

# The Export of Islamic Revolution in Iran and Its Threat for the US, the Soviet Union, and Arab Countries

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## ABSTRACT

The relationships between Islam and the West have become an important issue in the international world until today. Islam and Muslim countries are part of the factors which influenced the political dynamics in the world. In this regard, the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 is one of the major issues that contributed to the shaping the relationship between Islam and the West, even until to date. This is because this revolution has inspired the emergence Islamic movements around the world and triggered anti American sentiment among Muslims. This revolution also shaped the perception about the threat from Islamic fundamentalism in the West. This article will analyze the background and the context of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and its impacts on the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Arab states. It will argue that the Islamic Revolution become the major threat for all the countries because Iran has placed its revolution as the asset that would be exported to other countries. This revolution has challenged Western interests in the Middle East particularly on oil and natural gas supplies. The Islamic revolution also threatened the authoritarian

regimes in the Middle East which often oppressed their people in the name of Islamic legitimacy.

*Keywords: iran, the Islamic revolution, politics, international relations*

## ABSTRAK

Hubungan antara Islam dan Barat merupakan masalah penting di dunia internasional dewasa ini. Islam dan negara-negara Muslim merupakan bagian dari faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi dinamika politik di dunia. Terkait hal ini, Revolusi Islam di Iran pada tahun 1979 adalah satu dari isu-isu utama yang memberikan kontribusi terhadap pembentukan hubungan antara Islam dan Barat, bahkan hingga saat ini. Hal ini karena revolusi tersebut menginspirasi munculnya gerakan-gerakan Islam di seluruh dunia dan memicu gerakan sentiment anti Amerika di kalangan Muslim. Revolusi tersebut juga membentuk persepsi tentang ancaman dari fundamentalisme Islam di dunia Barat. Artikel ini menganalisis latarbelakang dan konteks Revolusi Islam di Iran dan dampaknya bagi Amerika, Rusia dan Negara-negara Arab. Tulisan ini menegaskan bahwa Revolusi Iran merupakan ancaman bagi seluruh banyak negara karena Iran telah menempatkan revolusi tersebut sebagai aset yang dapat diekspor ke negara-negara lain. Revolusi ini setidaknya menantang kepentingan-kepentingan negara-negara Barat di Timur Tengah yang terkait dengan *supply* minyak dan gas bumi. Revolusi Iran juga mengancam rejim-rejim otoritarian di Timur Tengah yang menindas melakukan penindasan terhadap masyarakat dengan dalih Islam.

*Kata Kunci: Iran, revolusi Islam, politik, hubungan internasional.*

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, conflict and cooperation between Islam and the West have become an important issue which has been considered as a significant factor in political policy making for many countries in the world. Islam and Muslim countries are part of the factors that rose and provided many contributions to the world politics, positively and negatively. The increasing number of the Muslim adherents in many countries and the rise of Muslim fundamentalists, are examples why Islam and Muslim countries have been considered as an interesting political and social issue. In this context, there are three major issues which have contributed to the relationship between Islam and the West. Those issues have made the situations in which creating conflict between them, influencing their perceptions, and encouraging the West to think about their foreign policy to Muslim worlds.<sup>1</sup> The first great issue is the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 which overthrew Reza Shah and replaced it with Islamic Republic of Iran. This revolution triggered anti American sentiment around the Muslim world and shaped the US's perception about fundamentalist Islam. The second is the Palestinian problem which was seen by Islamic people and Muslim countries as the vivid picture of the US government which was driven by Jewish lobby. As a result, UN and the US were seen as unable to push Israel and to promote peace resolution in this area. The third is the Afghanistan conflict that was often seen by Muslim as the contradictory the US approach to solve the problem and this greatly contributed to the 9/11 terrorist attack.

This article will examine the background and the context of Islamic Revolution in Iran as well as its impacts on the United States and

its allies, the Soviet Union and all the Arab states. As many observers and researcher said, Islamic Revolution in Iran was the major threat for the existence many foreign countries such as the US and Soviet Union, also for countries in the Middle East. Specifically, the following questions will guide trajectory of this essay: What is the historical and social background that triggered to Iranian Revolution? Why did the United States and its allies, the Soviet Union and all the Arab states consider the Islamic Revolution in Iran a major threat? Did they see it as a threat for similar reasons? In attempt to answer these questions, this article is divided into four sections. The first section examines the historical and social background which contributed to the sharp Islamic Revolution in Iran. The second section discusses the relationship between the US and Iran in the era before and after the revolution. The Third section assesses the position of Soviet Union in Iran and the impact of the revolution for its foreign policy. The fourth section elaborates the impact and the threat of Islamic Revolution in Iran for Arab states and their responses about the revolution.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION IN IRAN

The background of the Islamic Revolution in Iran can be tracked from the long historical root which has happened since nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is because the historical event has close correlation with the Iranian history at that time. At the past, the Iranian history related to political traditions, economic and social development at many states that had been influenced by Western capitalism and imperialism. In fact, the expansion of European capitalism

and civilization gave two impacts for the Iranian social structure. On the one hand, it created the convergence between European capitalism and the Iranian social structure. The convergence can be seen during the rule of the Qajar Empire (1786-1921) where many developments in Iranian society had been made. For example, there were many reforms and modernization in the military, bureaucracy, tax system, the emergence of modern intelligentsia, and others.

On the other hand, the expansion of Western countries also resulted in a gradual divergence for Iranian people, especially at the cultural level. This is because the European expansion resulted not only on economic reform, but also on triggering cultural and religious reactions. The proof for this is that many of the traditional and urban economic sectors of the *bazaar* (social groups in Iran) felt threatened by Western imperialism. On the same time, the *ulama* (religious leaders) also felt threatened by the rising of Western influence which can reduce their social position in the society.<sup>2</sup> From the above conditions, we can see that people in Iran do not stand in the one position when faced with Western imperialism. Some people and groups sought benefits from the Western impact, while others felt threatened with the influence of Western values and power in their society.

The Western intervention to Iranian society obviously became much greater and could not be controlled when Muhammad Reza Shah came to power after the forced abdication of his father Reza Shah in 1941 by the Allied forces, Russia (Soviet Union) and Britain. The main reason for this overthrow is that Reza Shah made close relationship with Germany. At that time, Germany was

the enemy of Russia and Britain in World War II. After the power replacement in Iran, the government gave more positive hopes to the society as the change of power orientation from the authoritarian regime to become more democratic.

However, this democratic regime and free condition were often confusing because Iranian society has many institutions, which they have to follow. For example, the legitimating competition between religious leaders and secular leaders in Iranian society often triggered conflict between groups in society. Although the occupation of Iran by Russia and Britain and the change in regime suggested political freedom, this condition also created social and economic crisis. This is because War World II gave contribution for the crisis in this country. On the other sides, this crisis suggested the intensification of political activity and political crisis during 1941-1953.<sup>3</sup> During this period, the peak conflict between nationalist groups and other classes was featured in Iran.

As part of the strategies to end the crisis and to make greater intervention, in 1953 the United States (US) had supported and backed the military coup against the nationalist government of Mohammed Mosaddeq and suppressed the oppositional social forces. It can be noted that this was the first large scale the US intervention in any at the Middle East countries. By supporting the military coup, the US got many advantages, for instance Iran's position became an anti-communist frontline state and close ally to the US. For the US interests, it is also important to stop the Soviet expansion in the Middle East and to end British monopoly over Iranian oil.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the authoritarian state which was established and led by

Mohammad Reza Shah after the coup with economic and financial support from the US, did not finish the crisis. Then, the reformulation of the Shi'i political doctrine as revolutionary doctrine becomes a gradual process and starting after the coup and reaching its height in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>5</sup>

Theda Skocpol, the expert of social revolution, states that under the second Shah, Iran became dependent more to oil and natural gas. Iran also transformed to a 'rentier state' which has close relationship and linked their policies to the world capitalist economy. Besides that, like the rulers of the Old Regimes in France, Russia, and China, the Shah of Iran was an "absolute monarch" and his power is more powerful than the old Shah. He introduced the modernized military power and also operated the secret police force.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the other factor which also contributed to the emergence of Iranian Revolution was the Shah's policy to become the "agent" US which has close association with them. As a consequence, the American military and economic presence largely at Iran, and this situation acted as a major stimulus to mass mobilization. If we compare to others revolution such as in the English, China, the Russian, and the Cuban, the anti foreign aspiration in challenging the legitimacy of the social structure also was a major factor of the protest movements.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, one of the most controversial policies issued by Shah Iran was a "White Revolution" in 1960s. By this program, the regime created a land reform program, redistributed land to wealthier peasants, extended state control to villages, and reduced the power of the *bazaar*'s institution. Nevertheless, this revolution had poor planning, many poor peasants left much the

agrarian and move to the urban area. As a result, urban Iran grew to become almost 50 % of the population and many of them live in a heavy condition.<sup>8</sup> In fact, many different social forces reacted to the doctrine of the White Revolution, especially from the landlord class, the religious leader, the *bazaar* and also from the secular oppositional parties. They considered that the revolution is a big threat for their existence in society. For example, the ulama' saw this program as the modernization power which can reduce their authorities, the *bazaar* looked this revolution as sign of intervention from government into their commercial and threatening their autonomy, and the landlords constituted it as a threat for their landlordism. Then, they organized in the National Front and criticized the Shah's program seriously. After that, the discontent of the religious community together with the economical and political crisis led to a revolt in June 1963 which declared by Ayatullah Ruhullah Khomeini. Unfortunately, the state dealt the movement with military means who brutally suppressed the protestors. After that, the leader of National Front also was arrested and Khomeini was banished to Turkey and later to Iraq.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that arresting of the leader of National Front triggered the mass protesters who demonstrated the Shah policies and his alliance with the US. To deal with this problem, Shah operated the SAVAK (his CIA and Israeli-trained security agency) to arrest and to suppress all the people or the organization which against his power. As a consequence, Iranian state came under the revolutionary pressure in 1977-1978 and all of the oppositional institutions made an alliance to overthrow the Shah's regime. Because the absolute monarchy model which was used as

his government style, Shah has to make and issue all the decision. According to Theda Skocpol, this situation became a major factor for the success of the Shah's opponent to overthrow him. The main reason for this is that his proponent felt difficult to consolidate their support without Shah's instruction.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the Islamic Revolution in Iran got their victory and Shah Iran left Iran in January 1979.

### **THE UNITED STATES AND IRAN: FROM THE CLOSE FRIEND TO BE THE GREAT ENEMY**

It can be argued that the relationship between US and Iran had changed dramatically after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Before the historical change which has transformed Iran from monarchy absolute regime under Shah Iran to Islamic Republic, the US was the main sponsor and closest friend of Iran in the Middle East. This close relationship has begun in 1953 when the US supported military regimes and brutal dictator who overthrew the democratic nationalist government of Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq. Although the US often claimed itself as a guardian of freedom and democracy, its foreign political policies often favoured suppressive and authoritative regimes. The US's involvement in Iran by giving fully supports in engineering the military coup was one of clear examples about American's double standards. Indeed, the CIA was directly involved and installed Mohammad Reza Shah's in Iran in 1954.<sup>11</sup> After that, the US government usually have stood behind self-appointed leader, providing them financial and military supports, and also gave security as well as political advice to the regime.

On the contrary, the political and economical intervention of the US to Iran by using the second Shah's regime policies did not get support from the Iranian people. Certainly, many of the *bazaar* and the *ulama* in Iran society felt that the policies of Shah Iran obviously became a big threat of their position in society. Besides that, Shah Iran abuse of civil liberties of Iranian people and his extensive use of state military approach to oppress critics and opposition, also added the negative perception of Iranian people about the US existence. In this era, the United States became identified with an illegitimate and repressive government. Then, this condition triggered Iranian resentment to Shah's regime and American intervention.<sup>12</sup> As Sheikhneshin argues, it is clear that since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, antagonism and mutual suspicion have characterized the relations between the US and Iran.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, this condition continues for almost three decades until now where the US has regarded Iran as the main sponsor of international terrorism and vice versa.

Although the Shah's Iran regime was destroyed by popular demonstrations which led by religious leaders under the guidance of Ayatollah Ruhullah Khomeini 1979, the demonstrations continues in many areas. The demonstrations now directed against "the US imperialism" as a powerful symbol for Iranian mindset of the American interventions in the past, also against all domestic political forces which was led by non-Islamic elites.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, Theda Skocpol argues that an extraordinary series of mass demonstrations were the result of cooperation of all oppositional power in Iran against Shah's regime. At this event, although they face the lethal of military oppression, the unemployed, worker,

artisans, merchants, students, and middle class struggled together for fighting the Shah's regime. They mobilized all the inclusive movement against a "corrupt", "imperialist", and monarchy power which was fully backed by the US power.<sup>15</sup>

It is clear that one of the factors increasing negative perception of Iranian people for the US intervention was the encouragement the United States which facilitated the Shah to leave Iran in January 1979. It is also added by the admission of the Shah to the United States on October 22, 1979 for medical treatment. Many of the proponents of Iranian Revolution believed that by helping Shah, the United States actually do not consider the Iranian people needs and their legitimate aspirations which were reflected by popular movements. The United States only want to save its interests and to continue their political interventions by giving political support for Iranian elite who opposed the Islamic Revolution agendas.

The above point of view also expressed by Sheikhneshin who wrote that after the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979), the US policy makers wanted to maintain relations with Iran because of their economic, political and military interests. In contrast, Iranian elites and people denied it and changed to increase anti-Americanism. But, the moderates groups in Iran which do not fully agree with Khomeini's administration for whom the US has a hope to maintain their relationship after the Revolution, do not satisfy with the US policy toward Iran. They think the US policy seem like a game of "wait and see"<sup>16</sup>. Indeed, members of Iran's religious circles also interpreted that that the desire to maintain cooperative relations between the US and Iran as the strategy of the US imperi-

alism and international Zionism to occupy Iran again.<sup>17</sup> As a result, after the Reza Shah's fall, the US relations with Iran never normalized.

Moreover, the most important fact causing the United States thought that the Islamic Revolution in Iran became the major threat for his states and its allies was the hostage crisis on November 4, 1979. At that time, Iranian people who opposed to the US presence in Iran took over the US embassy and held its diplomats and employees hostage for 444 days. This action not only destroyed the consolidation to refine the relationship of both countries, but also insulted American national pride. As a consequence, the action also has influenced every the US approach toward Iran.<sup>18</sup> After that, the US saw that Iran can threat not only the existence of the United States in Iran, but also the interests of the US in Middle East countries. Thus, if the US do not take the initiative actions to stop the Iranian influences to its neighbours in Middle East, Iran will become a great power in Middle East areas which will directly become a major threat for Israeli interest. In fact, the rising of Iran power reminded the US about the Pan-Arabism which was initiated by Gammal Abdul Nasser during 1960-an era.

Meanwhile, Ayatullah Ruhullah Khomeini as the highest leader of Iranian state, consolidated Iranian power to prevent all of the enemy from both internal and external power. At that position, the United States became the great enemy of Iranian existence in the world and they called the US as the "Great Satan". As the "Great Satan", the US had been associated with external forces of corruption.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the special status as the "Great Satan" for the US was derived from

three basic reasons: the US connection with Shah, Khomeini's view about the US as the greatest enemy of Islam, and the US relations with Israel.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, it was not surprised that the US then gave a strong support and provided satellite photographs to Iraq during Iraq-Iran war starting in September 1980. Actually, it is clear that Saddam Hussein and many of his Arab counterparts and were protected by the USA, had felt challenged by Islamic revolution.<sup>21</sup>

Sheikhnechin points out that the US policies towards Iran during the Iran-Iraq war raised the level of antagonism between two countries. The main reason for this is that Iranian people saw that the US as potential threat which can repeat its occupation to Iran and destroy their Islamic Revolution.<sup>22</sup> This reason was supported by the fact that during the Iran and Iraq war, the US used its influence to pressure its allies to stop arms support to Iran and to dishearten them from purchasing Iranian oil. In contrast, the US encouraged its allies to support and give financial contribution for Iraq<sup>23</sup> Consequently, at the first time of Iran-Iraq war, Iraq become more powerful than Iran and it has a big confidence to win the war. Unfortunately, as some observer noted, Iran gain the victory of the war due to the spirit of Iranian Revolution which gave more spirit and energy for Iranian's arms and people.

### **THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION AND ITS THREAT FOR SOVIET UNION**

It is clear that the Islamic Revolution in Iran does not only trigger the internal dynamics in Iranian society, but also give major effect to political phenomenon in international world. The Iranian revolution was one of the last disruption within a bipolar system

which the Western system and the Soviet system competed each other. Both of them try to find allies and to widen its influences in many countries in the world. As a strategic country which placed on the closed area with the former Soviet Union, the position of Iran is very important to the Americans. Consequently, the USA did everything to prevent Iran to become a Soviet satellite during the Cold War and after. So, it is not a surprise why the mass demonstrations who oppose the Pahlavi regime were ignored by the US. The US powers continued to support the Shah regime due to its Iranian's regime loyalty to the US.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, although the Shah was fully backed by the US power, the mass demonstrations succeeded to overthrow him on the 1979.

It has been asserted that the US leadership actually try to establish new relationships with Iran after Iranian Revolution. However, this political endeavour was failure because Iranian's new regime was unwilling to make cooperation with the US. Then, the new government in Iran compelled to make policies and practices hostile to the US. As a result, Iran declared its position as a neutral and independent state which do not favour neither to the US or Soviet Union. Instead of that, Iran tried to build relationships with the all countries based on reciprocal respect. As Hafizullah Emadi states, this was manifested in Iran's popular slogan 'Neither the West nor the East- but Islam'. Indeed, Iran in the post-Khomeini period remains to declared policies of Islamic revolution. Iran also strengthened its relations with the Third World and the former Soviet Union, and began to reemphasize its political role in the Middle East.<sup>25</sup>

Actually, this new policy gave new hope

for Soviet Union to reassert its relationship with Iran after was closed by the US intervention in Iran from 1953 to 1979. However, the Iranian leadership was sceptical to Soviet Union interests in the Middle East and does not have intention to give its political orientation to Moscow instead of Washington. This is because one the goal of the Islamic Revolution was to end Iran's dependence on the super power states and to build an independent foreign policy.<sup>26</sup> As a consequence, the emergence of Islamic revolution caused political earthquake among conservative monarchs in the Middle East and secular dictators who were backed by the US and Soviet Union. Many of these countries had felt endangered with the spread of Islamic universalism and anti US-Soviet Union which was contained by Islamic Revolution in Iran.

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that during the World War II, Iran was occupied by Britain and Soviet Union, and was replaced by the US in 1953 when the US backed the military coup to overthrow Mossadeq's government. In this respect, we can understand that the relationship between Iran and Soviet Union actually was not at equal position. In contrast, it can be said that the relationship between Iran and Soviet Union was not much different like Iran and the US relations. In addition, while the Soviet Union celebrated the overthrow of the Shah as American puppet in Iran, it has not been able to capitalize and occupy on Iran again. Indeed, Soviet Union saw that the power of the Islamic Revolution in Iran would have inhibited the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, or even prevented it. The Soviet Union also was not secure with Iran's doctrine about Islamic universalism because of its potential impact for Muslim adherents

living in Soviet area. If the doctrine spreads and influences the Soviet people, perhaps they can oppose the Kremlin government which govern with absolute monarch styles too.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the facts prove that the Soviet intervention of Afghanistan affect unfavourably for the relations between the Soviet Union and Iran. This is because Iran supports the Muslim revolt against the Soviet and named Soviet Union as an "oppressive power". Iran also called the Soviet Union to withdraw their forces, return Afghan refugees, and give the Muslim people to determine their future. Then, Iran's government also do not prevent for protesters who held huge demonstrations at Soviet embassy as protest for the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup> In that position, we can understand why Soviet Union seems worrying to control Iran after the Revolution moment. Although its intervention to Iran will gave the Soviet Union opportunity to access Iran' oil and gas supplies, the Soviet Union considered that the desire to occupy the new Iranian regime will give them a greater risks.

Regarding the above explanations, there was not surprise why when the war occurred between Iran and Iraq in September 1980, the Western states and the Soviet Union gave Iraq political and military supports. The Soviet Union and Western countries have big hope to Iraq for keeping the world from the impact of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. This action was also followed by the Gulf States which also felt threatened with the export of Iranian Revolution.<sup>29</sup> For them, Iranian attempts to export the Islamic revolution will destabilize the Gulf region and contradict with the interests of the Western Powers. This is because the Western powers would like to preserve their status quo there.<sup>30</sup>

Generally speaking, the Soviet policy regarding Iran is greatly influenced by the development of the power of the *mullahs* (religious leaders). When the *mullahs* seem strong, the Soviet increases its effort. In contrast, when it shows weakness, the Soviet Union would change their effort. Unfortunately, the Iran's winning in the Gulf war with Iraq and its supporters have made its regime more popular. As a result, the Iranian internal political competition was won by the Right, and the Left which was represented by the Tudeh Party, Bani Sadr, dan the Mojahedin-e-Khalq lost their power to participate in Iranian government. Then, the banning of the Tudeh Party on 4 May 1983 became a sign of stopping the relations between Iran and Soviet Union. This political decision was made as a reaction to the Soviet's support for Iraq and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Borrowing Aryeh Y. Yodfat's words, it was the Iran's way to 'punish the Soviet Union and a 'declaration of independence' from the USSR. For Iranian people, the Soviet Union was "no less satanic than the United States"<sup>31</sup> It can be argued that it was the same declaration which was given before to the United States regarding the same political factors and consideration.

### **THE EXPORT OF REVOLUTION AS THE REAL THREAT OF THE MIDDLE EAST STATES**

It has been argued that Iran's foreign policy after post-revolutionary under Khomeini ruler as the Supreme Leader, in general can be divided into two great aims. Firstly, Iran tries to implement the doctrine from Khomeini about "Neither East no West but the Islamic Republic". This ideological doctrine clearly stated that Iran has to fight

against Western intervention. Secondly, Iran also has a great goal to "export of the Revolution". It means Iran would like to give fully support for Muslim countries and non-Muslim countries to liberate them from their "oppressive and corrupts rulers".<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, the ideological doctrine from Iranian Revolution was followed by positive responses from Muslim countries and the Third World because they have lived under the authoritarian regime and Western intervention for a long time. As a consequence, many of the middle and low class people at Muslim countries have a dream to follow the success of Iranian Revolution.

Moreover, the dream for copying Iranian Revolution in Muslim countries clearly corresponds with the political policy of the new Iranian regime. The new rulers in Iran saw that their revolution would trigger another revolution in the Middle East areas. As a result, Iran seeks its neighbour countries which also would like to employ the revolution. Iran gave these countries the enough support by providing rhetoric, financial support, and action. The main reason for this is that for the new Iranian leadership, Islam was a means by which the religion liberates the world's exploited people to fight against the great power. It is also supported by the thought of Imam Khomeini which argued that export of the revolution was more important than political stability and economic development in Iran.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, the relationships between Iran and Arab actually have made since the seventh century when the Arab's conquered Iran. After the Islamization, Iran became part of the Muslim communities, although Iran has different language, culture, and political orientation. The differences influenced to

the relations between them, because the Arab viewed that their race was superior to other. These racial feelings also contributed to them for discriminating non-Arab convert. Some expert such as Shireen T. Hunter has argued that ethnic and sectarian antagonism are not major factor on the relationships between Iran and the Arab, but these issues became the divisive impact of other factors. And this antagonism was used by Arab and Iranian leaderships for gaining support from their own people. For instance, many of conservative states have argued that the Iranian Revolution does not have relevance for Arab states. This is because Iran's people were dominated by Shi'i follower, and the Arabs consist from Sunni.<sup>34</sup> For them, it was very different with the phenomenon of Pan Arabism who led by Gammal Abdul Naseer and revolutionary ideology in Libya who was led by Muammar Qadhafi.

However, the study which was conducted by James A. Bill showed that the differences between Arabs and Iranians in term of their school of thought (Sunnis and Shi'ites), does not necessary lead to the conclusion that Iranian revolution cannot inspire revolutionary movements in Arab states. During his fact-finding trips to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates on 1981, Bill showed that people around the regions have viewed events in Iran and the revolution with deep interest and appeal feeling. For people in these Arab countries, the revolution in Iran has inspired them for three basic reasons: firstly, the revolution became a successful example about the masses could overthrow a corrupt and repressive regime. Secondly, it was a successful movement for national independence from the superpower's interventions. Thirdly, the

Iranian revolution was a vivid picture of "a victory for Islam" which many Muslim adherents has dreamed it for a long time.<sup>35</sup>

Although the Arabs populations felt interested in the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the governments and ruling elites of Arab states have not been interested in the revolution. They view that the revolution as extremely dangerous and could challenge their power and authority.<sup>36</sup> They also thought that the export and the proliferation of the Iranian Revolution must be stopped by consolidating the states in Middle East. As was said by James A. Bill, the governments in Arab states have often responded this revolution inconsistently, wildly, and ineffectively. For example, President Husni Mubarak of Egypt told that he did not consider Iranian Shi'ite even to be Muslims. Many of Saudi circles also said the same view.<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, the Gulf Arabs' attitude toward the new government in Iran originally was a mixture of apprehension and expectation. At the first time, they felt optimistic with the statement of Mehdi Bazargan that Iran would pursue good neighbourly relations with the Arab states and would cut all ties with Israel. Therefore, the Arab states hoped that Iran will return to Arab sovereignty the three disputed island. On the contrary, the Arab states soon realized that the Iranian revolution would become embryo of Islamic movements which could threaten their governments. And this fear was increased when Shi'a adherents rebel against the government in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain during 1979-1980.<sup>38</sup> For Iranian new regime, this condition can be understood. This is because Ayatollah Khomeini saw himself not only as the supreme leader of Iranian state, but also

acting on behalf of the entire Islamic community.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, some the Arab states continued to use the fear of the Iranian Revolution to justify hostile policies toward Iran. Hence, it was predicted before, that in the Iraq-Iran War, many of Arab states fully support to Iraq invasion. They hoped that Iraq invasion would fall over the revolutionary regime in Iran and then eliminate the desire to export the revolution to Arab countries.<sup>40</sup>

Ironically, the full support and encouragement from the USA, Soviet Union, and the Arab states for Iraq during the war with Iran, does not result the winning of Iraq. Many of them expected that Iraq would win a fast military victory, because Iran was in trouble by violent internal political conflict and economic problem. Otherwise, the Iran victories over Iraq began in the Fall of 1981 and in April-May 1982 completely conquered and demoralized the Iraqi forces. After that, when the Israelis brutally attacked Lebanon in June 6, 1982 for the main goal to destroy the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) once and for all, Iran was the sole country which give concrete support for Palestinians.<sup>41</sup> Then, the Iran victories over Iraq and its moves to assist the Palestinians, gave Iran sharply increased respect and credibility in the Arab world. As a consequence, the Iranian model became a serious challenge to the traditional, authoritarian, and absolute regimes in the Arab states. Finally, the Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco has to consider policies and program which could respond and eliminate the threat of the Iranian Revolution.<sup>42</sup> From the above explanations, it clearly argued that the

export of the Islamic Revolution in Iran became a major threat for many governments in the Arab States. The threat was especially for regimes which ruled their government with corrupt, repressive policies, and do not give a greater freedom of social and political expression.

## CONCLUSION

This essay discusses the phenomenon of Islamic Revolution in Iran which has emerged at 1979 and its impact on many countries in the world. The Islamic Revolution in Iran occurred because the Shah Iran governed Iranian with the authoritarian style and corrupt behaviour. Another factor which influenced the revolution is the American intervention toward Iran which threatened the existence of religious leaders and traditional institutions in Iran. As explained above, the Islamic Revolution in Iran became as major threat because of the US and its allies, Soviet Union, and the Arab states felt threatened with the export of Islamic Revolution to many countries. In this respect, Ayatullah Ruhullah Khomeini as the spiritual guidance of Iranian new regime has stated that the export of Islamic Revolution is major goal of their foreign policy and it more important than economic and political stability in internal Iran. If the Western countries and Arab states do not do anything to prevent this agenda, the revolution will challenge the Western interests in Middle East in terms of oil and natural gas supplies. The export of Islamic Revolution would endanger the conservative and corrupt governments in Gulf states which do not give freedom of expression and prosperity for their people. As a consequence, they build alliances to prevent the growth of Iranian

power such as supporting Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War in 1980s. The above arguments suggest that Islamic Revolution in Iran threatens the US and its allies, Russia, and the Arab states based on similar reasons but different contexts.

## ENDNOTES

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