

GEOPOLITICS OF BUFFER SPACES: CHARACTERISTICS OF IRAN'S BUFFER SITUATION BETWEEN GREAT POWERS IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY (AD)

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ABSTRACT: *Buffers have existed as geographical phenomena since early periods of history. Since powers were formed in territorial spaces, they were constantly on the verge to maintain security and peace on their borders. One of the solutions for this was to create buffer spaces between their borders and their rival or aggressor's borders. No academic literature has yet observed this subject, and scholars have seldom sufficed to a mere definition of Buffer States without addressing the nature, quiddity, characteristics, and functions of buffers. On the other hand, the term "Geographical Buffer Spaces" was coined by the author of this article, and has no previous background in geographical studies. Some geographical locations are created and function as buffer spaces for preventing direct contact or conflict between rival powers, sometimes following mutual agreement, and sometimes as an individual action. In this state, rival powers agree to never enter and or occupy this space.*

The rivalry between two superpowers and existence of a weaker space between them, which is of strategic importance for both parties, attracts their attention and initiates a fearsome competition for dominancy over this space, and or at least maintaining neutrality within it. Nonetheless, these spaces become the apparent and hidden competition arena for these powers; a problem that states such as Lebanon, Iran, Korea, Afghanistan, and Cambodia in Asia, Algeria and Belgium in Europe, and Uruguay in Central America have encountered during the twentieth century, or continue facing today.

This study using a descriptive-analytical method, attempts to identify and explain the geopolitical buffer location of Iran between super powers.

Keywords: *Geopolitics, Buffer Spaces, Iran, Great Game, Buffer State*

INTRODUCTION

"Its roots reach back about 3500 years, to the fifteenth century (BC)" [1, 2].

"The world's earliest states, for security reasons utilized transition or border zones to spatially separate themselves. For the most part, these were sparsely populated or uninhabited areas that Spykman referred to as "waste border zones" [1].

There exists on a regional or global scale, two or more players and powers. These two superpowers, in order to control the world and its geopolitical regions, attempted to, and continue to compete with each other on a regional and global scale. They pursue the unique goal of governing and dominating geographical space. In the layout of these two powers' rivalry, their geographical space is separated from each other. There exists a weak geographical space between these two, namely a "vacuum space". The two powers are sensitive to this space and fully survey each other's operation. They rapidly respond to every action of their rival, and turn it into a control, surveillance, and intelligence space. A buffer space due to weakness, cannot supervise itself. What prevents collapse of this space is the action and rivalry of the two superpowers, which push back against each other. The buffer space may play a weak role; however, it will not be determinant. The two powers strive to recruit and employ allies and companions. Usually, in buffer spaces, the two powers attempt to hold the government in their precinct of alliance, cooperation, etc. Sometimes, they place the weak power under their direct influence, and consequently, the government functions under authority of one of the powers. According to Thomas Ross, "Of the 200 or so national political entities on the planet today, at least thirty-two have at some period during this century served as buffer states. Most buffer states of the twentieth century can be characterized as possessing an interior location,

especially those on the Eurasian landmass" [3]. Buffer and semi-buffer state political figures, predominantly due to their country's foreign policy are inclined toward one of the two superpowers, which this itself aggravates further weakness of these states, and these players act as tools for super powers to extend their influence in the buffer states. While buffer states in practice act as valid functional components in international relations, a new definition for buffer spaces must be presented. Better approaches for political management of buffer spaces can be presented by evaluating the structural and functional Pattern of buffer states. In explaining Iran's historical buffer situation among major empires especially Russia and Britain in the past two centuries, they confronted the country with many political, military, geopolitical, security, and territorial crises, which itself is a special pattern of buffer spaces that we will look into in the present study.

DEFINITIONS FOR BUFFER STATE

It should be noted that the concept of Buffer Space is substantiated through a systemic look at the world of geopolitics. This system is derived from the regional and global rivalry system and communicates existence of dynamic rivalry between powers. In this context, different definitions have been presented for Buffer States; however, no discussion has been carried out on Buffer Space. The most important definitions for Buffer States are given below:

1. "A weak state, small in size, probably without a positive foreign policy of its own, which lies between two or more powerful states, and thus serves to inhibit international aggression" [4].
2. "A buffer state is a weak power between two or more stronger ones, maintained or even created with the purpose of reducing conflict between them" [5].

3. "A buffer state is usually defined as a small independent state lying between two larger, usually rival, states. It seems natural to think of it as a sort of political fender serving to reduce the danger of conflict between its greater neighbors" [6].
4. Weak states mainly created to prevent conflict and struggle between two powerful states are designated as Buffers [7].
5. "Small political units located between large states" [8].
6. "An American scholar John Chay holds that a small power must be neutral and independent in order to play the role of agenuine buffer in a great power rivalry" [2].
7. "A small independent state lying between two larger, usually rival, states (or block of states)" [6, 9].
8. "Buffer states are lesser actor (in international relations) sandwiched between more powerfully endowed, ambitious, and often aggressive entities" [10].
9. "A buffer state is a small political or administrative unit located between, and separating two larger opposing powers" [11].

Conclusion from Definitions

"The basic definitions of a buffer state offered by Potter (1930), Spykman (1942), Mathisen (1971), Partem (1983), or any of the authors in this text were posited over a period of decades yet there is remarkably little difference among them" [6].

Therefore, the overall framework of the presented definitions is almost alike and agreeable by all scholars. The most important indexes and characteristics discussed in the above definitions are as follows:

1. The most important characteristic of a buffer state is residing between two rival states;
2. A Buffer is a small state, and a weak player in the world order; From the mid-twentieth century,

buffer states have been studied in the framework of small and weak countries;

3. Creating sectoral geopolitical balance, and reducing conflict between two aggressor powers;
4. Neutrality in foreign policy;
5. Possessing political independence and governance;
6. Buffer situation is imposed on buffer states; sometimes they are created by the powers, and their existential reason is creating balance of power in regional and global levels;

A state must have the above characteristics to become buffered, and to be included within the mentioned definitions. Residing between two super powers alone is not imperative to having a buffer situation.

Author definitions of Buffer Space

Considering the given discussion, the following definition for Buffer Space can presented:

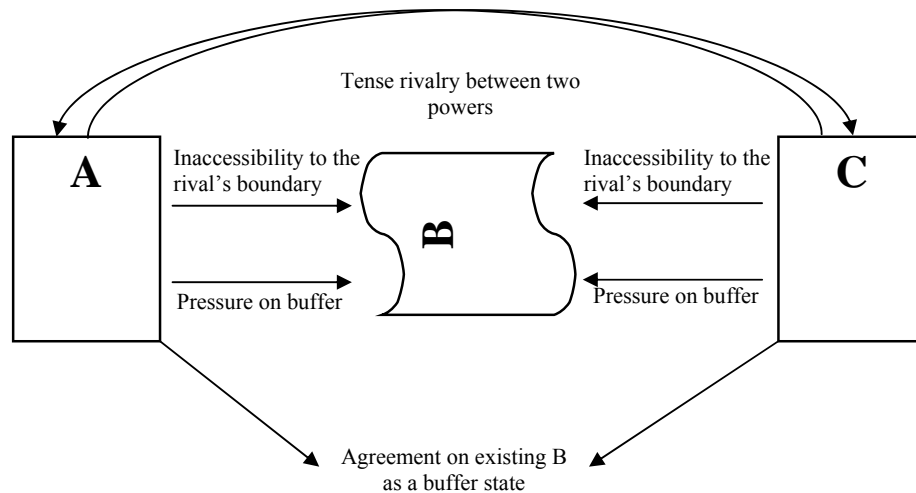
"A geographical space possessing one or more independent however neutral political units, which resides between two or more rivals and superpowers, or resides between the influence constituencies of two powers, or two super power and rival blocks, in a way that separates the two powers and reduces the probability of conflict and struggle between the two, provided that both parties agree upon the buffer space".

BUFFER STATE CHARACTERISTICS

Considering the proposed definitions, a buffer space possesses the following structural and functional characteristics:

Geographical Characteristics

1. **Location:** Location is considered one of the most important conditions in the formation of a buffer space, in which vicinal location and geopolitical location are of more importance.



A = Buffered power its sphere of influence, B = Buffer space, C = Buffered power its sphere of influence

Fig. (1): Schema of a Buffer Space

2. **Vicinal Location:** "Vicinal location is of utmost importance in the creation of buffer states" [12]. States with common borders are in more contact

with each other; hence, their fields of conflict are more compared to non-contiguous countries, which are less inclined to declare war upon each

other. "Thus, the contiguity of rival great powers negatively affects stability in the international system" [13].

3. "Several other studies discovered that the number of frontiers a country has positively correlates to that country's participation in wars" [14]. Therefore, they are more sensitive to the location of neighboring countries and closely monitor conditions. Thus, great powers throughout history, have strived to create and maintain buffer spaces between each other to prevent contact of their borders.
4. **Geopolitical Location:** Presence of strategic paths for transportation and sensitive natural resources in a territory can transform a country into a buffer.
5. "The development of buffer status in several states, namely Austria, Belgium, Bhutan, Iran, Nepal, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Switzerland and Yugoslavia, owes much to their location as invasion routes or points of contact between different people" [3].

Content

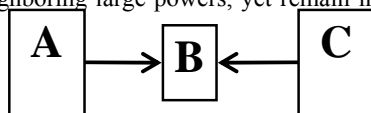
1. **Natural Environment:** In addition to the location factor, other inner geographical features of a country affect its buffer status (e.g.natural features especially arduous land or scattered population, and existence of major transportation routes relevant to the formation and protection of the buffer state).

"While modern technology has eliminated the effectiveness of the physical or spatial barrier, it has not reduced the need for the buffer state" [11]. Afghanistan, Austria and Yugoslavia are three excellent examples of a "crossroads" situation resulting from the rugged topography within a region" [3].

2. **Cultural Transition Regions and Human Characteristics:** "Many buffer states can be classed as zones of cultural transition and as such partake of the cultural and ideological patterns on either side of them" [15]. The majority of these states have a hostile environment and their population is dissimilar ethnicity and culture.

DISTRIBUTION OF POWER IN A BUFFER SPACE (PRESENCE OF SUPERPOWERS AND WEAKER SPACE)

"There are at least tree aspects of power distribution that must be considered. The first is that the buffer state should be smaller and weaker than the two neighboring big powers, the buffer state, however, does not necessarily have to be small; it could be a middle sized or even a large state, but the key is that the buffer must be smaller and weaker than the two neighboring powers. If the state located between the two powers is stronger and larger than the powers, it will become a "middle kingdom" rather than a buffer state. In other words, the two neighboring powers should be more powerful than the middle state. The second condition is that the middle state should have strength adequate to maintain self-determination. The buffer then must be strong enough to absorb shock exerted by the neighboring large powers, yet remain independent.



A and C: Buffered powers, B: Buffer space

If the buffer is too weak, it will either be destroyed, or become incapable of executing its buffer role. History provides numerous instances in which expansionistic neighboring powers intervened in the affairs of buffer states because of the weakness of the buffer. The excuse provided by the powers was that since the buffer was so weak, it could no longer function as a buffer and therefore threatened the power's security. The result of intervention usually was the demise of the buffer. The third condition is that the two big powers must maintain an approximate parity or balance of power. In addition to the balance of power, balance of interests is vitally important because power without an interest will not exhibit any influence in international relations" [2].

ACCEPTING PRESENCE OF BUFFER SPACE BY THE POWERS

"Buffer states owe their existence to the location of two or more politically or militarily powerful spheres of influence within close proximity to each other, and that these opposing powers, in an effort to maintain peace, may cooperate in the establishment of an independent state to separate their interests" [11, 6]. Hence, the fundamental component in terms of geography, is residing between two rival powers.

WEAKNESS OF A BUFFER COMPARED TO TWO BUFFER-CREATING POWERS

Partem believed that "One should not be concerned with defining a small (weak) state. The buffer is simply "smaller" (weaker) than at least two of its neighbors [16]. A buffer zone is a region occupied by one or more weaker powers between two or more stronger powers; it is sometimes described as a power vacuum" [14]. Throughout history, weakness of the buffer state has caused greed of neighboring countries and or world powers.

BUFFER INDEPENDENCE

In order to act as a buffer, a state must be completely independent and or autonomous. Units or political units of buffer spaces must have authority, and maintain their national sovereignty or threatened existence in all circumstances. Predominantly, buffer states solicit their sovereignty by neutrality and acting as a mediator between the two rivals.

"The powerful neighbors, in many cases not wishing to risk having the buffer area come under the control of an enemy state, agreed to the formation of an independent state to act as a barrier and at the same time neutralize the strategic routes through the buffer zones. Also important is the fact that since many of these buffer areas have been frequently invaded, the population is an amalgam of different people who may have been perceived by the powerful neighbors as unable, because of their diversity, to create a nation unified or strong enough to challenge either of the neighboring powers. Thus, because of the cultural heterogeneity of the buffer area resulting, in many cases, from the region's physiography, the neighboring powers held a synoecious attitude toward the buffer area and thus, independence was, if not assured, greatly encouraged by the powers" [3].

Fig. (2): Schema of pressure from two buffer-creating powers

NEUTRALITY POLICY

"Unless the buffer state succeeds in remaining neutral, its sovereignty is threatened and at times its very existence is placed in jeopardy" [9].

Belgium is one of the best examples of creation of a buffer state. The London treaty in 15 November 1831 signed by Britain, Austria, France, Peru, Russia, and Belgium recognized Belgium's independence and permanent neutrality. However, in World War I, Belgium's neutrality was contravened Germany. Contiguity of a buffer state to any of the powers eliminates its buffer position.

THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF BUFFER FOR RIVAL POWERS

A buffer space must possess special geographical, ethnical, strategic, and military characteristics etc. to attract attention of great powers. In the event that a space does not have such characteristics, and does not hold strategic importance for great powers, hence buffer space will not be formed. This importance must be equal between the two rivals so that agreement can be met regarding the buffer state.

TENDENCY OF RIVALS TO ADD THE BUFFER STATE TO THEIR DEFENSE SYSTEM

"A buffer state can let its territory be used as a military corridor by one of the great powers (either at its own will or as a result of coercion) makes it is really dangerous for another great power to acquiesce to the existence of a weak, neutral state at its border. That is why, whenever possible, great powers refuse to preserve neutral buffers between one another and try to gain influence over their smaller neighbors. As Trygve Mathisen observes: "Stronger powers have often endeavored to include minor powers along their borders into their defense system [14].

"According to research conducted by an American scholar, Tanisha Fazal, on the question of the survival of states in the international system, buffer states are more likely to die than non-buffer states, and unallied buffer states are more likely to lose their sovereignty and disappear than buffer states allied with a great power" [17].

LOW ECONOMIC GROWTH, CORRUPTION, INEFFICIENT MANAGEMENT

"The crucial determinant of the buffer system is conflict (rivalry and struggle for dominance) between the buffered powers" [16].

Ziring discussing the situation of Afghanistan during rivalry of Russia and Britain states: "Economic progress was slow and corruption and inept management prevented genuine development despite efforts by international agencies and foreign governments" [10].

Other buffer states due to permanent rivalry between buffered powers and buffer rulers to maintain sovereignty inevitably fall behind in terms of development.

FUNCTIONS OF A BUFFER STATE

The functions of a buffer state constitute internal and external dimensions, external roles being the most important aspects in this regard.

External Functions

1. Maintaining Peace

"The Primary function of the buffer states is to separate the conflicting sides and thus reduce the likelihood of physical (military) contact" [2].

"Survival of buffer states depends upon their ability to maintain peace between their neighbors, and the willingness of their strong neighbors to resist any attempt at conquest of the buffer by another state" [3].

"During the Great Game, however, Afghanistan was an effective buffer. For, despite mistrust and misunderstandings, Britain and Russia never

fought each other in Central Asia. The buffer state had served its desired purpose" [18].

2. Delaying War between Powers

Both powers in a buffer system have the chance to bring war to the buffer state and secure their home borders from any conflict or damage. In this sense "The buffer phenomenon has a dual positive effect on the macro stability of the international system: first, it minimizes threats emanating from the contiguity of rival powers; and second, it adds its inner stabilizing effect to the system" [13].

3. Rivalry of powers in forming regional and global alliances:

On the interregional level, a buffer state's behavior may be due to pressure of neighboring states in forming an alliance. An American scholar Tanisha Fazal claims that "buffer states are more likely to die than non-buffer states, and unallied buffer states are more likely to lose their sovereignty and disappear than buffer states allied with a great power" [17].

4. Balance of forces between powers:

Presence of balance of forces is of great importance and is vital to the survival of a buffer state. Not only balance of forces, but also balance of tendencies and interests of great powers is necessary in this course. The buffer system will survive only whilst such balance exists between the big neighbors. Spykman put the matter in the following words: "In a well as the stability of a frontier, is an indication of a system of approximate balanced force" [8]

5. Foreign Policy pattern of Buffer States

"There are three main types of foreign policy that the buffer state may pursue:

1. Neutrality;
2. Leading to one of the buffered powers, and
3. Relying on a third power" [16].

Options (1) and (3) aid the buffer state in maintaining the buffer situation; however, the second turns the state into a semi-buffer.

"In order to be effective, the neutrality of the state must be recognized by other countries. Neutrality, like all other international relations, differs from one political context to another and one period to another. Switzerland, for example, has made an option in favor of absolute neutrality" [19]. "Austria has always tended to practice active neutrality" [20].

Another solution is the "third power". A force that due to distant geographical location is less intent to conquer the buffer and is more inclined to expand relations. "Beginning in World War I and continuing in the interwar period, the Afghan government dealt with Germany as a possible counterweight to both Russia and England. To a lesser degree, the Cambodians would occasionally attempt to use the Chinese as a potential supporter against both North and South Vietnam. Yet the most striking examples of the third-power option were established by the British in their support of Belgian independence, and by the United States when it sent troops to defend the Lebanese government" [16].

PRESERVING GREAT POWERS' INTERESTS IN THE GLOBAL ARENA

Primarily, one of the most important functions of a buffer is preserving the interests of great powers in the global arena, and as discussed previously, if a buffer does not

possess strategic value for rival and superpowers, they will not transform it to a buffer, and will attempt to dominate it.

A. Internal Functions

“Because of its location, during peacetime, the buffer is in a position to benefit economically because it may have extensive trade relation with both neighbors” [3]. In a political perspective, considering domestic uprising, the buffer state enjoys relative stability. These domestic uprisings are a result of limited popular revolt due to skepticism against great powers, growth of nationalism, liberation movements, rival-power-aided opposition movements against the government, and development of separatist movements etc.

1- Government Level: A state’s government must be highly intelligent and efficient. They must closely monitor the situation of neighboring countries and respond to any activity. As a result, the level of espionage is elevated, intervention, and placing political players in buffer countries will significantly increase. Autocracy will grow and instability of the government is high.

The most important functions of buffers on the governmental level are:

1. Continuous intervention in governance of the buffer;
2. Xenophobia;
3. Instability of buffer regimes, and
4. Following de-utilization policies.

2- Social Level

“It is hardly surprising, therefore, that so much of (Buffer) national energy has been spent in establishing a national identity that is separate from those neighbors and in assuming international postures independent of them, nor is it surprising that those efforts have been only partially successful” [21].

The most important functions of buffers on the social level are:

1. High social, political, economic, and cultural vulnerability;
2. Cynical attitude of the residents of the buffer zone toward great powers;
3. Cynical attitude of the residents of the buffer zone toward the central government;
4. Growing nationalism and radical movements;
5. Suppressing the opposition by the government, and
6. Tendency of people toward isolation and seclusion in the buffer space.

FOUNDATIONS OF IRAN’S POLITICAL EVENTS

Iran’s political events hold two geographical bases: (1) The geographical location of Iran between different geopolitical spaces and regions, and (2) Iran’s buffer situation between world powers.

A geopolitical zone is a region consisting of a number of contiguous independent states with particular special political characteristics that differentiates it from other geopolitical regions [22]. Iran due to its geographical location stands between diverse geopolitical zones, including:

1. Base water zones: The Persian Gulf, Caspian Sea, Gulf of Oman, and the Indian Ocean;
2. Base land zones: South Asia, Caucasus and its Slave and Christian beyond Central Asia, Iraq and the Arab region, Turkey, and Afghanistan.

The abovementioned regions trade with Iran, and Iran’s different events and changes is under mutual effect of

Iran’s space and the mentioned regions. In other words, changes of Iran’s space to some extent are in conjunction with the input of the aforementioned regions to its space.

All geopolitical regions around Iran are blazing and crisis points, and play their role in global issues and have attracted the world’s attention to them. The most effective arena on Iran is South Asia. This zone is disturbed and Afghanistan is considered its supplement.

IRAN’S BUFFER SITUATION IN THE PAST TWO CENTURIES (1800-1989 AD)

In this period, Iran in terms of geopolitics and geostrategic, has stood exactly in between the strategies of the two great world powers and has played the role of buffer in the process of rivalry behaviors of the world powers [22]. The rivalry of the two great British and Russian empires, witnessed dominance, weakening, and ultimately disabling Iran’s governmental structure at the start of the twentieth century [23]. This status is a new experience in the situation of political and geopolitical geography, which was created because of these rivalries, and occupied the three Qajar, Pahlavi, and Islamic Republic regimes. Generally, this stage of Iran’s political existence can be divided into eight separate periods:

1. Start of the Great Game and intense confrontations in Russian fronts (1800-1830 AD)

The “Great Game” and rivalry of the great powers Britain and Russia in Asia commenced in 1800 AD [24, 25]. When Napoleon approached the Russian and Iranian courts, the British immediately went to work and detached a mission lead by Malcolm to sign an alliance contract with Iran against the Afghans, in which according to its clauses and conditions, prevented any involvement of the French in Iran [26]. In this era, Russia had the most effect and encounter with Iran, and occupied large areas of Iran’s historical, territorial, political, and cultural arenas in the North in Caucasia and Central Asia. The Russians had commenced occupying Iranian territory in search of dominating India and water borders in South Asia and The Persian Gulf. On the other hand, France had engaged in fearsome battles in Europe with the objective to take over India and overcome Russia. In 1806, exactly one year after the outbreak of war between France and Russia, a French council was sent to Fath Ali Shah’s court with the proposal for Iran to reclaim Georgia that had recently been appended to Russian territory. Execution of this proposal was under two conditions: Firstly, Iran is obliged to give up alliance with Britain, and second, Iran must prepare its troops for dispatch to India [26], reform Iran’s military, and make every effort to reclaim Georgia for Iran when the appropriate time.

In 1807 and in Finkenstein, Iran accepted France’s terms, and the French emperor was committed to expedite French instructors to

However, neither Britain nor France could prevent Russia from penetrating the South territories. The Gollistan Treaty that was the first agreement between Iran and Russia, was mischievously designed by the British, in a way that Caucasia was to be separated from Iran, and availed such a power for Russia in the region, which later worried the British and entailed their rivalry in the region [27]. This treaty emphasizes on three fundamental issues: Cession of territories and determining borders, intervening with Iran’s internal affairs, and trade relations [26].

Iran, which was disgraced by the Gollistan Treaty and defeat from Russia, engaged in war with the country for the second time. The Turkmanchay Treaty (1828 AD), the

result of Iran’s second defeat from Russia, was even worse, insulting, and cumbersome than the Gulistan Treaty. In the 1828 Turkmanchay Treaty, a clause was included, which allowed Russia to intervene with Iran’s internal affairs by supporting Abbas Mirza Qajar’s appointment as crown prince. This event is considered the start of capitalization and Iran’s political downfall [25]. With this agreement, Iran gradually gained Russian support and influence [27] and the country’s borders in Caucasia fell back to Aras River.

2- Involvement in the Afghanistan Issue and the Country’s Eastern Borders (1830-1860 AD)

The British, after the 1757 battle and overcoming the French in India, became the sole contenders in the subcontinent and Asia, and turned into Iran’s powerful Eastern neighbor. In 1820, in the midst of the war between Iran and Russia, the British occupied the southern shores of The Persian Gulf with the pretext of fighting pirates, and signed protectorate contracts with local governors. Sensing danger from Russia after it commenced exploiting results of the Turkmanchay treaty and started threatening activities around India via Afghanistan, determined the British to assign border to West India and pursue creating a large buffer called Afghanistan in Central Asia between its frontiers with Russia. From this stage, Iran experienced the most tension in its relations in eastern borders and with Britain. For this purpose, they increased the number of their agents, involved themselves in internal unrests, and even threatened Iran to military confrontation. The British started an unsuccessful war with Afghanistan, and finally in 1856, they declared war on Iran [26]. The whole period of Mohammadshah (1834-1848 AD), and the beginning of

Nasserredin Shah’s reign (1848-1896 AD) were coincident with political commotion of Iran with its neighboring Great Britain. In 1834, Russia and Britain reached an agreement about securing Iran’s independence [28]. When Mohammad Mirza the crown prince was moving toward Tehran from Tabriz to take the throne, Russian and British cavaliers were his escorts [27].

Iran carried out two military campaigns in Herat, which their outcome was nothing but enormous financial expenses. In the first attempt, after the siege of Herat by Iran, the British encouraged Herat’s ruler for resistance, and John McNeal, Britain’s ambassador made every effort to convince the Qajar Shah to raise the siege. However, the Shah that to some extent was aware of Russia’s support insisted on the situation. Britain’s ambassador threatened Iran and considered the Herat campaign a hostile action towards his government. He provoked the Ottoman government to take over Mahmareh and on his sign and under his obligation; even the British Navy took over Khark Island in The Persian Gulf [27].

Hesamolsaltaneh, Nasserredin Shah’s envoy, initiated the second Herat siege, which was after Herat’s conquest by Dooste Mohammadkhan in 1857. By Britain’s invasion of Southern Iran and crisis in Iran and Britain’s relations, following a resolution in 1857 in Paris between Iran’s envoy and Britain’s ambassador, the British were provisioned to move out of Southern Iran’s ports and islands, and in return, Iran was obliged to summon its military from Herat and recognize Afghanistan’s independence. Iran, whom witnessed the separation of one of its territories, only had the chance to discuss and negotiate its borders [26].

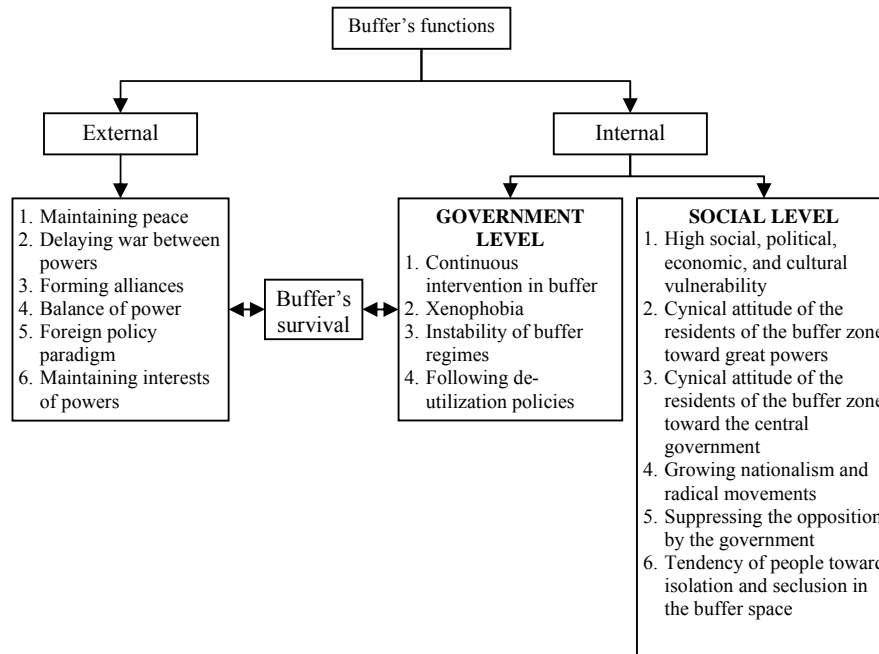
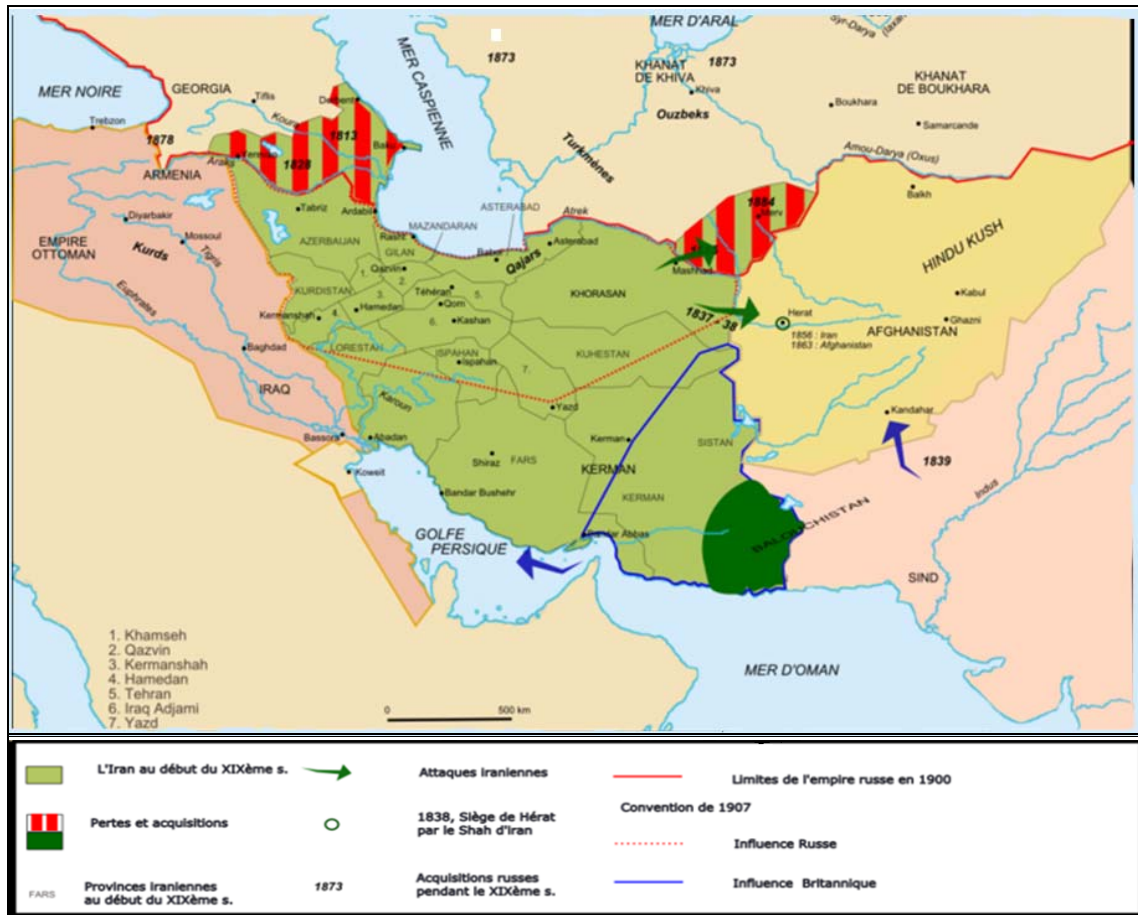


Figure (3): Functions of buffer states

Iran’s Map in the Great Game



Source : http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Jeu

3- Russian and British Economic and Political Rivalry in Iran (1860-1906 AD)

In this stage, the Russians extended their conquest in Central Asia and commenced the second phase of occupying Iranian territory. In 1869, Russia via a military campaign occupied Krasnodesk port on the Eastern shores of the Caspian Sea. In another campaign in 1873, Bukhara and Khiveh were separated from Iran. In an agreement between Russia and Iran in 1881, Atrak River was assigned as the border between the two countries. The Russian victory in Marv (1884) completed their aggression in the regions surrounding the Caspian Sea [24].

However, the important issue in this matter is Russia and Britain's serious rivalry in investment and exploitation of Iran's resources. Nasseredin Shah and his successor Mozaffaredin Shah (1896-1906 AD) due to poverty and financial need, granted many concessions in return to paltry sums. From 1860, Russia and Britain's rivalry regarding concessions for telegraph, roads, railroad, shipping, fishing, banks, oil, etc. weakened the foundation of this unfortunate state [26].

Russia by means of paying foreign loans had Iran's financial system under control. Payment of two major loans to the Iranian government in 1900 and 1901 for a bulk sum of four million Sterling Liras amounted two to the total income of Iran in two years [23].

However, the end of this era of economic rivalry was accompanied by the constitutional revolution. This

revolution in 1285 Hegira (1906 AD) marks the entrance of Iran's people to the political arena of the country.

4- The distressed situation of Iran from the start of the constitution until Sayyed Zia's coup (1906-1920 AD)

The resultant constitution did not meet expectations of the masses and finally the anarchy due to social chaos, opposition of radically religious, national and socialist thoughts, opposition of government and the people, constitutionalists and monarchists, presence of tribe and their traditional influence [29], World War I, tribalism and regionalism, and living hardships and civil war [30] embraced the whole country. Besides all this, the traditional intervention of Russia and Britain was another problem. With the constitutional revolution, Russian influence grew, and did not lessen until World War I and overthrow of the Tsar government, an influence that is described [23] as devastating. The constitutional revolution was disregarded, the Russians started supporting Mohammadali Shah, engaged in military confrontation, increased financial pressure on the government, made every effort to arrest constitutionalists, and finally the Kazak brigade occupied Tabriz city.

The British were seeking superiority in the South with the aim of balancing influence of the Russians in the North. They perceived a divided Iran into influence regions as the only possible solution [26]. The Britain-Russia agreement in 1907 specified the territories under control of the two countries in Iran. The two countries were fearful of the ascending power of Germany in Europe and its interest in

expanding influence in the East via the Ottoman Turkey. Britain was also worried about Russia's penetration in The Persian Gulf [23]. This agreement placed Afghanistan in Britain's sphere of influence, and divided Iran into three equal sections. The Russians occupied the North, the British occupied the South, and the third section was considered a neutral region between these two.

With the outbreak of World War I (1914-1918), Iran declared neutrality; however, this statement was left unobserved. Ottoman forces from the West, Russia from the North, and British troops from the South occupied parts of the country's territory. During the second year from the start of the war, a new secret treaty was agreed upon by Britain and Russia regarding division of occupied territories (1915), in which in case of victory of the alliance, Iran must be in a manner divided between the powers. However, the 1917 revolution in Russia prevented it from continuing with the war. Russia cancelled all treaties and concessions made during the Tsars. Hence, all commitments imposed on Iran by the Tsar government according to the Gulistan and Turkmanchay treaties were cancelled.

Following the establishment of the Soviet regime, the British sensed an empty rivalry arena and endeavored to make an unrivaled influence. The communist revolution in Russia added to the British apprehension of revolutionary thought influence in India. Britain's policy was to create a stockade of powerful or protégé governments around Russia. They took Iraq their tutelage and occupied Turkey with creating a national and anti-cleric government. However, in Iran, which a weak government had intensively made it prone to communist beliefs and consent, creating a powerful but protégé government was urgently and extremely required [27].

Nine months later, The Red Army disembarked a small force in Anzali port in order to eliminate British forces, which dispatched weapons to Caucasia and reinforcing guerillas against the Tehran Anglophile government. The serious Gilan threat, Azerbaijan's changes, consecutive tribal wars, presence of The Red Army in the North, and the British troops in the South, riots in the gendarmerie, and the inability of the government to form a parliament to approve the 1919 Iran-Britain agreement, all led to an acute political crisis in the capital [31]. In all this period, Iran was burning in the inferno set by civil war, World War I, and the presence of foreigners in the country.

5- From Sayyed Zia' coup to the overthrow of Reza Khan

In the days following the end of World War I, the British government saw it difficult to maintain its forces in Iran due to high expenses and parliament protests. To end these difficulties, Britain was extremely eager to form a powerful government in Iran [27]. In the meantime, Reza Khan backed by gendarmerie officers and British military advisers, reached Tehran in the night of the third of Esfand (21 February), arrested around 60 renowned political figures, ensured Ahmad Shah that the coup is for the sake of preventing a revolution, and asked him to appoint Sayyed Zia as prime minister [31].

Reza Khan's meteoric rise from obscurity to power, between February and May 1921, coincided with and was aided by the weakening of the British Legation's powers to influence the course of events in Tehran. Sayyed Zia re-employed British adviser and officers to reorganize and run the Persian finances and armed forces [32].

"Reza Khan had come round to the view that the Army had to forge an alliance with the influential aristocrats in

Tehran in the face of the revolutionary agitations in the north and the tribal unrests among the Kurds and the Lurs" [32].

On 24 May 1921, Reza Khan ordered freedom of the country's elites and asked Sayyed Zia to resign or leave the country. The next day, Sayyed Zia departed from Tehran after public protests.

"By the end of 1921, Reza Khan's hold on power had considerably strengthened, as a result of the death of the two men Muhammad Taqi Khan Pesyan and Kuchik Khan, who could have seriously challenged his bid for national leadership" [32].

"He is now more a military dictator than ever, controls the Cabinet has the greatest contempt for the Majlis and is feared by the Shah" [32].

The military's victories especially in Gilan and Azerbaijan strengthened Reza Khan's position.

"While the British came to watch satisfaction as Reza Khan continued to consolidate his power in Tehran, they remained opposed to the extension of his authority to South Persia, where they still maintained their close ties with various semi-autonomous tribal chiefs, particularly Sheikh Khaz'al and the Bakhtiari Khans" [32].

Britain perceived Iran as the last defense line against Russian oppression toward The Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. However, Reza Khan who was in the midst of forming a powerful central government took hold of the South. In this conditions, Reza Khan had turned into the most influential and powerful character in the country. Representatives of the Fifth National Council Majlis, on 09 Aban 1304 Hegira, deposed Ahmad Shah from the throne and transferred temporary government to Reza Khan under the constitution and laws of the country. This was the first time in the history of Iran where the throne and government were apparently transferred to another dynasty in a peaceful fashion [22].

Iran until 1941 remained a buffer state under the rule of Reza Shah, until once again, Germany's threat was introduced, and Reza Shah was inclined to attract their friendship; especially that Germany was not considered a colonial government in the eyes of Iran, enjoyed a flourishing industry and economy, and was in many ways ready to fulfill Iran's requirements. Moreover, preliminary stages of establishing an Iron Foundry and Steel-making plant were to follow upon initiating these relations [27]. Britain and Russia, which were allies against Germany in World War II considered the friendship between Iran and Germany as a threat, and frequently expressed their objection. However, Iran by declaring its neutrality in the war, did not perceive its friendly relation with Germany harmful for the alliance. He also did not submit to the continuum alliance request in deporting German settlers from Iran. Their ultimatum for obliging Iran to halt relations with Germany was left unanswered. Suddenly, on the morning of 03 Shahrivar 1320 Hegira, Russian and British forces carried out an assault on the country's borders without prior notice, and Iran was quickly occupied by the alliance [27].

Among Reza Khan's important accomplishments are: Nationalism; Taking the West as role model for the country's development; Maintaining order and security on the relying on a powerful military; Country integration and developing Iranian nationalism; Settling tribes and clans in one place; Creating a strong-central governmental bureaucracy; Establishing tax and banking systems; Establishing modern socio-economic, cultural, and political institutions; establishing railway and road

connections between different sections of the country, and Growth of urbanism etc.

6- From Occupying Iran to Decision to move out British troops from The Persian Gulf (1941-1968 AD)

Britain and Russia first intervened with Iran's internal affairs, then forced Reza Shah to resign from his position in favor of his son, and said that they would move out their troops from Iran within six months after the war. The invaders required a secure Iran in order to fulfill their strategic purposes including dispatching reinforcements and equipment to Russia via Iran. Meanwhile, Moscow supported formation of the Tudeh party in Iran. Thereafter, it formed separatist governments in northwestern provinces of the country in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. Finally, following Washington's pressure, Russian moved out their troops from Iran. Through this, by 1949 The United States presence in Iran was assured. Moreover, Iran was drawn into the American-encouraged Baghdad Pact later called the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). The Soviets, however, warned Tehran that their 1921 treaty permitted Soviet troops to enter Iran if the latter allowed foreign military forces to operate in the country. Iran was more a client state of the United States, less a buffer. Moreover, under American tutelage Iran loomed as a pro-western regional power, and the Shah of Iran projected an image of an ever confident and powerful Middle Eastern and Indian Ocean leader" [10].

After the 1332 Hegira (1953) coup that Mohammadreza Pahlavi had prepared with the help of the Americans, he successfully took control of power, and suppressed the opposition including Mossadeq and the Tudeh party. The Shah insisted upon his liberal authority and under the name of the White Revolution and with the official aim of introducing Iran among the world's most modern countries until the end of the 20th century, started a series of socio-economic reforms including territorial reforms. He supported the nationalization of the country's oil industry in 1950; however, he allowed a foreign oil consortium to exploit the country's oil resources. In return, the US government entitled Iran to loans and credit to counter economic recession and aided the country in forming the country's intelligence organization (Savak) to organize internal and even foreign security. Among the most important events in this period are US influence and close cooperation with Iran, territorial reforms, executing a number of developmental programs, and entering Iran into cold war geopolitical games. In the meantime, the Shah maintained close connection with the Soviets.

Mohammadreza in contrary to his father whom had resorted to Germany as the third world power to reduce pressure from surrounding great powers, was inclined to balance relations with the two super powers and initiate close relations with the Soviet. He attracted the Soviet's help and technical cooperation for more than one hundred industrial projects in Iran.

7- From Decision to move out British troops from The Persian Gulf to Iran's Revolution (1968-1979 AD)

Britain's retreat from The Persian Gulf is considered a milestone [23] and a turning point [25] in Iran's role in the region, because Britain as an ancient empire with two centuries of continuous presence in The Persian Gulf, and had created many difficulties by implementing its various desired plans and schemes for Iran. Britain decided to transfer its control of the region to its ally, The United States of America, to stand against the Soviet's influence

in the region. Therefore, in 1968, Britain's labor government officially announced that it would move out its troops from the east of the Suez Canal, and this decision was carried out especially in The Persian Gulf in 1971 [25]. This was the start of the exit process of an important world power, and commencement of geopolitical rivalry between emerging powers in the Indian Ocean. Meanwhile, Nixon's policy was carried out in different parts of the world. In this policy, America in order to carry out its deeds in world's crisis zones, required to make use of local forces to the extent possible and prevent direct military contact [33]. In this sense, the Shah's government was suitable for the US objectives and deeds in The Persian Gulf. The Americans has made huge investments in transforming Iran into the region's gendarme dependent on the US [33]. They believed that a colonialist presence in the region would promote anti-western emotions, resulting in the debacle of pro-western regimes [34].

The Arab governments of The Persian Gulf were not inclined to initiate any security ties with Iran after Britain's exit from the region; therefore, Iran decided to go it alone regarding the heavy financial burden of maintaining its own interests in the region along with interests of the coastal Arab governments and the west [25].

The US support for Iran created huge geopolitical and geostrategic thoughts in the minds of present politicians, in a way that Iran had defined its security zone to the southern 10-degree circle in the Indian Ocean, and relatively responded to all events and regional conflicts and sustained heavy financial costs. Defining Iran's borderlines in The Persian Gulf waters, taking back the three islands and departure of British troops, Co-founding of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), forming the OPEC, forming the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), defining Iran and Iraq borderlines in the Algerian 1975 treaty, transforming Iran into the most powerful military in the region, huge military contracts especially with the US, mediator in India-Pakistan relations, and encouraging regional countries to take the middle course and keeping aloof from the Soviet, the Shah being propounded in the Indian Ocean, and attempts to form the Indian Ocean Conference Organization [35] are among the accomplishments of the Shah. Moreover, the Shah's saber rattling in the Saudi Arabian peninsula and in the war with Zafar in Oman, supporting neighboring countries including Pakistan, which was under influence of the Shah, and transforming Iran into an anti-Marxist region etc. are among other actions of the Shah in this period. In these conditions, while Iran was growing as an emerging power with global interests, the Shah's ambitions as an invulnerable power, led to a series of actions that greatly unsecured his leadership position. The alliance of opposition forces under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah, despite his fine military, political, economic, and international facilities.

8- From the Islamic Revolution of Iran to the Collapse of the Soviet Union (1979-1989 AD)

In 1979, fall of the Shah and Ayatollah Khomeini's rise to power rapidly changed the course of affairs [23]. The Islamic revolution shattered the main pillar of US regional strategy in The Persian Gulf, splintered the US security belt and deterrent barrier in the southern borders of the Soviet Union, and turned Iran into an anti-US base in the

Middle East and The Persian Gulf, and the whole world [33]. However, Iran's unwillingness to join the Soviet, and in contrast, the Islamic Republic of Iran's anti-Soviet position to some extent lessened the impact [33].

In this era, Iran pursued a policy of separation from both buffers, leading to extensive pressure from both super powers. The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which had devised the principle of political independence from rival powers especially the US and the Soviet Union in the cold war, was extremely angered by regional rivals and world powers, and withstood intense pressure from outside its borders, including Iraq's widespread offensive against Iran between 1980-1988, US military and political threats, Iran's isolation in the international arena, US economic sanctions against Iran, activating opponent political movements in border territories including Kurdistan, Turkeman Sahra, and Khuzestan, developing social, political, and security crises inside the country as far as terrorist attacks on highly ranked officials and political figures.

The victory of the Islamic Revolution evolved the region's security perspectives, and extremely worried and threatened regional emirates and kingdoms [33], and ransacked whole policy structures and alliances of The Persian Gulf [23]. Ayatollah Khomeini's rise to power, for the first time, turned ideology to one of Iran's political tools. A tool that not only upset its neighboring Muslim countries, but also created panic in the Soviet Union with a Muslim population of 50 million [33]. The result was a coalition of Arab gulf nations against Iran, leading to the formation of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) without Iran and Iraq, with the leadership of Saudi Arabia.

Soviet forces occupied Afghanistan in 1979, an upthrow that shortened the distance of the Soviets to 300 miles

from the strait of Hormoz [25]. Iraq was happy about Iran's departure from the CENTO organization, breaking ties with Israel, and its inclination toward the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) [23]. However, suddenly it launched a military offensive against Iran in September 1980. The Iraqi government believed that the Shia revolution was planning to export its revolution [36]. This war later eight years and finally subsided after Iran accepting of the UN 598 resolution for cease-fire with Iraq. The Soviet Union collapsed a year after the end of war between Iran and Iraq, and the world map opened space for 14 new countries. Collapse of the Soviet Union was a turning point in the history of political transitions for the region and Iran, and Iran by realizing this superior situation resulting from the fall of one of the buffers, could revive its position and balance its relations in the region, and gradually depart its buffer situation.

CONCLUSION

The Great Game in Iran was the confrontation zone between to great world powers, Russia and Britain, in the nineteenth and twentieth century. From of the time of India's importance in Europe especially in Britain, South West Asia and especially Iran have been the zone of continuous quarrel of work powers. In the past two centuries, the two powers Russia and Britain have continuously intervened in all affairs of Iran, and have chosen Iran and Afghanistan as their buffer spaces in order to prevent clash and conflict in their borders. These rivalries resulted in separation of large parts of Iran, and the current Iran is the product of the unending appetite of the two great powers, which although managed to devour large parts of Iran's historical territories and cultural and territorial lands, however the central core of Iran which today forms the country has survived.

Table (1): Table of important eras in the past two centuries in the history of Iran

Row	Era	Most important event	Start and end of era	Specifications
1	The Great Game	Start of the Great Game and intensive conflict in Russian frontiers	1800-1830 AD	Encroaching some of Iranian territory, start of rivalry between Russia, Britain, and France in the region, Gulistan treaty and separating Caucasia from Iran, Second war between Iran and Russia: Iran's failure and signing the Turkmanchay treaty, Assigning Iran's prince (Mohammad Mirza) by the Russians
2	Unrest in Eastern Iran borders	Conflict regarding Afghanistan and in the Eastern borders of the country	1830-1860 AD	Iran's neighboring borders with Britain, dispossessing the French from the region by the British, British totalitarian movement in The Persian Gulf, Iran's importance for Britain in maintaining security of India, start of Russia's threats against India and provoking rivalry and suspicion of the British, Agreement between the two powers on Iran's independence, Separation of Herat from Iran and Afghanistan's independence.
3	Russia and Britain's rivalry	Economic and political rivalry between Russia and Britain in Iran	1860-1906 AD	Second phase of occupation of Iran's northern territories by the Russians, intensive rivalry between the two powers for obtaining privileges from Iran, entrance of the Iranian people into the political arena (the constitution)
4	Iran's turmoil	Iran's turmoil from the constitution to Sayyed Zia's coup	1906-1920 AD	Extreme social anarchy and disorder in Iran, Increase of Russian influence in Iran, 1907 agreement and dividing Iran into three regions, Iran's recourse to the third power (Germany), World War I and Iran's occupation, Russia's October revolution and departing rivalry in Iran, therefore added British influence in Iran, Public uprising in the North, North west, and South East of Iran in response to added British influence in Iran.
5	Coup and fall of the Shah	Sayyed Zia's coup until the Fall of Reza Shah	1920-1941 AD	Reza Shah's rise to power, his attempts at suppressing local rebels, ongoing buffer situation of Iran, recourse toward Germany as a third world power, establishment of an autonomous government.
6	Iran's occupation	From the country's occupation to Britain's decision to move its troops out of Iran	1941-1968 AD	World War II and occupation of Iran by Russia and Britain, Reza Shah's exile, The new Shah's balanced relations with both powers.
7	End of occupation until the Islamic Revolution	From Decision to move out British troops from The Persian Gulf to Iran's Revolution	1968-1979 AD	Britain's departure from Iran and America's entrance as a new serious rival for Russia, Start of the cold war and the US and Soviet geopolitical rivalry in Iran, Iran's inclination toward one of the powers (the US), reinforcing the Shah's regime as far as acting as the US gendarme in the region.
8	Devising inimical policy (independent from powers)	From the Islamic Revolution to the fall of the Soviet Union	1979-1989 AD	Fall of the Shah and establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, devising an independence from both sides policy by the new government, Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, US added presence in the region, Added pressure on Iran by both powers, Imposed war on Iran, Iran's isolation in the international arena, fall of the Soviet Union.

Ever since Iran was considered a buffer space between the two world powers, characteristics and functions of buffer states have been evident including permanent weakness of Iran compared to the two buffers, continuous intervention of the two powers in political, social, and economic affairs of Iran, recognizing Iran as a buffer state by the two powers according to the 1907 treaty, and buffer functions in the geographical space of Iran. Formation of freedom or separatist movements, peacemaking and balance of power between two superior powers, fulfilling buffers interests in the region and the world, and social and governmental functions occurred in Iran. Iran's geopolitical situation and its wealth of energy resources are considered among the main factors in its buffer situation, which has tremendously affected its government and the Iranian society.

Hence, in different eras, which we pointed out for Iran in the last two centuries, Iran's buffer situation has observed different forms and functions. However, Iran's predominant policy as a geographical zone has been neutrality and sometimes recourse toward a third power (Germany, and then the USA), which this policy in the two eras prior to the two World Wars (i.e. Iran's tendency to engage in relation with Germany as a third power) has provoked buffers to impose more pressure on Iran. In the period between the end of World War II until the coup on 28 Mordad 1332 Hegira (1953), Iran devised an active neutrality policy alongside balanced relations with the two powers; however, after the 1953 coup and the US-backed return of the Shah to Iran, the Iranian government was officially inclined toward the USA. However, considering that Britain had moved its troops out of the Indian Ocean region, the USA was no longer considered a third power, and rather, substituting Britain, acted as a new buffer against the Soviet Union.

The Islamic Republic of Iran until the fall of the Soviet Union, devised an inimical neutrality toward the two powers, and at first either canceled its relations with the two powers (the USA), or weakened its level of relations, which this inimical neutrality has resulted in pressure and trouble from both buffers on Iran.

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