Speech by Dr. Kamal Kharrazi, the President of the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Chatham House  
London, 19 July 2017

**The regional role of Iran: A Stabilizer or Destabilizing force**

**Dear Chairperson   
Ladies and Gentleman**

I am delighted to have the opportunity today to speak to you in this world-renowned research institute. Therefore, I would like to appreciate the organizers of this meeting.

Considering the dangerous events unfolding nowadays in the Middle East and the surrounding of the Islamic Republic of Iran, I take the liberty to speak about the role of Iran in the geopolitics of this turbulent region, and focus on the question that: Is Iran looking for the status quo or acts as a destabilizing force? Albeit, there can be follow up questions to which I may refer, such as:

1-    Why the geopolitics of the Middle East has been changing so rapidly in

recent years?   
2-    Who benefits from instability in the region and who benefits from status

quo?   
3-    Is Saudi Arabia looking for stability of Syria and Iraq, or it is

Iran which helps them not to be falling into the hands of terrorist groups?   
4-    Does the influence of Iran in the region emanate from its intervention in

Syria and Iraq? Or does it come from their support by Iranians against the

destabilizing measures of others?   
5-    Could Iran be indifferent towards instability of Iraq and Syria? Wouldn’t

that end up with the instability of Iran?   
6-    Could Iran ignore the official request of these two countries, at least

for the sake of its own security?   
7-    Had not Iran helped them and as a result Baghdad and Damascus had

fallen to Daesh, what could have been the destiny of the region?

8-    If Baghdad and Damascus had fallen to Daesh, could Europe be safer

today? Why did Europe take no action, then?   
9-  Which ideology does constitute the basis for Takfiri terrorism and where

is the birthplace of that ideology?   
10- Which countries in the region and its beyond, supported Daesh, Al

Nusra, Al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups?   
11- Can influence be gained through war, murder and supporting terrorism?

Or it comes from supporting other countries to resist against foreign

intervention and terrorist groups?   
12- And finally, how Iran could have defended its security against the

expansion of terrorism and instability in the region?

If we review the past history, we see that after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the undemocratic governments surrounding Iran started to build up conflict with the Islamic establishment. While the Islamic Revolution was a popular movement which manifested the will of its people through the establishment of democratic structures, there were authoritarian political structures surrounding Iran such as the Baathist government of Iraq in the west, the Soviet Union in the north and despotic tribal, non-democratic and traditional structures in the south.

Such structural contradictions on one hand and the spiritual influence of the Islamic revolution among the Muslims and freedom-seeking people of the Middle East on the other led the dictatorial regimes of the region to impose eight years of war on Iranians. Under such circumstances, the Western and Eastern blocks not only supported the aggressor but also imposed oppressive sanctions against Iran. Of course, Iran managed to win the imposed war and overcome the economic hardship of sanctions, continuing the path of its progress and development with the support of its own people.   
 **Ladies and Gentlemen**

Arab revolutions, which begun in North of Africa and spread to the southern states of the Persian Gulf, created unexpected instability and volatility in the whole region. The collapse of regimes in Tunisia and Egypt led to the vacuum of power in the region. Under such circumstances, terrorist activities were intensified and emboldened by the United States and its allies who trained, armed and supported Takfiri terrorist groups in Syria to topple its legitimate government.

The terrorist groups were successful in recruiting large numbers of young people who had been informed of Wahhabism in the mosques supported by Saudi Arabia across the world. Daesh or ISIS recruited eighty thousand forces, of whom twenty thousand were from 80 countries across the world, including Europe. These forces captured main parts of Syria and Iraq and weakened those governments.

The main goal of Daesh in Syria and Iraq was to change their regimes and establish a brutal Khalifat. The terrorists and their supporters were foreseeing to overthrow Bashar Assad in less than one month. In Iraq too, they occupied Mosul and moved towards Baghdad. They were very close to capture Baghdad and overthrow the Iraqi government. Under such conditions, Iran rushed to the rescue of Syria and later Iraq at the request of their governments, because, the advancement of terrorist groups towards the Iranian borders could have directly endangered its national security.

The Iranian support for the governments of Syria and Iraq aimed at maintaining the status quo and defending the territorial integrity and stability of those countries. Iran supported those governments because it was aware of the problems Takfiri terrorist groups were going to create for the whole region including Iran and even for other regions such as Europe. Here I would like to ask you the distinguished participants a critical question: Which one is a destabilizing force in the Middle East, IRAN or those COUNTRIES that supported terrorist groups overwhelmingly and called for the overthrow of the legitimate governments in Iraq and Syria?

The fact of the matter is that the United States and its regional allies are the main culprits in spreading instability in this region. It seems that the common interests of the United States, Israel and the reactionary Arab countries of the Middle East is weakening and disintegrating the large countries of the region. While Iran is for stability, status quo, and expansion of regional cooperation, they are seeking their interests in overthrowing standing governments of the region.   
  
**Ladies and Gentlemen**

The Iranian fight against terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria, resulted in the weakening of terrorist groups and undermining the Takfiri Wahhabi ideology. This, of course, irritated the US allies in the Persian Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia as the birthplace of Wahhabism and the main supporter of Takfiri Wahhabi groups. Therefore, the root cause of Saudi’s conflict with Iran and its efforts to promote Iran phobia, inciting other countries to cut relations with Iran, as well as its illegitimate military action against Bahrain and Yemen, who are solely seeking their natural rights to play a role in determining their destiny, rather than regime change, should be sought in the Saudi regime’s failure in Syria and Iraq.

Anyway, with the defeat of terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria, it is not reasonable to assume that the Takfiri Wahhabi terrorism would be eradicated so soon. It is envisaged that they will continue their activities by changing their strategy in the region and by migrating to other parts of the world, such as North Africa, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Europe and the Far East, setting up large and small terrorist organizations to create insecurity. Daesh and Al Nusra as organized terrorist groups cannot stay idle and would continue their vicious missions.

It is a fact that Salafi Wahhabi terrorist groups have an unbreakable link with the Saudi government. The Saudi government, since three decades ago and based on a long-term strategy, has trained Wahhabi Imams by establishing various Madrasas or seminaries in other countries and attracting foreign volunteers to be trained in Saudi Arabia. Today most of the mosques across the world are being run by Imams who have been trained and financially supported by Saudi Arabia. This is the findings of many think-tanks in the West including here in Britain.

However, it is regrettable that the British government has prevented the release of findings of an inquiry on the role of Saudi Arabia in the promotion of Wahabism and financial support of Takfiri-terrorist groups, only for the sake of financial gains. We believe that in order to exterminate Takfiri Wahhabi terrorism, Saudi Arabia, has to be known responsible. Otherwise, the continued spread of such radical ideology could jeopardize the security of the region and the world including Britain. Unfortunately, we have witnessed a similar policy in the United States, as the US administration has prevented the release of the Congress secret report about the ties of Saudi Arabia with the 9/11 attacks whose main perpetrators were Saudi nationals.   
  
**Ladies and Gentlemen**

In its broad propaganda campaign, Saudi Arabia with the support of the United States and Israel is portraying Iran’s combat against terrorism, and its fight against the regime change policy, as destabilizing measures. Is preventing Baghdad, Irbil, and Damascus from collapse considered as destabilizing measures? Had Daesh taken the power, what could have been its repercussions on the security of the region? Therefore, all countries, including Europeans should appreciate the Iranian military advisors and forces who under the commandership of General Soleimani rushed to the help of those governments and the defeat of Takfiri Wahhabi terrorism.

As with the influence of Iran in the region, such an influence is old one. In fact, since the Safavid era, there have been extensive spiritual links and interactions between peoples of Iran, Iraq and the Levant. Even some of the scholars and advisors of the Safavid Court, such as Sheikh Bahaei, were from that region. Even during the reign of the Ottomans, Iran had an active presence in Najaf, Karbala, and Baghdad, the sites of Shiite holy shrines, forging unbreakable bonds between Iranians and the people of Iraq. Such spiritual and decent presence is surely different from influencing other countries by force, through sending arms and money to terrorist groups.

One should not be oblivious to the point that the ultimate goal of the Iranian combat with terrorist groups has been to eliminate terrorist threats from its borders. The Islamic Republic of Iran has 1,458 kilometers of joint borders with Iraq, 909 kilometers with Pakistan and 963 kilometers with Afghanistan and has been always threatened through those borders. In the south of Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia has been always hatching plots against Iran. As an example, Saudi Arabia contributed about 100 billion dollars to the Saddam regime’s war against Iran. Today, Saudi Arabia has no reservation in supporting terrorists against Iran and its defense minister has publically threatened Iran with dragging the war inside its borders.

Therefore, Iran is not seeking hegemony; it is Saudi Arabia that is pursuing such a policy through proxy wars and direct military interventions in the region. These days we all see how Saudi Arabia, in line with its hegemonic policies, is imposing its bullying and illogical will on a small country such as Qatar. This is while Iran has invited both parties to resolve their differences through dialogue.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the following points:

1-    Regime change through military intervention, as in the case of Libya, or

through supporting terrorists and ethnic groups, as in the case of Iraq and

Syria, would not only exacerbate the security problems of our region, but

would strengthen terrorist groups and would prepare the ground for their

spread to the surrounding countries and the world at large.   
2-   To combat terrorism, it is necessary to forge real and honest international

cooperation rather than setting up show coalitions. It requires a precise

definition of terrorism, restraint from double standards in fighting

terrorist groups and using this vicious phenomenon as a tool for political

purposes.   
3-    Fighting terrorism requires the identification and extermination of its roots

and financial resources. The failure to eradicate Takfiri terrorist groups,

exposing their agents and their financiers and lack of real international

cooperation in the fight against terrorism would result in more insecurity

and instability in the region and elsewhere.   
4-    The fact of the matter is that Takfiri Wahhabi terrorism has nothing to do

with the beliefs and policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The roots

of Takfiri terrorism should be dried in its birthplace; Saudi Arabia.   
5-    The Islamic Republic of Iran is always prepared to engage in cooperation

with any country that is determined to fight against terrorism.

I thank you for your patience.