

IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY: TOWARD A CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE

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***Abstract:** This paper tries to analyze Iranian foreign policy based on Holistic Constructivism. The article argues that holistic constructivism is considered the most applicable theory for explaining Iranian foreign policy. This approach helps us to answer the question that why Iranian foreign policy toward the Western countries in general and the United States in particular, even when under systemic pressures, has remained relatively unchanged. Holistic constructivism links the two levels of analysis: domestic and systemic normative environment; and considers them to be two determinant factors that affect foreign policy of states. On this basis, the paper identifies the relevant domestic and systemic social norms affecting Iranian foreign policy since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The article argues that Iranian foreign policy is based more on its revolutionary and ideological values than the logic of nation states. To develop this argument, the model of 'Self-Reinforcing Cycle of Norm-Driven Behavior' is introduced.*

Keywords: Holistic constructivism, Iran, identity, social discourses, foreign policy, peaceful environment, aggressive environment

Introduction

Foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran seems complicated because of its normative and ideological dimensions. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iranian foreign and security policy has been dominated by a new set of revolutionary discourses. Therefore, to understand Iranian foreign behavior, one should try to understand the basic characteristics of the country's normative and discursive structures. On this basis, the most applicable approach is to keep one's distance from the rationalist theories and apply holistic

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constructivism as an approach to analyze Iran's foreign policy behavior.

Rationalist approaches assume that states are security-maximizer (neorealism and defensive realism), power-maximizer (offensive realism), influence-maximizer (neoclassical realism), or absolute gain-seeker (neoliberalism); but are not sufficient to properly explain Iranian foreign and security behavior. Because rationalist theories are based on two key assumptions that prevent one from considering rationalism as basis for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran:

- a) Emphasizing the impact of systemic pressures on the foreign policy of states
- b) Concentrating on self-oriented materialistic structures

On one side, since the Islamic revolution, the relative stability of the main principles of Iranian foreign policy shows that systemic pressures have not been so effective in changing the basic priorities of the country's foreign policy. The main principles of the Iranian foreign policy (such as counter-hegemonism, residence, justice-seeking, anti-arrogance campaign, and anti-American and anti-Israel stance), even when under the systemic pressures, have remained relatively unchanged.

On the other side, rationalists view states as unitary rational actors, which try to adopt a rational choice perspective in foreign policy. From the rationalist perspective, the foreign policy of states is only guided by material structures, and is considered the result of cost-benefit and means-ends analysis, which aim at maximizing security and power in world politics.

Rationalists make a motivational assumption that since states are power-seeking, security-seeking, or influence-seeking actors they have to be egoistic and self-regarding (vs. other-regarding), which try to maximize (offensive realism) or guarantee (defensive realism) their situations in international relations. As Kenneth Waltz, a leading neorealist scholar, argues, in an anarchical world,

self-help is the principle of action and most significant way to reach security.¹

In the rationalist account, “the reason for states to have selfish identities and interests is a structural requirement, and they are imposed on states by the structure, and thus exogenous to state interaction.”² From this perspective, in an anarchic system, units are functionally undifferentiated and exhibit similar behavior because anarchy imposes on actors particular rules, which force them to behave similarly. According to them, the foreign policy of states is subordinated to change in international distribution of power. Hence, they ignore the effect of domestic variables in determining states’ foreign policy priorities.³

Rationalist theories consider Islamic Republic of Iran an objective-oriented actor, which solely pursues selfish and materialistic interests. Whereas the author argues that Iranian foreign behavior is more guided by ideational and normative structures than material ones. Although the author does not deny the importance of material structures in a country’s foreign policy; but based on constructivists assumption, material structures are given meaning only by social and normative context in which they are interpreted.⁴ In fact, social facts are dependent on shared understandings; and hence on meanings, discourse, and language, which in turn, allow an interpretation of material fact.

Hence, to understand Iranian foreign behavior, one should try to understand the ideological and normative characteristics of the

¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 624.

² Yucel Bozdaglioglu, “Constructivism and Identity Formation: An Interactive Approach,” *Review of International Law and Politics* 3, no. 11 (2007): 125.

³ See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979).

⁴ Joseph Jupille, James A. Caporaso, and Jeffrey T. Checkel, “Integrating Institutions, Rationalism, Constructivism, and the Study of the European Union,” *Co-operative Political Studies* 36, no. 2 (February–March 2003): 14.

country's foreign policy. On this basis, the author keeps distance from the rationalist theories and applies holistic constructivism as a most applicable approach to analyze Iran's foreign policy behavior.

Constructivism: State Identity and Interests

The theory of Constructivism, as one of the most influential international theories of 1990s and early 2000, is based on a criticism of the traditional rationalist paradigms.⁵ This approach can provide powerful analytical tools for explaining state identity and interests in world politics.

Emanuel Adler, a leading constructivist scholar, defines constructivism as “the view that the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world.”⁶

The controversy between social constructivism and rationalism has become one of the most important recent debates in the field of international relations theory. This debate mostly concentrates on the distinctions between the logic of *consequentialism* represented by rational choice approaches and the

⁵ See Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Friedrich Kratochwil, *Role, Norms, and Decisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Nicholas Onuf, *A World of Our Making* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989); John Gerard Ruggie, *Constructing the World Policy: Essay on International Institutionalization* (London: Routledge, 1998); Martha Finnemore, “Norms, Culture, and World Politics: Insights from Sociology’s Institutionalism,” *International Organization* 50, no. 2 (1991): 325–47; Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm, Dynamics, and Political Change,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887–917.

⁶ Emanuel Adler, “Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics,” *European Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 3 (1997): 322.

logic of *appropriateness* theorized by social constructivism.⁷ Constructivism emphasizes the logic of appropriateness as a basis for state behavior, whereas rationalism emphasizes the logic of consequentialism as a basis for state behavior and interests.

The logic of consequentialism is the realm of rationalist approaches that treat the interests and priorities of actors as mainly pre-given during the social interaction. Rationalist theories concentrate on strategic interactions, in which the participation of actors is on the basis of their given identities and interests, and attempt to realize their preferences via strategic behavior. It “is the realm of instrumental rationality whereby the goal of action is to maximize or optimize one’s own interests and preferences.”⁸ Elster Jon explains that “rational choice is instrumental: it is guided by the outcome of action. Actions are valued and chosen not for themselves but as more or less efficient means to a further end.”⁹

But, constructivist explanation of state behavior is based on different assumption: the logic of appropriateness. It holds that “human actors are imagined to follow rules that associate particular identities to particular situations.”¹⁰ Actually, the logic of appropriateness implies rule-guided behavior, in which states try to “do the right thing” rather than maximizing or optimizing their given preferences as the logic of consequentialism implies. Hence, “normative rationality implies constitutive effects of social norms and institutions, since these rules not only regulate behavior, that is, they have causal effects, but also define social identities (‘good people do X’). This is where the *value added* of constructivism comes in.”¹¹

⁷ Thomas Risse, “Let’s Argue’: Communicative Action in World Politics,” *International Organization* 54, no. 1 (2000): 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹ Elster Jon, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 22.

¹⁰ James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, “The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 951.

¹¹ Risse, “Communicative Action,” 4–5.

One of the main contributions of constructivist literature is to problematize the question of state identity and interests. Constructivists do not treat state identity and interests as a pre-given and fixed variable; instead, claim that the identity (self-perception) of a state is the major source of interest formation of that state. As Alexander Wendt, a leading constructivist scholar, believes, “identities are the basis of interests.”¹² According to constructivists, understanding how actors’ identities are conditioned by non-material structures are very important, because identities first make interests then make behaviors. To describe interest-making, they concentrate on social identities of states.¹³

According to constructivist assumption, interest is determined by state identity, which depends on historical, cultural, political, and social backgrounds. Contrary to realists, who argue that material structures like balance of military power have causal effect on states behavior, constructivists claim that “systems of shared ideas, beliefs, and values also have structural characteristics, and that they exert a powerful influence on social and political action.”¹⁴

From this perspective, *ideas* have structural features. Ideas, understood as intersubjective meanings,¹⁵ are the medium and propellant of social behavior. Constructivists contend that “what actors do in international relations, the interests they hold, and the structures within which they operate are defined by social norms and

¹² Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 398.

¹³ Christian Reus-Smit, “Constructivism,” in *Theories of International Relations*, ed. Scott Burchill (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 217.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Intersubjective meanings considered as collective knowledge “that is shared by all who are competent to engage in or recognize the appropriate performance of a social practice or range of practices.” See Ira Cohen, “Structuralism Theory and Social Practice,” in *Social Theory Today*, ed. Anthony Giddens and Jonathan Turner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 287.

ideas, rather than by objective or material conditions.”¹⁶ They consider that ideational structures determine the ways in which actors redefine themselves. These norms (“collective expectations about proper behavior for a given identity”)¹⁷ tell actors who they are, what their goal is, and what role they should play.¹⁸ As Nicholas Onuf argues, ideational structures are both regulative (tell us what is cognitively permissible) and constitutive (tell us what is possible).¹⁹

From constructivist point of view, material structures are context-oriented; it means that “material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded.”²⁰ This principle claims that material forces are important only to the extent that they are constituted with particular meaning.²¹

It should be mentioned that Alexander Wendt does not disagree with rationalist assumptions; rather he argues that material capabilities should be understood within the context of ideational and social structures. By unpacking state identity and interests, constructivist approaches pose a powerful description of why different states behave differently under the same systemic constraint.

¹⁶ Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, “Bridging the Gap: Toward A Realist-Constructivist Dialogue,” *International Studies Review* 6, no. 2 (2004): 338.

¹⁷ Ronald Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter J. Katzenstein, “Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security,” in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 54.

¹⁸ Dale C. Copeland, “The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay,” *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 190.

¹⁹ For more information, see Onuf, *World of Our Making*.

²⁰ Alexander Wendt, “Constructing International Politics,” *International Security* 20, no. 1 (Summer 1995): 73.

²¹ Brian Frederking, “From Enemy to Rival: Constructing the Camp David Accords,” (presented at the International Studies Association, Midwest, October 27–28, 2000): 2.

Three Versions of Constructivism

The Constructivist approach is divided into three major branches: 1) Systemic Constructivism 2) Unit-level Constructivism 3) Holistic Constructivism.

1. Systemic Constructivism

Systemic Constructivism accepts the neorealist penchant for systemic theory – a third image perspective – and believes that constructivism can describe a systemic analysis of transformations in international relations.²² Systemic constructivism focuses solely on the ideational and normative structure of the international environment and ignores changes at the domestic political realm. Wendt's theory of constructivism introduces best example of systemic constructivism.²³ He draws a distinction between two kinds of identities: *social identities* and *corporate identities* of states. Social identity referring to the meaning an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others, and corporate identity referring to the internal human, material, ideological, or cultural characteristics that make a state what it is.²⁴ He emphasizes social identity which affects states' foreign policy behavior during the social interactions between unitary actors.

²² Adler, "Middle Ground," 342.

²³See Wendt, "Social Construction,"; Wendt Wendt, "Constructing International Politics,"; and Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁴Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (1994): 385. Internal dimension of state identity refers to "labeled national identity, the set of shared norms and narratives that sustain *we-ness* through time." External dimension of state identity refers to "the self-placement of the polity within specific international contexts." See Thomas Banchoff, "German Identity and European Integration," *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 3 (1999): 268.

2. Unit-level Constructivism

Unit-level constructivism, unlike systemic constructivism, focuses only on “the relationship between domestic social and legal norms, the very factors bracketed by Wendt.²⁵ Unit-Level constructivism stresses on the possibility of domestic changes in the *Alter* and *Ego* and the effect of these changes on cooperative or competitive relations with each other. According to this approach, socialization process internal to a state can transform the identity and interests of actors independently of such interaction at the international level.²⁶

3. Holistic Constructivism

Holistic constructivist approach is a theory of identity at both the domestic and international levels. It leads to expectations about how dissimilar states will respond to international pressures. Holistic constructivism has challenged this dichotomy between the systemic and domestic structures and tries to bridge the two approaches to accommodate the entire range of elements conditioning the identities and interests of states.²⁷ Koslowski and Kratochwil,²⁸ two leading scholars of the holistic constructivism, consider the corporate and social identities as a unified analytical perspective that “treats the domestic and international structures and process as two faces of a single social and political order.”²⁹ Holistic constructivists “focus on how domestic and international social phenomena interact

²⁵ Reus-Smit, “Constructivism,” 220.

²⁶ See Katzenstein, National Security.”

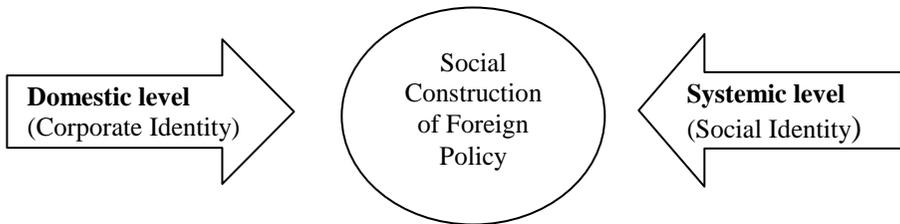
²⁷ Reus-Smit, “Constructivism,” 221.

²⁸ Rey Koslowski and Friedrich Kratochwil, “Understanding Change in International Politics: The Soviet Empire’s Demise and the International System,” in *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War* ed. Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995): 127–66.

²⁹ Reus-Smit, “Constructivism,” 221.

to shape the states' behavior in the international relations."³⁰ From the holistic constructivist perspective, foreign policy behaviors are consequence of interaction between both corporate identity (domestic level) and social identity (international level).

Figure 1: The Logic of Holistic Constructivism



From the holistic constructivist perspective, identity formation at both internal and international levels is a continuous process, in which both corporate and social identities interact with each other, and whereby states produce and reproduce new definitions of *self* and *other*. According to this approach, any transformation in the corporate identity of a state – as a result of domestic conditions – will eventually affect the identity formation at the international level, where states will try to reset their priorities in accordance with the new identity.³¹

Hence the normative approach employed in this research is built upon holistic constructivism in order to highlight the causal importance of internal and international ideas and norms in shaping states' foreign policy behavior. From this perspective, domestic identity, as well as shared norms of international society, has causal effects on states' interest and behavior.

Nevertheless, the author gives more importance to the domestic identity and constructive role of normative structures on Iran's preferences in foreign policy. As Michael Smith considers,

³⁰ See Richard Price and Christian Reus-Smit, "Dangerous Liaisons? Critical International Theory and Constructivism," *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 3 (1998): 265.

³¹ Bozdaglioglu, "Identity Formation," 142.

foreign policy is a phenomenon that derives from the identity theories.³² Iranian identity structures are mainly originating from the Islamic revolution, political Islam, shi'ite religion, political viewpoint of Imam Khomeini (the leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution), and the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Actually, systemic factors have a secondary effect on construction of the state's foreign policy. It means that Iran's identity and interests are more exogenous to the international system than endogenous one. The history of the Islamic revolution clearly shows that how domestic transformations have intensely constructed a new identity for Iran and its entailing interests (a fundamental transition from 2,500 years of Monarchical rule to religious democracy).

Based on constructivist assumptions, material structures are context-oriented. According to Wendt, "material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded."³³ On this basis, Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy behavior should be understood in its discursive context. In social science literature, a discourse is considered to be an institutionalized way of thinking; or, according to Jim George, is considered as the "broader matrix of social practices that gives meaning to the way that people understand themselves and their behavior... [and] generates the categories of meaning by which reality can be understood and explained."³⁴ For example, two different discourses can describe the same guerrilla movement as freedom movement or terrorist group.

³² Michael Smith, *European Foreign & Security Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1–16.

³³ Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," 73. For example, US relationships with Iran and Britain cannot be explained by just simple balance of military power. Only material structure cannot describe the fact that Britain is a close American ally and Iran is a sworn adversary. Also it is same for Indian and Iran's relationship with the United States or EU countries; for them, the Indian nuclear weapons are less threatening than Iran's missiles.

³⁴ Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 29–30.

Generally, the following socially constructed discourses have been guiding Iranian foreign policy since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. These discursive resources give meaning to the country's foreign policy behavior and distinguish it from the rest of the world.

Essential Discourses of Iranian Foreign Policy

1. Logic of *Responsibility* (vs. Logic of *Consequentiality*)

The transnational responsibility refers to the ideological objectives that a state pursues outside its borders as an ideological 'duty.' This specification distinguishes between secular states and ideological ones, though the term is more general than being limited to ideological states.³⁵

Unlike the logic of consequentiality in the rationalist theories, the foreign behaviors of Iran are not adopted solely in terms of their consequences. In fact, on the basis of the ideological logic, responsibilities, duties, and emancipatory missions shape the Iranian foreign policy behavior. Hence, the Islamic Republic of Iran is a mission-oriented state rather than interest-oriented one.³⁶ In line with the logic of responsibility, the country "undertakes the fraternal commitment towards all Muslims and unsparing support to the oppressed of the world. The practical reflection of this principle in Iranian foreign policy is manifested in rejection of domination, defending the rights of all Muslims."³⁷ In reality, the Iranian anti-Zionist policy and its support of Islamic resistance movements and Lebanese and the Palestinian people are interpreted within the logic of responsibility. Article 152 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (adopted on October 24, 1979) explains that "[t]he foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon... the

³⁵ Sadegh Haghghat, "Transnational Responsibilities and Human Rights," accessed December 12, 2008, <http://shaghghat.ir/index4.php?key=200&PHPSESSID=a025c407e687eda8e19d0da84e40d675>.

³⁶ S. J. Dehghani Firozabadi, "Emancipating Foreign Policy: Critical Theory and Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Policy," *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs* XX, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

defense of the rights of all Muslims, non-alignment with respect to the hegemonist superpowers, and the maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent States.”³⁸

In the Constitution, necessity of movement towards establishment of a united single world community to rescue deprived and oppressed nations throughout the world has been emphasized. To this end, more attention has been paid to relations between nations than to relations with states. Therefore, some of the foreign policy objectives are perhaps the most difficult for some to understand, unless we interpret them within the ideological context.

According to Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, “we have to support all oppressed people around the world... because Islam... is supporter of all oppressed people.”³⁹ Ayatollah Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran, has also emphasized that “we consider supporting the Palestinian and Lebanese people one of our major Islamic duties. This is why Washington is applying every pressure lever against the Islamic Republic in order to stop this support.”⁴⁰ Actually, after the revolution, the country with a new definition of *self*, tried to develop its new identity for the regional and extra regional states by the strategies such as: export of revolution, support of Islamic revolutionary movements.

Islamic Republic of Iran’s “enduring the costs and persistence against pressures which are not justifiable based on instrumental rationality and cost-benefit logic,” could only be explained within the logic of responsibility which is originating from the political Islam.

³⁸ “Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” accessed, January 01, 2012, <http://www.carsicm.ir/icmroot/public/Documents/PDF/constitutionlawofiran.pdf>.

³⁹ Sahife’ Noor, *Letters and Lectures of Ayatollah Khomeini* (Tehran: 1982), 3:31.

⁴⁰ Speech at International Conference in Support of Intifada, April 24, 2001.

The policy of “Proximity among Hearts” is one of the main consequences of the logic of responsibility. The policy “means economic support for Muslims or even infidels by the Prophet (PBUH), Imam, faqih (Muslim jurisprudent), or Islamic government to encourage their participation for Jihad or encouraging them to convert to Islam and defend it.”⁴¹ There are many verses of the Holy Quran and traditions that have stressed on this heavy duty to be shouldered by all Muslim individuals and governments.

The following assistances have been given in line with the policy of Proximity among Hearts: aid totaling \$250 million for Hamas as compensation for the Western boycott, and commitment to pay the salaries of \$100,000 to Palestinian Authority employees for six months. On December 11, 2006, approving delivery of one million tons gratis crude oil to Syria by the Islamic Consultative Assembly; approving a bill to extend the deadline for and to consider installments for repayment of North Korea’s \$170 million debt to Iran by the Iranian parliament; and economic aid to Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Palestine, and other Islamic countries.⁴² On this basis, what distinguishes Iranian foreign policy from other countries, is assuming “the *other-regarding* interest as inseparable part of *self-regarding* interest. Such interests are defined and pursued within the context of ideological interests.”⁴³

2. Counter-Hegemonism and Anti-Arrogance Campaign

These discourses are based on Islamic rule of *Nafy-e Sabil* or domination over Muslims. It could be argued that the most important behavioral feature of Iran’s foreign policy in past three decades has been counter-hegemonism or anti-imperialism, which

⁴¹ Mahmood Sariolghalam, “The Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Theoretical Renewal and a Paradigm for Coalition,” *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (Winter 2002): 69.

⁴² Sariolghalam, “Paradigm for Coalition,” 70.

⁴³ Firozabadi, “Emancipating Foreign Policy,” 17.

“has led to the formation of a particular role identity in Iran’s foreign policy: Iran as an independent state.”⁴⁴

Iran in its foreign policy is strongly counter-hegemonic and tries to challenge the monopolizing cores of oppressive power in the international system and looks for complete elimination of all kinds of colonialism, despotism, absolutism, and imperialism. In fact, Iran’s anti-Western and anti-American policies can be understood in context of these objectives and motivations.⁴⁵

For practical realization of this counter-hegemonic aspiration, the country is seeking “purposeful cooperation, coalitions, and alliances among anti-hegemonic forces at individual, state, and nongovernmental levels. To this end, Iran has extended its efforts to forge counter-imperialism fronts in third world, Islamic world, and Asian continent.”⁴⁶

In line with its anti-hegemonic and anti-arrogance discourses, Iran pursues two major strategies – a Look East Policy and South-South Alliances. Though the former Iran has built close relations with Eastern powers, especially China and Russia, it has also tried to realize its long sought ambition of becoming a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Iranian officials believe that an anti-US axis with nuclear powers such as China, India, and Russia could establish a pole of major powers in Asia, opposing American policies and deterring a US military attack on Iran. At present, Iran is seeking to recruit allies for a coalition that would oppose US interests in the Middle East and Central Asia.

By pursuing the strategy of South-South Alliances, Iranian officials also try to neutralize the West’s threats of a military strike or economic sanctions against Iran. Based on this policy, Iran attempts to get support of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for its nuclear programme. In August 2009, the Islamic Republic of Iran, in order

⁴⁴ Homeira Moshirzadeh, “Discursive Foundations of Iran’s Nuclear Policy,” *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 4 (December 2007): 529.

⁴⁵ Firozabadi, “Emancipating Foreign Policy,” 12.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

to deter the possible Israeli military strikes, enlisted the support of more than 100 non-aligned nations, which have welcomed Iran's involvement to vote on a proposal that bans attacks on nuclear installations.⁴⁷ On February 29, 2008, ambassadors of NAM at IAEA unanimously voted in favor of a communiqué in which Iran's peaceful nuclear activities are supported.⁴⁸

Iran also tries to develop the South-South alliances with Latin American countries such as Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and the countries that pursue an anti-imperialism agenda. The opposition to imperialism, neo-liberalism, and globalization from the position of third world 'victimism' is the main element of political affinity between Iran and these countries.⁴⁹ President Ahmadinejad pronounced, "An anti-hegemonic and anti-imperialistic front is currently forming, and all free nations and justice seeking peoples are little by little giving their hands together to create an expanded front against domineering system and thought."⁵⁰ Ahmadinejad, regarding Iran's relationship with Venezuela, said that "cooperation between Iran and Venezuela can be a model for anti-imperialist campaigns."⁵¹

Iranian leaders constantly have called for countering hegemonism and confronting imperialism as essential principle of

⁴⁷ "Iran Gets Support for Ban on Nuke Plant Attacks," *ABC News*, August 26, 2009, accessed October 11, 2009, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=8414881>.

⁴⁸ "Non-Aligned Movement States Support Iran's Nuclear Stand," *Payvand's Iran News*, February 29, 2008, accessed October 11, 2009, <http://www.payvand.com/news/08/feb/1273.html>.

⁴⁹ Susanne Gratus and Henner Furtig, "Iran and Venezuela: Bilateral Alliance and Global Power Projections," *FRIDE*, May 03, 2009, accessed October 10, 2009, http://www.fride.org/download/COM_Iran_Venezuela2_ENG_abril09.pdf.

⁵⁰ Statement by President Ahmadinejad in a meeting with Iran's ambassadors and head of missions. See *Iran Newspaper*, August 08, 2007, 1-2.

⁵¹ "Ahmadinejad Envisions Greater Iran-Venezuela Cooperation," *Tehran Times*, October 6, 2008.

Iran's foreign behavior.⁵² The Iran's supreme leader – as vital element in the country's decision making process – argued that “we'd never tolerate hegemonic behavior... and countering global hegemonic system and to overrule the oppressed-oppressors equation is an inseparable indicative of our diplomacy.”⁵³ In his viewpoint, the 1979 Revolution was as much about eliminating foreign powers influence in Iran.

According to Islamic principles, “there is no law to allow domination of infidels over Muslims, and ways are closed to foreign hegemony over Muslims.”⁵⁴ Based on the principle, if a contract is signed between Muslims and infidels, as soon as it becomes clear that the contract is against the interests of the Muslim society, it will be automatically cancelled according to the principle of “no domination over Muslims.”⁵⁵ In other words, based on the religious principle, “Islam is so that it gains supremacy and isn't dominated by others.” Hence, the Muslim government in its foreign affairs should behave in such a way that it won't be dominated by other powers.⁵⁶ In this respect, Ayatollah Khomeini, confronting the bipolar system of international relations, asserts: “We don't get along with any of the powers. We will be under the domination of neither America nor the Soviet Union.”⁵⁷

In the early days of the Islamic revolution, the concepts like Counter-Hegemonism and Anti-Arrogance Campaign had been crystallized in the policy, “Neither East nor West, [only] an Islamic

⁵² Firozabadi, “Emancipating Foreign Policy,” 18.

⁵³ Statement by Islamic Revolution Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei in a meeting with foreign policy authorities and ambassadors. See *Iran Newspaper*, August 20, 2007.

⁵⁴ This argument is a famous verse from the Holy Quran, which is known as Nafy-e Sabil Verse (Nisa: 141). See Sariolghalam, “Paradigm for Coalition,” 68.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁶ Asghar Eftekhari, “The Fixed Principles of the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *The Iranian Journal Of International Affairs* XIX, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 34.

⁵⁷ Noor, *Letters and Lectures*, 5:309.

Republic,” that is considered the Iranian version of Non-Alignment. At that point in time, Iranian revolutionary officials had four essential policy goals in declaring non-alignment: “(1) to achieve autonomy in foreign policymaking; (2) to avoid a costly involvement in the American-Soviet rivalry; (3) to end Iran’s dependence on one ideological camp; and (4) to improve ties with all states (except Israel and the former South African regime). Most of these goals were rooted in Iranian history, geopolitics, and economy. In fact, the status and condition of Iran under the Shah – before revolution – was the main factor in shaping such a post-revolutionary foreign policy.”⁵⁸

R. K. Ramazani – an eminent Iranian professor – asserts:

For Iran, the past is always present. A paradoxical combination of pride in Iranian culture and a sense of victimization have created a fierce sense of independence and a culture of resistance to dictation and domination by any foreign power among the Iranian people. Iranian foreign policy is rooted in these widely held sentiments.⁵⁹

As appeared in the Iranian Constitution as well as public declarations and the effective actions of Khomeini, Khamenei, Ahmadinejad, and other influential personalities (including Rafsanjani and Khatami), the ultimate aim of the Islamic revolution is the rejection of arrogant and hegemonic discourses and establishment of a new fair international system. Iranian officials “repeatedly accused the UN of being a tool in the hands of superpowers; they tried, instead, to activate institutions such as

⁵⁸ Houman A. Sadri, “An Islamic Perspective on Non-Alignment: Iranian Foreign Policy in Theory and Practice,” *Journal of Third World Studies* 16, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 31.

⁵⁹ R. K. Ramazani, “Understanding Iranian Foreign Policy,” in *The Iranian Revolution at 30* (The Middle East Institute, 2009), 12, http://www.mei.edu/Portals/0/Publications/Iran_Final.pdf.

movement of non-committed countries to make changes in the existing global relations.”⁶⁰

3. Independence and Self-Sufficiency: Toward Indigenous Technology

Securing independence and maximizing its dimensions are one of the preliminary bases of the foreign policy of states. Iranian independence seeking is based on three major sources: “Iran’s glorious past; historical victimization by invaders; and (semi)-colonial/imperial encounters.”⁶¹ Iran is seeking to internalize more advanced technologies and knowledge as an efficient response to the international boycotts.

Nowadays, pursuing indigenous capabilities, technology, and knowledge – especially regarding nuclear fuel cycle – has become a matter of national pride. By doing so, Iran tries to eliminate its reliance on foreign powers. For Iranian administration, the development of indigenous technology to achieve technological self-reliance will reduce dependence on foreign inputs, especially in critical and vulnerable areas and in high value-added items in which the domestic base is strong. Tehran argues that purchase of nuclear fuel faces systematic discrimination. This discrimination is result of both direct US interventions to cancel contracts and sanction companies that do business with Iran and indirect intimidation of foreign firms by threat of such measures. In fact, the US sanctions against Iran have strengthened Iran’s argument that indigenous nuclear fuel production is necessary. On this basis, in the 1990s, Iran began pursuing an indigenous nuclear fuel cycle capability by developing a uranium mining infrastructure and experimenting with uranium conversion and enrichment.

From the viewpoint of the Iran’s supreme leader, there is a causal relationship linking scientific advancement, self-sufficiency, and independence. Ayatollah Khamenei contends that American and

⁶⁰ Abdolamir Nabavil, *The Range in Iran’s Idealistic Foreign Policy: Ebbs and Tides*, <http://www.int-politics.com/Articles/No3/8802.pdf>.

⁶¹ Moshirzadeh, “Iran’s Nuclear Policy,” 529.

European sanctions against Iran are not only ineffective in changing Iranian foreign policy but they are actually constructive in that they force Iran to become more self-reliant. His perspective of self-sufficiency is that “self-sufficient enough to be economically independent and economically independent enough to be politically independent.”⁶²

The discourse of independence helps us understand “the Iranian overemphasis on self-sufficiency and Iran’s rejection of proposals that imply dependence on foreign sources in the nuclear field.”⁶³ In this regard, Ayatollah Khamenei argued that the United States is not opposed to Iran’s nuclear programme for the sake of proliferation threat but rather because of the potential independence and economic leverage that Iran would derive from it.⁶⁴

Ayatollah Khamenei said:

The fact of the matter is that western powers would like the nations in the Middle East region, including the Iranian nation, to be always dependent on them. This is why they say that it does not matter if we have nuclear power plants, but they insist that we should buy nuclear fuel for our power plants from them.⁶⁵

The Iranian leader accepts the costs of Iran’s political choices and believes that the price of Iran’s perceived independence is worth paying.⁶⁶ In order to attain independence and achieve

⁶² Karim Sadjadpour, *Reading Khamenei: The World View of Iran’s Most Powerful Leader* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008), 11.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 529.

⁶⁴ Karim Sadjadpour, *Iranian Political and Nuclear Realities and US Policy Options* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009), 5.

⁶⁵ Ayatollah Khamenei Speech in Mashhad, March 21, 2005, accessed April 13, 2009, http://www.shiatv.net/view_video.php?viewkey=d31f096d8a4a34f96b66.

⁶⁶ Sadjadpour, *Reading Khamenei*, 11.

national sovereignty and honor, any nation will have to pay a certain price. But nations should incur such expenses and make every effort to achieve the above objectives. They should be hopeful of the valuable results of their endeavors, despite all the attempts made by the enemies to undermine their hopes and aspirations.⁶⁷

In reality, the Islamic revolution for the first time created the political system of Islamic Republic as a response to long term crisis within the country; therefore, what is taking place and the decisions that have been made in Iran need to be understood within this context. "Iran's sensitivity to its independence and rejection of hegemony maybe fathomed by the examination of this background of revolutionary tendency."⁶⁸

4. Persian Nationalism

Persian nationalism provides another aspect to understand Iranian behavior. The Islamic Republic of Iran did not begin with a clean slate in 1979. Various historical and cultural influences continue to shape Iranian perceptions and behaviors apart from the clerical government. In Iran, as one of the world's oldest civilizations, there is a great sense of cultural and historical pride among Iranians, particularly the dominant Persians. According to Gregory F. Giles, "The culmination of these historical, cultural, religious, and geographic influences is considered to constitute Iran's 'strategic personality' or 'culture.'" ⁶⁹ He believes that Iranian strategic culture is rooted in its nearly 3000-year history of Persian civilization.

⁶⁷ Leader's address to Air Force Servicemen, February 7, 2006, accessed April 14, 2009, <http://www.Khamenei.ir/EN/Speech/detal.jsp?id=2006020A>.

⁶⁸ Manochehr Mohammadi, "Principles of Iran's Foreign Policy," *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs* XIX, no. 1 (2007): 7.

⁶⁹ Gregory F. Giles, "The Crucible of Radical Islam: Iran's Leaders and Strategic Culture," in *Know Thy Enemy: Profiles of Adversary Leaders and Their Strategic Cultures*, ed. Barry R. Schneider and Jerrold M. Post (Alabama: U.S. Air Force Counterproliferation Center, 2003), 145.

According to R. K. Ramazani, Iranians “take pride in 30 centuries of arts and artifacts, in the continuity of their cultural identity over millennia, in having established the first world state more than 2,500 years ago, in having organized the first international society that respected the religions and cultures of the people under their rule, in having liberated the Jews from Babylonian captivity, and in having influenced Greek, Arab, Mongol, and Turkish civilizations.”⁷⁰

Since the revolution, Iran has resorted to nationalism and used popular support as leverage against foreign powers. It believes that the popular support of the regime is a deterrence force against military threats. As Khamenei has repeatedly stated that the governments that rely on people’s support cannot be threatened by enemy.⁷¹ Furthermore, since the days of the Shah, Iranian officials have argued that Iran’s size, historical significance, and self-professed cultural superiority merit a basic role for the state in the region. Many of the Shah’s policies were aimed at reviving the ancient Iranian Empire. Such a quest for influence and status has continued after the revolution to gain a meritorious role on the world stage. The Islamic Republic’s officials trumpeted Iranian nationalism to gather public support in its war against Iraq, and nowadays, for nuclear activities. Many songs have been made on nuclear program to garner public support.

Based on nationalism, Iranian policy-makers try to activate the historical pride and seek to make a collective idea over the nuclear program. Nuclear program has now become Iran’s key national issue. Many Iranians who oppose the Islamic regime believe that Iran should continue its nuclear program despite disagreement and pressure from major powers of the world. Accordingly, many Iranians contend that the United States is simply trying to punish Iran for its defiance of American policies. They

⁷⁰ Ramazani, “Iranian Foreign Policy,” 12.

⁷¹For more information, see official website for the words of Iranian Supreme Leader, accessed May 30, 2011, <http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/>. Also see, accessed May 30, 2011, <http://www2.irib.ir/worldservice/englishRADIO/IRAN/Supreme.htm>.

believe that US pressure on Iran to give up its uranium enrichment “is a conspiracy by the western powers to deny or prevent Iran from acquiring advanced technology and keep Iran backward and dependent on the West.”⁷² Nowadays, Iranian leaders treat nuclear policy as a national issue and have been able to turn the nuclear issue into the proclaimed position of the Iranian nation.

5. Perception of Enemy

The discourse of enemy has been one of the main Iranian post revolutionary discourses, which entered into the Iranian political language after the Islamic revolution. The discourse of enemy “is fueled by the history of intervention, manipulation, and exploitation of the country by foreign powers.”⁷³

This discourse is evident in several speeches given by Iranian officials. Without an imaginary enemy, something like 80–90 percent of the political speeches of the leaders of the country would lose their meaning, and political leaders would be unable to finish their sermons. A savage and ‘satanic’ enemy is an inevitable and indispensable part of the political identity of the Islamic Republic; and over the past three decades, this characteristic has grown more visible in political debates. The discourse of enemy shows that Iran has deep mistrust of the outside world.

The discourse of enemy has theological and historical roots that stem from Iran’s deep historical sense of insecurity. This insecurity is originating from a series of oppressions and dominations suffered by Persia over the centuries, and which has left Iranian people more suspicious of foreigners. Religious and historical bases of enemy shaped the chronic enmity mentality of Iranian officials toward unjust powers. According to William Liddle – a leading Indonesian scholar – such mentality consists of three

⁷² Sadegh Zibakalam, “Iranian Nationalism and the Nuclear Issue,” *Media Monitors Network*, January 10, 2006, accessed April 14, 2009, <http://americas.mediamonitors.net/Headlines/Iranian-nationalism-and-the-nuclear-issue>.

⁷³ Daniel L. Byman et al., *Iran’s Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), 9–10.

mindsets: a *narrow* one that makes a binary opposition between *us* and *them*; a *defensive* one that considers the outside world as enemy; and a *conspiratorial* one that views the outside world as a group efficiently organized to fight Islam and Muslims.⁷⁴

Actually, by the discourse of enemy, the Iranian policymakers try to create a binary opposition between *Khodi* (us) and *Ghere Khodi* (others) within the society. It is difficult to find a speech of Iranian officials without emphasizing the role of enemy for destruction of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Ayatollah Khamenei used the term “enemy” 16 times in just one speech in the Kurdistan Province on May 12, 2009.⁷⁵

Ayatollah Khamenei, on February 16, 2009, said that the scientific progress in the country and the enthusiastic presence of youth in different arenas are among other indications of the failure of enemy in defeating the Islamic Republic. He warned that a cultural invasion by the enemy was among its efforts to spoil the Islamic system; and that all individuals, including him, have duty to defend the Islamic and revolutionary values.⁷⁶ He even attributed questioning the fairness of Iranian presidential election to enemies; and said, “Unfortunately some unjust friends and those who are a part of the nation and expect people to pay attention to them are unthankful and speak against the nation – repeating the lies of enemies.”⁷⁷

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in his meeting with President of Djibouti, Ismail Omar Guelleh, called on Islamic countries across the world to build a united barrier against the

⁷⁴ William Liddle, *Leadership and Culture in Indonesian Politics* (Sydney: Asian Studies Association / Allen & Unwin, 1997).

⁷⁵ Iranian leader’s speech in Kurdistan Province, May 12, 2009, accessed February 19, 2010, <http://aftabnews.ir/vdcezp8v.jh8vwi9bbj.html>.

⁷⁶ Official Website of Iranian Supreme Leader, accessed April 16, 2009, <http://www.wilayah.org/langs/en/index.php?p=contentShow&id=4815>.

⁷⁷ “Leader says High Turnout Will Infuriate Enemy,” *Tehran Times*, April 30, 2009, accessed April 16, 2009, http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=193455.

‘enemy plots.’ He was of the view that unity and cooperation among Muslim states will thwart the enemy plot to sow discord among Muslims and spread hegemony over them.

Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Chairman of Iran’s Expediency Council, reiterated one of the revolution’s main premises that “the United States is the main enemy of the Islamic Republic of Iran” and “Washington is making great efforts to disturb it.”⁷⁸

Since the Islamic revolution, such an image of enemy has played an effective role in shaping domestic and foreign policy priorities. It led Iran to increase its military power in order to make an efficient deterrence against the perceived threats. On January 11, 2008, when Iranian parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Commission decided to increase the country’s defense budget, Heshmatollah Falahat-Pisheh a member of parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Commission told that “The National Security and Foreign Policy Commission believes that it is bound to increase the country’s defense credits both in areas of hard and soft wares.”⁷⁹ He reminded that enemies and threats posed to the Islamic Republic are plentiful, and that according to the country’s 20-year vision plan, Iran should be the number one power in the region in all respects, including accomplishment of defense infrastructures and technology as well as optimization and updating of equipment.

6. Islamic Unity and Solidarity

Islamic unity and solidarity is recognized as Iran’s top foreign policy priority. This discourse began with the concept of *Umma* (combination of all Muslim communities) in the early days of the Iranian revolution. On this basis, the Islamic Republic of Iran is trying to build a unity among the Islamic states and enabling them

⁷⁸ *English People’s Daily Online*, December 03, 2008, accessed April 16, 2009, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/90854/6545067.html>.

⁷⁹ Fars News Agency, January 12, 2008, accessed April 17, 2009, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8610220616>.

to play an important role in the establishment of a fair system in world politics. The concept of Islamic solidarity principally refers to “the expansion of economic and technical ties among Islamic countries. The economic and technical relations of Islamic countries spill over to political and security areas... and Islamic contiguity further facilitate the interactions of Islamic countries, bringing about mechanisms for conflict settlement.”⁸⁰

Imam Khomeini considered the unity of the Muslim countries a practical necessity that foreign policy should accomplish. From his viewpoint, “Our Islamic scheme is to create a kind of unanimity of views among Muslims of the world, to unite the Islamic countries, to establish fraternity among different Muslims of the world, and to make a pledge with all Islamic governments of the world.”⁸¹ Ayatollah Khamenei at a two-day conference over Gaza crisis on March 3, 2009, said that “the key to the solution of many of the problems of the Muslim countries lies in the resoluteness and solidarity of this wonderful galaxy.”⁸²

Actually, the policy of export of revolution (in the early years of the revolution) has been replaced by the policy of Islamic solidarity, which is more consistent with political conditions of the contemporary era. The first target of this policy is Muslim countries that are based on Islamic principles like Lebanon, Syria, and Al Jazayer. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been looking for further convergence and brotherly relations with such countries.⁸³

Contrary to the previous policy of export of revolution, the policy of Islamic solidarity offers a new method for promoting the revolution. “[T]his strategy is looking to present the Islamic

⁸⁰ Davood Gharayagh Zandi, “Conceptualization of Islamic Solidarity in Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs* XX, no. 1 (Winter 2007–08): 74.

⁸¹ Noor, *Letters and Lectures*, 1:83–88.

⁸² Press TV, March 04, 2009, accessed April 18, 2009, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=87465§ionid=3510302>.

⁸³ Nour Mohammad Norouzi, “Evolution of Political Discourse and Dynamism in the Pattern of Iran Foreign Policy Actions,” *Rahbord Quarterly*, no. 31 (Spring 2004): 208–209.

Republic of Iran as a proper model... Having accomplished the first stage and making Iran as an efficient pattern for other Islamic countries, it can take the pivotal place contemplated in Iran's twenty years Prospect Plan (2024).”⁸⁴

7. Martyrdom, Jihad and Fearlessness

Martyrdom is a religious term in Islam, used as a title for Muslims who die fulfilling a religious commandment or waging war for Islam. The concept can only be understood in terms of the Islamic concept of *jihad* (Holy Struggle). According to the Holy Quran, the *shahid* (martyr) is considered one whose place in Paradise is promised.

Shi'a culture introduces some concepts and drives Iranian behavior in ways that are not readily understood by the West. Actually, the Martyrdom shows the Shi'a attitudes toward war, which is less goal-oriented than western concepts. Gregory F. Giles asserts:

As evidenced by Khomeini's conduct of the 8-year war with Iraq, struggle and adversity are to be endured as a sign of commitment to the true faith. [In this context,] Defeat is not necessarily equated with failure. This emphasis on continuing the struggle against oppression and injustice [as an Islamic duty] rather than on achieving “victory” is seen as producing a high tolerance of pain in Iran. The cult of martyrdom inherent in Shi'ism, specifically, the honor accorded those who give their life to defend the faith, may give Iran certain practical military advantages.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ This plan refers to a mid-term development strategy, approved by the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and pursues higher status of economic, scientific, and technological development for Iran, upon which Iran takes the first place among Middle Eastern countries in 2024. See Zandi, “Islamic Solidarity,” 80.

⁸⁵ Giles, “Crucible of Radical Islam,” 147.

In this regard, the Islamic Republic of Iran greatly benefited from martyrdom-seekers in the 8-year war with Iraq. Iran, by converting the war to ‘holy war’ (religion-based), revived the cult of martyrdom which materialists were unable to understand.

The concept of fearlessness can be inferred from the discourse of martyrdom. It means that martyrdom-seekers and Jihadists are not afraid of death at all in a battle or front. “The fear factor is a serious dilemma in mundane and materialistic societies in which the life is defined solely within the boundaries of the physical existence. They regard the happiness and well-being within the short span of life on the earth.”⁸⁶ This culture is completely opposite to cult of martyrdom. Interestingly, Israeli Prime Minister acknowledged the reality of the source of power (martyrdom and fearlessness) in Hezbollah: “when they (Hezbollah young combatants) are not afraid of death, then what can we scare them of?”⁸⁷

8. Justice: Toward a Revisionist Policy

Justice-based discourse consists one of the major principles of Iran’s foreign policy since 1979. The Islamic Republic of Iran sees the international system as an unjust and unfair system, which must be replaced by a just, fair, and virtuous order. Hence, the state is pursuing a revisionist policy based on justice and fair international relations and invites arrogant countries to behave fairly. From a revolutionary viewpoint, “until the realization of the ‘sublime universe,’ the world remains structurally divided into two antagonist areas: the world of good and the world of evil – light and darkness. There is the Party of God (Hibzollah) on the one side and the Great Satan (Shaytân-e Bozorg) on the other side. Compromise between

⁸⁶ Manochehr Mohammadi, “The Sources of Power in Islamic Republic of Iran,” *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs* XX, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 10–11.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

the two is impossible. The struggle is constant until the first eliminates the second.⁸⁸

In international relations terminology, Iran is considered a revisionist state, as its foreign policy in different periods of time has been critical of the international status quo. Iran uses justice-based discourses to criticise the existing international relations system. According to Khamenei, the Islamic republic tries to realise “justice driven policies,” which imply hostility towards the US and Israel, despite enormous economic and political costs (sanctions and isolation). He “prefers defeat to a victory that could be achieved through injustice or oppression.”⁸⁹

Justice-seeking policy was pursued with more enthusiasm in the Ahmadinejad’s administration. President Ahmadinejad, in his letter to President Barack Obama on November 04, 2008, advised him to make “fundamental change” in US foreign policy. He told President Obama that the world expects him to end policies “based on warmongering, invasion, bullying, trickery, and the humiliation of other countries by the imposition of biased and unfair requirements, and a diplomatic approach that has bred hatred for America’s leaders and undermined respect for its people.” He suggests Obama to keep his interventions within US borders and called him to end “unjust actions of the past 60 years” in the Middle East. Such injustice should “give way to a policy encouraging full rights for all nations, especially the oppressed nations of Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan.” Ahmadinejad explained Iran as a “great civilization-building and justice-seeking nation,” and said that Iran would welcome “fair and real changes” in the Middle East.⁹⁰

Ahmadinejad, in response to a question regarding Iran’s relationship with Latin America, said that “we are determined to

⁸⁸ Mehdi Mozafari, “Islamist Policy,” *Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation* (April 2009): 10, accessed May 13, 2011, http://www.ps.au.dk/fileadmin/site_files/filer_statskundskab/subsites/cir/pdf-filer/Mozaffari_Papers.pdf.

⁸⁹ Sadjadpour, *Reading Khamenei*, 11.

⁹⁰ CNS NEWS, November 07, 2008, accessed October 05, 2009, <http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/38993>.

maximize relations with countries of that region, and our cooperation is aimed at increasing peace and equal justice throughout the world.”⁹¹ In fact, the justice-based-discourse “allows us to understand Iran’s continuous reference to double standards in the international system and its demand for an international recognition of its right to nuclear technology.”⁹²

Based on this discourse, Iran does not want to compromise its right to have nuclear power, and does not accept the demand to suspend its uranium enrichment, which the US and other western countries see as a cover to produce nuclear weapons. Iran believes that every country has the inherent right to obtain and use technology and to develop its own natural resources to power its own economy. This includes nuclear technology. The country’s officials believe that the West has double standards, as they ignored Israeli nuclear arsenal, while putting pressure on Iran to prevent it from using technology for peaceful purposes.⁹³ According to Ahmadinejad, “It is no longer possible to humiliate nations and impose double standards on the world community.”⁹⁴

Iranian officials see proof of double standards in US approach to nuclear proliferation in the region, especially about the nuclear technology of Pakistan, Israel, and India.⁹⁵ Iranians feel humiliated that Pakistan is permitted by the international community to become a nuclear power, but the “sledgehammer” approach is

⁹¹ Islamic Republic of Iran’s Presidency website, September 25, 2009, accessed October 10, 2009, <http://un.president.ir/en/?ArtID=12114>.

⁹² Moshirzadeh, “Iran’s Nuclear Policy,” 538.

⁹³ “Iran Criticizes Double-Standard Policy on Nuclear Issue,” *Arabic News*, May 05, 2005, accessed October 04, 2009 <http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/050519/2005051916.html>.

⁹⁴ “Ahmadinejad Assails West for Despicable Forms of Intimidation,” Fox News, September 23, 2009, accessed October 04, 2009, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,554704,00.html>.

⁹⁵ Kayhan Barzegar, “The Paradox of Iran’s Nuclear Consensus,” *World Policy Journal* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 25.

employed against Iran.⁹⁶ From Iran's perspective, US nonproliferation policy and its double standards in the face of Iranian nuclear policy, terrorism, and disarmament are considered as the most apparent cases of unjust behaviors.

The above-mentioned discourses have been constituted in the course of Iran's modern history and "has been expressed and emphasized since 1979 in numerous and often repetitive ways, either via various declarations issued by the founding father of the current regime – Ayatollah Khomeini – or in the speeches and declarations made by his successor, Ayatollah Khamenei, and other prominent figures in the Iranian government (Rafsanjani, Khatami, Ahmadinejad), who have served as presidents. In parallel with these personalities, the ideological discourse is emphasized almost daily by imams in the mosques and in Friday prayer, the commanders of the Revolutionary Guards (Pasdaran), as well as other Iranian authorities."⁹⁷

Iran's Foreign Policy: A Holistic Constructivist Analysis

Since the Islamic revolution, the Iran's foreign policy has been subject to the mentioned discourses as main sources for Iranian definitions of its identity and hence interests. The mentioned discourses construct the identity, and consequently interests, of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In fact, Iran's identity and interests are constructed endogenously and stem from domestic social discourses. In other words, Iran, to a great extent, makes its priorities based on its corporate identity (the domestic social discourses) rather than social one. Then this already held identity may be affected by social interaction at the systemic level. The writer argues that the Islamic Republic of Iran comes into international interaction with its previously constructed identity; and then this identity determines who is 'friend' and who is 'enemy.'

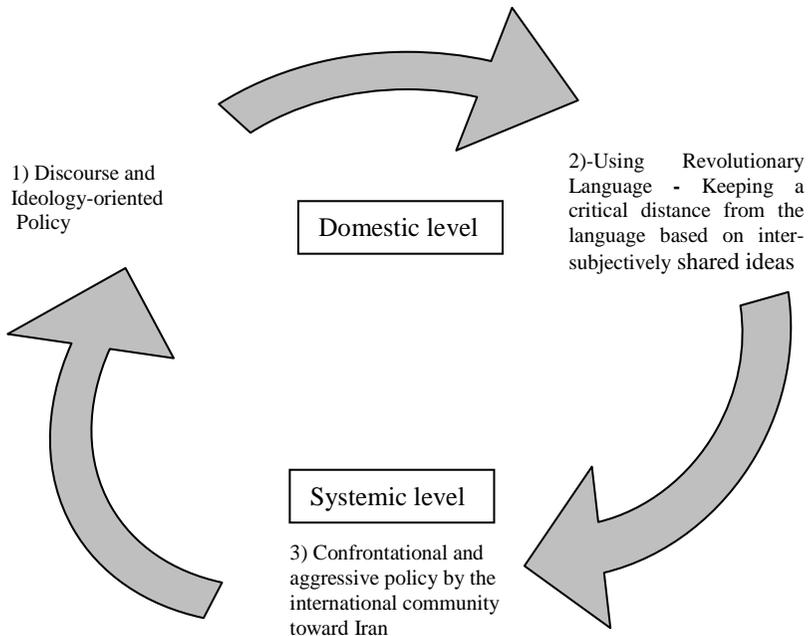
⁹⁶ See Mahan Abedin, "Iranian Public Opinion and the Nuclear Stand-Off," *Mideast Monitor* 1, no. 2 (April/May 2006).

⁹⁷ Mozafari, "Islamist Policy," 2.

Based on holistic constructivism, the research introduces the model of “self-reinforcing cycle of norm-driven behavior,” which helps us understand Iran’s interaction with the international community. (See figure 2)

This article argues that Iranian foreign policy is initially affected by domestic discourses (corporate identity) and then affected by social interaction at the systemic level (social identity). In other words, at the first step, before starting interaction with international community, Islamic Republic of Iran constructs its identity based on its corporate identity (domestic level), which determines who is ‘friend’ and who is ‘enemy.’ At the second step, this previously held identity can be radicalized and strengthened due to the confrontational normative environment (particularly because of the West’s policy toward Iran).

Figure 2: A Self-Reinforcing Cycle of Norm-Driven Behavior (Based on Holistic Constructivism)



Norm-driven behavior consists of two segments, which together create a self-reinforcing cycle: First segment takes place at the domestic level and focuses on the nature of the internal normative structures and examines the effect of such domestic social discourses on the construction of Iranian foreign policy. Second segment of the model concentrates on international political consequences caused by confrontational normative environment and examines its effect on radicalization of Iran's already constructed identity.

In fact, Iran's ideational and discursive policy causes the West's aggressive and confrontational policy toward Iran which itself strengthens ideational policy. Norm-driven behavior is not outcome-oriented and self-interest oriented; but, it can be defined as behavior conducted for its own sake as a consequence of dominant norms.

According to this model, Islamic Republic of Iran comes into systemic interaction with an already constructed identity (corporate identity) which can be radicalized in the face of the aggressive environment, especially the West's confrontational policy. Thus, it is necessary to consider both corporate (domestic) and social (systemic) identities thoroughly in analyzing Iranian foreign policy.

Initially, at domestic level, Iran's interest and identity are defined in the context of internally held discourses. These discourses impose a particular revolutionary language on Iran's political leaders rather than a common language based on inter-subjectively shared meanings. This revolutionary language – which is seen unreasonable for the western states – is one of the main reasons for mutual misunderstandings between the two sides. For example, Iranian rejection of the legitimacy of Israel's existence and President Ahmadinejad's revolutionary viewpoint⁹⁸ on denying the Holocaust as one of the major discursive battles between Iran and the West

⁹⁸ Ahmadinejad said, "Following World War II, they resorted to military aggression to make an entire nation homeless on the pretext of Jewish sufferings and the ambiguous and dubious question of Holocaust." Press TV, April 20, 2009, accessed April 18, 2010, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=92046>.

sparked many negative reactions in the West and resulted in UN resolution against Iran on January 26, 2007.⁹⁹

Nevertheless, in some areas, Iranian foreign policy has been welcomed by the international community whenever the country tried to keep distance from the revolutionary language and adopted a common language based on collective ideas. During Khatami's presidency, Iran introduced a peaceful identity of the self by the idea of "dialogue among civilization." This idea was welcomed by international society and became an inter-subjectively shared idea in world politics; and the year 2001 was called by the United Nations the "Year of Dialogue among Civilizations."

At systemic level, it can be said that confrontational norms lead states to adopt more aggressive approach toward each other, and benign global norms, in contrast, lead states to adopt more cooperative policy. For example, William Perry, tasked to comprehensively investigate the Clinton administration's policy toward North Korea in late 1990s, argued that the "primary reason [for North Korea's nuclear activities]... is deterrence... They would be deterring the United States."¹⁰⁰ Due to this acknowledgement, the Clinton administration moved to normalize diplomatic relationships with North Korea and provided the assurance that the United States would not plan a nuclear strike on North Korea. The Kim Jong-il administration responded by freezing its nuclear and missile activities.

But this process was stopped in the Bush administration due to his emphasis on "not rewarding bad behavior." Bush was seeing what William Perry perceive as deterrence as "bad behavior" and failed to recognize the interactive nature of the strategic relationships. The Bush administration's priority for taking unilateral measures, such as possibility of targeting North Korea for a preemptive nuclear attack, quickly put the two states back on the

⁹⁹ Against Ahmadinejad's speech on holocaust, January 27 was called by the UN the Day of Commemoration to honor the victims of the Holocaust.

¹⁰⁰ Selig S. Harrison, "Time to Leave Korea?" *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 2 (2001): 64.

cycle of malign multiplication. Non-aggressive norms during the Clinton administration drove North Korea to negotiating table; but aggressive and confrontational norms during the Bush administration caused failure of the agreement.¹⁰¹

Iranian case also shows that how dominant international norms, on occasions, can stimulate states to reconsider their previously held interest and identity to be consistent with internationally held norms at given time. For example, the relative development of liberal values during the Clinton's administration prompted Iran to behave cooperatively. President Khatami tried to increase Iran's peaceful and cooperative relations with the European countries. In this period, Iran accepted voluntary suspension of uranium-enrichment based on a political deal with Europe aimed at building confidence in peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. In the first year of Barack Obama's presidency, due to his emphasis on the diplomatic and peaceful solution for Iran's nuclear activities, Iran participated in diplomatic talks with the United States over its nuclear program in Geneva in the framework of the five plus one.

Whereas, confrontational and aggressive reactions by the international community toward Iranian foreign policy intensified the country's social discourses over uranium-enrichment program and strengthened its anti-Jewish/anti-American stances. Promotion of the confrontational norms during Bush's presidency stimulated Iran to resume its uranium-enrichment program after two years of voluntary suspension by partially reopening its fully safeguarded facilities.¹⁰² With the weakening of liberal and democratic values in the Bush administration (such as his 'Axis of Evil' remark, attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq, and threatening Iran with the possibility of an assault on Iran's nuclear facilities), Iran's foreign policy,

¹⁰¹ Jae-Jung Suh, "Caught Between Behavior and Identity: Nuclear Dilemma between North Korea and the United States," (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 30, 2007), 35–37.

¹⁰² "Iran to Resume Nuclear Research," *CBS News*, January 03, 2006, accessed December 03, 2009, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/01/03/world/main1174591.html>.

especially when Ahmadinejad came to power, was transformed into even more radical than that of Ayatollah Khamenei. US aggressive policies – which were seeking to cut off Iran from the world economic and trading system and supporting a regime change in the country – increased Iran’s tendency toward radicalization. Hence, the fluctuation of US policy toward Iran matches the changing perceptions of Iranian policymakers toward the United States.

Generally, whenever Iran faced a confrontational normative environment, the state responded more aggressively toward international community. The more recent example is Iran’s decision to built 10 industrial scale uranium-enrichment facilities, a dramatic expansion of the program in defiance of the UN demands it halt all enrichment activities. The move comes two days after the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN nuclear watchdog, passed a resolution demanding that Iran stop construction on a previously secret nuclear facility at Qom.¹⁰³ The head of Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization said that until then Iran did not have any intention of building 10 new uranium-enrichment facilities.¹⁰⁴

In fact, the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran have no collectively shared identity that would facilitate the process of rapprochement. Neither of them begins a new measure based on mutual understanding of security concerns that would expand the scope of exchanges beyond that of national security. In the present political process, Iranian threat and US threat are mutually constitutive. They can overcome the stalemate by highlighting the social aspects of the security dilemma, such as mutual understanding of identity and acknowledging each other’s interests and core security concerns. The social steps can contribute to a transformation of the social reality between the states. Although

¹⁰³ “Iran authorizes 10 New Uranium Plants,” *CNN*, November 29, 2009, accessed December 03, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/11/29/iran.nuclear/>.

¹⁰⁴ “Iran says UN Criticism Prompted New Nuclear Plans,” *Examiner*, November 30, 2009, accessed December 03, 2009, http://www.examiner.com/a-2346112~Iran_says_UN_criticism_prompted_new_nuclear_plans.html?cid=rss-Top_News.

such steps will not eliminate the enemy identity that each holds of the other but will go a great length toward creating an environment that dampens the truncated understanding and identity blaming, which would be conducive to diplomatic negotiations.

This trend shows that how international aggressive and confrontational norms can serve as one of the elements that strengthen position of ruling parties. In contrast, the peaceful international environment can moderate the radical position of governments.¹⁰⁵ Actually, the peaceful international environment can give an opportunity for radical states to redefine their former position and move toward rational policies in world politics.

Conclusion

This research has tried to apply holistic constructivism and to highlight the causal significance of domestic and international normative environment in construction of Iran' foreign policy. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran' foreign policy has been affected by two important variants at both domestic and systemic levels: On the one hand, Iran's domestic social discourses encouraged the country to adopt more ideological policy towards the western countries, particularly, the United States. Hence, as Iran's foreign policy challenges increase, its response to these challenges becomes more ideological than interest-based. On the other hand, such discourse-oriented policy is further radicalized due to the West's confrontational policy toward Iran. Continuation of the trends that began three decades ago, created a social context in which the two sides are locked in antagonistic identities.

Actually, Iran's ideological policy, on the one hand, and the West's hostile policy toward Iran, on the other hand, created a tragic and never-ending cycle of misunderstandings, which missed too

¹⁰⁵ See Kaori N. Lindeman, "Normative Origins of Revisionism: The Impact of the International Normative System on State Identity Formation," (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 30, 2007), 9, accessed December 03, 2009, www.allacademic.com/meta/p208753_index.html.

many opportunities. The article suggests that Iranian officials, in order to play an active role in the international relations, should redefine foreign policy discourses in accordance with the new political and economic environment; try to produce and reproduce new definitions of *self* and *other*; and reset their priorities in accordance with the new identity.

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