



The Axis of Resistance: Genesis and Sustainability in Light of the Islamic Revolution and the Soleimani School

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Abstract: The Axis of Resistance in West Asia has emerged as a strategic phenomenon reshaping the region’s political and security equations. This study examines the formative impact of the Islamic Revolution of Iran on this framework and the central role of Major General Qassem Soleimani’s doctrine (“Maktab e Soleimani”) in consolidating and sustaining it. Employing a descriptive–analytical approach grounded in library and documentary research and discourse analysis, the article unpacks the conceptual and operational linkages between the Revolution’s ideals and the Axis’s strategic architecture. The Islamic Revolution articulated a novel discourse rooted in anti imperialism, defense of the oppressed, rejection of domination, and unity of the Islamic Ummah, providing an ideological foundation and spiritual catalyst for the Axis’s emergence. Soleimani operationalized this paradigm through a network centric power architecture, empowerment of indigenous actors, strategic integration of battlefield and diplomacy, and adept management of hybrid warfare. These mechanisms transformed disparate movements into a cohesive and resilient bloc, capable of converting existential threats—such as takfiri terrorism—into opportunities to deepen strategic depth. The study finds that the Axis of Resistance is a direct outcome of the Islamic Revolution’s transnational projection, and its endurance, particularly after Soleimani’s assassination, stems from the institutionalization of his doctrine. This framework has elevated the resistance from reliance on individual leadership to a self sustaining intellectual and operational institution, creating a dynamic and regenerative strategic depth that continues to define the Axis’s regional relevance and adaptability.

Keywords: Islamic Revolution, Axis of Resistance, West Asia, Maktab e Soleimani, Soleimani Doctrine, network centric security, strategic depth.

Introduction

In recent decades, the West Asia region has been an epicenter of complex crises and geopolitical rivalries (see: Hinnebusch, 2015; Fawcett, 2013). Within this landscape, the emergence and consolidation of a phenomenon known as the “Resistance Front” as a strategic actor has challenged traditional power equations (Saouli, 2019: 46–66). This front – comprising a coalition of states and non-state movements with the shared objective of opposing the hegemony of the United States and the policies of the Zionist regime – has evolved into a regional power bloc (Chatham House, 2025). This study seeks to explain the origins and sustaining factors of this phenomenon, focusing on the central question of how the link between the Islamic Revolution of Iran, as the ideological source; the Resistance Front, as the strategic embodiment; and the School of Hajj Qassem Soleimani, as the operational doctrine and sustaining factor, is formed. Understanding this tripartite connection is essential for analyzing current and future developments in West Asia, since reductionist approaches that regard this front merely as “proxy forces” (Mangu, 2025: 94–102) fail to capture its complexity and resilience.

Accordingly, the central research question is: How has the Islamic Revolution of Iran, and through what mechanisms, influenced the formation and durability of the Resistance Front in West Asia? In answering this question, several sub-questions are posed: first, which theoretical foundations and discursive principles of the Islamic Revolution constitute the ideological basis for the formation of the Resistance Front? Second, what are the components of the “School of Hajj Qassem Soleimani,” and how have they contributed to the cohesion and continuity of this front? And finally, what are the challenges and opportunities currently facing the Resistance Front?

The main hypothesis of the study is that the Islamic Revolution, by presenting an independent discursive model based on

“anti-imperialism” and “support for the oppressed,” has provided the ideological framework for the convergence of anti-hegemonic forces; and that the School of Hajj Qassem Soleimani, by translating this discourse into the operational doctrine of “network-centric security,” has been a key factor in the endurance and effectiveness of the Resistance Front. Consequently, it is assumed that the principles of the discourse of Imam Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei form the intellectual foundation of this convergence, while Soleimani’s strategic approaches—such as “popularizing security” and “turning threats into opportunities”—have ensured the resilience of the resistance.

This research is descriptive-analytical in nature and conducted using a library-documentary method. Data have been gathered through the examination of books, articles, strategic documents, and content analysis of related speeches, and will be analyzed using a qualitative and logical-deductive approach. The article will, in the following sections, address in order: theoretical foundations; the origins of the Resistance Front within the context of the Islamic Revolution; the role and components of the School of Hajj Qassem Soleimani; current challenges and future prospects; and finally, the conclusion.

1. Literature Review

A review of the existing literature shows that studies conducted on the subject of this article can be categorized into three main approaches, each focusing on a specific dimension of this complex relationship: (1) the foundational and ideological impacts of the Islamic Revolution, (2) the strategic and institutional role of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and (3) the emergence of the “Soleimani School” as a factor in the continuity and advancement of the Resistance.

A significant portion of the research views the Islamic Revolution not merely as a political transformation but as a discursive revolution that, through the production and dissemination of new

concepts and values, created the intellectual and identity-based foundations for the formation of resistance nuclei. This discourse is built upon elements such as anti-imperialism, a return to authentic Islamic identity, justice-seeking, and support for the oppressed.

In this regard, Saleh Esfahani et al. (2020) in their study titled “The Model of the Resistance Front from the Perspective of Imam Khamenei (May His Eminence Remain)” conclude that the Resistance Front was formed and sustained after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, inspired by the intellectual system of Imam Khomeini and Imam Khamenei. Their study identifies the theoretical foundations of the revolutionary leaders as the roadmap and principal basis for the formation of this front. Similarly, Simber et al. (2014), drawing on diffusion theory, examine the influence of the Islamic Revolution of Iran on popular uprisings in the Arab world and show how it served as a source of inspiration in spiritual spheres by fostering collective will and generating networked power. Sadeghi (2014) likewise emphasizes the effect of the Islamic Revolution on the foreign policy identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran, considering this identity to be the main driver behind support for liberation and resistance movements.

The study by Davand et al. (2018), titled “The Impact of the Islamic Revolution on the Geometry of Islamic Resistance Power in West Asia,” further explores this issue in greater detail. They argue that the Islamic Revolution, through its inherent strength, promoted norms such as the culture of resistance, martyrdom-seeking, and political consciousness within regional societies, thereby consolidating the ideological and spiritual foundations of resistance. On the other hand, Nazemi Ardakani and Khaledian (2018) identify religious faith, national identity, and the ideology of political Islam as the most significant cultural components of the Islamic resistance discourse,

emphasizing their crucial role in strengthening and sustaining this discourse.

The second group of studies moves beyond discursive aspects and addresses the tangible, material, and strategic role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in organizing, training, and politically supporting resistance movements. These studies interpret the relationship between Iran and the Resistance Front as a strategic alliance aimed at countering common threats and redefining the balance of power in the region.

Jabbari Sani and Chegini (2021), in their article “The Position of the Axis of Resistance in the National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” argue that this front has become one of the key components of Iran’s power and national security enhancement, establishing a two-way security relationship between Iran and the members of the Resistance Axis. Shapouri (2022), in his book “The Axis of Resistance, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the New Regional Order,” thoroughly analyzes Iran’s role in shaping a regional order based on the Axis of Resistance. Fathi et al. (2020), emphasizing the role of extraterritorial deterrence strategy within Iran’s defense system, demonstrate how support for the Resistance Axis has contributed to strategic depth and the enhancement of Iran’s deterrent power. Earlier, Sooratchi (2013) had examined the role of the Islamic Republic in regional and trans-regional security, indicating the long-standing significance of this topic in strategic studies. This perspective views the Resistance Front as a geopolitical and strategic reality whose endurance would not have been possible without Iran’s comprehensive support.

The third and more recent stream of research focuses on the unique and unparalleled role of Martyr Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani as a “school.” These studies regard him not only as a military commander but also as a distinguished strategist, a field diplomat, and—most importantly—the practical embodiment of the

ideals of the Islamic Revolution, who succeeded in elevating the Resistance Front to a new level of cohesion and effectiveness.

Bagheri Dowlatabadi (2021), in his article "The Islamic Revolution and School-Building: The Case of the Martyr Hajj Qassem Soleimani School," thoroughly explores this concept. He introduces the Soleimani School as "the continuation of Imam Khomeini's school" and its operational manifestation in the complex arenas of West Asia. The study highlights sincerity, guardianship-orientation, courage, and revolutionary rationality as the pillars of this school and demonstrates how Martyr Soleimani, by adhering to these principles, succeeded in uniting various resistance groups.

Shafi'i Seif-Abadi (2019), employing an intentional hermeneutic method, investigates General Soleimani's role in forming the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq and Syria and analyzes the dimensions of his leadership in turning the threat of ISIS into an opportunity to strengthen the grassroots structures of resistance. This role symbolizes his capacity to link revolutionary ideals with field realities. Likewise, Araei et al. (2023) explain Soleimani's jihadi management performance in ensuring and reinforcing the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran, showing how this managerial style successfully overcame regional crises.

A review of the literature reveals that scholars have examined the relationship between the Islamic Revolution and the Resistance Front from discursive, strategic, and personal dimensions. However, most studies have addressed each of these aspects separately. Few studies have holistically demonstrated how the "Soleimani School," as a unique phenomenon, represents the intersection and synergy between the ideological foundations of the Revolution and the grand strategies of the Islamic Republic. The present study seeks to bridge this gap by arguing that the resilience and strategic successes of the Resistance Front result from a triadic synthesis of authentic

revolutionary discourse, intelligent and strategic state support, and charismatic, field-based leadership that culminated in the personality, thought, and practice of Martyr Qassem Soleimani. This integrative approach can lead to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind the formation and sustainability of resistance in West Asia.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations

Every scholarly study requires, for attaining a deep and coherent analysis, the precise definition of fundamental concepts and the establishment of a clear theoretical framework. This section deconstructs the concepts of the Islamic Revolution, the Resistance Front, and the Soleimani School, and explicates the study's theoretical framework, which rests upon a combination of constructivism, hybrid warfare theory, and the concept of smart power.

2.1. Conceptualization

2.1.1. The Islamic Revolution of Iran

The Islamic Revolution of Iran (1979) cannot be analyzed solely within the framework of classical theories of revolution that reduce it to economic crises or political dysfunction. This revolution, in Michel Foucault's words, was a "spirit in a spiritless world" and the manifestation of "political spirituality" (Foucault, 1988: 242-254). More precisely, the Islamic Revolution was a "discursive act" that challenged the dominant semantic and identity order of the bipolar world and the West Asian region (Mohammadi, 2018: 107). By reviving "Pure Muhammadan Islam" in contrast to "American Islam" (cf. Khomeini, 2018), it anchored its central discourse in concepts such as independence (the principle of "Neither East nor West"), freedom (liberation from domestic despotism and foreign colonialism), anti-imperialism (active confrontation with the system of domination), and support for the oppressed (especially the Palestinian people) (cf. Barzegar, 2024).

This discourse defined a new identity for Iran and provided an inspiring model for other Islamic and liberation movements, grounded in opposition to the status quo and the pursuit of creating an alternative and just order. From a strategic perspective, this discourse was translated into a cardinal principle in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic known as “export of the revolution” (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2013: 161). Contrary to biased interpretations, this export did not mean territorial intervention, but rather the “export of values, norms, and the culture of resistance” (Farzandi Ardakani, 2016).

The most vivid manifestation of this new paradigm can be seen in the redefinition of the Palestine issue. The Islamic Revolution successfully liberated the Palestinian cause from the narrow, ethnic frame of “Arab nationalism,” which treated Arab nation-states as its unit of analysis, and elevated it into a “central and identity-based issue for the Muslim world.” In this process, the unit of analysis shifted from the state-centric structure of “nation-states” to the transnational and civilizational concept of the “Islamic ummah,” thereby expanding the mobilization capacity and strategic depth of this cause to an unprecedented degree (Dehshiri & Bahrami, 2016: 139).

Accordingly, in this study, the Islamic Revolution is regarded as a generative source of discourse, identity, and strategy—forming the intellectual and spiritual foundation for the emergence of the Resistance Front.

2.1.2. The Resistance Front

The term Resistance Front refers to a strategic and informal coalition composed of both state actors (Iran and Syria) and non-state actors (such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Palestinian resistance movements including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Yemen’s Ansar Allah movement, and Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces). This front is not a classical military alliance or a symmetrical defense pact; rather, it is a complex

and multilayered network formed on the basis of convergence in objectives (countering U.S. and Israeli influence), shared threats, and common ideological values (Steinberg, 2021: 7–35; IISS, 2019).

A distinctive feature of this front lies in its networked, flexible, and asymmetric structure (Erfanifar, 2020: 63–80). Within this configuration, the Islamic Republic of Iran functions as the “central node” and enabler (IISS, 2020: 13), while other actors—though strategically coordinated—retain tactical autonomy and indigenous capabilities. This model, which may be termed network-centric security, enables the Resistance Front to operate simultaneously across multiple geographies through hybrid warfare methods, thereby ensuring high resilience against adversarial strikes. What initially emerged as a geopolitical “axis” has gradually evolved into a civilizational pole endowed with its own distinct cultural and identity logic (Fayaz, 2024).

2.1.3. The Soleimani School

In this context, the concept of school (*maktab*) transcends a mere command style. As the Supreme Leader stated, Martyr Soleimani must be viewed as “a school, a path, and a field of enduring lessons” (Friday Prayer Sermon, 17 January 2020). The Soleimani School represents the operational embodiment of the Islamic Revolution’s discourse in the field and a creative response to the complex security imperatives of the twenty-first century (Soufan, 2018; Golkar, 2023). It can be considered the doctrine of smart power for the Resistance Front. According to Joseph Nye (2011), smart power is “the intelligent combination of hard power (coercion and force) and soft power (attraction and persuasion).” Martyr Soleimani’s genius was precisely in this realm: he mastered this very synthesis—displaying decisiveness on the battlefield while exercising charismatic diplomacy that inspired hearts

and transformed cultural and ideological resources into a cohesive and potent transnational force (Dehghan, 2019).

The key characteristics that transform this school into a coherent doctrine include:

- **Strategic Rationality and the Integration of Field and Diplomacy:** A profound understanding that military strength in the field reinforces bargaining leverage in diplomacy, while active diplomacy consolidates field achievements. He was simultaneously a general and a senior diplomat (Asadollahi, 2020).
- **Architecture of Networked Power:** His unique ability to identify, organize, empower, and synergize indigenous and popular forces across different countries (e.g., the creation of Iraq's Hashd al-Shaabi). Instead of hierarchical and dependent structures, he built resistant, self-sustaining networks (Soufan, 2018; IISS, 2020).
- **Logic of Hybrid Warfare:** His command and coordination of operations that combined guerrilla warfare, special missions, cyber operations, intelligence warfare, and mass mobilization (Tasnim News Agency, May 9 2025; Shaeri, 2020).
- **Turning Threats into Opportunities:** The apex of his strategic artistry emerged during the ISIS crisis, when he transformed a threat designed to fragment the region and destroy the Resistance Axis into a historic opportunity for deepening strategic depth and cohesion within the Resistance Front (Bahman, 2020).

Accordingly, in this study, the Soleimani School is defined as an operational doctrine that, through the logic of smart power, transformed the ideals of the Islamic Revolution into a sustainable and effective structure of regional power.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

To explain the multifaceted phenomenon of the Islamic Revolution's impact on the Resistance Front, this study adopts a composite theoretical framework that combines constructivist and hybrid

warfare perspectives. Constructivism provides an answer to the fundamental question of why such a front was formed in the first place. Contrary to neorealism – which confines analysis to the material distribution of power – constructivism highlights the central role of identities, norms, and discourses in shaping actors’ interests and behaviour (Wendt, 1999). From this standpoint, the Resistance Front is conceived not as a transient tactical coalition but as the outcome of an identity-building process rooted in the Islamic Revolution’s anti-domination discourse. Ideas such as the “struggle against arrogance” and the “liberation of al-Quds” gradually evolved into intersubjective norms that redefined the common values of diverse regional actors. These shared principles provided a unifying discursive foundation that enabled groups and states with different interests and organizational structures to act collectively toward a greater transcendental goal, thus infusing their cooperation with moral legitimacy and ideological cohesion.

To understand not only why the Resistance Front emerged but also how it operates and sustains itself, the analysis turns to Hybrid Warfare Theory. In the contemporary strategic environment, as Hoffman (2007) explains, successful actors integrate multiple instruments of power within a single battlespace – conventional and irregular warfare, cyber operations, information campaigns, and economic pressure. The Soleimani School transformed this strategic logic into an indigenous operational model suited to the realities of West Asia. By merging field experience with adaptive intelligence, it enabled the Resistance Front to avoid direct confrontation with superior conventional militaries and instead exploit the vulnerabilities of those adversaries through asymmetric action. The creation of flexible, small-scale, and multifunctional networks allowed the Front to strike unpredictably in time and space, compensating for limited

resources with superior agility, local embeddedness, and moral motivation.

In synthesis, the Islamic Revolution, viewed through the constructivist lens, provided the ideological and discursive “software” that articulated the identity of resistance, while the Soleimani School, grounded in the logic of hybrid warfare and smart power, designed its operational and structural “hardware.” The synergy between these two dimensions—discourse and praxis, identity and strategy—produced the enduring and resilient phenomenon known as the Axis of Resistance.

3. Roots and the Formation Process of the Resistance Front in the Context of the Islamic Revolution (1979–2010)

This section explores the discursive roots and operational evolution of the Resistance Front from the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 until the eve of the Syrian crisis in 2011 (1389 SH)—a period marking the transformation of the “idea of resistance” into the “structure of resistance.” The formation of this front unfolded along two interlinked dimensions, ideological and politico-strategic, which gradually fused into a coherent axis through successive regional developments. The starting point of this process was the triumph of the Islamic Revolution itself, which, by introducing a new ideological discourse, established the identity foundation of the emerging Resistance Front.

The 1979 Revolution represented both a geopolitical and ideological earthquake that disrupted the prevailing order of West Asia, dominated at the time by three major paradigms—Arab nationalism, political conservatism and accommodation, and structural dependence on Western powers. Against this backdrop, the Revolution’s discourse, centred on political Islam and articulated through the slogan “Neither East nor West,” offered Muslim nations a third path rooted in independence and authenticity. The foundational

elements of this discourse—later absorbed into the identity of the Resistance Front—provided faith-based and identity-driven incentives that transcended material considerations and ensured the sustainability of its project.

Foremost among these elements was the principle of *Nafy-e Sabil*, or the rejection of foreign domination. Derived from Qur’anic injunctions, this tenet became one of the cornerstones of the Islamic Republic’s foreign-policy ethos, asserting that no power should have control over Muslim nations (Abdollahi, 2021). In Imam Khomeini’s thought, this injunction translated into a revolutionary doctrine of anti-imperialism, framing resistance to domineering powers—especially the United States—as both a religious obligation and a moral duty (Barzegar, 2024: 189). This anti-hegemonic outlook resonated beyond Iran’s borders, inspiring other countries and movements throughout the region to pursue independence and dignity vis-à-vis Western influence (Qaderi Kangavari, 2013: 199–238).

Closely linked to this was the principle of supporting the oppressed and reviving the Palestinian cause. Article 154 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic explicitly commits the state to supporting “the just struggles of the oppressed against the oppressors,” and Palestine came to symbolize this mission. Imam Khomeini’s proclamation of the last Friday of Ramadan as International Quds Day transformed what had long been framed as an Arab–Israeli dispute into a central and doctrinal issue for the entire Islamic world. This symbolic redefinition carried profound political consequences: it unified disparate energies across the Muslim world against a common enemy and institutionalized support for Palestinian resistance—both Shia and Sunni—as a fixed pillar of Iran’s strategic doctrine (Norouzi, 2012: 49).

Complementing these pillars was the principle of Islamic unity and the spiritual export of the Revolution, through which Imam Khomeini emphasized the concept of a single ummah transcending both sectarian and national boundaries (Barzegar, 2024: 2–201; Simbar et al., 2014: 2–8). This ummah-oriented worldview reduced divisions between Shia and Sunni communities and projected a model of spiritual leadership that could be accepted even within Sunni-majority societies. The export of the Revolution was therefore not coercive or material but inspirational—demonstrating that reliance on Islamic identity and mobilization of popular faith could empower nations to stand against the dominance of global powers.

These ideological frameworks soon translated into concrete action in the regional arena. Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon served as a decisive catalyst, transforming the abstract notion of resistance into an organized socio-political movement. With Iran's spiritual guidance and logistical support—particularly through the activities of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—the embryonic cells of Islamic resistance in Lebanon coalesced to form Hezbollah (Britannica, 2025). Distinct from earlier nationalist or leftist movements, Hezbollah conceptualized resistance as both a religious obligation and an inseparable part of faith-based identity, thereby endowing it with unprecedented social depth, endurance, and ideological coherence.

The Islamic Revolution, beyond its discursive transformation, reshaped the regional power structure and strategic equations, equipping Iran with the political and military instruments required to sustain and expand the Resistance Front. In the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, Iran transitioned from being a loyal Western ally to an autonomous regional power openly challenging the established order. This shift positioned the country as the principal anchor for

oppositional movements. To advance its extraterritorial objectives, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps established the Quds Force as a specialized operational arm tasked with communication, organization, training, and strategic advisory support to liberation movements. Over time, this force became both the coordinating nucleus and the strategic mastermind of the emerging Resistance network (IISS, 2019: 14–32). The eight-year war imposed by Iraq (1980–1988) operated as a “grand laboratory” for developing the theory and practice of resistance. Within this crucible, concepts such as jihadi management, asymmetric warfare, and popular mobilization were tested, refined, and proven in real combat (Moradpiri & Shorbati, 2012). These operational lessons, embedded as indigenous strategic knowledge, later formed the backbone of Hezbollah’s military doctrine and influenced other resistance groups across the region (IISS, 2019: 52–75).

By the early 1990s, the Resistance Axis expanded from a bilateral partnership into a multidimensional network, a transformation catalyzed by key historical events. In 2000 (1379 SH), Hezbollah compelled the Israeli military to withdraw unconditionally from southern Lebanon—the first time an Arab-Islamic force had achieved such a victory. This moment shattered the myth of Israel’s “invincibility” and provided irrefutable proof of the armed resistance model’s effectiveness (Blanford, 2011: 222–43).

The U.S. invasion of Iraq, designed to constrain and encircle Iran, was deftly reinterpreted through strategic management as a historic opportunity. The collapse of the Ba’ath regime opened the political and ideological space for Iran to extend its influence inside Iraq, transforming a former adversary into a vital link within Iran’s “strategic depth” and the Resistance Axis (Congressional Research Service, 2007). Syria, under Hafez and later Bashar al-Assad, further reinforced this structure by serving as a “bridge” and logistical artery connecting Iran to the resistance forces in Lebanon and Palestine

(Goodarzi, 2009: 286–99). Iran’s parallel support for Sunni-led Palestinian movements such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad illustrated the trans-sectarian nature of the Resistance discourse and undermined accusations of a “Shia Crescent” (Alemzadeh, 2025; Araki, 2016).

A decisive milestone came with the July 2006 War, or Second Lebanon War, initiated to dismantle Hezbollah’s military capacity. The campaign ended in a strategic defeat for Israel, as thirty-three days of sustained resistance established a new deterrence equilibrium and fortified Hezbollah’s defensive capabilities (Biddle & Friedman, 2008: 8, 29–31). This confrontation demonstrated three critical realities: asymmetric power could enable a non-state actor to withstand—and even challenge—one of the world’s most advanced militaries; the Resistance network was operationally genuine, with Iran and Syria providing tangible, coordinated support; and the Resistance had become an indispensable actor in shaping regional equations.

By the close of this period, on the cusp of the transformations often referred to as the “Islamic Awakening” or “Arab Spring,” the Resistance Front had matured from a revolutionary vision into an informal but potent power bloc. Its architecture comprised an ideological-strategic core anchored in Iran, a durable and battle-tested military arm in Hezbollah, the crucial state ally of Syria, active resistance cells in Palestine, and newly acquired strategic depth in Iraq. This structure formed the essential foundation for navigating the major crises of the following decade—an era in which the operational command and distinctive doctrine of Qassem Soleimani would reach their peak effectiveness.

4. The Role of the Soleimani Doctrine in the Leap and Sustainability of the Resistance Front (2010–2019)

The decade leading up to the martyrdom of General Qassem Soleimani (2010–2019) marked the transition of the Resistance Front from a “defensive axis” into a “regional power ecosystem.” This

transformation, taking place amid the most profound crises of modern West Asian history – the Syrian civil war and the rise of ISIS – was the direct outcome of the doctrine and school of thought architected and operationalized by Soleimani himself. His approach transformed the Resistance from a linear structure into a smart, adaptive network, ensuring not only its survival but also expanding its strategic depth and deterrent capacity to unprecedented levels. The following section analyzes the key components of this doctrine and its role in the strategic leap of the Resistance Front.

4.1. Networked Power Engineering

The most defining innovation of the Soleimani Doctrine lay in transcending traditional coalition models and constructing what may be termed a resistance ecosystem—a dynamic, network-centric architecture of power. This framework rested on three interrelated foundations that together redefined the operational design of the Axis of Resistance.

First, transnational networking and integration formed the backbone of this system. Through a unique combination of personal charisma and strategic rationality, Soleimani succeeded in interconnecting the often-disparate nodes of resistance—from Hezbollah in Lebanon and Palestinian factions in Gaza to Ansar Allah in Yemen, the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Iraq, and the National Defense Forces (NDF) in Syria – into a strategically coherent network. The pinnacle of this architecture emerged during the Syrian crisis, when Soleimani facilitated coordinated operations between these regional forces and a state power, Russia, thereby achieving unprecedented synergy between Russian airpower and Resistance ground units (Soufan, 2018). This arrangement exemplified a model of operational decentralization with strategic coherence—one in which local actors possessed tactical flexibility and initiative while

remaining guided by the overarching strategic brain of the Quds Force (IISS, 2020: 20; IISS, 2019: 121-157).

Second, the doctrine emphasized empowerment and localization of security. Rooted in the principle of “popularized security-building,” Soleimani’s approach relied predominantly on indigenous forces rather than on the projection of foreign armies. His strategy prioritized training, equipping, and enabling local actors to assume responsibility for defending their own territories. The formation of the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq – following the religious edict issued by the Marja’iyyah – and the organization of Syria’s National Defense Forces, modeled after Iran’s Basij, represented the most vivid manifestations of this vision. The internalization of security within local communities not only expanded legitimacy but also ensured the long-term sustainability of the Resistance’s defensive structure (IISS, 2020).

Finally, field presence and charismatic command constituted the third crucial element. In contrast to conventional staff generals who direct operations from afar, Soleimani personally commanded from the battlefield, maintaining a continuous presence across the frontlines of Iraq and Syria. His proximity to combat units cultivated trust, cohesion, and morale among a diverse and multinational spectrum of fighters. By directly engaging with operational realities, he minimized strategic friction, resolved intra-network disputes, and ensured the accurate translation of grand strategy into tactical practice (Shaeri, 2020; IISS, 2019: 121-157).

In sum, through these interconnected pillars – transnational integration, localized empowerment, and personal command – Soleimani engineered a flexible yet coherent web of power that turned the Axis of Resistance from a collection of allied movements into a self-sustaining regional security ecosystem.

4.2. Components of Soleimani's Strategic Doctrine: The Fusion of Battlefield and Diplomacy

The Soleimani School represented far more than a mere military doctrine; it embodied a comprehensive strategic philosophy for managing power amid the Middle East's volatile and conflict-ridden environment. Its essence lay in the constant dialectic between confrontation and accommodation, fusing the logic of armed struggle with the prudence of diplomacy.

One of the school's most salient characteristics was its capacity for transforming threats into opportunities. Crises that initially appeared existential were reframed into platforms for strategic expansion. The Syrian conflict—engineered at first to dismantle the Axis of Resistance—was turned under Soleimani's direction into a historic opportunity to extend the Axis's strategic depth to the Mediterranean and to institutionalize battle-tested, transnational combat formations such as the Fatemiyoun and Zeinabiyoun brigades. Likewise, the emergence of ISIS in Iraq was converted into a catalyst for creating the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which became both a long-term strategic ally of Iran and a source of legitimacy for its advisory presence in Iraq (Cingöz et al., 2024; Haj Younes, 2023; Bahman, 2020).

Equally central was Soleimani's intelligent integration of diplomacy and battlefield management. He mastered the art of synchronizing hard power and smart power in parallel arenas—combining direct military leadership with political negotiation. While personally commanding operations in the theater of war, he simultaneously maneuvered within diplomatic spheres, exemplified by his successful persuasion of Russia to intervene militarily in Syria (Nasrallah, 2021) and his negotiations with Iraqi officials to formalize the PMF as a recognized institution within the Iraqi state (Hosseini, 2019). This duality of roles enabled a unique synergy

between military effectiveness and political consolidation, allowing force projection and diplomacy to operate as mutually reinforcing instruments of strategy.

Under his leadership, the Resistance Front also witnessed the evolution from conventional asymmetry to an integrated system of active deterrence. Through operational interlinkage of all Resistance components, the Axis conveyed an unequivocal message: any aggression against one node would trigger coordinated responses from others. This transformation was underpinned by the advancement of precision missiles, offensive drones, and electronic warfare capabilities, collectively forming the technological basis of a hybrid deterrence strategy that substantially increased the costs of hostile action (Newman, 2023; Kazemi Qomi, 2016; Shaeri, 2020).

In essence, Soleimani's strategic doctrine institutionalized the fusion of field command with diplomatic engagement, creating a self-reinforcing security architecture in which military confrontation and political negotiation functioned as complementary tools. This synthesis elevated the Axis of Resistance from a reactive coalition into a resilient and multidimensional actor capable of shaping regional geopolitics through a balanced interplay of power and diplomacy.

4.3. The Spiritual Dimension and Personal Charisma: Beyond Strategy

The success of the Soleimani School cannot be interpreted solely through strategic calculations or military performance; it also rested fundamentally on the spiritual and moral authority embodied in Soleimani's own personality. His figure integrated the rational logic of strategy with the emotional and ethical appeal of spiritual leadership, thereby transforming mere command into a form of value-based mobilization.

At the heart of this dimension stood his sincerity (*ikhlas*), truthfulness (*sidq*), courage, and compassion—qualities repeatedly

praised by the Supreme Leader (11 Jan 2022) – which endowed him with exceptional soft-power capital. To his followers from diverse national backgrounds, he was not only a commander but also a moral exemplar, a fatherly figure, and a warrior-saint (mujāhid) who consistently exposed himself to the risks he asked others to bear (Office of the Supreme Leader, 3 Jan 2021). These traits fostered an atmosphere of trust, unity, and sacrifice that ensured the cohesion of a heterogeneous network of combatants operating across multiple theaters.

Over time, this moral charisma transcended the realm of personality to assume the status of myth and collective inspiration. By the closing years of his life, Haj Qassem had already become a living legend within the consciousness of the Axis of Resistance. His martyrdom did not terminate the school he founded; instead, it immortalized and universalized it. Commentators crystallized this transformation in the observation that “Martyr Soleimani is more powerful than General Soleimani” (Salami, 20 Jan 2020). In death, his persona was elevated from tactical leadership to a transnational discourse of resistance—a lasting symbol of defiance against oppression and arrogance, inspiring movements and societies far beyond the geographical scope of his lifetime operations (Mashreq News, 24 Feb 2022).

In this synthesis of spirituality and strategy, Soleimani’s charisma functioned as the doctrinal glue binding together the ideological, operational, and emotional layers of the Axis of Resistance—turning individual devotion into a coherent, collective endurance.

5. Challenges and Future Prospects of the Resistance Front after the Martyrdom of Qassem Soleimani

The martyrdom of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani on 3 January 2020, though a severe blow to the command structure of the Resistance Front, did not signify the end of its path. As the Supreme Leader predicted (11 Jan 2022), it instead became a turning point, ushering the Resistance into a new phase of evolution. This event simultaneously introduced new challenges and opportunities for the Front's maturation and sustainability. Understanding its future trajectory therefore requires a nuanced assessment of these concurrent dynamics.

5.1. Post-Soleimani Era Challenges Faced by the Resistance Front

In the aftermath of General Soleimani's martyrdom, the Resistance Front has encountered a complex constellation of internal and external challenges whose proper management will decisively shape its strategic path in the coming years. These challenges—spanning leadership succession, economic warfare, and regional realignments—together delineate the boundaries and possibilities of the Axis's continued evolution.

The most immediate and profound obstacle has been leadership succession and command cohesion. Soleimani's exceptional combination of charisma, spiritual authority, and transnational networking ability had made him the central connective node of the entire Axis (Soufan, 2018). His rare capacity to harmonize heterogeneous actors—ranging from Shi'a and Sunni movements to secular states—under a shared strategic vision endowed the Resistance with coherence despite ideological diversity. Following his martyrdom, the institutional framework of the Quds Force, under the leadership of General Esmail Qa'ani, has thus far ensured a degree of strategic continuity; yet reproducing the same depth of personal trust and emotional cohesion across the network remains a long-term challenge. Recognizing this structural vulnerability, adversaries have sought to exploit it through psychological operations and

disinformation campaigns aimed at cultivating suspicion and division within the network (Mashreq News, 4 Jan 2025).

A second persistent pressure derives from economic coercion and hybrid warfare. Having suffered repeated setbacks on the battlefield, the Western bloc—led by the United States—shifted toward a policy of “maximum pressure,” constituting a comprehensive hybrid strategy. This framework combines crippling economic sanctions on Iran and its allied movements with psychological and informational offensives intended to erode popular backing. At its core lies an attempt to construct a false dichotomy between “livelihood” and “resistance.” By targeting the socioeconomic foundations that sustain the Axis’s affiliated entities, adversaries endeavor to alienate local populations from the Resistance and to sap its social legitimacy and logistical endurance. The Lebanese financial crisis, amplified by media narratives blaming Hezbollah for national collapse, epitomizes this multidimensional campaign (Dubowitz & Schanzer, 2020; Daoud, 2021).

A third and increasingly structural challenge arises from regional normalization with Israel through the Abraham Accords. These agreements, designed to circumvent the centrality of the Palestinian question, have sought to forge an anti-Iran coalition among several Arab regimes while reframing the discourse of resistance as a destabilizing anachronism. Though the accords largely operate at the level of ruling elites and continue to face substantial opposition among Arab publics, they nonetheless complicate the regional political landscape. By tightening the strategic alignment between Israel and certain Arab capitals, they risk constraining the operational mobility and diplomatic margins of the Resistance Front (Sevilla, 2024: 112). Collectively, these developments reveal that the post-Soleimani era is characterized not by ideological fatigue but by a heightened contest over the narrative, legitimacy, and sustainability of the Resistance’s

transnational project – making adaptation and doctrinal coherence its foremost strategic imperatives.

5.2. Future Outlook: Opportunities Emerging from the Soleimani School

Despite the numerous challenges confronting the Resistance Front in the post-Soleimani era, the Soleimani School has laid conceptual and institutional foundations that now constitute the principal sources of its resilience and future upward trajectory. The seeds planted by its founder have matured into enduring opportunities that redefine the movement's strategic and sociopolitical horizon.

Foremost among these is the institutionalization and localization of resistance. Soleimani's cardinal achievement was the conversion of resistance from a leader-dependent phenomenon into an institutionalized and localized framework embedded within the social fabric of multiple states. Through the establishment of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Iraq, the empowerment of Ansar Allah in Yemen, and the growth of indigenous capacities within Hezbollah and Palestinian movements, the Resistance has evolved into a deeply rooted geopolitical reality. These entities are no longer peripheral allies of Iran but have acquired sovereign and localized agency, pursuing their own national interests while remaining ideologically anchored in the broader discourse of resistance. This model of strategic decentralization ensures both continuity and sustainability, rendering the network resilient even in the absence of its central commander.

Equally significant is martyrdom as a form of transcendent soft power and inspirational discourse. Soleimani's martyrdom transformed him from a tactical leader into a transnational archetype – a normative symbol of resistance against oppression and injustice. This metamorphosis endowed the Axis with an enduring reservoir of moral capital capable of mobilizing younger generations across the Islamic

world and beyond. The discourse of “Martyr Soleimani” has proven more lasting and influential than that of “Commander Soleimani,” converting his life narrative into a didactic model of justice-seeking and defiance. As such, it constitutes one of the Resistance Front’s most profound strategic assets, capable of sustaining ideological motivation and emotional cohesion far into the future.

Moreover, the evolution of integrated and smart deterrence marks another substantial legacy of the Soleimani School. The Resistance’s components in Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine have, through cumulative experience and technology transfer, attained advanced precision in missile, drone, and asymmetric capabilities. Operating within a network-centric framework, these assets form a multilayered deterrence matrix that significantly elevates the cost of large-scale aggression by either the United States or Israel. The Al-Aqsa Flood operation and Israel’s failure to achieve its strategic aims (Hamshahri Daily, 6 Sep 2025), together with Ansar Allah’s sustained operations in the Red Sea (Blanchard, 2025), exemplify the maturing operational logic and effectiveness of this deterrence architecture in the contemporary epoch.

In conclusion, the future of the Resistance Front will depend on the dynamic interplay between external pressures—aimed at exploiting leadership vacuums and exacerbating economic constraints—and the enduring strengths derived from the institutionalized, localized, and inspirational foundations of the Soleimani School. Both empirical evidence and strategic indicators suggest that the long-term balance tilts toward the sustainability, and even expansion, of the Resistance’s influence. Unlike charisma-based movements that wither after the loss of their leaders, this School is rooted in a dense web of principles, norms, and networks deeply embedded across the region’s sociomilitary landscape, ensuring its persistence as a shaping force in West Asian geopolitics.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explain “the impact of the Islamic Revolution of Iran on the formation and sustainability of the Axis of Resistance in West Asia, with particular emphasis on the Soleimani School.” The findings indicate that this influence constitutes a two-stage, dynamic, and evolutionary historical process, in which the Islamic Revolution functioned as the ideological and discursive foundation, while the Soleimani School served as the strategic and operational architecture. In response to the central research question, the Islamic Revolution provided the discursive and identity-based groundwork for the birth of the Axis of Resistance by presenting a new paradigm rooted in the principles of *Nafy-e Sabil* (denial of domination), support for the oppressed (Article 154 of the Constitution), and anti-imperialism. It elevated “resistance” from a mere tactical instrument to a civilizational and identity-based strategy, inspiring movements such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad to form the first rings of this transnational chain. During this initial phase (1979–2010), the Revolution prioritized exporting its values and discourse, altering regional power balances in favor of non-state actors, and institutionalizing successful models of resistance. The establishment of the IRGC Quds Force marked a key step in embedding this strategy institutionally and preparing its structural foundation for the next phase.

The second stage, unfolding amid the crises in Syria and Iraq during the 2010s, witnessed the emergence of the Soleimani Doctrine as a comprehensive and efficient doctrine of power engineering ensuring the leap and sustainability of the Resistance Front. Grounded in three pillars—popular empowerment (localization of resistance), spirituality and shared identity formation, and strategic rationality (management of hybrid warfare)—this doctrine successfully transformed existential threats such as ISIS and proxy wars in Syria

into opportunities to expand strategic depth and operational coherence. Through the creation of an intelligent networked-power architecture, Soleimani elevated the Resistance from a linear “axis” to a multi-layered regional ecosystem. The institutionalization of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Iraq and the management of a heterogeneous coalition in Syria were among his strategic masterpieces, consolidating the Front as an indispensable actor in the West Asian security order.

Although Soleimani’s martyrdom dealt a severe blow at the command level, the institutionalization and localization of the Resistance prevented systemic collapse. His legacy converted martyrdom itself into a new source of transnational soft power, revitalizing the spirit of resistance. The evolution of the integrated deterrence doctrine – as demonstrated by the Al-Aqsa Flood operation and subsequent regional developments – attests to the maturity, autonomy, and effectiveness of the strategic architecture he left behind.

Ultimately, the Axis of Resistance can be viewed as the dialectical product of the “authentic discourse of the Islamic Revolution” and the “pragmatic rationality of the Soleimani School.” The Revolution defined the “why” and “what” of resistance; the Soleimani Doctrine operationalized its “how” amid the most complex battlefields. This inseparable linkage guarantees the emergence, sustainability, and evolution of a Front that now functions not merely as a defensive shield but as an active, agenda-shaping actor in the political and security dynamics of West Asia. The process exemplifies how a revolutionary ideology can be transformed into a tangible and strategic power within the contemporary international system.

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