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IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SINCE 2001

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the discourse and practices of Iran in the areas of water and agriculture, economy, migration and political ideas, to test Iran's approach and also its influence in various fields. Drawing on a critical discourse analysis approach, it engages with published documents, elite discourses, and public narratives of Iranian leaders and intellectual elites to better understand the country's changing role and influence as well as policies and role perceptions in the Mediterranean area. Examining its alternative discourses, the paper aims at highlighting the conflicting, competing, as well as converging, policies and visions of these actors regarding the EU's policies and engagements.

INTRODUCTION

For decades, the countries and communities of the Persian Gulf have displayed a keen interest in the communities and the countries on the shores of the Mediterranean. Since the end of the Second World War, Iran and its Arab neighbours have interacted with peoples of the Mediterranean in dialogue and cooperation, as well as through conflict and competition. The relationship has been dialectical and interactive, in that the political crisis in the Levant in the 1940s not only gave birth to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan but also provided the context for the establishment of a short-lived monarchy in Iraq. Iran has, since the 1950s at least, been interacting with the Shia communities of Lebanon and those of Syria. Before the 1970s, moreover, it had close links with the so-called "moderate" Arab republics (Lebanon and Tunisia) and monarchies (Jordan, and Morocco) of the Levant and North Africa. By the 1960s the Pahlavi monarchy had already cultivated security and political ties with the non-Arab Mediterranean countries of Israel and Turkey, and had established a regional security partnership with the latter under the auspices of the West. By the early 1970s, following the death of President Nasser in Egypt, Iran was further empowered to develop links with the "frontline" states of the Arab-Israeli conflict and played an instrumental role in the Camp David peace process between Egypt and Israel, having supported the Arab side in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. Iran's relationship with the Arab countries of the Mediterranean has always been complex, as evidenced by the tensions between the Iranian monarchy and the republican Arab nationalists promoting a radical brand of pan-Arabism under President Nasser's leadership. But of equal interest is Iran's relationship with the post-monarchy regime in Libya following the coup in 1969, which on the one hand increased Iran's hostility to the regime in Libya, while at the

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same time facilitating Iran's leadership of the OPEC cartel's pricing policy and the hardening of the cartel's position on oil prices. Iran and Libya, ironically, not only managed to push OPEC to harden its negotiating stance with the oil majors, but also extracted concessions on output and control of the members' hydrocarbons deposits in these historic negotiations.

Since the revolution, Iran's links with parts of the Levant and the wider Mediterranean have intensified, but these have been coloured by ideology and the embryonic "Axis of Resistance" which has brought Iran closer to Lebanon's Hezbollah, Palestine's Hamas and of course the champion of the Arab rejectionist front, namely Syria. Iran's (Shia) Islamist revolutionism acknowledges its debt to the political maturity and influence of the Lebanese Shia community, as well to the Palestinians' national liberation struggle and Algeria's anti-colonial war of independence. Moreover, the term and concept of the Mediterranean as a region is absent in Iran's discourse. Rather, the emphasis rests on the Axis of Resistance and a set of Muslim countries which are part of the Islamic Ummah.

As a neighbour of the EU neighbours, Iran has always had an interest in the EU countries, recognizing that the EU's priorities can have a major influence on the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean and therefore may impact Iranian interests in these regions. In addition, Iran's support of Hezbollah and various Palestinian groups including Hamas has been at odds with the EU's efforts to advance the Middle East Peace Process. With the agreement between Iran and the P5+1+EU on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA),² there seems to be a promising outlook for Iran's interactions with Europe and broader integration with the international community. This has given rise to optimism, in some quarters, that Iran will play a positive role in implementing peace and security from the Middle East to the Mediterranean. This paper examines the discourse and practices of Iran in the areas of water and agriculture, economy, migration and political ideas, to test Iran's approach and also its influence in various fields. Drawing on a critical discourse analysis approach, it engages with published documents, elite discourses and public narratives of Iranian leaders and intellectual elites to better understand the country's changing role and influence as well as its policies and role perceptions in the Mediterranean area. Examining its alternative discourses, the paper aims at highlighting the conflicting, competing, as well as converging, policies and visions of these actors regarding the EU's policies and engagements (Ehteshami and Mohammadi 2016: 4). The documents analysed in this paper are prime examples of Iran's discourse as they reflect reverberating concerns of its Leader, officials, influential media and intellectuals in the construction of their worldview and the framing of the Mediterranean area and construction of alternative discourses.

1. POLITICAL IDEAS: CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS

According to Homeira Moshirzadeh (2015), the Islamic Republic of Iran's international relations can be understood in terms of plurality and complexity of discourses, namely realism, Islamism, anti-imperialism, international society and critical dialogism. Because the political structure of the Islamic Republic is complex – just as the concepts of republic and Islamic seem paradoxical

² Reached in 2015, implemented in 2016.

and complex – any of these discourses is a product of this intricate structure. However, the dominant discourse has arguably been that of realism (Moshirzadeh 2015: 10-18). Realism in the discourse of Iran's international relations is constructed via a binary opposition of inside/outside, where inside is the self that implies power and control, and outside is the other against which the self is defined. The articulation of nationalism as part of the multiple discourse of Iran marks the privilege of the inside (Moshirzadeh 2015).

The first five years after Iran's revolution are best described as anti-realist due to their emphasis on Islamic solidarity (Moshirzadeh 2015: 16). Yet, the realist dimension has come to dominate Iran's role perception and outlook since that time. Moshirzadeh suggests two factors in explanation of this shift. The first is the reliance of Iranian scholars and academia on Western theories of international relations. This is still the trend in Iran's universities, where undergraduates are exposed to realist theories as the principles undergirding international relations. The second significant factor in making realism the principle of Iran's discourse in international relations is the institutionalization of international relations and particularly the role that the Institute for Political and International Studies (established in 1983 under the supervision of the ministry of foreign affairs) has come to play. Its major journal *Foreign Policy*, put into circulation in 1986, promoted the largely Western-produced major realist texts in the field (Moshirzadeh 2015: 16-17). As Moshirzadeh (2015: 17-18) argues, "[e]ven in the more ideologically-driven publications [in Iran], realism is still somehow present".

Nonetheless, realism is not the only discourse associated with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Secondary to realism in this context is Islamism. During the first years after the revolution (in the 1980s), courses with Islamic titles and content were introduced in university curricula in political science. Such materials aimed at a universal Muslim solidarity rather than a nationalist or patriotic tendency. As Moshirzadeh (2015: 23) has it, "[t]hat is why the ideas of 'supporting liberationist movements' and 'the export of the Islamic revolution' have had a prominent position in the foreign policy agenda based on this discourse". Another significant discourse of Iran is the critical dialogism that gained momentum during Mohammad Khatami's presidency. This was manifest in his suggestion of a dialogue of civilizations. Being influenced by thinkers like Gadamer and Habermas, Khatami articulated a similar criticism of international relations and the embodiments of domination as its core (Moshirzadeh 2015: 32). Alternatively, he called for a peaceful world to be achieved through dialogue. The implication of Khatami's position was the upgrading of a mutual dialogic relationship, rather than one based on domination/subordination in the world. Having said that, it could be argued that Khatami's idea of dialogue with civilizations was a normative cover for his realist approach. This is because, in terms of realism, his policy of *détente* resulted in economic development and was therefore in harmony with the principles of realism that had informed the ministry of foreign affairs. This could explain why Moshirzadeh believes that the policy of realism "gained momentum" during Khatami's presidency (Moshirzadeh 2015: 17).

Nevertheless, what Moshirzadeh does not address in her paper is the post-structuralist reading strategy of international relations in Iran. Post-structuralist thinking was introduced to political science by Hossein Bashiriyeh (1997) in his *History of Political Thought in the Twentieth Century* and Mohammad Reza Tajik in a run of books and articles on postmodernism and post-structuralism (see Tajik 2007, 2008), which began appearing on the fringes of the dominant discourses of realism. Later, after a strategic shift at the global level (and especially the American shift towards the Pacific and East Asia) that coincided with many important incidents such

as the Arab Spring, post-structuralism became almost a discursive trend in Iran's academia, media and foreign policy. In view of this, what follows is a discourse analysis of writings that have used a post-structuralist reading strategy in Iran's international relations.

Prominent in the context of political ideas exploited by the Islamic Republic of Iran in its framing of the world (including, but not exclusively about, the Mediterranean) is critical geopolitics. In line with Jennifer Milliken's (1999) contention that discourse is a system of signification that gives meaning to the world, Paul Routledge's (2003) neologism of "anti-geopolitics" or "geopolitics from the bottom" designates a critical reading (or a problematization) of the dominant traditional geopolitical discourse. This critical geopolitics, which emerged in the 1970s as part of the postmodernist logic, aims at deconstructing the grounding assumptions of the traditional geopolitics. Part of Iran's discourse is influenced by this same approach in critical geopolitics, or alternatively "terrains of resistance" in Routledge's (1996) terms. To delineate part of Iran's anti-geopolitical discourse, we will first compare and contrast the traditional geopolitics and anti-geopolitics.

The traditional Western geopolitics, as opposed to anti-geopolitics or the critical geopolitics, assumes a top-to-bottom power relationship. The traditional view regards geopolitics (state power) as an organism (Toal 1998: 4); thus, being like a tree as the analogy implies, power grows but its growth is at the cost of killing weaker organisms around it, because it is in a state of constant struggle to achieve crucial resources to survive. Drawing on Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory of the survival of the fittest in the mechanism of natural selection, this implies a sort of geographical empiricism in the field of geopolitics since the most important of these crucial resources is land. This empiricist view is best manifest in Halford John Mackinder's Heartland Theory, as elaborated in *The Geographical Pivot of History* (1904), which regards, via extension of geopolitical analysis, the world as a globe that is divisible into three components: the World-Island which contains Europe, Asia and Africa; the offshore islands such as the British Isles and Japan; and the outlying islands. According to this theory, the heartland is located at the centre of the World-Island (Mackinder 1904: 433). Due to its position the heartland is the key controlling factor in ruling the globe; any power that can control the World-Island will also control the crucial resources of the world.³ In other words, Mackinder's view was towards the hegemonic domination of the world, with the heartland being the Russian Empire and Europe.

Drawing on Mackinder's view, Nicholas J. Spykman in 1944 developed his theory of the "rimland" as an intermediate region between the heartland and the sea. Spykman (1944: 43) famously held that "Who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world". An adaptation of Mackinder's Heartland Theory and Spykman's rimland was later adopted by the US during the Cold War for containing the Soviet Union.

By contrast, Iran's geopolitics could be part of the postmodern "anti-geopolitics" (see Pishgahifard and Ghodsi 2010) as a resistance against the geopolitics of the West which pervades political ideas, while simultaneously resting on a reading of the concept of the heartland. Based on this discourse, people's will and resistance plays a significant role in dismantling traditional equations of power. In this anti-geopolitical discourse, the political sovereignty of the dominant

3 Mackinder (1944: 150) puts his theory in verse very succinctly: "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world".

power is challenged. Anti-geopolitics involves cultural, political and spiritual forces in society that challenge the interest of the dominant power (Routledge 2003). Extending the idea into a broader scope of the globe, anti-politics could be read as forces of certain people who challenge the political sovereignty embodied in superpowers. Also, Gerard Toal (Gearóid Ó Tuathail) brought the new concept of "spiritual geopolitics" into the literature (Toal 2000), and Immanuel Wallerstein (1991) introduced "geo-culture" to postmodern geopolitical discourse – concepts to which many Iranian policy makers have been attracted.

By the same token, Iran is a new heartland who influences the rimland of Shia Islam. In this context, the all-important rimland would contain mainly Muslim countries in the region that is called the Mediterranean. The Eastern Mediterranean is a bridge that links Asia, Africa and Europe and therefore has a central geopolitical role. As it has a considerable population of Shia Muslims and is a neighbour to Israel, Iran is a key power to unbalance geopolitics and geo-strategic equilibrium in the region. Given that, the control and influence in the periphery (Eastern Mediterranean) are necessary to exerting power. According to some Iranian scholars (Pishgahifard et al. 2015), Iran takes a universalist mission upon itself and thus internalizes a sense of expansionism and exerting influence both in the region and the world. A significant means of this expansionism is Iran's potential religious (Shia) influence in the region (Pishgahifard et al. 2015: 9). The Shia expansionism that Iran is seeking extends to countries like Lebanon. Lebanon, having a border with Israel, is a good example of Iran's influence in shaping the power relations in the region. This influence is such that "anytime when it comes to the Islamic Republic outside the borders and in the Islamic world, attention is drawn to Lebanon and Hezbollah at its centre" (Pishgahifard et al. 2015: 18).

The view of Shia expansionism shared by some high-ranking officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Saudi discourse of sectarian rivalry with Iran supplement each other – each justifies the existence of the other. However, whereas Iran's discourse of Shiism is a view shared only by part, not all, of the political system, the emphasis on sectarian rivalry with Iran is more prevalent among Saudi leaders. The reason is due to the threat perception of each side (see Hadian 2015). Saudi Arabia perceives Shia Iran to be its nemesis against which it should mobilize the GCC, the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (all three consist mainly of countries with a Sunni majority), whereas Iran does not perceive Saudi Arabia to be a large threat. Moreover Iran is aware that by overplaying the sectarian card it will further alienate the Sunni governments and entities (such as the Palestinian Hamas and the Iraqi Muslim Brotherhood) in its surrounding regions.

The idea of Iran as the heartland of Shia Islam is common among many Iranian scholars in the Iranian Association of Geopolitics. Thus, Ghalibaf and Ghodsi (2012) start with the same premise, however they end up with a different policy recommendation. They hold that although Iran's role as the heartland of Shia should be brought into consideration and be utilized as a policy instrument, an emphasis on its destructive role is neither realistic nor true. They build their argument upon the fact that about 70 percent of Shia communities live in West Asia, which support's Iran's centrality in Shia Islam. Yet, they propose that Iran's policy, whilst benefiting from Shia geopolitical potentials in the region, should be formed mainly based upon realistic geopolitics. They also explain and analyse Iran's present policy:

Iran's goals in making close connections with the Shia population in the region is more a defensive and realistic policy rather than expansionist. To become the power in the

region, Iran does not solely attempt to boost her friendly Shia factions in the region. Iran's goals are on the one hand to create a secure and stabilized region around her borders and creating economic opportunities to have a strategic progress and development, on the other. As a powerful nation-state, Iran has a strategic interest in the region, whereas the main discussion in the discourse of Shia Crescent focuses on Iran's destructive power in the region. (Ghalibaf and Ghodsi 2012: 18)

As the authors remind us, it was in 2004 that King Abdullah of Jordan critically warned against the emergence of an ideological Shia crescent running from Lebanon through to the Persian Gulf – a conception which was perceived as an act of projection from Jordan's own political problems and also aimed at geopolitically isolating Iran (Ghalibaf and Ghodsi 2012: 5-6). Given that, the writers believe, the emergence of a violent and destructive ideological Shia Crescent should not be exaggerated. It should be noted that the idea of a Shia Crescent is a non-Iranian concept and identity (Ghalibaf and Ghodsi 2012: 18).

More significantly, this view can also be detected in Ayatollah Khamenei's speeches. In a meeting with foreign poets (mainly from Islamic countries), Ayatollah Khamenei stressed unity among all Muslims. In this regard, as he said, poets should pay special attention to Islamic unity (Khamenei 2012a). He considered the conflicts between Shia and Sunni communities as an act of sabotage by the West and a response to "Islamic Awakening". As he continued, "[w]idespread efforts are being made in order to stop this great wave of Islamic Awakening by fomenting discord among Muslims, but the Islamic Ummah must overcome the religious, ethnic and political causes of discord" (Khamenei 2012a). His diction implies a set of assumptions, starting with his use of the term "Islamic Awakening": the recent events in some Arab countries are a clear sign of Islamic awakening against the sovereignty of the West; for that reason, the West tries to sabotage it. Consequently, "the name 'Arab Spring' is inadequate for this great movement" (Khamenei 2012a). Second, by using the term "the Islamic Ummah", rather than using the notion of 'the people' in the countries involved in drastic political changes, he tacitly postulates a unity among all Muslims, avoiding making a distinction between Sunni and Shia, which in turn is an indication of his emphasis on Islamic unity.

On the other hand, Pishgahifard et al. (2015) argue that Iran's policy of exporting Shia revolution and creating a Shia crescent in the region is key to its geopolitical and geo-strategic triumph. According to them, the East Mediterranean is the front line of the Axis of Resistance and the Shia orbit; it is the embodiment of the clash between Islam and Israel, and because of its geopolitical and geo-strategic significance in the region it becomes strategic territory for Iran. Therefore, creating security loops in the periphery is essential to Iran's influence in the region (Pishgahifard et al. 2015: 26). Attempts to increase Iran's zone of influence have been a strategic priority in Iran's policy. As Pishgahifard et al. (2015: 26) contend, "the most efficient of these attempts is the element of religion". Since Iran is at the centre of Shia geography, it "can and should lead this zone [of influence] to unbalance geo-strategic and geopolitical equilibrium in the Middle East" (Pishgahifard et al. 2015: 26). Islamic movements in the Eastern Mediterranean are a very significant element of this influence and Iran is in a position to lead and benefit from such movements by turning them into a strategic means of territoriality. Iran would be well advised to have a long-term plan for the Eastern Mediterranean to achieve this territorial goal, in the view of Pishgahifard et al. (2015: 18).

In line with this argument and part of the discourse of Axis of Resistance is Jahanbakhsh Izadi and Hamidreza Akbari's (2011) contention. They argue that the strong pressure on Iran regarding its nuclear programme (leading to a United Nations Security Council resolution to apply sanctions), the isolation of Syria after the death of Rafiq Hariri, and wars against Hezbollah and Hamas in 2006 and 2008 respectively were all measures taken by the US after the 9/11 attacks, to destroy the Axis of Resistance.

A similar, but not identical, view of the world as having already undergone a drastic change regarding the centrality of actors involved in the formation of geopolitics can be found in the speeches of Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. While following a realist approach in his foreign policy that resulted in the "Iran Deal", Zarif has also upheld a post-structuralist analysis of international relations in numerous speeches, including at the Tehran Security Conference (2016) and the Munich Security Conference (2017), and in his recent co-authored book *Transition in International Relations of Post-Western World* (Zarif et al. 2017). Exemplary of his perspectives is his address at the Tehran Security Conference in December 2016 in which he emphasized the realization that power has shifted from the West in shaping West Asia, to the countries and non-state actors of the region. In this formulation, he dismantled the approach whereby the West is active and the East is passive. As he said,

In the bipolar world, there were only two main actors. However, following the collapse of that system, these two main actors were marginalized as exclusive actors in international relations. Perhaps, late Imam Khomeini could be considered among the first people who understood this reality. The fact that the time for exclusive political action was over was pointed out by the Imam. (Zarif 2016)

Zarif postulates that the world is not polarized anymore, which implies that the Western hegemony of West Asia is undermined. As the concept of polarization implies, only two powers were regarded as actors in fashioning the world, a situation that has changed since the Cold War. As he continues, "[t]his period of transition has so far taken more than 26 years and is still far from reaching a point of stability. However, we must note that the current period of transition has differences with previous periods of transition, including the fact that it is no longer West-centered" (Zarif 2016). The term "transition" here as a significant predicate implies both a shift of power from the West and the creation of a void to be filled by new powers (geopolitical actors), which in turn means the decentralization of power (as opposed to the traditional geopolitical view of the West as the centre). In Zarif's words, "We must be well aware of this reality that today, developments in international system do not start and end in the West" (Zarif 2016).

In this scenario, room exists for new actors to arise. Accordingly, Zarif (2016) continues, "On the other hand, if you wanted to talk about the global order, you would not be able to talk about configuration of the new international order without attention to West Asia region, and these realities signify a very fundamental development in international relations". Here the West as active and the East as passive is overturned, as the latter is now portrayed as playing a decisive active role in shaping the world, a position previously denied to the East in traditional geopolitical discourse. Also, the solidity of Western hegemony and dominant power in West Asia is shifted to a new, fluid shape in which centrality is neither solid nor coming from outside the region. A consequence of this fluidity of international conditions is the emergence of new players in shaping the geopolitics of the world. Zarif (2016) emphasizes that "At the present

time, even smaller powers can play a role through media and their sphere of influence. Today, the power and clout, which the Islamic Republic of Iran has, would not be possible under a bipolar world system and this is due to current fluid conditions in the world". The stability and security of West Asia, consequently, depends not on the West but on internal powers of the region, which today include non-state actors like Hezbollah and the so-called Islamic State (Daesh), whose existence is independent of, not limited to, a certain geography. As Zarif observes,

As you see, non-state and nongovernmental actors have entered the arena of political action, including in the field of security. On the other hand, such positive non-state and nongovernmental actors as the Lebanese Hezbollah as well as negative actors such as al-Qaeda and Daesh, are present in this arena and, for example, can both create security and undermine security. They do not need geographical expanse in order to take their action and all these changes are telltale signs of a fundamental development. (Zarif 2016)

This is indicative of fluidity of international conditions and undermines the traditional geopolitical assumptions that regard the West as the only (or the most important) player in shaping the world. He continues,

The important point is that within framework of these developments, West Asia region is no more a mere subject of action, but it is an actor. Therefore, when the future international system is in the offing, it is not like that other countries would make decisions about how to divide the resources that exist in this strategic region among themselves, but West Asia is now an actor in the arena of developments related to future international system without being a mere subject of other countries' actions. (Zarif 2016).

As the terms "subject", "actor" and "action" indicate, new roles have been assigned to new players. The binary opposition of active/passive, traditionally attributed to West and East respectively, has been reversed by the new indigenous players of the region.

Iran's political practice and consequently discourse are complex and multifarious. Iran's foreign policy is a complex blend of realism and ideological conceptualization (Ehteshami 2017: 250). Despite the emphasis by the Leader on self-sufficiency, Rouhani seems to be eager to trade more with the EU Member States so that they will be unwilling to re-impose sanctions if there is any disagreement over Iran's implementation of the JCPOA. After the Iran Deal, relations between Iran and the EU, especially with Germany, France and Italy, have been expanding as part of the country's pragmatic approach. Iran's economic ties with these major economies are attempts to re-enter the international market (Ehteshami 2017: 256). This pragmatism is manifested in Iran's commercial contract to purchase 100 Airbus aircraft as well as at least 20 ATR aircraft in 2016, in addition to signing an MoU with Shell in the same year to develop Iran's offshore gas fields. On the other hand, Iran's support of Assad, as a case in point, is interpreted in terms of the country's revolutionary policies. Thus, Iran's international relations have swung along the pendulum of revolutionary idealism and political realism (Ehteshami 2017: 256-57).

2. ENERGY AND INDUSTRY

In a speech to Iranian government officials in 2006, Ayatollah Khamenei put the notion of independence, as opposed to the domination of the West, at the centre of the Islamic Republic's strategy, calling for an emancipation of Iran and other Muslim countries from the grip of the West. In this speech he is quite concerned with the notion of political, economic and cultural independence from the West which, as he believes, has always tried to curb Iran and other developing countries. As he puts it:

The third principle is safeguarding political independence. This is very important. This is among the essential principles of the Islamic Republic. This independence is political and economic as well as cultural. We need to free ourselves from the shackles of the culture that the West has imposed on us. And this is another principle. The kind of movement, the kind of slogan, the kind of planning that ignores national independence is not principled. (Khamenei 2006)

This emphasis on independence, by implication, supports the premise that the West has always had a plan which aims at domination and exploitation of the Muslim (developing) world. Indeed, to use Khamenei's words:

The West has had plans for the Middle East since the 19th century because the Middle East region connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean. The Mediterranean Sea was where colonial governments used to deploy their forces and the Indian Ocean was where their colonies were located. And the Middle East was the region that connected these two locations to one another and they could not afford to ignore it. England used its influence in the 19th century and pressured Iran in order to protect India, which used to be Britain's colony at that time. We were sacrificed for India and the same was true of the entire Middle East region. This was how the foundations of Israel were laid. Different other factors emerged as well: the issue of oil, the issue of carving up the Ottoman territories after the First World War, the emergence of the Soviet Union. And the emergence of these factors made things worse. The West and its heir, America, have plans for the Middle East. In this sensitive region – which is oil-rich and is strategically and politically important – suddenly a government called "the Islamic Republic" emerges with its own principles and opposes the oppressive principles and aggressive policies of America. (Khamenei 2006)

Central to this notion of independence is a decrease in reliance on oil, as Khamenei specifies. And as the West, especially the United States, has "plans for the Middle East", Iran would be better off freeing itself from dependence on oil. The hostility of America, according to him, is precisely because it can no longer shackle Iran since the revolution. As he has it,

The most important divine blessing for our country, nation and government officials is that there is national dignity and independence. Today no power in the world can claim that it is dominant over our political system and that its statements, announcements or threats can affect the decisions we make. (Khamenei 2006)

Making the best use of oil resources and decreasing oil exports rather than using these resources for energy and meeting day-to-day expenses is, therefore, a way towards independence. As

he says,

It is necessary to pay attention to regional cooperation - the ongoing work related to ECO, Shanghai and other organizations. We need to follow up these things in a serious way. We need to focus our efforts on them. We need to make optimal use of our oil resources. According to experts, it would take 900 billion dollars' worth of non-oil exports and trade to earn the 50, 60 billion we earn by selling oil. This is a very important point. We earn that much money by selling oil and we use it to take care of daily matters. This does not make sense. This money should be spent in a more careful way. We are wasting our oil. Of course, this is not a recent development. Our economy and development has been based on oil for decades and it is not possible to change this situation overnight. Ten, twelve years ago, I told our government officials that as far as oil is concerned, the situation will be satisfactory the day we are able to announce that we will increase and decrease our output on the basis of our national interests, the day we are able to announce that we want to decrease our oil exports and use our oil for purposes other than producing energy. Using oil to produce energy is the worst way of using oil. This is while the world is discovering better ways of using oil and it is moving forward. When that day comes, we can feel happy that we have these oil reserves. (Khamenei 2006)

Along the same lines, In a meeting with Algeria's minister of mines and energy in 2016, Hamid Chitchian, Iran's energy minister, holds that "gone are the days when oil-rich states relied on petrodollars, as the global energy dynamics necessitate the development of domestic capabilities to build the future". He added "We are willing to transfer our energy experiences to all Muslim states, including Algeria" (Financial Tribune 2016). Typically, Iran's relation with Algeria is treated as a relationship between two Muslim states, rather than between countries in different geographical areas. Algeria is not seen as a Mediterranean country by Iran, and thus relations between the two are promoted as being of mutual interest, leading to both countries' economic independence from Western enterprises. Here, Tehran asserts the end of the long-held hegemony of petrodollars in establishing economic relations with the outside world, calling for the use of natural resources solely for the benefit of Muslim countries and peoples. Resources are to be used for development of links amongst Muslim countries. As Chitchian notes, "[I]sluch collaboration can help them [Algeria] reduce their dependency on western enterprises" (Financial Tribune 2016). Accordingly, Iran has consistently promoted its domestic policy of self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency in energy and water, for example, is said to be due to "reliance on domestic expertise", expertise which is said to have helped Iran export more energy (Financial Tribune 2016).

This emphasis on independence and self-sufficiency shows itself much earlier in the form of a plan, an agenda. In November 2003, a plan titled the "20-Year Vision Plan", which was prepared by the Expediency Council, was ratified by the Supreme Leader. The plan is referred to as the country's "horizon document" (Atashbar 2012). The aim of the plan is for Iran to be "the leading country in economy, science, and technology in the region by 2025, inspiring the region and the world with its constructive and effective interactions in international relationships" (Atashbar 2012). According to the plan, Iran will have secured 31.5 billion dollars in non-oil exports by the end of the horizon period. Having said that, a recent report by the World Bank provides a more realistic view of Iran's practical measures, regarding increase in non-oil exports. As the reports indicates, "Idespite the dominance of the oil sector-driven by the positive impact of the Joint

Comprehensive Plan of Action implementation on oil production and exports, there are some signs of dynamism in the non-oil sectors as well" (World Bank 2017). By the same token, both the concept of independence from the domination of the West, especially the US, and the idea of Iran as a source of inspiration for the Islamic world, including many countries in the Mediterranean, can be traced back to this document.

Similarly, on 17 August 2015, Khamenei gave a speech on the events which came to be known as the "Arab Spring", although Iranian officialdom rarely uses this term, preferring to refer to these uprisings as a divine "Islamic awakening". Of course, the adjective "Islamic" is also used for the Iranian revolution of 1979. Therefore, associations are made between what happened in Iran and the uprisings in several Arab countries. This implies, taking the time span between Iran's revolution and the "Islamic awakening" into account, the people in these countries are following the example of Iran; thus, the credit for the uprisings in the countries must go to Iran, and to the Supreme Leader accordingly, as he is the leader of the Islamic world/countries or what he calls the "Islamic region" (Khamenei 2015). Moreover, as the argument goes, the term "awakening" implies that all these countries had been in slumber and just then woke up to realize their true identities and the divine Islamic principles as enshrined in Iran's constitution and outlook. In other words, from Tehran's perspective, the reality of Islam has now opened their eyes, and they have come to challenge their Western-supported authoritarian regimes. Khamenei's diction rests heavily upon religious terms and shapes new concepts or diverts concepts through attaching religious terminology as predicates to events and places:

This began with the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. However, after the emergence of Islamic Awakening – that began four, five years ago in North African countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and other African countries – the enemies increased their pressures. That is to say, the enemy became anxious and uneasy in the real sense of the word. They adopted many measures that are continuing in the present time. Of course, they think that they have suppressed Islamic Awakening, but this humble person [Khamenei himself] believes that Islamic Awakening is not suppressible. (Khamenei 2015)

Given the binary opposition of "the oppressor" and "the oppressed", the West or what he calls "global arrogance" is taken, by implication, as an enemy of this "Islamic awakening" and consequently to Islam itself. As he says repeatedly, the United States "is the epitome of global arrogance" (Khamenei 2015). Therefore, Iran equates, and takes as predicate, all the unrest and socio-political movements against the ruling dictators in these countries to "Islamic awakening". These uprisings have Islamic motivations rather than a yearning for democracy. In this, the West is consequently regarded as the enemy of Islam and the supporter of those dictators – a concept quite contrary to the democratic principles that the West claims to stand for.

In contesting the Western discourse, Khamenei uses the terms "West Asia" to refer to what the West calls "the Middle East" and criticizes the latter usage:

The Europeans insist on referring to this region as the Middle East region. In other words, they locate east on the basis of Europe. To them, a region is Far East, another is Middle East and another region is Near East. Because of the Europeans' arrogance, this region has been called, "the Middle East" from the beginning. "The Middle East" is

a wrong name. This is West Asia. This is Asia – a large continent – and we are in West Asia. (Khamenei 2015)

Resorting to a kind of postcolonial discourse, Khamenei not only criticizes Western terminology and concepts but he creates alternative concepts that discredit Western assumptions of centrality, and emphasizes self-sufficiency of the developing countries.

3. WATER AND AGRICULTURE

When it comes to discussing the region known as the Mediterranean, Iran's official discourse rarely mentions agriculture and water, which is an indication that these issues, at least in the Mediterranean context, are not among Iran's mid- to high-level priorities and interests. However, discussions over agriculture and water are of course raised with regard to individual countries of the region. These countries are treated as part of the Muslim world and North Africa rather than in the context of the Mediterranean. Thus, the fact that they are in the Mediterranean is sidelined in the discourse; in other words, the concept of the Mediterranean and its associations are accordingly silenced in the discourse in question.

Under Khatami, Iran's publically announced policy and discourse mainly emphasized *détente*,⁴ mutual respect and cooperation with the international community. This policy was put to the test in the context of relations with Tunisia in the 2000s, as seen in the explanation by then Iranian foreign minister Kharrazi that "mutual trust" drives the Islamic Republic's new outlook. He expressed Iran's policy towards Tunisia in a joint meeting with his counterpart in that country, as reported in *Ettela'at International*, one of the official newspapers of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The foreign minister is quoted as saying: "We believe that the policy of detente and *mutual* respect will guarantee our interests as well as those of the entire world" (Ettela'at 2004; emphasis added). Kharrazi's emphasis, which presents Iran's policy, rests upon mutual cooperation since the term "mutual" is repeated during his talk. However, Iran's interest in expanding relations with Tunisia is motivated more by the country's position in the Muslim and Arab world as well as on the African continent, rather than because of its economic opportunities. As the newspaper quotes from Kharrazi, "Iran attaches importance to expansion of ties with Islamic, Arab and North African countries particularly Tunisia due to their deeply rooted cultural, historical and religious commonalties" (Ettela'at 2004). Moreover, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist tendencies of the West were emphasized in the Iranian discourse when the relations with Tunisia were discussed towards the end of Khatami's second term in office – and we should note that Iran was raising these issues with Tunisia's secular and West-leaning political regime under Ben Ali. As Kharrazi has it, "Iran opposes all types of hegemony and seek[s] unity among Islamic states, call[s] for respect for international rights and respecting each other's interests" (Ettela'at 2004). Kharrazi's emphasis on having a mutual relationship and the terms "hegemony", as well as "respect", imply Iran's policy of rejecting of any type of subordination as far as its relationship with the individual countries of the region is concerned.

4 The notion of *détente* first appeared in Iran's discourse in the early 1990s (under the presidency of Rafsanjani) but become state discourse during President Khatami's tenure (1997–2005).

This tendency towards independence has been a trademark of the Islamic Republic but has acquired a sharper policy focus in the context of Iran's "Axis of Resistance", constantly promoted and underlined by Iran's Supreme Leader in his discussions of Iran's regional and international relations. The following statements are interpreted and explained in the light of this doctrine, which emphasizes a resistance to US hegemony and an anti-Zionist and anti-Israel position – a policy according to which Iran supports the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and Assad's regime in Eastern Mediterranean. While referring to military advancements by Assad's forces, Eshaq Jahangiri, Iranian vice president, in a meeting with Imad Khamis, the prime minister of Syria, stated: "these advances owe to the courage and resistance of Syrian army and people" (IRIB 2017).⁵ These military successes are celebrated in the context of Iran's continuing support for the Syrian regime and Iran's decision to stand by Damascus since the beginning of the crisis, and in what Iran refers to as the "war against terrorism". Iran believes that it has spared no effort, in line with its doctrine of "Axis of Resistance", to support its partner (IRIB 2017). To reinforce the resistance front, the two countries also promote economic links, as part of which they have signed contracts for the promotion of trade and investment across the fields of transport, energy, agriculture and industry. In this regard, Iran has undertaken to invest in developing five thousand hectares of agricultural land in Syria (IRIB 2017).

Earlier, we noted the importance of self-sufficiency as a driver of Iran's development strategy and promotion of relations with Muslim countries, but since the 2010s this policy has been refined into what Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, proclaimed as the policy of Resistance Economy (*Eqtesād-e-moqavematī*). Officially declared in 2012, this new economy strategy is to be implemented by all three branches of the state as well as the Expediency Discernment Council of the System, to increase reliance on domestic capacities and reduce dependence on oil exports as a way of resisting the pressure of US-led sanctions on the country. Point number 12 of the proclamation requires an increase in the resistance economy and a decrease in economic vulnerability, via: a) developing strategic ties and cooperation with other countries, especially the neighbours; b) having a diplomacy of supporting economic goals; and c) making the best use of international and regional organizations (Khamenei 2012b).

In line with Iran's anti-imperialist discourse is its concern with the water security of the Muslim Middle East. Ali Mamouri and Asef Kazemi (2011) have, for example, highlighted "Israel's role in water crisis in the Middle East". The article identified Israel as a threat to the water security of countries of the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean, with an emphasis on Syria and Lebanon. It reads, "[t]he Zionist regime has always had a greedy eye on the water resources of the countries of the region including Syria, Lebanon and Jordan and has tried to fulfil its aggressive domination through war, occupation and the so-called peace talks" as well as "strategies of aggressive dominance and expansionism", with the dream of establishing a country that would stretch from "Nile to Euphrates" (Mamouri and Kazemi 2011: 137). Iran, arguably, sees itself as a champion of this precious resource.

5 All the translations are the authors' own.

4. MOBILITY AND MIGRATION

For Iran, it is the security dimension which overrides other matters, and other important issues such as migration and mobility play a secondary role in its conception of the Mediterranean and its people-to-people contacts within it. Nevertheless, while Iranians do travel for religious "site seeing" in Syria and for communal interaction with Lebanon's Shia population, they have tended to use Turkey (which Iranian nationals do not require a visa to visit) as the destination of choice for migration. After the revolution, Iran's relations with most Arab Mediterranean countries deteriorated, and only Algeria and Syria were counted as friendly countries by Tehran, with Libya being seen as a tactical partner. Relations with such key Arab countries as Egypt and Morocco underwent rapid decline and a long period of tension ensued, which lasted until 2011. It was only following the 2011 uprising in Egypt that Iran sent its first ambassador to the country. As for Morocco, Iran cut its diplomatic ties in 1981 over King Hassan II's hosting the exiled Iranian monarch. Similarly, Tunisia's embassy in Iran was closed during Iran–Iraq war in the 1980s and tensions remain while Tunis supported Iraq against Iran. Indeed, it was in the 1990s that the two countries started to establish diplomatic relations.

Inversely, Iran has begun to pay particular attention to the promotion of tourism as a source of hard currency and for the strengthening of people-to-people relations. In Rouhani's administration, significant attention is being paid to tourism to boost the economy and decrease its reliance on oil. This is a feature of Iran's so-called resistance economy. However, while the EU is being targeted for the promotion of tourism, the Mediterranean does not seem to rank highly in terms of tourism, in Iran's discourse. As already noted in the context of migration and mobility, Iran's view towards the Mediterranean is more concerned with security issues.

Iran is sensitive to the issue of refugees as a major humanitarian and security concern. President Rouhani, thus, in a meeting with the visiting Dutch Foreign Minister Bert Koenders in Iran in September 2015 remarked that "[t]he solution to this problem [flood of refugees to Europe] is to seriously fight and counter terrorism" (PressTV 2015). He warned that "[t]errorism should not be viewed as a problem limited to our region; rather it [should be considered as] a global scourge and fighting it requires global determination" (PressTV 2015). Thus, by calling the refugee crisis a "problem" and using the term "terrorism" which follows it immediately, President Rouhani is arguably making a link between terrorism and the recent crisis of refugees from the Mediterranean region to Europe.

Along the same lines, in a meeting with EU diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini in October 2016, President Rouhani warned against the spread of terrorism from the Levant to North African countries. In his exchanges, he called for strong action to stop the spread of violence by "a serious battle against terrorism" and warned that without decisive action the world "will see several terrorist governments and entities emerge in the North African region" (AFP 2016). The spread of terrorism, according to Rouhani, is due to the migration of so-called ISIL members from Syria and Iraq to North Africa, the result of which is manifest in attacks that have been carried out in Algeria and Egypt. Accordingly, as a solution to the crisis, he urged the European Union to put pressure on regional powers to stop supporting rebel groups in Syria. This correlation between mobility and terrorism in the Mediterranean implied in Rouhani's words stems from his security-oriented discourse towards the migration issue in the region. In other words, he views the Mediterranean as a penetrated region and, therefore, a vulnerable one when it comes to the unregulated movement of populations.

However, as already mentioned, Rouhani has paid significant attention to tourism in general to boost Iran's economy post-JCPOA. In fact, if it were not for the tensions between Iran and some Arab countries and the security issues in the Mediterranean, tourism between Iran and the region could have been subject to Iran's general policy of opening up the country to tourism. In the following, we will analyse Iran's discourse regarding tourism in general, which is given specific attention after the 2016 nuclear agreement.

Iran has emphasised tourism since the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as the Iran Deal. One of the most important consequences of the deal, as President Rouhani remarked in September 2016, is that Iran's economy could benefit significantly if tourism is given priority. To him, at this juncture in history, taking full advantage of the deal requires an improvement in Iran's tourism industry as one of the ways to increase people's welfare, create more job opportunities as well as self-sufficiency in products, and at the same time improve Iran's position and dignity in the region and the world. It has been pointed out that Iran is among the five countries in the world with the highest number of tourist attractions and is also amongst the cheapest to visit (EghtesadOnline 2016). To recap, Rouhani aims at boosting the economy by attracting more tourists to the country as a rigorous strategy to decreasing reliance on oil income. To reach this goal, he is aware that economic stability, especially low inflation, is a prerequisite to attracting tourism. He points to the fact that Iran has managed to decrease its inflation from 40 percent to 8 percent in just four years. Therefore, "when a tourist calculates the expenses", as Rouhani puts it, "s/he does not worry and can plan easily" (EghtesadOnline 2016). As part of this pro-tourism policy, Iran's foreign ministry has announced that based on a government decision in 2016 citizens of all but nine countries are enabled to obtain a visa upon arrival at the country's airports (Tasnim 2016). In line with this policy, Iran's plan is "to facilitate the entrance of tourists given the extensive tourism capacities of Iran" (Tasnim 2016). In the same vein, the head of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO), Masoud Soltanifarhad, stated that "Iran has formulated plans to increase revenue from the tourism industry within the next ten years to an amount equal to the income generated by oil sales" (Tasnim 2016). This is indeed an ambitious plan. Therefore, Iran's recent policy regarding tourism supports its stated aim of finding alternative revenues that would decrease dependence on oil; and at the same time requires the country's decision makers to open up to the world.

CONCLUSION

Having looked at Iran's discourse in the four areas of agriculture and water, energy and industry, immigration and mobility, and political ideas, it can be concluded that an alternative worldview is evident in the discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This discourse is grounded in an alternative narrative and distinct use of terms and terminologies which have embedded within them different conceptualizations and concepts. So, Iranian elite have begun using terms such as "West Asia" instead of the "Middle East" in reference to their geopolitical neighbourhood, and "Islamic Awakening" instead of "Arab Spring" when discussing the post-2010 Arab uprisings. This could be read as an attempt at creating an alternative world order which challenges the dominant Western discourse. Along the same lines is Iran's use of the phrase "Axis of Resistance" which refers to its own Arab-based regional alliance structure and

the ideological driver of its regional security approach. The phrase "Axis of Resistance" not only negates the "Axis of Evil" but also defines Iran's approach to the East Mediterranean/Levant countries. However, this phrase is at the same time indicative of Iran's worldview. Another aspect of Iran's discourse deals with the policy of "resistance economy" that primarily aims at reducing the economy's vulnerability (to international pressures) and reliance on oil income. But the term also has been used to justify acceleration of economic growth, cultivation of strategic relations with other countries, use of diplomacy in support of economic goals, and finally the best use of international and regional organizations. With regard to political ideas, anti-hegemonic perspectives and critical geopolitics (as opposed to the geography-oriented and state-centred traditional geopolitics of the West) form another feature of Iran's discourse in framing the world. Some significance is accordingly given to Shiism as an influential factor in the geopolitics of the region, and one that features heavily in Iran's discussions of, and involvement in, the Eastern Mediterranean.

Iran's post-revolution doctrine of "neither West, nor East", as well as its emphasis on resistance both in the form of economy of resistance and Axis of Resistance, and its posture of always taking the side of the revolutionaries and the oppressed, all serve to indicate that Iran's self-image positions the country as a victim: it is a country against which the world powers are always conspiring. To justify this suspicious attitude, Iranian leaders always refer to a series of recent incidents of oppression and interference in the country. The events cited vary from the coup in 1953 organized and run by the US and the UK against the democratically elected government of Mohammad Mosaddegh, to Iraq's war on Iran where the West and Arab countries supported Saddam Hussain, to the imposed sanctions that Iran regards as absolutely unfair over its (peaceful) nuclear programme. Therefore, Iran's self-image is that of victimhood: a righteous man with few friends and many enemies. Its view of many other countries mainly follows a dichotomy derived from this self-representation. Others are either with the oppressed or are with the oppressors. The oppressors include states such the US, Israel, sometimes the UK and those that Iran considers as being under the influence, and promoting the agenda of these countries. Following this categorization, the type of states and even non-state actors with which Iran aims to develop relations are those which are friendly (or at least not hostile towards Iran) and either challenge America openly or show some sort of independence from the United States, at least in some areas. This categorization includes states and entities such as Syria, Iraq, the Hezbollah of Lebanon, the Palestinian Hamas and the Houthis of Yemen in the MENA region; and Cuba, Venezuela, Russia and China in other parts of the world. But Iran is also keen on developing links with what it regards as neutral actors and those that possess and enjoy strategic autonomy. In this category fit the European Union as well as India and South Africa. Iran's interest in the EU is commercial but also strategic, in that the Islamic Republic regards the EU and many of its members as credible partners who have an interest in Iran's development and progress and are therefore not interested in isolating or stigmatizing the country. The pragmatism which Iran assigns to these powers also drives its own approach to them. The EU's recognition of Iran's legitimate interests, and Iran's acceptance of this, can help in driving a broader security dialogue which the EU can extend from a bilateral platform to a (regional) multilateral one. In arguing this, we are directly reflecting on the EU3's discussions with Tehran in the period 2003–05 which led to the signing of the November 2004 Paris agreement (Ehteshami 2010: 106). This agreement not only led to the suspension of Iran's nuclear enrichment programme (for a confidence-building period) but went so far as to consider confidence building, nuclear cooperation and assistance with Iran's membership application to join the World Trade Organization.

As noted earlier, the term and concept of the Mediterranean as a region is absent in Iran's discourse. Rather, the emphasis as indicated in its discourse rests on a set of Muslim countries which are part of the Islamic Ummah. This is in line with Iran's claim to leadership in the Muslim world. What is important in the region for Iran is its counter-hegemonic Axis of Resistance, with supporting the Palestinian cause and upholding an anti-Israeli position as one of the main principles of its foreign policy. This contrasts hugely with the EU's position which regards Israel as an associate member of the European Union. The EU states themselves have normal economic and political relationships with Israel. The EU is also committed to the two-state solution and formally recognizes the right of a Palestinian state to exist side by side with the state of Israel. Iran's hostility to Israel is one the main reasons for preventing the normalization of its relations with America and consequently has created a situation in which Iran is not able to fully integrate itself into the international community. Moreover, due to the continuing hostility between Iran and the United States and Iran's aggressive posture towards Israel, countries in the region (such as Saudi Arabia and Israel) have been able to form tacit agreements, secure indirect and direct US support, and directly target Iran's resistance front in order to undo Iran's relations with Arab Mediterranean countries. However, with Hezbollah's heavy military involvement in Syria and Hamas's strategic distance since 2012 from the Axis of Resistance and its acceptance of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, Iran's capacity to pose a threat to Israel has drastically decreased. In addition, with the re-election of moderate Hassan Rouhani as president in Iran in May 2017 and his election promise that all the sanctions against Iran including the ones not related to the nuclear issue would be removed (in order to achieve this Rouhani has indicated that his government will use the 5+1 negotiation example as a model for resolving Iran's longstanding issues with the West), it seems that there is an opportunity for negotiations between the EU and Iran aimed at finding ways of de-escalating tensions between Iran and Israel.

With regard to the multi-actor part of the analytical framework, it is noteworthy that Iran has tried to exert its influence in Lebanon and Palestine via such non-state actors as Hamas and Hezbollah rather than through the Lebanese government or the Palestinian national authority, to achieve its goals in line with the Axis of Resistance doctrine. With regard to Syria, before the Arab Spring, Iran's main point of reference in Syria was President Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian government. Iran did not pay much attention to the non-state organizations in Syria mainly because they were either under the control of the government or too weak to be considered as important actors in the country. Yet, after the civil war in addition to Assad's regime Iran has established relations with some groups that fight alongside Iran and the Syrian army against the armed Syrian opposition groups. In contrast, although the EU has tried to channel its relations through official lines in Lebanon and Palestine, it has also established relations with the civil societies in these countries and has worked with them in different areas such as humanitarian and cultural issues. We recognize that following the Syrian civil war, the EU also had little option but to try and influence the course of events in that country through establishing relations with non-state actors – albeit those that were fighting Assad's regime. Given the relative success of Iran, Russia and Turkey in securing a partial ceasefire in Syria and creating some "de-escalation zones" in the country, Syria is one of the arenas in which the EU, through negotiations with Iran, Russia and Turkey, can play a positive role towards finding a peaceful political solution to the conflict. Both sides can influence the key actors in Syria to guarantee the success of such a resolution.

Regarding energy, the EU's approach differs from that of Iran. As the EU places more emphasis on imports from North Africa, it seems to place less on Iran's oil and exports. However as Iran increases investments in new gas and oil projects to raise its output it naturally views the EU as a large and prosperous market for its oil and future LNG gas output. Iran is competing with the major oil- and gas-producing Mediterranean countries in this regard and will face stiff competition as the EU prioritizes access to Algeria, Libya and the emerging gas giants of the Eastern Mediterranean (Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Cyprus and Palestine).

With regard to the policy area of migration and mobility, both Iran and the EU view the Mediterranean as a penetrated and vulnerable region due to the unregulated movement of populations. Iran's discourse here is security-oriented, as it is concerned that the migration of radical jihadists from North Africa to the Levant might pose a threat to its allies in the Levant and Iraq. Similarly, the European Union members are part of the international alliance in the war against terror to combat terrorist groups such as ISIL in the region. Moreover, the EU countries are worried that the flood of migration from Syria to their territory will endanger their social fabric and destabilize their security. They are also concerned that with the wave of migration, some terrorists might infiltrate into the refugee flows and could potentially serve as operatives for attacks in the EU countries. In contrast, since Iran is not a destination for Syrian refugees, it is not as concerned as Europe. Nonetheless, recognizing that the refugee crisis is a serious challenge for the EU, and comes with huge burdens and costs for its members, Iran is trying to convince the EU that a solution to the crisis is obtainable through defeating Assad's opponents, many of which Iran considers as terrorist organizations. This strategy, Iran contends, will eventually lead to the end of the Syrian civil war, bring about stability in the region and resolve the migration crisis.

Two fundamental documents discussed in this study are exemplary of the Islamic Republic of Iran's discourse, indicating the view of the Leader and officials of Iran and its position in the world. These are the 20-year vision plan and resistance economy policy documents. The quotations analysed in this paper are taken from the statements of the Leader and political figures who are influential in framing the concept of the world and the Mediterranean, and also those who follow, describe and delineate the dominant discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Although in many of these citations there are direct references to the countries of the Mediterranean, Iran's discourse is almost silent when it comes to the EMP/UfM or the ENP. However, the discourse analysed here contain thoughts and policies about the position of Iran in the international system and Iran's view towards the world. Indirectly certainly, the claim can be made that Iran's discourse encompasses the Mediterranean and all its associated systems.

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