

# The Shia Rimland Theory, State Rationality and the Role of Iran as a Regional Power

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## Abstract

The present article is seeking to analyze the Shia's status as a regional factor and an active player in the international policy game by restudying the classic and modern opinions in the field of geopolitics and geo-culture. In this study by using the Rimland definition in Spykman's theory and analyzing Brzezinski's ideas, it is considering the relationship between and influence on both of them in the Middle East and surrounded regions. In a way this article is studying the geopolitical role of Shias in the region and tries to establish a new definition called "The Shia Rimland."

The Rimland is a region mainly controlled by Muslims and it has a tremendous strategic importance due to its rich energy resources such as huge reserves of oil and gas. The status of consumer countries in the area, its cultural and religious importance which is the birth place of Abrahamic religions, its geographical status which has a central link with Europe, Asia and Africa, and being the most important pathway of global energy. The mentioned reasons have changed this region to the battlefield of super powers since far.

Geographically, Shia phenomenon and Shia societies are located in the heart of the Rimland and after Iran's revolution it became an effective situation in international equations. Iran's revolution which was based on Shia ideology changed Iran to Shia Umm al-Qura and on the other hand made Shia societies awakened in countries of the Rimland region. Shias in the region who were living under the power of Sunni governments, have tried to change the current situation by emulating of Iran's revolution and opposing to existing situation – which is based on organized discriminations and government's desire against them. The present article is considering the role of Shias in the region as Iran's "periphery" environment and is investigating their social-political and geopolitical situation in relation with Iran as a Shia "centre". The article attends to explain Shia phenomenon geopolitically as an active actor in regional and international equations and also to explain the Shia new geopolitics.

**Keywords:** Shia, Heartland, Rimland, Geopolitics, Regional Equations, International Policy

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## Introduction

Geopolitics has passed a volatile history and on kept going with the world's realistic and theoretical policies as a classical science in the nations interests, internal and international policies. This science at first, was based on a type of pluralism in the world of international relations which inclined gradually to a type of dualism derived from world conditions and dividing it into two east and west parts. The Soviet collapse and the dream of communism global discipline drove this science to American individualism, so American scholars have been trying to reproduce American hegemony in different areas by planning theories in order to pretend that this is the only opportunity in present and future time.

The theory of "the world will see the return of traditional discipline in different areas" is confirmed again by the current global environment, particularly in recent years, and also by appearing regional powers and their avoiding and opposing America and its monopolistic policies. The present article is considering this issue of geopolitically and geoculturally with an approach to the Middle East and tries to explain this modern discipline.

English Geopolitician Sir Halford Mackinder (1861-1947) is one of the most famous theorists in classical geopolitic pluralism.( Flint, 2006: 17) His theory was reproduced and revealed in a new framework by American scholar Nicolas Spykman (1893-1943).( Chapman, 2011: 23-24) Later this framework became a precious heritage in moving forward the American hegemonic strategy and left a new custom in international relations, which continued in the thoughts of scholars such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, and it has played a critical role in the doctrine of American national security.( Kearns, 2009: 8) This article is intending to review these classical theories with respect to Shias role in the region, by offering a new approach in relation while considering the American practical policies in the Middle East. The article is also trying to offer a new theory in the Shia geopolitics field in order to being able to explain a new way out of Shia status in the Middle East. Thus, the article is based on this hypothesis: there is a specific area which we prefer to call it "The Shia Rimland" and each one of the classical geopoliticians called it with a special name. The Islamic Republic of Iran is placed in the heart of this

Rimland and based on the Shia state rationality; this country in this area is playing a pivotal role as a regional power.

### **Heartland and Rimland in Mackinder and Spykman's theories**

The basis of Hartland's theory, which was put forward by Mackinder in an evolutionary process during 1904 to 1943, was on the assumption of the existence of a global island consisting of Europe, Africa, and Asia. (Sempa, 2002:14-15) The key to achieve it should be investigated in the region called Heartland. This region that is called pivotal area, due to being surrounded by land, could not be threatened by any naval forces/armies and is protected by two domestic and foreign geographical crescents. The inner crescent includes Europe and Asia, and the outer crescent also includes continents, islands and regions beyond these two. (Spykman, 1944:36-40)

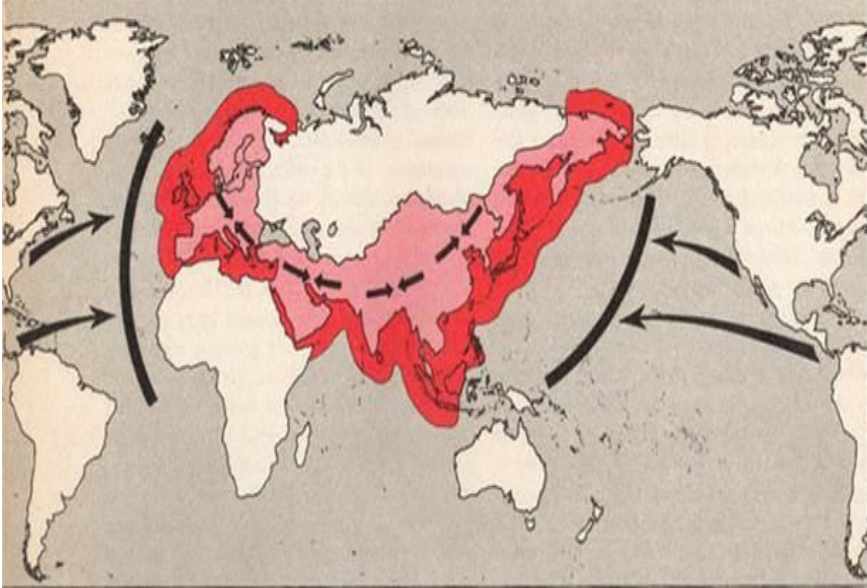
The importance of the above-mentioned region can be considered in Mackinder's famous saying that "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; Who rules the World-Island commands the world. ". (Mackinder, 1919: 150 and Brzezinski, 1997: 38)

Soviet's control over the Heartland and Eastern Europe, was the product of the Yalta conference and after that the Potsdam conference in 1945, and a share that Churchill and Roosevelt despite propensity gave to Stalin. So that a new world order will form for 45 years in the field of bipolar balance of power in the international atmosphere. (Kissinger 1994: 394-422) The order that divided the world into two east and west geographical camps.

American theorist Nicolas Spykman, sought to reform Mackinder's theory (at the end of World War II) so that in addition to compensation for its weaknesses, he could design a new theory in line with the new world order and fighting against Soviet Union and on the basis of the Containment Strategy. Thus, he presented the theory of "Rimland". (Spykman ,1944:40-50)

The marginal area of the Hartland, that was inner crescent areas and the lands consistent with this concept, was called Rimland by Spykman, and with emphasis on the sea power, he introduced Rimland's role as a supplement and replacement for the Heartland. In his opinion, Rimland is a region which by controlling it, is considered an obstacle to the superpower of Heartland (Soviet) and is controlled by the United States Navy. In his theory, a land-continental power (Soviet Union) is against a

naval power (United States), which are separated from each other by an obstruction region. (Spykman ,1944: 52) Therefore, Rimland is



considered very important in this theory.

Map N.1: Rimland and Heartland (Spykman, 1944: 54)

### **Brzezinski's Eurasian Balkan theory**

With the falling of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s , it was thought that in the New World Order that George Bush I in his speech (Kissinger, 1994: 804-805) presented, Rimland has lost its importance. Because capturing a vast section of Hartland (that included the independent lands of Soviet Union), now was caught from the old rival. But Brzezinski's attempts in redesigning the classical theories in a new form and representing these theories in the practical behaviour of US politicians, once again introduced the importance of Rimland in international politics. Therefore, the thoughts and the theoretical traditions of Brzezinski has been along Mackinder's, and it would not be an exaggeration if we call him Neo-Mackinderist, and his theory of "Eurasian Balkan" as a kind of Neo-Mackinderism.

In Brzezinski's theoretical plan, which is mentioned in the book titled "The Grand Chessboard" (1997), five geo-strategic actors and five geopolitics axes, in the atmosphere after the collapse of Soviet Union and

American Hegemony period have been mentioned which are active in the chess board. The actors considered by him are: France, Germany, Russia, China and India. Also his emphasized axes include: Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and South Korea. (Brzezinski 1997: 41) His overemphasis on the geographical pivot of Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkey and to some extent Ukraine, which he interprets it as a region torn by hatred, violence, conflicts and unrest, once more highlights the importance of the Rimland region and its role in the global equations, that is a region full of energy resources, especially oil and gas, which through its control they can achieve both their economical goals and also geopolitics goals that is preventing Russia from accessing to power and also hindering the rise of new powers.(see: Brzezinski 1997: 46 )

The axis of this pivotal region in the Eurasian chessboard is as follows; In the North: from the North Sea to southern Russia; In the East: to Xinjiang province in China; In the south: to Indian Ocean and From the West: to the Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea. (Brzezinski, 1997: 52) More than 400 Million people live in this region in the political form of 25 nation-state who have high ethnic and religious variety and the lack of stability is their most important characteristic.

Brzezinski's considered region which he calls it Eurasian Balkan, (Brzezinski,1997:123) is a return to Rimland theory of Spykman, and at the heart of this region is the Islamic Republic of Iran as a Shia nation-state, and around it and in the margins of vast resources of world energy in the Persian Gulf countries, we are witnessed by a very interesting Shia diaspora which regarding beliefs and life style and also politics are different from other peoples of the region and that the majority of them are Arabs, and this population (almost unified in terms of beliefs) have been distributed in national borders of different states.



Map.N.2: Eurasian Balkans (Brzezinski, 1997: 53)

### The components of the Shia Rimland

If we divide the geopolitics of the Islamic World into four sections: Central (Middle East), Western (African States), Northern (Caucasus and central Asia) and Eastern (from the borders of Iran to the coasts of Pacific Ocean), the Shia phenomenon has been in the heart of this region and is considered to be one of the potential actors of this arena. Therefore, the Shia Rimland is the leading centre of geopolitics of Islamic World, and also is the considered region in Brzezinski's theory.

The influential factors on geopolitics, and particularly Shia geopolitics, could be divided into two groups: fixed factors which include geographical status, space forms, its position and divisions, country's form, its size and topographical status; and conversional factors which include population, natural resources, political and social institutions. (See Morgenthau, 1948) Between these two groups, geographical situation and human population plays the major role, which the first one belongs to the fixed agents and the second to the group of conversional

factors. What follows is a review of these two factors in relation to the Shia phenomenon in Middle East and Rimland.

The region that we called it Shia Rimland, although comprises a vast section of the Islamic World, and is sometimes remembered as the Great Middle East, the main factor and stimulating engine and its heart, both geographically and conceptually and geopolitically, are areas controlled by the Shia population. Although in descriptions of these regions, theories like "Shia crescent" (see: Black, 2007) has been discussed before, and this crescent consists of Shia population from the Mediterranean to Iraq and Iran. In this theory, the Shia Rimland comprises a concept beyond this domain. A concept that includes countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and also part of India.

Since the time of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Shia have been an influential factor in the domestic and foreign realms of countries in the region. Except Iran, Syria, and to some extent post Saddam Iraq, the Shia in these countries (the majority of whom are Arab) are in a tangible minority regarding being shared in the arena of political-governmental power. The Shias have been always in severe deprivation in history, and the amount of suppression of this minority by the majority Sunni world and rulers was to the extent that they have been called as forgotten Muslims (Fuller & Franke, 1994). The influence of Iran's Islamic Revolution in building a Shia government based on the religious theory, politicalizing the Shia population and the so-called Shia consciousness and Shia revival (Nasr, 2006), on the Shia population of the region, presented them as a domestic actor inside their governments. Self-consciousness of Shias in social-political arena in Arab countries, and in connection with demands for social rights and access to status resources, power and wealth, in time has forced Sunni rulers to accept Shias' rights and their role in the domestic arena.

Also, consciousness of Shia populations and their realization of their position in the Persian Gulf region and Middle East, has elevated them to the level of an international actor. The Shias have been in a region that has an exceptional political and strategic situation in the world. This region was the main focus of regional disputes in the last 50 years, and by having vast energy resources, the industrial world and energy consumption markets need this region more than any time before. In the following sections, we point out two main components of the Shia

Rimland, which are considered as power sources for Shia, that is geographical status and population.( Naderi, 2012a, p.51 )

### **Shia Geopolitical Status in the Rimland**

The heart of the Rimland is Iran and the Persian Gulf. Shias of the Middle East have drawn a Shia belt around Persian Gulf, and as Thual says they consist 70 percent of the population of Persian Gulf.(Thual, 2000 :89) Thus, the Persian Gulf can be called a Shia bay, a region which possesses three fourth of the world's oil resources. The geopolitical importance of this region could be due to three main reasons: The cultural and ideological situation, the natural-geographical situation and the economical situation, which itself divides into two parts: possessing great reserves of oil and gas and consumption status of this region due to the incomes resulting from selling energy resources.

The cultural and ideological importance of this region is due to its civilizational origins. Great religions emerged in this region, and Islam as the last religion has a Middle Eastern origin. Shia Rimland in Muslims' thought, who are the majority population of this region, is important because of two reasons: First of all, Muslims' Qibla (Direction of prayer/Mecca, Saudi Arabia) and also the tomb of the Prophet of Islam, as a common point for all religions and Islamic groups and sects is in this area. Secondly, 11 graves of Shia Imams are in the same region and in 3 countries of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran, which Shias are very enthusiastic to pilgrimage them.

Rimland's natural and geographical importance is because of its position and natural shape. This region is the axis for the connection of three continents of Europe, Africa and Asia. The Persian Gulf plays a key role in this pivot. Persian Gulf is a part of a linking way that bonds the two Red and Mediterranean seas and two Atlantic and Indian Oceans together. The existence of Hormuz Strait as the entering portal of Persian Gulf, and its only seaway, and passing through this strait forty percent of world's traded oil daily (Cordesman, 2007), has doubled the importance of this region, which is in the power of the Shia population.

The economical importance of Rimland is divided into its two main components that has circulated today's modern world: great reserves of oil and gas and energy resources and also its consumer market. Energy and resources are among the main bases of the modern world, and the modern industrial world is formed on the basis of this vital artery. The Rimland as a rich region in energy which has no example in the world,



has the world's fate in its hands, in the current situation and in the future. Therefore, controlling this region is of extraordinary importance. Gas resources of this region are also, like oil, in the centre of attention of geo-economical theorists. Other reason for the importance of Rimland is due to the consumer markets. Consumption-orientation of countries of this region has led to the emergence of a great competitive market among producing countries. Oil-producing countries (except Iran) are mainly single-product, and by relying on their huge oil revenues, and by buying consumer goods, restore money to the industrial oil alliance countries. Their consumer goods include a vast spectrum, from the primary necessities to the modern tools of war and cultural goods based on the culture industry (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1987: 146) and mass production.



Map. N.3: The Geopolitics of Muslim world and the Shia phenomenon in the centre ([http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/world\\_maps/muslim\\_distribution.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/world_maps/muslim_distribution.jpg))

### **Shia Diaspora in the Rimland**

Composition of population and distribution of Shias is the main factor in unprecedented attention to the Shias and its importance. In this theory, these countries in terms of strategic importance, geographical

distance with Iran as the main centre of the Shia, and also the percent of Shia population are divided in two groups: (a) central countries, (b) peripheral countries.

(a) **Shias of the central arena**

**Saudi Arabia.** Shia population is between 10 to 15 percent (Middle East Report 2005) who are resident in two regions: Mecca, Medina (Nakhaveleh Shias) and in the Jeddah region; and the other, Al-Sharghiye (eastern) region. This population forms a Shia-residing area from Qatar to Kuwait in the margin of Persian Gulf, who are resident in a geographical range from the provinces of "Al-Ahsa" to "Qatif", and mainly in the oil regions of the country.

Shias permanent deprivation of social and citizenship rights, in the shadow of an extremist Wahhabi/Salafi government that considers them as heretical and atheists, and also their possession of the executive part of the country's oil, are the main features of these Shias.

**Iraq.** The Shias of this country as the majority of the deprived of basic rights in the 20th century, consist more than two thirds of the population of 93 percent Muslim majority of Iraq. (Naderi, 2008: 139) Their geographical distribution is also more in the south and centre of Iraq and in the oil-rich regions of the country. It may be claimed that in no country with this percentage of Shia population, Shias have been under so much pressure that this group were in time of the Ba'ath Party. Severe suppression and deprivation of basic social rights were two main features of Iraqi Shias in the history that had continued until the fall of Saddam in the year 2003.

**Bahrain.** This country along with Iraq is a country that has allocated the highest population of Shia in Persian gulf's Arab countries to itself. The Shias in this small island have the maximum population of 75 percent (Fuller & Francke, 1999: 120). This population, like other Arab countries, has been under the control of Sunni rulers and are considered as second class citizens.

**Kuwait.** The Shias in Kuwait make about 40 to 50 percent of the population. (Jafarian, 1991: 49) This small country that states in the centre of the Shia Iran and Iraq from one side, and Wahhabi Saudi Arabia from the other, and having 10 percent of the world oil reserves (Feili Roodbary, 1995:17) has a sensitive situation in the supply of world oil. The Shias of Kuwait, in the political and social view, are one of the components of the complex system of communications and trade, tribal

and ideological disputes that Kuwait's Sunni government is faced with in its political-social and economical system.

**United Arab Emirates.** The Shias of this country are resident mostly in Dubai Emirate (which is the Centre of economic activities and one of the most important Oil Emirates), and their population is estimated to be about 16 to 20 percent of the whole. (Alavi, 1994: 224) This group has no role in the political system of the country.

**Qatar.** 20-percent minority of Shia in Qatar Emirate, (Thual, 2000: 129) politically, they have no role in the higher official positions of the government.

**Oman.** The Shias comprise 23 percent of the population of this country. (Naderi, 2012a: 53) Being stated in the margin of Hormoz strait which is one of the most important seaways of the world, and also being under the control of a Sunni government, are the most important features of this group.

**Azerbaijan.** The Shias comprise 75 percent of the whole population of this small country. (Thual, 2000: 45) This part of Iran, with Russian aggression and then conspiracy in the Torkomanchai treaty separated from this country, and this event is still considered to be an emotional matter that is the symbol of red imperialism oppression on the Shias. Being under the control of the secular government on one hand, and being influenced by the power struggles of Russia and Turkey, on the other hand, is another characteristic of Azerbaijan Shias.

**Afghanistan.** The Hazara Shias of Afghanistan comprise 15 percent of its population. (Bakhtiari, 2006: 20) Long term lack of security in this country, diversity of identity and lack of a common national identity, that is caused by the ethnic structure of society, has affected the Shias in this country.

**Pakistan.** The Shias of this country with relation to population are the second religious group, and consist about 10 to 25 percent of the population of this country. (Arefi, 2002: 197) Religious fanaticism of Wahhabi Sunnis in this country and the emergence of extremist groups such as the "Sahaba Army" and the sectarian terrorism approach, has put Shias, who are almost scattered everywhere in this country, under severe pressure.

**(b) Peripheral Shias**

**Lebanon.** The Shias in this community enjoy a relative majority. They comprise 40 percent of the whole population of this small and important country (Rosiny, 2010: 222). This group, like other Shias have lived in poverty and discrimination, but political order created by the Taif agreement in the year 1989, could bring a new balance in favour of Shia forces in the Lebanese sectarian tradition.

The Amal movement and Hezbollah are the two major organizations that are representative of the Lebanese Shias. And these two groups, despite commonalities like Shia identity and fighting against Israel, also have serious differences among each other. Disagreements on the Taif Agreement that Amal accepted and Hezbollah calls it unfair are among their most important differences. Opposition of Hezbollah with this treaty, which is based on the theory that more portion must be given to Shias based on their efforts toward civil war, along with Shia's inherent dissatisfaction that the combination of their population is more than others, and following that the necessity to allocate more share of power to them, and the continuation of the system of traditional and institutionalized sectarianism in society and political groups, and also the defeat of the Israeli in 2006 war from Shia Hezbollah, has created an unstable order in Lebanon which every moment there is the possibility of its disintegration to the benefit of the Shias, and with that, Shias will be able to reflect the majority of their population and prove it in a practical way.

**Syria.** The Alavi Shias of Syria, although are a minority in the heart of the majority Sunni, are considered to be an exception in the whole of the Shia world. They comprise 17 percent of the country's population. (Ezati, 2009: 167) They have the most important social element, that is political power, completely in control, that other Shias (except Iran and to some extent Iraq and Lebanon in recent years) are deprived of. But to stay in power and keeping the existing situation is their most important concern and recent events that have some elements of a civil war in the country, have weakened and threatened the position of the Alavi Shias in the power.

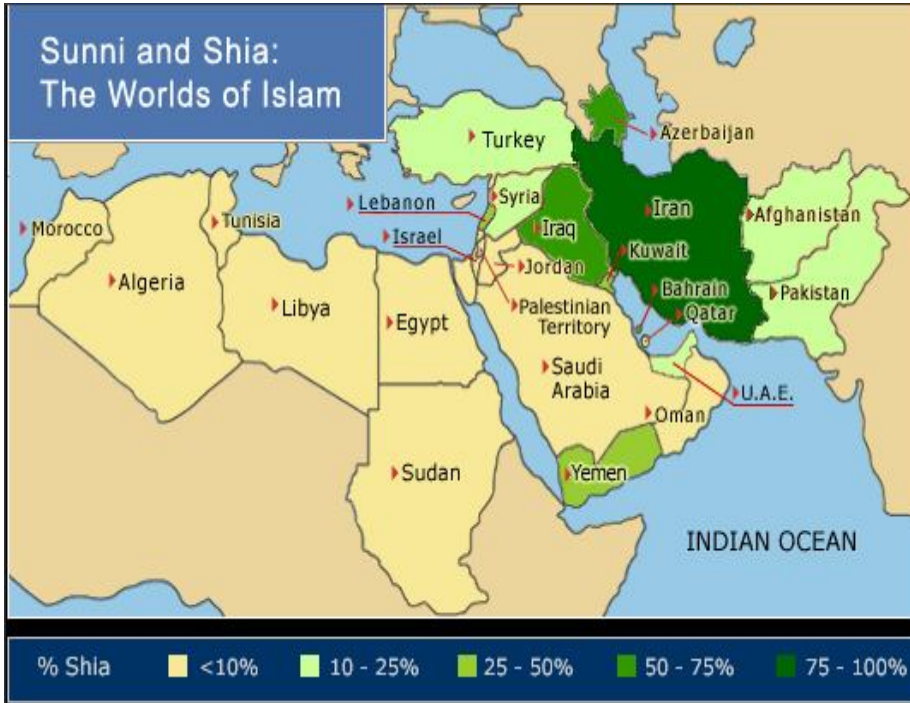
**Turkey.** The Alavi Shias of Turkey who are "Kurds" minority in the "Turk" majority and in the meantime, a Shia minority in a Sunni majority, have had a complex social-political status in recent years. They, whom due to their beliefs, were under pressure in the time of Sunni ruling

of the Ottoman Empire, by joining Ataturk, temporarily and practically freed from these pressures. In recent years, and with re-structuring Sunni Islamism in this country and the rise of Islamist parties, they are feeling the heavy shade of the threat. Having a population equivalent to one-fourth of the population of Turkey and their distribution throughout the country (Thual, 2000: 63) are among their other features.

**Yemen.** These Shias by consisting 40 percent of the population of Yemen's being (Naderi, 2012b: 8) are based in the northern provinces and mountainous and impassable areas. From the year 2004 so far they have been able to fight six times with the central government. They are opposed to a coalition consisting of al-Qaeda, America, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen's central government fighting them.

**India.** The Shias of India comprise 3 percent of the 1 billion populations of India's people (Ibid, p. 7) and are stationed mainly in "Lucknow" and "Hyderabad". Poverty and social backwardness and also lack of active participation in the political scene of India are main specifications of this population.

If we want to characterise Shias in the aforementioned countries (including the centre and periphery), we can mention these cases: deprivation of human basic rights; being exposed to obvious and hidden discriminations regarding basic rights and social-civil rights; lack of active and salient participation in political power and government's executive posts; government's look based on the doubt and suspicion toward them; being under pressure and prevention from expressing opinions and implementing rituals freely. All these are rooted in beliefs and it must be recognized in the duality of Shia/Sunni. A story which has a history at length of the history of Islam and goes back to the political affairs and beliefs in the beginning of Islam. These differences in time and with the rise of Sunni rulers', and their re-dominance on the Shias, has made Shias to be considered as lower class citizens, and has increased social inequality in sovereignties and also in political and regional domains.



Map.N.4. The Shia Diaspora . (<http://www.pbs.org> , March 26th, 2007)

### **Iran; a country at the centre of Shiism and in the middle of the Rimland**

The occurrence of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in the Rimland region and in a country that was considered as a part of the Western Block, and its declaration of independence in the shadow of the clergy leadership and the theory of Shia theocratic, had supranational and international effects on geopolitical structure of Middle East and Shia. The reproduction of Spykman's votes in Brzezinski's thought about the control on this region in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the appearance of the great Middle East plan in the first decade of 20th century, all have been put forward based on the idea of control on the Shia Rimland, and has been a reaction to regional misbalancing by the Shia agent, and by the leadership of Iran.

This revolution occurred in the geographical borders of Iran, located in between the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf. This is the most strategic region in Brzezinski's theory, and in addition to the domestic changes

had consequences that introduced Shia as an active agent in the International structure. The demographic characteristics (possessing more than one third of the whole world Shias), enjoying a dynamic economy, having great reserves of oil and gas, enjoying various climate and weather, possessing various mineral resources, possessing a young population, and being located in a strategic region, are among the unique characteristics of Shia Iran that enables this country as a regional power to enter into the international equations and also influence other Shias. The importance of this revolution in the geopolitical approach of populations is in its effect on the Shias of the Rimland region. These effects are as follows: 1- the revival of the Shia and endowing self-consciousness and identity to the Shias of other countries, 2- formation and strengthening parties and Shia political organizations in other countries, and 3- the significant role of Shias in the political structure of their countries. These three cases have positioned the Shias at the centre of attention so much that in past 30 years a large volume of the political and geopolitics literature has been published about this particular subject.

Iran as the model of a Shia government has created three images of itself: governmental Image (State Rationality), religious Image (Islamic Centre or Om-Al-Qura), and ideological and revolutionary Image (Anti Imperialism). At the governmental level, Iran acts in a specific geographical space as a Shia nation-state with the Shia ideology ruling it and by using Shia state rationality. Despite the negative view of some Islamic scholars to the phenomenon of a national states which consider it as a phenomenon in line with recreation of colonialism in its late form, (Siddiqui, 2004: 117-144) in the dominated atmosphere of the current nation-state, there is no escape from creating a Shia centre with special borders, and in the Shias' view, this is the first form of Iran's participation.

At the religious level, Iran is the Shias' Om-Al-Qura and is almost the only centre for widespread religious studies and research that exist in the world. Suppressive strategy of Iraq Ba'ath Party in the 1970s and thereafter, has caused a rotation of centrality of Shia education and research from Najaf to Qom and prosperity of the Qom seminary. This picture which is related to the recreation of Shias' chassis in a huge realm and its existential dimension, has an extraordinary importance to the Shias. Today, Qom is the gathering centre for religious authorities. If we do not include Ayatollah Sistani in Najaf and Fazlallah (d. 2010) in

Lebanon, almost can be said that all great Shia authorities in three decades have aroused from Qom.

The third Image that is related to the revolutionary and ideological dimension of Shias, has began with the intellectual renaissance of Shia fields by Ayatollah Khomeini, and was followed up by Iran's revolution and introduction of the Islamic Government Theory (Guardianship of the Jurist) or Wilayat al Faqih, and the active role of religion in the realm of politics and society.(Naderi 2008: 26) In the view of Shias, Iran is the symbol of Shia ideology, that campaign against US imperialism and its agendas.

### **The model of relationship, and Iran's effect on the Shias**

The victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution and its departure from the American atmosphere surrounding Iran as the symbol of West in the Middle East, was a turning point in Islamic Movements and rotation of Shias view and many of Sunnis toward Iran. Therefore, three above images, prone Iran to play a pivotal role in today's and future of Shias Rimland. Iran in Rimland's atmosphere can act as a coordinator agent and as a centre for Shias in order to reconstruct and manage its peripheral atmosphere. This peripheral atmosphere is composed of the first ring and the second ring in which Shia actors take mutual actions with the Centre. The first ring of peripheral areas of centre is consist of countries like Iraq, the Persian Gulf area countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, northern parts of Oman, eastern sections of Afghanistan and Pakistan, Azerbaijan, and eastern section of Turkey, and the second ring is comprised of the countries which are not directly in the border vicinity with Iran such as, Lebanon, Syria, western parts of turkey, eastern and north-eastern parts of Afghanistan, eastern sections of Pakistan, Yemen, India, and southern part of Oman.

Shia Identity is the most important area that Iran has worked on its eminence as a ground work for influence on the Shias in the region. Religious identity issue is the only issue that has been mentioned in the history of Islam. The dichotomy of heathendom/faith and Muslim/non-Muslim, more than anything else has been based on the Muslims' social identity definitions from the beginning of Islam up until now and at this time also, Muslims find recovery with the word "Ummah" or Islamic Community/Society. This word, although perhaps today in the modern age, is something like a fantasy in the mind of Muslims, (Marranci, 2008: 103-117) is still the important form of mental recovery of Muslims and



Shias. The image of establishing an Islamic-Shia nation, along with Shias' deprivation throughout the history and also their difficult situation today, can give them such an identity that draws all identity rings and belongings to the social networks with which one connects, to the margin. Therefore, in this direction, the emphasis on religion as an expression of Shias' solidarity and their great society, is a task in the agenda of Iran as Shias' Om-Al-Qura . In this direction, nationalism and ethnic identity can be regarded as serious identity rivals which can potentially act in order to weaken the Shia' identity project.

With regard to the three mentioned images of Iran, the potential influence of Iran can also be assumed in accordance with the three aspects in the economical, political, social and cultural areas. From the religious aspect, Iran has founded and expanded universities and religious educational-research centres inside and outside of the country, in order to provide an easy access to these centres for Shias. In the revolutionary and ideological aspect, it has founded organizations like the Islamic Culture and Communications Organization and the international assembly of "Ahl-al-Bayt". Also in the field of overseas media Iran has established TV channels like "Al-Alam" and "press TV". Besides, Iran has various radio networks with different languages including Arabic, Urdu, English, German, French and Turkish. All above fields of activity, can enrich the concept of Shia nation, and furthermore strengthen Iran's picture among the Shias. A picture which can introduce Iran as a point of hope and reliance to the Shias.

On the other hand, Iran with the support of Sunni Islamic movements like Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood, is seeking a more important role in the making of a new Islamic nation. This picture not only positions the Shias but also Sunni regions as part of the influence sphere of Iran.

Another factor is the Persian language and culture that exists in Afghanistan and the "Mavara-Al-Nahr" countries like Tajikistan. In fact, Shia state rationality, for its regional influence took advantage of Iranian culture, so that through this doubles its role.

### **Shia's new geopolitics and future political power of the Shias**

As mentioned earlier on, the dispersion of Shias in the strategic heart of Middle East and their geographical control over oil and gas domains, and also their considerable population, has caused Shias to play a pivotal role in the Rimland. This role can be in countries that Shias have the absolute majority in them (such as Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and Azerbaijan) as

well as in countries in which they are a relative majority (like Lebanon) and in countries in which Shias have a big share of population (like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait), or in other countries of the Rimland that Shias enjoy a considerable population in them. The pivotal role of Iran and 1979 revolution was so deep and impressing that today on the verge of second decade of 21st century, the Shias are considered to be one of the components of main power in the Rimland. Occupation of Iraq and Shias emerging to power and the formation of the first Shia Arab state on one hand, and the Lebanese Hezbollah war against Israel in 2006, on the other hand, were two important events in the first decade of 21st century which faced Shia geopolitics and also Rimland geopolitics with fundamental changes. The active role of Iraqi Shias in the realm of interference in the political power and administration of the country, and also the role of Lebanese Shia such as Hezbollah and Amal in political affairs, and the role of Hezbollah in resistance against Israel, along with Iran's growth in various fields, draws a prospect of future role of Shias in other Shia countries.

Historical experience of Shias' access to the political power in these three countries and also the current situation of Shias in other countries of Rimland shows that there is two general solutions for Shias in the way ahead to gain political power: 1- strategy of rise and abolishment movements, 2- strategy of reform movements. Experiences of Iran, Lebanon and Iraq all show the arrival of a shock to the governments and as a result the gain of power by Shias. This issue is also to some extent true about Kuwait. The Revolution in Iran, civil war in Lebanon, the foreign devastation agent in Iraq, and foreign invasion to Kuwait, all are evidences, according to some Shias, on the necessity of going the first way. The emergence of the reform movements more than anything else depends on the structure of the country and its social conditions. In a case like Saudi Arabia and Bahrain (before 2011), although this kind of movement in the short term can be considered as a remedy, but does not help to resolve the issue; because the main issue of sovereignty of the minority over the Shia majority still remains. In addition, the influence of Saudi Arabia and ideology of "Wahabism" as a pioneer and claimant of sovereignty over the Sunni world and as the Shia' main rival, do not allow rulers of Sunni countries to act as an active agent in the political structure of the countries. Thus, it seems that maybe due to political-social conditions of each country, a combination of these two could solve

Shias' issues, and in this way the role of Iran as the "Om-Al-Qura" and centre of Shia is very sensitive and important.

**Conclusion:**

In this article, by rereading the votes of classic geopolitics, we considered the changing process of these views and their persistence in theories of post cold war and put forward their votes in relation with the Rimland, by the emphasis on the theory of Brzezinski, and then presented the model of Iran's relations with the Shia Rimland.

Today, Shia as a geopolitical factor that can play a key role in the international actors' world, is at the centre of attention by analysts of political and social sciences, and this has been because of Shias' role in Rimland in the past three decades. Shia despite huge dispersion, ideologically or geographically, due to the use of specific history-aim attitude, and also because of their special social-political situation during history (Suppression by the Sunnis or sometimes non-Muslim rulers), has such a great potentiality for rebellion that it can be called an anti-power leaning to power.

Iran's revolution as a Shia anti-imperialistic revolution had a great impact on awakening and self-consciousness of the Shias of Rimland region, that is evident in the Shia activism in last three decades in this population and in their rises and anti-power movements during this period. Today, Shia movements as agents of domestic policy arena of countries of Rimland region on one hand, and in connection with Iran as the centre of Shia on the other hand, have turned into actors of the international arena, and this issue with considering exceptional situation of Middle East in the geo-economic and geopolitical equations, has revealed the prominent role of Iran and its importance, and has tied the future of the Shia movement with the fate of this country.

On one side, Iran has the supplies for a nation-state framework, and on the other side, claims a supranational ideology of Shia-Islamic Ummah, and the inherent contradiction of these two concepts, requires Iran to look at the phenomenon of nation-state as a transition stage, and make the links between itself and the Shias more extensive. The Shia agent and its identity and its prominence in Shia populations, promotion of political campaign to religion arena (like the experience of Lebanon and Iraq) and extending it to all countries of Rimland, the historical deprivation of Shias and their sociological and political situation in connection with Sunni rulers of Rimland, and the spread of the look of

struggle with injustice among the Shias, along with different supportive activities in political, social and economic areas by Iran, is the only way that leads to the recreation of Shias and strengthening their role in the region. In other words, the logic of defence of the centre and attention to Shia's periphery, in bonding with governmental practicalism is the only way that can strengthen Shias in the transition stage, and make them ready for the entrance to the post nation-state stage, and this is the same pattern that Iran has.

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