Counterterrorism in Middle Eastern Foreign Policy of Iran (1971-2021)

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Abstract

In the last half-century, Iran has emerged as a regional power in the Middle East. One of the indicators of a country's regional power is regional custodianship that includes fighting intra-regional threats, such as terrorism. The aim of the current paper is to study Iranian Foreign Policy approach on fighting terrorism. Confronting terrorist groups in the Middle East has been one of the major aspects of Iran's foreign policy under two different political regimes. The Iranian government's struggle with the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF) in Oman during the Pahlavi era and the fight against the Taliban terrorist group in Afghanistan and ISIS in Iraq and Syria can be seen as examples of this inter-regional struggle after Islamic revolution. Using David Rapoport (2004) and Robert Stewart's theory (2012), the paper seeks to investigate Iran's foreign policy stance on fighting terrorism in West Asia. The main question of this article is How have the waves of international terrorism, effected Iran's regional foreign policy in the Middle East over the past half century? The findings show that Iran's foreign policy has been countered by the waves of international terrorism and has protected the security of the Middle East against terrorist groups and shows how a strong Iran has always reduced the cost of major powers in the fight against terrorism.

Keywords: Terrorism, Regional Power, Dhofar Liberation Front, Taliban, ISIS.

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1.Interduction

Regional powers are the most powerful states in a geographical region and their number depends on the distribution of power in that region. The emergence of Iranian regional power began in the Second Pahlavi era, and Shah emerged as a regional gendarme after the British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf. In 1969 the Nixon Doctrine called for allied nations, especially in Asia, to take more responsibility for their own defense. Nixon and Kissinger believed that strengthening Iran's military would stabilize the Middle East, resulting in protecting not only Iran's oil supply but also the oil reserves of all countries bordering the Persian Gulf (Alvandi,2016:98-108). One of the results of Iran's new role as a gendarmerie can be seen in the direct military presence in Oman to counter the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF). The DLF movement was a Marxist terrorist group that was considered as a threat in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the victory of the Islamic Revolution changed the power balance of the region dramatically and disrupted U.S security policy in the Persian Gulf (Axworthy,2013:24). However, the Iran-Iraq war, the imposed war, and the structural pressures of the international system lessened Iran's regional power and thereby restrained Iran's role in the Middle East (Shariati and Ghafari,2019:49-50). Indeed, after the end of the Cold War, U.S Middle East policy was seemingly a doctrine of Dual Containment against Iran and Iraq. As former Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs in the Clinton Administration said, "dual containment stems from a judgment by the administration that both Iran and Iraq, in light of their recent actions and rhetoric, pursue policies that are in direct conflict with U.S interests. (Indyk and et.al,1994:2). From Indyk's point of view and many U.S officials, "Iran is paradoxically both a lesser and greater challenge to our policy. Lesser in the sense that Iran today does not pose the threat that Iraq did to our interests some five years ago. And our challenge is to prevent Iran five years from now from becoming the kind of threat that Iraq was five years ago" (Indyk and et.al,1994:5). Despite these statements, Iran, after the September 11 attacks, and when the Taliban emerged in the Middle East, besides its internal problems, began to fight this new threat in the Middle East. At this point, Iran was even willing to cooperate with the United States against the Taliban. It should be mentioned that the beginning of the 21st century was accompanied by a relative increase in Iran's regional power.

Regional developments, such as the U.S invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Arab Spring in 2011, strengthened Shiite groups and created a regional coalition led by Iran (Barzegar,2016:34-35). During this period, the emergence of ISIS posed a security challenge for the Middle East. But as a regional power, Iran fought this wave of terrorism with the direct presence of Iran's military forces and the use of proxy groups in Syria and Iraq. Iran's regional performance shows that in the last half-century, "counterterrorism" has always been one of the main aspects of Iran's foreign policy (Mossalanejad,2020:311-312). In this context the current study was an attempt to see how international terrorism is related to Iran's regional foreign policy in the Middle East over the past half-century. In other words, The main idea of this article focuses on the fact that Iran's foreign policy is not aggressive and in line with Iran's power-seeking, contrary to what some researchers of Iran's foreign policy say. As the article showed, this overseas presence of Iran has an anti-terrorist aspect, considering the geopolitical position of the country. It is worth mentioning the Taliban as Afghanistan's new government since it took power in August 2021 is not included in this research.

2 .Methodology
Electronic databases including JSTOR, Web of Science, Scopus, Science Direct and Google Scholar searched for the articles published from 1971 to 2021. Using a standard checklist, methodological quality of articles assessed. The findings summarized, and a narrative synthesis of data reported. This paper used a comparative approach and analytical-descriptive research method to explain its desired subject. The method of gathering information was based on searching for original sources and conversation with a few of Iranian soldiers present in Syria and Oman, and using news and information related to the foreign policy of Iran, Oman and Syria.

3. Conceptual Framework: Waves of Modern Terrorism
One of the most significant attempts to explain the nature of terrorism in the context of history has been made by David Rapoport, a professor of political science at the University of California. He, who specializes in the history of terrorism, presented his views on the historical typology of international terrorism and how it evolved in one process in an article entitled "Four Waves of Modern Terrorism"(Rasouli and Shariati,2020:206-207). This

framework can provide a platform for understanding the history of terrorism, assessing the current trend, and predicting the future. He argues that since the late 1880s, terrorism can be divided into four parts, with each part being called a "wave". Prior to addressing the issue of terrorism, Rapaport emphasizes the importance of the use of the word "wave" and defines it as a "cycle of activity" in a given period of time, which is being developed in several countries around the world. According to this theory, international terrorism in the "post-Westphalian" world has so far experienced four waves of anarchism, nationalism (anti-colonial), New Left, and religious, respectively. From his point of view, the first wave began in the 1870s and lasted until the 1910s. Between the First and the Second World Wars, a new wave of terrorism emerged in the colonial-dominated countries, which were fighting for the departure of the colonialists and the attainment of political independence. Rapoport believes that this wave of terrorism has reduced the ability of European countries to dominate their empires, and therefore, this wave can be called "nationalism" or "anti-colonialism". The "New Left" or Marxist wave of terrorism appeared in the late 1960s and continued until the late 1980s. According to Rapaport, the Vietnam War caused the wave to spread, and in the context of the Cold War, this wave was always dramatically intensified. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War led to a gradual weakening of the New Left wave in the late 1980s. The fourth wave emerged in the Middle East in the late 1970s, as the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The Soviet's invasion of Afghanistan led to the formation of a holy war or "Jihad" among Muslims. This wave quickly took on a religious orientation and was considered as militant Islam. The Fourth wave used suicide bombing tactics and Rapaport believes that the widespread influence of Western countries, including the United States, has intensified the wave in the Middle East so that one of the goals of militant Islam is now to force the United States to leave the Middle East (Rapoport,2004:51-62). Meanwhile, the relationship between regional powers and the waves of international terrorism seems to be important from a theoretical point of view. Regional power, which combines concepts such as military power, geography, and human resources, plays an important role in a country's foreign policy orientation. In defining this concept, Max Schumann argues that a regional power is an actor normally a state whose power capabilities in a region

significantly outweigh those of other actors within the same region and whose power is, to a high degree, based on its leadership role within the region (Schoeman,2003:353). Stefan Schirm proposes the following criteria for the classification of a state as a regional power: 1-The articulated claim for Regional leadership, 2-The material, and organizational resources for regional and international power projection. 3-The recognition and acceptance of leadership status by other actors/states in the region and outside of the region and finally, Real political influence in the region (Schirm,2007:11). Osterud, emphasizes on a regional power: which is geographically part of the delineated region, which can stand up against any coalition of other states in the region, which is highly influential in regional affairs (Osterud,1992:12). The important point in recognizing a country as a regional power is its performance at the regional level. Robert Stuart and his colleagues (2012) believe that one of the behavioral requirements of regional power is the role of regional protection (Joukar&Sazmand,2020:151). Regional security is an effort to maintain existing security order, which can include deterring existing challenges to the existing order or providing equipment to stabilize regional security. According to Robert Stewart and colleagues: "Custodianship is a Care-taking and Management role, focused on Contemporary Security Threats and Seeking to Manage These Threats within the Context of the Existing Order" (Stewart and et .al,2012:95). From this point of view, the first constituent aspect is that it is focused specifically upon securitized issues or actors that are internal to the region. Second, custodianship is focused upon temporally proximate threats. Third, the building of coalitions and the mobilization of institutional resources and mechanisms that are available within the status quo regional security order are likely to be driven by the regional custodian. Fourth, in cases in which the security threat is perceived to be emerging, the custodian will play a significant role in the direct deterrence of the threat. It need not wait for the problem to manifest itself to play the role of custodianship. Finally, the custodian may directly intervene in situations and actively attempt to manage and reduce their intensity and level of threat (Stewart and et.al,2012:98). Therefore, the current study employed this theory to show how Iran, as a regional power, has reacted to the waves of terrorism over the past half-century.

Figure (1): Theoretical Framework
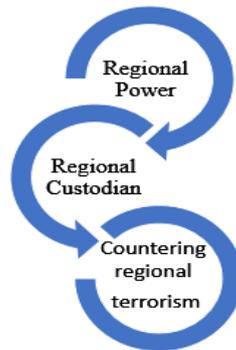
4.Research Findings
4-1. The Pahlavi II and the Third Wave of International Terrorism

Internal and structural conditions led the Shah to consider his major goal since the late 1940s to be to turn Iran into a regional superpower. Rising Iran's oil revenues in 1973, a 6.5-fold increase in GDP from $13 billion to $77 billion during 1971-78, along with increased military productivity such as personnel, training, and arms purchases, played an important role in transforming Iran to become the regional power in the Persian Gulf. (World Bank,2017; Shakoori and Vazirian,2019:67). The Cold War and Britain's withdrawal from the Persian Gulf and the Nixon Doctrine prompted the Shah of Iran to respond to the numerous crises in the Middle East. One aspect of regional power, to play the role of custodianship, is the fight against threats within the region, including terrorism. During this period, Iran faced the third wave of international terrorism of a leftist nature and as a result, began its confrontation with the Dhofar Liberation Front. For the Shah of Iran, the spread of leftist Arab nationalism was the most important threat in the Persian Gulf. Iran believed that the efforts of left-wing terrorists to form a new government in Oman would disrupt the order of the Persian Gulf region (Pahlavi,1980:273). After World War II, British colonial activity in Oman, along with extreme poverty and unemployment in the country, forced young people in the southern province of Zafar to search for jobs in other Arab countries. Due to the boom of guerrilla struggles in the world in the 1960s, they gradually became acquainted with the socialist-nationalist movements and in 1962 the Dhofar Liberation Front was formed .

On June 9, 1965, the Dhofar Liberation Movement declared its existence and was supported by the Eastern Bloc, Yemen, and Iraq. Their primary goal was to counter British influence and oust Said bin Taimur, King of Oman, as an obstacle to the development of Oman. Geographical and climatic conditions suitable for guerrilla warfare (especially mountains) and the support of South Yemen, along with the support of the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and Iraq, led to the rise of the Dhofar movement (Ladwig,2008: 64-66; Owen,1973:268-272). The Dhofar movement, in the first years (1962-1968), sought to establish a communist ideology for the independence of Dhofar province from the central government. During this period, the group was able to form the People's Liberation Army with the help of the poor people of the Dhofar region. Prominent members of the group's core during this period were "Muslim bin Naufal al-Kathiri" and "Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah", the current Oman foreign minister (Jones, 2011:560). After the September 1968 congress in Hamrin, the group announced its main strategy for guerrilla warfare and targeting the entire Persian Gulf region. This group also, changed its name under the influence of Marxist teachings, to the "Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf" (PFLOAG). By announcing the slogan "Fight against imperialism, colonialism, bourgeoisie, and feudalism", they began close relations with South Yemen and were able to capture about 80 percent of Dhofar province with the help of South Yemen by 1974. There is no exact information on the number of members of this movement. But some sources put the number at 2,000 full-time guerrillas and 4,000 part-time militiamen (Devore,2012:150). The Dhofar uprising and Iran's direct military intervention were an inevitable consequence of Iran's new role in the region. In fact, Iran's military intervention, with the support of the western bloc, demonstrated Iran's strength and ability as the only major force in the Persian Gulf region.

"The police are the last thing we want to be. We have repeatedly said we want to have regional cooperation, but only if other countries in the Persian Gulf region are weak, we can take care of them", Shah said (Pahlavi,1974: 1-4b). After Sultan Qaboos' 1970 coup against his father, Saeed bin Timur, the country called on other countries in the region to help counter the terrorist acts of the Dhofar Group. However, none of the Arab countries in the region responded positively to this request. This demand was the best

opportunity for Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran, to show Iran's ability to stabilize the region. "Oman has called on Iran to help deal with the Dhofar crisis, and Iran has accepted this request. Anyone who helps us resolve this challenge deserves appreciation," Sultan Qaboos told Cairo's "Akher SAA" Magazine (Ettelaat Newspaper,1974:4a). Meanwhile, The Israeli newspaper, "Maariv", wrote in late 1973: "Interference in the Dhofar partisan wars shows the Shah's decision to play a gendarmerie role". According to the Shah, Iran has the same duties that, in the past, the British forces had in the Persian Gulf (Archive of the Islamic Revolution Documentation Center,1974). According to Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in a meeting with the Commander-in-Chief of the Yemeni Forces defending Iran's national interests and regional security was considered the most important reason for Iran's military presence in Dhofar; "Our interests is that the army sacrifices himself, even outside the borders to protect the national and political interests of the country" (Ettellaat Newspaper,1975:3). However, Iran's intervention in the Dhofar crisis was due to several reasons:

The strategic importance of the"Raʾs Musandam" Peninsula in Oman in the Persian Gulf, whose mountains overlook the Strait of Hormuz, was one of the important factors in Iran's military presence in the Dhofar crisis, as the Dhofar terrorist group had potentially jeopardized the oil interests of Iran and the Western world in the Strait of Hormuz. The group had explicitly stated that their next step after capturing Dhofar was to take control of the Al-Musandam Peninsula (Chamankar,2007:56). He also said in an interview with the "Sunday Times" in March 1973 that Dhofar insurgents can take control of the Strait of Hormuz with their artillery, or they can sink a 500,000-ton tanker. What will happen then? (Pahlavi,1974:6b).

The security of the Strait of Hormuz was so important to Iran that the Shah said in an interview with Egyptian journalist Mohamed Hassanein Heikal about the reason for Iran's military intervention in Dhofar: "The Strait of Hormuz is our gateway to the world, this is the passage of Iranian oil, which is worth one hundred and eighty million dollars every day. Should I allow a dangerous communist regime to dominate this strait? No, I will never tolerate such a thing (Pahlavi,1975:5). In an interview with the "Daily Telegraph", Mohammad Reza Pahlavi said: "If the insurgents had entered the Persian Gulf, we would not have been able to resist. The Persian Gulf is our lifeblood and our only way to the ocean and the Persian Gulf for us is

more important than the "English Channel" for you. You have access to the Atlantic Ocean, but in our case, this is the only way to reach the free seas (Ettelaat Newspaper,1974:5b). At that time, Iran was the world's fourth-largest oil producer and the second-largest exporter of crude gas, exporting nearly 6 million barrels of oil per day from the Persian Gulf. According to the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), these exports reached about $ 20 billion in 1974 alone, which was more than the total revenue of Iran for the past sixty-five years (Taheri,1975:425). Dealing with the threat of communism was another reason for Iran to intervene. Since Iran was in the security belt of the Western bloc to counter Soviet influence in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, increasing the activities of the left-leaning Dhofar terrorist group had posed a big threat for Iran's identity. Soviet's support for the Dhofar uprising terrified Iran, as Iran feared that the Soviet Union would be stationed on the southern borders in addition to the north and that the danger of bilateral pressure and the old story of the presence of superpowers on both sides of Iran would be repeated. The Soviet Union, in fact, intended to endanger the position of the capitalist world in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman by infiltrating local groups opposed to the Western bloc. "The Dhofar movement is a communist revolution, and I oppose the ideology of communism in the region," Shah said in an interview. "The number of my forces to suppress this small group shows the intolerance against a communist regime in the region" (Chamankar,2017:406). Meanwhile, the strategic goal of the Dhofar Liberation Movement terrorist group since 1968 was to expand the revolutionary struggle and spread it to other parts of the Persian Gulf, especially Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain. In a statement, they declared the release of Dhofar as the first step towards the liberation of the Persian Gulf, emphasizing the continuation of their struggle against imperialism, capitalism, and the struggle against regional rulers throughout the Persian Gulf region as their sole goal (Halliday,1979:312). Based on the "domino theory", the Shah believed that the fall of the Omani government was the starting point for the collapse of other small Arab countries in the region, and this could lead to a serious crisis for the southern Arab regions of Iran (Mojtahedzadeh,1976:36). Amir-Abbas Hoveyda, the Prime Minister of Iran, in a speech emphasizing the words of the Shah, clearly acknowledged that: "If the Dhofar rebels had succeeded, it would have been dangerous for all countries in the region. If we had not stopped them, they

could have occupied Kuwait" (Chamankar,2012:39). Iran sent about 3,000 to 4,000 troops to Oman to protect the Persian Gulf region during the Dhofar crisis (Peterson,2012:150). Despite the withdrawal of most Iranian troops from Dhofar by 1976, units of Iranian troops remained there until 1978. By order of the Shah, several naval destroyers were deployed in the port of Salalah, Oman, and several F-4 fighters and F-5 bombers were stationed at the Midway Dhofar base (Archive of documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,1975). The Iranian military presence in Dhofar had heavy costs for Iran to maintain stability and security in the Persian Gulf region. According to British military experts, this figure is estimated at one billion dollars (Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,1976). There are no exact statistics on Iran's casualties during this war. Fred Holliday mentions the number of Iranians killed in 1973 alone as about 200. According to her, this statistic for the final year of the Dhofar War (1976-1975) included 25 army officers and 184 Iranian soldiers (Holliday,1974:353; Holliday,1979: 258). Some sources also state that the total number of Iranian casualties in the Dhofar war was 714 killed and 1414 wounded (Allen and Rigsbee,2014: 64).

4-2 .The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Fourth Wave of International Terrorism

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Iran's foreign policy faced a paradigm shift and Iran's orientation, goals, and national interests were reassigned. The regional strategy of Iran in the period of 1980-2001 was twofold: first, countering the intervention of the great powers in the region with an emphasis on the unity of the Islamic world and second, supporting regional multilateralism. Islamic Republic of Iran in the post-revolutionary years, due to its unique geographical location, high legitimacy of the political system, and its Islamic identity, had more potential, compared to the Pahlavi era to protect the region. However, the Iran-Iraq war and its aftermath, reduced its regional power. The below table shows the consequences of the eight-year war for Iran.

Table (1): Consequences of the Eight-Year War for Iran

	IRAN
Death Tolls	208000[1]
Wounded	520000[2]
Loss of oil Revenue	350
War Damage	450
Damage to Infrastructure	180
Purchase of War Equipment	24
Construction of New Pipelines	6.1

(Sources: Razoux,2015; Arab Mazar,2014; Mofid,1990)

The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan between 1994 and 2001 marked the beginning of a new wave of terrorism in the world. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 and the fall of Mohammad Najibullah's government in April 1992 led to the formation of the Afghan Mujahideen government headed by Burhanuddin Rabbani. However, the reign of the Afghan Mujahideen did not last long and internal disputes over the division of power and the prevention of the formation of a national unity government led to the rise of Taliban and the beginning of a civil war (Saikal,1998: 29-42).

Extremist ideology, along with the Taliban's anti-Shiite leanings, was the reason for Iran's support for the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. The Taliban, on the other hand, was a militant-religious group influenced by Salafi Jihadism organized by al-Qaeda bin Laden. The group, backed by the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, eventually came to power in 1996 with the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate of Afghanistan, led by Amir al-Mu'minin Mullah Mohammad Omar (Milani,2006:239-246; Koepke,2013:5-10). The rise of Taliban terrorism in Afghanistan caused major threats to the Islamic Republic of Iran and the region. The long borders of Iran and Afghanistan increased the vulnerability of Iran's eastern borders. Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, stressed in a speech that Iran has evidence that Western powers and their regional agents have created terrorist groups to weaken Iran on its eastern borders (Khamenei,2014). According to Hooshang Amirahmadi as an Iranian American academic and political analyst, the ideology of the Taliban terrorist group was the product of "Dual Containment" and the strategic and economic interests of some countries in the region, including Pakistan (AmirAhmadi,1998:4-9). In other

words, as part of its containment policy, the United States sought to prevent Iranian influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus after the collapse of the Soviet Union by using the Taliban force and destabilizing Afghanistan's borders (Hunter,2010:273-274). Afghanistan, under Taliban rule, became one of the world's largest narcotics producers, averaging more than 3,000 tons a year. Between 1996 and 1999, the Taliban controlled 96% of the Afghan poppy fields. The group taxed the poppy agriculture, which funded the majority of the Taliban's activity (Farrell and Thorne,2005:87-88). This proved to be a real threat against the peace and order of the region. Given that the transit of narcotics was one of the Taliban terrorism's financial resources, its widespread distribution made the eastern borders of Iran insecure.

Table(2): Taliban's Transit of Narcotics 1996-2000

Year	Opium Poppy Cultivation Estimates (Hectares)	Potential Opium Production Estimates (Metric Tons)
1996	58824	2248
1997	58416	2804
1998	63674	2693
1999	90583	4565
2000	82171	3276

(**Source**: Farrell and Thorne,2005:87-88)

In response to this threat, Iran supported a coalition of former Mujahideen groups against the Taliban. In 1998, Iran paid dearly for its anti-Taliban position. After taking control of the city of Mazar-e Sharif, a group of Taliban fighters killed 10 Iranian diplomats and a journalist and Iran mobilized about 70,000 troops along the border and threatened to invade Afghanistan. Iran stepped back after mediation by the United Nations, but relations remained tense. Despite the enmity between Iran and the United States, Tehran cooperated with the United States and its allies in the war against terrorism. Iranian officials supported the U.S military intervention by providing critical intelligence to the U.S military commanders, which included maps of Taliban military positions in Afghanistan (Akbarzadeh and Ibrahimi,2020:4). Although Iran provided significant moral assistance to the Afghan Mujahideen to counter the Taliban terrorist group, the Islamic Republic of Iran was unable to fund the fight against Taliban, due to the

depletion of resources after the imposed war with Iraq. The Taliban terrorist group was eventually marginalized after the U.S invasion of Afghanistan, and its leaders eventually decided to become less violent. The chart below shows how weakening Iran has resulted in the increase of America's spending on counterterrorism in Afghanistan.

Figure (1): The Annual Cost of the War in Afghanistan: 2001-2019

Cost		Troops
2001	$23b	9,700
2002	$23b	9,700
2003	$17b	13,100
2004	$15b	18,300
2005	$21b	17,821
2006	$19b	20,502
2007	$31b	24,780
2008	$39b	32,500
2009	$56b	69,000
2010	$94b	96,900
2011	$107b	94,100
2012	$107b	65,800
2013	$101b	43,300
2014	$86b	32,500
2015	$77b	9,100
2016	$58b	9,800
2017	$50b	9,800
2018	$52b	9,800
2019	$52b*	9,800

Total cost **$975 billion**

(**Source**: McCarthy,2019)

Although the U.S invasion of Afghanistan ostensibly weakened the Taliban terrorist group, it reinforced the fourth wave of terrorism in the Middle East. Ten years after the U.S invasion of Iraq, in 2013, ISIS managed to seize parts of the north and almost the entire province of Raqqa in Syria, and at the same time, by expanding its battlefields, it was able to take control of important cities in Iraq, as well. The order of Paul Bremer, the second Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, to confront Ba'athist affiliates was the first signs of terrorism in post-Saddam Iraq. According to the order, thousands of people in the middle layer of the Ba'athist pyramid, such as doctors, engineers, professors, and security forces, close to the Ba'ath party, were fired and humiliated and many Sunni tribes were marginalized (Mansoor,2013:8). Depicting ISIS as a result of Saddam's policies is not only historically incorrect, but also dangerously downplays the essential role that the 2003 war in Iraq had in the evolution of active militant groups within the country. The U.S.-led invasion and ensuing insurgency destroyed the Iraqi state as well as the Iraqi political system and ignited a civil war (Helfont and Brill,2016). The emergence of sectarian governments was the product of the oppressive policies of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq and the

policies of the United States in Iraq. Thus, shortly after the occupation of Iraq, new terrorist groups were formed in Iraq. As the main leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Zarqawi was a Jordanian jihadist fundamentalist who first began his activities with the terrorist group Ansar al-Salam in northern Iraq. He left the Ansar al-Salam group after - the occupation of Iraq in 2003 and formed the terrorist group Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (Organization of Monotheism and Jihad). By claiming that U.S forces are working with Iran and Shiites to drive Sunni tribes out of Iraq, Zarqawi succeeded in attracting and boosting the power of many moderate Sunnis, including Ba'athist forces and ousted elites (Al-Jabouri and Lensen,2010:8-13). Between 2004 and 2006, the Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad intensified their terrorist activities under Zarqawi and planned several suicide attacks. Zarqawi allied with bin Laden in 2004 and changed the name of his organization from "Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad" to "al-Qaeda" in Iraq. Shortly afterward, bin Laden appointed Zarqawi as the head of al-Qaeda operations in Iraq, calling this alliance an effective step towards establishing an authentic government (Raphaeli,2005). Following Zarqawi's death, the terrorist group became one of the most important political-military actors on Iraqi soil in late 2006, increasing its revenue to $ 720 million a year and launching a wider operation in Iraq and Syria (Levitt,2014:10). Economically, ISIS was the richest terrorist organization in history. According to the International Center for the Study of Violence and Radicalism, the group's total revenue for 2014-2016 is estimated to be 2525-4440 million dollars. According to a study, the population of ISIS fighters is estimated to be around 27000-30,000 (The Soufan Group,2015:7).

Table (3): Islamic State Income: 2014–2016 (Million Dollar)

	2014	**2015**	**2016**
Taxes and Fees	300 – 400	400 – 800	200 – 400
Oil	150 – 450	435 – 550	200 – 250
Kidnapping	20 – 40	Not known	10 – 30
Looting, Confiscations, Fines	500 – 1,000	200 – 350	110 – 190
Total	970 – 1,890	1,035 – 1,700	520 – 870

(**Source:** The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation,2017:9)

Thus, the terrorist group ISIS, which was the result of the third and fourth waves of terrorism, created a new wave of terrorism in the Middle East. In this atmosphere, the Iraqi and Syrian armies, which were unable to fight ISIS back, needed immediate help. In this condition, Iran once again sent

troops to Iraq and Syria to protect the region, halting the advances of the terrorist group ISIS in Iraq and Syria, inflicted heavy casualties on them. In other words, Iran was able to manage the war against ISIS by mobilizing popular forces in Iraq and Syria, rather than direct military intervention. However, about 2,100 Iranian soldiers lost their lives along the way (shahidi,2017). In Iran, these people were called the defenders of the shrine and are respected. Iran's power to counter ISIS terrorism and reduce international coalition spending was also endorsed by US officials. Brett Mcgurk, The US president's envoy to the global anti-ISIL coalition said that the US initially estimated that Baghdad would fall to ISIS in72 hours after the fall of Mosul. However, it was the Shiite militias under Iranian command that managed to save Iraq from ISIS (The International Institute for Strategic Studies,2019). In a similar incident and when the Iraqi troops launched an offensive against ISIS in Tikrit. The U.S. declined to participate in the operation, but thousands of Iran-allied Shiite militia fighters joined the offensive, along with Iranian advisors and military Equipment. General Martin Dempsey, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, endorsed, "This is the most overt conduct of Iranian support in the form of artillery and other things, so if they perform in a credible wayrid the city of ISIL, turn the city back over to inhabitants then in it would have been a positive thing in terms of the counter ISIS campaign" (Al-Arabiya,2015).

Iran's success in the fight against ISIS terrorism was such that the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani, the head of the elite Quds Force was Celebrated by ISIS, and so led to a situation in which ISIS Speeded up its recovery after it was nearly destroyed. The Islamic State (IS) group welcomed the death of Soleimani in a statement and described the Iranian general's demise as "an act of divine intervention that benefitted jihadists". However, this statement did not mention at all of the US, which carried out the deadly drone strike against Soleimani in Baghdad airport (Bowen,2020).

Table (4): Counterterrorism in Iran's Foreign Policy: 1962-2020

	Dhofar Liberation Front	**Taliban**	**ISIS**
Activity Period	1962-1975	1994-2001	2013-2017
The Wave of Terrorism	Third	Fourth	Fourth
The Geography of Conflict	Oman	Afghanistan	Iraq-Syria
Sponsor Countries	South Yemen, Iraq, the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and Iraq	USA, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE	USA, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey

	high	high	very high
Intensity of Threat for Middle East	high	high	very high
Type of Confrontation	Direct intervention on behalf of the United States	No direct intervention	Direct intervention and use of proxy forces
Iran's Performance Evaluation	Successful	Unsuccessful (due to power erosion)	Successful

5. Analysis and Conclusion

This article was an attempt to show Iran's determination to fight against terrorism in West Asia and the Persian Gulf, including Iran's fight against Dhofar, Al-Qaeda, Taliban (1996-2002), and ISIS terrorist groups, which are results of the third and fourth waves of modern international terrorism, respectively. In other words, Iran is appeared as care-taking and Custodian, focused on contemporary security threats in the region and seeking to manage these threats within the context of the existing order. The fight against terrorism as one of the necessities of playing the role of regional power has always been one of the concerns of Iran's foreign policy in the last half-century. Despite the change in its foreign policy after the Islamic Revolution, Iran has always been concerned about the disruption of order in the Persian Gulf region by waves of international terrorism. A review of Iran's performance in the war with terror shows that Iran after the Islamic revolution, unlike the era of Pahlavi regime, has more independence and motivation today to fight terrorism. While U.S support for the Shah's gendarmerie in the Persian Gulf led to the confrontation with the Dhofar terrorists during the Pahlavi era, Iran fights the terrorist groups independently after the Islamic Revolution. To sum up, the most important difference in Iran's foreign policy to fight against terrorism is the type of counterterrorism policy. Over the past half-century, Iran fought the third wave of terrorism on behalf of the western bloc and the United States during the Pahlavi era, while the Islamic Republic of Iran is fighting against the fourth wave of terrorism with the support of the region's people. From this perspective, a review of Iran's regional policy strategy shows that Iran's active presence in the security problems of West Asia has played a vital and inevitable role in preventing the increase in the power of terrorism in this region. Based on this role, Iran has tried to destroy the threat of terrorism from its source and beyond its borders through an active military presence and with educational and advisory assistance instead of waiting and defining the threat from embankments. Iran's flexible foreign policy to establish

extra-regional alliances against regional threats has been one of the pragmatic aspects of this method; The promotion of tactical cooperation and the precise justification of great powers to deal with common threats is a unique feature of Iran's foreign policy, which Iran's neighbors have paid less attention to for any reason. Therefore, we can say that only a strong Iran can confront terrorism in the Middle East.

6 .Acknowledgement

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