

Rethinking on the Backgrounds and Roots of Iranophobia Discourse in International Relations

Document Type: Research Article

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Received: 2018/10/19

Accepted: 2018/12/21

Abstract

Iranophobia is the hyperreality or representation of Iran's reality in international relations. With the Baudrillard's postmodern attitude, we can consider this phenomenon as one of the examples of displacement of the boundary of reality and representation, which was put on the agenda of the West, especially the United States, after the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran as a political project. Accordingly, Iranophobia was formed influenced by the cultural nature of the Islamic Revolution and its focus on the soft aspects of power and the reflection of the Islamic Revolution in the international relations and possible challenges to the interests of the West, especially in the Middle East region. Thus, in a short period time of after the Revolution, many of the concepts and developments of Iran's foreign and domestic politics, including the policy of issuing the revolution, Iran's support for liberation movements and causes, the Iraqi imposed war on Iran, the human rights issue, Iran's attempt to achieve military-defensive capabilities, etc. were interpreted with a reverse approach to their reality. This article tried to explain the dimensions and forms of Iranophobia and its consequences in the international relations by analyzing the backgrounds and roots of Iranophobia.

Keywords:

Iranophobia, Iran Revolution, West, Hyperreality, Representation.

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Introduction

“Iranophobia” is a combination of the two words of “Iran” and “Phobia”. “Phobia” means the unreasonable and intense fear or aversion disdain. It is defined both in the psychology literature as a severe but fictitious mental disorder and referred to in the social sciences fields as ethnocentric tendencies and fanatical attitudes to one or more people, nations, sects, or other groups. It may be the best to consider it alongside the term stereotypes to understand the term “Iranophobia”. The stereotype refers to “Repeating a topic in a uniform and long-term way so that it will become common over the passage of time and create the desired image of the subject as soon as it is heard by the audience”.

This concept of “phobia” (repeated fictitious fear) along with the word “Iran” as a country that has always been one of the most influential countries in the region and in the world due to its special geographical location and special natural and human capabilities and is located in one of the most geostrategic regions of the world at the junction of several groups of countries such as the Central Asia, Middle East, the Arabic countries, and the Indian Peninsula with rich oil and gas resources, rich and fruitful culture, etc., brings out the combination of Iranophobia more evidently. On the other hand, the governments ruling Iran, both before and after Islam until the present era, i.e., the Islamic Republic, given their privileged position, have always considered their possible power to influence regional and global developments, and thus, they have set some goals for themselves in relations with other countries, and still do. Therefore, this issue has always faced the reaction of other countries that have considered the hegemonic power of Iran unacceptable or intolerable, and still do so, which has added to the extent and severity of Iranophobia in the region and the world. In this context, we have witnessed more than three decades of hostile policies of the West, especially the US government against Iran. During this time, various tools have been used against the interests of the Iranian people around the world. Iranophobia, sanctions, propaganda in the form of issues such as human rights, establishing a coalition against Iran in various assemblies, supporting the opposition domestic groups, etc. have been the examples of the tools used by the US government and its allies against the interests of the Iranian nation and government.

Meanwhile, Iranophobia can be seen as one of the most important and influential strategies of the West against the Islamic Revolution of Iran. This discourse, which has been on the agenda of the West as a project since the

beginning of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, tries to represent the Islamic Republic of Iran, which had been created as a religious democratic system from the core of the Islamic Revolution, as a threat and excite and spread the grounds for fears and panic of it in the region of the Middle East and throughout the world. Thus, from the beginning of the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the Islamic Republic System have faced a variety of accusations like attempting to expand its hegemonic power in the region and issuing the revolution, the spread of terrorism and sabotaging the Middle East peace process, violation of human rights, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, etc. Accordingly, considering the importance and necessity of investigating this phenomenon, this paper tried to answer this main question:

- “What are the roots and backgrounds of the formation of the phenomenon of Iranophobia and its goals and reasons?”

1. Theoretical Foundations

The Iranophobia phenomenon can be regarded as one of the examples of the frontier of debate between the major current and the alternative current in international relations due to its nature. The mainstream, with the domination of the two attitudes of realism and liberalism, was responsible for the nature debates of international relations from the beginning of the formation of this field, but since the 1980's, with the critiques of the critical current and the emergence of numerous views - from the critical school to postmodernism, structuralism, etc. - the domination of the mainstream over the international relations faced serious challenges. In the meantime, focusing on the constructivism of realities, new ideas try to display the real impressions of the world of international politics with breaking down the structure deconstruction of the concepts and principles of the behavior of actors in the international relations.

In the meantime, the views of postmodern thinkers have certainly played an important role in this regard. Their views, focusing on the constructivism of international politics, have concentrated on the Great War of the modern narratives. As the thinkers such as Foucault, Habermas, Lyotard, Derrida, Baudrillard, Lacan, Deleuze, Guattari, etc., by refraining from reification and modern positivism attitude and emphasis on the constructivism inter-subjectivity of meanings and phenomena, have tried to question many common assumptions in the traditional social theories by criticizing the dominant view. In this context, the postmodern thinkers emphasize the

important role of the media in shaping discourses and their hegemony. They criticize the modern approach to the media and emphasize the constructivism of the meaning and the gap between truth and reality. From their point of view, there is a direct relationship between the media and the dominant discourse ruling in the capitalist system. In fact, the news reflected by the media are a narrative of the facts that are reproduced based on the ideological values and ideologies governing the news organization (Van Zoonen, 1998: 172). By introducing the relationship between power and knowledge in the present era, Foucault emphasizes that the minds of human beings are conquered and the humans are turned into the subject that they will think and see as the dominant eye of power desires. In such conditions, Adorno and Horkheimer define the media as the powerful tool of the capitalism culture-making industry in the service of persuasion, suppression, and distortion of the public mind. On the other hand, from the point of view of postmodern thinkers, the importance of the media has gone so far that the reality and the image of reality are reversed in some cases and the importance of the image of reality or the virtual has exceeded the reality itself in a way that in many cases, these fictitious and virtual images have taken the place of reality, and in some cases, the recreation of these virtual images is in practice the creation of things that have or have never had no exterior reality or original version. In this regard, the facts with a reference point in the past have created such a cumbersome confusion in the postmodern period that the significance of meanings has gone away and the very virtual and imaginative images have become the reference instead (Tajik, 2007: 93-100). This issue has been particularly considered in the ideas of Jean Baudrillard and in the Representation Theory. By working on the concept of "Hyper-reality", Baudrillard has tried to explain how the realities are represented in the imaginary space of the hyper-realities. From the viewpoint of Jean Baudrillard, the pseudo postmodern world is essentially a simulated world of the real world and the meanings undergo a superficial condition in the process of reconstruction, which he calls it "hyper-reality". Baudrillard believes that the hyper-reality is an image that is presented from a primary reality and this image is strengthened by the media system and the symbolic exchange system so much that it disintegrates the very reality and makes it meaningless. Hence, in his view, there is nothing as reality in the postmodern world, and it has turned completely into an imagination, phantom, affectation, imitation and image. In this view, the models always appear more realistic than the real issue, and basically, the collapse of reality is the result

of the reproduction of images (Baudrillard, 1988: 84-166). Baudrillard presented and analyzed this matter by writing an article about the Second Persian Gulf War in the early 1990s, by describing that "The Persian Gulf War did not occur" and emphasized that, this war has been made and fully represented by the media and they portrayed such a war for us. Indeed, nobody knows if the images broadcasted on the CNN are real or not; since, due to the media monopoly, the United States will show its own desired image to the world, which is definitely a hyper-reality very far away from the reality (Baudrillard, 1991).

In view of what has been said, we can also see the Iranophobia as a representation of a hyper-reality of the realities of domestic politics and foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is constructed based on the interests of the West after the Islamic Revolution and has so far been reproduced in various dimensions and forms, especially through media diplomacy. In the following, we first studied the effective factors in the formation of Iranophobia and then explained its dimensions, forms, and outcomes.

2. Factors Affecting the Formation of Iranophobia

Iranophobia is a project that has been formed since the formation of the Islamic Revolution due to the conflict between the basics, principles, and the performance of the Islamic Republic of Iran system with the rules governing the international system by defining the new political system ruling Iran as a regional and international threat by the West. The project has been created under the influence of several factors, the most important of which can be summarized as follows:

2.1. The Potential and Actual Abilities and Power of Iran

One of the most important factors affecting Iranophobia is due to the potential and actual capabilities and power of Iran. This issue is influenced by factors such as geographical features, natural resources, quality and density of the population, economic and technological development and military capability of Iran. These potential and actual capabilities of Iran can be divided into two types of inherent abilities and acquired abilities. The geographic location and natural resources are included in the inherent abilities category, while military, economic and technological capabilities are considered as acquired capabilities. On the other hand, in addition to these material factors of power, we can also speak of the non-material factors of power. The soft power of Iran

and the foundations of the discourse of the Islamic Revolution of Iran among the Muslim communities, and especially the Shiites in the region can be mentioned as such factors. Accordingly, of course, regardless of its political system, Iran is also considered as a country with potential and actual powerful abilities and capabilities in the region (Eisenstadt, 2015: 12-15).

On the other hand, the history of international politics shows that powerful states have always caused the feeling of threatening in others since they are never sure how these governments will use their abilities. In fact, as the power of a state increases, others will become worried about the potential misuse of this government from its power and seek to prevent it. Therefore, the increased power of a state naturally will result in an increase in the tendency of others to curtail and balance it (Little, 2008). In this context, it should be borne in mind that Iran historically, in terms of strength and power, has been superior to its neighbors, especially its southern neighbors. Hence, they have always been concerned about Iran's power.

Scrutinizing in the contemporary history of Iran's foreign relations reveals that such concerns have continued with ups and downs and whenever obvious changes have taken place in Iran's power, this fear has turned into phobia. Iran benefits from a significant potential in the Middle East in different spheres of power, from population to vastness, resources, and geopolitical situation, which automatically raises fears and concerns in others. The capabilities of Iran in the traditional and modern areas of power on a regional scale are so large that present this country as the only potential option of the regional hegemony. Therefore, the first factor of concern about Iran, or in its acute form, Iranophobia, is Iran's power, and therefore it is structural since it cannot be changed. Iran's capabilities, to a significant degree, worry its neighbors regardless of the type of government ruling it (Shariatinia, 2010: 194-195).

Meanwhile, considering the fact that the West is pursuing to make others sensitive to Iran's authority and capabilities to create Iranophobia, thus, Iran's capabilities are highlighted in various military areas followed by maneuvering on them.

The most important of these capabilities are as follows:

2.1.1. Iran's Weapons Strength in Strategic Weapons

One of the most important capabilities of Iran, which today is based as the focus of the Iranophobia project, is Iran's nuclear capability and its achievement of the ability to produce weapons of mass destruction. In this regard, it is stated that "since the end of the Iran-Iraq war, as Iran was

subjected to chemical invasion from Iraq, it was emphasized at the highest levels of decision-making in Iran to continue the nuclear research. Iran gradually made progress in the design of centrifuges. The scope of these advances continued as far that Iran managed to build small and scattered facilities with compact rows centrifuges, which makes it very difficult to find and destroy them. On the other hand, Iran has become able to manufacture chemical weapons and is likely able to produce nerve gas and use it in the warhead of missiles and cluster bombs. Iran also has the ability to produce advanced biological weapons and can use them as a complement or substitute for nuclear weapons” (Cordesman, 2009: 2-11).

2.1.2. Development of Missile Programs

Another important and influential reason for Iranophobia is the West’s focus on the development of indigenous missile programs in Iran. In this regard, in spite of Iran’s continuous emphasis on the defensive nature of its missile program as well as the long history of Iran’s peaceful presence in the region, the western countries insist that Iran’s missile programs, especially the solid-propellant rocket testing, are considered as another important part of Iran’s efforts to enhance its military capabilities and ambitious policies in the region. In this regard, it is emphasized in the Iranophobia project that “the use of Iran-made missiles with the mass destruction weapons that can be carried by their warheads is seen as a major threat (Intelligence on Iran, 2016).

2.1.3. Expansion of Iran’s Conventional Military Forces in the Region

Iran’s advisory presence in the countries of the “Resistance Front” and its efforts to support Muslims and oppressed people in the region and at the international level appears to be one of the other issues that is frequently repeated in many research works, including books, papers, and the think tanks reports as well as the international media called as “regional expansion, the expansion of regional hegemony, the establishment of the Persian empire, the Shia crescent, etc.” However, Iran’s advisory presence in neighboring countries is very limited and has been always at the request of the legal governments of these countries. In fact, Iran’s advisory presence has only strengthened the resistance identity and planned identity in these countries and has contributed to reproduce the identity of resistance, especially among the Shiites in the region with the emergence of endogenous movements (Javdani Moghaddam and Nasouhian, 2009: 102-108). However, given the conflict between the interests of the West and the reflection of the reality of Iran’s

activities in this area, it is always emphasized on Iran's "interventionism and domination" in the western reports of regional activities of Iran.

2.1.4. Increasing the Ability of Asymmetric and Irregular Wars

Iran's ability in asymmetric and irregular wars, which is the product of the holy defense times (Iran-Iraq war) and Iran's advisory presence on the resistance front in confronting the Salafi and Takfiri currents, is another important aspect of the Iranophobia project. It is suggested in this regard that, given that in general, any weapon and any kind of force can be used in these types of wars and Iran has already shown its ability in this regard, then, this particular capability of Iran is a threat to other countries. As the report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies of the United States, under the title of "The Forming Threat of Iran", refers to some of these issues such as "the use of Qods Force in Iraq, a series of military exercises and maneuvers in the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea, using drones over Iraq, sponsoring Hezbollah and training its forces, putting unmanned aerial vehicles, long-range missiles, and the Kornet anti-tank guided missiles at their disposal, sending weapons to Hamas and the Palestinians, supporting Shi'a groups in Bahrain, testing long-range and space-based ballistic missiles to create the ability to attack Israel and neighboring countries, performing military maneuvers in the Persian Gulf to demonstrate the ability to attack coastal targets, shipping and offshore facilities, etc." (Tajik, 2003: 51-52).

2.2. Misunderstanding of the Announced Policies

One of the most important factors influencing the formation of Iranophobia in the West comes from some declarative policies, which are sometimes raised by some political and military officials that are interpreted in the west and in the region as aggressive intentions of Iran. These announced policies are in fact false messages that are merely used to strengthen the negative mindset against Iran and intensify the Iranophobia project. In this regard, some examples can be mentioned such as the threat of the blockage of the Strait of Hormuz, targeting the countries of the region, expanding the sphere of influence of Iran from Afghanistan to the Mediterranean, the presence of Iraq in the sphere of influence of Iran, etc. (Wood, 2012). These announced policies provide a more objective context for Iran's threat to the West, and with their media representation, the Iran's threat becomes more tangible and at the same time, it is tried to show Iran's intentions are aggressive to create worries and fears in others. In fact, what comes from the West and Israel about

the aggressive intentions of Iran reflects their concerns about promoting the regional role of Iran and the spiritual influence of Iran throughout the region, which is underlined by announcing policies. However, the Iranian nation has never had any aggressive intentions so far and has not had military action against his neighbors in the recent past 100 years.

2.3. Establishing an Atmosphere of Iranophobia in the West

Obviously, one of the most important factors of Iranophobia in the West is resulted from the propaganda against Iran in the West. This issue, regardless of Iran's power or some of the announced policies mentioned as the invasive intentions of Iran, is used in line with the interests of the West to confront Iran by distorting certain realities of Iran's domestic and foreign policies. Indeed, given that any kind of strengthening of Iran's power in the region could jeopardize the desirable order of the West, hence, highlighting the so-called actual and potential actions of Iran is done to make balances against Iran and to further objectify the idea of Iranophobia. In the same vein, Iran's nuclear program, which is planned and designed for peaceful purposes and to enhance Iran's scientific and technological capabilities, a plan is introduced with military objectives aimed at destroying Israel. The Iran's support for the Palestinian people is displayed as support for terrorism and sabotage in the Middle East peace process and the spread of the spiritual message of the Islamic Revolution in the neighboring countries is represented as the intention of Iran to overthrow the ruling regimes of these countries. In total, the Westerners suggest through the media that Iran's capabilities and aggressive intentions can be turned into action by Iran. They are trying to provoke this view that Iran's efforts are made to expand its influence in the region considering the capabilities of Iran in the military and civilian fields in each of the countries based on the specific characteristics of that country and the kind of relations with Iran. For example, in countries with a Shiite minority, the support of Shiite militant groups is put on the agenda to create instability in those countries. The countries hosting US bases or other Western countries in the region are determined as the potential targets of military operations. Also, the increasing Iran's capabilities in the future and, as a result, the enhanced threat of Iran's can make the countries change their behavior in line with its favors.

In short, the Iran's threat is displayed in such a way to highlight its potential and actual aspects. Hence, Iranophobia become more tangible and Iran's threat is represented permanent and imminent (Banami, 2014).

3. Dimensions and Forms of Iranophobia in the West

As mentioned above, the Iranophobia project has been on the West's agenda for the past three decades. The main goal of this project has been to impose a security atmosphere over Iran and try to introduce Iran as a threat to regional countries and the international peace and security. The Iranophobia project and stating the understanding that Iran disrupts the international order and also intervenes in the affairs of the region countries and the regional crises are further broadened due to its ideological nature have been pursued by Western countries in various dimensions and forms. The most important and various forms and dimensions of Iranophobia are referred in the following.

3.1. Creating Fear from the Islamic Revolution and the System of Islamic Republic of Iran

One of the dimensions of Iranophobia constantly emphasized by the Western media include the attempts to distort the nature of the system of Islamic Republic of Iran. In this regard, the efforts are aimed at portraying an image of Iran in the global public opinion, especially the citizens of the Western governments that have no understanding and knowledge of Iran and the system of Islamic Republic of Iran and its values and objectives, in which, the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran is represented as an expansionist revolutionary system opposing any political, social, or even moral and religious values of the West, which seeks to expand its influence not only in the region but also at the international level even through destruction (Gold, 2015: 2-7). This project is pursued, especially with the deviating reconstruction of Iran's history in the Hollywood and the production of cinematic works such as the movies of 300, Alexander, Jerusalem, Countdown, and so on.

3.2. Denigration of the Domestic Situation of Iran

By deviating Iran's internal political-social status and its denigration, the western Iranophobia project attempts to prepare the global public opinion to accept and induce the confrontational policies of the West against Iran by presenting a picture of Iran's current situation as a primitive, undeveloped, and violating human rights country, especially the rights of women and ethnic and religious minorities, in which very strict religious laws are ruled within a non-democratic system framework that constantly violates the fundamental rights and freedoms of its citizens. In this regard, in addition to the media coverage of the West, Hollywood is trying to persuade the audience

accordingly by making various films in this regard against Iran, including the movies like, Not without My Daughter, Persepolis, The Stoning of Soraya M., etc.

3.3. Twisting and Distorting the Goals and Measures of Iran's Military Policies

The most important aspect of Iranophobia in recent years has focused on magnifying and distorting the objectives and actions of Iran's military policies. In this regard, by stressing on the military capabilities of Iran, its efforts to build missile weapons, nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction are emphasized, and with exaggerating its presence and influence in the region and in the international system, Iran's policies and goals as represented as expansionism and the expansion of influence in the region and the world and support for international terrorism (Malek Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 2012: 33-35). In this context, with a focus on introducing Iran's military advancements non-peaceful and introducing it as the center and focus of evil in the world, which seeks for conquest over the countries of the region and other countries, on the one hand, some issues such as Iran's attempt to expand its influence and intervention in the region, especially in countries with a Shia minority, supporting terrorist groups aimed at sabotaging and disrupting the Middle East peace process, Iran's relationship with al-Qaeda and ISIS, etc. are referred, and on the other hand, its policies to increase its influence in other areas, including Latin America, to confront the United States are highlighted and magnified.

4. Levels of Iranophobia

In light of what was said, Iranophobia in the West takes place as a project against the Islamic Republic of Iran in different dimensions and forms and at different levels. Meanwhile, Iranophobia is pursued at the regional and international levels, which will be discussed further in the following.

4.1. Iranophobia at Regional Level

The first and the most important level of Iranophobia takes place in the SouthWest Asia region by focusing on countries in the Persian Gulf region. This level of Iranophobia has been designed to create fears of the Islamic Republic of Iran among its neighbors. In this context, due to the natural difference between the powers of Iran and the countries of the region in terms of geography, population, military force, etc., the Iranophobia mentality is intensified among regional governments by focusing solely on these

capabilities and inducing Iran's aggressive intentions. On the other hand, given the wide-ranging history of ethnic (Arab-Ajam) and religious (Shiite-Sunni) differences and distinctions, the roots of doubt and threat of these countries towards Iran are intensified. In addition, with stressing the goals and ideals of the revolution and principles such as the issuance of the Islamic Revolution, the Iran's attempts to dominate the region are emphasized, through which, the Iranophobia is fueled (Noor Mohammadi and Kazemi, 2015: 93-97). Certainly, in the meantime, the efforts of some countries in the region to exploit this from of Iranophobic atmosphere adds to the severity of Iranophobia as well. For example, the Saudi Arabia policies in competing with Iran, the policies of the UAE and Bahrain against Iran and, in the past, the policies of Iraq during the period of Saddam Hussein against Iran have been adopted and pursued by focusing on Iranophobia.

In recent years, especially since the occupation of Iraq and the rule of the first Shiite government in this country, the scope of Iranophobia has been increased. This issue was strengthened especially with the raising of the Shiite Crescent. The term "Shiite Crescent" was first introduced by Abdullah II, King of Jordan, and then repeated over and over again by Hosni Mubarak and other Arab leaders. The Shiite Crescent refers to the connection of the countries of Iran and Iraq after Saddam, when the Shiites came to power and other Shiite countries of the region. Thus, raising the risk of the formation of a Shiite crescent by Arab regional leaders in practice referred to the induction of the intensified danger of the relations between the Shiites and Iran and the expansion of Iran's power in the region. In other words, behind the scenes, bringing the term of "Shiite crescent" was an attempt to indoctrinate Iranophobia in the region.

4.2. Iranophobia in the International System

The second level of Iranophobia is ongoing at an international level. At this level, focusing on Iran's nuclear and missile threat for international security and stability, Iran's support for international terrorism and the induction of anti-human rights nature of the political system governing Iran have been emphasized. In fact, at the international level, it is attempted to induce that Iran will be able to threaten Europe and the United States by achieving the atomic bomb and its transmission system. It is also suggested that Iran may provide the ground for massive terrorist conflicts in the Middle East region and the international system by transferring its nuclear weapons or long-range missiles to the terrorist groups. Meanwhile, it should be noted that Iranophobia

at both regional and international levels are in pursuit of a united goal, i.e., preventing the rise of Iran's power and achieving a superior status in the region and preventing Iran from pursuing the principles and objectives of the Islamic Revolution. Indeed, through the instigation of fear of Iran's hegemonic power and its ambitious policies in the region and in the international system, the Western politics is being pursued to confront the Islamic Revolution.

5. The Consequences of Iranophobia for International Relations

The West Iranophobia project against Islamic Revolution of Iran has left wide-ranging effects and consequences on the international relations, the most important of which, can be summarized as follows:

5.1. Iranophobia as an Obstacle to the Realization of the United Islamic Nation

One of the most important goals of the Islamic Revolution was to make efforts to realize the idea of the United Islamic Nation with the support of all Muslims and the oppressed people in the world. Due to the formation of misinterpretations of Iran's domestic and foreign policies, and especially under the influence of the West Iranophobia Project and the accusation of Iran of applying nationalist and sectarian policies, and so on, the initial attempts to achieve cohesion in Islamic countries and the formation of the united Islamic nation were weakened. Indeed, the magnifying of Iran's threat, the expansion of disputes between Iran and the Arab countries of the Middle East, and the cold war between Iran and Saudi Arabia led to divergence in the Islamic world.

5.2. The World's Warehouse of Weapons in the Middle East in the Light of West Iranophobia Policy

Undoubtedly, the Iranophobia policy and intensifying the Cold War between Iran and the Middle East countries in addition to some other factors must be considered effective in creating an arms race and competition in the chaotic regional environment and the advent of the Security Dilemma. This has caused an unprecedented rise in the purchases of weapons by the region's countries so that, according to the report by SIPRI Institute, the transfer of weapons to the Middle East accounted for more than a third of the global arms trade between 2014 and 2018. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia has become the largest importer of weapons in the world and its arms and weapons purchases show a 192% increase over the past five years. Egypt, Algeria, the United Arab

Emirates, and Iraq are also ranked as the top ten purchasers of weapons worldwide. Meanwhile, what matters is the interests of the West, and in particular the United States and Britain, from the exports of weapons to the Middle East since more than half of US arms exports (52%) and Britain (59%) are shipped to the Middle East (Sipri.org).

Importer	Share of arms imports (%)		Per cent change from 2009-13 to 2014-18 ^a	Main suppliers (share of importer's total imports, %), 2014-18		
	2014-18	2009-13		1st	2nd	3rd
1 Saudi Arabia	12	4.3	192	USA (68)	UK (16)	France (4.3)
2 India	9.5	13	-24	Russia (58)	Israel (15)	USA (12)
3 Egypt	5.1	1.8	206	France (37)	Russia (30)	USA (19)
4 Australia	4.6	3.6	37	USA (60)	Spain (29)	France (5.0)
5 Algeria	4.4	3.1	53	Russia (66)	China (13)	Germany (10)
6 China	4.2	4.8	-7.0	Russia (70)	France (10)	Ukraine (8.6)
7 UAE	3.7	4.2	-5.8	USA (64)	France (10)	Turkey (7.8)
8 Iraq	3.7	1.6	139	USA (47)	Russia (33)	South Korea (8.0)
9 South Korea	3.1	3.6	-8.6	USA (51)	Germany (39)	UK (3.0)
10 Viet Nam	2.9	1.8	78	Russia (78)	Israel (9.1)	Belarus (4.1)
11 Pakistan	2.7	4.8	-39	China (70)	USA (8.9)	Russia (6.0)
12 Indonesia	2.5	1.4	86	UK (19)	USA (18)	Netherlands (13)
13 Turkey	2.3	3.2	-21	USA (60)	Spain (17)	Italy (15)
14 Qatar	2.0	0.7	225	USA (65)	Germany (15)	France (7.4)
15 Israel	2.0	0.5	354	USA (64)	Germany (27)	Italy (8.9)
16 United States	1.8	3.7	-47	Germany (22)	Netherlands (13)	France (11)
17 Taiwan	1.7	1.0	82	USA (100)	Germany (0.2)	Italy (0.1)
18 Oman	1.6	0.6	213	UK (39)	USA (30)	Norway (8.5)
19 United Kingdom	1.6	1.7	-2.3	USA (71)	South Korea (17)	Germany (4.5)
20 Italy	1.5	0.6	162	USA (59)	Germany (26)	Israel (7.5)
21 Japan	1.4	1.3	15	USA (95)	UK (3.1)	Sweden (1.5)
22 Singapore	1.3	3.7	-63	USA (46)	France (21)	Spain (11)
23 Azerbaijan	1.3	1.2	15	Russia (51)	Israel (43)	Turkey (2.8)
24 Morocco	1.2	2.0	-35	USA (62)	France (36)	Italy (0.6)
25 Bangladesh	1.2	0.7	75	China (70)	Russia (18)	USA (3.2)
26 Canada	1.0	0.8	42	USA (63)	Netherlands (16)	Germany (6.9)
27 Thailand	1.0	0.7	46	South Korea (20)	Ukraine (18)	China (18)
28 Greece	1.0	1.5	-30	Germany (67)	USA (20)	France (8.4)
29 Kuwait	1.0	0.2	348	USA (87)	Russia (3.4)	Switzerland (2.9)
30 Kazakhstan	0.9	0.3	332	Russia (84)	Spain (5.5)	France (3.0)
31 Jordan	0.9	0.6	61	Netherlands (37)	USA (30)	Italy (5.8)
32 Norway	0.8	1.1	-22	USA (76)	South Korea (9.3)	Italy (6.2)
33 Afghanistan	0.8	1.6	-48	USA (66)	Russia (18)	Brazil (10)
34 Mexico	0.7	0.5	40	USA (63)	France (9.4)	Netherlands (8.9)
35 Brazil	0.6	1.0	-28	France (26)	USA (17)	UK (15)
36 Myanmar	0.6	1.1	-40	China (61)	Russia (20)	Belarus (6.5)
37 Finland	0.6	0.4	64	USA (37)	Netherlands (19)	Norway (19)
38 Poland	0.6	0.6	2.5	Germany (28)	Finland (20)	Italy (16)
39 Turkmenistan	0.5	0.4	59	Turkey (43)	China (31)	Russia (13)
40 Peru	0.5	0.1	303	South Korea (34)	Russia (22)	Italy (14)

Table 1. The 40 largest importers of major arms and their main suppliers, 2014-18 (SIPRI)

5.3. Militarization of the Middle East States

Looking at the political structure of the Middle East states reveals that most of these governments are military states or states with a militarized structure.

This issue has occurred under the influence of the internal challenges of these countries after independence, and especially the crises caused by the formation of Israel in the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli wars. However, after the triumph of the Islamic Revolution and within the framework of the West Iranophobia policy, the military nature and military approach policy of these states were strengthened. In fact, with the growing sense of threat from Iran, which arose under the influence of Iranophobia, the structural challenge of the militarized systems in the Middle East intensified with the expansion of arms purchases.

5.4. Intensifying the Ethnic-religious Gaps in the Middle East

Given the historical, political, and ideological differences between Iran and its neighbors, particularly Arab states from the past until now in the form of Arab and Ajam or Shi'a and Sunni conflicts and differences, etc., and then, the political competitions, especially after the Islamic Revolution have fueled them, inducing Iranophobia by the West has practically led to an exacerbation of the negative mentality of the region countries towards Iran and strengthened the tense atmosphere in their relationships (Adami and Others, 2012: 156-157). This issue has also fueled the ethnic-religious gaps in the Middle East and provided the grounds of the emergence and activities of some Salafi-Takfiri currents, including ISIS and the rise of sectarian conflicts and wars.

5.5. The Continued Presence of Trans-regional forces, Especially the United

States in the Middle East

The weakness of the national power of Iran's neighbors in the light of Iranophobia has made these countries to engage in extensive relations with the trans-regional powers and to establish political-security alliances in order to protect their political system from a subjective enemy adjacent to them. This issue has resulted in the deployment of foreign forces in the region, which has further complicated the regional issues.

5.6. Iranophobia and the Increased Security of Israel

Undoubtedly, Israel is the biggest winner of the Iranophobia policy in the region. By escalating the Iranophobia, this regime, has, on the one hand, fostered its relations with the West and benefited from a variety of political, economic, military, and other supports, and on the other hand, especially in recent years since 2003 until now, it has been seeking to introduce Iran as a

common threat to the countries of the region and Israel and create a Hebrew-Arabic coalition against Iran.

5.7. The Function of Iranophobia in Controlling Iran's Power and Exacerbating Pressure and Multilateral Sanctions

One of the most significant effects of Iranophobia can be seen in its function to put pressure on Iran. Thus, by creating fears of Iran, the Islamic Revolution, political Islam, etc., and emphasizing its support for terrorism, efforts to achieve mass destruction weapons, the widespread violation of human rights and such matters, the basis for imposing any pressure on Iran is provided. It is a measure repeatedly used by the West, especially the United States and Israel in Iran's nuclear case by emphasizing Iran's imminent threat of nuclear weapons and its widespread consequences to attract and manipulate the domestic and international public opinion as well as the need to increase international sanctions against Iran.

Conclusion

Iranophobia is a project backed and operationalized by the West that has been implemented since the victory of the Islamic Revolution so far. This project aims to confront the Islamic Revolution and the power of Iran in the region and the spread of the ideals and values of the Iran's revolution. In this regard, the West has tried to represent an unrealistic face of Iran and to create fear and panic by using various tools, especially the international media. In this context, the West has pursued the Iranophobia policy by focusing on several major axes, including magnifying Iran's nuclear program and allegations such as violations of human rights by the Islamic Republic of Iran, supporting terrorism, preventing the Middle East peace process, interfering in the internal affairs of the neighboring countries, etc. These events have been frequently repeated at both regional and international levels to be accepted by the international public opinion. The result of inducing a threat from Iran in the region has led to the establishment of the relations between Iran and its neighbors in an atmosphere of doubt about the goals and intentions of Iran in the eyes of the leaders of the regional governments, which has certainly led to an escalation of divergence among them. On the other hand, the regional governments have come across a convergence with trans-national powers due

to a sense of threatening by Iran, which has caused numerous political-security problems not only for Iran, but also for the region. In addition, with the spread of Iranophobia in the international system, the West has been working to suppress the idea of issuing the revolution by stating that Iran is pursuing ambitious goals in the region and in the international system, which, however, has led to intensification of international pressures and sanctions against Iran. The set of these factors has increased the threats to the national security of Iran and the challenges of Iran's foreign and security policies in the region and in the international system. Accordingly, it seems that under these circumstances, Iran must take steps to eliminate the Iranophobia caused by the West fear at two levels. At the first level, in dealing with governments with a focus on eliminating the tensions with the regional countries and the major powers, Iran needs to increase interactions in different areas. At the second level, in dealing with nations, Iran should eliminate the fearful mindset about it through focusing on the public diplomacy. Obviously, this requires a coherent and intelligent management and the use of various instruments of diplomacy.

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