

## **A Critique on Shia Geopolitics Discourse; With Emphasis on Genealogical Approach**

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### **Abstract**

Geopolitics In modern thoughts was in based on place as a key factor in understanding the geopolitical zones. But, in the postmodern thoughts, is emphasized on “Space” Instead of “Place” are emphasis on near discourses to each other in public space. For example, the shia geopolitics unlike geopolitical objective effects, has no Visual effects neither the territory nor any level of mapping. But a kind of an attempt to strengthen new words Discourse after Cold War is that threatened the Shia is intended to produce soft power for the west Countries. The idiom of Shia Geopolitics is revealed a Power structure system which can be realized to incentive coined the term. This paper is trying with the re-reading of terminology of Shia Geopolitics, stressed Iran’s, through a “Conceptual Genealogy”, that is done in form of “Discourse Method”, and disclosure of the" invisible structures of power "to give a better understanding of these term.

The results of the research show that located of Shia Iran in Matrix Sunni countries in the Persian Gulf, Always one of The West Maneuver Fields was for political Pressure action against Iran. So that The schemes such as “Iran Fears”, “Shiite Crescent”, and “The New Middle East” from regional and trans-regional actors purely has been a strategy to drive out Iran from playground area.

**Keywords:** Genealogy, Discourse Territoriality, Shia Geopolitics, Shia Crescent, Iran.

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**Introduction**

It is commonly believed that the basis of all geopolitical theories, whether traditional or critical, is “power”. However, “Traditional Geopolitics” focuses on the elements of “Place” and “Geographical Boundaries” as the key factors for understanding geopolitical regions, while “Critical Geopolitics”, rather than focusing on the element of boundary and place, puts more emphasis on close “discourses” together, not in a specific place, but in a general space. In other words, in critical geopolitics, the power strategy is always in need of employing space, and therefore, discourse. In this respect, the second perspective is the main theme of the present study. This perspective deals with how “Geopolitical Discourse Of Shia”, using critical geopolitics and theories of specialty seeks to create a soft power for heterogeneous countries which possess “the same security strategy” in light of such discourse.

The “Geopolitical Territory of Shia” involves Iran as its core and a set of Shiite regions in Middle East countries like Iraq, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon. This term was first coined by MallekAbdullah II, the Shah of Jordan, in 2004, and was advertised extensively throughout the world in 2006 visit of Israel Prime Minister from Jordan through their joint efforts with the help of the president of Egypt and the king of Saudi Arabia. The aim of this plan and the efforts made for realizing it was to create “doubt” that Iran, in a geopolitical plan in the crescent-shaped strip in the Middle East tries to dominate “Shia” over “Sunnis” in the Islamic world using Shiit communities, and confront “Shiite Crescent” with “Wahabism Geopolitics” on the one hand, and “Israel Geopolitics” In Arabian Middle East, on the other (Mojtahedzadeh, 2012: 27). Since Iran is the only large and powerful country of the region and enjoys a high capacity of influencing regional and international transformations, it seems quite necessary to pay a close attention to its role and position in “Shia Geopolitics”. In this regard, the present study, through a critical approach and based on the “Althusser’s re-reading”, “Foucault’s Genealogy”, and finally, “the Soft Power of Josef Nye” intends to answer the following questions: what are the hidden aspects

of “Geopolitical Discourse of Shia”? And ”what are the strategies of Arabic countries, Israel, and the U.S. for isolating Iran”? The objectives of the present study are analyzing “Geopolitical Discourse of Shia” and Unfolding of the strategy of the above-mentioned countries. The findings indicate that in effect, three strategies of “Islam phobia”, “Shiite phobia”, and “Iran phobia” in this discourse have led the U.S. and Israel to use the three strategies and Sunni Arab governments to use Shiite phobia”, and “Iran phobia” to promote their own regional security.

Nowadays, nation-states are effective actors in the geopolitical stage and expand their authority range in many dimensions. At the same time, religious actors expand their competencies in both state and non-state areas throughout the world. Hence, it is required to consider such actors as the alternatives of the government and the transformations which change the geopolitical area and international relations (Simbar, 2006: 115). Therefore, the present study addresses the geopolitical effect of religion in promoting geopolitical changes of Asian South-west.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study is a “Developmental Research” conducted through a “Critical Approach” based on “Post-Positivist Methodology”. To analyze the research topic, a combination of “Althusser’s Re-Reading theory” and “Foucault’s Paleontology and Genealogy” are used together with the “soft power of Josef Nye” in “Discourse Analysis Model” within the framework of “Discourse Method”.

### **Theoretical Bases of the Study**

The theoretical basis of the present study is a combination of “Althusser’s re-reading theory”, “Foucault’s Paleontology and Genealogy”, and, “the Soft Power of Josef Nye” which are proposed in the discourse analysis model.

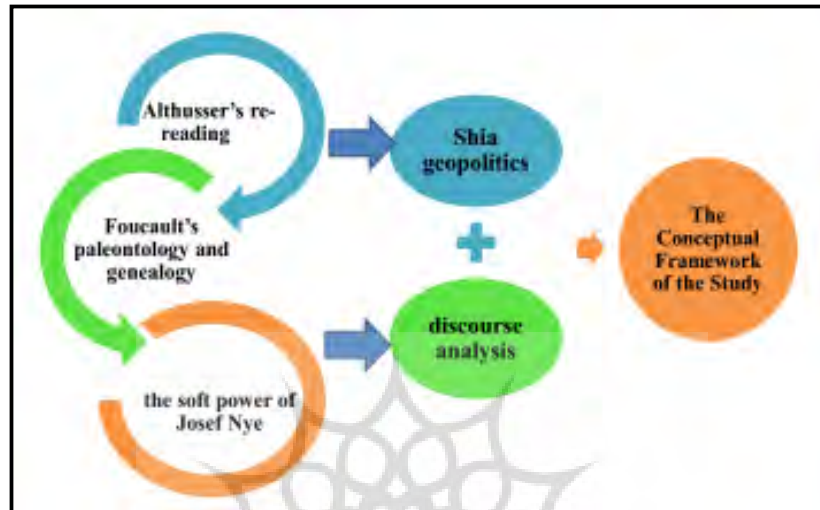
The term “Re-Reading” was first used by “Louis Althusser” the structuralist professor of the 20th century in his book “re-reading of capital” aimed at discovering invisible constructs dominating the thought of Carl

Max when he wrote his book “Capital”. The term, being one of the basic concepts of post-modern thought, was used for criticizing positivist approaches of humanities since then. “Re-Reading”, in fact, refers to “Genealogy” as mentioned by “Michael Foucault”. By “Re-Reading”, it is meant clarifying the conceptual roots of a word which are probably hidden behind invisible constructs. In genealogy, Foucault intends to explain the formulation principles constructing discourses; in later works, he tries to investigate the historical emergence of discourse making by looking for their relation with power and domination (Haghighat, 2007: 486). Foucault refers to the set of relations among sciences in a specific era as “knowledge System” or “Episteme”. “Episteme” is the set of relations which unify discourse actions in a given era (Zamiran, 1999:52). In general, Foucault intends to introduce the ideas that power “is a way to affect the subject(s) acting through their act or ability to act” (Foucault, 1997: 220). This conception of power requires one to analyze power relations more as the “Confrontation of Strategies” and less as resources belonging to one single actor (ibid, 210-211). Strategic conception of power changes our understanding of social constructs. In other words, in the framework of power relations defined in terms of the confrontation of strategies, “social constructs” can be conceived of as creating a context where such strategies expand. Guzzini (1993) inspired by the works of Pierre Bourdieu uses the term “field” to refer to an area of political behavior created through a specific set of social constructs or norms. Accordingly, Guzzini defines field as “the playing grounds where the actors realize their personal strategies and reconstruct certain game rules by playing there” (Guzzini, 1993: 166). Carine Fierce, using the concept of Wittgenstein’s language game, proposes a similar idea and believes that in such games, actors tend to present strategic maneuvers (Fierce, 1998: 17). As mentioned earlier, “Social Constructs” can be viewed as fields where one can trace the strategies of the actors. This field is comprised of inter subjective rules and norms which construct meaning thereby enabling actors to involve in power relations. Hence, it appears that one can have such a view to understanding the nature

of “Shia Geopolitics” and uncover its hidden aspects; also, strategy and its security and political aspects can be pictured on the bases of Foucault’s conception of “power”. In the following, Josef Nye’s discussion of “Soft Power” is explained as the driving force of the U.S. foreign policy and its relation with the idea of “Shia crescent”.

Josef Nye, coining the term “soft power”, proposed of the most famous and mostly-cited concepts in the “macro strategy discourse” in the U.S. He proposed this concept in 1990 in his book “bound to lead”, and since then, this concept was expanded in books and papers (Nye, 1990: 32). Nye, in his three books “bound to lead” (1990), “the paradox of American power” (2002), and “soft power” (2004) explains the concept of soft power. Although “genealogy of soft power” dates back to some decades ago, it was Josef Nye who offered a rather clear interpretation of it: “the ability to shape others’ preferences which are usually tied with abstract properties like character, culture, value, political institutions, and interesting policies in a way to be considered as legitimate or having ethical validity”. Accordingly, “soft power” is not the power to command; rather it is a sort of power of conformity (Nye, 2004: 5-7). Considering the foregoing discussion, it can be reasoned that proposing a subject as “Shia Geopolitics” is in fact a representation of a soft power which leads to the conformity of the foreign policies of Sunni Arab countries, the U.S. and Israel simply by means of seduction without the need to exert hard power. However, in order to address the way this idea has become a political discourse and what constitutes its “nodal point”, one need to discuss discourse and the way it is analyzed.

Fig. 1. The Conceptual Framework of the Study (developed by the authors)



“Discourse” refers to a system of values, rules, and meanings in an autonomous linguistic context which has independent impacts and influences all aspects of social life through which, countries and other social actors perceive and define themselves and the world (Dehghani Firozabadi, 2008: 58). Formation of issues and subjectives like “Shia Geopolitics” is an instance of discourse And subjectivity production and development which can be interpreted in accordance with the soft power big powers like the U.S. and for meeting their security needs and goals in the Middle East. In 1950s, a branch of linguistics, known as “Discourse Analysis” emerged which entered into social sciences with a background of language philosophy, hermeneutics, and a new-positivistic approach. Today, it is used for studying social phenomena. “Discourse Analysis” as a method for analysis can be defined as “identifying the relation among propositions and looking at the whole of what results from such relations” (Tajik, 1998: 22). Hence, this theory involves some degrees of relativism and there is no fundamental thing which gives identity and meaning to other phenomena; rather, the identity of everything is acquired through the network of others’

identities that became articulation together. Different elements which might be meaningless without each other, gain a new identity when they come together within the framework of a discourse. The relationship among these elements becomes possible through articulation. In this paper, while re-reading the Shia Geopolitics, its discourse articulation is addressed.

### **Formation of the term “Shia Crescent” or “Shia Geopolitics”**

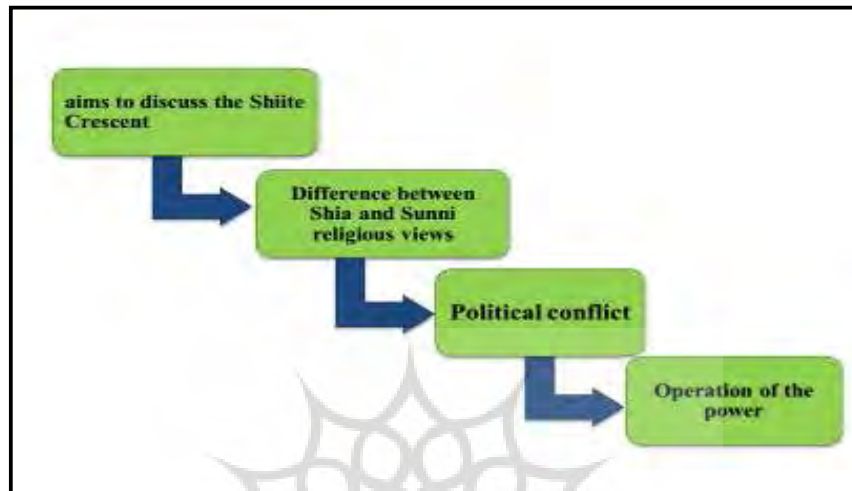
There is no certain answer for the questions who was the first person to use the term “Shia Crescent” or “Shia Geopolitics” and what were their purposes. Many believe that the use of this term must be related to long time ago, i.e. early days of Islam. Some others consider the age of Buyid and Safavid dynasty as the peak of using this term. However, regarding the approach of the present study stated in the section of theoretical basis, the mere term is not the theme of this study. It can be the case that before using this term by Malik Abdullah , it has been used in classes by teachers, in conferences by scholars, in meetings by politicians, and in press, e.g. Washington Post, by journalists, as “Thual” (2003) referred to it in his book “Shia Geopolitics” (Thual, 2003: 20). But in discourse analysis, words are considered when they gain “meaning” and start to “generate power”. For instance, “Shia Crescent” is a term with an academic background in German literature used for the first time in 2004, in strategic discussions of the regions” by Malik Abdullah II, the king of Jordan in his interview with “Washington Post” when visiting the U.S. (Washington post newspaper, December 8, 2004; page A.1). At that time, when the nuclear power crisis of Iran was in its highest level, on the one hand, and Iraq was inclined toward civil war, on the other, he claimed: “the main results of Iraq war is formation of a Shia Crescent under the control of Iran” (Walker, 2007:1). He believed that a regional strip from Mediterranean Sea to Indian Ocean and Caspian Sea which possesses abundant gas and oil resources is under the influence of Shiite Islam. Such Shiite empire is supported by “Tehran”. Hosni Mubarak, the deposed president of Egypt, repeated this term in 2005 in a Al-Arabiya TV interview and argued that “Shiites who live in the

countries of the region are more loyal to Iran than their own country” (Ibid). In fact, using this term simultaneously with the rule of Shiites in Iraq complemented the Shiite influence area which involved Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. It led the conservative “Sunni” political-security institutions of the region to express their concerns about the increase in the power and influence of the “Shiites”, particularly Iran, and formation of an effective “Shia Crescent” in the region. That is to say, the aim of proposing the idea of Shia Crescent and its geopolitics can be said to raise the tension and conflict between the Shiites and the Sunnis. Factors like September 11 incidents and the change of power equations in Iraq in favor of Shiites were among the main reasons for proposing the idea of Shia Crescent by the King of Jordan which has been supported by West to raise the tension among Muslims. In this plan, the center of the Shia crescent and its geopolitics is the Islamic Republic of Iran, while the “Iranian Policy” is based upon the unity of Muslims and integration of Shiites and Sunnis. Some attempts made by Iranian government prove this fact, such as the plan of “the week of unity” in Iran, naming the last Friday of Ramadan as “the day of Quds” in international level, and supporting “Hizbullah” and “ Hamas” in regional conflicts. Therefore, the idea of Shia Crescent is a tool for exerting regional and international pressure on the countries involves, particularly Iran. Although this plan can increase the weight of Shiites, improper positioning against it can damage the nature of Shiites active presence and confront Arab countries of the region directly and indirectly supported by the West with Shiites.

In this regard, we believe that the term Shia Crescent or geopolitics as a “Discourse” affected international policy and transformations of the Middle East when it, as a “Soft Power” started to “create power” for some Arab countries, Israel, and the U.S. Finally, the goal of proposing the issue of Shia crescent was indeed changing “differences of religious view” into “political conflict” and using it in “power equations” (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. The Goal of Proposing the Issue of Shia Crescent (Developed by the authors)



### **Arabic-Western Discourse Making; innovation of Shia Crescent or Shia Geopolitics?**

Disputes about Iran's nuclear program, plots of political power in Lebanon, and continuation of violence in Palestine and Israel can be addressed based on two explanatory models: first, the idea of "Shia Crescent" and second, the "rise or revival of Shiite". These two models are distinct from each other and can rarely be employed for the same phenomena. The reason is that the idea of Shia Crescent is developed in the Middle East by Sunni governors of some Arab countries, while the idea of Shiite rise and revival has been propagated by Western elites. Nevertheless, all such theories are based upon an analysis of "threat and danger on the part of Shiite" (Bröning, 2008: 60-61). Hence, two types of "Discourse Making" can be identified in Shia Geopolitics: 1. Arabic discourse making with nodal point of Shia Crescent, and 2. Western discourse making with nodal point of Shia rise and revival. In the following, the formation and purposes of each of them are explained.

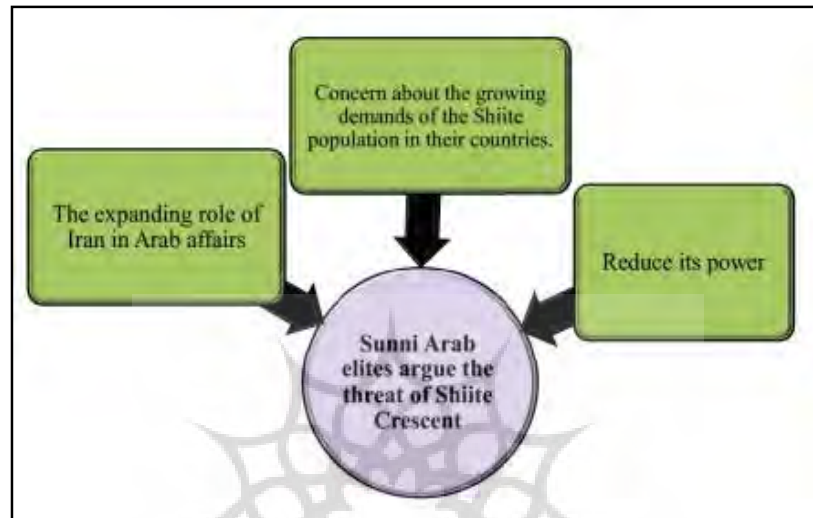
#### **Arabic Discourse Making**

As mentioned earlier, the concept of "Shia Crescent" was constructed in

2004 by the king of Jordan in his interview with “Washington Post” and presented the idea of emergence of a conclusive Shia Crescent as a potential threat for the Middle East. He clearly stated that planned changes are made for enhancing Lebanon Hezbollah by Asad’s government in Syria, the Shiite government of Iraq after Saddam, and finally Tehran (Robin & Baker, 2004). The publication of this theory in the region raised strong reactions of some countries and many Arab media accused Jordan’s King of encouraging sectarian inclinations. Responding to those criticisms and emphasizing his idea, Malik Abdullah II repeated that talking about Shia Crescent looks very simplistic, but politically, it is a fact (Black, 2007). The theory was refined and strengthened later so that idea of Shia Crescent was proposed with a geopolitical range expanding from Pakistan, Azerbaijan, and poppy field of Afghanistan and shaping the big Middle East to be the first Islamic government attaining the status of an Empire after Ottoman Empire (Butcher, 2007). Hosni Mubarak, in order to enhance the above theory and describe Shiite minorities of the region, referred to them as fifth column of Tehran. In his 2006 interview with Al-Arabiya TV, he stated that most Shiites of the region are more loyal to Tehran than their own country.

“Sunni Arab Elites” have three reasons for threatening nature of the Shia Crescent: 1. Reduction of their own power, 2. Concerns about the growing demands of the Shiite population of their countries, and 3. the expanding role of Iran in Arab Affairs (Fig. 2). According to Sunni Arab elites, revival of Shiites in Iraq has changed the power and policy bases in the Middle East; this situation will lead to new actions in regions where the Shiite majority, due to their political and social population, demand equal distribution of power, such as Iraq and Bahrain. In fact, Sunni Arab elites believe that formation of such a pattern for the first time in Iraq will pave the way for other Shiites in Arabic countries to demand their social and political rights, which through a process, will finally lead to removal of power from Sunni Arab elites in so-called Shia Crescent regions (Barzegar, 2008: 88).

**Fig. 3. Reasoning of Sunni Arab Elites about the Threatening Nature of the Shia Crescent  
(Developed by the authors)**



In this respect, there is no doubt that some Arab states will strive to face their challenges and threats, especially to reduce the pressure for “democratization”. Arab states found Iraq’s occupation by the U.S. as an opportunity to dissuade the U.S. from exerting pressure for democratization. Therefore, the idea of Shia crescent was proposed by Malik Abdullah and subsequently, by Egypt and Saudi Arabia with this in mind. The proposition of this idea had a totally political nature from the beginning which was caused by the danger Saudi Arabia and Jordan felt about the central role of Iran in the identity and organization of Shiites. The goal of this idea was separating Iran from the main body of the Islamic World (Mossallanejad, 1391: 164). Of course, the old competition with Iran and the concerns of Arab countries about empowering Iran in the region played a part in this regard. In effect, the main reason for proposing the idea of Shia crescent in the Middle East was to strike “Shia-phobia” and “Iran phobia” in the region to first, decrease the pressure of the U.S. for democratization in the Middle East, and second, to increase and highlight the need of the U.S. to

conservative Arab countries (Haji-yousefi, 2009: 180). In sum, the idea of Shia crescent proposed by Arab countries is a project through which Arabs strive to keep the present situation, confront Shia revival in the region, and increase Shia-phobia to protect their national interests and strategic interactions with the U.S. against the soft power of Iran in Asian Southwest. This is while the project of creating Shia crescent or unity of Shiite communities, and developing new Shia geopolitics in the Middle East by Iran is followed as protecting and enhancing resistance geopolitics instead of Shia crescent in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Javdani Moqadam, 1391: 57).

#### **Western Discourse Making: Shia Geopolitics**

“Noam Chomsky”, arguing that the most part of energy reservoirs of the Middle East is located in an area called Shia Crescent, believes that Iran’s control over this crescent is the most terrible nightmare of the U.S. He considers Shia Crescent as referring to the Cold War period and believes that Tehran is the center of the crescent which extends from Iran to Hizbullah in the south of Lebanon and covers the Shiite-residing areas in the south of Iraq and Syria (Ahmadi, 2011, 244). The U.S. develops the plan of democratization of Middle East countries and attacked Iraq for this reason. When the Shiites won Iraq’s 2004 elections, it concluded that democratization in the Middle East countries can threaten its own national security in the region. Hence, it strives to manage the crises of the Middle East through the idea of Shia Geopolitics and raising the tension between Shiites and Sunnis.

In summary, although Americans did not pay attention to the issue of Shia rise – as one outcome of Saddam’s overthrow- in their attack to Iraq, they are now seek to use this opportunity for their own benefit. In other words, the U.S. intends to use the worries for Arab countries about Islamic awakening and empowering of Shia for forming a regional alliance involving Arab countries and Israel against Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and Hamas.

### **Articulation of two Arabic-Western views in Shia-Phobia Discourse**

In this section, it is attempted to present the discourse articulation process of the idea of Shia crescent based on the countries which pursue their interests by proposing that idea. In fact, the statements of Jordan's king and Egypt's president were in line with the interests of the U.S. in the Middle East causing it to take the idea into consideration, so that "Vali Nasr" the counselor of the president (George W. Bush, Son) academically analyzed the regional development in terms of Shia emergence (Nasr, 2006: 25). According to Vali Nasr, revival or rise of Shia has a significant impact upon the national security strategy of the U.S. in which, the Shiite Iran has been defined the major challenge for American national security (the national security strategy of the United States of American, Washington. March, 2006). Therefore, the idea of Shia crescent was shared by some Arab countries and the U.S. with Israel to control the global challenges of the Shiite. The Israel state was at that time faced with continuous threats of Iranian president, so they welcome the idea (Ben- Horbin, 2008:57). Saudi Arabia having witnessed the failure of "Wahabism Geopolitics" in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Central Asia, and Caucasus until the early 2000s, on the one hand, and having faced with the simultaneity of such failures with the rule of Shiites in Iraq, on the other, not only considered all these transformation as the results of the success of geopolitical position of Shia Crescent discussed by Israel, Jordan, and Egypt, but welcome the idea greatly and rapidly joined the developers of the hypothesis, as well. In this regard, this country commenced expansive efforts for putting an end to Iran's domination on Persian Gulf, the power of Shiite majority in Iraq, and changing Bashar Asad's regimen in Syria (Mojtahedzadeh, 2011: 28).

In this way, the concept of "Shia Crescent", after being proposed by Jordan's king, became a basis for "Shia-phobia discourse" and was presented as the "power discourse". It could enter some countries of the region, the U.S., and finally Israel into the "same security discourse" leading to "generation of soft power" for these countries. But, why do these countries continually use the term, and what is the role of this concept in the

national security strategy of these countries? In what follows, it has been tried to address these questions.

### **The Position of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Shia Geopolitics**

Ezzati (2009), in his book “Shia Geopolitics and the security of Iranian boundaries” argues that in new era, the situation of Shiism in Iran is distinct from other Shiite areas of the Middle East. He states that the two factors of Islamic revolution of Iran and Lebanon’s civil war have presented the issue of Shiite as a geopolitical factor (Ezzati, 2009:17). But, when and for what purposes has the term Shia Geopolitics entered into political discussions and equations, and what is the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in it?

Before the idea of Shia crescent was proposed by Malek Abdullah, “Francois Thual”, the French researcher, in his book “Shia Geopolitics” had prepared the ground for formation of this discourse in scientific and academic settings. In this book, he had argued that the geographical gravity centers of Shiites are areas which affect the power relation throughout the world. And the Shiites residing Persian Gulf coasts are geopolitically important as 70% of world’s oil which is crucial for survival and economic growth of the world is located in this area. Any change and unrest in this region can have broad economic and political outcomes (thual, 2003: 20). Indeed, Thual was trying to induce the idea that Shiism was at the center of more regional and international disputes, and most Shiites reside in geopolitically significant areas of the world. This has provided them the power to challenge the world (ibid, 72). Thual, like other Western scholars in the area of political geography and traditional geopolitics such as Mackinder, Ratzel, and Haushofer, strives to introduce some areas as a danger for the West from an orientalist viewpoint and using the theories of domination; one time the ideology of communism, another time terrorist countries, and the other time Shiite countries. In fact, “otherness” and “enemy-making” is the key to all of their theories, and accordingly, places and countries change in line with the changing international context and construct, and this time, Shiite countries are the focal point of these theories.

It seems that “Thual” feels obliged to warn political leaders, supervisors, and experts of the West of the “danger of Shia” and call for a solution. In doing so, he sometimes exaggerates and argues that the “interests of the West” are endangered by empowering of the Shiites (Lakzaei, 2003: 26). In effect, a glance at the books, papers, and maps promoting the idea of Shia Crescent would reveal that all of them, unanimously, introduce the Islamic Republic of Iran as the center of this geopolitics. The reason is that, among all Shiite countries of the region, Iran has the highest political, social, cultural, and military position and its geopolitical position has located it in the center of energy oval of the world. I.e. to Caspian Sea from north and to Persian Gulf from south! Hence, all theories focus on limiting and isolating Iran, and controlling its power in the equations of Asian Southwest. In the next section, the “Shia Geopolitics” is re-read through “interpretation of the maps” and the invalidity of the claims of Arabic-Western countries is discussed.

## **Analysis**

### **Cartography of Shia Geopolitics; a Constructivist Approach**

Re-reading the concept of Shia geopolitics means releasing it from a meta-narrative construct beyond which, as Foucault argues, lies “power”. Analysis of the meta-narrative requires understanding of the political map of Shiite countries and showing their geographical facts which are not basically understandable in light of the concept Shia Geopolitics.

“Maps” have been constructed to affect the way we see and perceive the world, as well as to create and continue special discourses about the world. This is more realistic about maps which aim at depicting the land (Fotiadis, 2009: 1). In fact, maps, today, have lost their purity and have become victims of the mistakes the first cartographers who claimed depicted the world as it is, not as they view it (Rekacewicz, 2006: 4). Currently, non-impartiality of cartographers is evident, and it has been realized that all maps and pictures are social constructs (Fotiadis, 2009: 4). We should investigate how maps construct “meaning” and continue “special

discourses". Studying "the power of maps" would reveal how cartographical methods play a key role in a vast range of issues related to international relations (Matthew, 1997: 2). In "modern cartographies", Peter Vujakovic acquaints us with useful tools for investigating the way media use maps for enhancing narratives; whereas, "Critical Cartography" seeks to show representations, hidden messages, and power relations behind the construct of geographical knowledge as a broader area of knowledge. It focuses on the maps and methods constructing geographical knowledge (Vujakovic, 2002: 187-202). "Maps" can no longer be considered as objective images of the "world as it is"; rather, they are socially constructed images of the "world as it seems". Through common discourses and inter-subjective perception, "Maps" change into political expressions about facts enhancing specific narratives and supporting specific identities; they continue specific "representations". Extensive use of "Maps" in media, by government, and for education, as powerful images for representation of the world and tools to act in the world, requires a more critical and deeper understanding of the method through which "Maps" act politically. Under the comprehensive belief in the objectivity of "Maps", an indulgence in methods of cartography reveals its "socially-constructed nature" and reminds us how "Maps" aid in the construction and continuation of dominating discourses about the world. For example, designating a region as "Shia Crescent" is implicitly determining a "Foreign Policy". To show how "Maps" work, the idea of impartiality of "Maps" should be discarded. It should be shown how "Maps" construct "meaning" and how this meaning constructs "identities" which affect the "way we behave" in the world.

In this regard, we believe that "Shia geopolitics" represents the interests threatening the geographical map of Shiite countries against Sunni countries. In a definition, geopolitics means "competition of political units over land". Hence, three main bases of geopolitics are competition, land, and political units. "Re-reading" "Shia Geopolitics" according to this definition would reveal that the concept refers to competition of Shiite political units with Sunni government over land or land resources. This



situation involves the unity and integration of these units and continuity their “Political Map” so that the term “Shia Crescent” has been used to describe it. In what follows, it is tried to analyze maps 1, 2, and 3, and finally, using map 4, prove the unrealistic nature of the claims of developers of “Shia Crescent” and “Shia Geopolitics”. In effect, the main argument of the present study is that “Shia Geopolitics” has objective representation neither in cartographic level nor in reality (geographical) level. The developers of the idea try to induce it in reality by means of tools like “Map”. This paper addresses the hidden aspects of this issue.

As indicated in map 1, a green line, called “Shia Crescent” starts from Lebanon, passes through Syria, Iraq, and Iran, ends in Bahrain. The important point about “map 1” is geographical continuity of Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and Bahrain, showing the number of Shiites in those countries as percents; Lebanon 32%, Syria 60%, Iraq 65%, Iran 89% and Bahrain 65% while it is not the case in reality and objective representation of geography.

**Map 1. The Map of Shia Crescent as Claimed by the West**



Source: U.S. Central Information Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/redirects/ciaredirect.html>

Shiite populations of these countries have been distributed in special areas; even in there borderlines of a country like Iran, “Sunnis” live, and Shiites do not have geographical connection everywhere. In other words, this “map”, not paying attention to the exact geographical location of Shiites, both at country and regional level, tries to induce the idea of geographical continuity of Shiites countries by merely drawing a “crescent”.

“Map 2” is indeed “map 1” in which the number of Shiites in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Bahrain is indicated by percents as shown in “map 1”. However, the main difference between the two maps lies in the “Crescent” drawn in this map.

Map 2. The Map of Shia Crescent as Claimed by The West



Source: U.S. Central Information Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/redirects/ciaredirect.html>

In this map, the “Crescent” starts from Lebanon and ends in Iran. Thus, it is the opposite of crescent in “map 1”. From the two maps, it can be concluded that both try to induce “Shia crescent” in the region. In fact, the developers of such maps believe that the “map” must merely induce the formation of a “Crescent” in the region, no matter it is top-down or bottom-

up!

In “map 3”, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Bahrain are shown in green to show the “Geographical Continuity” of Shiite countries and formation of Shia Geopolitics. The map is practically “Representing Shia Crescent” by drawing a “Crescent”. In fact, it depicts each of these countries, without any reference to their various sects and religions and their distribution to express the goals of the developers. Even if one accepts the “geographical continuity map” as a factor for creating “Power” and considers geopolitical interests as the outcome of organic vicinity or relation of the given political units in the Middle East, the concepts of “Shia geopolitics” and “Shia Crescent” do not gain scientific reality. For instance, Iran and Iraq are two Shiite countries that have had conflicts and disputes more than any other country.

**Map 3. Representation of Shia Geopolitics as Claimed by the U.S.**



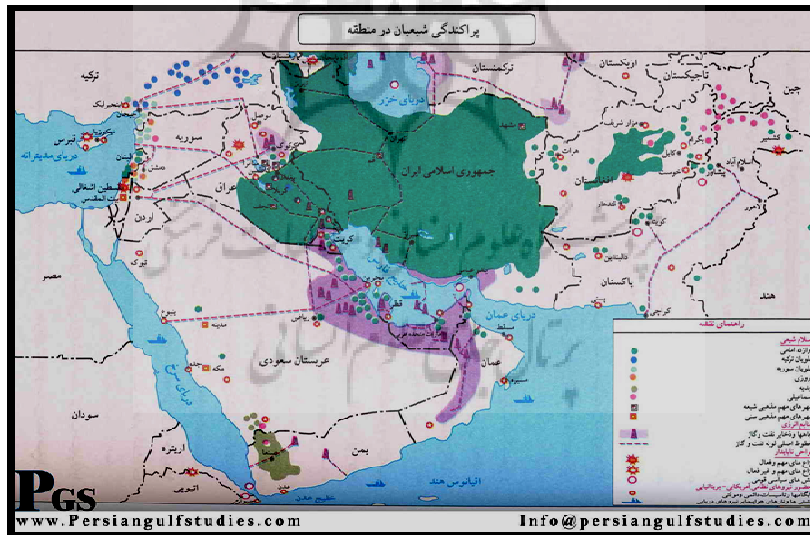
Source: <http://www.standupamericaus.org/iran-2/the-shi%E2%80%99ia->

Also, Bahrain is a political unit separated from Iran, which after separation, has not expressed any solidarity to Iran or other Shiite countries like Lebanon. Bahrain, with the low number of population, is not basically

regarded as a political unit capable of changing power equations. The political equations of Shiites residing in Lebanon in disputes with Israel which gain meaning in relation to groups like “ Hamas” do not represent the hidden meaning beyond the term “ Shia Geopolitics” though having solidarity with Iran. Palestine and Lebanon, with multi-sectarian population, especially an imbalanced composition of Sunnis and Shiites each with their claims about fighting against Israel and formation of government, do not conform to geographical interpretations of “ Shia Geopolitics” based on the integrity of geographical map and the power resulting from it.

Map. 4, show Scattering of Shiites in region base of “ The Geographical Place” which is derived from the Persian Gulf Studies Center web site and is nearly consistent with the geographic realities of region. Looking at the distribution of Shia in Iran, it is clear that some Parts of the eastern boundaries of Iran, in Razavi Khorasan Province, and south eastern of Iran are Sunnis.

**Map 4. Distribution of Shiites in Southwest Asia**



Source: Center of Persian Gulf Studies, [www.persiangulfstudies.com](http://www.persiangulfstudies.com)

Also, Turkmens in northeast, and Kurds in western borders of Iran in West Azerbaijan, Kermanshah, and Kurdistan province are Sunnis. In Iraq, Shiites only reside in the southern part of the country. In Lebanon and Syria, Shiites live in very restricted specific area. In Bahrain, Shiites do not have any geographical integrity through land with the four countries mentioned.

Put simply, looking at the above map which is somewhat in congruence with geographical facts of the region and distribution of Shiites, it is understood that under no condition one could show the formation of “Shia Crescent” on the map, let alone in reality and geography. Therefore, countries claiming “Shia Crescent” use a tool like “map” to enhance their target “discourse”, and attempt at inducing the idea of “Shia Crescent” to achieve their goals without considering geographical and humanistic facts of the region.

### **Conclusion**

As evident throughout the paper, this study intended to “analyze the process of discursive territoriality of Shia Geopolitics” as claimed by Arabic-Western countries. The main point this study sought to prove was that “Shia Geopolitics” as claimed by those countries has reality neither at “Cartographic” level, nor at “Geographical” level. The theory can only be explained in light of “Discursive Territoriality Theory” which seeks to “create soft power” for Sunni Arab countries, Israel, and the U.S. Needless to say that all three groups of these countries have targeted the Islamic Republic of Iran as the center of this geopolitics. In fact, the main strategic “Goal” of the U.S. since the Islamic Revolution of Iran has been to control and prevent fundamentalist Shiite movements of 1980s. To this aim, using Saddam Hussein and his characteristics, flamed the light of war between Iran and Iraq and followed its goal during the 8 years of war. Today, the main “Target” of the U.S. is the Islamic Republic of Iran. Indeed, heads of the U.S. and Israel, by highlighting the concept of “Shiite Crescent” intend to divert the minds of Arab decision-makers from Israel and increase their “concerns” about the “dominance of Shiite ideology” under the leadership

of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region. In other words, in order to enhance the effectiveness of “Shia Geopolitics”, Arabic and Western countries simultaneously use advertising tricks of “Iran-phobia” and “Shia-phobia” to challenge the foreign policy of Iran. Hence, investigating the advertising campaign of the West in new security specification of the Middle East would reveal formation of a new round of mental operations using “Shia-phobia” grounded in the idea of “Political Geography of Shia Crescent” proposed by Jordan’s king. It must be mentioned that the present study does not imply that Iran should practically adopt a “Passive Policy” with regard to strengthening Shiite countries of the region. Rather, the authors suggest that “the main decision-makers of Iranian foreign policy”, by acquiring knowledge about the hidden aspects of the goals of some countries like the U.S., Israel, and Saudi Arabia, should make the best decisions with lowest cost for Shiite countries of the region. They should try to avoid being entrapped in the discourse making of such countries and try not to “produce political literature” for “enhancing their discourses”.

### **Suggestions**

It is recommended to use the term “Shia Geo-Pacific” instead of “Shia Geopolitics” in theoretical areas of academic and journalistic discussions, and the term “Geopolitics of Resistance” is suggested to be used instead of “Shia Geopolitics” in practical areas.

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