

Institution: Durham University
Unit of Assessment: Politics and International Studies
Title of case study: Influencing Foreign and Commonwealth Office Thought and Policy towards the Middle East and Asia
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research by Professor Anoush Ehteshami has been drawn upon by senior Foreign and Commonwealth Office Research Analysts in developing UK foreign policy. In particular, it has informed their thinking on UK policy responses to the changing dynamic between the Middle East and East Asia; and on UK policy responses to Iran's nuclear programme. This has fed directly and indirectly into UK Government foreign policy.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Ehteshami's research in two areas underpins the impact identified in this case-study: a) what is now referred to as the 'Asianisation' of the Middle East and its implications for energy policy with direct consequences for the UK; and b) the interaction between the domestic politics of post-1979 Iran and its nuclear programme, with implications for UK counter-proliferation policy. Ehteshami has been employed continuously by Durham University since 1992.</p> <p>a) Ehteshami's research in this area extends over nearly 20 years, initiated in the mid-1990s with study of emerging Central Asian republics as they engaged with Middle Eastern states. This work located Gulf states in an increasingly Asian regional context, identifying emerging links – political, cultural and economic. Subsequent research picked out two consequent and principal dynamics of significance for this impact case-study. Firstly, the role of energy as driving the deepening of Middle Eastern, especially Gulf, engagement with an Asian region. For example, a workshop co-hosted with the FCO, resulted in Ehteshami, 'Asian geostrategic realities and their impact on Middle East-Asia relations' in H. Carter and A. Ehteshami (eds), <i>The Middle East's Relations with Asia and Russia</i>, (R1). This paper accounted for the ways in which the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR had changed the geopolitics of the Asian continent, enabling Asian peripheral countries not only to penetrate the Asian heartland, but also to pursue profitable links with each other unhindered, not least through energy transactions. Ehteshami's later research publications further examined processes and systems of regionalisation within a globalising world, arguing that globalisation can only be understood in the geopolitical context of regions and their diverse interactions. R2 (A. Ehteshami and Süleyman Elik, the latter then a doctoral student at Durham), 'Turkey's Growing Relations with Iran and the Arab Middle East' is an example of this, in which he identified the ways in which the MENA subsystem's non-Arab states (specifically Turkey and Iran) contributed to the shaping and fragmenting of the regional order. The paper argued that Iran-Turkey relations had themselves become a dynamic within a changing Arab order, not least because of the latter's location within the broader Asian context. A process which Ehteshami identifies as 'Asianisation of the Persian Gulf', is symptomatic of an Eastwards shift in the global balance of power. This challenges the assumptions of a Westward oriented Gulf rooted in mutual self-interest in maintaining established energy supplies and other links, stressing that an 'Asianised' Middle East will be a different sort of partner and that Western policy-makers must not assume existing connections will continue unchanged.</p> <p>b) Ehteshami's work on post-revolutionary Iran also dates back to the mid-1990s. On-going research examining Iranian politics has sought to make sense of constitutional and factional tensions behind struggles for control of a revolutionary state, an example being <i>Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives: The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution</i> (R3). This book was the first work to postulate that the post-Khatami president brought to power Iran's own unique group of military-linked conservatives, whose lower-middle class roots enabled them to climb ladders of power unchallenged, and to use populist discourses to dominate the republic's agenda. The analysis included consideration of foreign policy, which has also been a consistent theme of Ehteshami's research and which has become intensely policy-relevant as Iran's efforts to achieve a nuclear energy, and arguably a military nuclear capability, have progressed. UK policy in this area has had to respond rapidly to events as they occur, and very recent publications have been able to make their impact felt within FCO thinking. In 'Iran and the International Community: In the Shadow of Iraq', (R4), Ehteshami considered the implications of WMD proliferation in the volatile regional politics of the Persian Gulf and the broader Middle East, arguing the case that unrestrained proliferation in the form of Iranian acquisition of a military nuclear capability would</p>

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only further destabilise regional politics and fuel strategic rivalries. Reflecting on the strategic consequences of the 2003 Iraq war, he argued that the balance of power has changed so fundamentally in the region that one cannot make assumptions regarding a stabilising or deterrent impact arising from proliferation, or subsequent parity between regional powers. Further research on regional security included: 'Security and Strategic Trends in the Middle East' in Held and Ulrichson (eds), *The Transformation of the Gulf: Politics, Economics and the Global Order* (R5), which focuses on the strategic horizon of the region in the post 9/11 order, highlighting the role of identity politics and providing an explanation for their growing securitization. In 'The Middle East: Regional Security Institutions and their Capacities', in *Rewiring Regional Security in a Fragmented World* (R6), which was part of a large United States Institute for Peace project, he surveyed the capacity of regional institutions to manage the range of inter and intra state tensions shaping state behaviour, concluding that they are collectively weak and largely ineffective.

3. References to the research

R1. A. Ehteshami, "Asian geostrategic realities and their impact on Middle East-Asia relations" in H. Carter and A. Ehteshami (eds), *The Middle East's Relations with Asia and Russia*, RoutledgeCurzon, London, 2004 (pp.1-22). A second edition of this volume was issued in 2013.

R2. A. Ehteshami and Süleyman Elik, "Turkey's Growing Relations with Iran and the Arab Middle East", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4, December 2011, (pp. 643-662).

DOI:10.1080/14683849.2011.624322

Turkish Studies had a 2011 Impact Factor of 0.525. This was the third most viewed article with 866 on-line viewings (by May 2013).

R3. A. Ehteshami and M. Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives: The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution*, I.B. Tauris, 2007, 204pp.

"Readers looking for a solid introduction to contemporary Iranian political history will profit from 'Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives' finding in it a well-reasoned explanation for the rise of a new wave of conservative politics" (Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa on-line review. [http://www.asmeascholars.org/index.php?option=com_content &view=article&id=132](http://www.asmeascholars.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=132))

R4. A. Ehteshami, "Iran and the International Community: In the Shadow of Iraq", *e-International Relations*, July 2012. <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/07/31/iran-and-the-international-community-in-the-shadow-of-iraq/>

R5. A. Ehteshami, "Security and Strategic Trends in the Middle East", in *The Transformation of the Gulf: Politics, Economics and the Global Order*, David Held and Kristian Ulrichsen, eds, New York: Routledge, 2012, (pp. 261-277).

R6. A. Ehteshami, "The Middle East: Regional Security Institutions and their Capacities", in *Rewiring Regional Security in a Fragmented World*, Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall, eds, Washington, DC: USIP Press, 2012, (pp. 171-197). 25 citations on Web of Science.

4. Details of the impact

Ehteshami's work with senior FCO officials draws on both specific outputs listed above (R1-6) and on his academic standing as manifested through a large body of research outputs, some co-produced with FCO staff, published over many years. Identifying the impact of specific research outputs and specific scholars in a complex policy-making process is challenging, especially where impact is upon a department like the FCO that produces very little legislation and which is comparatively lightly scrutinised by Parliament. It is therefore notable that senior FCO officials such as the *Head of Research Analysts* and the *MENA Energy Adviser* identify Ehteshami's specific contribution in terms of 'two strands of activity that particularly stand out' (E1) and '...specific pieces of research/interventions that have not only informed the policy, but also survived and shaped the policy outcome.' (E2)

Asianisation of the Middle East and UK Energy policy

Impact in the qualifying period is rooted in R1, itself the outcome of a joint FCO/Durham seminar,

and R2, both specifically cited in **E1**. The Head of the FCO Research Analysts notes (E1) that, ‘... the impact of Prof Ehteshami’s pioneering work has been strong and is continuing: the interests of Russia and Asian countries (particularly China) in the Middle East is now one of the main themes of Research Analysts’ work. ... [T]his intellectual leadership on Prof Ehteshami’s part has established him as someone whose expertise is indispensable to our thinking on this topic.’ The FCO MENA Energy Advisor identifies how Ehteshami’s research in **R1** has directly affected the UK’s current International Energy Strategy: ‘The importance attached to the historical and contemporary links between Asia and the Middle East, as highlighted in the paper, were overlooked when discussions over the IES first took place. The historical relationship between the UK/West and the GCC, in particular, led policy-makers to believe that energy relations, for example, between Qatar and the UK, would be served by shared experience and common commercial interests. Professor Ehteshami’s paper, however, highlighted not only the historical importance of Asian and Middle East relations, but also charted the re-orientation of GCC economic and energy policy towards Asia, most notably China and South Korea. This line of analysis was both informative and persuasive and resulted in the IES recommending that the UK diversify Liquefied Natural Gas sources away from the Gulf and towards other markets.’

Diversification of supply as an element of maintaining reliable energy at a time of declining North Sea output and increasing reliance on gas imports was a key theme of the 2007 Energy White Paper, ‘Meeting the Energy Challenge’ which has shaped UK energy policy throughout the assessment period. Similarly, the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review, ‘Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty,’ notes that the ‘UK faces a range of risks related to our ability to access secure, diverse and affordable supplies of energy, which are essential to economic stability and growth.’ (**E4** p.50) The UK should ‘give energy a higher priority in UK foreign policy,’ and, ‘reprioritise bilateral diplomatic relationships, giving key supplier states a stronger focus.’ (**E4** p.51) As **E2** further notes: ‘[The] FCO’s Policy Unit Strategy Paper on Energy and Foreign Policy, which hitherto had neglected the importance of Asianisation of the Middle East ... [now] included reinvigorating energy relations between the UK and GCC ... and supporting UK-based international oil companies (IOCs) in their bid to work with MENA national oil companies (NOCs) within Asia. The FCO has followed these recommendations with vigour.’ This further reflects the emphasis in the FCO ‘Business Plan, 2011-15’ (November 2010) on ‘a more commercially minded FCO’ (**E5**, p. 5) stimulating business partnerships vital to the UK national interest and that ‘We [the FCO] want the UK to be the Gulf’s commercial partner of choice.’ (**E6**)

Ehteshami has continued to provide the FCO with what the Head of Research Analysts (**E1**) describes as ‘intellectual leadership’, participating in the MENA 2020 Seminar, co-hosted by British Embassy Beijing/China Institute of International Studies, as a member of the FCO delegation in September 2011. Including an academic as a formal member of FCO delegations is very unusual, reflecting the significance of this relationship.

The MENA Energy Advisor (**E2**) picks out the impact of Ehteshami’s work on Asianisation for the UK’s first GCC Regional Economist via the FCO workshop ‘The Impact of Asianisation of Energy Streams on Europe’, which Ehteshami helped organise. This meeting, ‘...opened important doors at leading academic institutions in each of the six [GCC] countries. As a result, the regional economist sends regular diplomatic cables, which inform policy, replete with direct references to academic materials written and recommended by Professor Ehteshami. ... I can see a clear correlation between Professor Ehteshami’s continuing contribution towards his analysis, which amounts to direct impact. Moreover, the GCC Regional Economist has recommended that we institutionalise the briefing process, as he was able to deploy and begin reporting within record time.’

Iran

Iran’s nuclear programme is at the centre of Ehteshami’s relationship with and impact upon the FCO, building on engagement pre-dating the assessment period including provision of evidence in 2007 to Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee in its Global Security Enquiry and his briefing of then Prime Minister Tony Blair in March 2006.

The 2010 UK National Security Strategy identifies an international military crisis as a ‘Tier 1’ (i.e. most serious) risk, with ‘...the desire of some states to acquire nuclear weapons capabilities

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increasing the danger of escalating crises.’ (E7, pp. 27, 30) Iran is cited as the key risk state (alongside North Korea) in the UK’s ‘National Counter-Proliferation Strategy, 2012-15’ (E8, p. 2). The UK is a key member of the 6 party group leading diplomatic negotiations with Iran on the issue, and in developing a global sanctions regime through the EU and UN.

Ehteshami’s outputs (R4-6) are directly cited by E1, with E2 also identifying the role played by R3 in influencing UK policy towards Iran. These outputs, alongside three specific briefing events between 2010 and 2012 are identified (E1) as having ‘... been particularly important since the closure of our [UK] embassy in Tehran’ as ‘... an important source of corroboration, as access to reliable data is scarce.’ E2 notes that Ehteshami’s research outputs and his bespoke presentations have, ‘fed specifically into the UK government’s wider calculations on how the Iranian government is likely to respond to increased sanctions. ... Ehteshami’s consistent argument that the Supreme Leader and the instruments of state will not succumb to sanctions pressure in its bid for nuclear status has fed directly into policy discussions. ... Ehteshami’s analysis has not only helped shape aspects of the UK government’s research agenda on Iran, but also the focus of partner countries. That is direct impact.’

In particular, the MENA Energy Advisor (E2) specifies that ‘...Ehteshami’s nuanced argument that pressure felt amongst those sections of Iranian society living just above the average household income has the greatest potential to influence the Iranian regime has set apart the UK government’s approach from its partners. Professor Ehteshami’s publications, bespoke presentations and briefings have had and continue to have an impact on the policy-process. His ideas, analysis and insights are sought after and continue to inform policy.’

The testimonials provided by two senior figures explicitly establish that Ehteshami’s research, and his research-based engagements with them, have impacted upon FCO thinking, strategy and policy through intellectual leadership and contributions to specific policy documents. The areas of UK foreign policy discussed are of major significance to the UK’s international engagements and standing, as well as its security.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

E1: Letter from Head of Research Analysis, FCO.

E2: Letter from MENA Energy Advisor, FCO.

E3 ‘Meeting the Energy Challenge: a White Paper on Energy’, HM Government. Available at <http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file39387.pdf>

E4 ‘Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review’, HM Government. Available at: <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm79/7948/7948.pdf>

E5 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, ‘Business Plan 2011-2015’, November 2010, pp.2-3. Available at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/publications-and-documents/publications1/annual-reports/business-plan/>

E6 ‘UK Trade and Investment in the Gulf,’ FCO. Available at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/globalissues/mena/uk-gulf/trade-and-investment/>

E7 ‘A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy’, HM Government, 2010. Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61936/national-security-strategy.pdf

E8 ‘National Counter Proliferation Strategy, 2012-15.’ Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/36194/counter-proliferation-strat.pdf

Further testimonial support may be sought from:

E9 Head of Middle East and North Africa Research Group, FCO.

E10 Research Analyst-Iran, Middle East and North Africa Research Group, FCO