

Foreign Policy from Khatami to Ahmadinejad

There is One Foreign Policy in Iran, which is Khamenei's

Foreign Policy

Noof Rashid ALDosari^{1*}

¹ Teaching Assistant at the International Affairs Department, Qatar University, Doha, Qatar

* Noof Rashid ALDosari, E-mail: n.aldosari@qu.edu.qa

Abstract

This Article is part of an MA thesis: "Iran Wilayat al Faqih System of Governance and Public Policymaking" which tried to investigate the challenges that public policy in Iran is facing under Wilayat al Faqih system of governance. The article here deals with foreign policy making in Iran from Khatami to Ahmadinejad in regards to both Iran regional role and Iran-U.S. relations. It sheds light on the challenges that are facing Iranian foreign policy making which can affect both the regime and the ideology of Wilayat al Faqih itself. It also, discusses series of problems that are challenging the authority of the supreme leader which resulted in a power struggle between the supreme leader (representative of the Wilayat al Faqih institution) and the president (representative of the Republican institution) inside the system of governance when it comes to policymaking. The contradictory roles between both is a result of the president limited power in formulating foreign policies, together with his ideological preferences that is different from the supreme leader. The Article concludes by stating that such power struggle between the offices may impact Iran's domestic policies but not Iranian foreign policies, as Iran is becoming a regional power.

Keywords

Iran, foreign policy, government, structure of power, political ideology

1. Introduction

This section will try to question whether or not Iranian foreign policies are crippled by *Wilayat al Faqih* system of governance. There is already a huge consensus between scholars on the impact of ideology on foreign policy; however, the limits or the degree of such influence in making foreign policy is a contested approach. For analyzing Iranian foreign policy it is important to know the key that unlocks the driving force of Iranian foreign policy, which is the ideology of *Wilayat al Faqih*. How Khomeini's ideology of *Wilayat al Faqih* is influencing foreign policy.

Ideology according to Hunt in his well-known work on *ideology and foreign policy* is "an interrelated set of convictions or assumptions that reduces the complexities of a particular slice of reality to easily

comprehensible terms and suggests appropriate ways of dealing with that reality” Ideology has to do with ideas and beliefs, thus it is important to question the interrelated relationships between ideas and policies, and how such ideas shape the world, more specifically, foreign policies. Also, whether Khomeini’s ideology (ideas) shape reality or reality is shaping Khomeini’s ideology. An “idea” which is a mentalistic connotation can serve as an instrument in policy making. In other words ideology is not only influencing policy making, but can be one of the tools in making foreign policy. It can be noted that while ideologies reflects power relationships, policy instruments are supposed to facilitates such reflection. For example,

U.S. policy is focused on an ideology of propping up client state governments by training their militaries and hunting down their enemies. So, policy instruments are organizations capable of carrying out specific activity sequences, therefore, policy instruments, in effect, are crystallized ideologies. Whatever may be going inside people’s heads, in the domain of foreign policy making, ideology takes an organizational form.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, “ideology has a religious character which both reinforces its mythical dimension and exempts decision-makers from presenting rational justification. It is the will of Allah and it is what Islam wants are often used as justification”. Moreover, emphasizing the word of Islam more than the word of Iran, does not necessarily obscure national interest, and here comes the question of which one is in the service of the other. Is “Islam” the motivator of Iranian foreign policy or Iranian “national interest”?

While it is important to understand ideology in Iranian foreign policy, it does not necessarily mean that it will produce a straightforward understanding or clear pattern in grasping Iranian foreign policies, because of the role of interest. Therefore, “an understanding of a nation’s ideology provides no certain insights into its behavior. Ideologies are important because they constitute the framework in which policymakers deal with specific issues...the relationship between ideas and action is not rigid”. The factor of interest is important as whether it goes together with the state ideology when shaping reality, or it is only that one prevails over the other. However, referring to Max Weber, Goldstein and Keohane insist that they do not argue that ideas rather than interests (as interpreted by human beings) move the world. Instead, they suggest that ideas as well as interests have causal weight in explanations of human action. By applying the Weberian position to the context of foreign policy, Carlsnaes also arrives at the conclusion that, the ideological nature of foreign policy is often contrasted with the notion of interest...but...these are not mutually exclusive but have, on the contrary, coexisted over the years, albeit with a tendency for agencies of interests to contain the agencies of ideology.

Wilayat al Faqih is the absolute guardianship of the jurist on behalf of Imam Mahdi, such leadership attributes resembles that of the Prophets according to Twelver Shi’i beliefs. Khomeini’s revolution prepared the way for such revolutionary ideology, in which it has both internal and external dimensions. The internal dimension has been discussed in the previous chapters of the research. The external

dimension is the worldview of Khomeini's ideology regarding Iran's position and relationship with the international system, which is written in the Iranian constitution as the discourse of the regime.

Furthermore, Khomeini's religious ideology stressed the importance of freedom and independence of not only the Iranian nation but also the Muslim nations from the shackles of imperialism. Khomeini, out of his ideology, molded the way that the Iranian state will adopt its foreign policies, a global Mahdist identity, in which it advocates an Islamic Imperialism against Western imperialism. The symbolism of Imam Mahdi is represented in the Iranian foreign policy as the savior of Muslims; the Islamic Republic is thus the savior of Muslims as an Islamic Empire. Khomeini "having directly linked the project of the Islamic Republic to the will of Imam Mahdi and his broad objectives: following the revolution, all the resources, efforts, and programs of the nation are to be directed to the preparation for the reappearance of the Imam. Thus the Iranian regime has a global Mahdist identity".

Moreover, Iran since the revolution had transformed itself from systematically legitimated status quo power to an internationalist Islamic movement. "The Iranian state thus equipped itself with the transnational mandate for the export of the revolution (*sudur-e enghelab*)". And the meaning for the export of the revolution is turning the Muslim world into one Islamic Empire. Therefore the ideology is advocating a single world community, ruled by the Supreme Leader.

Such abstract perception is institutionalized in the Iranian constitution, which states that: "the Constitution will strive in concert with other Islamic and popular movements, to prepare the way for the formation of a single world community". There is a sense of mission in delivering such ideology, that even the constitution itself defined its role to carry such mission which is: "to realize the ideological objectives of the Revolution (Nehzat) and to create conditions conducive to the development of man in accordance with the noble and universal values of Islam".

With such a religious character that is embedded in the Iranian constitution, Khomeini made an idealistic dualism in fighting imperialism, such dualism is based on the dichotomy between the oppressor and the oppressed, the *mostazafan-mostakbaran* dichotomy. Thus, Khomeini elevated the Iranian nation-state to the status of a vehicle of divine substance. Inevitably, the Islamic Republic felt destined to change what was perceived to be an overbearing hierarchical world order. The revolution aims to bring about the triumph of the *mostazafan* against the *mostakbaran* that it provides the necessary basis for ensuring the continuation of the Revolution at home and abroad. Illustrated in accordance with the Quranic verse *This your nation is a single nation, and I am your Lord, so worship Me (21-92)*.

Khomeini's theory may serve as a utopian romanticism of challenging the world order. The revolutionary state has a revolutionary foreign policy revealed in its aggressive face in the hostage-taking at the US embassy in Tehran (4 November 1979), which served as a red line for imperialist intervention in the Iranian state. As the Iranian constitution emphasized in Article 152: "The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon the rejection of all forms of domination, both the exertion of it and submission to it, the preservation of the independence of the country in all

respects and its territorial integrity”. Nevertheless, the same Article also emphasized the aspect of defending all Muslims. Although Iran rejects the interference of super powers in its affairs, it will, as an ambitious power strive for interfering in other states as a regional power and defender of Muslims! Therefore, Iran had to marry two identities namely Persian nationalism and Shi’i Islam.

Khominists believe in the justice of the Islamic revolution as a force that will destroy the system of world conquerors Zionism, Capitalism, and Communism. Nevertheless Khomeini’s anti-imperialistic struggle, “is not a principled struggle; the goal is not to put an end to imperialism as a harmful concept and as an erroneous political and economic construct. Rather, the real issue for Islamists is to *replace* Western imperialism with a new Islamic hegemony as a reminiscence of the golden age of Islamic world power (“single world community/*ommat-e vahed-e jahani*”).

Such struggle against imperialism is a struggle over identity. For example, when taking a look at the contemporary major states’ foreign policies it can be noted that struggle over identity has an influence on states’ behavior “from Russia’s struggle in the Post-Cold war era to Germany’s concerns about transforming itself into a “normal power”, China’s struggle over its global identity, and India’s concern that its great-power, and self-identity has never been recognized by others”. Thus, Iran is trying to be part of this identity struggle, and in order to be a sophisticated Empire it has to establish the necessary resources, such as interfering or conquering Islamic cities, establishing a nuclear power, which is considered to be as a national sovereignty, and finally serve as the savior of Jerusalem, in which Iran regards itself as an Islamic actor in the Middle East and the guardian of the Muslim world. As Khomeini used to say to Iranians during the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988): “the road to Jeru salem goes through Karbala”.

2. Wilayat al Faqih and Foreign Policymaking

Since the Islamic Republic structure of governance has traditional (religious) and Democratic institutions, both institutions play a role in foreign policy and international relations decision-making process. The main offices that are responsible for foreign policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran are “the supreme leader, the president, the Council of the Guardian, foreign minister, the NSC, and the *Majles*. The decision making process on bills goes from foreign minister, to president, to NSC, and finally to the supreme leader, who must sign all bills both on domestic as well as foreign policy issues”. Although the president and his office is the main body that is working on foreign policies since 1989, still the supreme leader is the person who has the final approval on foreign policies. Thus, the religious institutions represented by the Supreme leader also overpower the democratic institutions (president office) in Iranian foreign policy making.

The foreign minister reports directly to the president where policy initiatives are monitored in the president’s office. The role of the government is to demand for the Majles approval of all international agreements where it can be discussed but at the same time does not control the executive process of foreign policy decision-making. Regarding The visions of Iranian foreign policy, there is a rivalry

between the political elite (political faction) who adopts different ideologies, or those who may have different visions on how *Wilayat al Faqih's* foreign policy should be. However, the two main groups of Iranian political elite with regard to foreign policy making: first the Conservative faction, those who emphasize the identity of the Islamic revolution and Islamic values. They want to have good relationships with Islamic countries and against the rapprochement with the U.S. The second group represents the Pragmatist and Reformist Factions. They advocate for Iran to have a key role in international relations, trade and political ties that safeguard the state interest; therefore it doesn't mind having a good relationship with the U.S.

While the conservatives are ideologically driven, the Reformists and Pragmatists use a pragmatic approach in defining foreign policies. However, both agree on three things, which can be seen as the fundamental principles of the regime: independence, equality, and a greater role for Iran in international relations. Nonetheless, the main rivalry inside the Iranian system of governance regarding foreign policies remains between the president, the supreme leader and the foreign minister. Such rivalry of who has more power to shape foreign policies emphasizes the question of duality of power between the office of the supreme leader and the office of the president, and its impact on Iran's foreign policies. Scholars emphasized the nature of the system of governance impact on foreign policy decision-making. For example, "the main lines of foreign policy in liberal democratic regimes are determined by an elected government under the constant and decisive control of parliament together with public opinion. In such regimes, important changes in the orientation of foreign policy occur slowly and after intense debate and deliberation". While in autocratic regimes change in foreign policy comes quickly, as the leader of an oligarchy determines the foreign policy. For example, "the case in Egypt when President Anwar el-Sadat made a dramatic decision in 1971 by changing his country's strategic alliance with the Soviet Union, replacing it with an alliance with the United States of America". Another example, is the Shah's role in Iranian foreign policy, as his decisions were solely made by him in which the ministerial cabinet, and the parliament has no impact in his important decisions, such as oil production, and changing allies.

From the previous examples, scholars show how the nature of the system impacts state foreign policies. They emphasized that unlike autocratic and liberal democratic regimes, Iran classified as a totalitarian state, will also have an impact on its foreign policies, in which foreign policy is shaped in ideological terms. According to *Mehadi Mozzafri* in his article "*Islamist Policy*", the supreme leader has unlimited powers that his decisions on foreign policies are established according to ideological justifications.

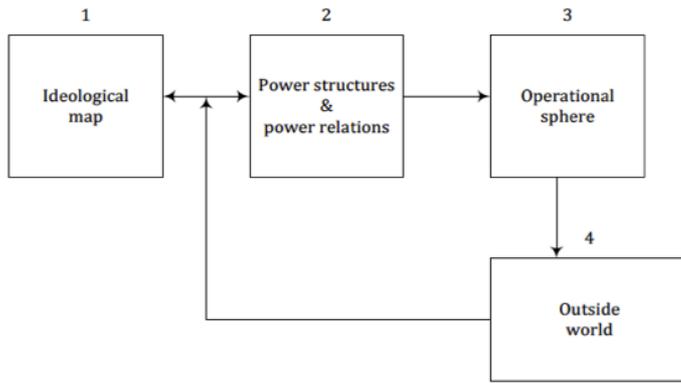


Figure 1. Mozzafri's Diagram of Iranian Foreign Policymaking

Mozzafri put forward a diagram, (see Figure 1 above), explaining that ideology comes before then power structure in formulating Iranian foreign policies. Nevertheless, the importance of the House of the Supreme Leader or the supreme leader's institution comes first as the power behind implementing such an ideology, as ideology needs power.

The importance of the House of the Supreme Leader in forming decision making of Iranian foreign policies cannot be over looked, as it constitutes the department of foreign policy of the House of Leadership. This institution has a supreme role in foreign policy decision making and works with other institutions that work in supporting the ideological goals of the regime. The supreme leader's institution and its supporting institutions working on foreign policies reflect the aspect that ideology and interest is embedded in institutions, or in the institutional form. This research suggests in Figure 2 below, how Iranian foreign policy is shaped in the Islamic Republic of Iran:

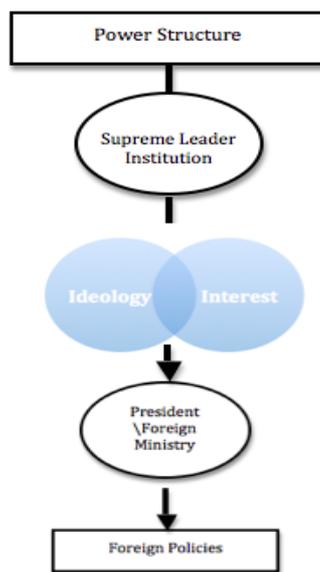


Figure 2. How Iranian Foreign Policy Is Shaped

Power structure thus is influencing foreign policies, or it can be said that it is the main player in formulating Iranian foreign policies. The Supreme leader as the leader of an oligarchy is the one who balances between ideology and interest, not the president or even the foreign minister, their role is simply to put forward or implement the supreme leader's final decisions. The House of the supreme leader reflects what can be called a centralization of policymaking. As The House of the Supreme Leader is an institution, then "there is an interaction between interests and ideology in human choices and decisions are inevitable by the very fact alone that a sediment of both has become over long periods of time an integral part of the fabric of human institutions or is often unrecognizably reflected by them".

The Supreme leader does not always balance between ideology and interest as interest overpowers ideology, but if he can balance between the aspect of ideology and interest, can he balance the power struggle between himself and the president? Mozafari emphasized that change happened in Iranian foreign policy when a contradiction arises between ideology and interest of the rulers. But he did not emphasize the aspect of structure of power rivalry between the supreme leader office and the president office in shaping foreign policies. The different institutions in the Iranian power structure entails that each would strive for more auto enormous power, and thus working to deliver autonomous interest hence impacting regime foreign policies.

The president institution's is weaker than the supreme leader's institution. With such power inequality, there is inside the system of governance a power struggle in respect of making or shaping foreign policies. The supreme leader and the president each would like to maintain his agenda on foreign policy. The matter of coherence in Iranian foreign policy is an issue feared by Mirdamadi of the Mjles' National Security Committee who declared in 2002 "no consensus existed whatsoever between the political groups in power on national security or the position of the country on the international chessboard". So, what would the president do if the supreme leader has no control over foreign policy? Or can the president implement his agenda without the force of the supreme leader's ideology of *Wilayat al Faqih*. Does the president see the ideology clashes with Iran's national interests, or mostly with regime interests?

Moreover, do power rivalry between president and the supreme leader have an impact on Iranian foreign policies, taking in mind that impact can also mean change in Iranian foreign policies? However, it is still not easy to figure out the reasons behind such an impact, because it could come from either power structure or group interest. Also, it cannot be said that the shaping of Iranian foreign policies is constrained between nature of the system (structure of power), or interest.

Nonetheless, rivalry between the two institutions created paradoxical impact on foreign policies. It can be noted that despite the system structure of power together with the force of ideology in shaping foreign policies, Iran rises as a regional power. This will be discussed in the coming pages in the case of Khatami and Ahmadinejad's foreign policies specifically, the US-Iran relations and Iran's regional role in the Middle East.

3. Khatami's Foreign Policy

Khatami's election was not a new political shift only inside Iran, but also outside Iran. The reform movement wanted to shift the conceptual paradigm about The Islamic Republic to look for better relations with the world. Furthermore, "the aspirations for an open society at home and integration into the international community stem from a combined sense of national pride and a growing consciousness of the need to be part of the democratic movement sweeping across the world". Unlike their parents, young Iranians did not witness the American hostage crisis during the revolution and Khomeini's motto: "independence, freedom and Islam", nor did they witness the CIA engineered 1953 coup. From this stand Khatami carried out as a reformist what the younger generation aspired for: a free (democratic) society and peace abroad, which can be interpreted as Khatami's world view and concept of Iranian foreign policy.

Khatami notion of dialogue between civilizations stress the fact that it is about self-identity in the international relations. The Islamic Republic since, the revolution, is trying to emphasize that Iran is a unique nation, which preserves its own Persian nationalism and Islamic religion and that it should be recognized by the international society with such identity. Khatami wanted to influence or break the spell of Samuel Huntington's thesis of clash of civilizations, and emphasize that the world order should not be seen as the "West versus the rest". In a globalizing world, Khatami thus used the strategy of "dialogue" to be part of the international society, believing, and in the same time, trying to convince the international society about his philosophical understanding that the international community should be dialogical instead of existing diplomatic channels.

Khatami's discourse was a clear message to the international community that serves Iran's willingness to get out of its international isolation. An Iranian university professor stressed that Khatami initiative "gave Iran a specific reputation without which no diplomatic effort on its part would have succeeded in getting substantial results". Moreover, "it was in this context that Khatami was given recognition in a special resolution by the United Nations General Assembly, declaring 2001 the "Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations". The terms upon which this dialogue won international praise, and contributed to softening the Islamic Republic's image".

Khatami's initiative came because of globalization and the increase connectedness not only in politics but also in social, cultural, and economic relations. Iran after the revolution was going through the Iraq-Iran war. After the war Rafsanjani became the president and Iran went through the so called "reconstruction era", thus Iran is in need to improve its relationship with other countries to improve foreign investment in Iran and thus strengthen the Iranian economy. Moreover, "greater economic interconnectedness prompted the Iranian establishment-reformist and conservatives alike-to forge a more approachable international image. Pressures emanating from economic globalization compelled the establishment to assume a more cooperative posture in order to safeguard the country's prosperity". Thus, it is quite possible to say that Khatami's foreign policy use of "dialogue between civilizations" is influenced mostly to strengthen the economical need more than the political concerns.

4. Khatami and Iran-U.S. Relations

The dialogue that Khatami wanted to use is not new but different. In the sense that dialogue between religions and cultures is since the Iranian revolution 1979, as the Islamic Republic used it in its foreign policy for the last 33 years. But “after 1991, dialogue among civilizations became instrumental not only to integrate the Islamic Republic into the post-Cold War international context but also to defuse Western pressures against the Islamic Republic”. The “dialogue” instrument has become one of the pillars of Iranian revolutionary foreign policy, an instrument that been used during Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani presidency then Khatami. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that in the 1990s, the term *goft-o-gu*, which means both “dialogue” and “discourse”, was widely used among academic quarterly titles published by Iranian intellectuals supporting the reformist movement. It was also the main principle of the rhetorical change that characterized the discourse of Iranian public diplomacy during the Khatami presidency. However, the supporters of the reformist president acknowledged that the idea of dialogue of civilizations was not sufficient to address Iran’s foreign policy concerns.

Indeed, Khatami “hoped that this conceptual paradigm would lead to a reduction in international tensions and a détente with the outside world”. Such instrument could help in strengthening diplomacy but not the Iranian intensified issues such as it relations with U.S. and the nuclear issue. Khatami was not able to implement his agenda of detent and rapprochement with the West beyond the cultural and economic sphere, something that made his instrument of “dialogue” serve just as a rhetoric, therefore substance was needed in order to implement a policy of détente.

Khatami’s “dialogue” helped to change the diplomatic relationships between Iran and Asia and Europe, more than their relationship with U.S. Thus, the EU-Iranian relations, blossomed under Khatami and frustrated American and Israeli attempts to isolate Tehran. The most significant hurdle to improved EU-Iranian relations—Ayatollah Khomeini’s 1989 fatwa against British author Salman Rushdie—was resolved in the fall of 1998 through negotiations between Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi and his British counterpart, Robin Cook. The triumph of national interest over ideology couldn’t have been clearer.

Khatami did a little in making Iran less isolated in regards to its relationship with U.S. He emphasized to the world that Iran is not to be a regional power and it is pursuing nuclear weapon for peaceful purposes. Khatami also in his first term hosted the Organization of the Islamic Conference to release Iran from its isolation and to reapproach the Muslim and the Arab world. “The summit was followed by his famous interview with Christiane Amanpour on CNN (in January 1998), where he called for American-Iranian cultural exchanges among scholars, artists, athletes and tourists. He proclaimed admiration for American political traditions”. He also emphasized that America’s imperial policies of domination toward some countries in the Middle East are against such tradition and great civilization. Khatami also blamed Iranian-American hostility on Washington when he stated that: “as long as the US is after harming Iran’s interests and independence, Iran will have no relations with the US”. So, on the issue of tension between the two states, he said that it is time to “crack the wall of mistrust that had

built up between America and Iran". U.S. was dealing with Khatami in the same way he did which is using rhetoric as Clinton made fair statements that Iran has the legitimacy to stand against anyone who is interfering in its domestic affairs. For example, the US issued an indirect apology about the CIA coup in 1953. Nonetheless, neither diplomacy nor the smiling mullah's soft rhetoric could lift economic sanctions during Clinton administration, and unfortunately, Iran in Khatami's second term was placed by the new Administration of George Bush under the list of "axis of evil".

The OIC nevertheless, in regards to Iran's relations with the Arab states, helped to shutter the long decades animosity between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Khatami visited Saudi Arabia to meet with Crown Prince Abdullah in which it regarded as the first visit since the revolution. In 2001 "Iran and Saudi Arabia signed a historic security pact for combating crime, terrorism, money laundering and surveillance of borders and territorial waters".

Moreover, Dr. Ghoncheh Tazmini, professor at University of London stated "the methodological hurdle that Khatami could not overcome in his attempt to implement his dialogue agenda, namely his inability to build a consensus inside the political elite to establish a dialogue with the West". However, the question is not about whether or not to convince the political elite but perhaps about convincing the supreme leader! More importantly does the president have the ability in the IRI (Islamic Republic of Iran) power structure to shape foreign policy visa-vie the supreme leader's unlimited powers?

The struggle between the factional elite was whether to pursue ideological justification or national and economic interests. It can be seen that although "Khatami chaired the Supreme National Security Council (the SNSC, the country's top foreign policy body), and selected his chosen foreign and defense ministers (Kharazi & Shamkhani, respectively), he still had to remain wary of domestic sensibilities". Khatami's diplomatic relationships was supported by the supreme leader however, he could not implement a rigorous foreign policy regarding the rapprochement with the U.S. because of factional political elite in the Iranian system was divided on such an important issue. The conservatives represented by the supreme leader see that Iranian security should be ahead of any economic development, something that the pragmatists and the reformists are pursuing. Moreover, conservatives have some sort of mistrust toward the West especially U.S. and Zionism, as the Zionists lobby is influencing Washington decision making on Iran. In 2001 "at the end of Khatami's first term, this defensiveness was articulated by the head of the judiciary, Ayatollah Mahmoud Shahroudi, in these words: our national interests lie with antagonizing the Great Satan. We condemn any cowardly stance toward American and any word on compromise with the Great Satan". This emphasizes Ghoncheh's point on Khatami's failure in convincing the political elite when it comes to establishing dialogue with the West.

The supreme leader Khomeini Undermined attempts to establish ties with the U.S. by continuing the support of Islamist radical groups in other Muslim countries, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza/West Bank. Moreover, while Khatami aimed at a dialogue with the U.S., Khamenei considered a Dialogue with America even more harmful than establishing ties with the country. As a result, though

since 1997 Iranian foreign policy has changed in its orientation and instruments, its substance (Islamic, anti-Americanism, anti-Israel, and independence) has remained much the same.

It can be noted that, “at the theoretical level, it is true that there is a close relationship between power and the dynamic of ideas in state behavior. Nevertheless, the case of President Khatami’s administration demonstrates that the correlation between discourse in public diplomacy and state action is, to say the least, only partially present”. Such disconnection must be noted because of the Iranian system of governance, in which the supreme leader is the main player in Iranian foreign policy.

Does such clash between the institution of the supreme leader and the president institution is impacting Iranian foreign policy? The former president Rafsanjani stated in regards to Iran-U.S. tens relationship that the relationship is “more of a political notion than a religious mandate, Our ideology is flexible”. Rafsanjani depicted the very aspect of Khamenei’s foreign policy, which is a foreign policy that can be best described by the 19th century British statesmen Lord Palmerston: “when people ask me for what is called apolicy, the only answer is that we mean to do what may seem to be best upon each occasion as it arises, making the interests of our country ones’s principle”. Such a method has been inherited in Khomeini’s foreign policy. As it can be seen that Khomeini’s decision reaffirmed Iran’s ideological goals while ensuring that those goals would not necessarily be actively pursued. The “liberation” of Jerusalem would remain a rhetorical vehicle to win legitimacy in the Arab world, but not an ideal to be pursued for its own purpose with concrete actions, in order not to jeopardize Iran’s short-term security needs. “It reaffirmed that our policy towards the region had a soft-power and hard power side. We always declare our views and our beliefs. But that does not mean that we need to operationalize these views into actual policy”, argued former Deputy Foreign Minister Vaezi.

Khomeinism or Khamenei’s foreign policy depends on strategy as an ideology and an ideology as a strategy. Ayatollah Khamenei has noted that, “regarding our vital issues, we are not sentimental. We do not make decisions based on emotion. We make decisions through calculations”.

Thus, we can see that the *Wilayat al Faqih* system of governance did not affect the Iranian foreign policies during Khatami’s presidency. Most importantly “the slogan of ‘Death to America’, that came with the beginning of the Iranian revolution did not prevent in some stages from rapprochement or collaboration if ‘interests’ assumes that without having such attempts be in a formal political situation or under the direct orders of the supreme leader”.

After the 9/11 attacks, Iranian factional elite started again to debate the issue of preserving the Iranian national interest based on whether or not to establish relationships with the U.S. Such a debatable issue intensified between the political elite after the U.S. preparations for waging a war on Afghanistan, in which Taliban posed a significant threat to the Iranian state. In this context, Khamenei’s foreign policy offered assistance to the U.S. in such war. Thus, Iran successfully helped U.S. to overthrow Taliban as “Iran had considerable influence with the Northern Alliance, the insurgency that had been battling the Taliban since the mid-1990s. Tehran used this influence to help the United States secure agreement among all elements of the Afghan opposition on a new government that took office in Kabul in

December of 2001, only a few weeks after the Taliban's ouster".

This is the kind of "dialogue" that Khamenei wanted to establish not Khatami. The fruits of Khamenei's dialogue with the U.S. can be seen also in U.S. intervention of Iraq to overthrow Saddam regime, something that made Iran offer assistance to the U.S. insurgency, but failed to have any response, however, after the overthrow of the regime, Iran offered the U.S. assistance because of the Iraqi sectarian divide.

5. Khatami & Iran's Regional Role in the Middle East

Khatami as a reformist did not transform Iran's relationship with the Arab states much, as his policies toward the Arabian Gulf were more or less a continuation of Rafsanjani's policies. Rafsanjani was following a policy of detent as a strategy to sustain Iran's economic developments and national interests after the Iraq-Iran war. Thus it can be seen that regarding regional peace and security, President Khatami in his address to the eighth summit of the OIC in Tehran in 1997 said that "the Islamic Republic of Iran, considers the establishment of regional security and cooperation with the participation of all the States in the Persian Gulf. Also, the adoption of reliable measures that would bear fruit of lasting security in the region and towards the creation of a common defense of shared interests and concerns of all countries and nations". Moreover, Khatami's policy of detent in the region and especially toward the Arabian Gulf was working as a policy of normalization. Furthermore, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister in Asia-Pacific Affairs, Mohsen Aminzadeh, stated that "the detente policy and reliance-building guidelines as well as developing regional and international peace and stability in line with Iran's political and economic development are the main foundations of Iran's foreign policy". In regards, to such policy of normalization with countries in the region, the Supreme leader and his conservative camp were supporting such a policy, but they would refuse any normalization policies with the U.S. and Israel. Khamenei's support of normalization with the countries in the region such as the Arabian Gulf wouldn't hurt the most important thing in Iran's foreign policy, which is *Wilayat al Faqih's* ideology.

Khatami was assuring the Arabian Gulf that Iran has no intention of taking power in the Arabian Gulf. For example Khatami was the first Iranian president to visit Arab counties in the last twenty years. In the 1999 he visited number of Arab countries such as Syria, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. His diplomatic relations and visits to Arab countries demonstrates that Iran mean no harm for Arab states, which helped in having improved relationships between Iran and Arab states. Such improved relationships are a result of Iran's ideological abandonment of the export of the revolution. During such time Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia have improved. However, for relationships between Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on the issue of the Islands was complex and still unresolved.

It can be said that Khatami's policy of normalization with the full support of the supreme Leader toward the Arabian Gulf made a calm relationships between Iran and the Arab states. However, Iran's shi'i ideology in the region is something that always haunts Arab's stability and security. For example,

Saudi Arabia is still a potential rival for Iran and rapprochement with it may demonstrate that regional leaders are interested in going over negotiations and other possible peaceful means in order to solve their interstate conflicts. Still, both parties are skeptical as the ideology of Iran-Arab relations is playing a dominant role for centuries, and appeared clearly for the Arab world after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Indeed Iran's shi'i ideology is the main reason for deepening the conflict between Iran and Arab states, taking the latter as a representative of Sunni states. As it can be seen the "dramatic transformation in Iran's regional environment occurred in the context of the fall of Baghdad in March-April 2003. Thanks to the USA's military intervention, Iran's most immediate geopolitical and ideological challenger, in the shape of Saddam's regime in Iraq, was obliterated in one fell swoop". Such regime fall strengthened the Shia who was dependent on Iran for survival. The influence of Iran in the region became greater when Iraq became Shia dominated state that seeks the economic, social and military support from Iran.

6. Ahmadinejad's Foreign Policy

Ahmadinejad's rise to power meant the rise of the neoconservative faction. However, it will be further discussed whether or not Ahmadinejad serves as neoconservative or what can be called *Ahmadinejadism* phenomenon.

Did Ahmadinejad make a shift in Iranian foreign policy after Khatami in regards to the Iran-U.S. relations. What kind of challenges did Ahmadinejad face in foreign policy making? Did he receive much support from the supreme leader? Since, the supreme leader's support means institutional support thereby legitimacy to practice or deliver actions. The research will further demonstrates whether Ahmadinejad's presidential power of policy making in relation to the supreme leader's power serves as the climax in the history of Iranian presidency under *Wilayat al Faqih* system of governance.

For example, in figure 3 and 4 below, the research is suggesting that the circle represents Iranian foreign policy. According to Amir Yousefi, professor at *Shahid Beheshti University* of Iran, "Iran's foreign policy has been confrontational-assertive and accommodationist-active simultaneously". Thus the research used the circle to represent that in figure 3. Moreover as shown in figure 4. Iranian presidents of the Islamic Republic were following each other policies but with a slightly different tactics with the stick representing Khamenei's foreign policy, as the supreme leader is the one who is responsible for steering Iranian foreign policy.

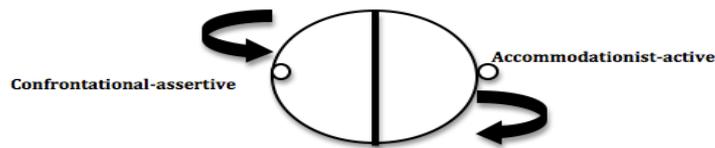


Figure 3. The Circle of Iran's Foreign Policy Moving between or within Two Points (Actions)

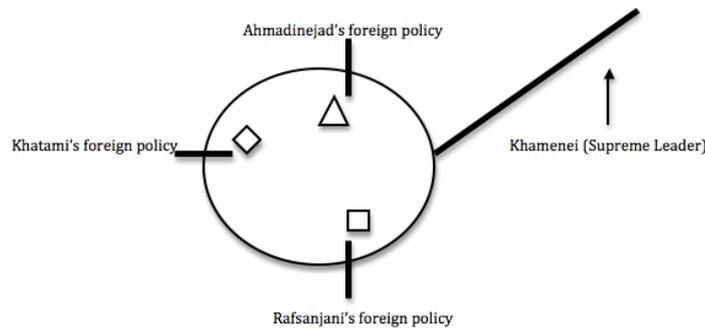


Figure 4. The Supreme Leader Steering the Circle of Iran's Foreign Policy

The most important things for the Iranian people are economy and foreign policy, thus, the new president Rouhani said when stepping in office that he wants to change his predecessor's bombastic foreign policy saying that: "his government will adjust its tactics to reach out to world powers". But he said the Islamic Republic would retain its principles. Rouhani also, said during the inauguration of Iran's new foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif. "Foreign policy is not where one can speak or take a position without paying attention". Rouhani made some important notions in his speech, namely that he will use tactics in his foreign policy (these where the president tasks lie) but that the "Islamic Republic will retain to its principles". In other words, the president has the power to use tactics but not without the power of the supreme leader authority, the guardian of how should Iran's foreign policy work. Rouhani further states that "we do not have the right to use foreign policy to chant slogans or clap", which what Ahmadinejad's did during his presidency in which he tried to shift the Islamic Republic identity from an Islamic empire to a nationalist (Persian) Empire, that is against Khamenei (Wilayat al Faqih's foreign policy). Why would it be dangerous if the president shifted Iran's foreign policy? Is it going to hurt the regime or Iran's national interest? As it can be seen that in the Iranian system of governance, the president has room for maneuvering when making a domestic policies, but does he have such room when making foreign policies?

Moreover, Rouhani speaking of change in Iranian foreign policy raises the question of who can change Iran's foreign policy the president or the supreme leader? Or is it the kind of change that the supreme leader wants to implement on Iran's foreign policy whenever a new president came to power? For example, can Ahmadinejad adopt a different ideology or tactics in making Iran's foreign policy, or

would he be doomed to fail as Khatami's tactic of "Civilization dialogue" doomed to fail. Finally, when listening to Ahmadinejad's international speeches, is the president trying to deliver his own voice (view on Iranian foreign policy) or the supreme leader's voice?

7. Ahmadinejad and Iran-U.S. Relations

While Khatami used "dialogue between civilizations" as a tactic in his foreign policy making, Ahmadinejad the populist used "*Mahdism* or *Mahdist* rhetoric" as a tactic. Ahmadinejad used such tactic to confront both the international system and *Wilayat al Faqih* system of governance. In addition Ahmadinejad's *Mahdist* rhetoric is based on a political/sectarian doctrine in which it emphasize the role of *Wilayat al Faqih* doctrine on the Islamic Republic. Ahmadinejad took support from the literature of the revolution and the writings of the founder of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini, and his successor Khamenei.

Therefore it can be noted that "Ahmadinejad's second mandate has seen more focus on this rhetoric in his speeches and statements; unlike previous presidents, Ahmadinejad insisted on opening all his speeches and official talks with the prayer for a hastening of the reappearance of the occult Imam". Moreover, Ahmadinejad tried to establish a linkage of such rhetoric with the claim of having a successful government administration. First he stated that the reason for his victory in the 2009 controversial elections is because of Imam Mahdi blessings on him. Also, that the success of his government's programs is because of Imam Mahdi, and his victory in his international speeches regarding facing the Western control over Iran and the nuclear issue were because of the blessings of Imam Mahdi.

Ahmadinejad in 2005, stated once that while he was delivering a speech to the UN General Assembly, he was "encased in an aura of light for the duration of his address. This version of the event engendered a wave of criticism in Iran after it spread across the Internet. At the time, some observers regarded Ahmadinejad's words as an indicator of the vision that would guide his actions during his presidency". Furthermore, "Ahmadinejad and his team believed that they should pave the way for emerging Mahdi (the Shiite religious hero who will come back in Apocalypse) and establish a Utopia in Iran and the world (Chatham House, 2006). On this basis, they seek justice and fair international system and try to change the status quo". Moreover, Ahmadinejad since he came to office emphasized Iranian revolutionary foreign policy. As the international community's particular way of treating the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially the West's way of dealing with president Khatami, has reinforced Ahmadinejad's assertive foreign policy. In spite of domestic developments in Iran and the Khatami Administration inclination towards improvement of relations with the outside world, particularly the Western countries and adopting a moderate foreign policy based on détente and peaceful coexistence, Iran was placed in the "axis of evil". In the nuclear issue, Khatami Administration adopted a moderate stance and suspended enrichment but the Western countries did not reciprocate in at least giving Iran security guarantees.

Thus, the way that Ahmadinejad bombarded speeches serves as a backlash against U.S. and its allies. In one of his UN speeches Ahmadinejad emphasized that the U.S. as an imperialist power deemed to be unfit for world governance. Ahmadinejad's bombastic speeches made diplomatic delegations leave the UN, first to leave was U.S. delegation, it was when Ahmadinejad referred to the September 11 attacks as an inside job and a pretext to invade Iraq and Afghanistan, and that US and its allies started targeting Iran. Ahmadinejad stressed that Iran is under sanctions over its nuclear programme, as a result of challenging orthodoxy. He said "by using their imperialistic media network which is under the influence of colonialism, they threaten anyone who questions the Holocaust and the September 11 event with sanctions and military actions". This is how Ahmadinejad's dealt with U.S. and its allies in his speeches, emphasizing his position against U.S.

However, although Ahmadinejad showed his support to the revolutionary character and goals of Khomeini against imperialism and Israel, he was at the same time eager to have dialogue with the U.S. Ahmadinejad sent in 2006 a letter to U.S. former president George Bush (as if it is part of diplomatic relations) however, there was no reply back from the U.S. to such a letter. Unfortunately, conservatives and reformists accused Ahmadinejad for pushing himself towards America more than it should be.

According to such accusation, it is worth questioning of whether or not Ahmadinejad speeches against the great Satan were just rhetoric! It can be said though that Ahmadinejad combined between the rhetoric against U.S. and the rush toward having a dialogue with it, but why? According to Hooshang AmirAhmadi, president of the Association for Relations between Iran and U.S., known as the Godfather of relations between the two countries, talked about Ahmadinejad's hidden love to the United States, says that Ahmadinejad tendency toward America is "a combination of love and hate, but he is facing the pressure from traditional fundamentalists influence in Iran and finds himself forced each time to show his hatred without being able to show his love. On the issue of Ahmadinejad negotiation with the U.S., Amir Ahmadi stated that Ahmadinejad is found to have a rhetoric with two faces, that he cannot hide the desire for open negotiations with the U.S. but at the same time he knows the sensitivity of such attempt inside Iran so in order to make things easier for him he substituted the word "call for dialogue" for "call for debate"; a framework that made dramatically controversial headlines. Furthermore Amir Ahmadi "compares between Ahmadinejad and Khatami regarding relations with Washington and says that: Khatami said to Americans: You are good but I cannot talk to you, while Ahmadinejad said to them: You are bad, but I want to negotiate with you".

The most important issue in Ahmadinejad's presidency is the nuclear issue, which serves as a huge challenge in his foreign policy making agenda. However, it is important to note that with such challenge, the nuclear issue is totally at the hands of Khamenei. Furthermore, "in 2003, Iran, under President Muhammad Khatami, with Rouhani as his chief nuclear negotiator, had voluntarily suspended its enrichment programme for two years and allowed intrusive inspections by the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in order to allay US and European fears about its nuclear programme. However, because the U.S. president then was George W. Bush who acted according to the

neo-conservatives agendas and principles together with the Zionist lobbies in the U.S., he ignored such gesture and ratcheted up sanction. Ahmadinejad when he came to office made a backlash against the Bush's action and he "escalated uranium enrichment and increased the installation of centrifuges from 164 in 2003 to 19,000 in 2013". Ahmadinejad knew that the West did not want Iran to complete its nuclear activities even within the framework of NPT, thus the foreign policy during Ahmadinejad was more of confrontational foreign policy toward the West, and in which is in line with the Supreme leader's foreign policy. Ahmadinejad's advisor and Mohammadi, former deputy of Mottaki, say that from Ahmadinejad's point of view, "Khatami's foreign policy did not enjoy enough power as well as resolve in order to prevent foreign states' intervention, particularly regarding the nuclear policies. Therefore, the Ahmadinejad Administration tried to avoid passiveness by adopting a confrontational foreign policy". Nevertheless, it is not yet clear enough whether if it was Khatami's foreign policy in dealing with the West was a mistake or if it is actually Khamenei's mistake! Who should be blamed for Iranian foreign policy making? Who should take the responsibilities for delivering such policies, the impact of implementing it (noting that foreign policy is related to domestic politics), the supreme leader or the president? These are important questions.

For example, the impact of Ahmadinejad's nuclear policy is disastrous on Iran's economic, and social well-being. Again is it possible for the president (Ahmadinejad) not to implement the nuclear policy that the Supreme leader is controlling? It is hard not to mention how much Ahmadinejad is influential in Iran but in regards to taking decisions without the supreme leader's approval, especially on foreign policy is not possible. Therefore, the strength of the president's abilities to make and influence policymaking in Iran is worth questioning as a strong president who represents the will of the people and the state interests could easily maintain and have greater authority. Thus "it could be hard for any Supreme Guide, to veto a package of popular reforms presented by a strong president. The presidency is a bully pulpit that, if used effectively, could mobilize public support for policies that the revolutionary organs might regard as not radical enough or even counter revolutionary".

In order to gain support for the president, Ahmadinejad tried to view that the economic problems that Iran is going through is not because of him (as he is not the person who holds the nuclear issue). Although economic problems existed before Ahmadinejad, however, the U.S.-led sanctions made things worse even for Ahmadinejad's populist economic plans. "The combined effects of draconian Western sanctions, corruption and sheer mismanagement are hitting the economy badly. High inflation and rising unemployment are adversely affecting working people and the salaried middle class. Food prices are rising from one day to the next, and many are being pushed further into poverty". Furthermore, on the issue of currency crisis, economists agree that it has been triggered by the financial sanctions which on top of a huge reduction in oil revenues from the EU, made it harder for Iran to carry on injecting petrodollars into markets to keep exchange rates down. What is making it worse is that the country is plagued by a power struggle between Ahmadinejad and Khamenei, said one Iranian analyst, so instead of handling the crisis the president is preoccupied by the arrest of his press advisor and the

central bank seems completely undecided and shifts from one policy to another.

Criticizing the government policies is a losing game in Iran, more importantly, critiques of the Iranian nuclear programme, a project under the auspices of Khamenei's office, will most likely not be heard. The impact of economic sanctions is something that Ahmadinejad blamed for and "although all foreign and defense policies are determined by the Supreme Leader, members of Khamenei's inner circle allege that Ahmadinejad's nuclear policies are the cause of UN, U.S. and European Union sanctions that have harshly impacted Iranian oil exports and banks". However, after all this, what the system was trying to do in that it was convincing the people that it is mainly Ahmadinejad's responsibilities.

Media in Iran also had a role in making the president responsible for the economic crisis that the Iranian people are facing. For example, an article published Wednesday, Oct. 3, by the Baztab website—a media outlet with ties to Mohsen Rezai, the former commander of the IRGC in which it tried to accuse Ahmadinejad's nuclear policies for "intervening in nuclear negotiations by replacing then-chief negotiator Ali Larijani with Saeed Jalili. Baztab claimed that Larijani had reached a consensus draft in 2008 with Javier Solana, then the-chief foreign-affairs official of the EU, which was approved by Khamenei. However, Ahmadinejad publicly refuted the draft and removed Larijani from his post". Thus, the article served as a pretext to absolve Khamenei of the consequences of the country's nuclear policies in which Ahmadinejad has no control of it.

Nonetheless, during Ahmadinejad last visit to the UN he tried to give several suggestions over the nuclear negotiations, a move that evoked the hardliner Hossein Shariatmadari whose the editor-in-chief of Keyhan newspaper—which served as the supreme leader mouthpiece. The editor tried to remind the president of his limited powers, stating that the president should not go against the legal authority of the Supreme leader regarding changing nuclear policies. He then supported his article at the end with Khamenei's reasons of why Iran should not go for negotiations with the U.S. Ahmadinejad tried to rid himself of the blame that was put on him and to throw it over Khamenei and his system of governance. He stated in his press conference, that "state television and other media criticize him and his cabinet, while awarding the judiciary and parliament a free pass, because I am the only person who is accountable before the people". For Khamenei blaming Ahmadinejad a thing that has many reasons: he wanted to show Ahmadinejad that the presidency has no independent power under his regime, as it served as a threat to the *mullah* regime. He also wanted to make Ahmadinejad a scapegoat if he wishes to initiate a new round of nuclear negotiations following the US presidential elections. The leader can then portray himself as much wiser than Ahmadinejad in order to reassure the West about his rationality and willingness to reach a deal. This would make it much easier for him to justify compromising over the nuclear dispute to the Iranian people as well.

8. Ahmadinejad and Iran's Regional Role in the Middle East

The U.S. president may opt to do he will make Iran, perforce, even more powerful than it is. Accommodating the Islamic Republic will give it even more From what is previously discussed it is noted that: "Ahmadinejad has adopted confrontational-assertive and accommodationist-active foreign policy at the same time". Ahmadinejad accommodationist active foreign policy was toward the third world, mainly the Muslim world, and his confrontational foreign policy was toward the West. However, Ahmadinejad had to adopt such foreign policy, as it is part of the nature of the *Wilayat al Faqih* system of governance, which is to adopt the supreme leader's foreign policy. Thus the president has no choice but to abide by Khamenei's simultaneous use of confrontational-assertive and accommodationist-active foreign policy.

Other than taking care of post-Iraq civil strife, Iranian foreign policy during the turbulent Ahmadinejad's presidency was also focusing on the Arab-Israel conflict together with their role in the Arab Spring. This helps to see that Iranian foreign policy does not only trying to manage to overcome conflict of power inside the system plus domestic problems, but also trying to manage to hold on the interplay of Islamist ideology and nationalistic mandate.

Iranian nuclear program made Israel and the Arabian Gulf afraid that it would threaten the stability of the Middle East. Nonetheless, Iran views Israel and the West to be behind the game of projecting Iran as a threat if it had a nuclear power. Thus, "the conduct of Iran's foreign relations represents a picture far from the idea of Ahmadinejad leading Iran down a path of isolation and painful retraction. Nor does his foreign policy provide evidence of his naivety in designing a strategy or misunderstanding international politics".

Therefore, Ahmadinejad by accusing Israel of being a threat when he said that: "this Zionist regime should be wiped off the map". He wanted to shift the image of Iran depicted as a threat by the West and Israel, and to direct the Muslim world and reminded it of their real enemy that is occupying Jerusalem. Ahmadinejad used the tactic of "populism-international" in order to win the alliance of not only the Muslim world, as a Muslim state who is responsible for the Palestinian case, but also with the third world countries that is anti-American, anti-Western.

Such populist-international move by Ahmadinejad served as a significant attempt toward mobilizing the Muslim world to be stronger internationally and to prevent any US suggestion to build alliances with the Muslim world against Iran. Ahmadinejad supported his move as since coming to office he has visited seven countries all of them being Muslim-dominated. In addition, "he has held more than 45 foreign meetings, predominately with representatives from Muslim states that are seen to be rouge, anti-American or anti-Western on the international arena (such as Venezuela & Cuba). Also, he has communicated with over 52 leaders—mainly in the Muslim world but also with leaders in Latin America and Africa".

Furthermore, in his foreign policy Ahmadinejad tried to substitute the world of Islam with Persian nationalism, something that is against not only *Wilayat al Faqih system* of governance but also against

Iranian (Khamenei's) foreign policy. Ahmadinejad used the Arab spring in his battle against the regime (Khamenei and his supporters), showing that he supports the people's will, painting in the minds of the Iranian people the populist leader. For example, he started to use the slogan of "long live spring" in his speeches, and in which some explained as being a hint to the Arab Spring. According to the opening to one of the newspaper's editorial, "this style of thinking and talking about (the human awakening) is a political maneuver and a dangerous work." The Ahmadinejad maneuver in its entirety is concerning his legacy, these efforts is to keep all of his political power and his allies, according to experts.

Nevertheless, the conflicting roles that Iran is playing in the Bahraini and Syrian revolution made Iran as (an Islamic state) appear in a complex situation in relation to the Islamic world and the international relations. The Syrian revolution exposed that Syria was in a strong alliance with Iran that is not restricted to political ties nor a limited time. So in regards to ending the Syrian crackdown it was most unexpected that Ahmadinejad supported other world leader's stand against the crackdown and "called for President Assad to end his violent crackdown of an uprising challenging his authoritarian rule in Syria". Ahmadinejad showed to the world that the president is aware of what was happening in Syria which was contrary to Khamenei's statements on Syria, that what was happening is not a revolution and not part of the Arab spring uprising.

For example, An article posted in the Reformist newspaper *Rooz* "Playing with Khamenei in Syria's Field?" stated that during an interview in *al-Minar* Television, Ahmadinejad took a 180 degrees position that is different from of Khamenei's views on Syria. His views came regarding the issue of Iran's foreign policy and the biggest challenge that it is facing in the Middle East, which is revolution against Assad, Iran's ally. At the interview Ahmadinejad said: "the people and government of Syria had to sit together and come to an agreement on reforms. He also said that the Syrian people must have the right to elections, freedom and justice, adding that a schedule should be agreed on this and the West not be allowed to intervene in its affairs". Such statements were different from Supreme Leader's position on the issue. According to an informed source who spoke with *Rooz*, the Supreme Leader's advisor on International affairs called Ahmadinejad a day before the interview and told him to maintain the same position of the Supreme leader. However, Ahmadinejad maintained his own views in order to get some concession from the supreme leader on Iran's domestic policies. Is it possible that Ahmadinejad way of using his own tools was actually against the supreme leader more than against Assad and his regime?

In regards to the supreme leader stand on Syria on the other hand Khamenei stated that: The events in Syria are fundamentally different in nature from those occurring in the other countries of the Middle East. By trying to simulate in Syria the events that occurred in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and Libya, the Americans are trying to create problems for Syria, a country that is on the path of resistance. The Islamic awakening in the regional countries is anti-Zionist and anti-American in nature. America and Israel are clearly involved in the events in Syria. The movement of the people of Bahrain is similar to the movement of the people of Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, and there is no sense in distinguishing between these similar movements.

It can be noted how the international conflict around Syria is developing more like a “sick man” in the region. An issue that even if the president of Iran wants to solve by himself, he wouldn’t be able to do so because of his limited powers inside the system of governance. Also, because, the Syrian issue lies in the hands of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and (until today) the government of President Hassan Rouhani does not have a say in it. Although Syria is becoming more and more costly to Iran, especially given that there are no short-term prospects of a political resolution to the crisis. Syria remains a crucial component in Iran’s policy to becoming the dominating power in the region.

However, Iran is seeing the “Arab Spring” as a golden opportunity to export Khomeini revolution to the Middle East. It also emphasizes the idea that the “Arab Spring” is influenced by the Iranian revolution. Like what Ahmadinejad said: “Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions are products of Imam. One can witness the hand of Imam in managing it”. Ahmadinejad is relating his messianic beliefs by saying that what the world is going through now, (meaning “Arab Spring”) is by Al Mahdi’s work and that this will help the world to get rid of the U.S. and Israel. It is also, something that his leader (Khamenei) emphasized before him. However, it seems that Al Mahdi does not want to have a Syrian revolution in the first place, and that can be seen through Iran’s reactions, especially Khamenei’s speeches.

While for Bahrain, Iranian foreign policy showed that when the Shi’i community in Bahrain were persecuted, or when the rights of the Hazara people of Afghanistan were violated, Iran spoke up about the rights of the Shia. It is only when Shi’i rights are at stake that Iran adopts the rhetoric of human rights and civil freedoms. Whereas when it comes to Syria, it is indifferent to the humanitarian situation. Iran has not donated a single penny to support Syrian refugees.

Also, it can be seen how Iran using Shi’ism as a Trojan horse in Arab states. “Iran has repeatedly denied having claims over Bahrain but the tensions have underscored the deep suspicions between Sunni-ruled Gulf Arab nations and non-Arab, Shiite Muslim Iran. Gulf Arab states are concerned about spreading Iranian influence in Iraq, Lebanon and the Gaza Strip and its potential effect on their own Shiite communities”.

Ali Khamenei made a comment over the Bahraini uprising stating that Iran is not supporting Shi’i protestors in Bahrain, and that what is happening in Bahrain has nothing to do with Shi’ism or Sunnism. Khamenei’s statement made viewing the situation as being sarcastic, he is giving us one option towards such a statement that if it’s not about “sectarianism” as he claimed then it would surely be about Iran. Khamenei supported his claim by saying that “Iran has been supporting the Sunni Muslims in Palestine over the past 32 years and this shows that Iran makes no difference between Shi’is and Sunnis. Khamenei said also that the Saudi military intervention in Bahrain is a mistake and that the Bahraini people only demand to have one vote for one leader. Iran’s conflicting roles in Bahraini and Syrian revolution reflected its agendas. For Bahrain it used the instrument of mobilizing Shi’is to overthrow monarchical system of Bahrain under the guise of freedom and human rights as the principles of people’s revolution. And when Syrian people fought for the same principles, the Iranian regime labeled

their revolution as a Western conspiracy meant to harm the “Axis of Resistance”.

Moreover, in the 2013 Islamic Summit, Iran used its own translation regarding the Syrian revolution. The translator replaced the word Bahraini instead of the Syrian revolution during Egyptian president Morsi speech. Iran’s Persian translation for the situation may work with the Bahraini Shi’i but not with Sunni Bahraini nor with the Syrian opposition.

The regional and international problems that Iran is facing had a role in revealing the discord between the supreme leader and the president. The latter used Mahdism to support or give more legitimacy to his presidency. Ahmadinejad kept referring to Imam Mahdi in his political speeches as a bullying tool against Khamenei. Thus Ahmadinejad is not following fundamentalist nor reformist but *Ahmadinejadism*. Ahmadinejad used Mahdi as tool of power inside the *Wilayat al Faqih* system and outside it. While Khamenei use of Mahdi is only from a divine perspective (that some said that Imam Khamenei is in a direct contact with Imam Mahdi) to maintain the aura of divine power surrounding Khamenei. On the contrary, Ahmadinejad wanted to wipe off this aura surrounded by Khamenei to show the people that he and Khamenei are in the same level, and the president should not be less powerful. Ahmadinejad did exploit the people’s belief of Mahdism as much as his master Khamenei did. Moreover, he tried to preach nationalism, bringing back Iran role not as an Islamic state but as a Persian state, which is the opposite to Khamenei’s ideology of foreign policy.

Furthermore, it can be noted that the Iranian president cannot really maintain a final decision regarding Iran’s power visa via the international system or between states without Khamenei’s power and support, as he is facing a problem inside the system of governance itself. Iranian foreign policy making reflects not only power struggle between the supreme leader and the president but also the struggle between the state and the revolution interests, that public policy making is trapped in such struggle, whether to make a policy for the interest of the state or the revolution.

In short, in Iran there is a political factionalism between the elite on foreign policy making divided into two camps: supporters of Khamenei’s foreign policy and supporters of non-Khamenei’s foreign policy, the latter is represented by the Iranian president and his supporters. Thus such factionalism is a projection of the power struggle between the supreme leader institution and the presidency institution. The question is does such power struggle in the system affects foreign policy making? The *Wilayat al Faqih* system of governance impact over foreign policy is paradoxical, the power struggle in the system over foreign policy making has an impact inside Iran more than outside Iran. As Khamenei with such power struggle in the system is trying to balance the aspect of ideology and interest in foreign policy, that is taking care of domestic policies in order not to influence or jeopardize the *Wilayat al Faqih* system of governance. Thus, we can see that part of the nature of Iran’s foreign policy is to preserve the regime of *Wilayat al Faqih* system of governance since its establishment in 1979. This can be noted in Khamenei’s Friday Prayer speeches, emphasizing the role of the revolution in establishing such system of governance that the superpowers want to remove.

Although *Wilayat al Faqih* system of governance foreign policymaking hurt Iranian domestic politics,

it made Iran rise as regional power in the Middle East.

The resourceful clerics in Iran had turned themselves into the key strategic factor in any move that Obama may make in the region—and in that in an age of asymmetric warfare, whatever regional power and prestige; attacking it will instantly bring out its scarcely hidden nature as basically a guerrilla operation and a garrison state.

For example, Iran role in Iraq as the overthrow of Saddam Hussein was a gift from U.S. to Iran together with Iranian support to overthrow the Taliban government all served Iran more than the U.S. Obama will have to solicit, one way or another, the active support of the Islamic Republic of Iran—and in achieving that end he will have to concede their regional share of power, which might include accepting a nuclear dot on an “axis of evil”. Syrian situation today serves as a better example of how Iran’s role is significant in solving such a festering sore in the region. Nevertheless, the fundamental challenge for IRI’s foreign policy is domestic pressure and preserving the legitimacy of the regime. Also, the “fundamental domestic challenge to the very legitimacy of the Islamic Republic puts all its regional allies under strategic and logistic pressure”.

Furthermore, on the issue of Iran’s relationship Arab–Israeli conflict, “a key pillar of Iranian revolutionary government’s foreign policy is rhetorical opposition to Israel but practical collaboration with the Jewish State”. Nevertheless, the Shah had close ties with Israel made the new clerical regime want to fix the Arab–Persian relationships, through using political Islam. So, “that orientation intensified Tehran’s need to oppose Israel, even though clandestine security ties with the Jewish state continued”. However, Ben-Ami Israeli, a former foreign minister, stated that “Iran was an enemy of the peace process, it was not interested in a peace agreement between Israel and the Arab world, probably because this could have isolated Iran further”.

Furthermore, Iran’s supreme leader told the head of Hamas that “the holy war for Palestine is for the honor of Islam and Muslims, and we will continue our firm support for the Palestinian people despite all the political and economic pressure, and that the issue of Jerusalem was not a Palestinian problem, but one for all Muslims”. However, it was easier for Iran to emphasize such rhetoric rather than confirming their words into a political action. Such slogans of supporting the intifada were rarely followed by concrete actions, even after the outbreak of the second Intifada. Even the Iranian people knew how much Iran supported the Intifada, as “a joke in the streets of Tehran reflected Iran’s pretense: “why aren’t there any stones left to stone the adulteress? Per the order of the Supreme Leader, all the stones have been shipped to Palestine as Iran’s contribution to the Intifada”.

Collaborating with Israel and the U.S. is something that would put the religious ideology in which the regime is based on in jeopardy. The rhetoric of the Supreme leader is constantly being against the state actions, as Iranian foreign policy has a nationalistic interest that disguised with Islamist ideology.

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