

SECURITIZATON OF MIGRATION: THE CASE OF THE AFGHAN
REFUGEES IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

A Master's Thesis

by

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September 2018

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Bilkent University 2018

To my mother

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IRAN

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Dođramacı Bilkent University

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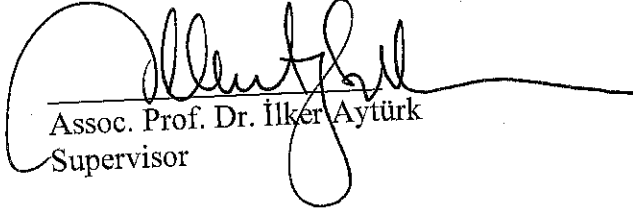
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

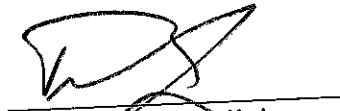
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September 2018


I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Political Science.


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ABSTRACT

SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION: THE CASE OF THE AFGHAN REFUGEES IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

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Based on security studies literature, this dissertation examines securitization of migration and Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran between 1979 and the present day. The main argument of the dissertation is that a pattern is discernible between Iran's direct involvement in armed conflicts and presenting migration as a security issue. Dividing the time framework into three periods, 1979-1989, 1989-2012 and 2012 to present day, the dissertation shows that when Iran gets involved in an armed conflict, -as in the first and third periods- it welcomes the Afghan refugees and pursues integrationist policies, and when Iran enters a period of peace, it resorts to restrictive policies against the refugees. Both international and domestic factors, which lead to this special relationship between the independent variable -

involvement in armed conflict- and the dependent variable -securitization of migration- are discussed in historical and sociological detail.

Keywords: Afghan Refugees, International Political Sociology, Iranian Politics, Migration

ÖZET

GÖÇÜN GÜVENLİKLEŞTİRİLMESİ: İRAN İSLAM CUMHURİYETİ'NDEKİ AFGAN MÜLTECİLER ÖRNEĞİ

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Yüksek Lisans, Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü

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Güvenlik çalışmaları ve uluslararası siyaset sosyolojisi literatürlerine dayanan bu tez, 1979'dan günümüze İran'daki Afgan mültecilerin güvenlikleştirilmesini incelemektedir. Tez temel olarak, İran'ın doğrudan silahlı mücadeleye dahil olması ile göçün bir güvenlik meselesi olarak sunulması arasında bir örüntünün var olduğunu tartışmaktadır. Zaman sürecini 1979-1989, 1989-2012 ve 2012'den günümüze olmak üzere üç döneme ayıran tez, İran'ın silahlı çatışmalara dahil olduğunda -birinci ve üçüncü dönemde olduğu üzere- Afgan mültecilere yönelik bütünleştirici politikalar izlediğini, barış dönemine girdiğinde ise mültecilere karşı kısıtlayıcı politikalara yöneldiğini göstermektedir. Bağımsız değişken -silahlı çatışmaya dahil olmak- ve bağımlı değişken -göçün güvenlikleştirilmesi- arasındaki

bu özel iliřkiye yol aan hem uluslararası hem de yerel etkenler, tarihsel ve sosyolojik ayrıntılar üzerinden tartıřılmıřtır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Afgan Mülteciler, G, İnan Siyaseti, Uluslararası Siyaset Sosyolojisi

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAFIA	Bureau of Aliens' and Foreign Immigrants 'Affairs
CSS	Critical Security Studies
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IRGC	Iran Revolutionary Guards Corps
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When do states securitize migration? Under which conditions do states attach a positive value and significance to incoming migrants and when would that positive outlook turn sour, leading the host country to securitize the presence of alien immigrants on its territory? Taking my cue from security studies and international political sociology literatures, in this dissertation I depart from these general questions, but focus on a specific one. The research question of this dissertation is how involvement in an armed conflict of a state affects the securitization of migration in that country. I explore this question by examining the case of the Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). To put it very briefly, I see a pattern and hypothesize that the IRI does not securitize migration when Iran is involved in an armed conflict and the reason for this choice is the change of its security priorities. Instead of securitizing the refugee population, the IRI chooses to benefit from them both in domestic politics and in the armed conflict. To analyze the case of Afghan refugees in Iran, I am going to restrict the timeframe of my research to the period between 1979 and 2018, which covers the whole history of the IRI until the present day. My theoretical framework is built around the critical security studies since it provides a wide range of research tools to track down the securitization practices. In this dissertation, I am aiming to make a contribution to the growing

literature on securitization of migration by bringing under the spotlights a case from the non-western world, specifically from the Middle East.

1.1 Concepts and Terminology

The use of terminology when studying migration is crucial. As Bigo (2002, p. 71) mentions for migration and security, “the wording is never innocent.” This applies to the term “refugee” as well. As Betts & Loescher (2011) explains, the term refugee has both legal and general meanings, and these meanings have evolved. According to the 1951 Geneva Convention, which currently provides the legal definition the refugee status and which the IRI is also a signatory of, a refugee is a person who left his country due to a well-founded fear of persecution and unwilling to return to it (Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951). When applied, this legally defined refugee status brings with it certain rights and privileges, as well as obligations and responsibilities, both for the refugee and the host country. Many host states, however, refrain from granting refugee status to avoid obligations and claim exceptions. The IRI is one such case, where only a fraction of Afghans in Iran are recognized as refugees, whereas the vast majority goes by different and periodically differing statuses given them by the IRI authorities (Chapters 2 and 3). In this dissertation, I am using the term “refugee” in its general meaning and apply it to all Afghans in Iran regardless of the various official or unofficial labels they have. What leads me to employ a more inclusive definition of the term is: 1) securitizing practices have an impact on all Afghans in Iran regardless of their status, although the harshness of the measures may vary, 2) while all Afghans in the IRI should actually have been covered by the terms of the Geneva Convention, Iranian decision-makers deprive the majority from this status in order to have a free a hand in dealing

with them. Therefore, when the term “Afghan refugee” is used in this dissertation, it does not reflect the limited number of Afghans, who were actually registered by the Iranian authorities as international refugees, but it corresponds to the sum total of 960.000 documented and almost two million undocumented Afghans currently living in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

Various terms have been used to define the Afghans in Iran. The Afghans who came to Iran before 1992 were granted the *mohajeer* status, which provided them with many rights and benefits. Originating from an Arabic root, *mohajeer* means ‘migrant,’ but it has a religious connotation. However, by the early 1990s, the IRI started giving the newly-invented *panahandeh* status instead. *Panahandeh* (singular form of the word) means “refugee” in the Persian language. Safri (2011) argues that the transformation of discourse from *mohajeer* to *panahandeh* is a signal of a newly-growing negative attitude vis-à-vis the Afghan population in Iran. There is in Iran also a limited number of Afghans, who were registered as refugees by the UNHCR, and asylum-seeking Afghans, who are waiting for a decision from the authorities. On top of all those, there are approximately two million undocumented Afghans in Iran, who do not have any documentation. Apart from these more legalistic terms to denote an Afghan in Iran, the most common and popular term, often used by ordinary Iranians to refer to Afghans is the “Afghan worker.” The “Afghan worker” (*Kargar-e Afghanistan*) is a daily term used for the Afghans employed in low value-added jobs in Iran (Moughari, 2007).

When it comes to distinguishing between the Afghans in Iran, the most significant difference among the Afghan refugees in Iran is their documentation, or the lack of

it. Being documented or undocumented/illegal creates a significant difference for refugees due to the different treatment accorded to their status. This distinction is not independent of the securitization of migration and appeared as a part of the securitizing policies. Documentation was not considered crucial for a whole lot of procedures and acquisition of rights and services during the period that the IRI was involved in the Iran-Iraq War, but became mandatory afterward (Hoodfar, 2014). This put many Afghans in illegal status and caused loss of their access to many rights and services. The illegal status of the refugees makes them more “flexible and exploitable” in the job market (Huysmans, 2000). To sum up, among the myriad of terms and adjectives regarding the refugees, documentation creates the most significant distinction.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Traditional security studies have a state-centrist approach, which takes the military sector as the central milieu of the security studies. The Critical Security Studies (hereafter CSS) emerged as a response to this by suggesting a widening in the scope of what the term “security” covers and, thereby, what security studies must also cover (Waeber, Buzan & de Wilde, 1998). Critical approaches expanded and widened the horizon of the security studies by acknowledging various actors other than states and various topics such as migration, environment, and economy as new areas of interest for security studies (Krause & Williams, 1996). Two aspects of the CSS are: 1) expanding the scope of the discipline by examining different threats such as environmental or societal, 2) widening the scope by including the security of subjects other than the state actor (Huysmans, 2006). Therefore, the CSS expanded

the horizon of the security studies, which was focused mainly on the military relations between states until then.

In this dissertation, I use the term securitization as a “kaleidoscope of practices,” which are mundanely applied by the officials (Balzacq, Basaran, Bigo, Guittet, & Olsson, 2010). Although this kaleidoscope contains the discourse as well, it is not restricted to it, and the discourse and practices regarding securitization are examined together. The importance of the combined effect of the discursive and practical elements comes from their potential to manipulate the public (Huysmans, 2000). In his study on securitization of migration in Greece, Karyotis (2012) shows the discursive or non-discursive aspects of the securitization, and mentions “visual images, performative violent acts, policy tools, institutional configurations, and forms of governmentality” as some of the “individual and collective framing strategies.” States often securitize migration by castigating or demonizing migrants and accusing them of being responsible for unemployment for the citizens of the host country by exploiting the welfare state and damaging the local culture (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002). Securitization of migration is a continuum from the management of migration to the criminal issues, hence provides a basis for linking the criminal activities with migration (Huysmans, 2000).

Conceptualization of the securitization practices is crucial for this study. Balzacq (2008) suggests that a securitization practice can be examined under the rubric of “the policy instrument,” which is a “package” containing “1) a type of good or activity, 2) a delivery vehicle for this good or activity, 3) a delivery system, and 4) a set of rules.” He then defines the securitization instrument as “an identifiable social

and technical ‘dispositif’ or device embodying a specific threat image through which public action is configured to address a security issue” (Balzacq, 2008). In this sense, border controls, security checks, surveillance technologies and many other material practices can be treated as the securitization instruments. By exposing how those security instruments are employed, it becomes possible to uncover how policy-makers translate intentions into practice and it also shows how social processes affect the policy instruments (Balzacq, 2008). This dissertation examines the impact of the armed conflict of the state in addition to the domestic social processes. In parallel with this approach, I track down the securitization of migration toward the Afghan refugees in Iran through the bureaucratic and legal regulations, the attitude of the officials, the evolution of the terminology used for defining the Afghans, refugees’ access to services, restrictions on civil rights, restrictions on mobility and economic activities.

In general, presenting migration as a danger to the local, national economy, character or prosperity is the securitization of migration (Waughan-Williams, 2015).

According to Ceyhan and Tsoukala, the arguments of security agents and media for securitizing migration have four principal axes:

- 1) a socioeconomic axis where migration is associated with unemployment, the rise of informal economy, the crisis of the welfare state, and urban environment deterioration
- 2) a securitarian axis, where migration is linked to the loss of a control narrative that associates the issues of sovereignty, borders, and both internal and external security
- 3) an identarian axis where migrants are considered as being a threat to the host societies’ national identity and demographic equilibrium
- 4) a

political axis where anti-immigrant, racist, and xenophobic discourses are often expected to facilitate the obtaining of political benefits (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002).

In this study, I searched for those axes and identified them in the case of the Afghan refugees in Iran. Just to give two examples to make this point, accusations toward Afghans for increasing unemployment and inflation (Mina, 2015) or claims of Afghans having too many children and not complying with the family planning program and breaking the societal harmony of Iran (Tober, 2007) reflect two of these axes.

1.3 Methodology and Case Selection

This dissertation conducts a single case study with a historical inquiry on the Afghan refugees in Iran, within the theoretical framework of the Critical Security Studies. The historical inquiry unmasks the evolution of policies and practices targeting the Afghan refugees in Iran, which simultaneously underlines Iranian securitizing policies. Critical Security Studies are intricately linked to the discipline of history as a terrain of social scientific research (Froese, 2013). The historical context of policy shifts and evolution is significant, because in this way I will attempt to show how Iranian decision-making on the Afghan refugees responded to an independent variable, that is, the IRI's involvement in military conflicts.

Since this dissertation examines the effect of the state's involvement in an armed conflict on the securitization practices it applies to the refugees, the independent variable of the research is the IRI's involvement in an armed conflict . The

timeframe selected for this study reflects both the entire history of the IRI and the history of the Afghan exodus: 1979-2018. This study provides a clear-cut picture of the relationship between my dependent and independent variables: Iranian decision-makers relaxed and continue to relax the securitization of migration in the context of an armed conflict, while they do implement harsh securitizing policies during cessation of such conflicts. Regarding the fact that securitization of migration is the “transformation of the logic of control and the surveillance of people entering and living inside the territory” (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002), the Afghan refugees in Iran pose an appropriate case for the continuous inflow of migrants, repatriation efforts, deportations and migration to third countries of millions of people for almost four decades.

Securitization of migration in Iran shows similar features to those few other cases. For example, like the case of Iran, undocumented migrants in Greece have been excluded from access to education, health services, and many other services and they are working in the sectors that locals usually do not prefer to do (Karyotis, 2012). Another similarity is the fact that Afghan refugees initially were welcomed in Iran due to their contribution to the economy just like the European countries that “used a permissive or even promotional migration policy motivated by the need for extra labour” (Huysmans, 2000). At the initial welcoming period, documentation was not so important for employment or social benefits, but this policy changed in the 1990s and documentation status became important. What makes the case of Iran quite unique, in comparison with other cases, is the fact that the securitization policies of the IRI evolved in parallel to its involvement in an armed conflict: First, the war with

Iraq between 1980-1989, and, second, the Syrian Civil War, in which Iran intervened in 2012 and continues to be a major actor.

1.4 The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Afghan Refugees

The Islamic Republic of Iran was established in 1979 after a period of discontent against the rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The new regime established as a theocratic democracy. In the meantime, civil war broke out in Afghanistan, which resulted in the Soviet occupation and led millions of Afghans to migrate to neighboring countries, especially Iran and Pakistan. Since this boom of migration from out of Afghanistan, Afghans emerged as the most significant foreign population in Iran as shown in Figure 1.

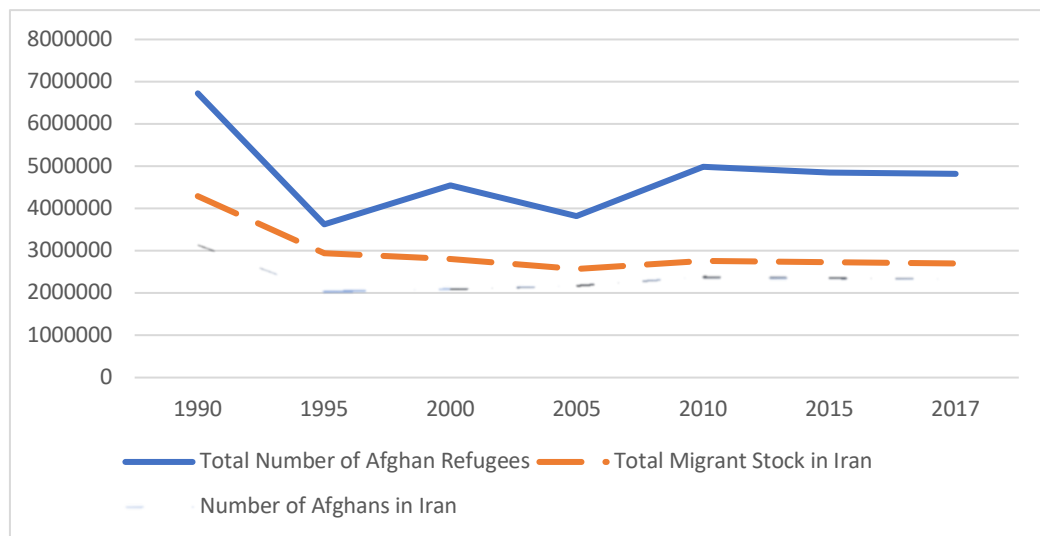


Figure 1: Number of Afghan refugees in the world, Total Migrant Stock of Iran, and Afghan refugees in Iran¹

¹ The figure is created based on the data derived from <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.shtml>

In the meantime, the Islamic regime in Iran experienced a lengthy and costly war with Iraq from 1980 to 1988. The war not only devastated the economy but also caused a considerable death toll for Iran. Since the concern of this dissertation is the effect of armed conflicts of the IRI on the securitization of the Afghan refugees, from an analytical point of view, the timeframe of the dissertation is broken down to three distinct periods: 1) the welcome period (1979-1989), 2) the unwelcome period (1989-2012), and 3) the Syrian Civil War (2012-2018). The first period corresponds to the IRI under the rule of Khomeini and the war with Iraq. The second period corresponds to the end of war with Iraq and change of rulers in 1989. And the last period initiates with the Iran's involvement in the Syrian Civil War and still continues. While the first and third periods correspond to the IRI's direct involvement in armed conflicts, the second period reflects a period in which the Iranian decision-makers mainly concerned with the consolidation of the regime at home. The periods, the rulers of the IRI during those periods, and the IRI's direct armed conflicts can be seen in the Table 1.

Table 1: Iranian political landscape since 1979

Period	Supreme Leader	President	Armed Conflict
Welcome Period (1979-1989)	Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1979-1989)	Sayyid Ali Khamenei (1981-1989)	Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)
Unwelcome Period (1989-2012)	Sayyid Ali Khamenei (1989-Present)	Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997) Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013)	No conflict
Syrian Civil War (2012-Continuing)	Sayyid Ali Khamenei (1989-Present)	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) Hassan Rouhani (2013-Present)	Iranian involvement in the Syrian Civil War (2012-Present)

1.5 Chapter breakdown

Chapter two of this dissertation examines the IRI's attitude towards the Afghan refugees who left their country due to the USSR occupation and the following political events. This chapter starts with the year 1979 in which the Afghan exodus began in great numbers, and an Islamic regime was established in Iran. The events in this period show that the Iranian regime welcomed the Afghans since they were crucial for the devastated Iranian economy, which was hit hard by the war with Iraq and the international isolation. Afghan refugees were not only beneficial for the economy, but many fought at the battlefield against the Iraqi forces during the war.

The third chapter examines the changing attitude of the IRI towards the Afghan refugees after 1989. Securitization practices emerged in accordance with this change of attitude. Documentation processes, bureaucratic obstacles, restrictions on the right of movement, deportations, restrictions on the social welfare benefits and subsidies, externalization from the formal economy and obstacles before education are examined to show securitization of Afghan refugees in Iran. I argue that since the priorities of the IRI transformed from the survival of regime to the consolidation of the regime, the Afghan refugees were no longer an asset which can be used in an armed conflict but an obstacle before the consolidation of the regime.

The fourth chapter describes the relative improvement in the lives of the Afghan refugees in Iran after the IRI's involvement in the Syrian Civil War since 2012. Although some of the securitizing practices continue, there has been a significant upturn for Afghan refugees. Many Afghan refugees have been fighting in Syria on the side of the Assad's regime, and their contribution to the Assad's defense is significant. Due to the domestic discontent among Iranian citizens, it is easier for the IRI to send the Afghan refugees to the war instead of the Iranian citizens. This contribution of Afghans and the changing security priorities of the IRI caused a relative easing on the IRI's policies toward Afghan refugees since they are, once again, becoming an asset for foreign policy. Finally, the last chapter will discuss the findings from the dissertation and their contribution to the field.

CHAPTER II

THE WELCOME PERIOD: 1979-1989

The period between 1978-1989 starts with the political developments in Afghanistan which led to the USSR intervention and ends with the year 1989, which marks the end of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Due to the instability in Afghanistan millions of Afghans sought refuge in different countries, especially neighboring Iran and Pakistan. Although for the Afghans Iran was not an alien place to migrate historically, the numbers were unprecedented. This was a tumultuous period for Iran, as well. During the first period of the refugee inflow to Iran in 1979, the Islamic Republic was founded after the Islamic Revolution. The newly established Islamic Republic of Iran's policy towards the Afghan refugees was positive in general. Main reasons for this positive attitude were the demand for cheap labor due to its beleaguered economy, the costly war with Iraq which caused a significant death toll among Iranians and its Islamist ideology shaped around the concept of the Muslim world and *umma*. Incoming Afghans were mostly absorbed into cities and worked in low value-added sectors, received help from social services and some even fought on Iran's side against Iraq. They were not only contributing to the economy, but also acting as living proof of the regime's slogan of 'Islam has no borders.' Due to Iran's involvement in an armed conflict, the Afghan refugees in Iran were useful policy

assets that could be helpful in both domestic and foreign policy. Therefore, securitization of migration did not take place during this first period.

2.1 History of Afghan Migration to Iran

Afghans had been visiting Iran as migrant workers, pilgrims, or merchants long before the period of conflict that began in 1978. One can trace this history to the reign of Nader Shah Afshar during the 18th century (Monsutti, 2008, p. 170). The records of settlement of the Afghans go as early as the 1850s (Hugo, Abbasi-Shavazi, and Sadeghi, 2012, p. 264). In some places in Iran, Afghans were making up 90 percent of the local population (Abbasi-Shavazi, Glazebrook, Jamshidiha, Mahmoudian, & Sadeghi, 2005, p. 13). Afghan migrants of the 19th century integrated in the Iranian society in a way that in the following century they were regarded as citizens of Iran that called upon by different names such as the *khavari* or the *barbari* (Adelkhah & Olszewska, 2007, p. 140). Their integration to mainstream Iranian society was such that, “during the Reza Shah rule, *khawaris* were represented at the national ceremonies as one of the nations of the country” (Abbasi-Shavazi, Glazebrook, Jamshidiha, Mahmoudian, & Sadeghi, 2005, p. 13). Literally meaning the “people of the east”, and also referred to as *barbari*, Afghan migrants of this early era were gradually accepted as Iranian citizens (Abbasi-Shavazi, Glazebrook, Jamshidiha, Mahmoudian, & Sadeghi, 2005, p. 13). This proves that Afghans were already in the Iranian social and cultural life long before the mass migration of the late 20th century took place.

The migration from Afghanistan to Iran increased in the modern era. In the 20th century, even before the military coup d'état in 1978 and the following Soviet

intervention in Afghanistan, migration from Afghanistan to Iran was already frequent. The main reason of this wave of migration was economic. During the 1960s and the 1970s, Afghanistan's economy was in a bad shape. Already declining agricultural output, hit hard by a catastrophic drought of the 1970s, caused great damage to the working class and agricultural workers (Emadi, 1991, p. 235). Afghanistan's economy was largely dependent on the Soviet economy, so much so that it was seen as "the periphery that provided raw materials and minerals in exchange for Soviet manufactured goods" (Weinbaum, 1989, p. 302). In contrast to Afghanistan's underdeveloped economy, Iran was industrializing, and there was a growing service sector. In Iran before the revolution, percentage of the people in the agricultural sector was remarkably decreasing due to urbanization (Moghadam, 1989, p. 41). When this economic contrast came together with the good relations between Iran and Afghanistan, Pahlavi rule allowed Afghan immigrant laborers to seek employment in Iran. While some of the Afghans lived and worked legally, others worked without documentation, and the officials tolerated this since they regarded the Afghans as cheap labor (Ashrafi & Moghissi, 2002, p. 90).

Bilateral relations were not always very warm, however, and there were occasional moments of trouble too. The first deportation of migrants took place during the 1970s, for example. Disputes between Iran and Afghanistan during the rule of President Daoud in Afghanistan led to Mohammad Reza Shah's sanctions, which included some use of force, but, more importantly, deportation of more than one million Afghans from Iran, and this mass deportation of Afghan immigrants in Iran negatively affected the Afghan economy (Emadi, 1995, p. 4). This incident of deportation shows that securitization of migration appeared long before the

establishment of the Islamist Regime in Iran in 1979 and it is not an unprecedented policy, initiated for the first time by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Despite mass deportations, however, several hundred thousand Afghans remained in Iran as migrant workers at the time of the 1978 coup and stayed in the country (Adelkhah & Olszewska, 2007, p. 141).

The reasons of Afghans to migrate to Iran vary. Better economic performance of and higher living standards in Iran are the most crucial factors. Afghanistan and Iran share a history under the rules of earlier empires and historical trade routes, which enhance economic relations (Carter, 2010, p. 980). In addition to economic closeness, Ashrafi and Moghissi (2002, p. 89) mention “geographical proximity and religious, cultural and linguistic affinities” as the factors that made Afghans to choose Pakistan and Iran. Religion especially acted as a significant motive especially for the Shi’ite Afghans, because the Khorasan region of Iran is home to the holy city of Mashad, the place of the tomb of the 8th Imam of the Twelver Shi’ite belief, and is quite close to Afghanistan. Oppressed Shi’ite Afghans chose to migrate to Iran since it was a religious center for their sect (Emadi, 1995, p. 3). However, apart from these, according to Monsutti (2008, p. 60), Iran is not only a destination for migration to many Afghans but also a part of the social and cultural life since the young Afghan workers go to Iran to save enough money to re-establish their lives in Afghanistan. This seasonal migration has been an integral part of the Afghan culture and it was significant for the mass migration after 1978, because already set up networks were going to act as a guide for migrants (Stigter, 2006, p. 117). These economic, cultural, religious, historical, and social connections between two

countries make it easier to understand why more than millions of Afghans chose to migrate to Iran.

2.2 1978-1979: Crucial Years of Change

The years 1978-1979 showed fundamental political changes for both Afghanistan and Iran. Afghanistan experienced continuous domestic struggles causing one of the biggest mass emigrations of the history. The instability in Afghanistan started with the coup against President Daoud. Army officers loyal to the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) staged the Coup and they carried it out successfully on April 27, 1978. As a result, President Daoud was overthrown and a 'democratic' republic declared in Afghanistan (Emadi, 1991, p. 235). Having the support of the USSR, the PDPA started applying fundamentally different policies and the harsh manner in which these policies were carried out caused a public opposition which led to an armed conflict by the end of 1979 (Rajae, 2000, p. 49). The PDPA soon branched into two rival factions, *Parcham* and *Khalq* and these two factions fought a violent war, adding to the misery of the Afghan people (Adelkhah & Olszewska, 2007). Having close ties with the USSR, the PDPA invited the Soviet intervention to end the power struggle in Afghanistan. Receiving this invitation, the USSR sent its armed forces to intervene in December 1979. However, this intervention was far from showing stability in the country. A resistance, internationally known as the militia of the *mujahedeen*,² against the intervention soon appeared. The exacerbation of the political and socio-economic crisis in Afghanistan and the resulting violence caused a mass migration from the country and led to some seven million displaced

² Mujahedeen is the plural term to define Afghan resistance fighters against the Soviet intervention. Dictionary meaning of the term is "the ones who do jihad." It had a highly religious connotation which meant to signify the resistance as an Islamic fight against the Soviet forces.

persons. A total of four million out of seven initially were seeking refuge abroad (Adelkhah & Olszewska, 2007, p. 138). This migration continued as the instability did, so in a brief time, the number of Afghans who left their country reached up to 6.2 million (Rajaei, 2000, p. 49). 97 percent of the Afghan refugees went to Pakistan and Iran (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 18). Decades after the start of the Afghan exodus, 95 percent of all Afghan refugees still continue to live in Iran and Pakistan, while the remaining 5 percent dispersed to some 70 countries (UNHCR, 2015).

Iran, on the other hand, experienced a major political turmoil, which led to a regime change in the years 1978 and 1979. In 1978, riots against the Pahlavi regime began all over Iran. The Shah tried to stop the riots by repressing the incidents, but he had to leave the country at the end. In 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran after his long exile of 16 years and founded the new regime step by step. Although the revolution was achieved through a broad coalition of Islamists, nationalists, socialists, different minority groups and many more political factions, it eventually took an Islamist form (Keddie, 2006). The new regime was basically a theocratic rule under a Supreme Leader. The regime's focus was on the *ummah*, the Muslim people, instead of the Iranian nation. Revolutionary leaders found the Islamic Republic of Iran on Shiite Islamic principles. Ayatollah Khomeini, founder of the new regime, argued that "Islam needs to be applied as a form of state since it is above all, a divine law" (Hiro, 1985, p. 116). According to Khomeini, the Revolution had to be a "a revolution without borders" (Takeyh, 2009, p. 3). What he meant was that the notion of nation-state was very restrictive and therefore it should not prevent reaching out to the Muslim world. Takeyh (2009, p. 18) explains this by stating that in the eyes of the new regime "nationalism and territorial demarcation were relics of a discredited past" and the IRI, as the heart of the Muslim world, had to search for

allies wherever it could find, regardless of the ethnic or other differences between the new Iran and them (2009, p. 18). For Khomeini, the Iranian Revolution was only the initial stage of a greater fight against the “forces of inequality and oppression” and in accordance with this idea, the religion did not recognize borders (Takeyh, 2009, p. 26). Hence, discriminating or restricting the lives of the Afghans would be incompatible with the Islamic Republic of Iran’s founding principles. For a regime that does not recognize borders, it was not a surprise to accept and integrate millions of their fellow Muslims. Khomeini urged traditional business class of Iran, the *bazaris*, to contribute to the government’s burden of the taking care of the Afghan refugees (Hiro, 1985, p. 225). The Islamic brotherhood rhetoric of the Islamist regime was one of the factors that helped Iran to justify the welcoming attitude toward the Afghan refugees to integrate them into the Iranian economy.

2.3 Afghan Migration to Iran After 1979

Iran’s policy towards instability in Afghanistan changed over time due to Iran’s own domestic and external struggles. During the last few years of the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah, Iran opposed the PDPA and the Soviet intervention. The Shah’s policy of being an unusually close ally of the USA was the main reason of Iran’s opposition. When the PDPA rule consolidated its hold over Afghanistan, Mohammad Reza Shah viewed this development as a threat and he supported opposition groups battling the Kabul regime. The new Islamist regime in Iran continued the Shah’s policies immediately after the revolution and even deported some Afghans migrants and closed the border and tried to justify this by associating them with crime (Hiro, 1985, p. 353). This was also related to the Islamist regime’s struggle with the Iranian *Tudeh* Party, which had close relations with the socialist government in Kabul.

However, the initial reluctance to accept the Afghan refugees ended as a result of the changing internal and external factors. When Iraq invaded Iranian territory in September 1980, Iranian authorities at once began to welcome the inflow of mostly Shi'ite Afghans. For the Iranian domestic and foreign policy-makers, the Afghan refugees presented many opportunities. For the first time, the Afghan refugees posed an important asset to further Iranian interests rather than being a liability. When the PDPA government in Afghanistan enacted a new conscription law in January 1981, which lowered the age of service for new recruits and extended the duty for the ones already conscripted, the number of Afghans leaving the country skyrocketed immediately (Urban, 1990, p. 75). Iran willingly accepted them and the number of Afghans in Iran, already close to 900.000 by 1981, increased even further (Hiro, 1985, p. 354). The rulers of the new Islamist regime in Iran saw the benefits of the Afghan refugees within a short span of time.

For one thing, one of the major advantages of Iran's involvement in Afghanistan and its acceptance of Afghan refugees was that it helped Iran's foreign policy stature in Moscow. After Khomeini and his supporters won the domestic power struggle against nationalists in 1981, Iran's Afghanistan policy focused on Afghan Shiites (Ahady, 1994, p. 83). Iran did not get involved in Afghanistan directly. Nevertheless, Iranian diplomats played their Afghan card to put pressure on the Soviets and also, very importantly to convince the Soviets to reduce their supply of arms to Iraq during the war (Milani, 2006, p. 237). For example, in 1983, Iran allowed Afghans to protest the Soviet intervention shortly after the Iraqi forces hit Iranian citizens by Soviet-made missiles (Hiro, 1985, p. 291). Possible gains from Afghanistan were marginal when compared to the importance of surviving in the potentially deadly

war with Iraq. Therefore, using its involvement in Afghanistan as leverage for getting any kind of support from the USSR and preventing its supply of arms to Iraq were more crucial. On the other hand, the IRI's involvement in Afghanistan was not only contributing to Iranian foreign policy vis a vis the USSR, but also and more importantly it strengthened Iran's hand against other intervening Muslim actors such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan by the claim of providing shelter to fellow Muslims. It is also important that the revolutionary regime in Iran was still trying to export its ideology, and Afghanistan was a proper target country for this. After the revolution, Iranians were publicizing the Islamic Revolution in the Afghanistan, for exporting the regime (Emadi, 1995, p. 8). If the Iranian regime had mistreated the refugees or refused to accept them, Tehran would have been deprived of a significant foreign policy tool, which helped it to overcome many obstacles including the war with Iraq.

2.4 Iran-Iraq War

Although the outbreak of armed hostility between Iran and Iraq cannot be blamed on one actor only, the IRI's aggressive foreign policy stance was definitely a major factor which led to a disastrous war with Iraq. Ayatollah Khomeini wanted Iran's Islamist regime to spread around the Muslim world, usually described policy-makers and scholars as regime export. After the revolution, Khomeini's idea of regime export created discontent among neighboring countries, especially the Gulf states. Khomeini's discourse on exporting the revolution especially focused on countries with a Shi'ite majority such as Iraq and Lebanon. Iraq was also considered to be the biggest obstacle before Iran's regional hegemony (Karsh, 2002, p. 29). After a period of discursive feud, Iraq under the Baathist rule declared war against Iran by claiming sovereignty over some Iranian territory. The newly established IRI found

itself in a disastrous war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The Iran-Iraq war is still considered by military historians as one of the longest armed conflicts in the history of the modern Middle East (Takeyh, 2009, p. 81). The war fundamentally changed the conditions in Iran and affected its policies on the Afghan refugees.

At the beginning of the war, Iran was already in a fragile condition due to the revolution and the ripple effects of profound socio-political change. The government was anxious about the fighting capability of the regular army because of the possibility of a counter-revolutionary movement, insurgency or a coup attempt. This caused a harsh repression on the military. Almost one hundred officers were executed in addition to some 12.000 officers purged (Karsh, 2002, p. 29). In addition to this, many political and ethnic opposition groups appeared against the regime. Iraq started the war with a sudden attack to exploit this situation at the end of 1980 and occupied some land on the Iranian side of the border. In response, Iran mobilized large numbers of militia under the banners of *Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)*,³ and volunteer forces called *Basij e Mustazafin* to fill in the gaps in its army, which was hardly a match for the Iraqis at that point (Karsh, 2002, p. 33). With the shared effort of the regular army and the militias, by the end of 1982 Iran stopped the Iraqi advance. Falling into the defending position, Iraq proposed a ceasefire in 1983 but Iran rejected the offer by demanding impossibly high conditions such as war compensation and an end to Ba'athist rule in Iraq. From this point onward, Iran's strategy was pursuing a war of attrition to exploit Iraq's manpower limitations (Pelletiere & Johnson, 1991, p. 32). The main idea behind this approach was that it was necessary to punish a ruler – Saddam Hussein- who defied the Islamist regime in Iran with the support of the Shi'ite population of Iraq. An

³ *Pasdaran* in Persian.

uprising of Iraqi Shi'ites did not happen, and the war continued with no tangible result for both sides. Revolutionary regime in Iran saw the continuation of the war beneficial for striking roots of the revolution deep down in Iran. Militia groups' commitment to the regime dominated the domestic politics in a way that internal disputes were now silenced and the public seemed to stick together more than it really was (Karsh, 2002, p. 73). Because of the war with Iraq, criticisms for the regime for being authoritarian and decimating freedoms left their place to a discourse of defending the IRI against Saddam's Iraq (Karsh, 2002, p. 29). A war which could have ended quickly dragged on for eight years despite its human, economic and social costs. Although the Iranian regime saw in this conflict an opportunity to keep a tight hold on power and displace its rivals, the burden of war reached unacceptable proportions. It was exactly in this context that the Afghan refugees were extremely helpful, that is, to alleviate the burden of the conflict. The burden of the war on the Iran was high. Unconventional methods used by the IRGC and the *Basij* militias significantly helped Iran to resist against Iraq and even start a counteroffensive but caused the death of hundreds of thousands of Iranians. These methods included using a mass of untrained militias for clearing the way before the army. These, so-called, human-wave attacks cost Iran heavy casualties in spite of its success against Iraq. By enforcing the strategies that can be achieved through IRGC, such as human-wave attacks and the attrition war, the impact of the IRGC on Iranian politics was strengthened. Insistence on using strategies, such as human-wave attacks, and the attrition war, that consumed more manpower, put a demographic strain on the Iranian society. Saddam's response to Iran's attrition war had devastating consequences in Iran. On the one hand, Iraq used chemical weapons, the so-called "poor man's nuclear bomb" to deal with the waves of Iranian attacks,

causing massive casualties (McNaugher, 1990, p. 5). Iran's total death toll during the war is not exactly known, although estimates range from 300.000 to one million (BBC, 2015). On the other hand, Iraq also resorted to crippling Iran's financial situation by destroying economically significant industrial zones, especially oil extraction and processing facilities. The impact of chemical warfare on the Iranian is often described as devastating. The war of attrition which started with the stalemate after Iran's offensive in 1983 and continued until the end of the war amplified the burden on the shoulders of Iranians. After all, the war of attrition also included crippling each other's financial situation through destroying economically significant industrial zones, especially oil extraction and processing facilities. With Iranians dying at the Iraqi front by the thousands, the demand for labor in Iranian domestic economy and foot-soldiers for war increased rapidly during the early 1980s. It was this overlap of external and internal factors that created a demand for Afghan refugees both for economic and military ends.

To sum up, Iran needed manpower both for surviving the war and keeping its devastated economy afloat. In addition to this costly war, the IRI was facing US-led sanctions due to the Hostage Crisis.⁴ Having committed all the resources and manpower available to the battlefield, the Iranian government regarded Afghans as a cure for the shattered economy and seriously impaired military. Therefore, incoming Afghans were more than welcome for Iran's survival. Thus, the government did not put obstacles against the Afghans in Iran through laws or regulations that restrict their economic activities. Instead, the IRI, made it easier for Afghans to integrate

⁴ Hostage Crisis are the events that deteriorated the IRI's relations with USA following the occupation of the American embassy in Tehran by leftist Islamist students on 4 November 1979. The events lasted for 444 days (Milani & EIR, Hostage Crisis, 2012).

into Iranian economy. During this period, the presence of Afghan refugees in Iran was not securitized.

2.5 Afghans in Iran 1979-1989: The Welcome Period

During the period 1979-1989, the IRI welcomed Afghans by giving many rights and benefits to them. The influx of Afghans into Iran in 1979 coincided with the Islamic Revolution in Iran which inspired and implemented an “open-door” policy toward Shi’a Muslim refugees leaving Afghanistan (Glazebrook & Abbasi-Shavazi, 2007, p. 191). The Afghans refugees were both expected and encouraged to integrate into Iranian economy and society. The regime’s ideology constructed around religion, instead of nation or ethnicity, and Iran’s demand for manpower, for both its military and economy, acted as two catalysts for the welcoming attitude. Most Afghans had the *muhajeer* status which included all the services and rights of a refugee and which simply gave every service except political rights such as voting. The use of the term *muhajeer* has been taken in the literature as a symptom of a religious attitude by several scholars (Glazebrook & Abbasi-Shavazi, 2007; Monsutti, 2007; Rostami-Povey, 2007). This is obviously due to the meaning of the term, an involuntary religious migrant, which resonates with the prophet and his companions during the early years of Islam. Having a religious reference, the *muhajeer* status and its implementation clearly showed the regime’s positive and welcoming attitude towards the Afghans.

The regime’s discourse on the Islamic brotherhood encouraged the Afghan migration and integration into Iran. Driven by its revolutionary ideals, the Islamic Republic embraced those Muslims in need of protection and support. Shared religion seems to

have been another reason for accepting Afghans in Iran. The regime did not take into consideration the long-term consequences of Afghan migration such as unemployment and social discontent (Zahedi, 2007, p. 231). Instead, the regime considered the short-term benefits of the refugee population and acted with great receptiveness toward them. Afghans were free to go everywhere in Iran in their search for work and livelihood during the war with Iraq which created a demand for their labor (Hoodfar, 2014, p. 133). This positive atmosphere created by the founders of the Islamic Republic was strong and pervasive, so much so that Afghans were going to remember it fondly in the upcoming decades and reminded Iranians their declaration of “Islam has no borders.” Adelkhah and Olszewska (2007, p. 151) suggest that this helped Afghans to integrate in Iranian society as they “married local girls, tilled the soil, gone to war, and volunteered for martyrdom in the cause of Iran.” The Afghan immigrants’ fondness for the early years of the revolutionary regime in Iran also shows the religious aspect of their integration into Iran. Afghan refugees felt at home in Iran not only because Iran was Shiite (like them) but also because Iran now declared itself home to all Muslims and not just a country of ethnic Iranians.

Despite its international isolation after the 1979 revolution, cost of war with Iraq, instability in the domestic politics and the lack of access to international assistance, Iran shouldered the cost of accepting Afghan refugees (Rajaei, 2000, p. 46). In the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution which led to a break with the US and other Western countries, most of the international aid went to support the refugees in Pakistan (Barakat & Wardell, 2002, p. 920). This lack of international support made the management of migration even harder to carry on for Iran. With the proximity of

Afghan and Iranian cultures and the lack of resources of Iranian government, migrant population engaged in urban life instead of camps. Only a small portion of the refugees were kept in camps while most of them were integrated in the urban life. At the peak of the Afghan migration in 1992, only 10 percent of the refugees were in camps (Adelkhah & Olszewska, 2007, p. 141). The small portion of the Afghans that stayed in the camps were mostly Sunni Pashtuns that mostly could not speak Persian, and their integration with the Iranian society was harder than the rest (Koepke, 2011, p. 3). Encouraging refugees to urban life saved Iran from the maintenance cost of the camps and it was also beneficial for economic needs of the Iranian economy.

The *mohajeer* status (also called *blue cards* due to their color), granted to Afghan refugees by the Iranian government, included work permits, which allowed the Afghans to get legally employed. The Afghans were concentrated in the labor-intensive economic sectors such as “construction, brick-burning and mining” (Safri, 2011, p. 590) and they felt the need to “accept employment for lower wages” (Rajaei, 2000, p. 50). Afghans who were guest workers at the time of the Soviet intervention also continued to be employed in Iran’s cities (International Crisis Group, 2009, p. 3). Considering the manpower needed for continuing the unconventional methods of the IRGC and the *Basij*, demand for labor force on these kinds of sectors was quite high. However, there were also some economic restriction for the Afghans with the *mohajeer* status. *Mohajeers* could not own their own businesses and their permits covered only low-wage manual day labor. Squire (2000, p. 7) states that the sectors which allowed the Afghans with the *mohajeer* status tended to be “mainly low-paid, hazardous or laboring jobs”. The IRI determined and

fixed the Afghans' role in the Iranian economy for filling the gap of labor force in some sectors and did not allow them to go outside of this boundary.

Afghans' contribution during the war years was not only through economic activities but also by spilling their blood for Iranian national interests. During the post-1983 stage of the Iran-Iraq war, many Afghans fought on the Iranian side. In an interview, Hakem Javadi, the former Iranian commander of the Afghan brigade in the Iranian army, named the *Abuzar* Brigade, in the Iran-Iraq war, states that Afghans trained in both Afghanistan and in the city of Qom in Iran and more than two thousand Afghans died in the war. The Afghans initially fought within the IRGC divisions but then the Afghan *Abuzar* Brigade was set up (Defa Press, 2015). Their involvement in the war shows the level of integration in Iran in a brief period of time. The activities of the Afghan brigade against the Iraqi forces became a symbol of Afghan fighters in the future when the IRI engaged in yet another armed conflict in the Syrian Civil War.

The IRI provided the Afghans with many social benefits including free education (Rostami-Povey, 2007, p. 301). From the beginning of the refugee inflow in 1978 to the year 1992, the Iranian government allowed most of the Afghans to register as *mohajeerin*, to gain automatic residency in Iran. Although the IRI did not officially recognize them as refugees, Iranian officials treated the Afghans as refugees as defined by the UNHCR (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 19). During this period, Afghans did not face significant problems about education, work permits, or health services. These services were the same as any accorded to an Iranian citizen. The *mohajeer* status also did not have an expiration date, therefore did not require

renewal (Glazebrook & Abbasi-Shavazi, 2007, p. 191). The Afghan refugees could access to the Iranian educational system freely. The free education included primary and secondary education, paid for from the Iranian budget (Rajaei, 2000, p. 57). Social services included adult literacy training by which some 300.000 adults obtained basic literacy skills in 15 years from 1985 onwards (Adelkhah & Olszewska, 2007, p. 145). The Afghan refugees were also receiving the same fuel, energy and food subsidies, provided to Iranian citizens (Koepke, 2011, p. 2). To sum up, during the period between 1979 and 1989 Iran welcomed the Afghan refugees due to several reasons. By giving work permits, health services, education and financial subsidies, the Iranian government was trying to create a conducive environment in which the Afghan refugees could adapt and blend into Iranian society. Most Afghans found jobs and earned their living while their children could find free primary and secondary education in Iranian public schools. They were, for example, not collected in and confined to camps as Afghan refugees were in Pakistan. Instead they were encouraged to integrate into the economy in order to survive in the war economy. Iran welcomed the Afghans not only by giving rights and benefits to them but also through religious discourse of the revolutionary regime, which greeted them as fellow Muslims.

2.6 Conclusion

The period of 1978-1989 shows a welcoming attitude of the Iranian government toward the Afghan refugees. The security regime of the IRI was not at odds with the Afghan refugees since they were much needed due to Iran's costly external struggles which caused an immense gap in both manpower and the Iranian economy. The Islamic Republic of Iran faced internal and external struggles after its establishment,

including the internal power struggle with nationalists and socialists, a regional war with Iraq, international isolation, and a wrecked economy, too. In this myriad of problems, the new regime was also trying to consolidate and legitimize its Islamist ideology and win hearts and minds of the Iranian society. The arrival of the Afghans turned out to be a crucial factor for the Islamic Republic, since its economy was severely ruined due to the disastrous eight-year-long war with Iraq. Many Afghans also fought against the Iraqi forces. Securitization of migration, during this period, would have worked against the interests of the Islamist regime in Iran. The welcoming attitude, on the other hand, was greatly beneficial for a number of reasons. The IRI welcomed the Afghan refugees because they were beneficial for a) contributing to the economy of Iran as low-wage labor force, b) supporting Iranian forces in its war with Iraq, c) they could pose a foreign policy asset especially toward the USSR, d) they were symbolizing the idea of “Islam has no borders.” The security regime of the IRI during this period was inclusive toward Afghans and this policy continued until the early 1990s. In the following chapter, I will show the grounds for the end of this welcoming attitude and the initiation of the new security regime which stigmatized the Afghans.

CHAPTER III

THE UNWELCOME PERIOD: 1989-2012

This chapter analyzes the transformation of Iran's attitude toward Afghan refugees after 1989. The welcoming attitude that Iran had adopted since the revolution gave way to a negative approach and the focus of this chapter is to explain the reasons behind this transformation.

3.1 Iran between 1989-2012

This section examines the changes in the international, regional, and domestic politics of Iran. The impact of these changes on the IRI's policy toward the Afghan population in Iran will be discussed.

3.1.1 International and Regional Context

Iran's war with Iraq was massively exhausting and the IRI had to accept a ceasefire in 1988 because it was becoming harder and harder to endure the costs of war. The war reached a stalemate in the second half of the 1980s and it was not likely for Iran to be able to continue due to: 1) the financial burden of the war, 2) the need for military spare parts, which was hard to procure since the Iranian army was mainly equipped with US-made arms, causing grave problems due to the US embargo, 3)

the lack of enough military vehicles,⁵ 4) problems with the regular army caused by continuous executions, purges and surveillance,⁶ 5) inhospitable logistics caused by the collapse of Iranian infrastructure after the Iraqi airstrikes (Segal, 1988). The emergence of the possibility of a war with the US after the incident of shooting down of an Iran Air Airbus in 3rd July 1988 by the USA Navy, was probably the last straw that broke the camel's back and led the IRI elites to the conclusion that the war should end (Razoux, 2015, 500). On July 15, 1988, the IRI government declared that it accepted a ceasefire as well as the UN Resolution 598, which urged Iran and Iraq to accept a ceasefire, withdraw forces to internationally recognized borders and release of prisoners (UN Security Council Resolution 598). Although minor clashes continued until mid-August of the same year, the Iran-Iraq war ended in the summer of 1988.

Iran followed a more pragmatic foreign policy after 1989 (Takeyh, 2009, p. 111). Since the revolution, the IRI was facing international isolation, especially in response to the Hostage Crisis in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, but also because of the aggressive foreign policy of the Islamic regime and the war with Iraq. New rulers of the post-Khomeini era, particularly the new president Rafsanjani had come to the conclusion that the IRI had to save itself from the isolation if the Iranian economy was expected to recover (Razoux, 2015). The national reconstruction program that the rulers of the IRI were seeking to implement forced them to rekindle peaceful relations with the international society, since the reconstruction of the

⁵ Iran had 1100 operational tanks while Iraq had some 3400 tanks, 1400 armored vehicles while Iraq had 4500 (Razoux, 2015, p. 453) and 70 operational aircrafts while Iraq had 632 (Segal, 1988) by 1988.

⁶ The estimated number of the executed officials of the regular army reached 5000 in 1988 in addition to thousands who were purged and exiled, and those who stayed in army had to operate with the guidance of the spiritual guidance officers causing a pressure on the regular army and obstacle for effective management (Segal, 1988).

country was not compatible with the existing animosities (Maloney, 2015). Therefore, after the war, IRI sought to unchain itself from this problem by seeking cooperation in its foreign relations to end international isolation (Behrooz, 2012). At the beginning of September 1988, less than a month after the last clashes of the war, the IRI reestablished its diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the United Kingdom (Razoux, 2015). The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq also helped Iran to pursue this policy gradual normalization even further. Even the relations with the United States, named as ‘the greater Satan’ by Ayatollah Khomeini, showed some signs of moderation exemplified by the American decision to unfreeze some Iranian assets. When the reformist president Khatami got elected in 1997, he took another daring step in the path of normalization by starting the ‘Dialogue of Civilizations’ initiative (Abrahamian, 2008). Later, at the end of the 1990s and in the very first years of the 2000s, the relations with the USA again showed some improvement, when Iran and the USA cooperated against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Iran’s re-integration into international politics continued until President George W. Bush’s statement on the “axis of evil” in 2002 (Milani, 2008, p. 248). Hence, revolutionary Iran’s aggressive foreign policy transformed into a more cooperative and soft approach between 1989 and 2002.

The more inward-looking Post-Khomeini rulers of the IRI focused increasingly on domestic politics and economy. They may not have necessarily given up on the idea of spreading the Islamist regime to other countries, but that policy was no longer a top item on their agenda. The new foreign policy approach of Iran could simply not have gone together with the policy of disrupting other countries by making attempts at creating similar regimes abroad. The IRI elites also knew that this idea was

beyond the IRI's political and economic capabilities (Amuzegar, 2014, p. 39). Instead, the rulers of the IRI silenced the hardliners at home, who insisted on exporting the Islamist revolution and tried to expand Iran's influence, on the one hand, through cultural activities and, on the other hand, sought to maximize national interest in foreign policy (Freij, 1996). Therefore, the new foreign policy approach made the idea of regime export unfashionable for the IRI.

Another important regional development was the instability in the political situation in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the Soviet forces in 1989. Initially Afghanistan experienced a transition in power in 1989. With the establishment of a new government in Kabul, hope for stability in the country appeared for the first time in more than a decade and up to 1.4 million Afghans from around the world, but especially from neighboring countries, moved back to their country (Abbasi-Shavazi, Glazebrook, Jamshidiha, Mahmoudian, & Sadeghi, 2005). But this optimism disappeared once the civil war started again and the Taliban came to power. Internal struggles between rival factions in Afghanistan escalated in the 1990s and uprooted the Afghan population again (Rajaei, 2000, p. 49). The civil war in Afghanistan between 1989 and 1993 and the repressive Taliban regime following this caused new waves of migration to Iran (Abbasi-Shavazi, Glazebrook, Jamshidiha, Mahmoudian, & Sadeghi, 2005). This new influx is notable for the economic migration of the Afghanistan's urban, educated middle class (Abbasi-Shavazi & Sadeghi, 2014, p. 91). Because of the new waves of migration, Iran was not only forced to deal with the management of the existing migration population, but it also sought ways to prevent the inflow of new waves of Afghan refugees. This situation continued until the early 2000s. After the establishment of a government in Afghanistan backed by

the USA-led coalition another hope for stability in Afghanistan emerged and more than five million Afghans repatriated to their country, mostly from Iran and Pakistan. But this trend, too, discontinued due to the worsening security conditions (Monsutti, 2008, p. 60). Despite all the international and domestic policies, Afghans continued to migrate from out of their country as a result of lack of accommodation, employment, security and declining living conditions in Afghanistan (Koepke, 2011, p. 7). To sum up, unending instability in Afghanistan urged policy-makers in the IRI to resort to securitizing practices to push Afghans back.

In general, Iran's international and regional politics after 1989 was characterized by a rather inward-looking approach, which was geared towards avoiding major conflicts and sought cooperation instead of disagreements. Iranian policy-makers attempted to create a new environment conducive for recovering the Iranian economy and consolidating the Islamic Republic. Naturally, this new foreign policy approach was going to have important consequences for Iran's attitude toward the Afghan refugees, as well.

3.1.2 Domestic Context

The passing of the hardliner leader Khomeini in 1989 provided an opportunity for a moderate domestic and foreign policy for the IRI. Khomeini's negative attitude toward the west and, in particular, the USA was preventing the IRI from opening to the world. Shortly before his death, a number of Khomeini's hardline decisions such as his fatwa, making it obligatory for Muslims to kill Salman Rushdie, his objection to the peace talks between Israel and its Arab enemies, and the assassination of opposition figures abroad put enormous strain on the IRI's efforts to end

international isolation (Zahedi, 2000, p.80). In June 1989, Ayatollah Imam Khomeini passed away and he was replaced by Ali Khamenei. Khomeini's political power was now shared by his two protégés, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Khamenei lacked the charismatic appeal and the religious authority of his predecessor, but he was nevertheless elected as the only candidate for the position of Religious Leadership (Maloney, 2015). Khamenei also lacked the religious credentials for the job, but this obstacle was solved through a change of the laws of regulating the preconditions of a religious leader (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 182). The new government set up around the two power-holders in the system, Khamenei and President Rafsanjani, was concerned about the recovery of the economy and the consolidation of the regime. President Rafsanjani was urging that this could only be achieved through liberal policies and this caused a tension between him and the Supreme Leader (Takeyh, 2009). In 1997, a reformist president and a parliamentary were elected and advanced this soft policy even further, both domestically and internationally (Abrahamian, 2008). The rulers of the post-Khomeini Iran were trying to strengthen the regime Khomeini founded, instead of expanding and exporting it.

By 1989, that is, after the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq war, the IRI could no longer control and dissipate domestic discontent in Iran through the exceptional measures of the war milieu. Up to that point, the atmosphere of war at home helped the Islamist regime significantly in dealing with possible discontent, because either many opponents of the regime employed self-censorship at war time, or in cases where they did not become quiet, the suppression of vocal opposition was tolerated by the Iranian society due to war conditions. However, after the war, the IRI had to make

political improvements for regime consolidation. The war served Khomeini as a pretext for exerting pressure on nationalists, opposing religious currents, radical opposition, and the ethnic insurgencies of the Azeris, Kurds and the Baluchs (Razoux, 2015). However, the harsh Islamist policies caused a discontent among public and repression was not enough any more, because the rulers of the IRI had exploited the situation of Iran-Iraq war too long and too much (Razoux, 2015). The new focus of decision-makers of the post-Khomeini era was consolidation of the Islamic regime by figuring out a way to satisfy the public. Therefore, the Iranian government turned towards domestic issues such as bringing down unemployment, managing public discontent toward some of the Islamic laws, dealing with the boom of population and rehabilitation of war veterans. In other words, to have a moment of respite to cater to domestic problems, the regime was avoiding international confrontations.

During this period, Iran could not escape from economic troubles. The war effected the economy fundamentally. Oil production of Iran fell to 500 thousand barrels a day from 1.5 million, while the price of a barrel of oil declined to \$17 from \$30 (Segal, 1988). Damage to infrastructure caused by the *war of cities* and the war of attrition, continuing inflow of migrants, internally displaced persons and skyrocketing military expenditures were the other problems of the Iranian economy caused by the war (Alnasrawi, 1986, p.878). Estimations for the total cost of the war for Iran amounted to around \$650 billion (Zahedi, 2000, p.5). Expectations for economic recovery after the war were high and there were some positive developments, too. For example, oil production in Iran doubled within the first year following the war (Razoux, 2015). But the termination of the devastating war did not rescue the

economy from a deep plunge (Maloney, 2015). Khomeini's project to increase Iranian population, the so-called '20 million army', between 1979-1989 led to a boom of population (Amuzegar, 2014, p. 61). When the ill-effects of the population increase were amplified by the reintegration of the formerly mobilized masses of war to the economy, the unemployment rate in Iran soared. Millions of Iranians who displaced and became migrants because of the war, the declining oil industry, an enormous increase of the population, insufficient infrastructure and high unemployment, and continuous migration – especially from Afghanistan and Iraq – were the major problems of the Iranian economy in the 1990s (Maloney, 2015). Immediate solutions such as liberalization policies, cut of subsidies, or seeking international investment did not rescue the Iranian economy from these problems. This was actually the environment in which the policy of securitization of Afghan refugees was helpful for distracting the public opinion from the structural reasons of the economic issues. In any case, turning the spotlights on the Afghan refugees and their status in the Iranian economy and society was regarded as one possible solution to Iran's domestic crisis.

Public opinion in the IRI during this period was very negatively disposed due to the socioeconomic costs of the war and the fundamentalist/Islamist policies of the regime. The government exploited the war milieu too hard, and the people were no longer convinced by the "whole infidel world is against us" argument, as they were in the early 1980s (Razoux, 2015). After the war and the death of Khomeini, factionalism in the domestic politics appeared between the reformists⁷ and conservatives. The government could not use the war as a tool for silencing the

⁷ *Eslah-talab* in Persian. Reformists push for a more liberal policies instead of the conservatives (*Osulgaran* in Persian) that insist on continuing Khomeini's Islamist policies.

opposing voices anymore. In this milieu, first reforms and concessions on the revolutionary laws and regulations were implemented during the term of the president Rafsanjani (1989-1994). These concessions were mostly concerned with the economy and the main debates were on unemployment, high inflation, and privatization. Policies for encouraging families to have more children were replaced by one of the most successful family planning programs of the world (Haghighat-Sordellini, 2011, p.169). The Islamist regime initiated an economic liberalization program which included giving some concessions on the gender laws to integrate women into economy (Alaedini & Razavi, 2005, p. 68). The drive toward changing the policies of the revolution strengthened after the election of a reformist parliament and the reformist president Khatami. Policies of the Reformist period (1997-2004), led by Khatami, sought cooperation in the international politics and this attitude enhanced the softening of the international isolation that Iran was facing (Abrahamian, 2008). Reformists kept pushing for more compromises and a gradual move away from the legacy of the Islamic regime. In 2005, populist-conservative Ahmadinejad got elected as president and slowed down the reformation movement until 2013 but public discontent continued, and even erupted as serious protests like the huge demonstrations after the 2009 Presidential elections (Dabashi, 2013).

Changes in public opinion affected the attitude toward Afghan refugees in Iran. Since the public concern now focused more on the economic and social problems of the country instead of defending the regime against domestic and foreign enemies, Afghans' role as the Muslim brothers became less helpful for explaining their presence in Iran. Instead, they were increasingly presented as a burden to the economy and the society of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Return and integration of

the war veterans to the home economy increased the unemployment rate and, therefore, ended the sympathy for the Afghan refugees, since their economic activities were now less demanded (Hoodfar, 2014). The high unemployment rate, which peaked to 16.7% in 1985, never fell under 10%, and became a structural problem (Valadkhani, 2003) Therefore, the economy was not on the side of the Afghan refugees in Iran after the end of the war. In this period, refugees were regarded as the main cause of high unemployment rates by many Iranians. “Economic issues such as inflation, high taxes, costs of refugees, unemployment, and the educated but unemployed new generation,” argued observers of Iran economy during period, “caused a tension between Iranians and Afghans in the cities” (Tober, Taghdisi, & Jalali, 2006, p. 65). Many Iranians, especially the ones who work on low value-added sectors such as construction or agriculture, began blaming Afghans for “disturbing wages and causing unemployment” (Rostami-Povey, 2007, p. 245). The transition of Afghan refugees from “Muslim brothers” and “compatriots in the fight against Iraq” to an “economic burden” took place only under peacetime conditions.

3.2 Securitization of migration and the Afghan refugees in Iran

Because of international regional and domestic changes in the IRI, Afghans’ presence in Iran was not beneficial for the Iranian foreign and military policies, or the economy anymore. Hence, Iranian decision-makers reshaped their Afghan refugee policy to create an unfriendly environment to encourage them to repatriate to Afghanistan. This policy involved many measures taken to present migration as a security issue, and eventually paved the way for the stigmatization of the Afghan refugees in Iran.

Iran tried to create a robust migration management policy after 1989 by, first, setting up new institutions to deal with the refugee status and problems, and, second, encouraging repatriation and decreasing inflow of migration. Migration management institutionalized under the framework of the Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA) with 25 local branches and 48 refugee camps. The BAFIA officially works under the Ministry of the Interior (Rajaei, 2000, p. 48). Duties of the Bureau begin with the registration and documentation of refugees and expand over to other services provided by the IRI government. The BAFIA also works for regularizing undocumented Afghan refugees in Iran because they are out of the government's sight and, their activities, especially for the employment, are out of the framework of laws and regulations of the IRI (Koepke, 2011, p. 8). Hoodfar (2007), asserts that the only aim of the BAFIA is to force Afghans back to their country. This effort for institutionalization of migration management shows that IRI took the issue more seriously in the post-1989 period.

As part of the gradual securitization of the refugee problem, status of the Afghan refugees in Iran transformed in the 1990s. By 1993, Iran stopped giving the *mohajeer* status and issued new Afghan refugees with temporary registration cards which named them as *panahandeh*⁸ (Glazebrook & Abbasi-Shavazi, 2007, p. 193). Like the earlier *mohajeer* status, *panahandeh* does not give the international refugee status⁹ either and it lacks the subsidies and the grant of an indefinite period of

⁸ Dictionary meaning of the *panahandeh* is "someone has taken refuge".

⁹ There were also some Afghans hold "white cards", which clearly designate their status as refugees and entitle them to greater rights than the Amayesh cards, including an exemption from taxes, the right to work, and the right to obtain travel documents as stipulated by the 1951 Convention on refugees (Rajaei, 2000, p. 58).

residence unlike the *mohajeer* status. The registration cards of the refugees with the *panahandeh* status is temporary in contrast with the blue cards of the *mohajeer* status holders that was giving an indefinite time of residence. Another major difference of the *panahandeh* is that the new term is religiously neutral, in contrast with the *mohajeer* status, which had a religious connotation (Glazebrook & Abbasi-Shavazi, 2007; Monsutti, 2007; Rostami-Povey, 2007). Safri (2011) argues that this change of terminology signifies the discursive shift in the transformation of the attitude of Iranian government towards refugees.

As part of the efforts for creating a more robust migration policy, the IRI began to tighten the documentation processes in the 1990s more seriously. Many Afghan refugees who came before the 1990s, did not acquire their registration cards since they did not seem important for receiving services and rights that they were automatically entitled to by their refugee status (Hoodfar, 2014, p. 133). By the end of 1993, however, over 500.000 of these new temporary residence permits had been issued to previously undocumented refugees - leaving an estimated 50.000 'illegals' in Iran at the time (Rajaei, 2000, p. 57). In addition to these, those who did not renew their cards on time and or those who were living outside of the designated areas also fell into the 'undocumented' status. Documentation process created a significant difference among the Afghans in Iran. Access to many services including education, health, and employment, or punishments such as the risk of deportation depend on documentation. As seen in other cases such as European countries, illegality of the undocumented refugees contributed to making them even more malleable and vulnerable in the economic activities (Huysmans, 2000, p. 754). The process accelerated with the establishment of an identification system and

registration by the early 1990s. Since 2003, a new system called *amayesh*¹⁰ is in use. *Amayesh* ID cards must be renewed annually and the renewal fee of this document is said to be worth the average monthly income of an Afghan refugee in Iran (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 32). *Amayesh* system also closes the gate for the right of claiming refugee status for the Afghans. Human Rights Watch mentions that since the establishment of *Amayesh* system, it is practically impossible for the vast majority of newly arriving Afghans to lodge refugee claims. (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 7). This is crucial because, being a refugee gives an indefinite residence guaranteed by the UNHCR while *Amayesh* cards should be renewed and its validity is only determined by the Iranian government. Colors of these temporary registration cards are changing every year to signify their validity (Abbasi-Shavazi, Glazebrook, Jamshidiha, Mahmoudian, & Sadeghi, 2008, p. 43). Registration efforts are mostly implemented and enforced through negative incentives such as depriving undocumented refugees from rights and benefits. But there were also some positive incentives such as the BAFIA's announcement in 2010 about letting all undocumented Afghans to work legally in Iran if they register, and this policy concluded with a boom in the number of registered refugees, which reached a total of 1.5 million (Koepke, 2011, p. 10).

The Islamic Republic also tried to limit the mobility of Afghans in Iran to make the life in Iran unfavorable for them. Initially, in contrast with other examples such as Pakistan, Iran did not shut Afghans in camps but hosted them in the cities and encouraged them to integrate into the Iranian life. But in 2007, the Iranian government, partly under pressure from Iranian citizens, who complained about

¹⁰ "*Amayesh*" means "planning" in Persian.

competition for employment, enacted a law, which designated some areas of Iran as no-go areas for the refugees (Farzin & Jadali, 2013). Also, specific areas were designated for refugees to live and if they were to choose to move to other provinces – even when the new destinations are not no-go areas- they would become deprived of their social and economic rights and benefits (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 54). The banned areas cover 22 provinces of the IRI (International Crisis Group, 2009, p. 14). As a result of this policy, since 2007, the Afghan refugee population in Iran concentrated in certain areas in a way that 57% of the Afghan refugees including undocumented ones live in three provinces only: the Tehran, Khorasan-e Razavi and Esfahan provinces (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Restriction of mobility limits the flexibility of economic activities of refugees, especially for the ones who work in temporary jobs.

Economic measures for securitizing Afghan migration to Iran are significant, considering the fact that financial concerns are one of the major motivations for Afghans to migrate to Iran (Abbasi-Shavazi & Sadeghi, 2014). As Monsutti shows in his study, migrating to Iran and getting involved in the economic activities there, independently from the current political or economic developments, is a “passage rite to adulthood” for many Afghans meaning that they migrate to Iran to save enough money and establish social networks to start their adult life in Afghanistan (Monsutti, 2007). Therefore, Iranian government tries to discourage Afghans by limiting their economic activities. Knowing the significance of the economic motives, depriving refugees’ of the freedom to pursue economic activities is a major instrument the IRI has been employing for encouraging refugee repatriation to Afghanistan (Hoodfar, 2014, p. 134). Even in the early welcoming period, the

Afghan refugees were not allowed to own their own businesses (Rajaei, 2000) and were mostly employed in menial jobs that were not in high demand by the Iranian citizens (Stigter, 2005a, p. 30). These included low value-added sectors such as construction, textiles, shoemaking, agriculture, and carpentry (Salehi-Isfahani, 2005). Documented refugees work for lower wages, since they usually do not claim disputes before the Iranian courts (Monsutti, 2006). Undocumented refugees cannot work legally at all; therefore, their economic activities are in the informal sectors (Stigter, 2005b, p. 26). The average cost of an Afghan refugee on the Iranian government is estimated \$2 per day (Koepke, 2011, p. 5) and the IRI officials emphasize these figures while stating that they have been forced to bear the burden of most of this cost with no or insignificant help from other countries and the international community (Tober D. , 2007, p. 269). Government officials accuse the refugees of harming the economy by creating a significant burden on the budget, increasing the rate of unemployment, and exploiting the subsidies (Carter, 2010, p. 983). Blaming the refugees for “taking jobs away from nationals and taking advantage of social services” is a frequent justification for securitizing migration (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002, p. 22). According to Adelkhah and Olszewska (2007, p. 157), Iran’s attitude towards refugees during the unwelcome period is parallel to the cases of European states due to the fact that Iran continued to restrict the livelihood of the refugees although the Afghan migrant workforce contributed to the Iranian economy in various and significant ways. To increase the pressure on the undocumented Afghan refugee workers, surveillance on the labor market has increased by the practices such as surprise police inspections in the industrial zones and work places (Stigter, 2005b, p. 27). This increase of the enforcement of the existing regulations is a result of the Article 3 of the “Regulations for Expediting the

Return of Afghan Nationals” which dictated the enhanced implementation of the Article 181 of the Labor Law.¹¹ The regulation also prohibited undocumented refugees from all administrative services, creating bank accounts and starting or renewing of an insurance policy (Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2003). This regulation specifically targets Afghan refugees and there are no such restrictions on other refugees and migrants such as Iraqis (U.S. Department of State, 2007). Restrictions on using financial institutions is especially significant since most of the Afghans send remittances to their families in Afghanistan. To sum up, during the unwelcome period, all economic activities of Afghan refugees are significantly restricted and they are being increasingly presented as a ‘cost’ for or ‘burden’ on the Iranian society by the official discourse to justify securitization of migration.

Presenting migration as a security issue in Iran resulted in the stigmatization of Afghans in the Iranian society. Afghan refugees often face unfounded or false criminal charges since they are easy scapegoats for any wrongdoing (Stigter, 2005a, p. 32). The IRI asserts that illegal Afghan refugees create threats to Iran’s security, for example, because of the possibility of their contact with rebels and drug dealers in Afghanistan (Koepke, 2011, p. 5). Migration is frequently presented as a security issue by the states since the migrants are “demonized” and “they are accused of taking jobs away from nationals, taking advantage of social services, and harming the identity of host countries” (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002). Afghans in Iran suffered their part from this approach as well. Cruel police treatment, unlawful appropriation of the registration cards of refugees, and other practices during the unwelcome

¹¹ The Labor Law was enacted in 1990 and the Article 181 was bringing imprisonment for 91-180 days to any employer who employs a foreigner who is “without a work permit or whose work permit has expired, or who employs a foreign citizen for work other than that specified in his work permit, or who fails to report the termination of an employment relationship” (International Labour Organization, 1990).

period created a feeling of insecurity among the Afghan refugees and these activities can easily be justified by the security discourse. The Iranian government depicted the Afghan refugees as “a danger to domestic society,” as Huysmans (2000) describes the securitization of migration in the EU. The Iranian government did not only attempt to restrict the refugees’ material lives but also tried to prevent their socialization and integration into the Iranian mainstream to make their lives in Iran less attractive. In this sense, the IRI banned Afghan refugees from collective activities including political, social and cultural events (Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2003). The IRI also tried to obstruct the Iranian citizens’ interaction with the Afghan community. One major example of this effort is the obstacles before marriages between Afghan refugee men and Iranian women. Children born into such marriages are not granted Iranian citizenship and passports (Stigter, 2005b, p. 19). It is estimated that there are some 40,000 marriages between Afghan men and Iranian women, which resulted in up to 100,000 children, who lack Iranian birth certificates and identity documents (Olszewska, 2011). This problem creates a generation, which must live in constant insecurity due to their uncertain and fragile status.

During the unwelcome period, the IRI’s securitizing practices also affected the Afghans’ access to education by preventing them from setting up their own schools and by creating obstacles for them to attend in public schools. The quality and extensiveness of education in Afghanistan is quite low and this makes education one of the main motives for Afghans to pursue a life in Iran (Hugo, Abbasi-Shavazi, & Sadeghi, 2012, p. 262). To put an end to this motivation, the IRI resolved to discourage the Afghans by taking securitizing measures, which step by step restricted the Afghans’ access to education. The Afghans who came in the 1980s

received free primary and secondary education regardless of their status, but by the early 1990s undocumented refugees were prohibited from enrolling in public schools (Hoodfar, 2014, p. 136). This policy did not fulfill official expectations initially, because the Afghans set up private educational institutions, the so-called ‘self-administered schools’ (*madarese khodgardan*) (Safri, 2011, p. 592). Self-administered schools depended completely on funds collected from the Afghan refugee community (Hugo, Abbasi-Shavazi, & Sadeghi, 2012, p. 268). Initially set up for the undocumented children, self-administered schools were preferred even more after the government’s decision to charge with a token tuition documented children of documented families for enrollment in Iranian schools in 2006 (Koepeke, 2011, p. 4). The costs of Afghan self-administered schools were significantly lower than the public schools, therefore many registered children enrolled in them as well (Olszewska, 2011). Iran demanded these fees specifically from the Afghan refugee children while, for example, Iraqi refugee children were able to attend public schools for free (U.S. Department of State, 2010). Establishment of the self-administered schools did not rescue Afghans from the risk of losing access to education since these institutions were under constant danger of being shut down (Chatty, Crivello, & Hundt, 2005, p. 399). In 2002, the IRI declared self-administered schools illegal and the Afghans sought accreditation for their education from the Afghan embassy in Tehran (Hugo, Abbasi-Shavazi, & Sadeghi, 2012, p. 267). Speculations for Saudis funding the self-administered schools for political aims continued (Khosrokhavar & Roy, 2013, p. 188) and Iran was already alarmed by the madrasa¹² system in Pakistan, which was propagating for Saudi Arabia (Milani, 2006, p. 238). These

¹² Many Afghan refugees were given ideological training for the resistance against the Soviet intervention in the refugee camps of Pakistan by the traditional educational institutions named *madrasa*. These activities were funded by Saudi Arabia and organized by the Pakistani government (CITE).

provided government officials with basis for taking further measures for pressuring Afghans. Between 2006 and 2008, self-administered schools came under attack by the government, which finally closed them completely (Safri, 2011, p. 592). In that year, only in the province of Tehran, the number of self-administered schools was “estimated around 350, servicing more than 100.000 students” (Chatty, Crivello, & Hundt, 2005, p. 401). After shutting down the self-administered schools, the IRI channeled Afghan children to public schools but since this required registration through the BAFIA, most of the undocumented children could not continue their education for a long time. Using the terminology of Ceyhan and Tsaukala (2002, p. 24), the IRI’s efforts for limiting Afghans’ access to education reflects the identitarian axis of the securitization of migration which juxtaposes migration as a threat to national identity: the Afghan community’s struggle for access to education by setting up schools was presented as a threat by alleging that there was a foreign (Saudi and Pakistani) involvement. The pretexts for the securitization of migration may differ, but the ultimate goal of the Iranian government during the unwelcome period was to increase repatriation of the Afghans to Afghanistan. Self-administered schools of the Afghans were perceived as an obstacle before the realization of this goal, therefore the IRI chose to shut them down in order to toughen the unwelcoming atmosphere it was trying to create.

The purpose of the IRI’s securitizing practices on the Afghan refugees was minimizing the Afghan refugee community, and, if possible, to get rid of them completely. Iran tried to achieve this also through encouraging voluntary repatriation and deportations. The IRI’s attempts to push Afghans to repatriate started in 1992 when the estimated number of Afghan refugees in Iran was around 3 million

(Koepeke, 2011, p. 1). Iran made a tripartite deal with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the government in Kabul and, according to this agreement, some 600.000 Afghan refugees in Iran repatriated in two years (Glazebrook & Abbasi-Shavazi, 2007, p. 191). But this trend ended when Afghanistan experienced a civil war and eventually succumbed to the repressive regime of Taliban in the 1990s. During the temporarily secure conditions following the US-led intervention, Iran signed another Tripartite Repatriation Agreement with Afghanistan and the UNHCR in April 2002, which projected the ‘voluntary’ return of an estimated 400000 Afghans from Iran during the first year of operation (Glazebrook & Abbasi-Shavazi, 2007, p. 192). After the fall of Taliban in late 2001, migration caused by security concerns decreased but in contrast to this, the economic migration increased after 2004 (Abbasi-Shavazi & Sadeghi, 2014, p. 91). The combined number of the repatriated Afghans from Iran and Pakistan between 2002-2011 amounted to 4.6 million refugees (UN News Centre, 2011). Although the number may seem high, it includes the Afghans who do seasonal work in the host countries. Although voluntary repatriation is regarded as a positive development by the UN, the main reasons behind the so-called “voluntary repatriation” are the economic pressures and the cutting off of subsidies by the Iranian government (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 9). In addition to repatriation efforts, the IRI also sought to deport undocumented Afghans (Glazebrook & Abbasi-Shavazi, 2007, p. 191). Documentation of the refugees also became arbitrary since the government could revoke registration cards of the refugees for not renewing the cards on time, for getting caught in the no-go areas or for working without a permit. There are reported incidents of “officials forcefully appropriating registration cards of refugees to put them in an illegal position for deportation” and “only in 2012, more than 30

full busses per day deported Afghan refugees” (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

Another problem is that Afghans being deported from Iran were given no opportunity to challenge their deportation, such as by explaining that they previously had refugee status but lost it through no fault of their own, or that they were prevented from requesting asylum or protection. (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 8).

Despite the efforts of repatriation and deportation, Afghan migration to Iran continued due to the security concerns in Afghanistan, economic motives, and social motives such as access to education. Most of the Afghan refugees consider staying in Iran beyond the expectations of the IRI governments (Monsutti, 2008, p. 58).

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter analyzed the policy of the presenting the Afghan refugees in Iran as a security issue after 1989. As a result of international, regional and domestic changes, Iran’s policies experienced a major transformation, which made it a more inward-looking country. The IRI took the Afghan migration to Iran as a security problem since it did not need them as a foreign policy asset anymore and presenting their presence as a burden for the Iranian economy and society was useful for dealing with the domestic politics. Therefore, the Afghan refugees in Iran faced stigmatization through legal, economic, bureaucratic, and social restrictions, aiming to, first, curb their integration with the Iranian economy, second, to discourage them from staying in Iran, and, third, to increase repatriation, and all these to partly prevent public criticism for their role in the spike in unemployment. These arguments should not be taken to mean that under armed conflict conditions there was no securitization of migration in Iran or, to put it otherwise, lack of armed conflict or peace in Iran is bad for the Afghan migrants on Iranian soil. On the contrary, both conditions—Iran’s

involvement in an armed conflict or the lack of it—would lead to different security regimes.

The IRI officials justified securitizing practices in, a) the economy by accusing refugees as the main reason for financial problems, b) domestic security by depicting Afghans as criminals, c) foreign policy by emphasizing the influence of rival powers on the Afghan community, and d) culture and society by claiming the Afghan refugees being a threat to social harmony. Regardless of the differences between the securitizing practices, all of them served the ultimate purpose of minimizing the Afghan presence in Iran: encouraging repatriation for the documented Afghans by creating an unfriendly environment for them and deportation for undocumented Afghans, many of whom fell into this status because of the post-1989 policies.

Although different political leaders came to power in Iran after 1989, with different political views, the attitude towards the Afghan refugees became worse gradually irrespective of the leading political faction. These unwelcoming conditions for the Afghan refugees in Iran was going to partially improve after Iran's involvement in the Syrian Civil War in 2012, and the next chapter analyzes this transformation.

CHAPTER IV

AFGHAN REFUGEES IN IRAN SINCE 2012: THE IMPACT OF THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

The IRI experienced changes in international, regional, and domestic politics through the 2010s. This caused a partial advancement in and relaxation of the conditions of the Afghan refugees in Iran. Although the shift is not as drastic as the one happened after 1989, it caused another transformation in Iran's migration policies. Hence, this chapter examines the post-2012 years as a distinctly different period in comparison with the unwelcome period between 1989 and 2012.

4.1 Iran Since 2012

Iran's domestic politics and foreign relations drastically changed after 2012. International, regional, and domestic developments after 2012 drastically impacted Iran's policies. While international isolation reached new heights once again, the IRI's regional policy transformed into a more assertive approach after the mass protest movements all around the Middle East in 2010, the so-called Arab Spring. Overall, the pressure of the public discontent at home became a grave problem for the Iranian policy-makers.

4.1.1 International and Regional Politics

The nuclear program of Iran, which is assumed to have started in 2002, created a serious tension between Iran and the West, especially the United States of America. Iran during the Ahmadinejad Era (2005-2013) preferred a populist anti-Western discourse in its foreign policy and used the nuclear program of Iran as the symbol of this policy. Due to grave concerns over Iran having a nuclear weapon, the US imposed sanctions and some other international actors followed this trend. International pressure on Iran increased when the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) imposed extended measures on Iran to stop the uranium enrichment program in 2006 (United Nations, 2006). In 2013, Hasan Rouhani came to power as a moderate candidate with the hopes moderating this situation. The negotiations he started concluded with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015 and signed by the P5+1.¹³ The JCPOA expects Iran to “ensure Iran’s nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful,” and in accordance with Iran’s action, the UN Security Council sanctions, as well as other unilateral sanctions were going to be lifted (US Secretary of State, 2015). In January 2016, the US Secretary of State declared that Iran “has fully implemented its required commitments” and lifted American sanctions (US Secretary of State, 2016). Hence, the prospect for prosperity by the oil revenues and channeling of foreign investment appeared as a tangible possibility for Iran for the first time in decades. But this optimistic environment did not last long since the newly elected president of the USA, Donald Trump, voiced an anti-Iranian discourse and insisted on revoking the JCPOA, which killed the last hopes for ending the international isolation that Iran faced. In May 2018, the USA declared its unilateral exit from the JCPOA, a policy decision that drove a serious

¹³ P5+1 composed of China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The countries are also known as EU/EU+3.

wedge between the USA and European governments, which actually wanted to deepen their ties with Iran (US Secretary of State, 2018). Although other parties to the deal expressed their will to keep the agreement, many trade deals have been falling in an ambiguous situation in the short term due to a fear of US sanctions, hitting the Iranian economy once again (Ewing & Reed, 2018). International companies are also hesitant to do business in Iran under these new conditions, as they do not want to be targeted by the American courts or sanctions (The Guardian , 2016). By August 7, 2018, US re-imposed sanctions against Iran (The White House, 2018). Therefore, Iran's attempt to overcome international isolation failed and leaving Iranian policy-makers unable to end the suffocating situation of their domestic economy.

Political developments in the region, as well, affected the IRI's foreign policy stance. Anxiety caused by mass protests all around the Middle East and their political consequences, the so- called Arab Spring, forced Iranian decision-makers to think more about regime survival. In December 2010, demonstrations started in Tunisia and by the first half of the 2011, protests against oppressive regimes spread to Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria. Initially, at least in discourse, the IRI leadership welcomed this development by claiming that the Islamic Revolution of Iran inspired Muslim peoples of the Middle East to topple secular dictatorships. But Iranian rulers feared the consequences of the “unraveling revolutions of the Arab world” as well (Dabashi, 2016). Could Iran steer clear of the political turmoil that engulfed the Middle East and North Africa, or would spring eventually reach Iran and topple its Islamic regime, too? Policy makers in Iran were already concerned because of the public dissent in 2009, which was widely considered the most

extensive and far-reaching public protest since the Islamic Revolution. The turmoil on Iranian streets in 2009 clearly showed the widening gap between the rulers and the Iranian public opinion (Adelkhah, 2012). In February 2011, thousands of Iranians gathered in Tehran one more time and expressed their solidarity with the protesters of Arab Spring (Dabashi, 2012). The fear from the possibility of a more extensive form of the 2009 protests led the IRI to take a more assertive regional policy. Therefore, the Islamist regime tried to save itself from the effects of Arab Spring by intervening in Yemen, Iraq, Palestine and especially, Syria.

Iran aimed to expand its regional impact abroad and defend its regime at home, through supporting its proxies in the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. Nasr defines Iran's regional policy as "forward defense", which involves "supporting friendly militias and insurgent groups across the Middle East" (Nasr, 2018). Iran's assertive regional policy is so significant that one of the demands of the USA for making another deal is Iran to end its operations abroad (Manson, 2018). This regional policy has two faces: a) defining new roles for the IRI's domestic institutions to make it possible for them to operate abroad, and b) supporting proxies and allies with the help of these outreaching institutions. The IRI's main institution to operate its foreign policy in the Middle East is the Quds branch of the IRGC, which was originally established during the Iran-Iraq War and later re-calibrated to run operations in many countries, including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and the Gaza Strip (Smith, 2007). The proxies and allies of Iran, and their proximity to Iran vary. Iran supports Hezbollah in Lebanon (DeVare, 2012), Houthis in Yemen (Juneau), Popular Mobilization Units (*Hasdhi Shabi*) in Iraq (Freidman, 2018) and Hamas in Gaza (Bob, 2018). However, Iran's most important foreign policy

investment since the outbreak of the Arab Spring is the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria.

Since the first protests in 2011, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been supporting the Assad regime. When the Arab Spring spread to Syria, the IRI at once declared the wave of protests as a “Zionist project to destroy the Islamic resistance” (Akbarzadeh & Barry, 2017). For the IRI, the insurrection against the Assad regime was the first step toward the eventual toppling of the Islamist regime in Iran. After declaring support, Iran started pouring in economic and military aid to the Assad regime. Iranian contribution was enormously significant for the survival of the Assad regime especially during the early phase of the struggle the government forces and various factions of the opposition. In addition to financial aid, which amounts to approximately \$6 billion a year, Iran sent military equipment and military advisors to Syria (The Jerusalem Post, 2015). However, more importantly, Iran helped Syria with continuous supply of ground forces, which Syrian army gravely needed due to its already weak manpower (Terrill, 2015). Iran-backed Hezbollah and Iran’s IRGC have been fighting side by side with the Assad regime’s forces since the beginning of the clashes. Iranian military personnel usually go by the title “advisor” to create an image that Iranian officials are not directly involved in the war. In an interview, Bashar al-Assad, said that “advisorship” is a “general term” and when those advisors “enter a battle, they become *fighters*” (al-Monitor, 2018). This approach shows that the Iranian government avoids the image of sending its citizens to the war since it only sends “advisors” and those who are fighting on the ground are just “fighters” thus not sent by the IRI but voluntarily joined to the war. In addition to the forces of Hezbollah, the IRGC and advisors from the Iranian conventional army (*Artesh*),

there are also military combat divisions composed of Afghans and Pakistanis under the command of the IRGC. The majority of these Iran-backed foreign forces in Syria, fighting as part of the Iranian military units and commanded by Iranian officers, are the Afghan refugees, with an estimated number of more than 18,000 fighters (Majidiyar, 2017a). The Iran-backed Afghan fighters in Syria, organized into the Fatemiyoun Brigade (*Liwa Fatemiyoun*), are receiving their training in preparation centers in the IRI, before they are transported to their military posts in Syria (Moslih, 2016). Since their entrance to the war, at least 2,000 Afghans died and some 8,000 were injured during the fighting (Majidiyar, 2018). Iran's contribution to Assad's defense against opposition forces prevented his downfall from the presidency and as of 2018, most of the Syrian territory is under control of Damascus. The role and significance of the Afghan refugee fighters in the Iranian struggle to prop up the Assad regime cannot be overestimated.

4.1.2 Domestic Politics

The situation in the Iranian domestic politics is challenging for the regime. This became clear after the 2009 elections in which president Ahmadinejad was elected for his second term. Reformist Iranians organized around the Green Movement¹⁴ and continued their opposition to the government. Leading figures of the Green Movement, including the former president Khatami and former prime minister Mousavi, supported Hasan Rouhani for the presidency in 2013 and 2017 elections since he was considered to be a moderate, though he was not a member of the Green Movement (Cunningham & Murphy, 2017). Already fragile and oil-revenue-dependent economy of Iran was struck severely by the sanctions, and this

¹⁴ Green Movement was the name of the incidents erupted after the 2009 Presidential Election of Iran. Millions of people protested the results of the election by the claims of fraud (Dabashi, 2013).

contributed negatively to the already existing discontent among the Iranian public. Rouhani sought to release the tension by ending economic isolation and, to that end, he did his best to push for the JCPOA for this purpose. But despite the trade deals with a myriad of countries from all around the world, the economy did not recover. Unemployment stood high, inflation did not decrease, and these unmet economic expectations from the Rouhani caused him trouble in the 2017 elections for his second term for the presidency (Hafezi, 2017). Although Rouhani won the elections with the landslide results, public discontent did not end. In the late 2017 and early 2018, many people protested against President Rouhani on the streets, although the protests quickly evolved into an anti-regime format to criticize the Islamic Republic with chants such as “death to Khamenei” (The Deghan & Graham-Harrison, 2017). Iran’s foreign operations, and especially the IRI’s involvement in the Syrian war became a focus of such attacks and was criticized by the public. People are demanding a recovery in the economy, and they consider the Syrian Civil War as one of the reasons for the Iranian economy to suffer. Following the highly expanded and sophisticated operations but not having their economic demands met, many Iranian people criticized these operations during the protests in the late 2017 and early 2018, by the chants such as “Neither Gaza, nor Lebanon, I Give my life for Iran” and “Leave Syria alone, deal with us” (Fathollah-Nejad, 2018). Therefore, pressure from the public compels the IRI to look for other solutions such as using the Afghan refugees in the Syrian Civil War to be able to resume and continue the operations.

4.2 Afghan Refugees in Iran Since 2012: A Partial Relaxation

The predicament caused by the IRI's insistence on maintaining its intervention in Syria and the resulting public criticism in Iran towards the operation led Iranian decision-makers to send Afghan refugees to fight in Syria. The Afghan refugees are quite functional for the IRI government to pursue its aims in Syria since it would be more difficult under the present conditions to oblige or convince the Iranian citizens to join the war and possible deaths of the Iranian citizens would increase the public pressure on the government. On the contrary, funerals of the "Afghan martyrs" in Iran are getting attention from the conservative people and serve as venues for pro-regime demonstrations as well (Dehghan, 2015). As the Afghan refugees in Iran became a "symbol of the resistance" in Syria, their situation has seen some improvement. Although these improvements are not enough to solve all their problems, which appeared during the unwelcome period from 1989 to 2012, there is a significant recovery, and the general attitude of the officials and the public have changed positively (Tasnim News Agency, 2016).

The newly found usefulness of the Afghan refugees, one more time due to war conditions in the region, helped change Iran's treatment of them. Due to the Afghan refugees' vital contribution by filling the manpower gap on the Assad regime's side, accelerating and increasing the number of Afghans joining the Fatemiyoun Brigade is important for the regime. The IRI tries to encourage Afghans to join the fight in Syria through mostly positive incentives. The Afghan refugee fighters in Syria are getting a salary, which varies between \$500 and \$1000 (Moslih, 2016). The main motives for joining the fight in Syria for the Afghan refugees in Iran are "the permanent residency, financial aid and other incentives for their families" while

some of the Afghans are joining to avoid “prison sentences” (Majidiyar, 2017b). The government also gives guarantees to fighters for the cases of their death in the war. Families of the fallen foreign fighters get Iranian citizenship (Financial Tribune, 2016) and free housing (Esfandiari, 2017). In addition to these positive incentives, according to a report of Human rights watch, the Iranian government forces many Afghan refugees to fight in Syria through different coercion methods including “threats of deportation” (Human Rights Watch, 2016). In another report, Human Rights Watch also observed that some Afghan refugee children are fighting in Syria (Human Rights Watch, 2017). The Iranian government has rejected the allegations of children fighters (Tehran Times, 2017). According to an article from the LA Times, many Afghan refugees have no other option than “to go to jail and face deportation or fight in Syria for a few months and gain legal residence in Iran” (Mostaghim & Bulos, 2016). There is also a new law for obtaining Iranian citizenship enacted by the Iranian Parliament, which gives authority to the Iranian government to give citizenship to the families of the non-Iranian ‘martyrs’ (DW, 2016). From the reports and the news about the Afghan refugees fighting in Syria, it is fair to claim that the IRI has been conducting a carrot-stick policy, which includes both positive and negative incentives toward the Afghans to convince them to join the war. Regardless of the methods of persuasion, a regional conflict in Syria has led to partial de-securitization of the Afghan refugees in Iran.

To exemplify, in addition to the incentives specifically generated for the fighters and their relatives, there has been some broad improvements for the whole Afghan community in Iran. These improvements are related to refugees’ access to education, health care, and documentation. The children of the undocumented families, once

banned from registering in the public primary and secondary schools, and the children of the documented families who had to pay a significant enrollment cost can now attend the public schools without any cost by a decree from the religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in 2015, and as a result, some 50.000 Afghan refugee children enrolled in the schools for the first time (Tehran News, 2017). The IRI also built some 15.000 new classrooms for these children (AFP, 2017; Abbasi-Shavazi & Sadeghi, 2014). Initially, there were some reports of the officials, who are restricting the right of the Afghan refugees to enroll in the schools despite the decree, but the government insisted on the implementation of this policy (Radio Zamaneh, 2015). Lack of healthcare insurance, causing trouble to many undocumented Afghans, is also being solved by including approximately one million foreigners in the healthcare system in 2015 (UNHCR, 2015). The government also gave citizenship to the children born in to marriages between a non-Iranian husband (the Afghans in this case) and an Iranian woman. In 2016, Iranian Parliament accepted the bill for amending the laws on migration, which included giving birth certificates for the children of Iranian women who married non-Iranians (Financial Tribune, 2016). By 2017, children of the Iranian women who married non-Iranians started have their identification cards (Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, 2017). Parliament tried to enact a similar bill in 2006 but it was never implemented. The implementation of the recent bill with the addition of the parts concerning the “foreign fighters”, shows that this change on the citizenship law is motivated by the significant contribution of the Afghans in the Syrian Civil War. To sum up, Afghan fighters’ significance in Syria forced government to take steps to improve the conditions of not only the fighters and their relatives, but the whole Afghan community in Iran.

The negative attitude toward Afghans from the government and the public also transformed for the better since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War. The positive vibe for the Afghans resulting from their contribution to the Syrian Civil War also had an impact on the attitude of the Iranian officials and the Iranian public.

Commander of the Quds Force, Qassim Soleimani, states that the “Fatemiyoun cleared the dirt of darkness from the faces of the Afghans,” and he also suggested that the cemeteries of the “Afghan martyrs” have become “something like the Imamzadehs”¹⁵(sacred visiting sites for Shi’ites), and according to him, the Afghan refugee fighters are positively influencing the Iranian society to have a more respectful attitude toward the Afghans (Tasnim News Agency, 2016). In one particular case, two Iranian soldiers tried to check the registration cards of the Afghan refugees, who were participating in the funeral of two Afghan fighters. Those two soldiers were immediately punished by their commanders and, in the following gatherings for the funerals of the Afghan refugees, it has become a custom not to check the registration cards (Tasnim News Agency, 2015). Afghans, once again, were perceived as Muslim brothers.

Despite the partial advancement of the conditions of the Afghan refugees, many problems still remain. The increasing number of Afghans crossing the Iran-Turkey border shows that many Afghans seek to migrate to Europe and Turkey (Sen, 2018). There are some claims that the negative incentives the Iranian government is using to increase the numbers of Afghan fighters in Syria enhances this trend (Human Rights Watch, 2016). However, a comparison between 1989-2012 and post-2012 periods shows that the general attitude toward Afghans in Iran has improved and the

¹⁵ Imamzadehs are the tombs of the descendants of the holy Imams according to the Shiite belief.

statements of Iranian officials prove the connection between those improvements and the Afghans' contribution to Iran's operation in Syria.

4.3 Conclusion

After 2012, Iran intervened in the costly Syrian Civil War while struggling with domestic discontent at home. International isolation and Iran's regional policy, on the one hand, and domestic discontent at home, on the other, transformed Iran's security priorities. The IRI's policy-makers resorted to similar decisions made during the 1980-1989 period, and attempted to guarantee regime survival by continuing armed conflicts while trying to endure the economic hardness by the discourse of "resistance economy" (Takeyh, 2016). In this situation, the Afghan refugees in Iran functioned as one of the most effective instruments of the Iranian government's involvement in Syria since sending them to Syria is more advantageous than sending Iranian citizens. By focusing on the Afghan fighters, the regime is trying to distract public opinion from the Iranian citizens who are also involved in the war. It is even argued that the Iranian media coverage directed toward the Afghan fighters is about convincing Iranians that "only Afghans, and not Iranians, are dying in Syria" (Latifi, 2017). To encourage the refugees to go to Syria, the regime has been improving the conditions of the Afghans in Iran by amending already existing and restrictive laws, relaxing the implementation of legal and statutory measures, and changing its discourse on the Afghans. Since the regime's definition of security once again shifted to foreign issues and the survival of regime against domestic discontent, the securitization of Afghan refugees' existence on the Iranian soil is not a priority as it was between 1989-2012, which leads to a partial relaxation of their condition.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The puzzle of this dissertation is whether there is a relationship between Iran's involvement in armed conflicts, and Iran's treatment towards Afghan mobility across its borders. The independent variable (Iran's direct involvement in armed conflicts) determined, to a large extent, the status of the Afghan refugees in Iran and the rights and services they were granted by the IRI regime. In the previous three chapters, I presented evidence to prove this relationship between the two variables.

The welcome period between 1979 and 1989 illustrated a positive attitude on the part of the Iranian officials toward the Afghan refugees. Since the Afghans were much needed for the economy of Iran, that is, to fill the manpower gap therefore, the security regime of the IRI emerged in a way that included the Afghans instead of stigmatizing them. Facing numerous difficulties, including the war with Iraq, collapsing economy and international isolation, the Islamist regime considered Afghans to be beneficial for Iran. The IRI did not prevent the influx of Afghan refugees and provided them with the same subsidies it provided to the Iranian citizens. Iran greeted the Afghans as fellow Muslims. Their integration into the Iranian society, through economic activities, mobility in Iran or access to education, was encouraged. Although the government gave the *mohajeer* status to most of the

Afghans, documentation was insignificant for access to rights and services. As a consequence of this policy, the Afghans contributed to the Iranian economy during the hard years of the war with Iraq, and many Afghans even fought at the battlefield. To sum up, the IRI showed a welcoming attitude towards the Afghans, since they were a) beneficial for the Iranian economy, b) helping the Iranian forces against the Iraqi army, c) posing as a foreign policy asset particularly regarding the actors involved in Afghanistan, d) representing the Islamist ideology of the regime, which welcomed all Muslims.

The positive vibe towards the Afghans in Iran faded away after the end of the war with Iraq. After 1989, Iran became more concerned about the domestic politics. Dealing with economic concerns and attempting to alleviate public discontent with the Islamist regime became the priorities of the decision-makers. Due to high unemployment rate, Iranian decision-makers began considering the Afghans' role in the economy as a burden instead of a contribution. It was also useful to point at the Afghans as the major cause of high unemployment rate, which was actually a result of a myriad of structural problems including the returning veterans, booming population, increased women's employment, devastated infrastructure after the war and the never-ending international isolation. Hence, the IRI started to encourage repatriation of the Afghan refugees to Afghanistan and tried to prevent the further influx of refugees and securitized the Afghan refugee population for this aim. The securitization of Afghans included strict documentation process, which caused many Afghans to lose their access to social services including enrollment in the public schools, shutting down of self-administered Afghan schools, restricting Afghans' mobility within Iran, cutting subsidies to refugees, and implementing mass

deportations. The general view toward the Afghan refugees became unsympathetic since they were mainly seen as a cause of economic and social problems. The ultimate aim of the securitization of Afghans in Iran was to minimize the Afghan presence in Iran through repatriation and deportation efforts.

The Afghans in Iran experienced a partial relaxation in their legal and living conditions after the IRI's involvement in the Syrian Civil War after 2012.

Considering the defense of Bashar al-Assad's rule in Damascus vital for the Islamist regime in Iran, the Iranian decision-makers have been supporting him since the beginning of the uprisings, often at great cost to Iran. However, the public discontent caused by the economic problems at home made it hard for the Iranian government to justify its costly operations abroad. To deal with this conundrum, the IRI resorted to the policy of sending the Afghan refugees in Iran to fight in Syria. By emphasizing the role of the Afghan fighters, the regime is trying to create an image that Iran's involvement in Syria is dependent on the Afghans instead of Iranians. To increase the number of the Afghan fighters willing to move to the Syrian front, the Iranian government created many incentives including salaries, documentation for undocumented fighters, and granting citizenship to the families of the fighters. The contribution of the Afghan refugees to Iran's operation in Syria caused a new wave of a positive attitude towards them, both on the part of the Iranian officials and the public. Although many restrictive policies continue, currently the Afghan refugees are experiencing another welcome period through significant improvement of their conditions in Iran. These improvements include a decline in the number of deportations, relaxation of the restriction on their mobility, access to public schools and relaxation of documentation pressure.

Table 2: Policy and Attitude Changes toward Afghan Refugees in Iran

	Welcome Period (1979-1989)	Unwelcome Period (1989-2012)	Syrian Civil War (2012-present)
Allowing arrival of new refugees	Not restricted	Prohibited	Restricted
Deportations	Insignificant	Common	Less common
Subsidies	Provided for the majority	The majority disqualified	No data
Education	Accorded the same rights as the Iranian citizens	Not available for undocumented children / Self-administered schools were available until 2005, but shut down after	Can enroll in public schools regardless of the status
Attitude	Afghans as fellow Muslims escaping from occupation	Afghans as a threat to the economy and social harmony in Iran	Afghans as fellow Muslim fighters for the IRI's interests
Restrictions on Mobility	None	No-Go Areas	Partial relaxation of the enforcement of no-go areas
The Significance of Documentation	None	Strict documentation rules with grave consequences	Relaxed implementation of documentation rules

This dissertation contributes to the existing literature on the securitization of migration and refugees since I attempt to single out the direct involvement of the host country in an armed conflict as an independent variable and discuss how this independent variable impacts on the decision-making process about the Afghan refugees in Iran. I argue that in the case of Iran, the presence of my independent variable leads to the betterment of the legal status and living conditions of the refugees, whereas its absence results in the presentation of migration and refugees as security issues. Of course, the fact that I isolated and emphasized direct involvement in armed conflicts as my independent variable does not mean that there could be no

other such independent variables. On the contrary, there could be many, such as the state of the economy, religion, and regime type, just to cite the obvious few. In each such case, future researchers should study the relationship between those independent variables and the securitization of migration. A comparative study of securitization of refugees in Iran with other cases, such as Turkey, would be very fruitful in identifying other independent variables.

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