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Master's Thesis

Religion and Foreign Policy

Traditional Islamic and Iranian Islamic counterpoise
approach to regional peace



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Abstract

The Traditional Islamic Approach is rooted in Islamic teachings and principles, emphasizing the importance of justice, compassion, and dialogue as mean to achieve peace. In contrast, the Islamic Iranian Counterpoise Approach is a more contemporary approach that reflects the Iranian government's national interest and aims to counteract the influence of Western Powers in the region. This study will make a comparative analysis that will examine the traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian counterpoise approaches towards regional peace. The study also examines the similarities and differences between these two approaches, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses under the umbrella of Islamic republic of Iran. The analysis explores from the theoretical foundations of both approaches previously used by the scholars in both historical and cultural contexts, as well as their practical applications in the Middle East. The findings suggest that while both approaches have their merits, the traditional Islamic approach offers a more sustainable and inclusive approach to regional peace. This approach prioritizes peaceful conflict resolution, dialogue, and mutual respect, that is a key to fostering long-term stability and harmony in the region. In contrast, the Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach, while effective in countering external influence, may lead to increased tensions and conflicts in the region. Overall, the analysis contributes to the on-going debate on approaches to regional peace in the Middle East, providing insights into the historical and contemporary factors that shape these approaches and their implications for regional security and stability.

Key words

Comparative analysis, Traditional Islamic approach, Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach, Jihad, Holy Wars, Regional peace, Historical context, religious factors, Political factors, social factors, Geopolitics



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1 Introduction

The religion of Islam is often subject to scrutiny and stereotype in the international arena, with many attributing violence to the religion. However, it is essential to understand that the Islam has different sects, and each sect has its own interpretation of Islamic teachings. One such sect is the Shi'ite sect, which is followed by the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) having slightly different beliefs as compared to other sects of Islam. The IRI has been the subject of debate regarding its approach to jihad and its role in Iranian foreign policy, with scholars offering different perspectives. On the one hand, some scholars argue that the Iranian regime's approach is based on the belief in the obligation to spread the Islamic revolution beyond Iran's borders, closely tied to the idea of "Wilayat al-Faqih, or the rule of the Islamic jurist" (Haykel, 2017, & Schirazi, 1999). On the other hand, other scholars argue that the Iranian regime's approach to jihad is primarily focused on preserving its own power and interests, rather than spreading Islamic ideology (Nasr, 2006, & Tabaar, 2019).

In contrast, the traditional Islamic approach to peace is focused on promoting peaceful coexistence among people of different religions and sects (Yazdani, 2020). Islamic teachings encourage Muslims to be peacemakers and promote the welfare of society. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself was known for his peaceful approach and promoted interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Islamic teachings also promote justice and fairness, which are necessary elements for achieving peace. This approach has been applied in various Muslim countries, including Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia. These countries have pursued a foreign policy that promotes peace and stability in the region and beyond. For example, Turkey has played an active role in mediating conflicts in the region, including the Syrian conflict. Malaysia has promoted interfaith dialogue and cooperation through its initiatives, such as the Kuala Lumpur Summit, which brings together leaders from Muslim countries to discuss issues of mutual concern.

This research study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of two approaches the traditional Islamic approach and the Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach to regional peace. The study will explore the differences and similarities between these two approaches and assess their effectiveness in promoting regional peace. It will also examine the factors that contribute to the Iranian regime's approach to jihad and its impact on regional peace. The study will trace the analysis from previously published scholarly articles and case study analysis to achieve its objectives.

The literature review will include scholarly articles, books, and other relevant sources that provide insights into the traditional Islamic approach to peace and the Iranian regime's approach to jihad. The case study analysis will focus on specific events or situations where the traditional Islamic approach to peace and the Iranian regime's approach to jihad have been applied. The study seeks to offer a more nuanced understanding of the role of Islamic teachings in promoting peace and the factors that influence the approach of Islamic states towards regional peace. The research is significant because it will offer insights into the factors that contribute to the Iranian regime's approach to jihad and its impact on regional peace, as well as the effectiveness of the traditional Islamic approach to peace in promoting regional peace.

1.1 Research problem:

Iran is a theocratic state that draws inspiration from religious beliefs, it is challenging to determine its foreign policy structure and operationalization are based on religious teachings. The Iranian constitution highlights "Pan-Islamism, Pan-Shiism, anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist, the Resistance Front, and anti-Western in terms of Holy War as active participants in the foreign policy decision-making process. Additionally, constitution has indicated that the Supreme Leader holds significant power in terms of major foreign policy decisions under the concept of Wilayat al-Faqih, considering himself as an Apostle of Islam which is written in the first preamble of current constitution

(Alexandros, 2005, p. 2). Apparently concept of religious beliefs is the central tool of current constitution in terms of FP decision making process. However, traditional Islamic teachings do not provide specific criteria or frameworks for decision-making processes or decision-makers, except to serve the humanity.

1.2 Purpose of the Study:

Many scholars, such as Haykel (2017), Schirazi (1999), Vali Nasr (2006) and Mohammad AyatollahiTabaar (2019) have discussed origin, history, and role of Wilayat al-Faqih in different institutional arrangements and standing of Ayatollah Khomeini's views. There have been numerous studies on the Iranian foreign policy model regarding regional security. However, many of these studies only compare Iran to other theocratic regimes. After conducting a thorough study of the previously published literature available in international language, the main weakness is highlighted that both traditional Islamic teachings and the Iranian Islamic approach have conceptual variances when it comes to achieving their FP objectives. Therefore, this research will focus on analysing this important aspect.

The primary aim of this study is to identify the differences between the traditional Islamic approach and the Iranian Islamic approach (adopted after the revolution of 1979) of retaliation towards adversary. Furthermore, it will investigate how these two models deal with regional security and their effectiveness in bringing peace to the region.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the similarities and differences between Traditional Islamic Approach and Iranian Islamic Approach?
2. To what extent the Traditional Islamic norms and Iranian Islamic approach in terms of response to adversary adds to the foreign policy behaviour of Iran.

2. Literature Review

The Middle East has been struggling to achieve regional peace, and scholars have explored various approaches to achieve it. In the Islamic world, two contrasting approaches have emerged: the traditional Islamic approach and the Shi'a Islamic approach. The concept of jihad, which is central to these approaches, has been debated among scholars for centuries, with varying interpretations and applications. In the contemporary era, the discussion often revolves around the differences between the Traditional Islamic and Shi'a (Iranian) approaches to jihad and how they influence foreign policy decisions. While both approaches have their roots in Islamic teachings, they differ in their interpretation and application. A comprehensive comparative analysis of these two approaches can provide a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of the Middle East and help in developing effective strategies for achieving regional peace.

2.1 Traditional Islamic Concept of Jihad

According to Delong-Bas (2011), Jihad is not among the Five Pillars of Islam, however it is considered an important aspect of the faith. "The foundation of Islam is based on five pillars that include: the declaration of faith (Shahada), prayer (Salat), giving to charity (Zakat), fasting during Ramadan (Saum), and making a pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj)" (Ibid, 2011). According to the traditional Islamic concept, as mentioned by Esposito (2010), jihad refers to a struggle or effort made by an individual in the path of God. Some scholars argue that the traditional interpretation of jihad is more focused primarily on individual spiritual struggle to overcome sin, attain closeness to God and defence of the Islamic community (ummah) from external threats. According to this interpretation, defensive warfare is only justified in cases where the ummah (Muslim community) is under attack and in need of protection (Ibid, 2010). This struggle can take many forms, including the personal struggle against one's own ego, the struggle to do good and promote justice in the world, and even armed conflict in defence of

one's community or faith. This defensive approach is exemplified by the traditional concept of "Dar al-Islam (house of Islam) and Dar al-Harb (house of war)" where non-Muslim states are seen as potential threats to the ummah's security and are therefore legitimate targets of defensive jihad. This interpretation emphasizes the internal, spiritual dimension of jihad and downplays the idea of armed conflict (Mandaville, 2016).

2.2 Jihad as a Physical Struggle

In contrast, Ozel (1993) contend that the traditional Islamic concept of jihad is broader and includes not only spiritual struggle but also physical warfare against external threats. This interpretation sees jihad as a duty to defend the Islamic community from aggressors, both internal and external (Ibid, 1993). This view emphasizes the defensive dimension of jihad and highlights the importance of collective action in defence of the ummah. On the other hand, Dr. Gerges (2016) has argued that the Sunni concept of jihad has evolved over time and is not exclusively focused on defensive warfare. He notes that many Sunni jihadist groups, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, have used the idea of offensive jihad to justify their attacks on non-Muslims and Muslims who they consider to be apostates (Ibid, 2016).

2.3 Jihad in Contemporary Contexts

Moreover, taking into account the concept of jihad in contemporary contexts, Hoffman (2015) argue that jihad has been distorted and misused by groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS, who have used it to justify acts of violence against civilians and non-combatants (Ibid, 2015). Therefore, such interpretations of jihad are not consistent with traditional Islamic teachings and that they represent a departure from the historical practice of defensive warfare. The contemporary interpretations of jihad must take into account the changing nature of conflict in the modern world, including the use of asymmetric warfare and the rise of non-state actors. The traditional Islamic concept of defensive jihad may not be adequate to address contemporary security

challenges, and that new interpretations and approaches to jihad are needed (Juergensmeyer, 2005).

2.4 Jihad as a Struggle for Just Cause

Furthermore, Michael Knapp (2003) argues that the term "Jihad" does not refer specifically to holy war; rather, it refers to fight or striving in God's way or to work resolutely for a just cause. In contrast to its Christian equivalent term from the Medieval Era, the word "jihad" among Muslims still carries religious and military connotations from the time of the crusade struggle for the cross. After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the word "jihad" was often used in Western news media. This term which is usually referred to as the sixth basic foundation of Islam, is still not entirely understood by western countries. In order to try to disrupt opponent plans and protect the lives of your compatriots, it is imperative in battle to understand your enemy's psyche, the motives behind it, and also his tactics and goals. Understanding how Islamic fundamentalists perceive jihad and employ it as asymmetric warfare against the United States can help us develop this sort of viewpoint (Ibid, 2003).

Similarly, Gordon Middleton (1992) emphasizes the historical development and use of the idea of jihad to comprehend contemporary events within the Islamic world and its relations with the West. For instance, late in 1990, the president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein proclaimed a jihad against the Western Coalition forces, and Saudi Arabia likewise proclaimed a jihad against Hussein's advancing Iraqi forces. To understand contemporary events within the Islamic spheres of influence and their relations with the West, it is crucial to understand the historical development and use of the idea of jihad. The history of the Islamic idea of jihad is examined in this paper. To comprehend the place of jihad in contemporary Islamic thought and practice, it emphasizes the historical origins of the concept of jihad as well as its manifestations and justification (Ibid, 1992).

2.5 Iranian Regime's Approach to Jihad and Foreign Policy

In contrast, considering the Iranian approach to jihad and its role in Iranian foreign policy, Haykel (2017) and Schirazi (1999) posit that the Iranian regime's approach to jihad is based on a belief in the obligation to spread the Islamic revolution beyond Iran's borders and closely tied to the idea of "Wilayat al-Faqih, or the rule of the Islamic jurist". They contend that the Islamic jurist has a duty to protect the Islamic Republic and its people from internal and external threats, using all means necessary, including armed struggle. In this view, the Iranian regime has used its ideology to support armed groups and militias in neighbouring countries, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen, in order to extend its influence and destabilize its rivals (Ibid, 2017).

On the other hand, scholars such as Vali Nasr (2006) and Mohammad AyatollahiTabaar (2019) argue that the Iranian regime's approach to jihad is primarily focused on preserving its own power and interests, rather than spreading Islamic ideology. They suggest that the regime uses religion as a means of legitimizing its rule and projecting its power regionally, rather than as an end in itself. In this view, the support for armed groups and militias is seen as a tool for advancing the regime's political and strategic interests, rather than a manifestation of religious conviction. Furthermore, the concept of jihad is seen as encompassing a range of struggles, including political, economic, and social struggles to achieve the goal of an Islamic society (Ibid, 2006, & Ibid, 2019).

2.6 Contrasting Perspectives on Iran's Foreign Policy: Ideology vs. Non-State Organizations

Mahdi Mohammad Nia (2010) point out that Iran's foreign policy is fundamentally driven by its revolutionary ideals and discourses, which are shaped by its radical ideologies and values (Ibid, 2010). In contrast,

AfshonOstovar (2016) suggests that Iran's foreign policy is more complex than just its religious identity and values, and that its approach to relationships with non-state organizations is more significant in this regard (Ibid, 2016). On one hand, Nia's (2010) argument seems compelling as he suggests that Iran's foreign policy is shaped by its revolutionary ideals and discourses, which are deeply rooted in its Islamic identity. This argument is supported by the fact that Iran's government has Islamic theocracy, where religious leaders have significant political power. Furthermore, Iran's foreign policy has been shaped by its efforts to defend its Islamic theocracy from external threats, which has led to alliances with non-state organizations that share similar beliefs. This approach has resulted in Iran's support for Shia groups, which has alarmed its neighbours, contributing to increasing sectarianism in the Middle Eastern region (Ibid, 2010). On the other hand, Ostovar's (2016) argument suggests that Iran's foreign policy is more complex than just its religious identity and values. Ostovar argues that Iran's approach to relationships with non-state organizations is more significant in shaping its foreign policy. While Iran's religious identity and values influence its foreign policy, its interactions with non-state organizations play a more critical role. Furthermore, Iran's sectarian foreign policy conceals more about its actions than it reveals and has only served to reinforce its approach, leading to increasing sectarianism in the Middle East (Ibid, 2016).

2.7 Sectarianism in the Muslim World: Contrasting Views

Celso (2016) and Litvak (2021) both shed light on the sectarian divide in the Muslim world and the efforts made by different groups to address it. Celso argues that sectarianism, state failure, and apocalyptic beliefs are key factors contributing to the rise of Sunni jihadist groups, leading to fratricidal atrocities that are difficult to stop. On the other hand, Litvak focuses on Iran's attempts to bridge the divide between Sunnis and Shi'a and maintain its leadership position in the Islamic world. While Celso's article provides an insightful analysis of the root causes of sectarianism and its consequences, it

is important to note that not all Sunni jihadists share the same motivations or goals. Some may be motivated by political grievances, while others may be driven by religious convictions. Moreover, Celso's argument that apocalyptic beliefs are contributing to intra-confessional hostility in the Muslim world, may be disputed. Some scholars argue that apocalyptic beliefs are not unique to Islam and that they may be used as a means to mobilize people for political or social change (Roy, 2014). On the other hand, Litvak's article provides an insightful analysis of Iran's efforts to bridge the sectarian divide and promote unity among Muslims. However, Litvak's argument that the conflict between Sunnis and Shi'a has no significant ideological or historical roots that might be contested. But in reality, the Sunni-Shi'a divide has deep historical and theological roots, and sectarian tensions have been exacerbated by political and social factors (Nasr, 2016).

2.8 Iran's Involvement in Syria: Balancing Regional Hegemony with Sectarian Tensions and Political Stability

Moreover, Ilan Zelayat (2019) provides an interesting perspective on the involvement of Shi'a militias in the Syrian conflict, arguing that their participation is part of a larger Iranian strategy to establish regional hegemony and deterrence. However, it's crucial to take into account the possible repercussions of such measures, for Iran as well as for the rest of the region. On the one hand, Zelayat's analysis suggests that Iran's involvement in Syria is driven by a desire to protect itself and establish regional dominance. This may be seen as a rational response to perceived threats, such as the ongoing conflict in neighbouring Iraq and the perceived threat posed by Israel. By using Syria as a testing ground for its regional strategy, Iran may be able to learn valuable lessons about how to project power and influence beyond its borders, which could have significant implications for the wider Middle East. Iran's involvement in Syria carries potential concerns, especially if it is perceived as an effort to impose its own ideology on the area (Ibid, 2019). The gap between Sunni and Shi'a groups in the Middle

East is already widening, and Iran's attempts to promote a particular brand of Shi'a Islam could exacerbate this tension. This could lead to further sectarian conflict, which would not only be harmful for the people of the region but could also undermine Iran's efforts to establish regional hegemony (Litvak, 2021). Moreover, the rise of sectarianism and extremist ideologies in the region is in part a response to failed states and inter-confessional tensions. If Iran's involvement in Syria is seen as an attempt to exploit these divisions for its own gain, it could further fuel the cycle of violence and instability that has plagued the Middle East for decades (Celso, 2016).

2.9 Middle East: The Sectarian Struggle between Iran-Saudi Arabia

Nuruzzaman (2019) put emphasize on the sectarian struggle between Shi'ites and Sunnis that affected the ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia. On one hand, he provides a comprehensive overview of the differences between Shias and Sunnis, the two main branches of Islam, and highlights how the sectarian conflict has been a historical, religious, and socio-political issue. The rivalry between Shias and Sunnis dates to the time of Prophet Muhammad, and it has continued to shape the Islamic world in various ways. "The sectarian conflict has also affected the relationship between Iran, a Shia state, and Saudi Arabia, a Sunni Wahhabi state, as they have been involved in ideological and political disagreements, leading them into conflict with one another" (Ibid, 2019). On the other hand, Diansaei Behzad (2018) argues that the sectarian conflict is just one aspect of a larger regional struggle for dominance between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Behzad contends that "both Iran and Saudi Arabia want a larger share of the new Middle East" and they are essential to their efforts to strengthen their position in the Middle Eastern countries from a religious perspective. In the context of Islamic discourse, Iran is viewed as a dominant force, and in the context of Arab discourse, Saudi Arabia plays a similar role with a strong propensity (Ibid, 2018).

In terms of the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Behzad (2018) suggests that ties between the two countries have never been at an acceptable level. Several events, including the Arab Spring, Saddam Hussein's overthrow in Iraq, and the Iranian Revolution of 1979, have hampered relations between the two regional hegemonies. The author contends that both Iran and Saudi Arabia are utilising instrumental sectarianism to bolster their positions in the Middle East and that it is a crucial part of the process of transforming the regional order. Determining the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia therefore involves several factors, not only the sectarian strife between Shias and Sunnis. Other elements including political philosophy, ethnicity, and geopolitical interests all play a role in the struggle for dominance in the Middle East (Behzad, 2018).

2.10 Shaping Shia and Sunni Islamism: Economic and Social Factors

Khatchik DerGhoughassian (2011) presents an interesting analysis of the "social origins of Shia and Sunni Islamism" highlighting the different routes that these two movements have taken. However, the article does not provide a comprehensive explanation of the complex factors that have shaped these movements, including the role of regional and global politics, economic factors, and social movements. One limitation of DerGhoughassian's analysis is that it overlooks the role of economic factors in shaping the Shia and Sunni Islamist movements. Economic disparities, unemployment, and poverty have been identified as key drivers of social unrest and political mobilization in the Middle East (Bayat, 2010). Economic factors have influenced the development of the Shia and Sunni movements and their political strategies. Moreover, the Shia movement in Iran has been able to endure and expand using "Social Movement Theory". This view holds that the three main Shia Movement mobilizers: the IRGC, the Basij, and mosques; have been successful in preserving Shia Political Islam. The long-term survival of this political strategy hinges on actively resurrecting the Shia movement's fundamental ideals, making use of Shia values, religious symbols, and holy

days like Ashura, as well as financially sustaining the Movement with petrodollars. The mobilizers, especially the IRGC, repress these values because they are in motivation behind how the Shia Movement functions (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001).

2.11 The Complex Impact of the Iranian Revolution

Matthiesen (2017) challenges the dominant frame of reference in analysing transnational Shia politics, which focuses primarily on the relationship between Iran and Shia communities and movements around the world. The author argues that this approach obscures the complex dynamics within Shia politics and overlooks the impact of the Iranian Revolution on Sunni communities and movements. While the 1979 revolution had a profound impact on Shia communities and movements around the world, it is important to acknowledge its impact on Sunni political Islam as well. As he points out, many proponents of Sunni political Islam viewed the revolution favourably, including the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizbut-Tahrir. This suggests that the Iranian Revolution of 1979 had a significant impact on the Islamic countries beyond just Shia communities. However, it is also important to consider the potential drawbacks of Sunni political Islam's early embrace of the Iranian Revolution. Some argue that this embrace ultimately contributed to the rise of sectarianism and the further entrenchment of Sunni-Shia divisions in the Islamic world (Ibid, 2017). As Khattab and Poole (2019) note, the Sunni embrace of the Iranian Revolution helped to fuel the spread of anti-Shia sentiment and contributed to the rise of militant Sunni groups. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that the 1979 revolution and its aftermath have had complex and varied impacts on different Sunni communities and movements. As Roy (1994) notes, some Sunni movements, particularly those in the Arabian Peninsula, saw the Iranian Revolution as a direct threat to their own power and sought to counter its influence in the region (Ibid, 2019).

2.12 The Complex Regional Dynamics in the Middle East

Helfont (2009), Hossein (2019), and Irani (2008) shed light on the complex nature of the regional dynamics in the Middle East, particularly concerning Iran and its relationship with Shia Political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood. While Helfont argues that “the Brotherhood’s relationship with Iran and Shias” is complicated and must be understood to develop a responsible foreign policy towards it, Hossein focuses on how the Shia political Islam has survived in Iran for over forty years. On the other hand, Irani evaluates that regional security policy of Iran and its foreign policy towards Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the GCC. One point of contention in this debate is the role of Iran in the Middle East’s sectarian conflict between Shia and Sunni. Hossein argues that the emergence of new Islamist organizations worsened sectarian strife, while Irani notes that Iran has emerged as an important player in the region, including the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. However, Helfont suggests that “the Brotherhood’s relationship with Iran and Shias is complicated” making the so-called Shia Crescent less clear. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the nuanced nature of Iran’s regional policy to develop a more comprehensive foreign policy towards the region. Another point of debate is the approach to researching the Middle East’s regional dynamics. While Hossein focuses on a political and economic approach to understanding Shia political Islam in Iran, Irani relies on Iranian, Arab, and Lebanese sources from the Middle East. In contrast, Helfont argues that understanding the complicated connection between the Brotherhood and Shias/Iran requires contextualizing their foreign and regional policies within the developing regional order. Therefore, the complex regional dynamics in the Middle East involving Iran and its relationship with Shia Political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood require a comprehensive understanding to develop responsible foreign policies towards the region. This understanding should be based on a multidisciplinary approach that takes into account political, economic, and

cultural factors and draws on various sources, including local perspectives from the Middle East (Ibid et al., 2009, 2019, and 2008).

In conclusion, these differing interpretations of jihad can have significant implications for foreign policy decisions. Defensive jihad may lead to policies focused on maintaining territorial integrity and responding to external threats, while offensive jihad may lead to policies focused on spreading Islamic ideology and supporting allies and proxies in other countries. However, it is important to note that these interpretations are not necessarily fixed or universal. Many scholars argue that the concept of jihad is constantly evolving and adapting to new circumstances, and that the Sunni and Shi'a interpretations are not always clear-cut or mutually exclusive. Furthermore, the use of jihad as a foreign policy tool is not unique to Sunni or Shi'a states. Many non-Muslim states have also used the concept of holy war or religious justification for their foreign policy actions throughout history (e.g., the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and the Christian Just War tradition). While there are certainly differences in interpretation and application, it is important to approach these debates with nuance and avoid generalizations or stereotypes.

3. Theoretical Framework

In international affairs, the pursuit of regional peace, particularly in the Middle East has been a persistent challenge. To understand states approaches towards regional peace, several theoretical frameworks have been developed and applied in the field of international relations. In this context, this essay aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach to regional peace using the theoretical lenses of Neoclassical Realism and Just War Theory. Through the application of these theoretical frameworks, this essay seeks to provide insights into the motivations and actions of states in the pursuit of regional peace in the Middle East.

3.1 Neoclassical Realism and its application in the study of Traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian Counterpoise Approaches to regional peace

Neoclassical realism is a theoretical approach that seeks to explain state behavior in the international system, which combines insights from realism and domestic factors (Taliaferro, 2009). This approach emphasizes that foreign policy of a state is shaped not only by external factors but also by domestic factors such as interest groups, bureaucratic politics, and public opinion. Domestic factors can either enhance or constrain a state's ability to pursue its foreign policy objectives (Ripsman, 2017). Neoclassical realism provides a more nuanced understanding of state behaviour by recognizing how domestic factors shape foreign policy decisions. It can help to explain why states may adopt different foreign policies even when facing similar external pressures (Kegley & Blanton, 2017).

Furthermore, Rose (1998) argues that neoclassical realism highlights the importance of a state's perception of the external environment and how it is influenced by domestic factors (Rose, 1998). For example, "a state's perception of the balance of power and its own relative power position can significantly influence its foreign policy decisions. This perspective can help explain why states may have different responses to similar international crises. In the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy's decision to pursue a naval blockade of Cuba was influenced by his desire to avoid appearing weak in the eyes of the American public" (Ibid, 1998). Similarly, Taliaferro (2009) and Kegley and Blanton (2017) hold the opinion that by recognizing the various actors and interests involved in foreign policymaking, neoclassical realism helps explain why states may pursue different foreign policy objectives even when facing similar external pressures (Taliaferro, 2009; Kegley & Blanton, 2017).

Moreover, the neoclassical realist approach to international relations and the traditional Islamic approach to regional peace share some similarities in their

emphasis on the role of both external and domestic factors in shaping state behavior. However, El-Affendi (2013) illustrates that the emphasis on religious and cultural harmony in the traditional Islamic approach may be overly idealistic and may not always be practical in the face of geopolitical realities. On one hand, proponents of the traditional Islamic approach argue that religious and cultural harmony is an essential component of achieving lasting regional peace. They may point to historical examples where Muslim leaders successfully promoted interfaith and intercultural dialogue as a means of resolving conflicts and promoting peace. Additionally, they may argue that failing to address religious and cultural differences can lead to increased tensions and violence, as seen in conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Ibid, 2013).

On the other hand, critics of the traditional Islamic approach argue that achieving religious and cultural harmony is easier said than done. They may argue that historical conflicts, such as the Sunni-Shia divide, demonstrate that deeply ingrained religious and cultural differences can be difficult to overcome. Additionally, they may argue that geopolitical interests and power dynamics often trump religious and cultural considerations in international relations. Despite these criticisms, it is important to note that this approach also recognizes the importance of domestic factors such as public opinion and interest groups in shaping state behaviour (Hashmi, 2013). This suggests that even if achieving religious and cultural harmony is difficult, it is still worth pursuing as part of a broader strategy for promoting regional peace.

The emphasis on economic cooperation is an important aspect for promoting regional peace and stability, as outlined in the traditional Islamic approach. It raises a critical question. Is economic cooperation the only factor that can guarantee regional peace, or are there other factors that need to be considered? While economic cooperation can be an essential factor, it is not sufficient to guarantee peace, as it may not address underlying conflicts and tensions that exist between different groups or states. Additionally, economic cooperation may not be feasible if there are other conflicts, such as territorial

disputes or religious differences that need to be resolved first (Ali & Abubakar, 2018).

While the emphasis on the role of external factors such as international law and diplomacy raises another critical question. Are these external factors enough to guarantee regional peace and stability, or do they need to be complemented by domestic factors such as religious and cultural harmony and economic cooperation? While international law and diplomacy can play a crucial role in promoting peace, they may not be sufficient in themselves to address underlying domestic factors that shape state behaviour. Furthermore, external factors may not be effective in cases where domestic factors such as public opinion and interest groups hold sway over a state's foreign policy behaviour (Abdullah, 2018).

Taking into account the foreign policy behaviour of Iran, It can be analysed through the lens of neoclassical realism, which takes into account both external and domestic factors that shape foreign policy behaviour of a state. Iran's foreign policy can be considered as a counterpoise approach to peace in the region because it aims to project power and influence throughout the Middle East in order to balance the dominance of other regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Israel (Jahner, 2012).

The link between the state and society is one of the domestic factors that affects the foreign policy of Iran. As a theocratic state, the government of Iran is influenced by the views and preferences of its religious leaders, who play a vital role in formulating the foreign policy of Iran (Ehteshami, 2008). For instance, Iran's assistance to local Shia groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen can be viewed as a component of its efforts to assert its dominance in the area and support its Shia neighbours (Johnston, et.al, 2020). Another domestic factor that shapes the foreign policy of Iran is its political institutions. Iran's complex political system, which includes elected officials as well as unelected religious leaders, can lead to competing interests and power struggles within the government that can affect its

foreign policy decisions. For instance, the Supreme Leader and the Revolutionary Guard may have different views on how to approach regional conflicts, which can lead to differing policy decisions (Ehteshami, 2008).

At the same time, external factors such as “the balance of power in the region and the threat perceptions of neighbouring countries also play a role in shaping Iran’s foreign policy behaviour”. Iranian support for regional Shia militias can be seen as a response to the perceived threat posed by Sunni-dominated states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and Israel (karagiannis, 2016). “The pursuit of nuclear technology by Iran can also be seen as a response to the perceived threat posed by the United States and its allies in the region” (Ehteshami, 2008).

3.2 Traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian Counterpoise Approaches to regional peace from the lens of Just War Theory

According to Ogadinma (2022), the just war tradition, which is a set of mutually agreed rules of combat, has historically evolved between culturally similar enemies who share a moral identity and values. The lack of rules to war and any asymmetrical morality between belligerents should be denounced, and the rules of war should apply to all equally, regardless of any historically formed conventions. This is because warfare has been infused with moral concerns from the beginning, and some moral considerations were used by warriors to limit the outbreak or potential devastation of warfare, such as the treatment of women and children, prisoners, or the concept of honour, which is highly specific to culture.

Traditional Islamic thinking, which emphasizes the importance of religious and cultural harmony, economic cooperation, and diplomatic relations, aligns with the principles of the just war tradition. According to Hashmi (2013), peace can only be achieved through a combination of external and internal factors, including interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Therefore, the Traditional Islamic approach to regional peace, with its emphasis on the

importance of religious and cultural harmony, can be seen as consistent with the principles of the just war tradition (Ibid, 2013). However, there are challenges in applying the just war theory to the Traditional Islamic approach to regional peace. For instance, the just war tradition assumes a mutual agreement between the warring parties on the rules of engagement, which may not be the case in conflicts involving non-state actors or groups with different cultural and religious values. Additionally, the just war theory assumes that the use of force is a last resort and proportional to the threat faced, which may not align with the Traditional Islamic approach to regional peace, which emphasizes a counterpoise approach to projecting power and influence in the region (Kozhanov, 2018).

One possible point of debate is the extent to which the Traditional Islamic approach to regional peace is compatible with modern interpretations of Just War theory. Some scholars argue that Just War theory is out-dated and irrelevant in the contemporary world, as it assumes a state-centric perspective that does not account for the complex transnational issues that characterize modern conflicts. They argue that the Traditional Islamic approach to regional peace, which emphasizes economic cooperation and interfaith dialogue, is better suited to address the root causes of conflict in the contemporary world (Bellamy, 2012). However, others argue that Just War theory is still relevant and applicable to modern conflicts, including those in the Middle East. They argue that the principles of Just War theory, such as the distinction between combatants and non-combatants and the proportionality of force, can be applied to contemporary conflicts in the region. They contend that the Traditional Islamic approach to regional peace should be complemented by Just War theory, which provides a moral framework for the use of force in cases where diplomacy and economic cooperation are insufficient to address the root causes of conflict (Fiala, 2015).

Moreover, the application of Just War Theory to the Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach to regional peace presents further challenges. The

Islamic Republic of Iran has a different interpretation of just war theory, which emphasizes the defence of the Islamic community and opposes any aggression or occupation by foreign powers. This approach has led Iran to support various militant groups in the region, which has raised concerns about the proportionality of its use of force and adherence to the just war principles. Therefore, while the Traditional Islamic approach to regional peace may align with the principles of just war theory, the Iranian counterpoise approach presents significant challenges to its application (Nasr, 2009).

Furthermore, some scholars argue that the Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach to regional peace is not compatible with Just War theory, as it involves the projection of power and influence in the region through proxies and asymmetric warfare. They argue that such tactics violate the principles of Just War theory, particularly the principle of discrimination, which requires that force be directed only at combatants and military targets. On the other hand, proponents of the Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach may argue that the use of proxies and asymmetric warfare is necessary to counterbalance the dominance of other regional powers, and that such tactics can be justified under the principle of self-defence. They may also argue that the principles of Just War theory are themselves rooted in Western thought and may not be applicable or relevant to Islamic conceptions of warfare and peace (Sjoberg, 2006).

3.3 Constructivist Theory on the dynamic nature of Islamic identity and norms

The Constructivist Theory suggests that the international relations are socially constructed and that actions and behaviours of actors in the international system are shaped by their beliefs, identities, and norms. This theory can be applied to analyse the Traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach to regional peace, specifically examining how Islamic

identity and norms influence the attitudes and actions of Islamic states in the region.

In the context of Traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach to regional peace, Islamic identity and customs are very crucial in determining how Islamic government(s) view peace and conflict resolution. As Kamrava (2008) argue that “religious norms and values play a critical role in shaping the foreign policies of Islamic states” (Ibid, 2008). Similarly, Islamic beliefs such as justice, compassion, and tolerance can significantly influence the decisions and actions of Islamic states in the region. For example, Islamic states may be more likely to promote peace and stability in the region by upholding the principles of justice and compassion (Bouta, et.al, 2005).

Furthermore, the Islamic identity also shapes the perception of Islamic states towards non-Islamic states and their role in the region. Islamic states may view non-Islamic states as a threat to the Islamic identity and may be more likely to resist their influence in the region (Hashim, 2003). Roy (1994) holds similar view, he argued that “the Islamic identity shapes the perception of Islamic states towards the West, which is often viewed as a source of secularization and cultural erosion”. As such, Islamic states may be more likely to take a counterpoise approach towards non-Islamic states in the region, seeking to maintain their own Islamic identity and protect it from external influences.

However, it is essential to point out that the Islamic identity and norms are not static and can change over time, influenced by global trends and international events (Hashim, 2003). Islamic states interpret and apply these beliefs in different ways, leading to different approaches to regional peace (Kamrava, 2008). Therefore, a debate can arise as to whether the Islamic identity and norms are the only factors that shape the Traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach to regional peace, or whether other factors such as international pressure and economic interests also play a

significant role. For example, some scholars argue that Islamic identity and norms are not the only factors influencing the Traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach to regional peace. They suggest that economic interests, political power, and security concerns also shape the policies and actions of Islamic states in the region (Bouta, et.al, 2005). For instance, Islamic states may be more likely to cooperate with non-Islamic states if it serves their economic interests or enhances their political power (Kamrava, 2008). Therefore, Constructivist Theory can provide a useful framework for analysing the Traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach to regional peace. However, it is crucial to recognize that the Islamic identity and norms are not the only factors influencing the attitudes and actions of Islamic states in the region. A deeper understanding of the complex factors shaping foreign policy is necessary to promote peace and stability in the region.

4. Research Methodology

The research design of this study is guided by the principles of qualitative research. The methodology includes case studies, and a comparative qualitative content analysis. The comparative qualitative content analysis method is used to compare and contrast the data collected from the case studies to identify similarities and differences between the two approaches. This is supported using multiple case studies, which allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian Counterpoise approaches towards peace (Smith, 2009; Stake, 2005; Creswell, 2013).

4.1 Multiple Case Studies

Multiple case studies are an important research method in exploring complex phenomena and drawing valuable insights (Mohieldin, 2006). In this study, multiple case studies are being used to analyse the two approaches to regional peace. The case studies involve the examination of historical events, policies, and actions that reflect each approach (Nasr, 2011).

To identify potential variables for examination, the historical context and evolution of traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian approaches to regional peace can be studied (Esposito, 2010). The principles and values underlying the two approaches to regional peace can also be considered (Al-Qaradawi, 2000).

In the context of this study, some potential dimensions can be examined include:

- The historical context and evolution of traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian counterpoise approaches to regional peace.
- The principles and values underlying traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian counterpoise approaches to regional peace.
- The effectiveness of traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian counterpoise approaches to regional peace in achieving their goals.
- The impact of traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian counterpoise approaches on domestic and international politics.

By examining multiple cases and comparing them, this study draws insights and conclusions about the effectiveness and suitability of traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian counterpoise approaches to regional peace. We can also identify potential areas for improvement or future research.

It is important to note that the multiple case studies research method has its limitations. There may be few cases, and the results may not be generalized to other contexts. However, when conducted rigorously, the multiple case studies research method can provide valuable insights into complex phenomena and contribute to the development of theories and policies.

4.2 A Comparative Qualitative Content Analysis

Islamic principles continue to be a driving force in shaping the world view and policy decisions of many Muslim countries (Abdullah, 2019). The promotion of regional peace and stability remains a core Islamic value (Barnidge Jr, 2008), which is pursued through various approaches. This paper seeks to undertake a comparative analysis of two major Islamic approaches to regional peace - Traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian approach. The research is conducted through a qualitative content analysis of relevant literature and documents.

The methodology adopted for this study is a qualitative content analysis of relevant literature and documents. The focus is on the analysis of the concepts and approaches to regional peace promoted by Traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian approach. The sources for the analysis include scholarly articles, books, policy documents, and speeches by relevant leaders.

The Traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian Counterpoise approaches to regional peace have several similarities and differences. Both approaches emphasize the importance of Islamic values and principles in promoting regional peace. However, while the Traditional Islamic approach emphasizes the importance of justice, compassion, and tolerance, the Islamic Iranian Counterpoise approach emphasizes the importance of Islamic governance and resistance to Western imperialism (Makdisi, 2011). The Traditional Islamic approach also places a strong emphasis on the rule of law and the protection of human rights (Alsaafin, 2016), while the Islamic Iranian Counterpoise approach places more emphasis on the role of the Islamic jurist in guiding the political and social affairs of the Muslim community (Afkhami, 2009).

In conclusion, this comparative analysis of Traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian Counterpoise approaches to regional peace shows that both approaches are rooted in Islamic values and principles. However, there are

significant differences between the two approaches, particularly in their emphasis on the rule of law and the role of the Islamic jurist in guiding the affairs of the Muslim community. It is important for policymakers to be aware of these differences when developing strategies for promoting regional peace in Muslim countries.

4.3 Material

There are several sources that can be used as reference material for this study. Content based sources employed for the traditional Islamic approach to regional peace include the Quran, Hadith, and the works of prominent Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah (Majid, 2007). These texts provide insight into the principles and concepts that form the foundation of traditional Islamic thought on regional peace. For the Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach, key documents used as reference materials include the Iranian Constitution (Moeed, 2018). These materials provide insight into Iran's perspective on regional peace, its strategies for achieving it, and the role of Islam in its approach.

Secondary sources for this study include academic articles, books, and reports on the subject. For example, Moeed (2018) provides an analysis of Iran's foreign policy and its ideological underpinnings, while Majid (2007) explores the concept of peace in Islam and the challenges facing Muslim societies in achieving it. Other relevant sources include the works of scholars such as Abdulaziz Sachedina, John Esposito, and Hamid Dabashi, who have written extensively on Islamic approaches to peace and conflict resolution.

In summary, this study draws on a range of primary and secondary sources, including classical Islamic texts, key documents related to the Islamic Republic of Iran, and academic articles, books, and reports. These materials provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian counterpoise approaches to regional peace and contribute to the development of insights and conclusions about their effectiveness and suitability.

4.4 Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of this study, several measures are being taken. First, the materials are being selected based on their relevance to the research question and the research objectives (Creswell, 2014). Second, the analysis is being conducted independently to ensure the reliability of the results (Patton, 2015). Third, the analysis is being reviewed by a panel of experts to ensure the validity of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Fourth, the research findings will be compared with the existing literature to ensure the consistency of the results (Creswell, 2014). Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of the research findings (Patton, 2015).

By conducting this research independently, this study aims to minimize the risk of bias and increase the reliability of the results. In addition, by selecting materials that are relevant to the research question and the research objectives, this study aims to ensure that the analysis is based on reliable sources.

Validity refers to the accuracy and truthfulness of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By employing the experts' knowledge and expertise in the field of Islamic studies and international relations can help ensure that the analysis is accurate and truthful. Additionally, comparing the research findings with the existing literature can help ensure the consistency and validity of the results.

4.5 Significance

The significance of this research is supported by several authors who have emphasized the importance of understanding Islamic approaches to peace building. For example, Ahmed (2016) argues that Islamic values and principles can provide a unique perspective on conflict resolution and peace building. Similarly, Nafi (2018) emphasizes the need for a deeper understanding of Islamic principles and their relevance to contemporary issues of conflict and peace.

Furthermore, the contribution of this research to the existing literature on Islamic approaches to peace building is important, as the literature is limited in its scope and depth. This research addresses this gap by providing a comparative analysis of two major Islamic approaches to regional peace.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

There are several ethical considerations that the research follows, including maintaining the confidentiality and authenticity of sources, and ensuring the research is conducted in an unbiased manner. As noted by Juma and Juma (2015), maintaining confidentiality is crucial in research to protect the participants' privacy and maintain their trust. Additionally, the research is conducted in an unbiased manner to ensure that the findings are not influenced by the researchers' personal beliefs or interests (Mertens, 2014). The sources used in the research are properly cited to avoid plagiarism, which is considered as an unethical in research (Bretag et al., 2019).

5. Traditional Islamic Approach to Regional Peace

Since the seventh century, the Islamic tradition has had a tremendous impact on the Middle East and the larger Islamic world. According to Abul A'la Maududi, "Islam is not a mere religious creed, it is a way of life, a complete system governing all aspects of human existence, social, economic, and political" (p. 18) and which is reflected in the historical development of Islamic governance and thought. The development of Islamic thought and governance was significantly assisted by the creation of strong Islamic empires like the Abbasids, Ottomans, and Safavids as a result of the spread of Islam from the Arabian Peninsula. These empires established political, cultural, and economic systems that continue to shape the region today. As argued by Marshall Hodgson, these empires served as "carriers of the Islamic cultural tradition" and contributed to the growth of a shared Islamic identity across the region (Hodgson, 1974, p. 150).

The decline of the Islamic empires in the Middle Ages and the rise of European colonialism and its impact led to significant changes in the political and economic realms of the Islamic world. The colonial powers divided the region into separate colonies and spheres of influence, undermining the unity of the region and contributing to the emergence of modern Islamic nationalism (Esposito, 2003). Islamic political movements began to form in the 20th century; examples include the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan. These movements reflected a desire for autonomy and self-rule and aimed to advance Islamic governance. As noted by John L. Esposito (2003), these movements were “often critical of the West, Westernization, and secularization” and sought to promote an Islamic alternative to modernity (p. 59).

One of the most significant events in the region’s recent history was the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which saw the foundation of an Islamic republic under the rule of Ayatollah Khomeini and the overthrow of the secular Pahlavi dynasty. As argued by Vali Nasr (2007), the revolution “unleashed a new wave of Islamic activism” and challenged the dominance of secular nationalist governments in the region (p. 3). The Iranian Revolution also had a profound impact on regional politics, particularly in the Persian Gulf. The emergence of Iran as an Islamic Republic, and the government’s promotion of Islamic governance and opposition to Western powers challenged the existing regional order and contributed to tensions with neighbouring countries, particularly Iraq and Saudi Arabia (Kamrava, 2008).

Today, the Islamic world is characterized by a range of political, economic, and cultural dynamics, with a variety of approaches to regional peace. The comparative study of traditional Islamic and Iranian approaches to regional peace seeks to explore the various historical, political, and cultural factors that have influenced these approaches and their impact on the region.

6. Analysis of Traditional Islamic Principles and Teachings Related to Peace and Conflict Resolution

The concept of regional peace in Islam dates to the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who worked towards creating a peaceful society in Medina through the establishment of a social contract known as the Constitution of Medina (Ali, 2021). The concept of peace in Islam is not just the absence of violence, but it encompasses the idea of justice, equality, and harmony in society (Kumar & Paracha, 2019). The traditional Islamic approach to regional peace is based on the principles of justice, compassion, and tolerance. In Islam, peace is achieved through the establishment of social and political systems that uphold these principles (Raza, 2016). The Quranic teachings emphasize the importance of resolving conflicts through peaceful means and negotiation (Quran 49:9) and prohibit aggression and violence against innocent people (Quran 5:32, & Kumar & Paracha, 2019).

According to Dr. Abdulaziz Sachedina, a prominent Islamic scholar, the traditional Islamic approach to peace building emphasizes the importance of building relationships and engaging in dialogue with other nations and communities. He argues that the key to achieving regional peace in Islam is through “maintaining good relations with neighbours, seeking justice for all, and upholding the rights of minorities” (quoted by Sachedina, 2011, p. 45). Moreover, Islamic scholars suggest that the concept of regional peace in Islam is not limited to Muslims only, but it includes non-Muslims as well. The Quranic principle of “no compulsion in religion” (Quran 2:256) emphasizes the importance of religious tolerance and coexistence with people of other faiths (Kumar & Paracha, 2019).

The following are some of the Islamic principles and teachings related to peace and conflict resolution:

- **The importance of justice:** In Islam, justice is considered a key principle for maintaining peace and resolving conflicts. The Quran emphasizes the importance of justice in numerous verses, including the following:

“O you, who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So, follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort [your testimony] or refuse [to give it], then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted” (Quran 4:135)

This Quranic text highlights the importance of being just, even if it goes against one’s own interests or those of their loved ones. This principle is important for conflict resolution, as it ensures that all parties are treated fairly and equitably.

- **Forgiveness:** Forgiveness is another key principle in Islamic teachings related to peace and conflict resolution. The Quran emphasizes the importance of forgiveness:

“Take what is given freely, enjoin what is good, and turn away from the ignorant. And if an evil suggestion comes to you from Satan, then seek refuge in Allah. Indeed, He is Hearing and Knowing. Indeed, those who fear Allah - when an impulse touch them from Satan, they remember [Him] and at once they have insight (Quran 7:199-201)”.

This verse highlights the importance of turning away from ignorance and seeking refuge in Allah. It also emphasizes the importance of forgiveness, as forgiveness can help resolve conflicts and restore peace.

- **Dialogue and communication:** Islam emphasize the importance of dialogue and communication in resolving conflicts. The Quran emphasizes the importance of communication in the following verse:

“And do not dispute with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say, we believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him (Quran 29:46)”.

The above text highlights the significance of communicating in a respectful and peaceful manner, even when disagreements arise. It also emphasizes the importance of finding common ground and acknowledging the shared belief in one God.

- **Non-violence:** Islam emphasizes the principle of non-violence in resolving conflicts. The Quran emphasizes the importance of non-violence in the following verse:

“Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors (Quran 2:190)”.

This text highlights the significance of self-defence but emphasizes that violence should not be used to resolve conflicts. Islam promotes peaceful resolution of conflicts through non-violent means.

6.1 Comparative Analysis of Principles and Teaching of the Quran and the Bible Regarding Peace and Conflict Resolution

The Quran and the Bible are two of the most influential religious texts in the world, and both offer guidance on peace and conflict resolution. While there are similarities in their teachings, there are also some differences. Here is a comparative analysis of the principles and teachings of the Quran and Bible regarding peace and conflict resolution:

- **Importance of Forgiveness and Reconciliation:** Both the Quran and Bible emphasize the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation. The Quran teaches that, “Believers should forgive others and

reconcile with them, even if they have been wronged (Quran 42:37)” (Ali, 2021). Similarly, the Bible instructs believers to forgive others, and even to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44, (New International Version)).

- **Non-Violence and Turning the Other Cheek:** The Bible teaches that Christians ought to turn the other cheek rather than confront an evildoer (Matthew 5:39). Similarly, the Quran teaches that believers should respond to evil with goodness, and that the best response to an enemy is to be peaceful (Quran 41:34) (Kumar & Paracha, 2019).
- **Self-Defence:** While both the Quran and the Bible encourage peace, they also recognize the right to self-defence. The Quran teaches that believers have the right to defend themselves against those who would harm them (Quran 2:190) (Kumar & Paracha, 2019). Similarly, the Bible acknowledges the right to defend oneself (Exodus 22:2-3, (New International Version)).
- **Just War Theory:** The Quran and Bible both recognize the concept of just war. The Quran teaches that war is only permissible when it is fought in self-defence or to defend the oppressed (Quran 22:39-40) (Ali, 2021). Similarly, the Bible teaches that war may be justified if it is fought for a just cause (Jeremiah 22:3, (New International Version)).
- **Importance of Dialogue and Negotiation:** Both the Quran and the Bible emphasize the importance of dialogue and negotiation in conflict resolution. The Quran instructs believers to resolve disputes through peaceful dialogue (Quran 49:9) (Kumar & Paracha, 2019), while according to what the Bible says, Christians should desire and pursue peace (1 Peter 3:11, (New International Version)).
- **Love Thy Neighbour:** The Bible teaches that Christians should love their neighbours as themselves (Mark 12:31) (New International Version). Similarly, the Quran teaches that believers should be kind

to their neighbours and treat them with respect (Quran 4:36) (Kumar & Paracha, 2019).

Therefore, both the Quran and the Bible offer guidance on peace and conflict resolution, emphasizing forgiveness, reconciliation, non-violence, self-defence, just war theory, dialogue, negotiation, and loving thy neighbour. While there are some differences in their teachings, both texts share a common goal of promoting peace and harmony among people.

6.2 Case Studies of Traditional Islamic Approach to Regional Peace

Traditional Islamic approaches to regional peace can be observed in historical events and the use of Islamic law in various Muslim societies. The Treaty of Hdaybiyyah and the role of Islamic law in the Ottoman Empire are two examples of these approaches (Kelsay, 1993; Ozdalga, 2011). Both examples emphasize the importance of peaceful resolution of disputes and the use of Islamic principles and teachings to maintain regional peace. These examples highlight the significance of Islamic principles and teachings in promoting peace and harmony in society.

6.3 Treaty of Hdaybiyyah

The Treaty of Hdaybiyyah is a significant historical event that illustrates the importance of peaceful resolution of disputes in Islam. In 628 CE, the Muslims and the Meccans negotiated a treaty that guaranteed a time of peace between the two sides (Esposito, 2010). The pact of Hdaybiyyah was significant because it marked a turning point in the relations between the Muslims and the Meccans. The treaty ensured a period of peace between the two sides and allowed the Muslims to focus on spreading their religion without fear of attack. The treaty also contained provisions for resolving disputes between the two sides through peaceful means (Kelsay, 1993).

6.4 Role of Islamic Law in the Ottoman Empire Rule

The Ottoman rule provides another example of traditional Islamic approaches to regional peace. Islamic law, or Sharia, played an essential role in the Ottoman Empire's approach to maintaining peace (Ozdalga, 2011). One example of this is the Ottoman Empire's use of arbitration as a peaceful means of resolving disputes between individuals or groups. Islamic law provided guidelines for the arbitration process, including the appointment of arbitrators and the procedures for presenting evidence (Ozdalga, 2011). The Ottomans also used diplomatic treaties to establish and maintain peaceful relations with neighbouring states. Islamic law provided guidelines for the negotiation and enforcement of treaties, ensuring that they were fair and equitable for all parties involved (Kelsay, 1993).

6.5 Comparative Analysis of Traditional Islamic Approach to Peace and the Concept of Jihad

A comparative analysis reveals some interesting insights into the role of Islam in promoting peace and harmony in society. While both approaches have their roots in Islamic teachings, they differ in their emphasis and application:

The concept of jihad has been the subject of on-going debate and controversy both within the Islamic community and outside of it. While some interpret jihad to mean holy war and the use of violence against non-Muslims, others view it as a peaceful struggle to uphold and promote Islamic principles (Esposito, 2002). The Quranic verse "Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors" (Al Quran 2:190) is often cited in discussions of jihad and its relationship to armed conflict (Haque, 2017). However, the Quran also emphasizes the importance of peaceful resolution of disputes and the use of Islamic principles and teachings to maintain regional peace and forbids the use of

violence against innocent civilians. The verse “And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden, except by right” (Al Quran 6:151) is often cited as evidence of Islam’s emphasis on peace and respect for human life (Haque, 2017). The Treaty of Hdaybiyyah and the role of Islamic law in the Ottoman Empire are examples of traditional Islamic approaches to regional peace (Khan, 2020).

Islamic scholars and leaders have repeatedly emphasized the importance of using peaceful means to resolve conflicts and promote Islam (Ali, 2016). The Prophet Muhammad himself advocated for peaceful conflict resolution and condemned unnecessary violence (Aslan, 2005). Moreover, Islamic teachings prohibit the killing of innocent civilians, even in times of war (Esposito, 2002). As the Quran states, "If anyone kills a person - unless in retribution for murder or spreading mischief in the land - it is as if he kills all mankind, while if anyone saves a life, it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind" (Al Quran 5:32). It is important to note that the concept of jihad has evolved over time and can be interpreted in different ways based on context, culture, and historical circumstances.

Despite these teachings, some extremist groups have used the concept of jihad to justify acts of violence and terrorism. This has led to widespread misconceptions about Islam and the role of jihad within it (Esposito, 2002). To counter these misconceptions, Islamic scholars and leaders have emphasized the peaceful and spiritual aspects of jihad and have called for a renewed understanding of the concept that is grounded in compassion, justice, and respect for human life (Ali, 2016). In addition, some scholars argue that terrorism has no place in jihad, others argue that the use of violence can be justified in certain circumstances, such as in cases of foreign occupation or aggression (Smith, 2006).

The role of jihad in modern times has been debated for many years, with some scholars advocating for a re-evaluation and updating of the traditional understanding of the concept to reflect contemporary challenges and realities

(Qureshi, 2012). Others, however, argue that the traditional interpretation of jihad is still relevant and applicable today (Cook, 2015). Moreover, there is a difference of opinion on the distinction between jihad and other forms of armed conflict, such as just war theory in Christianity. Some scholars view jihad as fundamentally different from just war theory, while others find significant similarities between the two (Cook, 2015).

Proponents of a reinterpreted concept of jihad argue that the term has been misused and distorted to justify violent extremism and terrorism (Qureshi, 2012). They suggest that a revised interpretation could emphasize the importance of peaceful means of resolving conflicts and underscore the defensive nature of jihad. In contrast, scholars who support the traditional understanding of jihad believe that the physical struggle against those who threaten the Islamic faith, and its followers is still relevant today (Cook, 2015). They note that the concept of just war theory in Christianity shares many similarities with the traditional understanding of jihad, such as the idea of fighting for a just cause and with proportionate force.

In conclusion, the concept of jihad is complex and multifaceted, encompassing both personal and collective struggles to uphold Islamic principles. While some interpretations of jihad have emphasized the use of violence, Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of peaceful conflict resolution and respect for human life. As such, it is important to approach the concept of jihad with nuance and understanding, considering the diverse historical, cultural, and religious contexts in which it is invoked.

6.6 Iran's Foreign Policy Behaviour and Perception in the Context of Divine Guidance and Traditional Islamic Norms

6.6.1 Understanding the Complexities of

Iran's Foreign Policy

Iranian foreign policy is a multifaceted and complex issue that is shaped by a variety of factors, including historical, cultural, and geopolitical considerations. One of the factors that shapes Iran's foreign policy is its religious and ideological commitments. "Iran is a Shia Muslim state, and its foreign policy approach is heavily rooted in the concept of Wilayat al-Faqih (Guardianship of the Jurist)" which is a principle of Islamic governance that gives the highest religious authority to the Supreme Leader of Iran. This approach emphasizes the importance of unity and cooperation among Islamic countries in promoting peace, security, and stability in the region (Maloney, 2015). The Iranian government believes that regional peace can only be achieved through a counterpoise approach which is deeply rooted in the concept of Jihad. For instance, the Iranian government has been vocal in its support for the Palestinian cause and the rights of the people of Yemen and Syria. Iranian leaders have sought to promote Shia Islam and to counter the influence of Sunni Islam in the region. Iran has also sought to promote its revolutionary ideology, which seeks to challenge the dominance of Western powers in the region (Ibid, 2015).

Another factor that shapes the foreign policy of Iran is its position in the Middle East. As argued by Krieg (2017), Iran has been actively engaged in regional diplomacy, participating in various multilateral initiatives aimed at promoting regional peace and stability. These include the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and the Non-Aligned Movement. Iran's foreign policy is motivated by its desire to protect its strategic interests and to

balance the power of its adversaries in the area, especially Saudi Arabia and Israel. Iran has taken part in number of regional wars, notably the Yemeni and Syrian Civil Wars. In both cases, Iran has been accused of supporting armed groups and exacerbating the conflicts. However, Iran has maintained that its involvement is limited to providing political and humanitarian support to the respective governments and communities (Ibid, 2017).

Finally, Iran's foreign policy is shaped by its relationships with other major powers. Iran has historically had a complex relationship with the United States, which has been marked by periods of cooperation and conflict. Iran has also sought to build relationships with other major powers, including Russia and China, in order to counterbalance the influence of the United States and its allies in the region (Krieg, 2017).

6.6.2 Fundamental Principles of Iran's Current System of Rule Based on Divine Guidance and Traditional Islamic Norms

The current system of rule in Iran is based on a unique blend of Shia Islam and its political ideology. The concept of Wilayat al-Faqih, or the "Guardianship of the Jurist" was introduced as a means of establishing an Islamic government based on the principles of Islamic law, justice, and equality. These principles of rule include the rule of a Supreme Leader, who is considered to be the ultimate authority on all matters of state, and the involvement of religious figures in government affairs. The Iranian government also views its role as promoting Islamic principles and values, both domestically and abroad. There are various interpretations and debates about the concept of jihad in Islamic thought and practice, which is an important aspect of Iran's foreign policy and regional influence (Nasr, 2006) and (Tabaar, 2019).

The fundamental principles of Iran's current system of rule are:

Divine guidance: The system is based on the principle that the ultimate authority for governance comes from God, as expressed through the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and his successors, the Imams. The Supreme Leader of Iran is considered the highest authority on earth, acting as the representative of the Hidden Imam, the 12th Shia Imam who is believed to have gone into hiding and will return to establish justice on earth (Momen, 1985). Article 5 of the Constitution states: "During the Occultation of the Wali al-Asr (may God hasten his reappearance), the leadership of the Ummah devolves upon the just and pious faqih who is fully aware of the circumstances of his age; courageous, resourceful, and possessed of administrative ability; and recognized and accepted as leader by the majority of the people".

Guardianship of the Jurist: According to this concept, the Supreme Leader of Iran, who is a high-ranking cleric, has the authority to interpret Islamic law and make decisions on behalf of the people. This means that the Supreme Leader has the power to veto legislation passed by the parliament, appoint the heads of the judiciary and the military, and have final say on all matters of state. The concept of Guardianship of the Jurist was first articulated by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Khomeini argued that Islamic law provided for the rule of the jurist in the absence of the Twelfth Imam, who is believed by Shia Muslims to have gone into hiding and will return one day to establish justice on earth. Khomeini's ideas gained widespread support during the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which overthrew the monarchy and established an Islamic Republic in Iran (Khomeini, 1979).

Popular sovereignty: Iran's system of rule is also founded on the principle of popular sovereignty. This means that the people have the right to elect representatives to the parliament, which has the power to make laws and approve government policies. According to Article 6 of the Iranian constitution, "the country's affairs must be administered on the basis of public opinion expressed by the means of elections". As stated in Article 62 of the constitution, "the Islamic Consultative Assembly (parliament) has the legislative power in the Islamic Republic of Iran". As per Article 87 of the constitution, "the president and ministers are obliged to appear before the Islamic Consultative Assembly to give explanations when deemed necessary".

Social justice: The Islamic Republic of Iran places a strong emphasis on the principles of social justice, which are derived from Islamic teachings and enshrined in its constitution, which declares that the government has a duty to "eliminate poverty, illiteracy, and backwardness, to provide social security, eliminate unemployment, and increase productivity" (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Article 3). Furthermore, the Islamic Republic of Iran's commitment to social justice is also reflected in its foreign policy. The country has been an active participant in international efforts to promote economic and social development, particularly in the Global South. Iran has contributed significantly to international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to advance the goal of social justice (Ghaderi & Jafari, 2019).

Independence and anti-imperialism: Iranian system of rule is also characterized by a strong sense of independence and

anti-imperialism. According to Khonsari and Baharvand (2019) “Iran’s foreign policy is rooted in a sense of independence, self-sufficiency and resistance to foreign domination” (p.129). These principles have shaped the political and social landscape of Iran and have had a significant impact on its foreign policy behaviour. They have helped to create a strong sense of national pride and identity, while also contributing to tensions with other countries, particularly those that are aligned with the United States and other Western powers (Ansari, 2019).

6.7 The Impact of Divine Guidance and Traditional Islamic Norms on Iran’s Foreign Policy Behaviour

The impact of Iranian current system of rule based can be seen in several key areas:

Iranian Approach to Adversaries: Iran has a confrontational approach to adversaries that perceives it as a threat to its sovereignty and independence. This includes countries that are aligned with the United States and Israel, such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states (Behzad, 2018). Iranian approach to adversaries is further shaped by its support for militant groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. Iran views these groups as allies in the struggle against Israel and Western powers, and as a means of expanding its influence in the region (Litvak, 2021). Iranian support for these groups has led to tensions with other countries and has been a major factor in its strained relationship with the United States and its allies.

Iran’s Stance on Regional Conflicts: Iran takes a critical view of regional conflicts and seeks to play an active role in resolving them. The involvement of Iran in these conflicts includes conflicts in Syria and Yemen, where Iran supports the Assad regime and the Houthi rebels, respectively. Iran views its involvement in these conflicts as a means of supporting oppressed

communities and countering foreign intervention, particularly from the United States and its allies (Irani, 2008). Iran's involvement in regional conflicts has led to tensions with other countries, particularly those that support opposing sides in these conflicts. For example, its support for the Assad regime in Syria has led to tensions with Saudi Arabia, which supports opposition groups in the country (Behzad, 2018). Similarly, Iran's support for the Houthi rebels in Yemen has led to tensions with the Gulf States, which are supporting the Yemeni government in its fight against the rebels (Ostovar, 2016).

Stance on International Organizations: "Iranian system of rule is founded on the principle of popular sovereignty, which means that it values the role of international organizations such as the United Nations. However, its anti-imperialist stance has led to tensions with these organizations, particularly over issues such as nuclear weapons and human rights" (Irani, 2008; Nia, 2010). Iran's nuclear program, has led to sanctions and condemnation from the international community, including the United Nations. Iran's stance on human rights, particularly in relation to political dissent and the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, has also been criticized by international organizations (Litvak, 2021). Iran views these criticisms as part of a larger agenda by Western powers to undermine its sovereignty and independence (Middleton, 1992).

6.8 Impact of Iran's Foreign Policy Behaviour on its Relations with Neighbouring Countries and the Broader Middle East Region

"Iran's ambitions to become a regional power and to exert influence on neighbouring countries have led to a complex and often tense relationship with other countries in the region" (Irani, 2008). One of the major sources of tension in Iran's relations with neighbouring countries has been its support for Shia groups and governments in the region (Methiesen, 2017). Iran has backed the Shia-led government in Iraq and the Alawite-led government in

Syria, both of which have faced opposition from Sunni-majority countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This has led to accusations of sectarianism and interference in the internal affairs of these countries. Iran's support for Shia groups in other countries, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthi rebels in Yemen, has also been a source of tension. These groups have been involved in conflicts with neighbouring countries, such as Israel and Saudi Arabia, leading to a proxy war in the region.

In recent years, Iran's relations with the Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), have been strained. These countries have accused Iran of supporting terrorism and interfering in their internal affairs. The conflict in Yemen, where Iran supports the Houthi rebels and Saudi Arabia leads a coalition supporting the Yemeni government, has further escalated tensions between Iran and the Gulf countries (Behzad, 2018). Iran's relations with Israel have also been tense, due to Iran's support for groups such as Hezbollah and its rhetoric against Israel (Filin et al., 2022). Israel has accused Iran of seeking to develop nuclear weapons and has threatened military action against Iran in response. Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology has also been a major issue in its relations with neighbouring countries and the broader region. The fear that Iran may be developing nuclear weapons has led to concerns about regional security and the potential for a nuclear arms race in the Middle East (Litvak, 2021).

6.9 Middle Eastern Countries and Immediate Neighbourhood Response to Iran's Actions and Aspirations

Iran's actions and aspirations, driven by its system of rule based on divine guidance and traditional Islamic norms, have often been perceived as provocative and confrontational, leading to a range of responses from the international community. While Iran has found allies and supporters in some countries, its confrontational approach has also created significant challenges for its relations with the wider international community. As such, its actions

and aspirations will continue to be a significant source of debate and analysis in international relations. In the Middle East, Iranian influence and actions have been a source of concern for many countries, particularly those that are aligned with the United States and other Western powers. Iran's support for groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, as well as its involvement in conflicts in Syria and Yemen, has been a major source of tension in the region. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates have been particularly critical of Iran's actions and have taken steps to counter its influence in the region (Celso, 2016; Helfont, 2009; Khan, 2016).

On the other hand, Iran has also found allies and supporters in the region, particularly among countries that share its Shia Muslim identity. Iraq, for example, has a close relationship with Iran, and has been a key ally in Iran's efforts to counter the influence of the United States in the region. Similarly, Syria and Yemen have received significant support from Iran, which has helped to maintain their positions in the face of external pressures (DerGhougassian, 2011; Devenyi, 2014). Outside of the Middle East, the actions and aspirations of Iran have also elicited a range of responses from the international community. Western countries, particularly the United States, have been highly critical of Iran's nuclear program, which they perceive as a threat to regional and global security. This has led to a range of sanctions and diplomatic pressure on Iran, which have had a significant impact on its economy and international standing (Bonner, 2008; Schirazi & O'Kane, 1999).

6.10 Western Perception of Iran's System of Rule

The Western perception of Iranian system of rule, which is based on divine guidance and traditional Islamic norms, is largely shaped by media coverage, political rhetoric, and historical events. This perception has had a significant impact on Iran's image in the eyes of the West, as well as its relations with Western countries. One of the primary criticisms of Iran's system of rule is

its lack of democracy and transparency. The role of the Supreme Leader, who has ultimate authority in Iran, and the Council of Guardians, which approves candidates for elections, are seen as obstacles to democracy and the rule of law. As Trita Parsi (2007) notes that “the Council of Guardians has frequently disqualified candidates for office based on vague charges of lacking the proper Islamic credentials”. This has led to accusations that Iran’s elections are not truly democratic (Ibid, 2007).

Additionally, human rights abuses in Iran, including treatment of political dissidents and women’s rights, are widely publicized in the Western media. According to a report by Amnesty International (2021); “Iranian authorities continued to use the death penalty extensively, executing hundreds of people...often after unfair trials”. The treatment of women’s rights is also a significant issue, with laws and practices that limit their access to education, employment, and political participation (Ibid, 2021). Furthermore, Iranian support for groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas are viewed with suspicion in the West. These groups are seen as terrorist organizations by many Western countries, and Iran’s support for them is seen as a threat to regional and international security. As Robin Wright (2011) notes, “Iran has long been a major backer of Hezbollah and Hamas”. This has led to accusations that Iran is sponsoring terrorism and destabilizing the region.

The western perception of Iran nuclear program has also been a point of contention, as its intentions have been questioned by the United States and other countries. These factors contribute to a negative perception of Iran in the West, which can have a profound impact on its relations with western countries. Western countries, led by the United States, have accused Iran of pursuing nuclear weapons, while Iran maintains that its program is for peaceful purposes. This disagreement has led to economic sanctions and strained relations between Iran and the West. “The West has long been suspicious of Iran’s nuclear program and has sought to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons capability” (Dobbins et al., 2013).

7. Discussion and Conclusion

The Traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian Counterpoise approaches to regional peace emphasize that peace and security are fundamental to the development and prosperity of any region. The study reveals a complex interplay of religious, cultural, political, and historical factors that shape the approach to regional peace. Both approaches emphasize the importance of justice, dialogue, and negotiation in resolving conflicts. They also prioritize the need for mutual respect, understanding, and tolerance among different communities and cultures. This study has shown that both the approaches to regional peace are based on different underlying principles and have different applications in various regional contexts. The study utilizes the constructivist theory to provide a deeper understanding of the social and political factors that influence the approach to regional peace in both approaches. The theory suggests that the approach to regional peace is shaped by social norms, values, and beliefs constructed by actors in the international system. Both approaches prioritize the need for mutual respect, understanding, and tolerance among different communities and cultures. As such, any effort to promote regional peace and security must take into account the complexities of the regional dynamics and the diverse perspectives and interests of the stakeholders involved.

The traditional Islamic approach focuses on social and political harmony based on Islamic principles of justice, tolerance, and human dignity. It is rooted in the Islamic teachings that emphasize the importance of justice, compassion, and forgiveness as the foundations of a peaceful society (Esposito, 1995). This approach prioritizes diplomacy, mediation, and conflict resolution through peaceful means, and it emphasizes building trust and fostering mutual respect among conflicting parties. On the other hand, the Islamic Iranian Counterpoise approach is more pragmatic and strategic, drawing on Iran's historical experience as a regional power and its revolutionary ideology. This approach emphasizes the importance of strategic alliances, deterrence, and balancing of power to achieve regional

stability and security. It focuses on the concept of resistance against external and internal threats to Islamic values and principles (Katouzian, 2013). While both approaches share certain similarities, they are rooted in different historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors. For instance, the Traditional Islamic approach, which emphasizes internal factors such as the interpretation of Islamic law and agreement among Muslim scholars, has been successful in promoting peace in regions like Southeast Asia and the Balkans. In contrast, the Islamic Iranian Counterpoise approach, which is more focused on external factors such as the actions of external actors, has been criticized for exacerbating regional conflicts, particularly in the Middle East.

The study has also highlighted the role of external actors in shaping these approaches to regional peace. External factors such as the United States and Russia have significantly influenced the regional security architecture in the Middle East, leading to the formation of the Islamic Iranian Counterpoise approach in response to perceived external threats. Therefore, the two approaches differ not only in their emphasis on internal versus external factors but also in their origins and underlying principles. The Traditional Islamic approach is based on the principles of 'ijtihad' and 'ijma', which promote the interpretation of Islamic law and the agreement of Muslim scholars on religious matters. On the other hand, the Islamic Iranian Counterpoise approach is largely based on the geopolitical considerations and interests of the Iranian state.

In addition to external actors, identity also plays a significant role in shaping the approach to regional peace within the Islamic world. The traditional Islamic approach emphasizes the importance of a shared Islamic identity, while the Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach emphasizes the significance of a strong Iranian identity in promoting resistance against external threats. However, both approaches face challenges in promoting regional peace. The traditional Islamic approach faces difficulties due to the diversity of Islamic interpretations, lack of consensus on the definition of Islamic values, and

influence of non-Islamic factors. On the other hand, the Islamic Iranian counterpoise approach faces challenges concerning the tension between resistance and cooperation, lack of clarity in the definition of internal and external threats, and potential for the approach to be used for regional hegemony. Understanding these challenges and differences is essential for promoting regional peace and resolving conflicts within the Islamic world effectively.

Moreover, Iran's foreign policy behaviour is influenced by its perception of itself as a regional power and a defender of Islamic values. Its system of rule is founded on the principle of *velayat-e faqih*, which gives ultimate authority to the supreme leader who is guided by divine guidance. As a result, Iran sees itself as responsible for promoting Islamic values and principles, and it has been active in supporting Islamic movements and governments in the Middle East. This has often put Iran at odds with other countries in the region, particularly those with more secular governments. Additionally, Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology has raised concerns among its neighbours, who fear that Iran may be seeking to acquire nuclear weapons.

From a constructivist perspective, Iran's involvement in the conflict in the Middle East can be understood in terms of its identity as a regional power and its ideological orientation as an Islamic Republic with a revolutionary ideology. Iran seeks to assert its influence in the region through various means, including its support for Shia communities and militant groups. Its support for groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen has caused tensions with regional rivals such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE. However, the impact of divine guidance and traditional Islamic norms on Iran's foreign policy behaviour is significant and shapes its relations with neighbouring countries and the broader Middle East region (Mousavian, 2017).

Furthermore, the foreign policy of Iran is also driven by anti-imperialism, anti-Westernism, and Islamic values, leading to its support for anti-Western

movements and governments in the region. The conflict in Syria has highlighted the divisions between Sunni and Shia countries in the region, with Iran supporting the Assad regime. Iran's actions and aspirations have been met with mixed reactions from other Middle Eastern countries, with some being sympathetic and others sceptical. Overall, Iran's pursuit of regional power and promotion of Islamic values and principles have shaped its foreign policy behaviour, leading to both cooperation and tension with other countries in the region.

The study proposes policy implications to promote regional peace and understanding between different stakeholders in the Islamic world. Efforts must be made to address the root causes of conflict, such as political, economic, and social grievances, and cultural exchange programs, interfaith dialogue initiatives, and people-to-people exchanges should be promoted. However, the two approaches differ in their recommendations for promoting regional peace and security. The Traditional Islamic approach emphasizes the importance of dialogue and understanding between different communities and cultures, while the Islamic Iranian Counterpoise approach focuses on deterrence and the use of force to prevent aggression from external actors. The Traditional Islamic approach recommends the creation of programs to promote mutual understanding and cooperation, while the Islamic Iranian Counterpoise approach calls for the establishment of a strong military and security apparatus to maintain regional stability. Understanding these differences is crucial for developing effective policies to promote regional peace and resolve conflicts within the Islamic world.

Finally, the study highlights the need for greater regional cooperation in promoting peace and security. The creation of regional organizations, such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), can play an important role in promoting dialogue, cooperation, and trust-building among different communities and countries. Moreover, the role of external actors in the region must be carefully balanced to avoid exacerbating regional conflicts and tensions.

Based on the constructivist theory, the following are four recommendations for the comparative analysis of traditional Islamic and Islamic Iranian counterpoise approaches to regional peace:

- i. **Emphasizing shared norms and values:** The constructivist theory emphasizes the significance of shared norms and values in shaping state behaviour. While analysing traditional Islamic and Iranian counterpoise approaches to regional peace, it is important to recognize the role of shared cultural and religious values in shaping their approach. Specifically, the influence of Islamic ethics and values must be considered, and the potential for greater convergence and collaboration between the two approaches based on shared norms and values should be explored.
- ii. **Focus on the role of identity and perceptions:** The constructivist theory emphasizes the role of identity and perceptions in shaping state behaviour. Therefore, any analysis of the two approaches should focus on the role of identity and perceptions in shaping their approach. In this regard, it is important to focus on how the two approaches perceive each other and how they construct their own identities in relation to each other.
- iii. **Encourage regional cooperation:** Regional cooperation can play a key role in promoting regional peace and security. Policymakers and stakeholders should encourage greater regional cooperation through the creation of regional organizations, joint development projects, and cooperation on regional security issues.
- iv. **Consider multiple perspectives and interests:** Any effort to promote regional peace and security must consider the diverse perspectives and interests of the stakeholders involved. Policymakers should adopt an inclusive and participatory approach that engages all relevant stakeholders, including civil society organizations, religious leaders,

and marginalized communities. This can help to promote greater ownership and sustainability of any peace building efforts.

Future Gaps:

Through thorough study of both Islamic approaches towards regional peace few areas need to be clarified in the future.

- First, whether the Authoritarian states use religion as a tool in their Foreign policy if so then to what extent? (Comparative analysis).
- Second; a potential future study could examine the contrasting FP behaviour of Sunni-majority countries and Shia-majority countries in promoting regional peace.

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