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Middle East Brief

Continuity Despite Revolution: Iran's Support for Non-State Actors

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The Islamic Republic of Iran supports a number of non-state actors throughout the Middle East, such as Hizbollah in Lebanon and elements of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (*al-Hashd al-Sha'bi*). Iranian leaders describe their support for such groups in religious and revolutionary terms and as resistance against "global arrogance" (*Istikbar-i Jahani*), meaning imperialism. This aspect of Iran's foreign policy, therefore, is widely understood to be a product of the 1978–79 Iranian Revolution and as motivated, in large part, by ideology.

In contrast, this Brief argues that Iran's pattern of support for non-state entities after 1979, shaped around the so-called Axis of Resistance, is a continuation of a regional policy that dates to the late 1950s and continued through the 1960s and 1970s. Both Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and the leaders of the Islamic Republic pursued a strategy of backing extraterritorial groups and invoking historical and religious ties to Shi'i communities in the region to counter perceived threats and contain adversaries. The shah enmeshed the Imperial State of Iran in Iraqi and Lebanese politics by augmenting anti-Nasser and anti-left non-state actors; the Islamic Republic continued this pattern, sometimes even backing the same individuals that the shah had embraced.

Iran today supports a network of Islamic anti-imperialist entities, both Sunni and Shi'i, to deter the U.S. and to contain regional rivals—like Israel and Saudi Arabia—as well as non-state threats, such as the Islamic State (ISIS). The Revolution, therefore, did not inaugurate Iranian support for non-state allies and partners, and that support cannot be understood primarily in ideological terms.

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The Shah's Non-State Foreign Policy

After consolidating power within Iran in the mid-1950s, the shah turned his attention to what he perceived to be growing external threats to his throne emanating from the Arab world. The rise of Nasserism and the growth of leftist movements in the region contributed to the fall of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958, the overthrow of the kingdom in northern Yemen in 1962, and the Libyan coup d'état of 1968. The shah feared that these developments would allow the Soviet Union to gain a foothold in Iraq and the Persian Gulf. Consequently, he forged alliances with pro-American Arab monarchs and even undertook a military intervention in Oman from 1972 to 1975 to help Sultan Qaboos suppress the leftist uprising in Dhofar.[1]

A cornerstone of the shah's strategy to counter pro-Nasser and leftist forces in the region was the Green Plan (*Tarh-i Sabz*), which his secret police and intelligence service (SAVAK) conceived after 1958. In the wake of the coup in Iraq, the Free Officers who took power in Baghdad under the leadership of Abd al-Karim Qasim ended the alliance with Iran by withdrawing from the pro-Western Baghdad Pact; developed friendly relations with the Soviet Union; and claimed sovereignty over oil-rich territories in Iran. The Qasim government (1958–63) began supporting Arab separatists, as well as the Tudeh communist party in Iran. In response, SAVAK established ties with Iraqi pro-Hashemite figures and military generals, and the shah began to see Kurdish leaders like Mustafa Barzani as potential allies against the emerging Iraqi threat.[2] In 1963, Qasim was deposed and killed in a Ba'thist coup led by Abdul Salam Arif. Although Arif was fiercely anti-communist, his government's close relationship with Nasser's Egypt and territorial claims against Iran brought new tensions to Baghdad-Tehran relations.

In an effort to restore the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq and end Baghdad's threat to both Iran's western borders and the Persian Gulf, SAVAK embraced the Iraqi opposition, including Iraqi Kurdish groups and some Shi'i leaders.[3] For years afterward, Iran supported the Kurdish insurgency, led primarily by Mustafa Barzani (and, later, by Jalal Talabani), and SAVAK assisted Peshmerga forces who fought against Baghdad. This alliance between the Iranian government and Barzani was reinforced between 1972 and 1975 by the CIA under President Richard Nixon and by the Israeli Mossad. They provided Barzani's Peshmerga with intelligence, money, and weapons so as to tie down the Iraqi armed forces and limit Baghdad's ability to meddle in Iran's Khuzestan province and the wider Persian Gulf.[4]

After 1958, the relationship between Baghdad and the Kurds waxed and waned, largely over the issue of autonomy for the Kurds of Iraq. When Kurdish leaders were not at war with Baghdad (for example, briefly in 1958–59, when Qasim courted Barzani), Iran's leverage against Baghdad decreased. Consequently, Tehran played on intra-Kurdish factionalism in order to maintain pressure on Baghdad, as happened following a ceasefire in 1964 between Barzani and Arif. Subsequently, Iran increased its support for Barzani's rivals, including Jalal Talabani, who in 1975 co-founded the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

The shah also provided support to some Shi'i clerics who struggled against Ba'thist rule after 1968. In 1969, as tensions between Baghdad and Tehran rose over the Shatt al-Arab, a river on the Iran-Iraq border, the ruling Ba'th targeted Shi'i communities to "comb out" and expel Iraqis of Iranian origin. In the same

year, Ba'thists jailed and tortured two prominent clerics: Sayyid Mohammad Mehdi al-Hakim, a scion of Grand Ayatollah Mohsen al-Hakim in Najaf, and Sayyid Hassan Shirazi, the brother of Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Shirazi, who was an influential *marja*' (source of emulation) in Karbala. Mohammad Mehdi al-Hakim fled Iraq in 1969 and, for a time, took refuge in Iran, where he received financial assistance to use against the regime in Baghdad.[5] While it is not clear how al-Hakim used Iranian resources, the assistance to him continued until the final days of the shah.[6] SAVAK's military support for the Kurdish insurgency in Iraq came to an end in 1975, when Baghdad and Tehran signed the Algiers Agreement and resolved most of their border disputes.[7]

The shah of Iran also backed non-state actors in Lebanon, which the Green Plan conceived of as the front line in the fight against pan-Arab, Nasserist, and leftist forces in the region.[8] From the mid-1950s until the late 1960s, Iran's paramount policy in Lebanon was countering Nasser's Egypt and its spreading influence in the country, as well as in the wider region. As Nasserism's pan-Arab appeal began to decline after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the shah's attention turned to the growing power of the Palestinian movement in Lebanon.

Following the 1970 Black September conflict in Jordan and the expulsion of Yasser Arafat, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) moved much of its base to Lebanon. Soon after, many anti-shah Iranians—including both Islamists and leftists—moved to Lebanon and Syria for military training at Palestinian camps run primarily by Fatah and by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. In response, the Pahlavi monarch embraced anti-Palestinian Maronite and Shi'i notables and assisted them with money, propaganda, and weapons—sometimes in coordination with Israel. SAVAK offered aid to the mostly Maronite Phalange (Kata'ib) Party, to Camille Chamoun's National Liberal Party, and to Raymond Eddé's National Bloc party (all of whom opposed Nasser and the PLO); this aid helped the National Liberal Party and the National Bloc party win parliamentary seats in 1960.[9] Thus, the shah thrust Tehran into the middle of Lebanese politics—which, soon after the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, were becoming deeply divided between the Phalange Party and its allies in the Lebanese Front, on the one hand, and the Lebanese National Movement and its PLO allies, on the other.[10]

Key to the shah's strategy to counter his regional adversaries, however, were Shi'i communities. The Green Plan sought to support pro-Iran Shi'i leaders (not only in Lebanon, but also in Syria and Iraq) through financial assistance, diplomatic support, and cultural activities; the shah hoped thereby to steer the Lebanese Shi'a away from pan-Arab and leftist forces, such as the Ba'th, the Communist Party, and the Independent Nasserite Movement (*al-Mourabitoun*).[11] The Imperial State of Iran provided financial support to "moderate" clerics and politicians and undertook construction projects, including schools and hospitals, in order to win the community's loyalty.[12] In an interview, a Lebanese cleric who played a leading role in the creation of Hizbollah said that the Iranian ambassador in Beirut, General Mansur Qadar—who was also an influential SAVAK figure—"gave cloak (*'aba'a*), watches, and money to (Lebanese) shaykhs on the occasion of *al-Ghadir* (an important Shi'i feast)."[13]

In this context, the shah financed some of the activities of Sayyid Musa al-Sadr, the Iranian-born Lebanese cleric who became an influential leader of the country's Shi'i community between 1960 and 1978 and, in 1969, was the first head of Lebanon's Supreme Islamic Shi'i Council. The shah also reached out to Sayyid Hassan Shirazi, a prominent Shi'i cleric of Iranian-Iraqi decent who had established himself in Lebanon and Syria since 1969, to promote him as a pro-Iran leader within the Shi'i Lebanese community.[14] Thus, contrary to widespread belief, Hizbollah, which was created after 1982, did not mark the beginning of Iranian support for non-state actors in Lebanon; it was not even the beginning of Iranian support for Shi'i clerics in Lebanon.

The Ayatollahs' Non-State Foreign Policy

Revolutions are marked by both rupture and continuation. Since the Iranian Revolution of 1978–79, the leaders of the Islamic Republic have consistently cast their support for non-state entities in Iraq, Lebanon, and elsewhere in terms of resistance against imperialism and Israel, and as conveying a commitment to downtrodden nations as well. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) often employ religious language when referring to this so-called Axis of Resistance—now comprising Iran, Syria, and their non-state allies in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen—which forms the backbone of Iran's network of influence in the region. By justifying its regional strategy in terms of revolutionary or religious ideals, the Islamic Republic seeks to highlight its break from the practices of the preceding Imperial State of Iran.

But despite the revolutionary rhetoric of the Islamic Republic, this aspect of Iran's regional policies since 1979 mirrors and, in many ways, directly continues those of

the shah in the 1960s and 1970s: Both pursued a strategy of backing non-state actors and using Shi'i communities throughout the region to counter adversaries.[15] After 1979, Lebanon, with its strategic location and sizeable Shi'i population, remained central to Iran's regional strategy. And checking Iraq was a strategic challenge that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who led the 1978–79 Revolution, inherited from the shah.

Soon after the overthrow of the Pahlavi monarchy, Iranian revolutionaries, who had in the 1970s established close ties with the Palestinian Fatah to advance their anti-shah struggle, began to foster and support anti-Israeli and pro-Khomeini forces in Lebanon.[16] Initially, revolutionary clergy, most prominently Ayatollah Husayn Ali Montazeri and Sayyid Ali Akbar Muhtashami, along with the IRGC sought to spread the Iranian Revolution to Lebanon both through Fatah and with the help of Shi'i and Sunni clerics who were galvanized by the ostensibly clerical-led uprising against the shah and inspired by Khomeini's statements in support of the Palestinian cause.[17]

Attempts to export the Revolution gained ground in the wake of the June 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, when IRGC forces arrived in Lebanon to train the embryonic forces of Hizbollah, in coordination with pro-Khomeini clerics. In response to the invasion, a network of pro-Khomeini clergy began to take shape—primarily within the Association of Muslim 'Ulama' in Lebanon (*Tajamm'u al-'Ulama' al-Muslimin fi Lubnan*)—and gradually what would become Hizbollah emerged, with IRGC support, as a major source of resistance to the Israeli invasion.

The actors that Khomeini's Iran embraced in Lebanon included Shi'i and Sunni clerics and activists, as well as militants inspired by the 1979 uprising that had overthrown the "pro-American" shah. Following the example of the Iranian Revolution, they hoped that they could mobilize Lebanon's population against the Israeli occupation and topple the sectarian political order of the country. By the mid-1980s, these actors, through mass mobilization and military operations, managed to force the Israeli army to withdraw to southern Lebanon and U.S. Marines to fully depart the country. The "Islamic resistance" successfully disrupted Washington's efforts to consolidate the pro-American president Amin Gemayel's hold on power and implement the U.S.-backed May 17 Agreement, which aimed to bring Lebanon into the sphere of Arab countries that had signed peace treaties with Israel.[18]

Since its public debut in February 1985, Hizbollah has evolved from a small militant force into a sophisticated non-state actor that operates both in Lebanon and in the wider region—one that has offered Tehran greater influence in the region and has also served as a source of leverage to counter U.S. hegemony and fight Israel (and, subsequently, ISIS). Despite U.S. and Israeli diplomatic pressure and military actions, Hizbollah has become a key driver of Lebanese domestic politics.

The party also currently plays a significant role in reinforcing Tehran's allies in both Syria and Iraq. Since 2013, Hizbollah has engaged and fought in the Syrian civil war and decisively helped the forces of Syrian President Bashar al-Asad recapture territory that his government had lost to rebels.[19] Lebanese Hizbollah had also extended its reach to Iraq by 2014, mostly by establishing an advisory presence alongside the IRGC-Qods Force to train Iraqi militia and assist them in fighting and recapturing territories from ISIS. Describing the war against ISIS as an "existential struggle," the secretary general of Hizbollah, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, contended that the party's military engagement in Syria and Iraq sought to strengthen the "backbone" of the Axis of Resistance.[20] Thus, Hizbollah's role has been crucial for the integrity of Iran's network of allies (both state and non-state) in the region.

Although Hizbollah is Iran's principal ally in Lebanon, it is not the only recipient of Tehran's support within the Lebanese Shi'i community. In the post-Khomeini period, the Islamic Republic has nurtured stronger ties with clerics who are not affiliated with Hizbollah, including the leadership of the Supreme Islamic Shi'i Council, which was established by Musa al-Sadr in 1969.[21] The current head of the Council, Shaykh Abdul Amir Qabalan, exemplifies the continuity in Tehran's approach to the Lebanese Shi'a since the monarchical epoch, as he had a close relationship with the embassy of Pahlavi Iran in Beirut.[22]

As for Iran's relationship with Iraq, there were similarities before and after 1979 not only in the types of threats Iran was facing from the ruling Ba'thist government, but also in the way that the Pahlavi and Islamic Republic governments responded to those threats. Saddam reneged on the Algiers Agreement with the shah that he had signed in 1975, and, after the revolution, Khomeini resumed Iranian support for Iraqi Kurdish groups and, to a significantly larger extent, for Shi'i non-state actors who opposed the Ba'th Party. As soon as the revolutionaries prevailed in Iran, the two major Iraqi Shi'i opposition groups, the Shiraziyyin movement and the Islamic Da'wa Party, endorsed Khomeini's leadership and urged Iraqis to rise up against the "shah of Iraq" in the example of the Iranian

Revolution.[23] By September 1980, when Saddam Hussein declared war on Iran, all of the surviving principal leaders of these two opposition groups had fled the violent crackdown inside Iraq, and most relocated to Iran.[24]

From 1980 onward, as the Iraqi refugee population grew in Iran, the Iraqi opposition militarized, veering away from their initial hope for a popular uprising and becoming increasingly tied to the Iranian war effort. With the intensification of the Iran-Iraq War, Tehran armed Iraqi Kurds and Shi'i forces, as well as some pro-Syrian Ba'thists, and organized them within the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI, now known as the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq), which was established in 1982. Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, who had fled Iraq and moved to Iran in 1980, became the central figure in SCIRI. His older brother, Sayyid Mohammad Mehdi al-Hakim, despite his previous ties with the Pahlavi monarchy, was able to visit Iran and establish a relationship with the Islamic Republic's leaders.

Though the shah's support for the Shi'a in Iraq was limited to backing a few clerical figures, the galvanizing shock of the revolution and the example of clerical leadership in mobilizing the masses allowed revolutionary Iran to attract, influence, and mobilize Iraqi Shi'i movements in a more effective way in line with its geopolitical objectives. On the Kurdish front, the IRGC embraced the very leaders whom SAVAK had supported: Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and Masoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party both received military and logistical support from the IRGC to mount an insurgency against the Iraqi Armed Forces. The Iranian revolutionary clergy and the IRGC were initially distrustful of the Barzanis (this was the case with the al-Hakims as well), accusing them of cooperation with the shah. But as the Iran-Iraq War wore on, the Islamic Republic expanded and widened its support of the Iraqi opposition to more effectively contain Saddam Hussein's forces.

The hope for a popular uprising inside Iraq akin to the Iranian Revolution, or for a military victory that would sweep Saddam Hussein from power, fizzled out by 1988, when Baghdad and Tehran agreed to a cease-fire that ended the eight-year-long war between the two countries. But the Iraqi groups that Tehran had sheltered and supported against Saddam nevertheless came to play a key role in helping Iran establish and cement its influence in Iraq after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion and the overthrow of the Ba'th Party. The Badr Corps—originally the military arm of SCIRI—and forces associated with the Islamic Da'wa Party, whose members had fought

alongside the IRGC in the Iran-Iraq War, established themselves within the post-Saddam political and security apparatuses; other groups backed by the IRGC militarily fought U.S. forces in Iraq.

After the 2003 invasion, shaping a post-Saddam political order in Baghdad that was favorable to Tehran—and preventing the U.S. from entrenching its military position on the western flank of Iran by establishing permanent bases there—was of paramount importance to Iranian leaders. Against this backdrop, the IRGC built its influence by relying on Iraqi exiles who had been based in Iran prior to 2003 and nurturing sympathetic groups, mainly among the Shi'a, by providing military training, arms, and money. By the time of the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq in 2011, Iran and its allies were entrenched in the Iraqi political system.[25] After the fall of Mosul to ISIS in 2014, pro-Iranian Shi'i groups, particularly Badr, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, and Kata'ib Hizbollah, formed the nucleus of the Popular Mobilization Forces.[26] These militia played a key role in helping the Iraqi military liberate territories and defeat ISIS, both inside Iraq and, after 2015, in Syria, where they fought not only ISIS but also anti-Asad opposition groups.[27]

The Axis of Resistance as an Upgraded Green Plan

Since the 1950s, Iran's non-state foreign policy has been part of its broader strategy of containing regional and international threats to its national security and territorial integrity.[28] The continuity and durability of this strategy suggests that Iran's current non-state foreign policy cannot be analyzed as entirely a product of the 1978–79 Revolution. From the viewpoint of the Islamic Republic, extending the Axis of Resistance into Iraq through actors like the Popular Mobilization Forces has been critical not only to preventing anti-Iranian elements (e.g., Ba'thists, ISIS, and pro-American Iraqi leaders) from coming to power in Baghdad, but also to hampering the U.S. military in Iraq.

In Lebanon, what drives Iran's support for non-state actors today is a combination of historical and cultural ties with the Lebanese Shi'a, the geopolitical importance of Lebanon in shaping the power balance in the region, and the pro-Palestinian ideology of the Islamic Republic: Iran seeks to buttress the Lebanese political order that allows Hizbollah to maintain its armed resistance to Israel and continue its extraterritorial activities in Syria and Iraq. In particular, backing the so-called "Islamic" resistance against Israel allows the Islamic Republic

to present itself as a champion of a cause popular in the eyes of both Sunnis and Shi'a throughout the Muslim world. From Khamenei's perspective, an unabashedly pro-Palestinian position denies regional rivals such as Saudi Arabia the opportunity to depict Iranians as heretical Persians and thereby undermine Tehran's effort to overcome ethnic and religious impediments to its regional influence.

Iran's post-1979 international isolation, however, has made its non-state policy more central to Tehran's approach to the region than it was to Iran's regional policy under the shah. Iran's regional policy under the Pahlavi monarchy relied on alliances with Arab monarchs and Western powers as well as with non-state actors. The Islamic Republic's network of influence in Lebanon and Iraq seeks to compensate for Iran's current lack of state allies and its antiquated and sanctions-constrained armed forces, enabling it to avoid the high costs of conventional warfare against superior military powers such as the U.S.[29] Instead, the capability that Iran has developed to fight via non-state allies, or proxies, enables it to inflict harm on its adversaries—primarily the U.S., Israel, and Saudi Arabia—at low cost to itself and in a deniable manner.[30] It also helps counter non-state threats to its security, such as those posed by ISIS.

Though Khamenei relies on various revolutionary, pan-Islamic,[31] and pan-Shi'i rhetoric to justify Iran's extraterritorial activities, he also has been clear in tying the Axis of Resistance to the national security concerns of the country:

If it were not for the martyrs who defended the shrine, we should now have fought with the agents of the vicious enemies of Ahl al-Bayt[32] and the enemy of the Shi'a in the cities of Iran.[33] The enemy also had other plans in Iraq...to reach the eastern areas, bordering the Islamic Republic...In Syria, too, if it was not for what our valued commanders did,...now we would have to fight them [ISIS] in nearby neighborhoods, here in our streets and cities. An important part of the security that you enjoy today is because of these Shrine Defenders.[34]

Khamenei's remarks in justifying Iran's regional policies, though presented in religious language, dovetail with the position of pre-Revolution officials that "We should combat and contain the threat [of Nasserism] in the east coast of the Mediterranean to prevent shedding blood on Iranian soil."[35] "The Mediterranean east coast," which was of paramount importance to SAVAK's generals, remains at the heart of the IRGC's extraterritorial activities. Their commander has declared: "Today the strategic border of the Iranian nation's resistance against global arrogance has spread to the Mediterranean east coast and North Africa."[36]

The Axis of Resistance, which underpins Iran's network of non-state actors, is essentially the shah's Green Plan evolved to a deeper and wider level of influence and with one crucial additional component: an Islamic revolutionary ideology that has enabled Iran to articulate and project its regional role in an appealing way to publics across the region and garner support even beyond Shi'i communities. Iran's revolutionary rhetoric, especially when directed against U.S. hegemony and in support of the Palestinian cause, confers on Iran's regional activities a trans-sectarian character, allowing Tehran to make inroads into a region that would otherwise have been more resistant to a predominantly Persian and Shi'i power.

At the same time, the Islamic Republic also employs Shi'i rhetoric to mobilize individuals and public opinion within segments of Iranian and non-Iranian Shi'i communities in support of its extraterritorial activities. For example, Iran has mobilized and organized in Syria—under the banner of Shi'i "shrine defenders"—thousands of fighters from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and Iraq to combat ISIS as well as armed Syrian opposition groups. The shah lacked this coherent ideology and appealing image, which the 1978–79 revolution afforded the Islamic Republic.[37] Thus, what sets apart the ayatollahs' policies from the shah's is not the non-state strategy per se, but rather the existence of this revolutionary ideology. The ideas and rhetoric of the Revolution, in both its pan-Islamic and pan-Shi'i forms, enabled the construction of a sophisticated non-state network which has brought Iran more regional influence and status than either its nuclear or ballistic missile programs.[38]

Conclusion

Contrary to the dominant view in both the West and the Arab world, Iran's strategy of supporting non-state entities dates back to the late 1950s, not to the Revolution. Both the shah and the Islamic Republic relied on extraterritorial entities in the region, as well as on historical and religious ties to Shi'i communities, to contain and resist both real and perceived threats. For the shah, such threats came from pan-Arab, Nasserist, and leftist forces, as well as the Soviet Union. Ayatollah Khamenei perceives such threats as emanating from the U.S. military presence in the region, Israel, and non-state groups like ISIS, as well as from regional rivals—especially Saudi Arabia and, more recently, Turkey.

Although ideology partly influences Iran's reaching to Lebanon, it is not the driving force behind the Axis of Resistance. Analyzing the non-state policy of Iran in the

wider context of the Pahlavi and Islamic Republic eras shows that Iran's regional role has primarily been determined by history and geopolitics. But Iran's revolutionary ideology has lent an integrity to the Axis by unifying its various components around anti-imperial and anti-Israel resistance, thereby conferring a sort of trans-sectarian legitimacy.

Endnotes

1   Additionally, in 1976, the shah—jointly with the leaders of France, Morocco, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia—established an international counter-revolution alliance, the Safari Club, to fight communism in Africa and support pro-apartheid South African forces, such as UNITA in Angola. On the Safari Club, see Piero Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976–1991* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013) 67–68.

2   See Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 69.

3   See Arash Reisinezhad, *The Shah of Iran, the Iraqi Kurds, and the Lebanese Shia* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 61, 78–79.

4   See Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah*, 77-125.

5   'Ali al-Kawrani, *Ila Talib al-'Ilm* [To the Seeker of Knowledge] (Qom: n.p., 1431/2010), 248–51 (in Persian).

6   Anonymous, Author's interview (Tehran, Iran, October 12, 2019).

7   On Pahlavi Iran's support for Iraqi and Lebanese non-state actors, see Reisinezhad, *The Shah of Iran*.

8   The centrality of Lebanon was partly due to the Iranian failure to restore the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq. On Pahlavi Iran's involvement in Lebanon, see Abbas William Samii, "The Shah's Lebanon Policy: The Role of SAVAK," *Middle Eastern Studies* 33.1 (January 1997), 66-91; and H. E. Chehabi, *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years* (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies and I.B. Tauris, 2006), 137–200.

9   Samii, "The Shah's Lebanon Policy," 70; and Mostafa Alamuti, *Iran Dar Asr-i Pahlavi: Jang-i Qudrat Dar Iran* [Iran In the Pahlavi Era: The Power Struggle in Iran], vol. 11 (London: Chap-i Pika, 1992), 523–24 (in Persian).

10   Fawwāz Ṭarābulsī, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto, 2007), 187–88.

11   Samii, "The Shah's Lebanon Policy," 69.

12   H. E. Chehabi and Majid Tafreshi, "Musa Sadr and Iran," in Chehabi, *Distant Relations*, 156.

13   Shaykh 'Ali al-Kawrani, Author's interview (Qom, Iran, November 28, 2019). General Qadar was Iran's ambassador in Beirut from 1972 to 1979. Since approximately 1960, he had served as chief of SAVAK's station and in other diplomatic positions in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.

14   See the SAVAK document "Muzu': Sayyid Hassan Shirazi," [Center of Historical Documents Survey](in Persian). After fleeing Iraq in 1969, Sayyid Hassan Shirazi established a seminary in Zeynabia, a suburb of Damascus, as well as mosques and hussainiyas (Shi'a prayer halls) in other Syrian cities, like Homs and Latakia.

15   In a study on the Reconstruction Jihad (*Jahad-i Sazandigi*), one of the most important revolutionary organizations established after 1979 for rural reconstruction and development in Iran, Eric Lob similarly shows the political and social continuities that carried over into revolutionary Iran. Lob argues that the origins of the Reconstruction Jihad date back to the shah's era and were rooted in the monarch's rural development policies between 1962 and 1979. See Eric S. Lob, *Iran's Reconstruction Jihad: Rural Development and Regime Consolidation after 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

16   See Mohammad Ataie, "Revolutionary Iran's 1979 Endeavor in Lebanon," *Middle East Policy* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2013), 137–57.

17   Montazeri was one of the leading figures of the revolution, and Khomeini's heir designate between 1984 and 1989. Muhtashami was Khomeini's point person in Bilad al-Sham and Iran's ambassador to Damascus between 1981 and 1984.

18   U.S. Marines left Lebanon in February 1984, and a month later the Lebanese parliament abrogated the agreement.

19   See "Hizbollah's Syria Conundrum," International Crisis Group, Report No. 175/Middle East and North Africa (March 14, 2017). As early as 2012, Hizbollah commanders and fighters were regularly entering Syria on reconnaissance, intelligence, and liaison missions; this limited and targeted approach had changed by 2013. See IISS, *Iran's Networks of Influence in the Middle East* (November 2019), 88.

20   Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, "Hizballah Min al-Muqawama Ila Ma B'ada al-Muqawama" [Hizbollah from resistance to after resistance], *al-Akhbar*, February 13, 2015 (in Persian).

21   This change in the Islamic Republic's approach came after years of tensions with Shaykh Mohammad Mahdi Shamseddin, who presided over the Supreme Islamic Shi'i Council before Qabalan. See H. E. Chehabi and Hassan I. Mneimneh, "Five Centuries of Lebanese–Iranian Encounters," in Chehabi, *Distant Relations*, 42.

22   Shaykh 'Ali al-Kawrani, Author's interview, Qom, Iran, November 28, 2019.

23   The Da'wa Party and the Shiraziyyin movement had their roots in the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala, respectively, and had branches across the region. On the impact of the Revolution on these two transnational movements, see Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

24   Ali al-Mu'min, *Jadalyat al-Dawa* [The Dialectics of al-Dawa] (Beirut: Dar Rawafed, 2017), 93 (in Persian).

25   IISS, *Iran's Networks of Influence in the Middle East*, 122–57.

26   Nader Uskowi, *Temperature Rising: Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Wars in the Middle East* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 102.

27   These pro-Iran forces "joined the Iraqi army, local tribes, and the Kurdish Peshmerga in operations to begin retaking territory from the group, eventually recapturing Tikrit in April 2015, Ramadi in December

2015, Fallujah in June 2016, and Mosul in July 2017." See Council on Foreign Relations, "Global Conflict Tracker: Political Instability in Iraq."

28   Reisinezhad, *The Shah of Iran*, 5.

29   IISS, *Iran's Networks of Influence in the Middle East*, 4.

30   Ibid., 195–96.

31   Creating a united Islamic front against the common enemies of the *umma* (the Muslim community) was one important dimension of the 1978–79 Revolution's ideology.

32   This literally means "People of the House," which refers to the family of the Prophet Mohammad.

33   Iranian state propaganda calls the Iranian and non-Iranian militants who have fought in Syria "the Defenders of the Shrine" (*mudaf'in-i haram*). "Shrine" here is a reference to the Shi'i shrines of Sayyidah Zaynab (located six miles southeast of central Damascus) and Sayyidah Ruqayya (located at the heart of the old quarter in Damascus).

34   "Bayanat Dar Didar-i Khanivadiha-yi Shuhada-yi Marzban va Mudaf'-i Haram" [Statements during the visit of the families of the martyrs of the border guards and shrine defenders], *Khamenei.IR*, June 18, 2017 (in Persian).

35   Colonel Mojtaba Pashaie, head of the Middle East Directorate of SAVAK, made this statement during a SAVAK meeting. See Letter from 'Isa Pejman, reprinted in Alamuti, *Iran Dar Asr-i Pahlavi*, 521–23, quoted in Reisinezhad, *The Shah of Iran*, 94.

36   "Salami: Iran Marz-i Rahburd-yi Khud Ra Ta Sharq-i Miditarnih Tus'ih Dadih Ast" [Salami: Iran Has Expanded Its Strategic Border to the Eastern Mediterranean], *Mashregh News*, November 26, 2014 (in Persian).

37   On the Pahlavi government's vague ideology concerning Iran's regional activities, see Reisinezhad, *The Shah of Iran*, 320–22.

38   IISS, Iran's *Networks of Influence in the Middle East*, 2.

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