic culture theory by not including the beliefs or organizational culture of civilian foreign policy-makers.
question. If the policy expectations of strategic culturalists are in line with actual Iranian foreign policy decisions, then strategic culture will demonstrate that culture is the primary constraint on the foreign policy process. In the case of Iran, the main cultural areas (addressed further in Chapter 3) that create Iran’s strategic culture and, therefore, constrain the foreign policy process are the themes of oppression and suffering in Twelver Shi’ism and Iran’s collective historic consciousness regarding subjugation and colonialism of outside powers. Because these cultural constraints are produced at the domestic level, strategic culture policy expectations should be mostly immune from changes in the systemic environment. For instance, Iran’s antagonistic stance toward the U.S. is created by a mix of Shi’ite doctrine, which sees the U.S. as an oppressive non-Muslim state, and the association of the U.S. with the 1953 coup and support of the Shah. These are ideas that are fixed in the collective consciousness of Iranians, and therefore, manifest themselves in Iran’s strategic culture. Thus, in the eyes of strategic cultural theorists, U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan should not create a change in Iran’s stance toward America even if the Iranian regime views the outcome of events in Iraq (such as the toppling of Saddam Hussein) and Afghanistan (such as the American efforts to rid the Iran-Afghanistan border of drug dealers) as helpful to its domestic and regional foreign policy aims. Overall, strategic culture theorists would expect that Iran’s U.S. foreign policy is mostly informed by its collective historical consciousness and collective religious psyche. Strategic
culture's main downfall is that it is such a broad area that it cannot always directly determine foreign policy outcomes. For this reason, the argument that strategic culture should supplement realist theory, described below, is salient when culture does not primarily explain a specific foreign policy.

**Strategic Culture as Supplement**

Since this thesis supports the assertion that strategic culture theory is best used as a supplement to neoclassical realist theories rather than an all-encompassing theory of how states make foreign policy decisions, it is important to explain the argument made by Desch, Legro, and others. In “Culture Clash: Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies,” Desch argues that “[t]he best case that can be made for...cultural theories is that they are sometimes useful as a supplement to realist theories” and bases this on the examples of Vietnam and the Cold War where cultural arguments and predictions were proven inaccurate.³⁹ He explains that culture could not explain the differences between how the South Vietnamese, on the one hand, and the North Vietnamese and Vietcong, on the other hand, fought since these armies came from similar strategic cultures.³⁰ Regarding the Cold War, Desch states, that “[d]espite the forecasts of doom by culturalists at the time, the democratic,

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³⁹ Desch, p.142 and p.147.

commercial, and non-Clausewitzian U.S. clearly won the Cold War, and it did so with largely the same strategic and political cultures that had 'lost' Vietnam. It also handily won the Persian Gulf War.\textsuperscript{31} Thus, Desch's contention is "...that some new culturalists in security studies...claim too much for cultural explanations; by themselves, cultural variables do not provide much additional explanatory power."\textsuperscript{32} Jeffrey Legro argues in a similar vein as Desch when he states that "...it is the combination of culture and structure that matters."\textsuperscript{33} Legro bases his argument on his findings that "...when cultural orientation clashes dramatically with material feasibility, cultures are more likely to adapt, as in the case of the U.S. submarine warfare."\textsuperscript{34} Desch explains that "...the critical question is how much independent explanatory power [culture] has."\textsuperscript{35} Using post-revolutionary Iran as the case study, this analysis compares the two theories against one another in order to ultimately support the assertion that strategic culture theories should supplement realist theories (in this case, neoclassical realist theory) when realist theories fall short of explaining foreign policy outcomes.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p.169.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p.134-135.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p.133.
\textsuperscript{35} Desch, p.170.
**Expected Results**

Iran acts as a self-interested state competing for power in conducting its foreign policy. Iran’s current foreign policy is not dictated by the U.S. or any other great power, but it does view the U.S. and Israel as its main enemies based on military superiorities and nuclear capability. It, therefore, views its enemies in a realist light and President Ahmadinejad uses language that communicates a power-politics type of worldview. However, Iran’s military doctrine and foreign policy is informed by more than the systemic environment and relative material capabilities. The expected conclusion of this analysis is that neoclassical realist arguments – specifically those that address the motives of revisionist powers and their ability to use ideology to extract and mobilize resources – have more explanatory power than strategic culture arguments with regard to Iranian post-revolutionary foreign policy toward the U.S.

**Potential Problems**

There may be some predictive power that will arise from this analysis and expected conclusion of Iran’s post-revolutionary foreign policy toward the U.S. However, one has to be careful not to take strategic decisions resulting from either cultural variables or relative capability calculations as absolute; there are internal and
external variables that can change the game at any time. Any kind of outlier examples in this analysis where Iran’s military action does not match Iran’s strategic culture or expected reaction to the systemic environment will be recognized. In circumstances where Iranian foreign policy outcomes in the post-revolutionary time period do not fit stereotypical cultural behavioral patterns for Iran, it is helpful to determine what changes in the structural environment or other non-cultural variables explain the deviant behavior. Lastly, a problem with any analysis that includes culture is that culture is largely communicated through language and since I am not fluent in Farsi, the analysis relies on English language texts by cultural and political scholars of Iran.

Conclusion

Theory serves as an instrument to simplify the complexities of foreign policy analysis at each level of inquiry: sub-national, national, and international. As demonstrated above, the debate between neoclassical realism and strategic culture is about the extent to which domestic variables influence foreign policy decision making. Neoclassical realists see domestic variables, such as Iran’s revisionist ideology, as an intervening variable between the material constraints of the systemic environment and foreign policy outcome. Strategic culturalists see culture as the main independent variable exerting influence on foreign policy decisions before the

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36 Glenn, Howlett, & Poore, p.48.
systemic environment is considered. I argue that neoclassical realist arguments that address the ability of the revisionist state to use ideology to extract and mobilize resources are better able to explain Iran’s post-revolutionary foreign policy toward the U.S. I also argue that in those instances where neoclassical arguments cannot provide an explanation for a given foreign policy decision, strategic culture theory is useful as a complementary theory. The following chapter identifies the most salient literature and cultural factors in Iran’s foreign policy formulation.
CHAPTER 3
NEOCLASSICAL REALIST AND STRATEGIC CULTURE LITERATURE

Twelver Shi’ism

History, Nationalism, and Ideology

Cultural Factors in Military Doctrine

Conclusion

As previously mentioned, neoclassical realism and strategic culture differ on how states are primarily constrained in their foreign policy. However, the fact that both theories incorporate unit level variables, albeit in two drastically different ways, makes it necessary to outline the main cultural factors used by Khomeinists to consolidate power and to show how those cultural factors are used to help create and justify Iran’s foreign policy. The cultural factors that I believe are most salient to Iran’s U.S. foreign policy are Twelver Shi’ism, Iran’s history, and Iranian nationalism. The following outlines the literature regarding these cultural variables and the theories that show how these cultural variables are used to infuse Khomeinist ideology into Iran’s military doctrine and Iran’s U.S. foreign policy.

Twelver Shi’ism

Just as it is today, prior to Khomeini’s rule, Shi’ism was central to the majority of Iranians’ way of life. The majority of Shi’ites in Iran belong to the Twelve Imam and believe “that the spiritual and temporal leadership of the Muslim
community passed from Muhammad to his cousin and son-in-law Ali and then sequentially to 11 of Ali's direct male descendants. Twelver Shi'ites believe that the son of the eleventh Imam, Hasan Askari, will appear at the end of time as mahdi. The mahdi is referred to as the hidden Imam because he is currently in occultation. The main elements of Twelver Shi'ism that influence Iran's U.S. foreign policy are the concept of martyrdom, the concept of suffering and oppression, and the concept of good and evil. These elements, though capitalized on by the Iranian regime, are rooted in the religious history of Twelver Shi'ism.

Khomeini encouraged martyrdom in the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War in order to capitalize on the deeply held religious beliefs of the majority of Iranians. The term martyrdom has been used since the late twentieth century to refer to Muslims who die in defense of Muslim territory (jihad). The concept of martyrdom is also presently used in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' military doctrine, which will be described below. John L. Esposito, arguably the foremost American scholar on Islam, explains the religious background to the concept of martyrdom:

37 Ibid., p.118.
38 Arjomand, p. 181.
Husayn's martyrdom on the tenth day (ashura) of Muharram at Karbala in 680 is the paradigmatic event of Shi'i history. Remembrance and ritual reenactment of the tragedy of Karbala is a cornerstone of faith, personal and communal identity, and piety. It accounts for the special vision and character of Shi'i Islam as a disinherit ed, oppressed community, loyal to God and His Prophet, struggling throughout history to restore God's rule and a just society. The martyrdom motif was extended to all the Imams, who with the exception of the twelfth, were believed to have been martyred.40

Esposito explains further that Husayn's martyrdom and suffering is commemorated annually by Twelver Shi'ites through praying, weeping, and self-flagellation.41 Roger Savory explains that,

[T]he concept of martyrdom as the ultimate good became deeply imbedded in the Shi'i psyche, and the emotional and cathartic commemoration of the martyrdom of the imams became a powerful weapon which could be used to rouse the masses for political ends.42

The importance of explaining the concept of martyrdom is to underscore the cultural and religious significance of not just martyrdom, but also the theme of suffering and oppression in Shi'ism. Arjomand explains that "...martyrdom...constitutes the major component of the Shi'ite theodicy of suffering."43 And, according to Savory,

Khomeini capitalized on the connected theme of suffering and oppression in Shi'ism

42 Savory, p. 407.
43 Arjomand, pp. 112-113.
“...by posing as the champion of all oppressed peoples everywhere.” This theme of oppression was used to justify the Iranian regime’s moral significance and it has been used in the post-revolutionary period to characterize the U.S., Israel, and the West as oppressors. This part of Iran’s foreign policy also has its roots in Shi’ite religious thought, as explained by Savory:

During the whole of the mediaeval period, the Muslim worldview divided the known world into two blocs:

the house of Islam, where the true faith prevailed and the Muslim caliph ruled, and the house of war, where unsubjugated infidels still remained. Between the two there was a perpetual and inevitable state of war...[which] would end only when the whole world was brought into the house of Islam.  

Savory further explains that

...[Khomeini did] not acknowledge the Marxist division of the world into socialist and capitalist states but [used] the traditional Islamic division of the world into dar al-Islam [House of Islam] and dar al-harb [House of War]...  

Savory’s explanation gives more insight into the religious component of Khomeini’s anti-Western worldview. The aforementioned explanation of Khomeini’s views demonstrates how Iran’s strategic culture elites capitalize on the deeply held religious beliefs of Iranian society for the political aims of the Iranian regime.

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44 Savory, p. 412.
46 Ibid., p.416.
**History, Nationalism, and Ideology**

The Iranian regime also uses Iran’s collective historical memory of subjugation by outside forces to stir up nationalist sentiment and to justify its foreign policy objectives toward the U.S. Iran’s history is seen by Iranians as one of constant subjugation by outside forces, including the British, the Russians, and involvement of the U.S. in the assassination of Mossadeq, relationship with the Shah, and involvement in the Middle East and Persian Gulf.47 G. Hossein Razi explains that there is a “crisis of dignity” in the Middle East due to a history of subjugation. According to Razi, nationalism

\[ \text{...resurrect[s] the dignity of the articulate population and eliminate[s] the feeling of insecurity and inferiority. The appeal of nationalism...in the Middle East is thus to a large extent a reflection of the crisis of dignity, that is, of individuals' sense of self-worth, honor and esteem.}^{48} \]

The leadership in Iran uses this “crisis of dignity” and nationalist sentiment by “...[going] to extremes to prove to their people and perhaps to themselves beyond the shadow of a doubt that they are not subservient to great powers.”49 The result is a foreign policy toward the U.S. that is intended to exploit nationalist sentiment in Iran and in the region. The part of Iran’s foreign policy that is created by the “crisis of

47 Razi, p.82.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
dignity" supports the argument that Iran's post-revolutionary U.S. foreign policy is better explained by neoclassical realist arguments; the regime exploits cultural sensitivity based on historical realities in their response to structural pressures exerted on Iran. In other words, the regime uses historical realities to justify its foreign policy.

Razi's description of the "crisis of dignity" also supports neoclassical realist, J.W. Taliaferro's, explanation of the ability of the state to extract and mobilize resources where state power acts as the intervening variable between the state and the systemic environment. In Taliaferro's resource-extraction model, state power is "defined as the relative ability of the state to extract or mobilize resources as determined by the institutions of the state, nationalism, and ideology."50 Taliaferro explains how state-sponsored nationalism and ideology help to increase state power:

...state-sponsored nationalism tends to increase social cohesion and the propensity of individuals to identify with the state, which in turn facilitates leaders' efforts to extract and mobilize resources from society for national security goals. Ideology, in contrast, can facilitate or inhibit leaders' efforts to extract and mobilize resources, depending on the content of that ideology and the extent to which elites and the public hold common ideas about the proper role of the state vis-à-vis society and the economy.51

50 Ibid., p.213.

51 Ibid., p.215 and p.219-222. Resource extraction is the ability of the state to turn its "societal wealth into military power". Mobilization refers to increased state expenditures toward state institutions on a large scale or non-state actors for the use of expanding production.
In Iran’s case, the regime has successfully been able to use both state-sponsored nationalism and ideology in order to achieve its aims. It does this, in part, by appealing to Iranian cultural sensitivities found in both Twelver Shi’ism and the “crisis of dignity.”

In a similar argument to Taliaferro’s explanation of how states use ideology to increase power, Randall L. Schweller argues that ideology, specifically fascism, is the elemental factor in the extraction and mobilization capabilities of an expansionist state, especially an expansionist state bidding for regional hegemony, as is the case with Iran. Schweller explains that,

"...in the age of mass politics, ideology plays an instrumental and necessary role in helping leaders extract resources and mobilize domestic support for novel and expensive grand strategies. This is particularly true in the case of revisionist great powers."

Some of the characteristics of fascism that Schweller argues are in common with offensive realism could also be used to describe Khomeinism: mass mobilization by playing on the fears of the masses; exploitation of social and economic grievances; "self-sufficiency as an instrument of political power;" "a necessity for war-

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52 Part of Schweller’s argument is that fascism is the missing ideological element that takes offensive realism from theory to practice (p. 230). The focus of this analysis is on the role of Khomeinism rather than whether Iran is a fascist state. However, noting the similarities that the Iranian regime’s ideology has in common with fascism allows for a greater understanding of how the Khomeinist ideology is able to extract and mobilize resources.

53 Schweller, p.228.
preparedness;" and, rejection of the international political economy. The characteristics that Khomeinism has in common with fascism, as described by Schweller, are relevant to this analysis in that those same characteristics are used either as tactics or as justification in Iran's post-revolutionary U.S. foreign policy. In addition, the Iranian regime is successful at using historical and religious grievances, nationalism, and ideology to extract and mobilize resources in order to gain power.

Cultural Factors in Iran's Military Doctrine

The exploitation of the above-named factors in the creation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' [IRGC] military doctrine is one of the key ways Khomeinism is used to consolidate power and carry out its pro-revolutionary proxies against Israel and the U.S. While major recent historical factors such as "...the losses of men and equipment during the 1980-1988 war with Iraq and the success of U.S. efforts to restrict weapons sales to Tehran" were the initial major factors in developing Iran's post-war doctrine, history, religion, and nationalist themes that originate in the pre-revolutionary era are "...a keystone for Iran's conception of war and military doctrine." In "The Continuing Evolution of Iran’s Military Doctrine," Steven R. Ward explains that "[m]ilitary and spiritual discipline are linked, possibly

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54 Ibid., pp.237-239.

in an effort to create more obstacles to breakdowns in authority because of modern Iran’s past history of military coups and coup plotting. A connected psychological tactic used by the IRGC is to ingrain the Armed Forces with “…religious zeal and the concept of martyrdom to confront stronger powers.”

In 2001, the Revolutionary Guard Command College outlined “…the use of pro-revolutionary proxies outside Iran’s borders” and, in 2003, the IRGC Commander “…warned that the U.S. was in a military-economic war to control Islamic culture, saying that in this situation the Guard’s mission of cultural defense took priority over other defensive missions.”

The commander’s comment and Ward’s research demonstrate that Iran’s military doctrine is influenced by a mix of genuine Iranian cultural attributes and the Khomeinist ideology that the regime depends on for survival.

Conclusion

The literature on cultural variables specific to Iran’s strategic culture and the neoclassical realist literature on resource extraction and mobilization give several main insights for the analysis of Iran’s foreign policy toward the U.S.: First, the literature on Shi’ism explains that Iran’s foreign policy is heavily influenced in the concepts of martyrdom, oppression, and the division between good and evil. Second,

\[56 \textit{Ibid.}, p.561.\]

\[57 \textit{Ibid.}\]

\[58 \textit{Ibid.}, p.564.\]

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the neoclassical realist literature demonstrates that genuine historical grievances, nationalism, and ideology are manipulated by the state in order to mobilize and extract resources to increase power. Third, the literature on military doctrine demonstrates how Khomeinism is infused into the organizational culture of the IRGC and, therefore, into Iran’s U.S. foreign policy. Together, the insights provided by the literature underscore the importance of understanding how Iranian cultural variables relate to state power and resource extraction and mobilization.
CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY

Takeover of the U.S. Embassy

Support of Hezbollah

Iran-Contra Affair

War in the Persian Gulf

Anti-Semitic Rhetoric toward Israel

Nuclear Weapons Program

As indicated in the first part of the thesis, Iran's overriding foreign policy goal is to become the regional hegemon in the Middle East. Iran's ambition to become the regional hegemon is an integral part of Iran's foreign policy toward the U.S. This is because a large part of Khomeinism is its anti-American and anti-Western sentiment; it allows Iran to become self-sufficient and make its own regional foreign policy independent of any states to which it might otherwise be beholden. The question that this thesis seeks to answer is whether Khomeinism is used, after first responding to the distribution of power in the region, to extract resources and mobilize its citizens and the military in order to accomplish its hegemonic ambitions. Or, is Khomeinism, as Iran's strategic culture, used to primarily formulate foreign policy before the systemic environment is considered? What follows is a case-study where Iran's major post-revolutionary foreign policy decisions toward the U.S. are analyzed to
determine which foreign policy theory, neoclassical realism or strategic culture, is better able to explain Iran’s decision making process. For the most part, the case study will focus on each event or policy in chronological order from the creation of the Islamic Republic to the present. There are two exceptions to this order: Iran’s support of terror in the Middle East and Iran’s rhetoric toward Israel. Iran’s support of terror is addressed after the Takeover of the US Embassy because Iran’s involvement in Hezbollah started in 1982, but its support of terror in the region continues to this day. Iran’s anti-Semitic rhetoric toward Israel is addressed toward the end of the case-study, despite a history of anti-Semitic remarks from the start of the Khomeini era, because of the vast increase in such rhetoric by Ahmadinejad since his election.

**Takeover of the US Embassy**

The takeover of the U.S. Embassy by radical students in Tehran on November 4, 1979 was the first major event that involved the U.S. since the start of the Iranian Revolution. At first, this event could not be considered official policy by the Iranian regime since Khomeini’s rule had not been consolidated at the time the takeover of the U.S. Embassy occurred. Khomeini, himself, didn’t know about the seizure at the outset. In time, however, Khomeini vocally supported the takeover and the hostage crisis that ensued. In fact, Khomeini’s rule was consolidated in large part because of the hostage crisis. While the takeover of the US Embassy started as an impulsive
move by radical students, it became Iran’s foreign policy as the hostage crisis continued. Neoclassical realists would expect for the takeover of the embassy to be in reaction to a pressures in the systemic environment involving the U.S. Strategic culturalists would theorize that the takeover and hostage crisis would primarily be as a result of Iran’s culture, which is influenced by Shi’ite doctrine and Iran’s collective history of U.S involvement in Iran.

As an impulsive move by radical students, the takeover of the U.S. Embassy was rooted in Iran’s collective memory of America’s involvement in the 1953 coup and other grievances that had to do with America’s relationship with the Shah. Ray Takeyh explains the culture of the revolutionary elite and the revolutionary students in his book, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*:

A look back at the Iran of 1979 reveals a revolutionary elite that really did see itself as under siege, struggling against enemies, real and imagined...the Islamic Republic’s leaders were extremely anxious about U.S. intervention. An Iranian generation accustomed to believing that American machinations lay behind all of their country’s misfortunes found it impossible to believe that the Carter administration would passively accept the demise of its reliable ally in the strategically critical Persian Gulf. As such, the takeover of the embassy was a strike against the nefarious American plot, a nonexistent one at that. Still, Iran’s insecure revolutionaries came to perceive that by taking over the embassy, they would necessarily prolong their new mission.59

59 Takeyh, p.96.
Takeyh further explains that Khomeini was able to consolidate power because of the students' actions in Tehran and the regime subsequently “called for the return of the Shah and his assets, the end of American interference in Iran’s internal affairs, and an apology for past U.S. misdeeds” for the freedom of the hostages. The hostage crisis continued for 444 days and allowed for Iran to consolidate power domestically. The regime realized that the benefit of consolidating power domestically outweighed the cost of losing the U.S. as an ally. The event falls into a neoclassical realist argument where power and regional hegemonic status is the main systemic goal and the ideological component of Khomeinism is the intervening variable. Iran’s revisionist ideology created a foreign policy so aggressive that it violated another state’s sovereignty in order to increase power domestically and in the region. A neoclassical realist explanation of foreign policy, therefore, has more explanatory power in this instance than a strategic culture explanation.

Support of Hezbollah

Iran’s support of Hezbollah is also informed by Khomeinism and its goal to export Islam worldwide. Hezbollah is a political movement used by the Iranian regime to consolidate power in the region and become a formidable power against the U.S. and Israel. Ward explains that Hezbollah’s initial objectives were to “expel the

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60 Ibid., pp. 97-98.
Americans and Israelis and crush pro-Iraqi groups in Lebanon” in an attempt to export the revolution and gain further independence from the U.S. More than any other Iranian foreign policy area, Iran’s creation and backing of Hezbollah, supports Schweller’s argument regarding the role of ideology in resource extraction and mobilization; Hezbollah is the main vehicle Iran uses to implement its aggression in the region, specifically toward Israel. Iran’s support of Islamic terror supports neoclassical realist expectations in that Iran pursues its regional aspirations with Khomeinism acting as the intervening variable. A strategic culturalist would expect that Khomeinism would primarily influence Iran’s decision to commit terror in the region. While Khomeinism is used to influence ideology and military doctrine within Hezbollah, the strategic culture explanation ignores the primacy of two factors in Iran’s regional reality: (1) Iran wants to become the regional hegemon to maximize power and security, and (2) the regional structural reality for Iran is that its sworn enemies, the U.S. and Israel, are seen as major roadblocks to Iran’s regional aspirations. The following gives more insight into how Iran uses Khomeinism to aggressively pursue regional hegemony through terrorist organizations.

Iran exports the revolution through its financial, material, and training support of Hezbollah through a special unit of the IRGC, the Quds force. Through Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran has engaged in a proxy war with Israel and is thought to have

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invested around $20 billion in Hezbollah in Lebanon since its creation in 1983. To demonstrate the importance that Hezbollah plays in Iran’s foreign policy toward Israel, in an interview with the New York Times, Muhammad Atrianfar, publisher of the newspaper Shargh said, “Officially, Iran is not aware of what Hezbollah does... Logically and unofficially Iran is always aware. The reason is clear, because of all that Iran has done for Hezbollah. Hezbollah is Iran in Lebanon. When Iran looks at Hezbollah, it sees Iran.” Ward lists the events in which the IRGC was involved with helping Hezbollah in the first decade after the revolution:

[IRGC] officials supervised attacks such as the suicide bombing of the U.S. embassy in April 1983, where sixty-three people, including seventeen Americans, died. The Guard was also behind the truck bombings of the American and French multinational forces in October 1983, in which 241 U.S. Marines and 58 French peacekeepers were killed. The guard was involved in [Hezbollah’s] hostage operations during the rest of the decade when seventeen Americans and seventy other foreigners were kidnapped. Ten of those hostages died in

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62 Taheri, p.245.
63 Ibid., p. 101.
64 Slackman, p.4.
captivity, including CIA Station Chief William Buckley, who was tortured and murdered.\textsuperscript{65}

Ward explains that the aims of Khomeini and the IRGC were accomplished in that “[t]he kidnappings in Lebanon reduced Western influence in the country”, which supports Schweller’s argument that ideology is a key component of a state’s strategy to become regional hegemon. Khomeini’s anti-Western ideology was influential in extracting and mobilizing the resources necessary to create Hezbollah in Iran’s goal to rid the Middle East of the U.S. presence, as well as Iran’s ultimate goal of regional hegemony.\textsuperscript{66}

Hezbollah operates in many countries around the world and carries out its anti-Zionist policy in countries other than just Israel. Taheri explains that, “[i]n 2007, a court in Buenos Aires found the Islamic Republic responsible for a terrorist operation in 1994. A unit of [Hezbollah], acting on orders from Tehran, blew up the headquarters of the Israel-Argentine Mutual Jewish Association in Buenos Aires, killing 86 people and injuring 250.”\textsuperscript{67} In the most recent proxy war between Iran and Israel, in the summer of 2006, Hezbollah in Lebanon captured two Israeli soldiers as prisoners. In retaliation, Israel conducted airstrikes on Hezbollah in Lebanon while

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{67} Taheri, pp. 97-98.
Hezbollah countered with strikes of Iranian-made rockets. The rockets were "very similar if not identical to those used against British troops in Basra" in Iraq, according to Prime Minister Tony Blair.  

Lebanon's ability to launch such a formidable counter-strike was due to close to six years of planning (since Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000) by Hezbollah with the help of Iranian advisors who trained and helped Hezbollah fortify positions in southern Lebanon. In fact, IRGC members were involved in fighting the war. In an article in Foreign Affairs, Ze'ev Schiff wrote that "[a] number of Revolutionary Guard members were killed in the Israeli incursion into the town of Baalbek (close to the Syrian border) on August 1, and Israeli intelligence claims that Iranians helped Hezbollah fire the land-to-sea missile that almost destroyed an Israeli warship in mid-July." A New York Times article from July 30, 2006, explains that Iranian "...foreign policy experts and former government officials said that Iran had come to view Israel's attack on Lebanon as a proxy offensive. They now view the war as the new front line in the decades-old conflict with Washington." The same article quotes Hamidreza Jalalipour, a former Iranian government official, as saying that the way Israel attacked Hezbollah is "the United States' revenge against Iran" and the

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68 *New York Times*, 7/18/2006. p.2. The rockets were "very similar if not identical to those used against British troops in Basra" in Iraq, according to Prime Minister Tony Blair.

69 Schiff, p. 23.

70 Ibid.

71 Slackman, p.1.
response from Israel is "like waging war against Iran", underscoring the linkage between Iran’s foreign policy toward Israel and its foreign policy toward the U.S.\textsuperscript{72} It is likely that Iran’s foreign policy toward Israel will become more aggressive since as of January 2011, Hezbollah has taken control of the government in Lebanon.

While the Iranian regime’s agenda is to export the revolution through Hezbollah, Taheri argues that Islamic terrorism is not about religion because many different elements come together to fight against what the Iranian regime sees as the imperialist forces of Israel and the U.S. Taheri sees Islamic terrorism as a political movement; Iran may finance Hamas, but there are no Shi’ites fighting in Palestine and, in Azerbaijan, Iran supports the anti-American Sunni Taleshi groups over the pro-American Azeri Shiites.\textsuperscript{73} For Iran, Khomeini’s call to export the revolution by supporting regional terrorist groups helps to expel the U.S. from the region and cause trouble for Israel. So, while cultural variables are a key component to Iran’s influence in Iran’s support of Hezbollah, as described below, Taheri’s point shows that Iran’s revisionist ambitions take precedence.

Cultural variables such as Shi’ism’s focus on martyrdom, as seen in the suicide bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon; Iran’s historical memory of the

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., p.1.

\textsuperscript{73} Taheri, pp. 98-99 and p.101.
U.S. involvement in the Shah's reign; and, the anti-Semitic rhetoric (addressed below) used by the regime play a large role in how the Khomeinist ideology fuels the passion of those who fight for Hezbollah. These cultural variables are used in the IRGC's military doctrine and make their way into the training of Hezbollah. However, as previously mentioned, it is Iran's bid for regional hegemony that puts these cultural variables into play when looking at Iran’s support of Hezbollah. Therefore, neoclassical realism, specifically Schweller's argument regarding expansionist states, has more explanatory power with regard to Iran’s involvement with Hezbollah’s actions in the region.

**Iran-Contra Affair**

A neoclassical realist explanation also has more explanatory power when applied to the Iran-Contra Affair, Iran’s secret dealings with Israel and the U.S. to acquire weapons in exchange for American hostages held by Hezbollah in Lebanon. A neoclassical realist would expect that a state in Iran's position in the Iran-Iraq war would increase its weapons capability at any cost in order to survive. In this case, the intervening variable would be Iran's religious and historical differences with the Iraqi regime. A strategic cultural theorist would expect that Iran would *not* deal with the U.S. at any cost because Iran's strategic culture is inherently antithetical to any dealings with the U.S. This, quite obviously, was why it was shocking to Americans and Iranians when it was revealed that Iran, the U.S. and Israel had been negotiating
arms for hostages. Iran implemented a pragmatic policy over ideologically influenced policy toward the U.S. 74 Because of Iran’s focus on its need of weapons to continue defending itself against Iraq, structural constraints emanating from the regional systemic environment took precedence over ideological constraints. Iran had not changed its anti-American policy; instead, Iran’s reasoning in participating in the Iran-Contra Affair was a form of maximizing power and security at all costs, even if it meant dealing with its sworn enemy. 75

Any type of concession, such as the Iran-Contra Affair, that Iran makes toward the U.S. cannot be explained by cultural factors. This is because Iran’s antagonistic foreign policy stance toward the U.S. is influenced by several different cultural factors: Iran’s historical consciousness regarding America’s role in the 1953 coup and alliance with the Shah; the themes of oppression, good and evil, and martyrdom in Shi’ite theology; and Khomeini’s ideological influence on Iran’s foreign policy toward the U.S. With so many facets of Iran’s culture culminating in an anti-American foreign policy, the reasons for the Iran-Contra Affair in which Iran had direct dealings with its sworn enemy would have to exist outside of the cultural realm. One caveat to this explanation is that Iran’s motivation for the dealings with

74 Ramazani, p. 556.

75 Israel and the U.S. also had their own reasons for the Iran-Contra Affair – fighting Iraq and freeing the hostages from Lebanon, respectively – that led them to disown their own strategic cultures. This supports Legro’s research where he found that cultures are likely to adapt when “cultural orientation clashes with material feasibility”. (Legro, p.133)
the U.S. was a result of its hatred of and need to win against Iraq, which of course, emanates from religious and historical differences with the Iraqi regime. One can, therefore, make the argument that cultural factors were influential in Iran's decision to deal with the U.S. Cultural factors, however, have to be ruled out as the primary motivation of dealing with the U.S. because Iran turned a blind eye to its hatred of the U.S. in order to have a chance at winning the war against Iraq.

**War in the Persian Gulf**

Iran's handling of American tankers in the Persian Gulf in the late 1980s, was a sort of physical proof that Iran had not abandoned its anti-American sentiment. Systemic imperatives were the fuel behind Iran's foreign policy toward the U.S. in the Persian Gulf in the late eighties. In 1987, the U.S. accepted Kuwait's proposal to protect Kuwaiti tankers as part of a strong stand against Iran. Ward explains that "[n]ot surprisingly, Iran saw the reflagging [and protection of the tankers] as an unfair attempt to bolster Iraq and interference in a life-or-death matter."76 Iran retaliated with mine warfare when the first U.S. convoy began to protect merchant shipping. According to Ward, "Iran credited 'invisible hands' for the attack and enjoyed the propaganda victory gained from the spectacle of sophisticated American warships being forced by pre-World War I technology to hide behind the Bridgeton [one of the

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U.S. warships in the convoy].”

This was the beginning of ongoing attacks in the Persian Gulf, including several planned attacks by [Iranian] forces against patrolling U.S. Army helicopters, a U.S. mobile sea base, Kuwaiti ports, and the U.S.-flagged Sea Isle City. In retaliation, the U.S. demolished “...the Rashadat and Resalat oil platforms in the southern Gulf [after allowing an evacuation of the Iranians] that [Iran] was using for targeting ships.”

The U.S. destroyed more oil platforms in retaliation for the mine that struck the U.S. Samuel B. Roberts and sunk an Iranian fast-attack craft in self-defense. Neoclassical realists would expect for Iran to act in the way that it did: Iran responded to the regional systemic environment, and the Khomeinist regime’s hatred of the U.S. and regional hegemonic ambitions were the intervening variables that influenced the way Iran’s response toward the U.S. was handled. Iran’s strategic culture certainly played a part in Iran’s perception of the U.S. presence in the Persian Gulf as a threat and in the way it conducted its defensive measures against the U.S. However, Iran’s strategic culture could not have primarily accounted for Iran’s foreign policy since this was an instance where Iran was reacting to the systemic environment, first and foremost.

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77 Ibid., p. 284.
78 Ibid., pp. 286-287.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., P.287.
Anti-Semitic Rhetoric toward Israel

An analysis of Iran’s post-revolutionary U.S. foreign policy is incomplete without also addressing Iran’s foreign policy toward Israel. That is because Israel, as a major ally of the U.S. is seen by Iran as a client of the U.S. Therefore, Israel is also an enemy of Iran. Because of the historically close relationship between the U.S. and Israel, Iran’s foreign policy toward Israel is part and parcel of Iran’s U.S. foreign policy. It is not just Israel’s relationship with the U.S. that Iran takes issue with; the Iranian regime does not officially recognize Israel as a state and considers Palestine an occupied territory. Amir Taheri explains that anti-Semitism never gained ground in Iran until the politics of the Cold War. Iran became hostile toward Israel, partly through Egyptian propaganda broadcast into Iran and partly because of the Soviet Union’s position toward Israel as a member of the “enemy camp,” which influenced the Iranian left who had initially been ambivalent toward Israel. The following will address the Iranian regime’s anti-Zionism in its foreign policy, which was part of Khomeini’s ideology and has been carried on by presidents Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad.

Since 1963, Khomeini linked his anti-American remarks with his anti-Israeli rhetoric in his writings and speeches, both of which were linked to Iran’s history of

81 Taheri, pp. 133-134.
outside powers being involved in Iran's internal affairs and what Khomeini saw as the Shah's collusion with the U.S. and Israel.\textsuperscript{82} In the post-Khomeini era, anti-Semitic statements have increasingly become part of the Iranian regime's rhetoric, especially when it comes to Presidents Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad. In 2001, Rafsanjani... evoked the prospect of a thermonuclear exchange that would end up with Israel's annihilation... 'the use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel would destroy everything' while the Muslim world, if attacked in retaliation, could easily afford to lose millions of 'martyrs.' He concluded: It is not illogical to contemplate such an eventuality.\textsuperscript{83}

Just after his election in 2005, Ahmadinejad famously called for Israel to be wiped off the map at a "World without Zionism" conference.\textsuperscript{84} And, addressing members of parliament in 2008, Ahmadinejad referred to Israel's place in the Middle East:

'\textquoteleft They should know that regional nations hate this fake and criminal regime, and if the smallest and briefest chance is given to regional nations, they will destroy [it].' In the same speech, he said, 'Our mission in the arena of foreign affairs is to present the idea of Pure Islam as the only path for the salvation of mankind to all nations. We have to smash the existing models in the world.'\textsuperscript{85}

The quotes by both Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad are instructive in that they put the regime's opinion of Israel's existence, as well its foreign policy toward Israel, in

\textsuperscript{82} See Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980) translated and annotated by Hamid Algar.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., pp. 144-145.

\textsuperscript{84} Fathi, p.1.

\textsuperscript{85} Taheri, pp.139.
politico-religious terms. By mentioning the sacrifice of “millions of martyrs,” Rafsanjani uses Shi’ism’s “…major component of the Shi’ite theodicy of suffering,” as Arjomand refers to it, as a way to defend the country. 86 By referring to “existing models in the world” Ahmadinejad also linked Iran’s anti-Western policy to its Israel policy.

These quotes demonstrate the blurring of the lines between politics and religion in Iran’s foreign policy. Despite debate within Iran regarding foreign policy between different political factions and between branches of government, Ahmadinejad’s statements go unquestioned in public by the Guardian Council, Ayatollah Khamenei, and other members of parliament signals that the regime endorses his anti-Zionist viewpoints. Ahmadinejad’s statements regarding Israel are attempts to stir up animosity in the region and to gain support for the regime among citizens living in Sunni countries whose leadership has historically been hostile toward Iran. 87 This demonstrates that Ahmadinejad uses this anti-Semitic rhetoric as way to consolidate power at home and increase power in the region. In this case, Iran fits a neoclassical realist explanation, especially Schweller’s theory, by responding to the dynamics of the region involving Israel and using the anti-Semitism inherent in the Khomeinist ideology as the intervening variable.

86 Arjomand, pp. 112-113.
87 Porter, p.1.
Nuclear Weapons Program

In the 1990s, it came to light that Iran had received information and materials from A. Q. Khan’s black-market network in Pakistan in 1987. Iran’s clandestine nuclear weapons program came to light in 2002, and in 2003, under President Khatami, Iran allowed inspections by the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) and negotiations with the EU-3 (Britain, Germany, and France). In 2006, Iran re-started its uranium enrichment program under newly elected President Ahmadinejad who claims that Iran’s nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only. The five permanent members of the U.N. and Germany held talks with Iran in 2010 where a deal to export its enriched uranium for processing later fell through. In January 2011, The New York Times published an article detailing the known details of the success of the joint U.S.-Israeli attempt to slow down Iran’s nuclear ambitions. According to the article, the Stuxnet computer worm, “...appears to have wiped out roughly a fifth of Iran’s nuclear centrifuges and helped delay...Tehran’s ability to make its first nuclear arms.” The retiring chief of Israel’s Mossad intelligence agency, Mier Dagan, believes that the Stuxnet virus will delay Iran’s bomb making ability until 2015.

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88 Broad, Markoff, and Sanger, p. 1.
89 Ibid., pp. 1-2.
Domestically, Iran’s nuclear weapons program is an attempt for the regime to hold onto and consolidate its power. In a report on the strategic culture of Iran for the United States Threat Reduction Agency, Willis Stanley explained the reasoning behind Iran’s nuclear ambitions:

A nuclear weapon capability...would help to fulfill the leadership’s ambition to make Iran the Islamic world’s preeminent power, a fulfillment of Iran’s rightful role as regional hegemon and as a beacon for all to convert to the true Islam...the regime has skillfully created domestic support for an inordinately expensive civilian nuclear program as a matter of national pride and symbol of cultural progress.90

Additionally, Iran’s nuclear ambitions would deter the U.S. and Israel, which would allow for Iran to be immune from an attack by both countries.91 The variables that make up the regime’s strategic culture are all at play in Iran’s nuclear ambitions: Iran’s historical and religious memory of oppression manifests itself in its belief that becoming a nuclear power will restore it to its “rightful role as regional hegemon;” the regime’s goal to export the revolution will be achieved when it acquires nuclear weapon capability; and Iran’s use of nationalism is used to create domestic support for its nuclear weapons program. However, it is clear that neoclassical realism is better able to explain Iran’s development of its nuclear weapons program since it is

90 Stanley, p.24.
91 Taheri, p. 249.
primarily a part of both Iran's regional aspirations and Iran's deterrence of Israel and the U.S. Schweller and Taliaferro's theories, in particular, are best able to explain Iran's policy in this arena. First, Schweller argues that revisionist powers use their ideology for resource extraction and mobilization in their bid for regional hegemony. Second, Taliaferro theorizes that state-sponsored nationalism facilitates extraction and mobilization capabilities and that the competitive nature of the anarchical system causes states to emulate other successful states. Interestingly, in the case of Iran's nuclear weapons development Iran emulates the same states it is trying to deter, Israel and the U.S., in an attempt to be on the same playing field as far as weapons capability is concerned.

**Iraq and Afghanistan**

After the U.S. led invasion in Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein's Sunni regime, Iran saw the leaderless majority Shi'ite population as an opportunity to fight a proxy war against the U.S. and coalition forces. Iran supplies Shi'ite militias with training and weapons, including rockets, to fight in neighborhoods in Basra and in the Green Zone. According to Taheri, "[t]he idea is to put the Islamic Republic and its clients in Iraq in a position to claim credit for having 'expelled the American

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92 Cooper, p.1.
Iran's larger goal in Iraq since the fall of Saddam has been to yield influence over the Shi'ite population in an attempt to gain more control in the region and export the revolution. Iran also meddles in Afghanistan by giving bags of money to President Hamid Karzai in order to drive a wedge between Karzai's government and the U.S. and NATO. According to the New York Times, NATO officials say that Iran is paying for, arming and training Taliban fighters, as well as financing candidates in the parliamentary elections. Iran's policy toward the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan is a response to the structural opportunity created by U.S.-led coalition forces, which is informed by the regime's culture. In other words, neoclassical realist explanations of foreign policy work better in this instance where Iran formulates its U.S. policy as a reaction to the changed regional environment. Iran does this with cultural justifications such as exporting the revolution and independence from the U.S.

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93 Ibid., p.251.

94 Filkins and Rubin, p.2.

95 Ibid., p.3.
CHAPTER 5
ANALYSIS

The case study clearly shows that in most cases post-revolutionary Iran’s U.S. foreign policy is decided by first taking the regional and international systems into consideration and then letting Iran’s revisionist ideology, Khomeinism, act as the intervening variable, which determines the way the policy is formulated. This supports Schweller’s argument that neoclassical realism requires an ideational component. The U.S. Embassy takeover in Tehran, the Iran-Contra Affair, Iran’s creation and support of Hezbollah, the war in the Persian Gulf between Iran and the U.S. in the late 1980s, Iran’s support of Shi’ite militias in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan, the regime’s anti-Semitic remarks toward Israel, and Iran’s development of a nuclear weapons program are all better explained by neoclassical realist theory, specifically Schweller’s theory that revisionist powers respond to the systemic environment with a charismatic ideology.

The U.S. Embassy takeover and the hostage crisis that ensued was Iran’s attempt to increase power in the region to support its revisionist aims while Khomeinism acted as Schweller’s charismatic ideology. The decision of Iran to deal with the U.S. and Israel in the Iran-Contra Affair was a pragmatic decision to make sure that Iran could continue to fight Saddam’s army. Iran’s creation and support of
the Shi'ite terrorist group, Hezbollah, in Lebanon was initially a response to Israel’s invasion of Lebanon and Iran’s goal to rid the region of Israel and to gain power. The increased U.S. presence in the Persian Gulf in the late 1980s created a structural constraint for Iran and the regime’s hatred of the U.S. provided the intervening variable, which determined the Iranian response to the U.S. threat. Iran’s proxy wars in the region, anti-Semitism toward Israel, and its development of a nuclear weapons program are attempts to drive the U.S. and Israel out of the region and attain regional hegemonic status through increased power, an aspiration that is associated with being a revisionist power.

Of the major foreign policy events discussed in the case study, the fact that neoclassical realism provides more explanatory power regarding the foreign policy events discussed in the case study, leads me to argue that, in Iran’s case, strategic culture’s importance is not as a supplemental theory, but as the intervening variable. The importance of the revisionist ideology of Khomeinism as an intervening variable is that it demonstrates the value of culture. I, therefore, disagree with Desch’s argument that “…cultural variables do not provide much additional explanatory power.”96 In the absence of a cultural explanation, one does not understand why Iran is a revisionist power in the first place, especially with regard to the religious,

96 Ibid., p.169.
historical, and ideological underpinnings of why Iran is a revisionist power. Without some knowledge of the culture of civilian policy makers, the military leadership, and the culture at large, the intervening variables in the neoclassical realist equation are not adequately understood. To be a neoclassical realist means that one needs to not only be able to identify the systemic constraints, but also have a good understanding of the culture behind the intervening variables.

In the case of Iran, this means that Khomeinism is influenced by legitimate religious beliefs and historical grievances. It also requires an understanding that Khomeini used legitimate religious beliefs and historical grievances for the regime’s revisionist goal of regional hegemonic status. Khomeini used the themes of oppression and suffering in Shi’ite theology to cast the U.S. and Israel as oppressors. He also expertly combined the traditional division of the Islamic world (between the House of Islam and the House of War) with both the historical grievances of subjugation by outside powers and the political grievances of the Iranian people regarding the relationship between the Shah and the U.S. By adding the religious component to the historical and political reality, Khomeini did two things: (1) he capitalized on what Razi refers to as “the crisis of dignity” by using nationalism to eliminate a collective feeling of inferiority and, (2) he created what Schweller refers to as the “ideational component” that would allow Iran to pursue its policies of self-
reliance and revisionism. By implementing Rule of the Religious Jurisprudent and keeping a lid on meaningful dissent of the people with the threat of military action, Khomeinism has allowed the Iranian regime to extract resources and mobilize in order to “take advantage of systemic opportunities”. The Iranian scenario echoes the following statement regarding fascism by Schweller:

...fascism...posited an unrelentingly dangerous world and then sought, as a remedy for this dismal condition, to maximize the nation's power at everyone else's expense. Brutality and ruthlessness were portrayed as necessities for the victimized group’s survival; and dissent within the group, whether among elites or within society, was not tolerated.

As mentioned in the literature chapter, some of the characteristics of fascism that are listed by Schweller are apt descriptions for the Iranian regime and the case-study reinforces these characteristics. For example, anti-American and anti-Semitic remarks by the regime play on the fear of the masses for mass mobilization; exploitation of social and economic grievances by characterizing the U.S., Israel, and the West as the oppressors is a way of insinuating that Iranian social and economic problems are caused by the U.S. and the West; characterizing the U.S., Israel, and the West as oppressors is also a way in which the regime champions its domestic policies.

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97 Lobell et al., p.230.

98 Ibid.

99 Lobell et al., p.250.
of self-reliance and rejection of the international political economy; and, finally, “a necessity for war-preparedness” can be seen in Iran’s creation and support of Hezbollah, the Taliban, Shi’ite forces in Iraq, and, especially in Iran’s development of nuclear weapons.

Although Taliaferro rejects several of Schweller’s arguments regarding a fascist state as the ultimate example of the “offensive realist state,” Taliaferro and Schweller’s arguments work hand-in-hand; when taken together, the two theories give a more complete picture of how Iran works in its quest for regional hegemonic status. Taliaferro explains the internal and external conditions necessary for resource extraction and mobilization while Schweller argues that ideology is the key to resource extraction and mobilization capabilities for “expansionist grand strategies.”¹⁰⁰ The case study clearly indicates that Khomeinism has served Iran well in extracting resources and mobilizing the IRGC, Hezbollah, Hamas, the Taliban, and Shi’ite groups in Iraq in order to expel the U.S. presence in the region. Taliaferro’s resource extraction model helps explain the conditions necessary for a state’s success in its bid for regional hegemony. In Iran’s case, the regime has used Khomeinism to “[mobilize] passions into a nationalist fervor,” and to create a sense of “high external vulnerability” to extract resources, mobilize, and pursue both emulation and

¹⁰⁰ Lobell et al., p.221 and 227.
innovation for over thirty years.\footnote{Ibid., p.197 and p.247.} Iran has pursued emulation, most notably by developing a nuclear weapons system, and it has pursued innovation by creating terrorist groups and revolutionary proxies to fight against Israel and the U.S. in the region. Together, Schweller and Taliaferro’s theories have the most explanatory power with regard to Iran’s foreign policy toward the U.S. in the post-revolutionary period.

In conclusion, neoclassical realist theories on the foreign policy of revisionist powers apply to Iran more than strategic cultural arguments. This is not to say, as demonstrated in the case study, that culture has no role. The explanations of Khomeinism, Twelver Shi’ism, Iranian history, and the case study demonstrate how important culture is. An analysis of a state’s strategic culture informs the policy maker or analyst to a greater extent than a study of the balance of power or relative capabilities at any given point in time. However, in the case of Iran’s post-revolutionary U.S. foreign policy, systemic variables are the primary consideration with Khomeinism acting as the intervening variable. In addition, knowledge of any given country’s culture still has to be filtered through the cultural lens of the country making the foreign policy. In other words, a greater understanding of Iran’s strategic culture does not necessarily lead to different policies by an American administration.

\textbf{American policy makers and analysts are enculturated within their own strategic}\n
culture, which includes their negative experience with Iran over the past thirty-plus years and the current U.S. role as world hegemon. Because of this, a greater understanding of how Iran makes decisions is unlikely to produce different policies by the U.S. A drastic re-orientation in U.S. foreign policy is also not a guarantee in cultivating better relations with the Iranian regime as it exists today. Informed by the research in this analysis that demonstrates deep-seated religious and cultural variables in Iran’s strategic culture, I believe that until there is a democratically elected president in Iran chosen from a field of democratically elected candidates (as opposed to a group of candidates hand-picked by the regime), Iranian foreign policy toward the U.S. will continue to be decided from a starting point of animosity.
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