



DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

IRAN -US CONFLICT 2020: LIVE ESCALATION ON TRUMP KILLING OF SOLEIMANI IN IRAQ

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Abstract

This dissertation is engaging and contributes to the contemporary research on the distinguished transformations of American Iranian relations in the post-Soleimani era. It is represented dangerous and unprecedented escalation steps. The USA airstrike killing of Iran's Qassem Soleimani led the principal causal of this international tension between the two countries. In light of this, the authors show how this incident came about and why it is relevant to be given scholarly attention. Equally important to consider is the use a liberal and realistic perspective in the unpacking of an international incident that almost brought the world in front of a devastating war. The study is grounded on the reasons which led the US to kill the Iranian top general (Qasem Soleimani). And why the Iranian leadership answer on this killing in the way they did? In this study, I used the previous studies to understand the roots and development of Iranian American relations before and after the Khomeini revolution. I will also rely on the analytical method and include a research problem on the reasons for the permanence and continuation of the American Iranian conflict. I will use realism and liberalism to reach a deeper theoretical understanding of the latest escalation when Qassim Soleimani had been assassinated on January 3, 2020.

Keywords

Assassination, Escalation, Iraq, Iran, US, Realism, Liberalism

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1-Introduction

In the early hours of Friday, January 3, the American Air Forces launched an airstrike near Baghdad Airport, targeting leaders of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (Crowley, et al, 2020). The raid killed the Quds Force Commander Qassim Soleimani, Iran's most dangerous general (Ibid, 2020). Soleimani's name had appeared prominently in the fields of Iranian proxy wars, in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and other conflict areas (Rapanyane &Shai, 2020, p15670-15679).

The assassination of Soleimani came a few days after the efforts of the Popular Mobilization Forces to storm the American embassy in Baghdad, and Washington then threatened the Iraqi authorities loyal to Iran with a decisive response for any future tactics that Iran plans against the United States of America. Reactions continued to follow Soleimani's killing inside and outside Washington, amid fears that his death would spark a wide war in the region (Crowley, et al, 2020).

While "military tensions are overshadowing diplomatic engagement. It remains unclear whether the Iranian actions have supposedly prompted alarm in Washington were offensive or defensive in nature" (The US, Iran and 'maximum Pressure', 2019). The US State Department announced that the operation was directed by Trump, who led administration authorized the aerial bombing of Soleimani. In Iran, the scene was different, and the voices of threats and intimidation vowing revenge for the killing of its leader were raised. In this context, the Iranian Ministry of Defence announced its intention to retaliate from the perpetrators of the attack, Iran's goal is revenge not war (Rapanyane &Shai, 2020, p15670-15679).

President Trump's calculations in making this decision based on the determinants related to his awareness and perception about a number of variables related to the history of US-Iranian relations, and the threats facing his country's interests in the region, and the effects of pressure on the internal situation on him. Reports emerged that the Commander of the IRGC's Quds Force, Qassim Soleimani, had supposedly instructed Shia militias in Iraq to prepare to attack US interests. In 2019, anonymous Iranian officials claimed that the transfer of several dozen shortrange ballistic missiles to southern Iraq was a 'backup plan' to maintain a deterrent if Iran were attacked" (The US, Iran and 'maximum Pressure', 2019).

The timing of President Trump's decision is related mainly to developments in events that took place inside the Iraqi territories from December 2019 to January 2, 2020, which is the timing of the implementation of the process. These events are summarised by the actions of the Iraqi "Hezbollah" carrying out a missile attack on a US military base in Kirkuk, Northern Iraq, on Saturday, December 28th, killing an American contractor and wounding four American soldiers .On Sunday, December 29, 2019, the United States carried out air strikes targeting five Hezbollah bases in Western Iraq and Eastern Syria, and what escalated the events between the two sides was the Iraqi "Hezbollah" militia demonstrators on Monday, December 31 who stormed the American embassy in Baghdad, and burned the American flag, broke down the security gates in the vicinity of the embassy, in what resembled the scenario of the occupation of the American embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979 after the Iranian revolution (Rapanyane &Shai, 2020, p15670-15679).

Through this assassination, the United States of America undertook using a new approach that it did not use previously to punish enemies,” without congressional authorization -- will increase the threat to American troops, diplomats, and families in the region. Trump's 'maximum pressure' campaign has made the region less stable, divided US decision makers from key allies, and is driving our adversaries together” (Kaine,2020).

On the other hand, the Iranian response came with locally manufacturer ballistic missiles on the American base in Iraq which is also a new context (Martyr, 2020), because Iran has always tried to hide behind its regional agents such as militias in striking American interests. We need political theories to explain the escalation of the two countries. In order to reach a deeper theoretical understanding, I chosen liberalism and realism, they are two well-established theories in international relations which a group of foreign policy theorists stand behind them, so how will realism and liberalism help us to obtain an in-depth knowledge of the recent escalation between Iran and the United States of America 2019-2020?

2-Outline of the Thesis

The outline of the thesis is as follows. In the third section, I review previous research and move to the fourth section, the aim and the research questions are explained. Section 5 presents a historical overview of the Iran-US relation and this section is divided into three parts. In the first part, I take on the relationship between the United States of America and Iran before the Khomeini revolution and, I explain the first seed of this conflict in a 1953 coup. In the second part, the period that followed Khomeini's revolution and its most prominent event is the detention of American hostages at the embassy for 444 days. As for the third part, it included the period following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, until the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. The thesis then goes on to discuss in section 6.1 the realism theory as one of the theories of international relations. As for Section 6.2, it was devoted to the liberalism theory. Section 7 discusses available data and research design. Empirical analyses and results are presented in section 8. Section 9 discusses the results and concludes.

3- Previous Research

A search was conducted searching for material on “analysis of the American/ Iranian conflict with a liberal and realistic dimension” but all the results seemed to indicate that this topic had not been investigated previously, especially in the incident of the assassination of Soleimani. However, there are many studies that contributed to providing explanations on American foreign policy using various theoretical approaches, for instance, using the theory of international crises and the role theory. There is less explanation on the theoretical perspective of the realistic and liberal approach regarding the US-Iranian relations after the assassination on January 3,2020.

There are many perspectives to analyse the US-Iran conflict like the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever (2003) can best comprehend and unravel the complexities in the relations between international power and a regional power (Hussain,2015, p.29-47). “The theory engages that states in geographical proximity share an ambivalence of hostile and amicable relations due to their common security outlook and problems. The security complex works in four overlapping circles; at the local level, at the

regional level, at the intra-regional level and lastly at the universal level referred as super complex" (Buzan&Waever,2003).

These security complexes affect each other from state to region and then international level or vice versa, so determine intra-state relations bilaterally and multilaterally. In addition," the processes of securitization and de securitization or both are so interlinked that the security problems cannot be analysed or resolved apart from one another. However, the US presence in Iraq, Afghanistan and its naval fleet in the Persian Gulf makes it proximate to the Middle Eastern regional security complex (RSC), where Iran as an important regional actor is swaying influence Middle East. Furthermore, Iran and the US are in complex and conflictual security relationship that determines their bilateral ties and impacts the regional and super security complexes" (Buzan&Waever,2003).

According to Kenneth Katzman, Kathleen J. McInnis and Clayton Thomas (2020), U.S. officials and reports consistently identify Iran's support for militant armed factions in Iraq a significant threat to U.S. interests and allies. Attempting to oblige Iran's nuclear program took priority in U.S. policy after 2002 as that program forward. The U.S. also has sought to thwart Iran's buy of new conventional weaponry and development of ballistic missiles." In May 2018, the Trump Administration withdrew the United States from the 2015 nuclear deal, asserting that the agreement did not address the broad range of U.S. concerns about Iranian behaviour and would not permanently prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon" (Katzman, et al.2020).

According to Nils Jordet (2000), at Tufts university, the overall theoretical framework of the realist model of international relations best explanation the fundamentals of the conflict between the US and Iran; National interests and power are the two core variables in realist theory. A hierarchy drives the actors in the international system. "At the bottom of the interest pyramid is the fundamental desire for self-protection. Survival always takes priority over" higher" needs. Each contender is first and foremost driven by fear of destruction and extinction. The international system is one characterized by scarcity and anarchy. Scarce resources are negotiated through politics, which is defined as the struggle for power, in both a domestic and international political setting. It is a pessimistic worldview. Competitors are fundamentally untrustworthy and survival in the system is only possible through self-protection. Each unitary actor has two fundamental alternatives in its pursuit of interests: competition or alignment of interests with other contenders. Cooperation or alliance only takes place when the participants in the power struggle find that their interests are coinciding. In an international system composed of independent nation-states, the survival of both the polity and the whole system depends on the rational pursuit of the national interests mutual with a realistic assessment of national strength. In short, competition, and conflict result from clashing needs and interests". (Jordet, 2000).

The conflict between the US-Iranian relations has led to great disaster, especially regarding the 2003 Iraq War to the American foreign policy history. Though with various conventional wisdoms depicted, the war has been perceived to liberalism product with endless repetitions and promotion by various prominent academic realists which includes Stephen Walt (2003), Michael Desch (2008), and John Mearsheimer (2003), among others. Moreover, the same

academic realists were among the first vocal war critics prosecuting as the product of the critically liberal American foreign policy desires which are evident in regard to liberal internationalist as well as in the neoconservative cycles.

However, the idea is essentially flawed regarding the ideological Iraq War origins in comparison and relationship with liberalism and realism. In the case of any war, many actors are portrayed with debates and justification threads regarding the causes and the origins confounding the story. Based on the Iraq War, it is a clear and straightforward aspect that it was a result of the American hegemonic superiority pursuit. The origin is depicted back to the thoughts of prominent and ancient realists portraying the international order as a result of power concentrations and not from balance of power shifting. Therefore, the superiority approach was due to the seriousness and urgency amplification because of weapons vulnerability which was potentially unreserved by anticipation.

Realism depicts related and conflicting of thoughts derived from three categories that has relate to the war or conflict between the two countries. They conflict in answering the question where the security and order come from regarding the international politics, therefore, essential in understanding the ideological cause of US-Iranian conflict. Balance of power realism depicts that order and security comes from balanced power configuration whereby state must resist attempts by any other state in establishing dominant position. Hegemonic realism depicts that power is a result of power concentrations hence the preponderant states agenda in order provision and position sustenance. The interdependence realism advances the security interdependence high level making the international disorder dangerous hence effective government must merge at large scales. Therefore, the realism varieties playing a major role in the US-Iranian conflict each nation knowing their ideal reasons and aims.

Therefore, the need of drawing inspiration from other experiences using realistic and liberal theories to understand the conflict, including the experience of annexing Crimea in 2014, Russia proved through the process of annexing Crimea that realism is still present despite the Western world's attempts to liberalize the borders of the Russian bear. Many researchers wrote their opinions on this crisis from a realistic and liberal perspective, such as Krastev and Leonard (2015), Sakwa (2015), Rynning (2015) and Mearsheimer (2014). In addition. Iraq will be strongly present in our thesis because it is an essential part of the Iranian American conflict.

3.1. US Foreign Policy from Realistic and Liberal Perspectives

According to Stephanson (2015) there appears to be a shift in the world view of the United states from optimism regarding its role as a superpower capable of leading the international system in the wake of the collapse of the former Soviet Union, to pessimism about its inability to maintain peace and international stability (Stephanson, 2015, p.359-374).

Mearsheimer (2019) argued, in his book *The Great Delusion*," liberalism faces challenges related to its relationship with realism and nationalism" (Mearsheimer, 2019, p.43), and he questions if the relationship between realism and nationalism a relationship of conflict or coexistence is and how and when do major powers use that relationship to achieve their external goals. From these questions, the author affirms that the key to understanding the

limits of liberalism is recognition of its relationship with realism and nationalism, and the nature of the interaction between them to influence international politics. He also pointed out that the liberal American hegemony during the administrations of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, as well as Barack Obama failed to achieve their goals of liberal hegemony. Mearsheimer (2019) argued during that period, "Washington played a major role in sowing death and destruction in most regions of the world", such as the Middle East - for example - which has reached a state of anarchy that is not likely to end soon (Ibid, 2019, p.43-61). Therefore, he believes that the United States should return to realism.

Mearsheimer (2019) asserts if the United States is transformed from liberalism to realism will be linked to two basic considerations; The first consideration relates to the future structure of the international system; On the one hand, the Chinese rise, and Russia's quest to regain international standing on the other hand, may reshape the structure of a future international order from a unipolar to a multipolar system, and if that happens, the United States will have to abandon liberal hegemony and embrace a realistic approach out of fear of any potential threats from its opponents (Mearsheimer, 2019, p.63).

Fukuyama (1992) argues that liberal democracy should be spread using soft power through supporting liberal projects in countries that suffer from a lack of democracy (Fukuyama, 1992, p.128-137). In contrast Ikenberry (2005) does not see a problem in spreading liberalism through the use of force (Ikenberry, 2005). These two points of views show that there are conflicting opinions on how to spread liberalism but they both agree that liberalism is the way forward. This is in contrast Mearsheimer (2019), who is a realist and sees realism as the way forward.

Returning to the realist theory, one of the realist theorists Waltz (2000) argued that realism is the effective theory that can be used in international relations. He defended this theory against liberal theorists who claimed that realism is not effective because liberal theory was able to achieve success in ending the cold war without resorting to hard power. Liberalists argue that the world moved from a bipolar world to unipolar world because of liberal theory. Despite being a realist, Waltz does admit that there is now a unipolar national system, but he still maintains that realism is the most useful in leading the world. (Waltz, 2000, p.5-41).

3.2. Iran's Foreign Policy from Realistic and Liberal Perspectives

Iran is not a democratic country (Harper, 2016, p14-17), although it is present in many international organizations and has commercial relations with some neighbouring countries such as Oman and the United Arab Emirates (The Impact of Renewed Sanctions on Iran, 2019). Its commercial behaviour and its presence in international organizations is liberal behaviour but it does not help generalize the standard of liberalism to it.

As for the neorealism theory further, it explains Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon. The theory stems from the idea of why Iran wants power. And what size can countries reach in terms of strength? Or what is the amount of force that is sufficient? And the explanation within this theory is that the neorealism may be offensive in the sense that the countries are always looking for opportunities to obtain more power and they must do so whenever it appears to them that feasible (W A, 2016, P.155-157). All of that applies to Iran in part of its power to

support its armor in Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen, Popular Mobilization Forces, Hezbollah, and the Houthis have all increased their power and adopted what opportunities are appropriate with voids in Yemen and Lebanon and political transfers in Iraq, in addition to that they have increased their strength in the Syrian through the presence of General Qassim Soleimani.

Interpretation cannot be applied in relation to Iran's quest for power by acquiring a nuclear weapon. Rather, it is another aspect of the new realism, which is defensive realism, that provides the interpretation because defensive realism is based on the interpretation that states are searching for the appropriate amount of power, and that any state if becoming overly powerful, she threatens existing equilibrium and her desire for more strength puts her at risk (Lee, 2016).

4- Aim and Research Questions

This paper aims to build on previous research in a cumulative way. By using realism and liberalism we will gain a deeper understanding of the recent escalation between US and Iran, especially after the killing of Qassim Soleimani in 2020.

Therefore, the purpose is as a result that conflict development between the US and Iran has surprise many scholars like Vali Nasr (2020), who had written dozens of articles and held many press interviews on this topic. Such an international incident regarding the US-Iranian standoff and aspects to each other has made the academic specialists, journalists, and commentators try figure out the ideal approach pertaining the conflict. However, among them, they have come up with diverse theoretical underpinnings regarding the behaviour and predictions on what could be the next moves or plan of actions to be considered by the global players. The dozens of studies dealt with this issue in theoretical approaches, for instance, the theory of international crises and the national interest and role theory have been used in explaining the US and Iran relations. The answer can be “yes” though this can be a surprise to those having the idea of international relations content having no history of ideas or consideration. For instance, pacifists presenting liberals as peace loving cosmopolitans and perceiving the national states as dangerous preferring the world federations or under the transnational arrangements. However, the modern liberal international relations and thinkers have taken further developments in supporting the liberal internationalist institutions. Both realism and liberalism theories admit on the sanctions as the essential instrument regarding the international relations. Nevertheless, realism advocates have the perception that permits are the obvious reality concerning the international relations used in power policy framework by the states in attaining their national interests. On the other hand, liberals depict a regulatory sight regarding sanctions with the consideration as the preventive and legal instruments not in favour of international regulations violators, thus, liberal theoreticians have sanctions believe of unavoidable instruments applied in prevention of international rules and norms violation.

Using the theories Realism and Liberalism, therefore, helps in the understanding of the US-Iran conflict through answering of specific research questions. The relationship between the US and Iran have been an international security problem prompting war and fights amongst them. Therefore, the two nations could have been friends, but with one reason or other,

instead becoming enemies of own making due to their conflicting ideas. Thus, the thesis raises the following questions.

According to Realism and Liberalism: Why did the U.S. choose to kill the Iranian top general Qasem Soleimani? Which goals did the U.S try to reach by this action? And why did the Iranian leadership answer this killing in the way they did? Which goals did the Iranian leadership try to reach by their action?

5- Historical Perspective of the Iranian American Relations.

Although Iranian- American relations began in the mid-nineteenth century (Amirahmadi, 2014, p.5-20) they were not serious until after the Second World War. America, which emerged from the war as a great power, sought to inherit the declining British influence in the Middle East, and in Iran in particular. The fear of the Soviet Union's incursion into Iranian territory helped make Iran occupy an advanced position in American plans related to the Truman Doctrine of 1947 and by which the United States mobilized its military and material capabilities to support countries that fear from being caught in communism (Spalding, 2007, p.323).

5.1.US-Iranian Relations Before the Khomeini Revolution

Three months after the Truman Declaration, the Marshall Plan in 1948 to rebuild Europe after the end of World War II was announced, Iran's importance came to power, due to its oil that flowed into Europe and Japan. Oil cast was a shadow over Iranian- American relations significantly after the arrival of Muhammad Mossadegh as prime minister in 1951, when he nationalized Iranian oil (Heikal, 1981, p.13-27).

Mosaddeq was approach the Soviets, which the United States viewed with great caution, which led to its agreement with Britain to remove him, and this was done through the "Ajax" intelligence operation (Israeli, 2013, p.246-262), which was arranged by the CIA (Bayat, 2017, p.2). When Mossadegh was overthrown in 1953, the Iranian oil concession was distributed in a new way (Ibid, 2017, p.2).

Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who assumed the throne of Iran in 1941, worked to lead his country to move forward in the direction of modernization and westernization, and he viewed the United States as a model that should be followed (Campbell &Segev, 1989, p.204).

All of these reasons combined, had a great role in the outbreak of the revolution in 1979, that revolution, which was based on an Islamic ideological basis, opposes the American capitalist ideology, its leaders viewed the United States as the main ally of the deposed Shah in 1979, which produced a state of hostility declared with it from the first moment of the revolution (The US, Iran and 'maximum Pressure ,2019). Ayatollah Khomeini, who led the Islamic revolution, used to describe America in his sermons as the Great Satan, and considered it to stand behind every evil in the world (Heikal, 1981, p.53).

“A turning point after the Revolution came when young Islamic radicals in Tehran took American diplomats and embassy employees’ hostage for 444 days. They used the Shah’s entry into the US for medical treatment as a pretext. Subsequent developments simply

reinforced the hostility and mistrust between the Islamic Republic and the US” (Amirahmadi, 2014, p.5-20).

5.2. The US and Revolutionary Iran

United States rejected the Iranian offer, announced the freezing of Iranian assets, and began to impose economic sanctions on Tehran, and called for stopping the import of Iranian oil, but, as Walt (2013) asserts in his book *Revolution and War*, the crisis was ended in the autumn of 1981, when the hostages were delivered in exchange for the release of \$ 11 billion of Iranian assets frozen in America (Walt, 2013, p.112-118).

There are those who go further than that and see there is an Iranian deal with the presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan, in order to delay the release of the American hostages to topple the other rival (Jimmy Carter) in return to gain US arms deals to confront Iraq in the war (Cantey ,2014, p.34-95). This was also confirmed by the BBC, in a program titled “444 days - the Iranian hostage crisis - BBC documentary,” the hostages released in the first minutes of the 20 January 1981, which means exactly that the Iranians want this victory for the new president, Ronald Reagan, not to his opponent, former President Jimmy Carter (BBC Documentary, 2016).

In Iran-Iraq war, America was openly leaning through the media on the Iraqi side. More while the US secretly supplied Tehran with many important arms and intelligence deals (Cantey ,2014, p.34-95), to prolong the war on the one hand and the fulfilled of Reagan promise to the Iranians when they helped him defeat his rival Carter by prolonging the hostage-taking of the US Embassy in Tehran, according to the Iran Contra scandal (Ibid, 2014, p.34-95).

The Iran-Iraq war continued fiercely and began taking the form of hitting Iranian oil installations at a time when Iran was unable to repel Iraqi aircraft attacks because it lacked an air defence weapon, so it resorted to naval mines to strike tankers in the Gulf until things evolved and an American aircraft brought down an Iranian civilian plane and killed about 290 people (Pasley, 2020), (Amirahmadi, 2014, p.5-20),before Khomeini announced his approval of the UN Security Council resolution to stop the war.

5.3. US-Iranian Relations in the 1990s

“In the aftermath of Kuwait crisis (1990-91), the US adopted the dual containment’ policy against Iran and Iraq, which did not yield the desired results” (Hussain,2015, p.29-47), moreover developments in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and the Madrid Peace Conference. These developments allowed Iran to breathe and rebuild itself (Burns,1991, p.349-350).

In 1997 President Muhammad Khatami came to power in Iran as representative of the reformist current in Iran and began a discourse different from the prevailing and well-known discourse on Iran. His speech seemed moderate calling for dialogue between civilizations and cultures and gave a different picture that had a better effect on Iran (Leyne, 2009) at the time when the Taliban movement took control in Afghanistan.

In March 2000, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced an apology for the role of the United States of America in the overthrow of Muhammad Mossadegh in 1953 who was (democratically elected Prime Minister) and she confessed the coup that led to the installation of the Shah (Madeleine K. Albright, US State Department Archives, 2000).

The Clinton administration also partially lifted sanctions on Iranian carpets, pistachios, and caviar, and maintained oil and gas sanctions. Then Tehran cooperated with Washington on the invasion of Afghanistan, where Madeleine Albright later met with Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi as part of the regional talks about Afghanistan (Myers, 1998).

The post 9/11 regional security environment brought the US and Iran closer (Hussain, 2015, p.29-47). After the Taliban's overthrow in Afghanistan, American and Iranian diplomats met in Bonn, Germany, in the presence of United Nations representatives to form a new political regime in Afghanistan. The Afghan government was formed in 2001, and the Iranians realized that there is a new American project that aims to bring down all political regimes in the region. Since that date, the name of Qassim Soleimani has appeared prominently to confront the American liberal project. I will explain the details of this appearance and the assassination process in the 8 and 8.1 parts (Ibid, 2015, p.29-47).

6- International Theory

In this section, I will introduce the contemporary research field of realism, liberalism theory, the US and Iran's policy in Iraq, and the latest escalation. This will then be followed by a presentation of the research questions guiding this paper and discussing the contribution and limitations of this study.

In the field of foreign policy studies, researchers have identified a set of goals that constitute a general framework for a country's policy, most notably:

Self-Protection

Self-protection means preserving the independence of the state, its decision-making authority, and its international legitimacy. It means protecting its entity, people's lives, social values, and political systems (Gustavsson, 1998, p.23-25). This is what the American administration and the Iranian regime aspire to.

Security

Security means trying to create a regional or global system characterized by the least amount of external threat to the state. The anarchic nature of the international system lies in the absence of a central governing authority for the behaviour of states, which leads to a lack of trust between the units of the international system and drives them to obtain power in exchange for a sense of security and threat from the other side, which ultimately produces what is called the security dilemma (Waltz, 1959, p.315).

Economic Well-being

Having access to sources and causes of economic wealth and achieving prosperity for society is one of the main goals of foreign policy (Gustavsson, 1998, p.23-25). Both Iran and the United

States of America have economic oil interests in Iraq, and the two countries are competing for economic returns.

International Prestige

The understandings and expectations that give meaning to brute material capabilities are the result of a deep material structure, and their analysis must be supplemented by elements of intrinsic strength such as prestige (Kim ,2004, p39-55). States seek a distinguished position in international context. An Iranian-backed attack on the US embassy in Baghdad (2019) returned the American memory to 1979, when a group of Khomeini supporters stormed the US embassy in Tehran and detained all its employees. The United States of America seeks to maintain its international prestige. The US initiated the assassination of the mastermind of this behaviour, in order not to repeat the 1979 scenario. The Iranian response by ballistic missiles came in the way that Iran maintains its dignity in the regional environment, this response came by bombing the American military base in Iraq.

6.1. Realism

Realism appears as a theory after the end of the Second World War when the international system shifted from pluralism to bipolar in response to its idealistic counterpart, which dominated international relations after the First World War. Realistic ideas assumed international relations were characterized by conflict, and the war was considered the ultimate solution to international conflicts. Realism has attached great importance to national security and states' survival (Mearsheimer, 2019, p.34-39). It also expressed fundamental doubts that progress could be made in international politics, as progressed in domestic politics. These ideas formed the basis for most pioneers of realism in ancient and present times.

Realists carried a pessimistic view of international politics. Although they agreed on the necessity of achieving world peace, they doubted its possible because of the world's marked struggle, competition, and war (Mearsheimer, 2002, p. 22-23). After the First World War, realists were busy finding ways to prevent a recurrence of war and ensuring peace, which caused competition. They activated the study of international relations after the First World War (Dougherty& Pfaltzgraff, 1996, p.10-11).

The shift towards the realism scientific method in international relations first started in the literature of realist writers in 1946, for example, Hallet Carr (1946) and Morgenthau (1948). The traditional realist theory was criticized in the seventies of the last century, as a result of its failure to consider the structure of the international system in the study and analysis of international politics, and the failure to pay any attention to international institutions, which demonstrated the need to adapt the traditional realist theory to international changes. Waltz (1959) has accused Morgenthau of not being able to formulate a persistent theory or foresee for future. On the other hand, Waltz developed a testable theory and enriched the concepts of international politics regarding peace and war. Waltz is credited with working to restore realist theory to its place in international policy analysis, where he worked on reformulating the ideas of the traditional realist theory and laying the foundations of the new realist theory,

away from relying on human nature in understanding and interpreting international relations (Sutch&Elias, 2007, p.146-147).

In his classic book *Man, the State, and War*, published in 1959, Waltz argued:" that the various interpretations of the causes of war can be easily categorized into three scenarios, namely, human, state, and international order" (Feng& Ruizhuang, 2006, p.113). In his 1979 book entitled "Theory of International Politics," Waltz worked to address theories of international relations that he accused of "shorthand," having failed to explain international politics due to its lack of focus on the structure of the international system (Sutch&Elias, 2007, 74-75).

Waltz (1959) set more levels of analysis than those on which traditional realism was based and worked on adding the level of analysis related to the international system and its structure, where Waltz (1959) emphasized that the three levels of analysis that include man, the state, and the international system are essential levels for understanding and analyzing international relations. However, he focused on the third level, although he insisted that the other levels should not be neglected (Waltz, 1959, p.311-312).

In the aftermath of World War II, realist theorists sought to perpetuate the concept of balance of power as a basis for understanding international relations, which was represented by the contributions of Morgenthau, Waltz, and Mearsheimer (Little,2009, p.11-12). Realist theory had dominated international relations for a period exceeding five decades. However, the change in the structure of the international system has cast a shadow over realist thought. The Cold War had ended peacefully, and the collapse of the Soviet Union had caused the collapse of the bipolar international order and the emergence of a unilateral system. It was the worst event that faced real-life theorists. It violated all their expectations and posed a challenge to many of their theoretical concepts, such as deterrence, stability, and a balance of powers.

6.2. Liberalism

Early liberal thinkers such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) founded the concept of liberalism theory because there is a possibility to control human behaviour through laws, civil constitutions, and state institutions, instead of conflicts war (Dunne, et al., 2007). Mearsheimer (2019), in his book *The Great Delusion Liberal Dreams and International Realities*, presents his vision of the concept of political liberalism and its various implications for the foreign policy of states, especially the United States of America. He also seeks to achieve an understanding of how liberalism is used in international politics. Essentially, the idea of political liberalism encompasses a comprehensive strategy based on liberty and property to foster the construction of institutions that facilitate the freedom of each individual through limiting and constraining political power.

Liberalism is a highlight point of view of the rule's framework of most of the day, spoken by the convenience of the term "liberal democracy" as an approach to portraying countries with free and fair elections, law, and an organized guarantee of joint flexibilities. Regardless, the internal of liberalism, the space of the theory of IR, has created in its specific substance exceptionally owns (Brandt et al, 2014). Liberalism contains a group of thoughts and disputes, almost how organizations, hones, and affiliations related to money control and natural states'

horrible restriction. Most unequivocally, liberalism has been the usual sheet of authenticity in the IR theory because it offers a more hopeful perspective, based on a substitute review of the story to which it is in the practical person.

Liberalism depends on the moral argument that guarantees an individual man's legitimacy to life, opportunity, and the property is the government's essential objective. In this way, non-conformists emphasize the individual's prosperity as the fundamental piece of a good political system structure. A political system represented without control, such as administration or oppression, cannot ensure its residents' life and opportunity. Throughout these lines, the more significant concern of liberalism is to manufacture instructing protected individual adaptability by controlling and reviewing political control (Rabinowitz et al, 2016). The non-conformists are particularly annoying by the struggle prepared for action courses away. The fundamental concern is that war expects states to develop military control. This control can be used to involve external conditions, but it can also be used to abuse its case residents. Consequently, the political systems established in reformism routinely limit military control by such means, as they guarantee the regular citizen authority over the military.

Struggles of territorial expansion or colonialism: when States try to manufacture domains by taking place abroad, they are incredibly annoying by liberals. Not only do expansionist confrontations strengthen the state with the origin of people, these shocks. In addition, they require extended extraction obligations with military occupation and political control of a new area and clusters of individuals (Nisbet et al, 2015). The occupation and control require tremendous organizations that are interested in keeping up and expanding the power of a new region. For liberals, therefore, the centre's problem is the way to build a political system that can allow States to embrace new hazards without undermining the flexibility of the person from their masses. The primary organization monitor control in great states is accessible and sensitive careers imply that people can do without their control rulers, giving a careful center of the open specialist's behaviour. A critical moment of obstruction in political restriction is the division of political regulation between different branches and government levels, such as a parliament/congress, a boss, and a standard set of laws. This takes into thought supervising the rules within the use of the restriction. Therefore, one must beware confusion in the concepts regarding the difference between liberalism as a political ideology and liberalism as an IP theory about how states relate to one another.

Notably, these are issues that primarily concern domestic politics. However, the realm of international relations is significantly important to the liberals since the activity of a nation in a foreign country tends to impose significant implications on the citizens of the country. Under the paradigm of international relations theory, the concept of liberalism has substantially evolved into a unique and distinct entity. Pertinent to international relations theory, liberalism is a comprehensive ambitious strategy through which the democratic state aims to convert the largest possible number of countries towards democracy and promote the openness of the international economy and build international institutions (Mearsheimer, 2019, p. 33-39). The liberal state seeks to spread its own values widely through its endeavour to spread those values and reflect on the balances of political forces. Especially since the liberal elites view liberal hegemony as a wise policy that states must adopt for granted, this is because

democracy seeks to spread values according to an ethical and strategic perspective, which sees it useful to spread in authoritarian states, especially since liberal politics see that democratic countries do not fight with each other. Therefore, it ultimately provides a formula for overcoming realism and promoting international peace, where liberal states seek to eliminate authoritarian states, in anticipation that these countries help some of the non-liberal forces that exist within liberal states, making them vulnerable to threat (Mearsheimer, 2019, p.125-133).

The main challenge to realism is liberal theories. One of the liberal theories trends is that interdependence on the economic side will dissuade states from using force against each other because war threatens both parties' state of well-being, as liberal states view central actors in international affairs. In all cases, all theories Liberalism is overshadowed by cooperative tendency far beyond the defense trend in Neo-Realism. Still, each provides us with a different combination of fostering this cooperation (Fukuyama, 1992, p.128-137). Liberalism is the dominant thought capable of producing the necessary interpretative dimensions of international relations, scientific development, advanced technology, and economic transformations (Fukuyama,1992) the foundations for liberalism as an intellectual model flourished, so they worked to glorify personal freedom and exaggerated the position of the individual within the state and society and the rule of law instead of ambitions and selfishness of states (Moravcsik, 2009,p. 710-714). As for neoliberalism, it has gone beyond the narrow framework of national sovereignty, reaching the status of international cooperation along the lines of supporting regional and international organizations and institutions whose role has been growing exponentially.

Mitrany (1965) believes that the emergence of these organizations is a real fulfilment of the functional desires of public opinion and technocrats in particular who prefer to move in the direction of the transnational path, thanks to the prosperity of the media and the ease of exchanging information, which led to the creation of a common structure is represented in international organizations that undertake to fulfill the tasks of communication and rapprochement between countries and peoples (Ashworth&Long, 1995,p. 34-45). Within the neo-liberal trend, Deutsch (1978) pointed to the role of communication and media between individuals and groups and pointed out that international relations must go beyond the framework of relations between international entities to enter cross-national relations.

6.3. Contribution and Limitations

This thesis will mainly focus on the U.S. and Iran conflict and not on other countries, however, other countries within the region will be mentioned if considered relevant. There are also several significant regional powers that are involved in the conflict such as Iraq, Israel and KSA, however, they will not be studied because of the scope of the thesis. The theories used in this paper is realism and liberalism since they are the two most prominent perspective within international theories. However, the scope of the study does not allow for further theories. There will also be limitations within the concepts and a few main factors will be presented.

As in the fourth part (Aim and Research Questions), this dissertation will thereby:

1) According to realism and liberalism, what are the most probable explanation to the US's and the Iranian behaviour in this conflict?

2) According to realism and liberalism what conflict styles are there and how will we recognize them in this study?

By doing so, I aim to contribute to previous research and have scholarly relevance by adding to theories on international relations style, realism, and Liberalism. My research is also of external relevance. It contributes to new insights on how we may understand Iranian behaviour and the US as a big actor in the Middle East. In this paper, my academic addition will be shed light on the new path in Iranian American relations after the assassination of Qassim Soleimani in 2020. I claim that the US-Iranian conflict in the Middle East region, particularly Iraq, is a proxy conflict. It is no secret that the US-Iranian conflict falls within the field of international relations, and for this paper to be able to provide deep theoretical explanations about the assassination of the Iranian leader Qassim Soleimani and the Iranian response in the way they did, we must use the realistic and liberal theory in international relations.

7- Research Design and Method

In accordance with the research question, I will work to analyse the assassination (03/01/2020) operation carried out by President Trump's administration according to the realistic theory and liberal theory, within the field of international relations, then in the results section, I specify the perspective closest to the explanation of the assassination. I will do the same with the Iranian missile response to the US military base. Relying on the criteria of realistic and liberal theory.

Since the Islamic Republic of Iran is a non-democratic country (Harper, 2016, p.14-17), we cannot normalize the principles of liberal theory on its behaviour towards the international community except in a limited part represented in active participation in concluding international agreements and treaties with countries of the Western world, such as the Iranian nuclear deal with the P5 + 1 group.

After the end of the Cold War, the American administration adopted a new principle in international relations called liberal hegemony and the basic principle of this hegemony is to remake the world into the US image (Mearsheimer, 2019, p.4). So, Iran realized the danger of liberal hegemony over its national security, especially after the Iraq invasion under the pretext of spreading liberalism in 2003, and Iran has endeavoured to thwart US project with all its capabilities.

Through their foreign policy, Iran and US seek to arrange future conditions outside their borders, to serve to her interests. The more power the state has, the more it can achieve its external goals. Not to mention that it is able to serve its national interests, which include protecting the state and ensuring its security (Reus&Snidal, 2010, p.682-695).

Realism and liberalism theories attempt to understand the nature of the behaviour of states among them, according to the different philosophical view of the nature and origin of relations between countries. Many intellectual schools have emerged developed theoretical

frameworks to explain the trends and behaviour of countries, the following scheme clarifies this issue further:

7.1. Realism Theory: Contemporary political realism in its interpretation of relations between countries and the nature of the international system depends on some of the pillars or elements that make up the theoretical concepts of contemporary realism to understand the structure of the international system and international relations, and which countries must take these concepts into account in their foreign policy (Mearsheimer,2010,p.79-85).These theoretical pillars or elements are strength, national interest, balance of powers, and we will try to study these central ideas briefly, for both Iran and the United States of America, by focusing on the following:

- **Power:** Through its various proxies, Iran has demonstrated its military power in various ways. It has also launched a missile program and pursued other weapons programs. Its aggressive behaviour has even brought the US and Iran closer to war. This may even force the US to quit Iraq, leaving that country even more vulnerable to Iran (Slavin, 2020).

- **National Interest:** In the post-ISIS era, Iran is actively working to destabilize the US' political and military policies in Iraq. It has also openly called for the departure of the coalition forces. For Iran to achieve its national Interests "it will attempt to take advantage of its strong link with various local Shi'ite militias to curtail US interests in the region and demand US withdrawal, like in 2011" (Arif, 2019, p.344-363).

- Balance of Power:** The Western and Arab world's view on the importance of a balance of power has been the main factor that has ensured the security and stability of the Persian Gulf region. This perspective argues that after the overthrow of the Iraqi government in 2003, the international community should establish a new balance of power to restrain Iran's growing influence in the region. Since the US failed to redefine its role in Iraq, it has tried to play a new role in the region. Its attempts to minimize Iran's participation in the new balance of power has created a security dilemma in the Gulf. "Today, actions that Washington considers to be security-enhancing are regarded by Tehran as bringing insecurity to the region. Washington's continued concentration on the balance of power risks disrupting natural power equations, potentially exacerbating the conflict between Iran and the United States and other regional states. If, however, the United States can accept an Iranian role in the region's new security architecture in the form of a balance of security, Washington and Tehran could consequently establish an accommodation that might advance the interests of all concerned" (Barzegar,2010) without the need to assassinate Soleimani.

7.2. Liberalism Theory : Liberalism has gone beyond the narrow framework of national sovereignty, to the status of international cooperation along the lines of supporting regional and international organizations and institutions whose role has been growing dramatically, that the emergence of these organizations is a real fulfilment of functional desires of public opinion and technocrats in particular who prefer to move in the direction of the transnational path, thanks to the prosperity of the media and the ease of exchanging information, which led to the creation of a common structure represented in international organizations that pledge to fulfill the tasks of communication and rapprochement between countries and peoples

(Dunne & Schmidt, 2017,p.123).Liberalism emphasises collective security and democratic peace, Attempts to find common economic and commercial values and spreading democratic values and promoting human rights principles (Nye,2018):

-Collective security and democratic peace: Tensions escalated in the Middle East last year after attacks on oil tankers and Saudi oil facilities, the US killing of a top Iranian commander and Iran's military response. Some of Washington's allies, had lost faith that the United States would reliably expand military protection, began making cautious diplomatic overtures to Iran (Groupe, International Crisis,2020).

The idea of a collective and inclusive security dialogue aimed at reducing tensions has been around for many years, focusing on the Gulf sub-region. It is time to launch one. The first step is to produce concrete ideas and international support for such a dialogue, which can open new channels of communication. To maximize the chances of success, efforts should begin modestly, perhaps at the initiative of smaller Gulf states with active diplomatic support from a range of European and other governments (Groupe, International Crisis,2020).

-Economic interest: The economic ties between Baghdad and Tehran are rooted in the history of the two countries. They have been strengthened by the presence of economic sanctions against Iran. Despite these obstacles, the two countries have been actively developing their trade ties (Arif, 2019, p.344-363).

-Spreading democratic values and promoting human rights principles: In light of the logic of the Bush Doctrine, we can see that the Iraq war was a goal, and a means to a greater aim, given Iraq's position in the Middle East and the position of the Middle East in the international balance of power. Therefore, there were three chessboards on which the attack plan on Iraq in March 2003 was being played: national, regional, and international. Anyone familiar with Bush's logic will understand that the bet was far from overthrowing a dictator hostile to American peace. It is a project to remove all dictatorships in the region, including the Iranian regime, and establish alternative democratic regimes (Smith, 2014,p18-42).

I will present the goals of the assassination and the goals of the Iranian response in the experimental analysis and results section (Chapter 8). Then I will define the most important goal in the conclusion (Chapter 9).

7.3. Source Criticism

A practical case study showed (Østfold University College, 2021) that most people find it difficult to evaluate cognitive authority performance and media credibility, for example, by comparing the overall credibility of newspapers and the Internet, and so these assessments tend to be sensitive. Newspapers, television, and the Internet are frequently used as sources of information and audiences, but their reliability varies by topic (Savolainen, 2007). There is no doubt that the assassination of Commander Qassim Soleimani is very recent (2020), so, of course gives greater credibility to many of the allegations in this thesis, given that the reader heard the incident repeatedly from advertising media.

Therefore, I have made effort to diversify sources from the East and the West to achieve higher credibility. There was a very keen interest in selecting big names in the field of

international relations and the theories used in this field such as Fukuyama, Mearsheimer, Nye and Hyde-Price. As for other sources, diversification was the master of the situation, with various researchers from the United States of America, Israel, the Middle East, and Europe. I asked some advice from Gothenburg University library, after researching and checking, they gave me seven sources, Makhura B. Rapanyane & Kgothatso B. Shai, Mohammad Reza Chitsazian & Seyed Mohammad Ali Taghavi, and others. I also asked some advice from University of Haifa, particularly, Dr. Ronen Zeidel who is a Researcher of Iraq at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. Zeidel directed me to important sources of well-known authors such as, Bayat, Isakhan, Dodge and others. There is no doubt that the diversification of sources reassures the reader more and avoids bias, taking into consideration the reputation of the publisher and the reputation of the institution in which they work. These criteria above apply according to (American Library Association, 1994).

I found in the realist theory and liberalism the rational choice in explaining the behaviour of the two countries, especially since these two theories were widely used in the field of international relations in the post-Cold War world, as in the Crimean crisis in 2014.

7.4. Material

In the process of selecting what material to analyse for a research study, one must make distinct and well-measured decisions. Even though one would like to analyse all relevant material available, there are practical limitations that have to be considered and it is up to the researcher to argue why the selected material is enough for the study (Esaiaasson et al. 2012, p. 220). To answer the given research questions of this paper I depended on:

Sources from previous books such as *The Return of the Ayatollah* (Heikal,1981), *All the Shah's Men* (Kinzer,2003) and *The Circuitous Nature of Operation Ajax* (Israeli,2013), that analysed the US-Iranian conflict historically and within various stages as a primary source for understanding the roots of the conflict, its causes, and the results. I decided on material selection according to my prior knowledge of these researchers. Moreover, Gothenburg University Library consulting, as well as Professor Ulf Bjereld, who guided me to some sources of realism and liberalism and also Dr. Ronen Zeidel from the University of Haifa. I was inspired from Professor Hyde Price's lectures and articles a great awareness of realism and liberalism, and the opinions of the two schools' thinkers such as Fukuyama (1992), Waltz (1959), Ikenberry (2005). Through YouTube, I am addicted to the lectures of the pioneer of realism, Professor John Mearsheimer, as well as the lectures of the pioneer of liberalism, Joseph Nye.

In addition, this escalation is new event, only a limited number of newspaper articles and research papers were available, we relied on many of them and developed the method of analysis according to the motives of the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran from a realistic and liberal perspective.

Furthermore, I also followed Carnegie Middle East Center, and the opinions of political analysts in news to add their knowledge and experience in my experience. These analysts had a useful addition to understanding the course of events and without excess, while taking caution from the opinions provided by political analysts for fear of falling into the trap of bias. To work around this issue, a critical view has been applied and additional sources have been

examined to either confirm or reject the information provided by the political analysts. Where Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, BBC, French 24, and Alhurra American channels hosted a select group of political analysts who contributed to this scientific addition.

Finally, as the main empirical sources of this paper are original material, which is entirely objective, all material has been selected thoughtfully and with appropriate consideration. I can also claim that this research appears to be the first of its kind that explained the Iranian American escalation after the assassination of Qasem Soleimani in accordance with realism and liberalism in this material that the former authors themselves have failed to detect, since they have not applied a realist/liberal perspective such as Kinzar and Heikal.

8-Empirical Analysis and Result

Realism Theory Perspective

It is an instinct of realists that human aggression is the mastermind of conflict exhibited by the respective states or nations (U.S. and Iran) while seeking power and creating an atmosphere of mistrust and antagonism. Realism expounds on the changes in the international relation between U.S. and Iran that led to suspicion and diminishing cooperation. The theory builds a solid background of why the U.S. viewed General Qasim a criminal and ultimately killed him. Because of the tension that existed between U.S. and Middle East (Iran and Iraq), U.S. suspected the collaboration between Iran and the Iraqi militia; the U.S. initiated a retaliatory attack to compensate for the assaults of the US military bases by the militia. In a statement, U.S. killed Soleimani Qasim, fearing the proxy forces he was nurturing against the U.S. allies and European countries. Realism explains the action of the U.S. trying to strengthen their political and economic power against Iran as an indicator of an anarchical state in the name of a "superpower" nation. The United States of America decided to murder Soleimani (2020) urgently to prevent further damage to U.S. interests in Iraq. When states like the United States of America detect an imminent danger like General Qasim, he is eliminated with his allies and threatens to take further action if Iran retaliates; they even proposed economic sanctions. For instance, the American Soleimani strike coincided with Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the head of the Popular Mobility Forces, to balance power. It is interesting to note that Iran experienced the conflict from within (forces deployed from the military bases in Iraq). Through offensive realism, Iran desired to avenge the murder of Soleimani and the Hezbollah militia leader, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. Perhaps in response to this, Tehran would also try to kill a senior American military officer after that. Therefore, Iran attempted to balance the loss of top officials with a response equal to the size of the loss.

In response, the American airbase had been subjected to 11 Iranian strikes. The Iranian General Soleimani's assassination confirmed that American dissuasive prowess is still in existence and strong to create a "peaceful realism" (Kondoch, 2020). The policy of dissuasion is mainly a technique applied by a nation chocked with disagreements created by the conflict of interest and acquisition of power. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iranian Supreme Leader, who participated in an extraordinary meeting of the Iranian National Security Council, demanded retaliation. While proposing protectionist measures of the retaliatory actions, Khamenei says that "the answer to Qasim Soleimani's assassination must be a direct and balanced response

to U.S. interests"(Martosko & Crane 2020). It is no secret that in attempting to prove its realistic strength, Iran responded through ballistic missiles, which is a message that Iranians are capable of fighting an international conflict. Iran's missile response on the U.S. military base in Iraq was retribution for the killing of Qassim Soleimani. The state interests in power and economy are the first and ultimate objective of formulating the American-Iran conflict, the doctrine of economic advantage, success, supremacy, and domination. The American interest in international relations through American convoy in Iraq confirms the aim of American foreign policy; therefore, the United States of America is motivated by national interests, targeting the high-ranking Iranian officer near Baghdad International Airport. However, domestic politics may have shaped Iran's rapid and unusual response to Soleimani's death to demonstrate their determination. Unless the opposition noticed and exploited their vulnerability, so Iran have retaliated further.

Since the dissuasion policy implemented by the United States of America denounces violence, realism can be used as a tool to bring peace instead of conflict. The U.S. National Security Strategy put forward "a realist strategy" which recognizes the central role of power in international politics of bringing peace." (Mather, 2018). The Secretary of the United States of America argues that while previous governments used force, President Donald Trump has no aspiration to use power to propagate the American model. (Qassem & Yahaya 2020) Instead, the foreign policy of Trump is a peaceful realism, restraint and respect." (O'hern, 2012).

1- Power: The two countries used force in the assassination and missile response. Realist theory is based in its theoretical construction on the basis of the premise that "strength is the main goal at the internal and external levels," and it is the basis for presenting a general theory that explains the relations of multiple forces and the basis on which state policies in the international and national domains are based, which are two different aspects of one phenomenon. Power simply is the ability to influence others and subordinate them to the will of the strongest. Or as Blau (1964) defined it as the influence over behaviour through negative sanctions (Barnett&Duvall,2005). Therefore, according to the new realism, which does not see the military factor as the only factor for power unless it is accompanied by a cultural, political, and economic victory, those who possess this potential are the ones who are able to impose their word and manage things according to their interests, this is evident in Zakaria's book, *The Post-American World* (Zakaria, 2011, p.199-204).

Where the power of the state is considered one of the factors on which relies of special importance in the balance of international relations.

Morgenthau (1955) sees that "politics is power, so power remains an accurate summary of classical realism," stressing that the goal of all politics is power, yet it does not mean that power is the only advantage of politics (Morgenthau &Waltz, 1955, p.586-587).

- Iranian Power from a Realistic Perspective: The US Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) has published a large 117-page report entitled "Iranian Military Power," which is an intelligence product that examines the basic capabilities of the Iranian military. Christian Saunders, Senior Defence Intelligence analyst on Iran at the Defence Intelligence Agency (Saunders,2019), provided a summary: For 40 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been opposing the United

States and its presence in the Middle East. Iran is displaying its military strength through two different military institutions: the regular forces, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.

Iranian ballistic missiles constitute an essential component of its strategic deterrent, with the presence of other military capabilities that I do not see need to display in line with the nature of the Iranian response to the assassination. Iran lacks modern air power, and Iran has adopted the ballistic missile option as a long-range strike to deter its opponents from attacking them.

-US Power from a Realistic Perspective: With the escalation of tension between the United States and Iran, the prospects for an impending war between the two countries increase, especially in the wake of the killing of the Iranian military commander, Qassim Suleimani.

In the Middle East, the United States of America has tens of thousands of military personnel in bases and on ships across the region, as well as arrangements with several countries to move soldiers and military equipment through ports and airstrips. The Qatari Al-Udeid Air Base is the largest American base in the region and there are about 13 thousand forces in it, and it is the base from which the plane that targeted Soleimani was launched as part of the deterrence policy of showing realistic power (Chughtai, 2020). In Iraq, there are dozens of bases and about 6 thousand troops, the details of which are not revealed. The US Air Force base Muwafaq Al Salti was also located in Jordan, which was the starting point for operations against ISIS.

2- National Interest: Interest is one of those considerations that limits the behaviour of power in adapting and deciding political behaviour, and it is true that the belief that power and interest can co-exist in changing their mutual relations. According to realism, every country in the world has a set of national interests (Hyde-Price, 2008, p.49-64), the theory of political realism, national interest and not morality is the main standard by which the state acts in its foreign affairs (Tvrsko, 2013, p.38-57), which can be summed up in three main interests: the interest of survival, which is the basic interest of the state, and means that it remains present and cannot be abolished. The interest of maximizing military power, which is the primary state tool for defending itself against greedy people. And the interest of maximizing political power, which is the concern for the economic and commercial dimension in relations between states, because that is the material basis on which the interest of maximizing military power is based. The political and strategic decision-maker in Iran considers that everything that Iran is currently doing in the region comes within the framework of the supreme Iranian national interest. Iran was deeply immersed in the Iraqi reality and in various fields, politically, economically, militarily, socially, and religiously, Iran trying to block any future American threats. Iran has shown that it can respond to any threat affecting its national sovereignty and national interests (this does not mean that I justify Iran's actions, but it is an attempt to make the reader understand the Iranian point of view). Days after the assassination of Soleimani, Iran launched the missiles to the US military base in Iraq to make the world understand that the Iranian national interest is indivisible.

The directions of the American strategy towards the Middle East cannot be separated from the vision adopted by the Trump administration for the world, which was based mainly on the

principle of "America first", (Albright, 2018, p. 212-217). He put the interests of the United States in the foreground.

-Iran's National Interests: The political and strategic decision-maker in Iran considers that everything that Iran is currently doing in the region comes within the framework of the supreme Iranian national interest, and Iran is fighting what the misleading regional and international policies have produced in the region. Iran was deeply immersed in the Iraqi reality and in various fields, politically, economically, militarily, socially, and religiously, trying to block any future American threats. Iran itself has shown that it can respond to any threat affecting its national sovereignty and national interests (this does not mean that I justify Iran's actions, but it is an attempt to make the reader understand the Iranian point of view). Days after the assassination of Soleimani, Iran launched the missiles to the US military base in Iraq to make the world understand that the Iranian national interest is indivisible.

- American National Interest: The directions of the American strategy towards the Middle East cannot be separated from the vision adopted by the Trump administration for the world, which was based mainly on the principle of "America first", and Trump's talk that with every decision and every action of his administration will take (Albright, 2018, p. 212-217). He put the interests of the United States in the foreground.

Trump's strategy towards the Middle East region focuses on a number of major issues, some of which were present in President Trump's speeches and speeches during his term, such as the war on terror and the "ISIS" organization, the Iranian nuclear program agreement, relations with the Gulf states and Egypt, and the issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the deal of the century, the strategic alliance for the Middle East, and as these positions showed, are directed towards bringing about changes in the American strategy towards Middle East issues.

In order to achieve the interests of the United States of America in the Middle East, it was necessary for President Trump's administration to confront Iranian activities that would counter US interests by launching a missile strike on the mastermind of all this activity.

3- Balance of Power: It is a principle based on the fact that the presence of countries and alliances in a situation which their military strength is almost equal is something that would prevent the outbreak of armed conflict, and accordingly some countries seek to preserve the military balance (Wohlforth et al, 2007, p.155-185). When there is a balance of power between the countries of the Middle East, a kind of stability will be achieved, but when one of these countries tries to maximize its military capabilities, to protect itself, the position of the other countries is to maximize their military strength as well or the alliance and form counter-coalitions of that state, in an attempt to preserve security and stability in that region. Iran has apparently tried to show itself as a counterweight to the US military through its missile experience in striking the US military base in Iraq with ballistic missiles on the 8/01/2020.

US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, led Baghdad falling under Tehran's grip (Dodge, 2013, p.186-188). The Trump administration maybe has sought to restore balance and restrain Iran in the region through the military operation targeting Commander Soleimani on January 3, 2020. It was seeming as one of many other reasons behind the Soleimani's assassination.

- **Iranian Political Doctrine in the Balance of Power:** When there is a balance of power between the countries of the Middle East, a kind of stability will be achieved, but when one of the countries of the region tries to maximize its military capabilities, in order to protect itself, the position of the other countries is to maximize their military strength as well or the alliance and form counter-coalitions of that state, in an attempt to preserve security and stability in that region. Iran has tried to show itself as a counterweight to the US military through its missile experience in striking the US military base in Iraq with ballistic missiles. "While Iran looks around and sees that its nearby countries, such as Russia, India, Pakistan, and Israel, all have nuclear capabilities, to go nuclear has thus become, for Iran, the whole nation's ideal and aspiration. Having the nuclear capability would give Iran greater cover for conventional aggression and coercive diplomacy, and immediately limit US freedom of action in the Middle East" (Hong,2014, p.408-424).

-**US Political Doctrine in the Balance of Power:** One of the balances of power that the United States was striving to maintain was that balance between the Iraqis and the Iranians. However, this balance ended completely after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 and the occupation of Iraq. US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 led Baghdad falling under Tehran's grip. The Trump administration has sought to restore balance and restrain Iran in the region through the military operation targeting Commander Soleimani on January 3, 2020. "The US and its allies seek to check Iranian nuclear ambitions and Iran's support for international terrorism. The US has exposed Iran's human rights abuses and support of terrorism to the international community. Militarily, the US has established a permanent presence in many of Iran's neighbours and has built the deterrence capacity of its rivals. Hostility between these two rivals came to a climax when the US listed Iran as an 'axis of evil' in 2002" (Hong,2014, p.408-424).

Liberal Theory Perspective

On the contrary, liberalism theory views the conflict as a product of constrained international freedom and undermining rights, international treaties, agreements, or laws. For example, the situation is tough with the Iranian Nuclear Agreement (Yahaya 2020), which experiences ground-breaking tensions between Tehran and Washington. The Islamic Republic of Iran has a less liberal atmosphere to negotiate Nuclear files. The strike would attract the public's attention, which is confirmed by statements by military leaders that the process is a direct order from the president (Renshon, 2020); the operation might have gone against the peace agreements between the two countries. However, Trump liberally defended the United States of America that Washington was not trying to change Tehran's rule but was reducing its risk, an objective contradiction of his administration's attempts of changing the Islamic Republic's rule.

The Iraqi parliament voted to remove American forces from the country hours after the General's death that violated Iraqi Sovereignty.

Liberal theory gives powerful nations the authority to punish non-democratic regimes, explaining the United States' recent behaviour in murdering Iranian General Qassim Soleimani in Baghdad International Airport. The liberal theory explains the urgent need for a process of

assassination that reassures the international community, minimizing systemic conflict and providing a peaceful global community; democracy could even be used as a defensive containment strategy. Democracy raises systemic and regional peace, particularly in non-democratic countries and nations, and citizens do not need to be uncertain (Talmon & Heipertz 2020). Because there should be no barrier to many democratic USA and E.U. members establishing trade relations with Iran, some of them have evolved into political, institutional relations, which pushed for the signing of the Iranian nuclear program deal. However, the non-democratic state, on the other hand, reacts to a democratic state attack, as the Iranians consider the assassination of Soleimani an attack on Iranian Sovereignty. Since Iran protects its trade institutions with democratic countries, it responds firmly to all attempts that affect its reputation in the international community. Through a missile attack on the U.S. military base in Iraq, Iran secures its position as an international institution.

China and Iran, however, have global and regional ambitions, and both have colliding relations with the USA. Perhaps with the ballistic missiles, Iran responded to protect our commercial interests as a sovereign nation Renshon (2020); on the other hand, Iran believes the United States is witnessing the rise of non-liberal political players and the prevalence of economic understanding in commercial matters. The promotion of democracy has disappeared and is no longer part of U.S. political discourse. Moreover, prominent Western politicians have been taken over by the right and populist movements and ideologies. Due to the anarchy and lack of higher authority in the world order, many democratic countries, such as the U.S. and Israel, have begun to illegally target officials from other countries (Yahaya 2020).

Yahaya (2020) added that despite clear evidence by the Turkish government of the 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Saudi Arabia, the West did not punish Saudi Arabia for an unlawful act that violates fundamental human rights. The Iranian regime, like all neighbouring Iraqi countries, including regional allies of the United States, like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, realized the danger of the U.S. project early enough; therefore, the restricted vision united despite its ideological contradiction to thwart liberty in Iraq (Talmon & Heipertz 2020). Iraq, a new East issue arose, which meant that local actors began to look for foreign allies to strengthen their position on the national scene. The conflict between Iran and the U.S. has intensified with their representatives. Iran benefited ultimately from political reorganization, as slogans calling for democratic transformation in Iraq led to a bitter sectarian division of the political landscape (Talmon & Heipertz 2020).

O'hern (2012) believes, from a different perspective, that the chaos is intended and planned by the United States. The creative theory of chaos, according to O'hern (2012), means: "it's a political or humanitarian situation that is supposed to be comfortably following the stage of deliberate chaos" (O'hern, 2012). Therefore, it is deliberate chaos to reach a political position or reality that caused the chaos.

1-Collective Security and Democratic Peace is the alternative perspective advocated by liberalism rather than the realistic perspective that focuses on national security. Collective security consists in forming a broad coalition that includes most of the main actors in the international system with the intent to confront any other actor (Snyder, 2004).

Iran have put forward a proposal for an inclusive Gulf dialogue, called the Hormuz Peace Initiative (IRNA News, 2020). Tehran is not in the ideal position to launch or lead a Gulf dialogue, because it is a direct party in the Middle East conflicts and is not a neutral mediator. Moreover, it is an illiberal state (Harper, 2016, p.14-17). The recent dramatic events (When Iran's followers attacked the US embassy in Baghdad in December 2020) have proven that Iran is neither seeking peace nor establishing collective security unless the last American soldier leaves the region.

Perhaps the American acceptance, if not full support, of a dialogue process in the Gulf in which its allies participate in it is a precondition for its successful launch. At the present time, this appears unimaginable. The Trump administration is engaged in building an anti-Iran coalition and in coercive diplomacy in the form of financial and economic sanctions (Farouk, 2020). The possibility of building collective security diminished with the United States assassination of Qassim Suleiman, the commander of the Iranian Quds Force, in January 2020.

2- Liberalism attempts to find Common Economic and Commercial Values and interests that would reduce the intensity of conflicts between countries. In addition, spreading liberal values, market freedom and international trade between countries would lead to an interdependence economic interests between countries, which would in turn to achieving security and prosperity for all international actors (Snyder, 2004).

At the international level, Iran's oil, and military activity with the traditional allies of Russia and China exceeds the limits of economic interests, which raises Uncle Sam's ire, because it is linked to the extent of returning to the cold war climate and competition for hegemony in the region. The Trump administration is trying to tighten economic sanctions on Iran and take military measures that may amount to the killing of a prominent Iranian leader to dissuade Iran from its ambition to invite countries in the region, such as Iraq, to join the Chinese project (One Belt One Road), thus leaving Iraq from US space (Kou and Komenda, 2016).

Pollock (2019) argues about the impact of trade tensions on the Middle East. If the "trade war" continues between the United States and China, and subsequently causes a slowdown in global economic growth or even a global recession. Much of the Middle East's economies are dependent on oil revenues, and thus will suffer multiple damage. This is likely to be the most important consequence for the region of the ebb and flow of economic relations between the United States and China (Pollock, 2019). Iran seeks to maintain the strategic partnership with China and obstruct US economic interests in the region.

3-Spreading Democratic Values and Promoting Human Rights Principles in exchange for reducing military factors is a step towards establishing security (Snyder, 2004).

We made it clear in the thesis that the Islamic Republic of Iran is an illiberal state and that its commercial openness and the conclusion of international agreements do not make it a country that adopts liberal principles. Iran has seriously sought to obstruct the project to spread liberalism, which the US administration has adopted in order to protect its political system, Iran has shown determination in responding to All aspects of the consolidation of the American project, the latest of which was the launch of ballistic missiles at the US military base in Iraq.

The United States: Embraced the liberal project with great ambition after the end of the Cold War. This does not contradict with the fact that the administration of President Donald Trump does not adopt the project of liberal hegemony as did the previous presidents of the United States of America, this was said by Mearsheimer (2020) in one of his lectures on this topic (Mearsheimer, 2020). So, the liberal state has the right to use military force to defend itself against authoritarian regimes (Danju, et al 2013), and this happened on January 3, when an American plane launched the assassination of Soleimani (2020).

9-Conclusion

Through realism and liberalism theories of international politics, the research seeks to determine the escalation of the USA-Iran conflict that led to the killing of Qassim Soleimani in 2020. Concerning the theories, we will answer the following research questions:

Why did the U.S. choose to kill the Iranian top general Qasem Soleimani? Which goals did the U.S. try to reach by this action? And why did the Iranian leadership answer this killing in the way they did? Which goals did the Iranian leadership try to reach by their action?

During the last 42 years of US-Iran relations, both states have been on a conflicting path with each other, on issues like Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), Economic sanctions, Support the militia, Liberal spread, and Israel, as well as complementing each other such as the war against ISIS. The regional and international webs of security complexes interlink both countries in several political, economic, and military issues.

Even though liberalism and realism have opposing ideologies, both explain the causes of international conflicts but from different angles. For example, realism's natural aggression of the United States government to preserve powers and prevent other nations' reproach creates disagreements and results in conflicts and death. The international relation between Iran and the USA has been mainly traded, and global security (anti-terrorism) insinuates that Iran collaborates with the militia and terrorists threatens the relation. General Suleiman Qassim was an influential leader who was rumoured to connect with the militia and nurtured proxy groups who threatened the USA further; thus, he was assassinated. The conflict results from the opposing interests of the two nations. Iran reacted offensively and retaliated through ballistic missiles (realism's counter-conflicting action). Policies are primary peaceful ways to protect the interest of a nation, for example. This dissuasion policy persuaded Iran to sign a peace deal with the United States of America. Liberalism, on the other hand, explains the cause of conflict as disregards of law, freedom or democracy, and peace deals. America saw Iran as a non-democratic country that does not give freedom a chance to thrive. So, they taught them the "the hard way" by Killing Qassim to stop foreshadowed wars and conflicts but establish democracy. Following the reactions of both Iran and America during the conflict, we categorize the two nations into two categories. American are more of liberalists because of the attempts to sign peaceful agreement with Iran while Iranians especially supporters of Suleiman Qassim are realist. This finding is supported by the history of the countries' support of the two political ideologies as explained below.

American Liberalism:

When the CIA established a strong network of relations in Iran. This network contained more than a hundred clients and an annual budget. "Then the American administration asked the intelligence to employ this network for plan a coup against Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh". These words were from Stephen Kinzer's book (*All the Shah's Men*), beginning of what would constitute the first coup of American intelligence in the Middle East.

The establishment of strong relational network between America and Iran by the CIA to counter communism in the East was seen as a realism-based reaction but it marked the beginning when America exhibited liberalism in Iran. Even though the American government seems to have controlled the political decisions of the Iranians, they were liberating them from the hands of the communists (Kinzer, 2003, p.169-173). Countering communism in Iran by the Americans was a global liberal order that took almost 60 years from 1945. The Americans were always anxious of containing the communist bloc; thus, they compelled Iran out of the grip of the Soviet Union through diplomatic and non-conflicting techniques. Americans embraced liberalism after they experienced the cost of war which affected their industries in both West Germany and Japan. The American strategic decision to apply liberalism fits the democratic theory which is without wars and conflicts. But, in 1999, Bill Clinton bombed Belgrade to force it to liberate Kosovo. In 2003, George W. Bush invaded Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein. To build a sustainable, peaceful, and prosperous democracy in Iraq.

In 2011, Barack Obama embraced the promise of the Arab Spring to bring democracy to the countries of the Middle East and sought to advance it by bombing Libya and removing the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. Nobody in Washington noticed that in each of these cases, the American pole was using military force to impose liberalism on countries whose governments could not militarily respond to it. The spread of capitalism and liberal democracy through the nozzle of the tank and initiated the use of military force to kill Qassim Soleimani. Here power came together as a realistic concept and spread the values of democracy as a liberal goal. With the continuum ideology of liberalism which led to establishment of development projects in Iraq, the Iranians began to stick to their nuclear projects to expand their territories undisturbed by the Americans, which would agitate more conflict; the relationship between USA and Iran began to deteriorate.

Iranian Realism: I mentioned in this thesis that Iranian foreign policy is based more on political realism than it is on ideological grounds. Iran considering the adaptation of its foreign policy in order to achieve its interest of protecting its political system from external and internal dangers more than anything else. What Iran is doing is natural to protect its national interest in a world characterized by anarchism structure, which forces countries to self-protect their national interests.

We understand what Iran is doing, but we must stop here at two particularly important points regarding the realism school and Iran's external political behaviour that have great impact on the countries neighbouring Iran, especially the Persian Gulf States. The first of these points is that the theory of political realism takes us to two basic models in the interpretation of the foreign policies of states: defensive realism and offensive realism. It was Kenneth Waltz who was the most famous to speak about defensive realism. He mentioned that states in the international system based on anarchism and working to gain a high degree of strength to

maintain and defend its existence as a political entity against all external and internal threats (Waltz, 2013). Countries raise their military capabilities to defend themselves according to this line of realism, exactly as Iran is doing in showing its power.

As for offensive realism, as Mearsheimer (2019) spoke of it, it talks about the actual desire of states to raise their military capabilities not only in their quest to defend themselves, but also to expand and impose hegemony on others. These two models are important in understanding realistic theory and in interpreting a country's foreign policy (Mersheimer, 2019). The question that deserves to be mentioned here is that if we recognize that Iran is a country that follows political realism, which of the two predecessors follows Iran?

This is what Iran is doing as it is trying to achieve the goal of a regional balance of power with the United States and its allies in the region. But what Iran did not realize; the fact that Iran's continued upgrading of its military capabilities will also lead other countries to raise their military capabilities as countries that are realistic and want to protect their interests by achieving a balance in power. However, the continuous work by the countries of the region in increasing their capabilities leads to the emergence of the "security dilemma", which says that countries that seek to raise their military capabilities believe that such action will achieve security and stability for them. From this point it becomes clear to us what the Islamic Republic of Iran seeks to achieve in increasing power and achieving balance within realistic theory.

Iran's belief that its endeavour to increase its military capabilities will bring it security and stability is exaggerated in terms of political realism, as it may bring the security dilemma through which it may threaten the security and stability of the State. Whatever the discussion, Iranian foreign policy is geared towards prioritizing its national interest in a world where the realist school says that staying in it is for the strongest who must work to balance with its competitors or disturb the balance in its favor.

The Iranian foreign policy is more of a political realism than liberalism; they chose realism in order to protect their political interest from the interference by the international stakeholders like the United States of America or from other states that are characterized by anarchy. According to Waltz (2013), Iran seems to apply defensive realism to defend their territory against the external and internal threats. It is undoubted that Iran is realistically defensive, whose operations depend on military influence (enforced by the government) to prevent negative influence on their political system; thus, they had to defend the death of their "military powerhouse" (General Qassim). However, we realize that Iran sometimes imposes hegemony on its neighbouring nations that do not balance with them, making it an offensive realist as well.

By answer to research question this goal mattered

In this section, I define the goals precisely for both countries through direct answers to the research questions, considering that I reviewed all the possibilities expected from the assassination and the Iranian response in chapters eight and nine. In this section, I can summarize the answer to the research questions with the lens of liberalism and realism.

- Why did the U.S. choose to kill the Iranian top general Qasem Soleimani?

Since the project of spreading liberalism began with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran has been the country most determined to confront this project. The mastermind of the Iranian strategy to resist the goals of the United States of America is General Qassim Soleimani. Therefore, the US administration chose to kill him because of the damage that US suffered over the past 17 years, the latest of which was his followers attempt to storm the US embassy in Baghdad.

- Which goals did the U.S tried to reach by this action?

The most important American goals that were achieved through this strike are: deterrence, protecting American interests and the security of its citizens, reassuring regional allies who share economic and security interests with the United States, and protecting the American experience that began in 2003.

- Why did the Iranian leadership answer on this killing in the way they did?

The Iranians must avenge the death of one of their symbols, Iran has always been proud of its national product of ballistic missiles, so Iran has chosen to respond with its missiles. The assassination of Soleimani was in Iraq, and the Iranian response was against the US military base in Iraq.

- Which goals did the Iranian leadership tried to reach by this action?

Iran has tried to achieve the following goals: creating a state of military balance, preserving its dignity and prestige among countries, highlighting power, competitiveness, and challenge.

finally, how long a superpower (USA) can exceed a regional power (Iran) and the vice versa in the changing security environment for peace and stability in the Middle East and world. However, the new beginning in the US-Iran relations has to withstand the baggage of conflictual history (I mean during the new administration of President Biden), hardline parliaments, dissatisfied allies and changing regional security environment.

This study faced many obstacles, the most important of which was the difficulty of comprehensively encompassing the US-Iranian conflict, as it has so many ramifications related to religion, political belief, history, civilization, and ideology of the Shiites of Iran and Israel, and there are more and more.

On this basis, I recommend that future studies be comprehensive studies of all these aspects, because studying this conflict from one angle does not provide us with the truth we want. Therefore, my contribution was distinguished in that I did not overlook the roots of the conflict and its relationship to the recent crisis.

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