

CHAPTER I

PROPOSAL

A. Research Purpose

The purpose of completing this paper is to answer our curiosity about the Iranian utilization of Non-state Armed Groups (NSAGs) as written on research question. It is expected that the analysis from this paper could be an additional course of knowledge. Honestly, this paper is also aimed at fulfilling the main requirement of graduation in Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta.

B. Background of Problem

In 1979, an Islamic revolution, led by Shiite cleric Imam Khomeini, succeeded to overthrow the shah from power. The last shah, Reza Pahlavi, was not supported by people, especially by Shiite clergy, because of his autocratic method of ruling, secular view and his closeness to the west in term of policy.¹ This could be seen from his close tie with the US and the recognition of Israel. In addition, his governance was considered suppressive and out of Islamic values. His government was not supported by people and clerics. He also had a clash with traditional class of

¹ *Background note: Iran*, (accessed on April 30th 2009); available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm>

merchants, which is called as Bazaari.² Since that revolution, Iran has become a republic after hundreds of years under Shah's monarchic rule. This revolution has changed many aspects within Iranian life.

A new revolutionary theocratic regime's policy can be characterized as seeking regional influence by initially trying to export the revolution to the region, resisting the west and Israel, as well as pursuing nuclear capability. One of Islamic republic's radical foreign policy is the support toward Islamic militant groups in the region.

In the last two decades, Iran has been supporting several well-known NSAGs in Middle East and elsewhere. They are resistance groups that are anti-America and anti-Israel. Most of them are Shiite but some are not, depending on its interests. They vary in the level of support they get. Some get tacit, some get partial and some get full support.³ This policy is such a controversial policy that can increase regional tension. Most of moderate Sunni Arab states, which are pro-west, oppose this policy because they accuse Iran is trying to create regional turmoil by assisting Hezbollah's violent activities in Lebanon, as well as Hamas in Palestine and Badr Corps in Iraq. Thus, Iranian support toward Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) has provided bad

² "Mohammad Reza Pahlavi," in *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* (accessed on April 30th 2009): available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammad_Reza_Pahlavi

³ James M. O'brien, "Exporting Jihad: Iran's Use of Non-state Armed Groups" (Master of Arts in law and Diplomacy Thesis, TUFT University, 2006)

hope toward 'Middle East Peace Process', especially in case of Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq.

There are some groups to be mentioned. In Lebanon, Hezbollah is a popular militant group, which was created directly by Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) of Iran as a result of Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory. Hezbollah becomes the most important of Iran's ally that has an abundant of track records. Hezbollah regularly engages in terrorism, criminal enterprises, and violates the laws of war.⁴ After the end of Lebanese civil war, Hezbollah directly violated the mandate of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559 by maintaining its militant wing. This resolution calls for the removal of all foreign troops from Lebanon and disarmament of all militia. However, this resolution has had little influence over the status of Hezbollah's arms and has done nothing to stop outside support from both Syria and Iran. As its purpose of formation is to deter further Israeli expansion, Hezbollah focuses its operation near Israeli border. It has become even more aggressive. Since founded in 1982, Hezbollah has launched thousands of rockets into Israeli territory. In addition it has also launched several major attacks including: the 1983 suicide bombings of French Headquarters and U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, killing 58 French soldiers and 241 Marines; the 1984 hijacking of an Air France passenger jet; and the 1988 bombing near Saudi Arabian Airlines offices in Kuwait City as a result

⁴ Keith A. Petty, "Veiled impunity: Iran's use of non-state armed groups," *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy*, 22-MAR-08. Available from http://www.accessmylibrary.com/comsite5/bin/aml2006_library_auth_tt.pl?item_id=0286-34837503

of Saudi Arabia's severance of diplomatic ties with Iran just weeks before.⁵ It usually carries out border attack toward Israeli patrolling soldiers.

Hezbollah is very capable of committing guerilla war. In 2006, for example, it kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and killed some others when patrolling near the border. This action forced Israel to respond by launching a massive attack at Hezbollah's main base in south Lebanon. The war was inevitable. Unfortunately, due to Iranian support, Israel was defeated and finally pushed to withdraw after three weeks of war.

In Palestine, Hamas has become an important Iranian ally, which poses a significant threat toward Israel. Iran assists hundreds of million dollars annually to Hamas for its operation. Hamas carries out violence in its operations such as; kidnapping, attacking convoy, sniping and suicide bombing. Radical struggle, no recognition, no negotiation and no compromise with Zionists, are the principles embraced by Hamas that has tackled peace efforts. Hamas always keeps its tough stance of no recognition to the state of Israel.⁶

The Israeli disengagement from Gaza Strip in August 2005 created a new situation which accelerated the establishment of an area fully controlled by Hamas. It was quick to use its increased military power to make political capital in internal Palestinian affairs. It won the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in January

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ "Who are Hamas?," *BBC News*, January 4, 2009 (Accessed June 12, 2009); available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1654510.stm

2006 and formed the government the following March. Unfortunately, because of its terrorist behaviors, this government was not supported by most of Arab states and the west as well. United States, Israel, some Arab and European states imposed an embargo to Hamas' government by stopping financial assistance and blocking access to and from Gaza. At this moment, Iran appeared as the only one who wants to assist Hamas. However, this government didn't last long because some of its ministers finally quit after a conflict with Fatah came to war. After that, In June 2007, Hamas carried out a putsch in the Gaza Strip, neutralized Fatah and the Palestinian Authority's military and political power and set up a radical Muslim entity in the Gaza Strip, nicknamed Hamastan. The new entity, supported and aided by Iran and Syria, directs its own internal and foreign affairs, conducts a terrorist campaign against Israel and has divorced itself from the Palestinian Authority in West Bank, led by Abu Mazen from Fatah.

After controlling Gaza city, Hamas intensified its terror toward Israel by launching rockets and targeting civilians. Hamas is still arresting an Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, which was kidnapped two years before as a bargaining power.⁷ Since 2006, Hamas intensified its resistance toward Israel by firing more rockets into Israeli territory, which caused several death and injury. As a response, Israel launched a massive military attack on Gaza city in the last 2008 until early 2009, Operation Cast Lead. According to UN figure, in 2005, 1,194 Al Qassam rockets were fired at Israeli

⁷ "Hamas 'captures 2 Israeli soldiers'," *Press TV* (accessed on 13 May 2009); available from <http://www.presstv.com/Detail.aspx?id=80428§ioned=351020202>

territory. In 2006, the rocket fires increased to 1,786, and in 2007 it decreased a little to 1331 rocket fires. According to Israeli security agency, in 2008, 2,048 rockets and more than 1,672 mortar shells were fired from Gaza strip into Israel. This doesn't include the period of Operation Cast Lead, which begun on 27 December 2008, during which the rocket and mortar fires increased significantly.⁸

In Iraq, Badr Corps and Mahdi's Army are also other influential NSAGs. The Badr Corps was initially formed by Iranian Revolutionary Guard to deter Saddam's regime during Iraq-Iran War.⁹ It is also aimed at deterring Iranian Kurdish rebels. Mahdi Army is a Shiite militant group that dominates slum area in Baghdad, led by Moqtada Al-Sadr. It has thousands of militiamen and large influence in southern Iraq. The concern whether Mahdi army is backed by Iran rose after Al-Sadr visited Iran several times during US operation in Iraq. After the fall of Saddam's regime Badr corps and Mahdi's Army fought against US-led military force. At the same time, their members are actively involved in creating new Iraqi government. Some of them become politician and some other join military and police service. Badr Corps and Mahdi Army become the most annoying resistant group for United States because

⁸ "Attacks on Israeli Civilian by Palestinians: Rocket and mortar fire into Israel," *B'tselem Publication*, (accessed May 13, 2009) available from http://www.btselem.org/english/israeli_civilians/qassam_missiles.asp

⁹ Ali Safavi, "A Brief on the 9th Badr Corps (Brigade)," *Near East Policy Research (NEPR)*, Sep 01, 2001. (Accessed May 13, 2009) available from http://www.neareastpolicy.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=30

they have many personals with advanced weapons, as well as large support from Shiite Iraqi people. These groups have killed thousands of US-led troops in Iraq.

Because of the rising role of non-state actors in recent international affair, the states often utilize NSAGs to achieve its special interests. Sometimes, International law applicable to the states is not applicable to NSAGs. As the result, the states that utilize NSAGs can do everything while hiding behind the international law. So the utilization of NSAGs seems to be reckless. It is out of international law.

Although the utilization of NSAGs is not in accordance with international law, many states have done this policy. In Middle East, this policy has ever been implemented by Iraq and Libya in 1980s, when Saddam and Khadafy secretly organized terrorist movements to attack US interest all over the world. However, this policy finally ended with peril because they had to face political pressures and economic sanctions from the West. Because of harder international pressure, Libya finally quitted and re-oriented its policy. But Iraq didn't follow the path until US-led troops attacked it in 2003.

Unlike Libya and Iraq, Iran has been utilizing NSAGs for at least 30 years long and it is still doing it until today. The impact of this policy has been significant toward regional security that finally affect to Iranian foreign relation. Since this policy has provided a difficulty in setting up peace in Middle East, especially in Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine, Iran is considered a trouble maker. As the result, it experiences severe diplomatic ties with neighboring states and the west. The US cut diplomatic tie with Iran following militant activity during Islamic Revolution 1979.

The US then blacklisted Iran and put it among terrorist states. In addition, Bush administration included Iran in 'the axis of evil' along with Cuba and North Korea. Other Middle East states keep away from building relation with Tehran for safety reason because some of them have experienced several impacts caused by Iranian-backed militant groups. States like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Algeria and Morocco have been annoyed by Iranian policies.

Iranian utilization of NSAGs not only affected its foreign relation but also its economy and military. Iran has been experiencing extreme economic sanctions posed by United States and European countries. As the result, Iran experiences some difficulties that slow down its economy.¹⁰ Iran also experiences hard military embargo from US and EU that make it unable to purchase military equipments and technology from those countries. Iran cannot even get the spare parts for its commercial transportation.

Now, Iran position in the region is in danger. Its nuclear program has made the problem becomes more complicated. Some groups of Iranian people---reformist movement---urge the government to change its foreign policy to be more compromise with the west in order to regain international trust so that it can restore its economy and foreign affair. The demand to restore economy and prosperity is getting high among Iranian people. The west has offered several economic compensation if Iran want to change its foreign policy. However, Iran prefers another path. Iran is still

¹⁰ Nader Habibi, "The Iranian Economy in The Shadow of Economic Sanctions," *Brandeis University*, October 2008, Available from <http://www.brandeis.edu/crown>

overtly supporting NSAGs, as well as enriching uranium. Iranian leaders have repeatedly said that it is necessary for Iran to support Hezbollah and Hamas in fighting the occupiers. It sounds brave indeed. Last year, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad even stated in his speech that ‘Israel must be wiped off the world map’, as reported by Washington Post. Iran also insists that the outside powers must be eliminated from the region.

Although the international and domestic pressures are getting tighter, Iran doesn’t give up. In contrast, it keeps maintaining its policy of utilizing NSAGs. Iran even increases its support toward Hezbollah, Hamas and Iraqi Militants in the last few years. So, there must be something behind this foreign policy that we need to find out. It seems that Iran has been utilizing these groups for a certain purpose.

C. Research Question

Even though Iranian policy to support NSAGs is controversial, Iran keeps maintaining this policy. “What are the purposes behind Iranian utilization of NSAGs?”

D. Theoretical Framework

In general, a theory is an interrelated set of parsimonious, fact-like statements assembled for the purpose of explaining a set of phenomena and predicting its future occurrence. Theory helps us to simplify and connect complex and seemingly disparate real-world phenomena. In analyzing state’s foreign policy, we need to use

theories as a means of simplifying the complexity of foreign policy processes, with the main goal of explaining how and why foreign policy decisions were arrived at. According to Bruce Russett and Harvey Starr, policy refers to something about choice and choosing from various courses of actions. While, according to Jack C. Plano & Roy Olton foreign policy is formulized as:

*“Foreign Policy is strategy of plan course of action developed by the decision makers of a state vis a vis other state or international entities aimed at achieving specific goals defined intern of national interest”.*¹¹

Bruce Russett and Harvey Starr also described decision making as a process that focuses on the people involved in the foreign policy process and on the part of the process that deals with choosing among alternative course of actions.¹² Another important concept in analyzing foreign policy is national interest. National interest can be defined roughly as a country’s goal or ambition whether economic, military or cultural. National interest is very often used as a mean to analyze the purposes of a state’s foreign policy.

Regarding state’s support to NSAGs, Belgin San Acka differentiates state’s support to NSAGs into two types; direct and indirect support. He also insists that there are two causes that make a state to be likely giving its support to NSAGs, which

¹¹ Jack. C. Plano & Roy Olton, *The International Relation Dictionary*, (Rinehart and Winston, 1969), page 128

¹² Bruce Russett and Harvey Starr, *World Politic: the Menu for Choice*, Freeman, page 261

are intentional or unintentional cause. To see those types and causes, take a look at the table below.

Table I. Types and Causes of State Assistance for NSAGs

TYPES		CAUSES	
<i>Direct</i>	<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Intentional</i>	<i>Unintentional</i>
Providing sanctuaries Giving weapons Training camps Financial aid	Political support Peaceful propaganda Fund raising Trade activities Passive support	Conflict escalation Bargaining chip Regional influence Create instability	Weak or low capacity (collapsed / failed states) Democratic freedoms
Greece: PKK camps Syria: Lebanese Hizballah	European states: PLO	Iran: Palestinian Hamas	Afghanistan: Taliban European states: PKK

Sources: Belgin San Acka¹³

There are three aspects in NSAG phenomenon; host state, sponsor and target. Host state is a state in which a NSAG operates. Sponsor is the actor who supports NSAG's activities in term of financial or materials. Target is the actor who is aimed to be the victim of NSAG's activities. A weak state, which doesn't have domestic capacity to control its territory, often falls into a safe place for a NSAG. If this happens to a state, the outside actor, who has a specific interest on this situation, will try to take advantage by sponsoring any NSAG within its border. Then, either host state or another actor can be a target.

¹³ Belgin San Akca, "Supporting Non-State Armed Groups: A Resort to Illegality?," A paper prepared for delivery at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, *University of California*, August 30th-September 2nd, 2007. page 20

For a better understanding, we need to recognize common motives that make a state pay supports to NSAGs. Belgin San Akca has explained that states have several motives for their support of NSAGs; such as *gaining international prestige, destabilizing an adversary, having a bargaining chip during possible negotiations, and ideological affinity with a NSAG*.¹⁴

Rational Actor Theory

Rational actor theory is very common used in social science, psychology and economics. In international relation study, this theory insists on the rationality of an actor, especially state, in deciding policy based on rational calculation. Rational actor theory holds that individuals or actors must anticipate the outcomes of alternative courses of action and calculate which one will be best for them. Rational individuals choose the alternative that is likely to give them the greatest satisfaction (Heath 1976: 3; Carling 1992: 27; Coleman 1973).

The government of a State is a core player in formulating foreign policy based on national interests. When faced to a number of alternatives, a state's leader must choose the best choice from available options based on excellent calculation. The central element of calculation involves a cost benefit analysis: *Pleasure* versus *Pain*. The choice will be directed towards the maximization of *individual* pleasure.

¹⁴ Ibid, Page 2

In the case of Iranian support to NSAGs, Iran gives both direct and indirect supports to Hezbollah, Hamas and Iraqi militants. Iran is such a sponsor state of NSAGs and is not a host state. Iran supports NSAGs outside its boundaries because Iranian government is relatively strong to avoid NSAG's emergence inside its territory. The Iranian support is intentional, which is caused by several reasons such as; Conflict escalation (i.e. with Iraq during Gulf War), Bargaining chip (i.e. during negotiation with The US), Regional influence (i.e. in competition with Arab States), and Creating instability (i.e. In Palestine, Lebanon and recently Iraq).

This policy is exactly passed through a clear calculation of cost and benefit. According to the theory, a state decides a certain policy because that policy is likely giving more benefits or the benefits it will get is bigger than the cost it has to pay. As a sponsor, Iran has spent much money and energy to support its NSAGs activities. As the result of this policy, Iran has also been experiencing several risks that it has to pay. Firstly, it experiences a conflict with the west and severe relation with its neighboring Arab states. Secondly, it experiences a hard economic sanction imposed by the west that affects its economy. Thirdly, it experiences a military embargo imposed by the west that causes the shortage of its military equipments, as well as the difficulty of aviation spare parts.

However, Iran gets more precious benefits from this policy regarding to its long-term purposes. Firstly, Iran can achieve ideological acceptance from Muslims due to its support to NSAGs, by which it can achieve regional influence and become a regional power. As the only one non-Arab Shiite state in the region, maintaining the

utilization of NSAGs is likely a better choice for Iran in order to achieve the ideological acceptance from its Sunni Arab neighbors, rather than quitting the support to NSAGs. If Iran decided to stop its support to NSAGs, its relation with the Arab regimes would be better, but it is unlikely that Iran would gain the recognition for its regime's legitimacy. Moreover, it is unlikely that the Arab regimes would let the Iranian Shiite government to dominate the region. On the contrary, maintaining the policy to support NSAGs gives more benefits. To play an Islamic card by recalling an anti-Israeli rhetoric, at the same time supporting the resistance of Hamas and Hezbollah, would open the door for further involvements in regional issues, thus letting Iran becomes a regional power. This policy is effective in attracting people's opinion, by which Iran would be seen as a legitimate state in Middle East that protects Muslims and promotes Islamic government. A professor of Tehran University, Hossein Seifzadeh agreed that Iran had to play the Islamic card in order to gain more favorable image among Sunni Arab population.¹⁵ Now, for example, Ahmadinejad and Hassan Nasrullah have become the most popular figures in Middle East because of their high profile position on Palestine issue.¹⁶ In the level of state, Iran's involvements in critical regional issues of Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq lead it to be a regional power. This will leave no more choice for other Arab states but to recognize Iranian Islamic ideology.

¹⁵ Gareth Porter, *"Iran's Anti-Israel Rhetoric Aimed at Arab Opinion,"* (accessed on 15 April 2009); available at <http://www.antiwar.com/porter/?articleid=14379>

¹⁶ *ibid*

Secondly, Iran gets a bargaining chip during the negotiation with the United States. The utilization of NSAGs is the best choice because it significantly increases Iran's bargaining power vis-à-vis the US that could enable it to maintain its Islamic regime and nuclear program, as well as to persuade the US to withdraw its sanctions and pressures toward Iran. A significant capability of Hezbollah and Hamas could pose a considerable threat toward U.S. interests in the region. More or less, NSAGs can be used to intimidate US or Israel and to halt any possible actions toward Iranian interests. If Iran decided to abandon its NSAGs, Iran would be weaker and impossible to negotiate with the US and defend its national interests from US threats.

Thirdly, Iran achieves international prestige from Muslim world and from the world as a whole. For Iran, gaining international prestige through the resistance against global hegemony is better than gaining it from the cooperation with international regime because the circumstance forces Iran to do so. Therefore, the support to NSAGs is very important to be maintained. In regional level, any victory of Hamas or Hezbollah in their engagement with Israel will automatically lift up its prestige in Muslim world. By supporting these Islamic resistances against foreign oppression, Iran is portrayed both as a friend and as the protector of Muslims. In international level, if NSAGs can win Iran's negotiation with the US and help it maintaining its nuclear program, then Iran will gain an immense prestige from the world as a whole. Otherwise, Iran would probably lose its independent action if it chose to abandon its NSAGs because the United States would control Iran's

behaviors. Under the US's influence, Iran would not be able to achieve an applauding international prestige.

Fourthly, Iran can destabilize the United States, Israel and moderate Arab states. Having weaker enemies is very important for security reason. The utilization of NSAGs remains essential to maintain because it really helps in decreasing the threats posed Iranian enemies. The activities committed by Iran's NSAGs in the region have weakened the influence of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. In addition, the asymmetric warfare carried out by Hezbollah, Hamas and Iraqi insurgents also have weakened US and Israel in some aspects such as financial, army, mentality and public opinion. Never-ending wars against militants committed by the US and Israel have made them busy and frustrated. Billions of dollars the US spent annually for Middle East campaign has affected its domestic economy and politics. The United States has been frustrated in Iraq, where it can do nothing against Iranian growing influence there. The Israel has now been encircled by Iran's NSAGs so that its position vis-à-vis Iran is weakened. The destabilization of these Iranian enemies has diminished the threats they posed toward Iranian interests and ultimately reduced the possibility of enemy's attack on Iran. Having the enemies destabilized, Iran can feel more secure. On the contrary, If Iran decided to abandon its NSAGs, its enemies would grow bigger and bigger and Iran might face more dangerous threats from them. The United States and Israel would be the first to attack Iran and the Arab states would pose a greater threat toward Iranian sovereignty.

E. Hypothesis

My guess is that gaining ideological acceptance from Muslims to achieve regional influence, having a bargaining chip during negotiations with the US, gaining international prestige both from Muslim world and from the world as a whole, and destabilizing the US, Israel and moderate Arab states, are the motives behind Iranian utilization of Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs). In order to achieve those purposes, the utilization of NSAGs remains the best choice among other options.

F. Range of Research

This research will emphasize on the reasons behind Iranian utilization of NSAGs. The explanation will be focused mainly on political conditions faced by Iran in Middle East and the other actors that play inside. The explanation will be more on politics rather than economy. I will focus on the connection between Iranian government and several militant groups in Middle East and will take three NSAGs (Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iraqi militants) as the example. I am not going to explain too much about those NSAGs one by one in details, but I will be interested to emphasize more on the Iran's necessity of utilizing those groups. In this paper, I need to limit the timeline, that is between 1979 Islamic Revolution and present, in order that the research will not go too far.

G. Method of Research

The method of research is qualitative analysis. The information and data necessary for the completion of this paper are acquired from many second sources, which are relevant and reliable such as; books, journals, newspapers, magazines, and reliable internet articles.

H. System of Writing

In this paper, I am going to write based on the arrangement below;

CHAPTER I: in this chapter, I would describe the research purpose and background of problem so that we would have a clear understanding about the problem that needs to be analyzed. The problem question will also be mentioned to ease the analyses in order that the explanation will be focused. Then, a theoretical framework will be set in order to help me explaining the problem systematically. Based on these elements, I will put my hypothesis for the problem. I will also ensure the range of research and the method of collecting data so that my explanation will not be out of range and my source of information will be scientifically reliable.

CHAPTER II: In this chapter, I will explain about the relation between Iran and Non-State Armed Groups. I will describe the profile of Iran, along with its governmental system and foreign policy orientation. I will describe the definition and characteristics of NSAGs. Then, I will explain the profile of each Iranian-backed

NSAG, which consist of Hezbollah, Hamas and Iraqi militants. The kind of support and how Iran supports them will also be explained in this chapter.

CHAPTER III: In this chapter, I will show the impacts of Iranian utilization of NSAGS. The impacts toward Iranian foreign relation relating to its relation with the West and neighboring states will be explained in the first section. Then, the impacts toward Iranian Economy and Iranian military and aviation will also be explained in the next section of this chapter.

CHAPTER IV: In this chapter, I will explain the benefits gained by Iran from the utilization of non-state armed groups (NSAGS). I will explain the calculation behind the policy of maintaining support to NSAGs and prove that this policy remains the best option among others. This will include several variables such as; gaining ideological acceptance, having bargaining chip during the negotiation with the US, gaining international prestige, and destabilization of adversaries.

CHAPTER V: In this chapter, I will conclude the achievement of the research.