**Remarks by H.E. Dr. Kharrazi in the Korber Institute**

on  **The Regional Role of Iran**

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I am delighted to be speaking in this prestigious institute about the regional role of the Islamic Republic of Iran which I believe is a crucial subject at the present juncture.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

I want you to imagine for a moment Iran's geographical map in your mind. You will see that Iran has been surrounded by many countries in the north, south, east and west. Each of these regions has some sort of cultural, historical and political commonalities with Iran and are therefore influenced in one way or another by the Iranian civilization.

The Islamic Revolution of Iran became victorious nearly 40 years ago. During the past four decades, each of these geographical regions has faced issues and incidents which have had their impacts on Iran. And Iran has also influenced its neighboring countries in helping them to preserve their territorial integrity and stability.

In order to clarify this, I would like to give you some examples from Iranian recent history, the first decade, the middle decades and the fourth decade after revolution.

In the first decade, Iran faced two significant regional events: The occupation of Afghanistan by the former Soviet Union and the occupation of parts of the Iranian soil by the Saddam regime.

The occupation of Afghanistan not only had some impacts on its neighbors but also forced other regional countries and the international community to react and combat the Soviet forces. The West, led by the United States and assisted by Pakistan and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, began organizing Arab radical forces to fight the Soviets. The horrible end result was the emergence of Al-Qaeda and the Arab-Afghan forces, and later the Taliban.

Iran opposed the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviets, and Imam Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic revolution, took open stances against the Soviet invasion and called upon the people of Afghanistan to resist. As well, Iran considered as dangerous the formation of radical Islamic forces by the West and its regional allies and therefore focused its support on the Afghan Mojahedin or fighters such as Ahmad Shah Masood.

Iran was well aware that any support for radical groups would have dangerous consequences for the security of other countries. However, after the withdrawal of the Soviet forces, such radical groups were relocated to North Africa, and the Takfiri terrorism emerged in Algeria, Egypt and some other countries of the region.

Under such circumstances, Saddam Hussein attacked Iran with the support of some Arab countries, in particular, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Saddam violated all principles of international law by showering our cities with bombs, use of chemical weapons and attacking commercial vessels.

However, Iran defended its territory and evicted Iraqi aggressors. Iran controlled the war to not spread to other parts of the region including those who supported Iraq. In general, in the first decade, Iran managed to defend its soil and prevent the expansion of terrorism and instability to the whole region in spite of the uncontrollable situation in its east and west.

In the second and third decades, we had the collapse of Soviet Union in the north and the occupation of Iraq and the second Persian Gulf war in the south. These two incidents were the source of great developments at the regional and global levels.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, nine new states emerged in north of Iran: the Russian Federation, three new countries in the Caucasus namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, as well as five other countries in Central Asia which are Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Even though Iran could have claims on some of the new republics for historical reasons, it was amongst the first countries to recognize the new states in support of the stability of that region.

Some of these newly-emerged republics faced serious crises in the early years of their formation. Russia was grappling with internal crises such as the Muslim autonomous republics particularly Chechnya. Iran which at the time was the chair of the Islamic Cooperation Organization tried to maintain its impartiality and contributed to the establishment of peace in Dagestan in spite of the supports given to radical Chechnya forces by some Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia.

In the Caucasus, conflict erupted between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the autonomous republic of Karabakh. Iran tried hard to control this conflict, and as a neutral mediator tried to resolve the problem of Karabakh through dialog and prevent more instability in the region.

In the internal bloody conflicts in Tajikistan between the government and the Islamic Movement Party, Iran managed to bring the two sides to the negotiating table. As the result, peace returned to Tajikistan. Iran also played a supportive and mediatory role in the Kyrgyz problem.

Therefore, since the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the independence of new republics, Iran has tried hard to maintain good relations with those governments based on mutual respect and cooperation.

The second significant incident after the Iranian revolution was Saddam Hossein’s attack to Kuwait and the regional and international confrontation with Iraq. Despite the support given to Saddam by some Arab states of the Persian Gulf such as Kuwait in his war against Iranians, Iran condemned Kuwait occupation by Iraq and hosted the Kuwaiti refugees.

Unfortunately, the constructive role of Iran in liberating Kuwait and assisting the coalition forces to overthrow the Taliban in Afghanistan was not appreciated by the United States and President Bush branded Iran as an axis of evil.

In the recent decade, another important development of the region was the so-called Arab Spring which soon turned to disappointment. The interference of foreign powers and some of the countries of the region to change regimes resulted in more conflict, instability, coup, terrorism and civil war. The territorial integrity of some regional countries was even jeopardized.

Some of the littoral Arab states of the Persian Gulf such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar supported radical Salafi and Takfiri groups. This resulted in more instability and chaos. Saudi Arabia supported the coup in Egypt and intervened military in Bahrain in support of its undemocratic government. Saudi Arabia, Emirates and their allies also attacked Yemen as it is continued today.

The intervention of foreign forces in Libya, Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen led to severe instability which regretfully continue to this date. The mistake made by Arab countries and the West in supporting radical Salafi and Takfiri groups in Afghanistan, leading to the establishment of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, was repeated in the Arab Spring. More violent and savage organizations such as Daesh, Al-Nusrah, Jeishol Islam and other terrorist groups were born in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

Iran, as against many other countries in and outside of the region, has always emphasized on the right of people to ask for reform, but not changes imposed by foreigners, as wherever foreign forces have intervened, conflicts and civil war have begun.

Iran was opposed to the foreign intervention in Libya and the resort to force to overthrow Qaddafi regime. Today, we witness how Libya has been divided into two parts, and civil war is underway between the two sides. In Syria, Iran was warning against the formation of Salafi and Takfiri groups, but as the result of billions of dollars of support by the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, and the United States, Daesh, Al Nusrah, and other groups were emerged.

With the establishment of terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq, Iran rushed to their help upon their request. If Iran had not assisted Syrian and Iraqi governments, Damascus, Baghdad, and Erbil had definitely fallen into the hands of terrorists. And even the Iranian territory could have been targeted as Daesh was only 40 kilometers away of the Iranian border. On the other hand, without doubt, if Iran had not rushed to the rescue of the governments in Iraq and Syria, Europe could be facing the menace of terrorism today much more seriously.

Anyway, with the defeat of Daesh, the Kurdish-Arab conflict exacerbated in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, the Kurds have called for independence and have the support of the United States. In Iraq, the Kurdistan authorities held a referendum for independence, which was leading to civil war. Here, it was the wisdom and mediation of Iran to control the crisis.

As against Saudi Arabia, Iran has played a stabilizing role in Lebanon. Saudi Arabia recalled and detained the Lebanese Prime Minister to prepare the ground for an internal conflict. Fortunately, President Macron mediated and the Prime Minister was released. On the other hand, the Lebanese officials, in particular, the Lebanese President and the Secretary-General of Hezbollah defused the tension by their calmative statements, and as a result, the recent parliamentary election of Lebanon was successfully held with no tension and turmoil, and the Speaker of the Parliament and the Prime Minister were chosen without any controversy.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

The military aggression of Saudi Arabia and the UAE on Yemen is a tragic and shameful story. The question is that why Houthis of Yemen who account for about 40 percent of the population of the country should not be entitled to have a share of power in their country? Should they be suppressed in the cruelest manner because are asking for their legitimate right?

The Islamic Republic of Iran, right from the beginning of the crisis, supported Yemeni-Yemeni talks and even called for the settlement of this issue through negotiation with the help of the Europeans. However, Saudi Arabia and the UAE continue their aggression which has resulted in nothing, but the killing of thousands of women, children and innocent men, and the destruction of infrastructure and houses of defenseless people of Yemen.

This is of course not the end of the story. More serious crises are foreseen for the future in this sensitive region which also neighbors Europe. Today, we see that the present US administration has withdrawn from the nuclear deal in spite of signing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action which has been endorsed by the UN Security Council with the potential of playing a key role in the stability and security of the region.

The US government is inciting the countries of the region to wage a war and enter into unwanted conflict. Notwithstanding, Iran has fully complied with the JCPOA as confirmed in several reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency. However, if Europe fails to secure the interests of Iran within the framework of the JCPOA, there is no reason for Iran to remain in the deal. And this could increase the range of crises in this region and lead to more instability, which would undoubtedly have consequences on the Europe security.

I thank you for your patience.