Evolution of the Revolution
-
The Development of Foreign Policy in Post-Khomeini Iran

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Introduction

_Iran is blessed with all the facilities to be the industrial engine, thus de facto leader of the region, except good governance_ – as Iranians joke, reinforcing some scholars’ view that the Iranian model is a failed, bankrupt one. These scholars argue with such historical facts, that during the Pahlavi era Iran was an emerging geostrategic power, a significant power with the one of the greatest armies of the world, with a coherent foreign policy. By the Nixon doctrine Iran became the number one instrument of the United States’ Cold War policies in the Middle East. After the revolution of 1979 though, Iran became isolated and was forced into a long lasting war with its western neighbour. Iran lost its regional influence, military capabilities and economic power and the process of the Iranian rise was interrupted, from which decline Tehran has not been able to fully recover so far.

It does not mean, however, that the author of this paper in any degree agrees with the claims about the bankrupt nature of the Islamic regime, or with the superiority of the previous system compared to the present one. An independent, impartial observer cannot let him or herself become biased, not even in a case concerning the probably most disputed and generally discredited country of our age, the Islamic Republic of Iran, when most literature and media dealing with Iran, even the sources he or she uses are more or less reflecting official or unofficial views of governments, think tanks or authors related to them. Therefore, this paper is written in a will to stay impartial, maintain a neutral point of view, with endeavour not to judge any kind of state or individual behaviour discussed in the followings and to avoid the marshlands of non-uniformly accepted terms by refrain from using such terms as terrorism.

Analysing Iran’s foreign policy is important and useful not just to understand a declined but re-emerged Middle Eastern regional great power’s behaviour and actions affecting both regional and international security, but also to assess the strange and unique relationship between religion and politics in the country. Islamic Iran has one of the most complex political structures in the world, with a very well defined and regulated official system of checks and balances and with an unrecognized, informal system of intergroup and interpersonal relations, which one’s influence on politics cannot be measured, but can be explored and analysed by empirical observation. As among all the domains of Iranian politics, its foreign policy is the most sensible and
researchable, one can stand a good chance of gaining a better understanding of Iran by approaching the Islamic Republic through studying its foreign behaviour.

This paper does not question the general opinion that Iranian foreign policy has undergone and is undergoing a series of changes, and has visibly shifted towards pragmatism serving national interest and ensuring regime survival instead of aggressively exporting the Islamic revolution. Although, the author of this thesis puts forward the hypothesis that Iran did not break with its religious revolutionary ideology in its foreign behaviour, it was only the priority order of its goals which was changed, introducing new, short- and intermediate term objectives in order to create the suitable conditions for pursuing the long term ultimate goals.

The hypothesis is tested by the examination and analysis of Iran’s Arab policy from 1989, up to present day, focusing on the driving forces of various foreign policy actions and their relation with the revolutionary principles. Since without knowledge of Iran’s revolutionary Islamic background, the First Chapter of the thesis is dedicated to present how Ruhollah Khomeini coined his theory governance of the jurists from the early idea of Islamism, then how were the ‘eternal’ principles of the Iranian revolution incorporated in Islamic Iran’s law, defining the path to follow for future Iranian foreign policy. For the reason that the structure of this thesis does not follow chronological order in its strict sense, but discuss each concerned topic in one block – the First Chapter ends with the presentation of the domestic changes and development in power-relations which had significant effect of the Iranian foreign policy since the demise of Khomeini.

The Second Chapter of the work is divided into three subsections, each discussing a different area, or period of Iran’s foreign policy, not leaving the region of the Middle East and North Africa, starting with the longest and strategically probably the most important one, Tehran’s Gulf policy. The paper describes Iran’s foreign policy towards the long despised littoral Sunni monarchies in the Gulf, keeping its ideological principles in the view, trying to explain the self-contradictions in Iran’s foreign behaviour, for example towards Saudi Arabia. The subsection also highlights Iran’s struggle to oust the United States from the region through the Iranian efforts for the establishment of a security arrangement in the region. After reaching our age in the presentation of Iran’s Gulf policy, the second subsection discusses the Arab Spring focusing on Iran’s interests, possibilities and reactions. The paper presents Iran’s renewed and reformed strategy for the export of its revolution towards the Arab Spring
countries facing a possible post-Islamist future. The author lays stress on Iran’s relation with the Bahraini and the Syrian uprisings, probably the two most particular cases of the Arab Spring for Tehran. At the end, to fill the gap between Syria and the Gulf, the thesis presents Iran’s foreign policy towards its last Arab neighbour, Iraq, mostly after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003. The discussion of the Iranian behaviour towards Iraq confirms the paradigm change in Iran’s resurfaced revolutionary policy, already analysed by the author while dealing with the Arab Spring.

This thesis does not deal with Iran’s foreign policy towards the United States, Europe or Israel, as these topics are already well-researched and covered by abundance of academic works. The strategic relations of Iran with Russia, China, or other non-Western countries are also ignored in this work, due to their pure realist, ideology-free nature. The author, however, remains silent about Iran’s complex relationship with its Eastern neighbourhood and the Central Asian republics, and its opaque ties in sub-Saharan Africa, with respect to the format requirement, including the advised length of this thesis set by the faculty.
Chapter I. – Understanding the Iranian Foreign Policy

1) From religion to ideology

‘Foreign policy perceptions of the Islamic Republic of Iran are rooted in the religious and cultural values as well as a civilization which goes back to over seven millennia ago.’

To understand what Ali Ahani, Iran Deputy Foreign Minister for Europe has said about the roots of the Iranian policies in religion and cultural heritage, thus to understand present day Iranian foreign policies, it is essential to examine these roots, especially the religious one. It might seem trivial, that Iran’s foreign policy roots from religion, culture and history. In general, political cultures and behaviours are usually formed by a mixture of a given nation’s historical experiences and its culture, including religious characteristics. In the case of Iran, the situation is more complicated, as Islam affects its politics in a much higher degree than its does Iran’s neighbours’ and other Muslim countries’ decision making. For Iran Islam is a political ideology, the very core of decisions made in Tehran since 1979.

In the 1960s, when Sayyid Qutb, one of the pioneer ideologists of modern Islamism was executed in Nasser’s Egypt, it was still nationalism which dominated the politics in the Middle East and not just in the Arab countries. We can talk about Arab-, Turkish and Iranian nationalism and also Zionism, or Israeli nationalism. After the defeat of the Arab countries in the 1967 war with Israel, Arab nationalism was doomed to decline and the star of political Islam started to rise, primarily in Egypt. In the late 1970s, slightly more than ten years after Qutb’s demise the balance of the two ideologies was turned and Islamism or political Islam became the most important mobilizing force in the Muslim world – despite the fact that nationalist regimes remained mostly intact.

Despite its modernist nature, Islamism was widely regarded as something retrograde, inevitably equalized with the term fundamentalism, derived from the early 20th century Christian fundamentalism. To be accurate, very briefly Islamism can be

1 Ahani, Ali: Islamic Republic of Iran’s Foreign Policy perceptions and options. Presentation held at the Hungarian Institute for International Affairs, Budapest, 16 November 2010.
divided into two trends: mainstream political Islamism and militant Islamism also known as Jihadism. (Jihad means struggle and is a religious duty for Muslims) The so-called mainstream Islamism accepts the rules of modern politics and wants to establish a state on the basis of Islam, while militant Islamism commits offensive actions sold as defensive acts making references to a defensive war, Jihad, for defending the Muslim world, the Ummah against its internal and external enemies. Even Islamist thinkers of both sides distance themselves from one another, denouncing each other either too soft and opportunistic, or unduly violent and a degeneration of Islam. While returning to the fundamentals of Islam would mean the creation of a state like the Caliphate right after Muhammad’s time with the strict traditional interpretation of Islam as its core and source of all its laws, Political Islam still carries the curse of this misinterpretation. After the Iranian revolution of 1979, in the eyes of the leftist intellectuals the new Iranian system, with its clerical establishment represented a religious form of fascism, while liberals regarded them as resurrected medieval fanaticism.

During the early period of this then-new ideology in the 1950s-60s, the phenomenon of Islamism originating from Egypt was supported by the United States to counterbalance Arab nationalist leaders, who might be willing to pact with the Soviet Union, but – not counting the governments concerned, who banned these movements – no one paid serious attention to Islamism, until the very end of the 1970s. Right after the overwhelming success of the Iranian revolution, Islamism gained a new meaning, and was put in the spotlight of political analysis. Experts and policy makers both in the Western and the Socialist world regarded Islamism as something inherently evil, which seemed to shake the very foundation of the political and international structure of the Middle East thus threatening their positions and allies in the Muslim world. Nevertheless history proved them wrong. In the last two decades the Islamist movements entered their declining phase and their downtrend has accelerated since the late 1990s. Many scholars see Khatami’s election as president in Iran in 1997 as a very telling symbol of the decline of Islamism and the desire for change.

The author of this paper cannot agree with this view though that Islamism is ultimately degenerating. A decade after Khatami’s election, – who himself was a cleric ranking hojatoleslam, a Shia clerical rank just below ayatollah – he still strongly supports the achievements of the 1979 revolution the present day, designating the

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Khomeini principles of the Islamic revolution in Iran as ‘eternal’\(^3\) – one can witness a slow, but steady process of Islamization in Turkey orchestrated by the Erdogan government. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan seems to drive the country toward an Islamist-leaning post-Kemalist future. Also, even though the future of the countries of the so-called Arab Spring is not yet clear at the time of writing this paper; it is already obvious, that Qutb’s movement, the long-time oppressed and banned Muslim Brotherhood is on the rise on the bank of the Nile and will almost surely be the most important political force in post-Mubarak Egypt. It is neither an objective nor the purpose of this paper to discuss our days Islamism as such in too much detail, but it is enough to take a look at the news about Malaysia, post-revolution Tunisia and Libya to be convinced that Islamism is not on the decline as it was announced by so many, not too long ago.

The thoughts of Qutb and British Indian (then Pakistani) Abul Ala Maududi – both of them Sunnis – were quite similar and influenced almost exclusively Sunnis. Unlike them, Shia Khomeini took a different, more sophisticated approach for setting up a new ideology. Khomeini’s views were popular primarily, but not exclusively, among Shia Muslims. What the three of the 20\(^{th}\) century’s most influential Islamist thinkers had in common was their point of view. Qutb, Maududi and Khomeini, all three looked at Islam from a political position and visualized an Islamic state, opposing both secular nationalism and quetism, a very strong characteristic of Islam before the rise of modern political Islam.

Khomeini became the head of a minority faction of the Shia clergy around 1962 in Iran, ruled by a secular, pro-American autocratic regime headed by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Khomeini and his circle criticized their fellow clerics for their quietist behaviour and urged for active opposition of the shah. A year later, due to his anti-regime views Khomeini was an outcast, spending the next decade in Najaf, Iraq and the last weeks of his exile in Neauphle-le-Chateau, France before returning to Iran in 1979. During his exile he led seminars and gave lectures for the followers of his ideas and published his systemized thoughts in his work *Velayat-e faqih* (Governance of the Jurists). He called for the establishment of an Islamic state under the guardianship of the religious scholars.

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Khomeini’s Velayat-e faqih started an intellectual revolution no Sunni scholar could manage to achieve in the second part of the 20th century. An exiled Iranian ayatollah reviewed the works and thoughts of other modern Islamist thinkers, Sunnis and Shias alike, and created a new dimension of political Islam. Qutb and Maududi lacked significant religious education and qualifications, making them and their ideas very vulnerable to Muslim scribes, who were representing quietism by forming a passive alliance with the secular governments. One of the keys to Khomeini’s success and the Iranian revolution was his clerical authority and prestige. Despite he was not directly supported during his exile by the mainstream Iranian clergy, as a marja (highest clerical rank, literally source of imitation), his authority and skills to interpret religious texts, to practice ijtihad, (interpretation the Quran and the Sunnah and setting up rules for various fields of life) in his own way was unquestionable, thus he did not become a victim of the Shia clergy, as his Egyptian and Pakistani counterparts did.

Khomeini argues in his work, Islamic Governance, that Islam provides guidance and regulation for all aspects of life from personal to political matters, thus Islam is political in its nature, legitimizing his Islamist theory saying:

‘The ratio of Qur’anic verses concerned with the affairs of society to those concerned with ritual worship is greater then a hundred to one. Of the approximately fifty sections of the corpus of hadith containing all the ordinances of Islam, not more than three or four sections relate to matters of ritual worship and the duties of man toward his Creator and Sustainer. A few more are concerned with questions of ethics, and all the rest are concerned with social, economic, legal, and political questions – in short, the gestations of society. ... Islamic law is a progressive, evolving and comprehensive system. All the voluminous books ... on different areas of law, such as judicial procedure, social transactions, penal law, retribution, international relations, regulations pertaining to peace and war, private and public law – taken together, these contain a mere sample of the laws and injunctions of Islam.’

Most Shia marjas opposed Khomeini’s theory of Islamic governance, due to the traditional Muslim quietism. Shia Quietism roots in the general Shia belief that the

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twelfth imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hassan, or Muhammad al-Mahdi disappeared at the age of five, starting the period of hiding, “the Occultation” in 874. Mahdi is a kind of messianic figure for Muslims who was hidden by Allah. During the period of Occultation the world is dominated by evil and villainess, and it will be Mahdi who brings the truth and justice back to Earth. For the reason that our world is experiencing its dark ages, Shia believers passively subordinate themselves to earthly powers in a way that they pretend to be obeying by not revolting against it. This behaviour is called taqiyya. In the ages of Occultation, Shia believers are politically subordinated to secular or corrupt political powers but their loyalty is with the clergy, who are lined up between several well recognized and prestigious scholar ranking high in Shia hierarchy. The political independence of these high ranking clerics, ayatollahs is guaranteed by the zakat tax of their followers, paid directly to them, giving marjas freedom not just from politics, but also from the mainstream clerical establishment, in case they think differently.

Other than being an educated cleric himself, Khomeini’s other key to success was his ability to win the support of the broadest part of the population possible. Qutb and Maududi failed to secure a social basis for their ideology, managing to acquire the support of the young intellectuals only. An Iranian anti-shah activist, revolutionary figure and leading opposition ideologist Ali Shariati interiorized the theory of class struggle in his revolutionary vocabulary, by translating Frantz Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth and using the Quranic expression mostafadin meaning weak and mostaqbirin meaning arrogant for Fanon’s oppressed and oppressor. Khomeini adopted Shariati’s mostafadin and mostaqbirin in his rhetoric and started to consequently use them the 1970s. Since becoming the flag bearer of the mostaqbirin, Khomeini managed to win a social basis for his ideas no other Sunni or Shia Islamist could do. By ceasing to mention the velayat-e faqih and focusing on the twin concepts of mostaqbirin and mostafadin in the last two years, the exiled ayatollah could win the support of the rural and poor urban people, the modern and more wealthy urban population, the students, the salary-dependant middle class, the employees, the labourers and also a part of the clergy formerly opposing his views at the eve of the revolution, as Khomeini broadened the meaning of his message to cover all segments of the Iranian society except the members of the shah’s court.5

Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi fled from Iran in January 1979. Khomeini arrived to Tehran on the 1st of February. Onboard of the Air France flight, a reporter asked the ayatollah about his feelings related to his homecoming. The then 76 years old Khomeini’s rigid answer was a single word: ‘Hichi’ – meaning “nothing” in Persian. The posterity interpreted his famous answer in many ways. Some say, it was meant to symbolize the importance of the suppression of one’s ego, but the more widely accepted elucidation is that Khomeini wanted to stress his vision about an Islamic revolution not just in Iran, but globally in the Ummah. The Muslim community in its entirety took priority over Iran as a modern nation state. Khomeini rejected what he called ‘nation-worshipping’. The export of the revolution and the support of various Muslim movements, both which will be explained later, are fine examples of Khomeini’s views about an Islamic world-revolution, of which Iran was ought to be the only flag bearer.

In contrast with Iran’s policies during the reign of shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who wanted to turn Iran into the leading power of the Gulf region, Islamic Iran from the earliest days portrays itself as the heart of the Muslim world as an attempt to gain worldwide Muslim support, which gives Iran more legitimacy in the face of various regional and international challenges the country has to and will have to face and also as an attempt to widen its influence from the Gulf region, to the whole Ummah. As a result of the 1979 revolution, from the United States’ and generally the West’s most important ally in the region, Iran was transformed into an anti-western adversary of its former allies, or “masters” as Iranian leaders since 1979 describe the nature of the relationship existed between the sides. The ideological principle of “Neither East nor West but the Islamic Republic” was coined by Khomeini and was destined for emphasizing the break of ties with the West and above all the United States, the dissociation from the Socialist bloc and above all the Soviet Union, thus propagating the non-aligned nature of the new Islamic Republic. The foreign policy orientation of Iran became mainly ideologically driven in the first ten years after the revolution, inspired by the theories of ayatollah Khomeini.

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A meaningful phrase of Khomeini very well illustrates the initial religious zeal in the prospective Iranian foreign policy, as it says ‘there is no reason why the Islamic government of Iran should sit at the same table with another government which has no belief in Islam and human ethics’, or another emphasizing the missionary vocation of the new regime, saying ‘The objective of this revolution has been to promote Islam, Islamic ethics, human ethics as well as raising humans on the basis of human criteria’.¹

The new leaders of Iran realized however that their new regime will not last long without stable relations in the international system. Therefore, Iranians have tried to shift their partnerships towards the East in a strict geographical and not in a political sense, turning their back on the “enemies of Islam and Iran” as they regarded the West in general. Iranian politicians believe that moving towards the East is less risky than building relations with the West, with its hegemonic tendencies. Iran considered China as a possible model to follow and this view is more or less still above ground with such embracers as Rafsanjani, Ahmadinejad and Khamenei.

In the late 1980s, as a result of the isolation of the country, a shifting process has started with the consent of Khomeini, whose views have grown more refined since the revolution. This shift resulted in the opening in Iranian foreign policy, thus in the slow but steady process of reintegration of Iran into the international system. In the last years of Khomeini’s leadership, ideology as the main motive of foreign policy started to be pushed into the background, giving ground to national interest and pragmatism. Iran, overstepping the restrictive bounds set up by its own self, found new friends in Latin America, the Far East, Russia and even in the Holy See.

Despite the paradigm shift starting in the last years of Khomeini and strongly supported by his successor Khamenei and President Rafsanjani, ideology and revolutionary principles still play a significant role in Iranian foreign policy today, as Iran still regards itself as a revolutionary state, with a revolutionary mission. One cannot stress enough that despite the general view that Iran “has gone soft” regarding its revolutionary zeal experienced in the early 1980s; the Islamic Republic’s ultimate strategic goals are quite the same as the ones visioned by Khomeini. The difference between the Iranian foreign policy of the first half of the 1980s and the one of our days is the fact that Iranian leaders realized that placing regime survival on the top of the

preference list is the key for the achievement of all other goals. The steadiness of the original Khomeini principles in the deep, invisible fundamentals of Iranian political thinking, concealed by the apparently often-changing and sometimes incoherent foreign policy makes Iran one of the most interesting and challenging subjects of foreign policy analysis.

2) Revolutionary principles

‘Unlike the slogan ‘Neither East nor West but the Islamic Republic’, which lost its meaning after the end of the Cold War; Khomeini’s declaration of fundamental principles of the Islamic revolution has persisted to the present.’ The principles of ‘independence, freedom and the Islamic Republic’ were the ones designated by President Khatami as eternals.

The principle Islamic Republic means that politics and leadership must be exercised in accordance with Islam. According to the general view, the revolution of 1979 was nothing else than a replacement of a secular dictatorship with a religious one, forcing religion on the Iranian society and politics. However Khomeini was not the first one in Iran to refer to divine right as the source of legitimacy. Originally in Islam there is no distinction between state power and religion. The Safavid dynasty of Persia, which declared Twelver Shiism to be the state religion has also claimed that their right to rule is provided by God. Moreover, if we want to look at a broader picture – and we have to do it in order to understand Iranian political thinking, which is a mixture of the Persian-Iranian legacy and Islam –, we must go back in pre-Islam times. At the turn of the 5th and 6th century BC, the legendary Persian king of the Achaemenid Empire is reported to refer to Ahura Mazda, the deity figure of the ancient Persian religion Zoroastrianism as the source of his right to rule. ‘I am king. Ahura Mazda gave me the kingdom.’ Centuries later king Ardashir I argued that politics and religion should not be separated, claiming ‘Consider the altar and the throne as inseparable; they must always sustain one another. A sovereign without religion is a tyrant.’

One can see that the continuity of religious ruling is a 2500 years old tradition and a characteristic of Iranian politics, and the Pahlavi era meant only a tiny deviation.

from this custom. The ‘eternal’ principle of Islamic governance – as Khatami referred to it – is also highlighted by present Leader Khamenei. A fine example for putting his cards on the table Khamenei said in March 2012, that Iran has divine right to retaliate if attacked by an aggressor, referring to a possible strike by Israel or the United States. ‘The Koran states that if an enemy attacks you first, the enemy will certainly be defeated … This is God’s law. We are not thinking of attacks and aggression, but we are attached to the existence and identity of the Islamic republic.’ – Khamenei said.11 Ex-President Rafsanjani, however, said in 2005 that ‘Khomeini’s motto of ‘independence, freedom and the Islamic Republic’ came from the people that God does not appoint the religious guardians, and that the people do not need his permission to elect their representatives. Their right to vote, said Rafsanjani, is based on custom.’12

Concerning independence, the record shows that in the past two hundred years before the revolution of 1979, Iranian policy-makers have seldom been so much in control of their decision-making process as they have been since the revolution; and record also shows, that since the revolution, they have been able to defend Iran’s independence and national security interests in war and peace. ‘Iranian foreign policy-makers are well aware of the limits of Iran’s independence.’ Under the pressure of the war with Iraq they left behind their early isolationist tendencies. Even Khomeini, who in the earliest days of the revolution said that Iran should not sit at the same table with governments not sharing the belief in Islam, modified his point of view claiming that ‘establishing relations with other countries is compatible not only with the Islamic prophetic tradition, but also with Iranian national interests. Failure to establish relations, he warned sternly, would mean ‘defeat and annihilation’ for Iran.’13

Taking a look at Khomeini’s incoherent early statements about foreign policy, it can be noted that he liked to express his thoughts in an abstract sense, sometimes inseparably connecting independence with relations with other countries. His announcements ‘The Iranian nation does not allow any country to interfere in its internal affairs and defends its freedom and independence while treating all countries in kind.’, or ‘Our Islamic Republic will be friendly toward all nations and respects them

provided that they mutually respected us.’ seems to stand opposed to ‘There is no reason why the Islamic government of Iran should sit at the same table with another government which has no belief in Islam and human ethics.’, however all the three quotations are from the same time.\textsuperscript{14}

When they decided to break out from isolation, Iranian leaders foresaw the standards of independence of the forthcoming generations. Present day Iranian youth rejects the idea that Iran can be sufficient unto itself, but they take pride in their country’s glorious past and recent polls are said to show that 92 per cent of Iranians are profess to be ‘very proud’ of their nationality compared with only 72 per cent of the Americans, who are usually portrayed to be outstandingly patriotic. Iran’s geopolitical environment and its hydrocarbon resources have invited foreign invasions, occupations, interventions and exploitations in the past. In order to prevent the slightest form of domination and decrease in independence, security measures and policies often overshadow the success of the principle of freedom in its internal, social and political sense.\textsuperscript{15}

One must note that the ‘independence, freedom and Islamic Republic’ triplet, despite all the respect it receives, was never codified. Instead, the Islamic constitution adopted in October 1979, systematized a new quartet as the main guiding principles for the prevailing foreign policy of Iran. The 10\textsuperscript{th} chapter of the constitution is dedicated to foreign policy. Its 152\textsuperscript{nd} Article declares the four fundamental principles of Iranian foreign policy:

\begin{quote}
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, the defence of the rights of all Muslims, nonalignment with respect to the hegemonist superpowers, and the maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent States.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{16} Article 152 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran
Regarding the given article, Iranian foreign policy must be crafted along the four principles of 1) freedom, as rejection of all forms of foreign domination; 2) independence, incorporating the preservation of territorial integrity; 3) protection of Muslims’ rights without being allied with any of the hegemonic powers; and 4) peaceful coexistence with non-belligerent states. One can see that the principles of freedom and independence are borrowed, or carried over from the original triplet and they are rounded out by two, unambiguously foreign policy related ones. These principles guide the Iranian foreign policy since the revolution, more or less spectacularly, depending on the country’s actual government, position and possibilities, and not least on the way they interpret them.

3) Legal framework and actors of foreign policy decision making

The most important element in the legal framework of Iranian foreign policy is the already cited constitution adopted in October 1979, and once amended in July 1989. The constitution was drafted along and around ayatollah Khomeini’s theory of Islamic governance, formulating the world’s only theocratic republic by combining typical Shia Muslim elements with typical western democratic ones. However Khomeini himself insisted on the non-democratic nature of the Iranian system, as democracy was a demonized definition attached to the west at the time of the revolution. One can say that with and despite all its theocratic-clerical characteristics and restrictions, Islamic Iran is the only working democratic system in its immense neighbourhood concerning its Gulf-neighbours as well, except for Turkey and maybe Azerbaijan. The Iranian constitution defines the Iranian political structure thus the institutional framework of the country’s foreign policy.

The above presented 152nd Article is one of the four articles of the 10th Chapter of the Iranian constitution devoted to foreign policy. Article 153 guarantees that no foreign control can be permitted over Iran’s natural resources, economy, army or culture, while Article 155 is about granting political asylum. Article 144 is also very important regarding Iran’s relations with Lebanese Hezbollah, Palestinian Hamas, or other organizations considered as terrorists by several western governments. In accordance with the third principle pronounced in Article 152 about the protection of
Muslim rights and with Ali ibn Abu Talib’s call, ‘Help the oppressed and fight the oppressors!’, Article 144 says:

_The Islamic Republic of Iran has as its ideal human felicity throughout human society, and considers the attainment of independence, freedom, and rule of justice and truth to be the right of all people of the world. Accordingly, while scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the internal affairs of other nations, it supports the just struggles of the freedom fighters against the oppressors in every corner of the globe._

It is visible that one of Iran’s most criticized behaviour, namely its support for various organizations and movements for which Iran is registered as a state supporting terrorism in the West comes from the constitution of the country, thus it constitutes an inalienable characteristic of the foreign policy of the country. So inalienable, this support is guaranteed to Iran’s small allies independently from the actual government in power. To illustrate the main hypothesis written in the introduction, claiming that presidents in Iran are not the ones in Iran to scheme foreign policy, it is an open secret that since the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Iran organized the Hezbollah in Lebanon in 1982, Tehran provides 200 million USD annually for its ally on the Mediterranean coast, no matter how friendly and cooperative (i.e. Khatami) or hostile and refusing (i.e. Ahmadinejad) the actual President of Iran tries to appear on the international scene.

After the revolution of 1979 ‘the post-revolutionary Iranian political elite has introduced a semi-theocratic mode of rule’, but also ‘the Islamic Republic or Iran’s political institutions are based on a modern state that finds its origins in the constitution of 1906.’ Iran’s ‘political power structure is composed of connected but also competitive formal and informal political power centres.’ This goes for foreign policy as well: like in most countries, foreign policy decision making is diversified in Iran as well, the decisive last word however always comes from the office of the Supreme Leader. Beside him, the most important players in foreign policy decision making in

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18 Article 154 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran
Iran are the President and his Foreign Minister, the country’s Supreme National Security Council and the parliament.

According to the country’s constitution, the highest authority in Iran is the head of the Islamic Republic’s clerical establishment, the Supreme Leader of the Revolution. As Article 2 of the constitution stipulates it, Iran’s independence is secured by

“continuous leadership and perpetual guidance, and its fundamental role in ensuring the uninterrupted process of the revolution of Islam ... continuous leadership of the holy persons, possessing necessary qualifications, exercised on the basis of the Koran and the Sunnah, upon all of whom be peace”\(^\text{20}\).

The Supreme Leader should normally not get involved in everyday politics of the country, rather he lays down the guidelines, designates the path on which the Islamic Revolution should move on. The Supreme Leader is chosen for life, and supervised by a directly elected clerical body, the Assembly of Experts. In accordance with Article 110, the Supreme Leader’s duties – among several others not enumerated here – are the delineation of the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Supervision over the proper execution of the general policies of the system, assuming supreme command of the Armed Forces, the declaration of war and peace and the mobilization of the Armed Forces, the appointment of the President after presidential elections and also his dismissal, if Iran’s interests says so.\(^\text{21}\)

All major and important political decision of the President, which would deviate from the normal way, from the revolutionary pattern, must be – generally informally – approved by the Supreme Leader. If he says no, then no matter how bad the President adheres to his plan or idea, it cannot be carried out or implemented. It means that the directly elected President in Iran, is – even if officially not directly subordinated to the Leader – only second in the power structure, supervised by the Supreme Leader. According to Article 113,

\textit{After the office of Leadership, the President is the highest official in the country. His is the responsibility for implementing the Constitution and}

\(^{20}\) Article 2 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
\(^{21}\) Article 110 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran
acting as the head of the executive, except in matters directly concerned with the office of the Leadership.\(^\text{22}\)

Among many others the area of responsibility of the executive contains the pursuing of foreign policy as well. The foreign minister is appointed by the President thus represents the President’s views in most cases, but not at all times and as history showed it, the person of the foreign minister can be subject of a clash between the Leader and the President.

A thirteenth chapter has been added to the constitution in the last days of Khomeini’s leadership, containing only one article, namely Article 176 which calls for the establishment of a new institution called the Supreme National Security Council. This article expresses that:

\((1)\) In order to safeguarding the national interests and preserving the Islamic Revolution, the territorial integrity, and the national sovereignty, a Supreme Council for National Security presided over by the President shall be constituted to fulfil the following responsibilities:

1. Determining the defence and national security policies within the framework of general policies determined by the Leader;

2. coordination of activities in the areas relating to politics, intelligence, social, cultural and economic fields in regard to general defence and security policies; and

3. exploitation of materialistic and intellectual resources of the country for facing the internal and external threats.

\((2)\) The Council shall consist of:

- the heads of three branches of the government,
- the chief of the Supreme Command Council of the Armed Forces,
- the officer in charge of the planning and budget affairs,
- two representatives nominated by the Leader,
- Ministers of foreign affairs, interior, and information,
- a Minister related with the subject, and

\(^\text{22}\) Article 113 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- the highest ranking officials from the Armed Forces and the Islamic Revolution's Guards Corps.

(3) Commensurate with its duties, the Supreme Council for National Security shall form subcouncils such as Defence Subcouncil and National Security Subcouncil. Each subcouncil will be presided over by the President or a member of the Supreme Council for National Security appointed by the President.

(4) The scope of authority and responsibility of the subcouncils will be determined by law and their organizational structure will be approved by the Supreme Council for National Defence.

(5) The decisions of the Supreme Council for National Security shall be effective after the confirmation by the Leader.23

It is visible from the constitution, that the Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) is not like any other national security councils for example like the probably most famous American one. Normally in most other countries national security councils are advisory bodies to the executive branch; they provide information, guidance, opinions and plans for the head of the executive, who is generally the chairman of the council. In contrast, the Iranian SNSC is the body itself setting Iranian foreign policy – along the already discussed principles –, and its decisions confirmed by the Leader, are binding for the government who only has to execute it. The SNSC is more like a board of directors of a company, with a secretary appointed by the President. By his own presence and through the men appointed by him also present in the Council, like his ministers and the secretary, the President can exert influence on the foreign policy decision making, but he is well counterbalanced by the Supreme Leader’s men, namely his representatives and the military commanders appointed by him. In this way, with Iran analyst Karim Saldjadpour’s words, ‘Decisions in Iran are made by consensus rather than decree… Ayatollah Khamenei rules the country much like a CEO.’24

There are of course other actors with certain degree of influence in foreign policy making in Iran too, like Iran's directly elected parliament, the Majlis, which has

23 Article 176 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran
the power to approve international agreements, contracts, protocols and treaties.\textsuperscript{25} However the Majlis may not interfere in the executive foreign policy decision making process, the parliament ‘discusses foreign policy issues, and individual members can make public statements on regional and international issues.’\textsuperscript{26} As a counterbalance for the Majlis there is the Guardian Council, a kind of constitutional court, a twelve-member body of six clerics picked by the Supreme Leader and six jurists picked by the Head of Judiciary (who is appointed by Supreme Leader). This Council is the most spectacular element of the unorthodox system of checks and balances in Iran, responsible for vetting the candidates of presidential and parliamentary elections, a means the Council used effectively in the early 2000s, to facilitate a kind of constitutional coup to cripple reformist President Khatami. The Guardian Council has also veto power over all decisions made by the Majlis, making any un-Islamic, un-revolutionary and unwanted attempt of change made by the legislation impossible.\textsuperscript{27}

Another body, called the Expediency (or sometimes Exigency) Council, arbitrates between the Majlis and the Guardian Council in case of prolix debate about a proposed bill, and consults the Supreme Leader when these two bodies fail to reach agreement. The Expediency Council is also an advisory body for the Supreme Leader, who can ask advice from the Council in any topic, including foreign policy.\textsuperscript{28} Finally, it is important to note, that without having any codified role in foreign policy making, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) also play an important role in both setting and executing foreign policy through its own intelligence, covert operations and enormous influence in high level Iranian politics.\textsuperscript{29}

Eva P. Rakel calls the attention to another, informal power structure working in the shadow of the official one:

‘Cutting across state institutions and their aligned institutions, the informal power structure is composed of different political factions of the political elite: the Conservative faction, the Pragmatist faction and the Reformist faction. These factions are not coherent groups but consist of different branches with sometimes contradictory policy orientations.'

\textsuperscript{25} Article 77 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran
\textsuperscript{27} Article 91-99 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran
\textsuperscript{28} Article 112 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran
Sometimes the factions even overlap in their political outlook. As there are no legal political parties in Iran, the political action represent different ideas on politics, economics, socio-cultural issues and foreign relations. Rivalry among different political factions has a great impact in the process of political decision making and is an obstacle to the formulation of coherent domestic and foreign policies. ... It can be concluded that the Conservative dominated group is more ideologically driven in its foreign policy outlook, while the Pragmatist and Reformist factions have a less doctrinaire approach to foreign policy. The three factions agree on certain fundamental principles (...) but they have different views on how these principles should be put into practice.  

Briefly, Iranian foreign policy can only be pursued officially as the Supreme National Security Council sets it along the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Leader according to the fundamental principles dating back to the revolution. Any plan or attempt to deviate from it, even the slightest must be consulted with the highest authority. How is it possible then that various Presidents have spectacularly different foreign policies? The answer is startlingly simple: They do not really have. It is only the language they use what is different, what can actually be different. As it was stated in the introduction, the author of this paper claims that the number one goal of the Iranian foreign policy is very much the same today, in 2012 as it was in 1989, when Ali Khamenei succeeded Khomeini as Supreme Leader and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani commenced his first term as President of the Islamic Republic, after the demise of the father of the Revolution and the amendment of the constitution: regime survival.

Even though sometimes it might seem incoherent, Islamic Iran pursues a steadfast foreign policy with a set of ultimate goals to achieve. In order to achieve these ultimate goals, there are several intermediate, “milestone” objectives, which might deviate remarkably from the nature of the ultimate goals. These intermediate objectives are still not determined by the President – or at least not him alone, as his task is to execute the foreign policy, not to plan it. The reason why outsiders are susceptible to see Iranian foreign policy incoherent and incline to say that major changes in Iranian foreign policy (thus in Iranian strategic thinking) can be expected when a new president takes office is the fact, that it is up to the President what kind of language and rhetoric

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does he chooses to represent and to pursue the foreign policy of his country – which is for the most part planned by the Supreme National Security Council along the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Leader, according to the principles and goals set up by Khomeini himself.

4) Power figures and domestic developments after Khomeini

In November 1987, then-Parliament Speaker Rafsanjani said that ‘Iran should stop its crude diplomacy to avoid making enemies’. Despite being a cleric himself ranking hojatoleslam, Rafsanjani’s views were much more realistic than the ones of the mainstream clergy. However Rafsanjani, after his election as President did not dispense with the religious ideology completely; some say it was because ‘he had to please various constituencies.’ 31 Nevertheless, the fact that as a speaker under Khomeini’s leadership, Rafsanjani could announce such a thing marks the beginning of the next decade in Iranian foreign policy, in which national interest prevails over ideology; at least concerning short- and intermediate term goals.

Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani born in 1934 in the central Iranian city of Rafsanjan to a family of farmers and clerics. He studied theology in Qom where he met Ayatollah Khomeini, whose close follower he became. Rafsanjani began his political activism in the 1960s as part of the Islamic Student Movement, opposing the regime of the Shah. Like most of his fellow revolutionaries, he was imprisoned several times during the 1960s-70s. He became a trusted aide and friend of Ayatollah Khomeini, a key member of Iran's Revolutionary Council at the beginning of the new Islamic Republic. He acted as Speaker of the Majlis from 1980 until his election as President in 1989. In the last year of the war with Iraq, ayatollah Khomeini appointed him acting commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He is seen as the main mover behind Iran's acceptance of the UN Security Council resolution which ended the war.32 After Rafsanjani’s election as President, Iran opened up its economy towards the West, as it needed foreign investment for the reconstruction of the country an opening which of course could not be done only in the domain of economy. To break out from isolation,

Iran had to reform its whole foreign policy towards its hostile neighbourhood and the
demonized West.

Of course, Rafsanjani needed a supporting – or at least a sidestepping – Supreme
Leader for his programme to be executed, and in the early 1990s, Khamenei seemed to
be a perfect match for the President. Seyyed Ali Khamenei was born in the north-
eastern Iranian town Mashhad to a family of religious scholars, to an Azeri father and a
Persian mother. Khamenei began advanced religious training in Qom while still being a
tenager, and shortly became a protégé of Khomeini. After Khomeini was exiled,
Khamenei continued to mobilize protests and demonstrations and maintained close ties
to his exiled mentor. Khamenei was imprisoned multiple times and, in 1975, he was
internally exiled. After the triumph of the revolution Khamenei became one of
Khomeini’s primary lieutenants, briefly serving as Minister of Defence, then as the
supervisor of the IRGC. In the 1980s he was elected as president twice in 1981 and in
1985. During his two terms, he was a key player in guiding the policy for the Iran-Iraq
war.33

The way Khamenei became Leader of the Revolution explains a lot about his
early style of leadership. Originally the Islamic Republic’s constitution called for the
Supreme Leader to be a Grand Ayatollah. In early 1989, Khomeini became estranged
with his designated heir Grand Ayatollah Ali Montazeri as he started to criticize the
domestic policies of the Iranian government. Khomeini, probably feeling his end is
near, started to look for another cleric who could succeed him as Supreme leader, but he
was not satisfied with the pool of senior clergy in Iran. In April 1989, just three months
before his death Khomeini had the constitution revised so that future Leaders needed to
be only an expert on Islamic jurisprudence and to possess “the appropriate political and
managerial skills”. The amendment also abolished the office of Prime Minister,
transferring more power to the President. Just a decade after the revolution, the Iranian
power-structure underwent a series of significant reforms, giving ground for a new
foreign policy.

Then-President Khamenei himself, who was holding the rank only of a
hojatoleslam, and did not know at that time, that he would soon become the Supreme
Leader, argued in defence of the amendment of the constitution, that Khomeini’s
legitimacy as Supreme Leader did not derive from the fact that he was a Grand

33 Altman, Alex: Ayatullah Ali Khamenei: Iran's Supreme Leader.
Ayatollah, but rather from his recognition and reputation as a courageous political leader and an expert on Islamic jurisprudence. Rafsanjani concurred with Khamenei, and became Khamenei’s kingmaker by working behind the scenes convincing Khomeini to appoint his old friend and ally as his heir. Shortly after Khomeini’s demise in June 1989, the Assembly of Experts approved of Khamenei’s succession by a vote of 60 to 14. However, it was not hidden, that Khamenei’s religious credentials were inferior, the Iranian political elites rallied behind Khamenei. The Assembly of Experts declared in its communiqué that Khamenei was selected because he was close to Khomeini and for his important role in both the revolution and the war with Iraq, while also being knowledgeable of “the contemporary problems facing the Muslim world.” Khamenei’s status was elevated overnight and he became Ayatollah the day after his election, but a marja only five years later, in 1994.34 Khamenei’s inaugural address as the new Supreme Leader of the Revolution speaks for itself: ‘I am an individual with many faults and shortcomings and truly a minor seminarian. However, a responsibility has been placed on my shoulders and I will use all my capabilities and all my faith in the almighty in order to be able to bear this heavy responsibility.’35

It is not quite clear who had more influence over foreign policy making after Khomeini’s demise, Rafsanjani or Khamenei, whose legitimacy for being Supreme Leader was widely disputed, but in an interview made by Christine Marschall, former UN Ambassador of Iran Rejai Khorassan said:

‘After Khomeini’s death, there were no difference between President Rafsanjani and Leader Khamenei. ... It is difficult to say whether there are real differences between the two, or whether Khomeini’s system was maintained. Khomeini left a model of administration by which the Leader was pre-occupied with the broader scope of politics and cultural issues which went beyond national borders, whereas the government was concerned with national matters. ... When Rafsanjani came to power the population expected change, for instance an opening to Europe and the United States. Khamenei seemed to be interested in the same policy orientation. However, many extremist groups accused

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Khamenei and Rafsanjani of diverting from the ‘line of the Imam’. Khamenei had to maintain his legitimacy as Leader and therefore [by time] took a more ideological line than Rafsanjani. ³⁶

This strange relation, which seemed more like lassisez faire than strict subordination and supervision between the President and the Leader was the most visible manifestation of the so-called “tactical alliance” between radicals and moderates after 1989. The leadership axis formed between Khamenei and Rafsanjani is better understood as a shared belief that economic prosperity was needed first to build a strong state before the message of the revolution could be any further propagated. “Let the revolution be triumphant in one country first, before starting to spread it!” became a motto of Iranian politics. As Sayyed Mohammad Sadr, a foreign policy expert affiliated to the President’s office wrote:

‘The most important strategic aim of the Islamic Republic is the globalisation of Islam and the Islamic Revolution. ... It follows that all moves and policies in the economic, security, cultural, political and other fields should be in the way of realising this aim. ... Since the Islamic revolution and the regime is based on Islam, the ultimate aim is export of revolution and the spread of true Islamic thought. Since export of the revolution and globalisation of the Islamic movement is not possible without central backing and permanent support, we should exert all efforts to protect this centre, the Islamic republic of Iran.’ ³⁷

For a revolutionary state, whose very legitimacy is based on an religious ideological theory, it was necessary to legitimize its new wave of foreign and economic policies as widely as it was possible, both for the domestic and international audience. Traditional hard liners like ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, chairman of the Guardian Council since 1988 announced, that the unorthodox policies of reconstruction are aimed at ‘transforming the Islamic Republic into a ‘power capable of slapping the enemies in the face.’’. His colleague ayatollah Emami-Kashani, spokesman of the Council insisted that Iran should be a rich country not just from a spiritual-religious and cultural point of view, but also in term of economy. It can be stated that by this time the Islamic

revolution turned Iranian; in the debate between Islam and Iran, the balance was tipping towards Iran. The idea of actively exporting the revolution was abandoned; instead a new concept of passive export was invented and implemented. According to this idea, Iran ought to be an exemplary state, something which would like to be followed. As Hasan Rowhani, Deputy Speaker and Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council put it:

‘The leader of the Islamic movement is Islamic Iran whether we say or not. ... The eminent leader of the revolution, his eminence Ayatollah Khamenei ... is the leader of the world of Islam today. ... The guidance of Islamic movement [is] a humanitarian, Islamic, religious and revolutionary duty which our system bears. ... We have to build Iran, strengthen, modernise and develop it. We must establish social justice in formed into a modern developed county it would be a model country for all Muslims.’

During the 1990s Khamenei slowly became associated with the radical right, but his consolidation as Supreme Leader was an even slower process. Khamenei’s leadership style in his first decade was generally letting Rafsanjani govern the country in economic and foreign fields the way he wants, as long as he doesn’t do anything spectacularly anti-revolutionary. Since Khamenei shared the same opinion about the importance of short- and intermediate term goals as Rafsanjani, like economic reconstruction and the reintegration of the country into the international community, he did not have any serious objection regarding Rafsanjani’s politics, except for the fact of course that despite the general opening and the new, market oriented economy, President Rafsanjani during his two terms, could not manage to improve the economic situation of Iran in a way and degree he was expected to do so. A decade after the end of the crippling war with Iraq and almost twenty years after the revolution, the Iranian economy was still just a shadow of what it used to be during the ancien régime.

In 1997, after eight years of pragmatist presidency, Iranians elected a not very well-known reformist candidate, Seyyed Mohammad Khatami in a huge turnout election. Khatami was born in 1943 and is a middle ranking Shia cleric, whose training in religion was in the philosophical tradition of Islam, rather than the juridical,UTILITY
precluding any possible elevation to the rank of ayatollah. His interest in philosophy was not limited to Islamic philosophy, as was reflected in his complex and integrative view of the world. Breaking his studies in the seminary, Khatami attended Isfahan University, where he obtained a BA degree in Western philosophy. According to Khatami, his favourite Western philosopher is John Locke. After obtaining a BA degree, he continued his studies in Tehran, where he studied educational sciences. Influenced by his father, who himself was an ayatollah, after obtaining an MA degree in educational sciences he returned to seminary in the holy city of Qom for seven more years. Khatami is a hojatoleslam, literally meaning “authority of Islam”. (As a difference between an ayatollah a hojatoleslam, the latter cannot become a marja and cannot issue fatwas.) From 1978 to 1980, Khatami was the director of the Islamic Centre in Hamburg, giving him first-hand experience of Western culture, which he used very efficiently later on. It means, that he was not in Iran during the revolution, but was always a supporter of Khomeini and his theories. In 1980 he became member of the new Islamic Majlis of Iran for two years. In 1982 Khatami became Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance for the first time, until 1986, then for a second time, in Rafsanjani’s cabinet from 1989 until 1992. After resigning from his ministerial position, he was appointed as director of National Library of Iran and member of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, an institution responsible for preserving the pure Islamic nature of Iran’s cultural life under the supervision of the Supreme Leader.

Khatami’s view of the world and of the west in particular was very significantly different than the one of the other Iranian leaders before and after him, marking his attitude to the west, very well illustrated by the language of his foreign policy. According to Khatami, “Western civilization had much to offer the world, noting that it was a “phenomenon … whose positive achievements are not few.” Khatami thought that “the first rule of dialogue … is to know yourself and identity. The second rule is to know the civilization with which you want to maintain dialogue.” Khatami labelled his foreign policy strategy towards the West “Dialogue among Civilizations” twisting Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilization” theory. Regarding the relations with the West, Khatami always emphasized the importance of communication, about which he

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was truly serious. From the realistic idealism of Khomeini, through Rafsanjani’s realism Iranian foreign policy thinking pulled through a long and difficult evolution. Khatami’s election opened a new chapter in Iranian foreign policy by introducing constructivist thinking and attitude, something that seemed very different from the original Khomeini notion of foreign policy.

Khamenei might have been embarrassed by Khatami’s “liberal” approach to foreign policy towards the West, but gave the President the green light to pursue its policies holding out the friendly right hand. After the failure of Rafsanjani to rev up the economy, Khamenei supposed that Khatami’s policies might achieve that breakthrough with the West, which could ultimately lead to a significant flow of foreign investment in Iran. However, European businessmen and companies preferred trade over investment in Iran, as the domestic political climate was not convincing for foreign investments in the country. Also, the United States’ sanction policy was a deterrent factor for possible investors. Even if the economic results failed to come about, Iranians could feel, that their country is really on its way out from isolation, as the United Nations was so impressed by Khatami’s attempt to narrow the gap between Iran and the international community or in a wider and more abstract perspective, between different cultures, or civilizations with the Iranian President’s usage, it devoted the year 2001 to be the “Year of Dialogue Between Civilizations”.

In 1999 student protests broke out in Iran as a response to the action of shutting down a reformist newspaper by conservative groups having ties with influential clerical circles. The IRGC wanted to exploit the opportunity to step on the political scene and put down the protests itself, which attempt was very much opposed by Khatami. It was the first situation since his inauguration as Supreme Leader that Khamenei had to interfere in a serious domestic affair, what is more the protestors started to chant slogans calling him murderer and tyrant. Khamenei was unable to give any response for days and finally he ordered the demonstrations to be put down and the leaders punished.\(^\text{42}\)

The 1999 student demonstrations and its suppression meant the beginning of a conservative backlash, which started to affect domestic affairs first, but was later expanded to cover the field of foreign policy as well.

This backlash had its triumph after Khatami’s American-policies failed to achieve a breakthrough after Iran became part of the “axis of evil” and Washington

rejected Khatami’s Grand Bargain proposal. The conservative Guardian Council started to veto more and more bills of the overwhelmingly reformist parliament, blocking the Khatami administration in its work, rising serious questions about the Iranian system’s democratic nature. The Guardian Council vetted many of the reformist candidates running for the 2004 legislative election, turning the 65 per cent reformist Majles of the last four years into a 54 per cent conservative one depriving Khatami of its power to govern, crippling him for his last year of Presidency.43

The 2005 presidential elections caused a split among Iranian conservatives, between traditional conservatives and populist-like neo-conservatives. Iranian neo-conservativism was born in the first half of the 2000s and is a minority branch of the Conservative faction, which had become radicalized after the war with Iraq, as they were excluded from policy-making and the economy by the dominant – elder – part of the Iranian political elite. In the presidential run-up, Khamenei, who finally managed to consolidate his position as the Supreme Leader around 2000 supported Ahmadinejad in the run-up of the elections. Khamenei thought that Ahmadinejad, whose main rival presidential candidate was Rafsanjani, will be easy to influence and will not make as much trouble as his two predecessors did.

Ahmadinejad was born in 1956 to a religious blacksmith’s family, thus he is the first Iranian President who is neither a cleric, nor coming from a clerical family. He started his academic studies in 1975, on the subject of civil engineering in the Science and Technology University in Tehran. In 1986, he continued his studies at MSc level in the same university. Ahmadinejad got engaged in political activities while being a university student by attending religious and political meetings before the Islamic Revolution. With the victory of the Islamic Revolution, he became a founder and also a member of the Islamic Association of Students in the Science and Technology University. During the war with Iraq Ahmadinejad was actively present as a member of the volunteer Basij (literally mobilization) forces, a militia subordinated to the IRGC, as an instructing officer in different parts and divisions of the battlefronts particularly in the war engineering division until the end of the war. In 1989, he became a member of the Board of Civil Engineering Faculty of the Science and Technology University. In 1997, he managed to obtain his Ph.D. on transportation engineering and planning. 

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Ahmadinejad’s foreign policy towards the West was much more confrontative and provocative than any of his predecessors’. While he continued the Rafsanjani-Khatami Gulf- and neighbourhood policy, to ensure Iran’s position in the region, he also made efforts to build up stronger ties with Pakistan and India, the Central Asian Republics, Turkey, Russia, China and certain Latin American countries, like Brazil and Venezuela. Iran’s approach towards BRIC countries (an acronym referring to Brazil, India, China and Russia as the four most advanced economic powers not belonging to the West) and other ambitious developing states has to be regarded as a countermeasure to the growing pressure on Iran extorted by the West, with which Iranian relations experienced a serious drop after Ahmadinejad’s inauguration.

Khamenei, who could finally consolidate his power in the early 2000s during the conservative backlash, supported Ahmadinejad’s foreign policy, whereas condemned certain claims of the President, what even Khamenei found too harsh and harmful for Iran’s position in the international community. The Leader supported Ahmadinejad’s run for a second term in 2009, but the relations between the two power figures deteriorated after Ahmadinejad was re-elected. The cause of the clash cause was Ahmadinejad’s chief advisor, Rahim Mashaei and his “deviant” religious views. Ahmadinejad’s deeply religious personality might affects his foreign policy behaviour in a certain degree. Some say his views are dangerous as Ahmadinejad thinks that Mahdi’s return is near which might result in irrational decisions or actions. In 2011, Ahmadinejad dismissed his Minister of Intelligence but Khamenei revised the President’s decision (even though according to the constitution it is the President’s duty and right to appoint and dismiss Ministers) and placed Heydar Moslehi back to his position.

Ahmadinejad lost its support during the 2012 Parliamentary elections, where the Khamenei-led conservative wing triumphed, with the surprising support of the reformist camp. Roughly the same happened to Ahmadinejad in 2012 then with Khatami in 2004. Crippled for the last year of his Presidency most likely President Ahmadinejad will not be able to affect Iranian policy really much. There is a view that the purpose of the whole power struggle and the reason for making Ahmadinejad unviable for his last year

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44 Biography of H.E. Dr. Ahmadinejad, Honourable President of Islamic Republic of Iran. 
is a plan from the side of the Leader to abolish the Office of the President, creating a purer theocracy by removing an “unnecessary” democratic element from it. However the more likely reason is the will of the traditional conservative side to eliminate the so called neoconservative branch of Ahmadinejad, Mashaie and their circle.
Chapter II. – Examining Iranian Foreign Policy

1) Iran’s policy of good-neighbourliness in the Persian Gulf

The invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces in August 1990, opened a window of opportunity for Rafsanjani to promote his country in the region, as other Arab Gulf countries now seemed Iraq as the immediate threat to the security of the Persian Gulf and not Iran, who already abandoned its alienating policies of revolution-exporting and was the very first state in the region to condemn the Iraqi aggression.\textsuperscript{45} The Iraqi invasion thus opened a window of opportunity for Iran, to approach its Gulf neighbourhood, whereas Khomeini’s views about the Arab monarchies in the Gulf region were pretty clear: in his work “Governance of the Jurists” he stated that ‘Islam proclaims monarchy and hereditary succession wrong and invalid. … Islam, then, does not recognize monarchy and hereditary succession; they have no place in Islam.’\textsuperscript{46} But Khomeini was gone and the new winds brought new policies; winds blown by a phenomenon not unknown for Iranians, just temporarily set aside by the revolution: national interest.

Rafsanjani even re-established official diplomatic relation with Saudi Arabia in 1991, the country Khomeini hated probably the most, allegedly saying that one day Iran can have good diplomatic relations with Iraq or even the United States, but not with Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{47} In 1987, during the co-called Hajj incident after which no Iranian pilgrims could participate in the Hajj pilgrimage for three consequent years (until 1991), one of the two most important feast of Islam, Khomeini declared that ’the Saudi rulers, “these vile and ungodly Wahhabis, [a conservative branch of Sunni Islam] are like daggers which have always pierced the heart of the Muslims from the back,” and announced that Mecca was in the hands of “a band of heretics.” Once more, the Saudis were transformed into what [then-]speaker of the parliament, Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, called “Wahhabi hooligans.” Rafsanjani recalled the nineteenth-century Wahhabi massacres (of Shi’ites) in Najaf and Karbala, the Wahhabi destruction of

Islamic monuments in Medina (venerated by Shi‘ites), and the Wahhabi burning of libraries (containing Shi‘ite works). The Wahhabis “will commit any kind of crime. I ask you to pay more attention to the history of that evil clique so that you can see what kind of creatures they have been in the course of their history.”

Iran’s orientation towards the Gulf and economic opening towards the West were more then similar to the methods of the Shah. The informal rehabilitation of the Shah by Rafsanjani, through the resurrection of the previous Iranian foreign policies well illustrated the break with the strictly ideologically-driven foreign policy – which was also condemned by Khomeini is his last years. The ayatollah did even drink from the “poisoned chalice” because he realized that Iran’s interest was dictating to do so. Iran in many aspects returned to, or more precisely fused the pre-revolutionary foreign policies of its with the one implemented after 1979. Iran abandoned its export of the revolution, started to concentrate on its narrower region, its Arab neighbourhood along the coasts of the Persian Gulf and the fresh independent ex-soviet states in Central Asia, stopped making outbursts against the United States and opened its market for foreign investors. The new foreign policy – and the Kuwaiti invasion by which Iraq made itself the new common enemy of the Arab monarchies of the Gulf – started a thaw between Iran and its Arab neighbours, slowly but steadily reintegrating Iran into the international political and economic system.

Iran, under shah was the most powerful country in the Gulf region and a strong ally of the United States, thus the implicit candidate for the gendarme of the Persian Gulf. After the revolution, the oil monarchies – especially the ones with significant Shia minorities – became very suspicious towards Iran as they feared the export of the revolution. The war with Iraq exhausted and weakened Iran’s military and after 1988 the Iranian military capabilities were only shadows of their former self. On the other hand, Iran’s oil and gas reserves and its strategic geographical position made the country unable to be ignored. As Ansari put it, ‘Even if Iran had no oil and gas of its own, this simple geopolitical reality would make it difficult to ignore’, emphasizing that during history, ‘Iran benefited from the many trade routes that crossed its territory [e.g. the Silk Road]. Now it finds himself sitting astride the two great energy emporiums of the world: the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea.’ Ansari also pointed out, that there are

other important factors behind Iran’s great power-ambitions, as Iran possesses enormous reserves of various mineral and metals, including gold, copper, and uranium, and also has the demographics necessary for industrial growth, with a population amounting to roughly seventy nine million by 201249. Also, in addition to these material and demographic advantages must be added a ‘rich and cohesive cultural inheritance whose influence far exceeds the boundaries of the modern Iranian state.’50

Iran took sides with the West in 1990 by declaring itself neutral, but strongly condemning Iraq during the Kuwai crisis, even suggesting mediating the conflict. Because of all this, Gulf states became more willing to cooperate with Iran both in economic and security issues. As the cease of the export of the revolution was not a very spectacular and easily noticeable change in behaviour, this rapprochement between Tehran and its Arab neighbours was the first clear sign of change in Iran’s foreign policy behaviour already started under Khomeini but culminated in 1990-91. But why was the security of the Persian Gulf as a whole so important for Iran? The answer also points out that it is not very probable that Iran would close the Strait of Hormuz in our days; it is more likely that Tehran considers its – debated – capability to stop commercial and military sailing between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman as an instrument for the very last resort. Iran needs the Strait open and shipping in the Gulf undisturbed. After witnessing the First Gulf War going total, involving oil exporting capabilities, starting the so-called tanker war, not surprisingly the security of the Persian Gulf became a top priority of Rafsanjani’s foreign policy, as Iran needed other Persian Gulf countries to assure the free flow of oil, a common interest of the whole region composed by countries whose economies are wholly and completely dependant on energy export. Iran’s ports, through which Iranian international trade, including oil export occurs, are located almost exclusively in the Persian Gulf. And it was not just the free flow of oil which was so important for Iran that it radically changed its behaviour; it also needed the member states of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to stabilize oil prices to increase its oil revenues through which Rafsanjani could carry out his programme to reform the economy.

As it was already mentioned above, Rafsanjani’s Gulf policy was much more like the one during the shah then the one of the early days of the revolution, which

wanted to erase and abolish everything which could be connected to the ancien régime. Iran’s role as the great power of the Gulf was a characteristic quality of the shah’s foreign policy and something very different from the original ideas of Khomeini, who ‘didn’t feel a thing about returning Iran’, instead he was dreaming big and planning a global revolution all around the Ummah. Thanks to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, relations improved between Iran and the Persian Gulf countries, which was most evident at the Gulf Cooperation Council’s Summit in Qatar, December 1990. In Doha, the GCC announced its approval for a future cooperation with Tehran and Iran’s participation in regional security arrangements. A year later, Rafsanjani suggested an economic and a technical cooperation between the Gulf monarchies and Iran, which could possibly lead to a comprehensive security arrangement.

However, it is important to note that even if Iran made a huge sacrifice by halting the active export of the revolution, which was the major obstacle between Iran and its monarchic neighbours, it did not cease supporting the Hezbollah what is more, started to support the Palestinian Hamas in 1993 and – through proxy organizations – allegedly blew up the Israeli embassy in 1992 and a Jewish cultural centre in 1994, both in Buenos Aires, Argentina, for which present Minister of Defence Ahmad Vahidi is still wanted by Interpol. Anti-Israeli and anti-American sentiments and efforts remained to be major characteristics of Iranian foreign policy under Rafsanjani, even if they were not talking about them openly.

The most important result of these anti-American sentiments was Iran’s hitherto struggle to oust the United States from the Persian Gulf and to replace it as the guarantor of the security of the region, through a security umbrella involving all the monarchies under Iranian leadership. The rapprochement in the Gulf seemed to halt just as suddenly as it begun some one and a half year ago. It turned out that the GCC preferred the presence of foreign forces rather than their Persian neighbour to guarantee their security. In February 1991 a meeting was arranged between the GCC and Egypt and Syria where they discussed and decided to sign the Damascus Declaration in March, to invite Egyptian and Syrian forces to be stationed in the Gulf. Arab nationalist Hosni Mubarak was strongly against any kind of Iranian role in a regional security arrangement which could lead to its consolidation as a regional great power. One of

Iran’s few already standing allies, President Hafez al-Assad assured Tehran that ‘Iran would play an important role in a post-Gulf War security order’ though.

As the GCC itself was not free of inside conflicts, its two greatest member state Oman and Saudi Arabia were approaching the security arrangement of the Gulf from two completely different points. Oman preferred a security arrangement with Iran involved in it, probably to counterweight Saudi Arabia while Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates were impressed by the fascinating American capabilities presented during Operation Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Desert Sword separately and together as well. The United States deployed hundreds of thousands troops to the region in months and crushed Iraq’s dreaded army in weeks, with ridiculously low casualties. Egypt withdrew from the Declaration two month after signing it in May and pulled out its troops from the Gulf, but despite what Assad promised to Iran about its future role in Gulf security, the coastal monarchies turned to the United States and signed bilateral agreements and treaties entrusting the United States to guarantee their security through constant military presence and by selling them modern arms in huge amounts.

As a consequence of the growing American influence, Tehran felt the need to start rearming itself and to take measures to guarantee its own manoeuvrability by confirming its claim to control the islands of Lesser and Greater Tunb and Abu Musa, confronting the UAE in an unprecedented manner. The Emirates also claimed authority over the three islands due to their extreme strategic importance; as the Persian Gulf is a very swallow sea, the depth of the water determines the lines along which ships can navigate, so all oil tankers and big military ships have to pass between Abu Musa and the Tunbs, practically elongating the Strait of Hormuz and providing Iran some two hundred kilometres of waterways more to control – or close as a last resort.

Among many several others, the eight years long “imposed war” with Iraq as Iranians refer to it had an extremely important consequence. Iran’s isolation by the international community forced Tehran into self-sustainment, which means that Iranians adapted to reduced circumstances, developing stunning engineering ingenuity and to compensate for the lack of spare parts for its mostly American hardware, Iran developed a logistical capacity on its own. ‘Far from starving Iran of military resources, the embargo had encouraged the development of an indigenous arms industry. The war

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taught Iranians the necessity of self-sufficiency and confirmed the ideology of the revolution, which regarded the West, and in this case foreign suppliers, as inherently untrustworthy.  

As it was mentioned above, seeing its Gulf neighbours signing security agreements one by one with the United States, Iran felt the necessity of arming itself in a way it can challenge American superiority in the Persian Gulf. As Iraq, Iran’s traditional antagonistic rival was crippled by the coalition forces with a no-fly zone stretched above it, Tehran did not feel the necessity of rebuilding its former conventional military strength; instead, Tehran turned towards the instruments and methods of unconventional warfare and strategic deterrence. Instead of focusing on the offensive capabilities which Iran did not need at the moment, Tehran started to develop its ballistic missile and anti-ship capabilities, to deter any future aggressor – the United States as Iranian leadership seemed it most likely – from attacking Iran through its ability to strike back asymmetrically or close down the Strait of Hormuz, subtracting some one fifth to one fourth of the crude oil from the international market, causing unpredictable consequences for world economy.

But Rafsanjani’s mission to set the Iranian economy afloat was not an easy one. As after four years of relative American indifference towards Iran under the presidency of George H. Bush, newly elected democratic President Bill Clinton adopted a policy of containment against Iran, starting with the 1992 Iran-Iraq Arms Non-proliferation Act and culminating in the 1996 Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA).  This policy became known as the “dual containment”, referring to the then already existing containment policies against Iraq, implemented after the second Gulf War. The purpose of these sanctions were to slow down the Iranian efforts to reconstruct and develop its petroleum industry, which was critically damaged during the war with Iraq, therefore limiting its revenues and making Rafsanjani’s economic policies impossible to prevail.

As it was mentioned above, one of Iran’s most important intermediate-term goal is to push the United States out of the Persian Gulf, or even from the broader Middle East in order to extent Iran’s regional influence. All Iranian factions consent in this question. The difference between the factions is how America depicted them; reformist and pragmatists say that the United States is a mere strategic challenger of Iran in the

region contesting for influence, while hardliners regard the United States as a socio-cultural threat. Either way, each faction was afraid of American military presence in the region and was in consent on the need for deterrence capabilities.

This idea led to the final word in a discussion going on since the “war of the cities” commenced in 1985, when Iraq started to bomb Iranian cities with its SCUD missiles, that Iran should obtain its own missiles to be able to strike back, or should it focus on traditional air force capabilities? The “Imposed War” was over, and however Iraq did not mean the slightest threat to Iran after its defeat in the Second Gulf War, the region was swarming with American forces. What more, since almost all Iranian aircrafts were of American origin and Iran could not get enough spare parts to maintain the condition of its areal fleet due to the weapons embargo on Iran declared by the “Great Satan”, as conservative politicians usually refer to the United States, the dilemma was finally decided.

Between 1991 and 1993 Iran bought its first pieces of Nodong missiles from North Korea. Nodong missiles are the North Korean variants of Soviet SCUD-D Medium Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM) and Iran based its whole ballistic missile programme on these Nodongs. As Iran learned the lesson from the war with Iraq about the untrustworthiness of foreign arms suppliers, it decided to build up its own missile programme under the control of the IRGC. Thanks to its impressive engineering abilities developed during the war with Iraq, Iran test launched its first domestically made MRBM, the Shahab-3 in 1998, (which missile with its range varying between 1300 and 2000 kilometres, depending on the model and the size of the warhead it carries up to 1000 kilograms and serves as the main deterrence instrument of Iran’s inventory). Since the beginning, Iran’s missile forces have always been under the command of the Revolutionary Guards’ Aerospace Force. With its Shahab-3 missiles Iran can reach any important American base in the Gulf region, in Central Asia and it can also hit Israeli targets. As Brigadier General Mohammad Baqir Zoldaqr, head of the Join Staff Command of the IRGC claimed in the mid-1990s:

“The United States is the only enemy we take as a main threat in our strategy. None of the regional countries ate at a level to be a threat

against Iran’s security. We have organized our forces and equipment to counter the US threats and our exercises and manoeuvres have been arranged to the bass of these threats.\textsuperscript{57}

The fact however, that the Gulf monarchies have leagued with the United States in the early 1990s instead of forming a security umbrella with Iran as its head did not put an end to the thaw between the two sides. The Arab-Iranian rapprochement culminated in the late 1990s, during the first years of new Iranian President Mohammad Khatami. Through the good offices of its traditional rival Saudi Arabia, the presidency of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) went to Iran and Tehran hosted the 1997 summit of the Organization. All neighbouring Arab states were present at the summit with crowded delegation, including Saudi Arabia, who was represented by then-crown prince, now king Abdullah himself. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and President of Palestinian National Authority has not been in Iran since 1980 as the relation between Iran and the PLO deteriorated, due to the disagreement on the solution of the Palestinian question.

At the conference Khatami reassured the Arab neighbourhood, that Tehran – despite the rhetoric of the 1980s – accepts their monarchic regimes and that Iran’s intentions in the region are of peaceful nature. Crown prince Abdullah’s reaction to Khatami’s announcements was a kind of a milestone speech in the Arab-Iranian relations:

\begin{quote}
With the immortal achievements credited to the Muslim people of Iran, and their invaluable contributions throughout our glorious Islamic history, it is no wonder that Teheran, the capital of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is hosting this important Islamic gathering; it is quite natural for the leadership of this Muslim country to be quite aware of its duties and responsibilities towards the Islamic Nation at this critical juncture in our common history; and, motivated by this feeling, to do all that is in its power to serve Islam and the Muslims, to consecrate the spirit of solidarity and interdependence among them, and to help them avoid all that may split their ranks or weaken their common cause. \textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}


A few weeks after the conference, in February 1998 Rafsanjani who was the head of the Expediency Council at this time visited Saudi Arabia, spending more then two weeks among the ‘Wahhabi hooligans’, where he was received by King Fahd and the crown prince Abdullah, a reception which was denied to the American Secretary of State Madeleine Albright two weeks earlier. A year later, in May 1998, for the very first time in history, an Iranian president, Khatami made a visit to the Kingdom to discuss the stabilization of oil prices as their decline caused economic problems for both countries. Nineteen years after Khomeini, an Iranian president was discussing hundred percent pure economic problems with the Saudi king, the long-hated ruler of the ‘vile and un-godly Wahhabis’.

It must be noted however, that changes in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process were also beneficial for Iran in his efforts for developing a good neighbourhood policy. A year before Khatami’s election, in March 1996, President Rafsanjani met with Yasser Arafat in Pakistan for discussions about the tension in the Palestinian-Iranian relations. Rafsanjani toned down and after that there were no more condemnation from Iran’s side on the two-state solution in Palestine, what Arafat was pursuing. As a result of the more and more frequent Palestinian attacks against Israeli targets, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu turned against the peace process, which rose tensions between Israel and the Arab countries of the region. Iran realized the golden opportunity given by the renewed tensions between the sides and started to promote its softened stance to mend fences with its neighbours and other Arab governments as well.

The Arab League took a stand on the Israeli behaviour it recommended all member states to stop the normalization of the relations with the Jewish state as long as Tel Aviv does not return to the negotiating table. The freshly installed Khatami administration did not hesitate to prove Israel’s statements about Iran’s aggressive nature wrong, assuring all its Arab neighbours, that all Israel and the United States were saying about Iran’s ambitions in the region was just part of a discrediting campaign against Tehran, to divert attention of what Iran called the United States’ and Israel’s own menacing policies. With the unwilling help of Netanyahu, Iran achieved that the countries of the region, just like after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Saddam, forgot about Iran and regarded once more Israel as the common enemy of the region. As David Menashri wrote: ‘Just as a sense of threat from Iran helped bring the Arabs closer to

Israel, Arab frustration with Israel pushed them closer to Iran. It is very well illustrated by the joint condemnation of Tel Aviv by the Saudi and the Iranian foreign minister; ‘There is an agreement that Israel’s policies are obstructing security and stability in the Middle East’ – as Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal announced it in November 1997.

Khatami’s Defence Minister Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani was forcing the improvements of Iran’s relations with the GCC member states in order to blunt American political attacks on Iran and to lessen the United States’ military influence in the Gulf region. In 1997 he claimed that the coastal states should seriously opt for formulation of a stable and coordinated common strategy to reach sustainable security without any extra-regional involvement. Contrary to the IRGC whose commanders were just starting to take an active part in politics at that time, the Artesh’s (Iran’s “traditional” Armed Forces) leadership was neither before, nor after so deeply involved in politics then in the first years of Khatami’s presidency. In 1998 Tehran announced its willingness to exchange its complete missile technology know-how with GCC states in exchange for a binding non-aggression pact and military cooperation accord; briefly, for a long discussed complete security arrangement. A good example for the Iranian military’s intention to establish a security cooperation is Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan’s visit to Tehran in 1999, where Admiral Shamkhani, after greeting his counterpart broke protocol and pressed the security arrangement issue in a private discussion, before any of his political superiors could meet the Prince. Despite all the Iranian efforts, the collective security arrangement was never brought to a successful conclusion.

After the Arab-Iranian relations reached their peak in the very late 1990s it became visible, that any further rapprochement is not possible as long as certain rivalries and tensions do not cease to exist, but these problems were not likely to be resolved as they concerned the involved states’ most sensitive geostrategic, ideological or ethnical interests. Such sensitive issues were the territorial dispute between the UAE and Iran about the sovereignty of the strategic Abu Musa and Tunb islands, the rights of the Shia citizens of the Gulf states or the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran over the

leading role of the Ummah. The Iranian leaders realized that – like in most past cases since the beginning of the thaw – it is them who have to loosen the keep on their ground and that despite the improved economic and diplomatic relations with its neighbours, Iran was still treated as an outsider in its own vicinity by its neighbours. It is important to note however, that Iran could more or less maintain agreeable relations with Qatar and Oman, – the two countries of the Gulf Iran does not have such disagreements with and they were even about supporting the 1998 Iranian plans for the collective security cooperation – as it does with Bahrain, the UAE or the Saudi Kingdom.

After the unveiling of the Iranian nuclear programme in 2002 questions arose about the nature of Iranian ambitions and attitude among the Gulf countries. Iran’s reactions and behaviour towards the international community further fuelled the paranoia of the Arab monarchies, pushing them towards the United States, which was absolutely contrary to the Iranian strategic aim, to oust the United States from the Gulf. Despite the rearrangements of the domestic power relations at home, due to what Khatami in many sense was weakened for the last 2 years of his Presidency, the Iranian Gulf policy did not show any spectacular change.

Despite the new President’s, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s harsh anti-American rhetoric, and the general suspicion about the country’s nuclear programme, Iran continued to maintain good relations with its Gulf neighbours. In 2007, an American report, namely the National Intelligence Estimate assessed Iran’s weapons programme as suspended, which backed the Iranian standpoint that the country has no aggressive intentions and should not be treated as a threat; instead, Iran is interested in a full, multinational security arrangement in the region.\(^{63}\) The result of the NIE was Iran’s invitation to the GCC heads of state Summit in Doha, 2007 was a strong sign from the part of the monarchies that despite the pressure they bear on their relationship with Iran from the United States, they still want to pursue good neighbourly relations with Iran, whose ambitions for becoming a regional great power turned clearer than ever in the previous years following the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.

After the 2007 Doha Summit, seeing less and less chance for a multilateral security cooperation started to approach its neighbours – at least some of them – with plans of bilateral security agreements. Iran maintains important economic relations with all its Gulf neighbours – the UAE is one of Iran’s most important trade partners in the

world, while Kuwait is working on a project to connect the country to the Iranian national gas grid. However, the dispute over the three islands in the Persian Gulf between Iran and the UAE still overshadows the ties between the two countries. Qatar and Oman are Iran’s two closest partners in the region, even pursuing military cooperation with Tehran. From time to time the Qatari and the Iranian navies and coastal guards get engaged in joint exercises and pool naval intelligence, while visits by military delegations are also common between the two countries. Also, Qatar and Oman were the only two GCC countries who refrained from directly criticizing Iran’s interference during Bahrain’s Shia uprising in 2011. Moreover Qatar and Iran even held several high-level meetings to discuss security and economic agreements during the period in which the uprisings occurred, triggering the disapproval of certain GCC countries.64

On the other hand, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia distanced themselves from Iran in the last approximately five years for various reasons. Saudi Arabia became more and more suspicious about Iran’s growing geopolitical power and started to draw the world’s attention to a phenomenon which since it was introduced was and is viewed by many as threatening, the so-called Shia Crescent. The Shia Crescent or Shia awakening is alleged an Iranian-led Shia alliance in the Middle East, ranging from Shia majority Bahrain (which is ruled by a Sunni minority) to Shia majority Lebanon (which is governed through consociationalism, as state power is divided between the Christians, Shias and Sunni Muslims) through overwhelmingly Shia Iran, Shia majority Iraq and Alawi ruled Syria (which country’s population is overwhelmingly Sunni). The term Shia Crescent was coined by Hashemite King Abdullah II of Jordan in 2004 originally referring to a Damascus-Baghdad-Tehran power axis after a Shia-dominated government took power in Iraq.65 Wahhabi Saudi Arabia, who with Shia Tehran usually refer to each other as heretics, stretched the original axis to reach from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf, to include the Shia-populated coastal territories of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia beside Lebanon and Bahrain. According to Saudi claims, Iran and its Shia allies are plotting to undermine the security and stability of the concerned areas by forming a coalition against the Sunni majority region.

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Bahrain could never really forget the Iranian backed coup-attempt of 1981 thus never has established such strong relations with Iran as for example Kuwait or Qatar did. After a nationalist outburst by Iranian politician and advisor Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri, who in 2009 mentioned that Bahrain used to be Iran’s 14th province triggered Bahrain’s withdrawal from almost all major economic and energy-related discussions and set the Iranian-Bahraini rapprochement backward for years.66 Since 2011, and the outbreak of the Shia disturbances in Bahrain the two countries’ relation dropped to the level of the 1980s. Bahrain consistently accuses Tehran for supporting the rebelling Shias and for breaking its promise about non-interference in the Gulf countries domestic affairs, while Tehran denies any involvement in the Bahraini disturbances, but consistently expresses its moral support for the demonstrators. The GCC as a whole also claimed that Iran is connected to the rebels and called Tehran to cease the support provided for its Bahraini allies, and Saudi and Emirati units of the GCC Peninsula Shield Force were deployed to help the Bahraini security forces in the crackdown.

Despite the countries mutual official point of view about the Iranian nuclear programme that they recognize Iran’s right for peaceful nuclear technology and energy and prefer the diplomatic dialogue between Iran and the international community instead of a military solution, Wikileaks cables brought some countries real intentions to the open in November 2010. According to the leaked cables, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain (and Jordan also) had been urging the United States for years to carry out military strikes on the Iranian nuclear facilities, to halt the Iranian nuclear programme, while the UAE consistently called the Iranian leaders evil and Qatar’s Prime Minister is quoted to say ‘They lie to us, and we lie to them’.67

Iran, as the author of this paper already mentioned it, is an outsider in its own vicinity. Despite all its efforts, the Sunni Arab regimes of the Gulf more or less lock up when Iran, more precisely when an Iranian initiative appears. It would be convenient to say that the littoral Arab states are just pretending to be good neighbours while in reality they cannot stand the Iranians. One major characteristic of the Middle Eastern international relations is their complexity. Nothing is black or white in the region, as the Iranian foreign policy very well illustrates it. It a complex mixture of ethno-religious,

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historical, economic, security and moral factors which drives the foreign policy of the Gulf states, thus defines the latitude of Iranian foreign policy. The conservative monarchic regimes of the region do not like the Americans more then the Iranians, on the contrary, they – maybe with the exception of Kuwait, where the Americans are truly regarded as saviours and liberators – despise the Americans due to their liberal lifestyle, deviant culture and general attitude. The way how female American officials are treated in the region finely illustrates it. Pecunia non olet (money does not stink) – as ancient Romans said. Securitas non olet (security does not stink) – as present day Gulf states might say. The Arab Gulf countries’ relations towards the United States are solely based on national interest. As long as someone buys their oil and secures the extraction of that oil – and secures their regimes of course – the Arab monarchies will not want any change, what is more they will not want to change partners.

The way Iran changed its Persian Gulf strategy in the early 1990s, contradicting its own revolutionary ideas, in order to secure regime survival through economic development changed the minds of its neighbours and in a slow but steady process they accepted Islamic Iran as their neighbour, some of them got engaged even in military cooperation with it. History showed no alliance lasts forever, especially the ones between different cultures. And the Middle East is just about to undergo serious, historic changes. There is no need to vision a Huntington-like Clash of Civilizations, according to what the Muslim unity as such would oust the West from the Ummah. If Iran can keep its regime working – for what most probably it will need serious domestic reforms – the time will work for Tehran. The most important possible changes which will affect the Iranian foreign policy towards the Gulf are briefly presented in the following.

Some scholars say that under President Obama the United States started to move away from the Middle East and concentrate on the Pacific, as American interests of the future lie in the Far East and the Pacific region. While the United States was so occupied with its war on terror, emerging geostrategic powers laid the very foundations of their future economy. It does not mean that the US will abandon the Persian Gulf in the near future, but as Washington’s strategic focus will move to the Pacific, American attention to the Gulf region is likely to drop. Revolutionary people of the Arab Spring are voting for Islamists, ‘because they trust them, because they are the only ones who can be trusted, not the pro-Western technocrats who are corrupted and are the remnants
of the sad past.’68 One of Saudi Arabia’s – and the United States’ – most important allies was Mubarak’s Egypt. After watching the downfall of its number one regional ally Riyadh, it resorted to the most commonly used means in Middle Eastern international relations: interstate interference and intervention in Bahrain and Yemen. Saudi Arabia cannot afford losing any more of its allies especially from the Persian Gulf and if Riyadh continues to pursue its interventionist policies, further alienation is expectable between it and Tehran.

Saudi Arabia’s most precious allies in the Persian Gulf are all rallied in GCC. The Gulf Cooperation Council however is a weak organization. The GCC was formed as a response to the Iranian revolution and the fear of its spread. As Iran made serious efforts to make it clear in the last two decades that it does not actively want to export its revolution and accepts the Gulf monarchies as its neighbours – with the possible exception for Bahrain, the legitimacy and necessity of the Cooperation might become questioned. It has internal problems, disagreements in monetary and foreign policy matters, territorial disputes and rivalries between member states. There is a chance that if the member states cannot agree on certain questions, the GCC’s coherence will further weaken and that can even lead to the dissolution of the cooperation.

Sunní-Shí’í divide amplified by Saudi Arabia, is the main ideological framework in the last 10 years, used to demonize Iran and consolidate Saudi power and influence. Saddam also tried to act as a “Sunni Knight” fighting the “Shí’í heretics”. Of course his politics were not about Sunni unity, he was purely nationalist trying to become the leader of Arabs.

On the other hand, Iran is standing before a significant rise in power in geopolitical means. As in the framework of the war on terror, the United States knocked out Islamic Iran’s two hostile continental neighbours – Talibán Afghanistan and Baathist Iraq. The United States, not caring about the consequences on the regional balance of power toppled the two regimes which were serving as Iran’s counterbalances, making way for Tehran to fill the geopolitical vacuum. The growing Iranian influence in Iraq (Ch. II/3.) is already manifested in certain aspects, and Tehran’s – political and economic – penetration of Iraq is surely catalyzed by the American withdrawal in late 2011. The author of this paper predicts a very similar scenario to come true in Afghanistan after the fixed withdrawal in 2014. It is Iran’s

influence on Iraq however which might play a significant role in the not too far future. A possible military cooperation between the two – former nemeses – might attract other regional states to realize the Iranian potential and join such an initiative.

Iran’s Gulf-policy’s future cannot be predicted without taking a look at the Iranian domestic situation. With the internal political and social tensions and the clash between the Supreme Leader and the President Iran does not seem a very stable state. In any case, most experts agree that – despite its serious need for domestic reforms – the Islamic regime still enjoys the support of the majority of the population. One possible domestic change may have radical effects on the Iranian foreign policy: the abolishment of the Presidency and the “resislamization” of Iranian politics. If the Supreme Leader abolishes the office of the President, Iran will turn into a real theocracy with the clergy holding the executive power. Khamenei is getting older and there are reports about his bad health. If he is succeeded by religious hard liner, it is possible that after the realist politics of last two decades, Iran will try to return to the roots and restart pursuing the foreign policies of the early 1980s. Despite the improbable nature of this scenario, one must take it into consideration and its consequences on Iran’s relations with its Arab neighbours, built up by the sweat of its brow would be undoubtedly dreadful.

2) Iran and the Arab Spring – Threats and opportunities

2011 will go down a long-memorable year in history of the Middle East. Not just because Osama bin Laden was disposed, or the United States finished its eight years long war in Iraq, but mostly because 2011 was the year when a power-restructuring started to take place. In a framework in what Arabs of the Middle East might be able to take their own fate in their hand after some 600 years of oppression, either under the Ottoman Empire, or under their military leaders. The principal motives of the popular movements, in contrast, were not political ones. As the situation developed, of course, political demands were incorporated in the people’s endeavour, but the basic reasons were economic and social problems. Most of the MENA countries’ societies are very young; a 50 per cent of the population is under the age of 25. The demographic booms do not only result in the necessity of the expansion of the social networks of the

concerned countries, but also the state has to take measures to provide jobs and housing for its young citizens. Countries which have gone through baby booms realized that the explosion of the social tension can be postponed by years through extensive public education, but they did not foresee that they will result in an explosion of the social discontent after all, especially of the well-educated youth.\(^\text{70}\)

Iran’s attitude to the region wide disturbances, uprisings and revolutions going on since late 2010 is just as complex as its whole foreign policy and it cannot be described simply as general supporter of the revolutions. All of the Arab regimes against which the revolutions and protests broke out were secular and authoritarian ones thus Iran welcomed most of these uprisings as they held out the best hopes of change in power relations in the region. Iranian leaders called the concerned countries’ leaders to give in for the public will and step down, giving way to a free transmission. After the demonstrations led to success in Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011 and the domestic power-relations in the two countries became visible, Iran proclaimed that the Arab Spring is Islamic in nature, a historic manifestation of the oppressed people’s desire for Islam-based politics.\(^\text{71}\)

Despite the fact that in the aftermath of the rebellions, the Islamist parties and movements constitute the most influential political powers in those countries where the revolutions or uprisings were successful, Iran’s statement about the Islamist character of the Arab Spring is far from the truth. The whole revolutionary wave shaking the MENA region comes from the politically so far insignificant Tunisia. In December 2010, the domestic tensions in Tunisia led to mass protests demanding major changes to eliminate government corruption, unemployment and to guarantee political freedom. The Tunisian revolution was the first in a series of uprisings and also the fastest to achieve its goals, as President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali resigned less than a month after the uprising broke out, ending the era of his 23 years long Presidency.

Seeing the surprisingly quick success of the Tunisian revolution, people in many MENA countries rallied to demand political and economic changes. A strip of countries from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf – or to the Caspian Lake if we consider the protests in non-Arab Iran as part of the Arab Spring – were reached by the revolutionary

\(^{70}\) Erzsébet, N. Rózsa: Arab Awakening, or a New Regional Order Emerging in the Middle East? Hungarian Institute of International Affairs, Budapest, 2011. pp. 4-5

wave. The intensity of the protests differed from country to country. Some could solve the problem with economic concessions like Saudi Arabia or Oman, some needed to implement political reforms, like Jordan, while protests in other countries escalated into violent rebellions with the ultimate goal to topple long-standing oppressive systems in order to establish new, democratic ones. However, in Libya it went even further, pushing the country into a civil war, triggering foreign intervention and orchestrated regime change.

Generally speaking, the motive of the protests and revolutions were almost exclusively economic and social, but not religious. Islamist parties or movements – either legal or illegal – stayed away from protests and actions; there was no Islamic rhetoric in the language used by the protesters and revolutionaries. Some scholars say the inactivity of the Islamist groups during the revolt were and are to maintain the spontaneous, multicolour and secular appearance of the struggles, making them more likeable for the international community and public opinion. In September 2011, Fawaz A. Gerges said, ‘they [the Islamists] are waiting in the corner, because they realize that the only way to power leads through democratic elections and as they are the oldest and most respected political force in those countries, they know they will win the elections.’ And his prediction came true. In Tunisia, a moderate Islamist party won the most seats in the country’s Constituent Assembly with 37 per cent of all the seats, followed by a secular party with not even 9 per cent of the seats. The rise of Islamism is even more spectacular in the case of Egypt. About 65 per cent of the seats in the newly elected Egyptian Parliament are occupied by Islamists; hard liners and moderates together, with the majority of the latter faction. However, Islamists in Libya did not wait until the election of the Constitutional Assembly scheduled in June 2012, and has already made their claims about the implementation of Sharia in the country, where the next periods’ politics will most likely be defined by the power relations of the various rebel groups and tribes, who are still possessing the arsenal with which they fought their rebellion.

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The rise of Islamism though is more a consequence of the Arab Spring then a reason for it. Accordingly, the general view is that the spontaneous nature of the revolts made any organizing work from the part of the Islamists unnecessary. During the 1979 revolution in Iran, Khomeini’s Islamists were the leading group of the anti-Shah movement, behind which all the other smaller groups rallied and drove the revolution to success. After the revolution, however, Khomeini used the salami tactics to eliminate his former fellow revolutionaries, who were thinking alternatively one by one; “La révolution dévore ses enfants” - the revolution devours its own children. It happened in Iran and it is already coming about in Libya, but unlikely to occur in Egypt or Tunisia, where the new Islamist parties are committed to pluralistic democracy.

One can also state that the emergence of an Iranian-like Islamic Republic with theocratic leadership can be ruled out in the concerned countries. It does not mean, however, that Iran had and has nothing to do with the revolutions and uprisings and the formations of the new systems. Through its al-Quds (Jerusalem) Force, Iran has an extensive network of covert agents all around the region, pursuing economic, intelligence, combat and even advisory activities in most probably all the countries inside Iran’s broader sphere of interest. In addition, Iran has several sources from what it can derive legitimacy for itself to interfere in another country’s domestic affairs. These sources, ranging from historic religious calls through revolutionary principles to the 1979 constitution, have already been discussed in the first chapter of this paper.

The Arab Spring provided Iran a golden opportunity on which Tehran is not likely not to take a chance. Through the disturbances and the rise of Islamism in the MENA region, Iran might try to resurrect its doctrine of exporting the revolution, but in a much softer way than it used to do in the 1980s. As – with the exception of Bahrain and Northern Yemen – the revolting countries are overwhelmingly Sunnis, it is not expectable on their side to subordinate themselves to a Shia Iran. The 21st century edition of the revolution-export is more likely to support the creation of independent moderate Islamic states with a kind of Islamic democratic system, respecting the Westphalian rules of statehood, but forming a pan-Islamic alliance with each other and Tehran, at least in certain well-defined areas, like the Palestinian question, or the independence of the Ummah from foreign powers.

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Supreme Leader Khamenei’s report to the Assembly of Experts finely illustrates the evolution of the revolution in Iran, the way how Tehran can adapt to external changes, conducting a pragmatic, but revolutionary foreign policy at the same time. According to Khamenei, Iran must be content with the Muslim Brotherhood’s “religious democracy” concept in Egypt. Khamenei said that Tehran has to accept that the Sunni Arab states reject the theory of velayat-e-faqih, thus instead of the Iranian system with its clerical establishment, Iran must promote an Islamic democracy for them, inspired by the preaching of Ayatollah Khomeini (not paying attention to the fact, that Khomeini disassociated himself from using the term democracy for Iran). If Khamenei really meant what he said, that the Sunni Islamist concept of governance is acceptable to Iran, then this is ‘a huge olive branch to the Muslim Brotherhood’ in Egypt and its “wings” around the Muslim world. This doctrine practically follows the path on which Rafsanjani’s idea of being an exemplary state was coined at the beginning of his presidency some twenty years ago, but shows a significant degree of flexibility on the part of the Iranian leadership, proving the uniqueness of the regime, being a progressive theocracy; a change which was already susceptible since the paradigm change of the Iraqi Shias in 2007 (Ch. II/3), but not confirmed by officials so far.

Obviously Iran is having much more difficulty in infiltrating the physically far Sunni Arab countries’ newly emerged and emerging political elites, than it had to face in the case of Iraq and most probably Afghanistan, in which countries Iran can and does easily exploit the possibilities given by the absolute closeness of them in denominational, historic, cultural and geographical means as well. Likewise, the very same factors suit for Bahrain as well. The relation between Bahrain and Iran has always been tense. The two-thirds majority of its population is Shia, and one of the most populous ethnic groups is of Iranian origin. Bahrain used to be part of the Persian Empires for centuries, which fact was used for an argument for the Shah to proclaim Bahrain as its 14th province in 1957. Regarding these facts, Bahrain should be the specimen of target countries of the export of the Iranian revolution. Hence, Bahrain was one of the first countries where Tehran tried to interfere and overthrow the regime in

1981, but the coup attempt failed and since then there was no major effort from Iran’s side to make the Bahraini regime fall.

The wind of the Arab Spring reached Bahrain in February 2011, when the Shia opposition of Bahrain started to demonstrate, demanding the elimination of discrimination of Shias, the leave of King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, free elections, new constitution, in brief: complete regime change. Since the very beginning of the uprising, Iran morally supported the protestors by rhetoric and political means, calling King Hamad to resign and give way for the public will and also by drawing the international community’s attention to the Bahreini situation. However, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia accused Iran of actively supporting the Bahraini rebels, thus interfering in a neighbour state’s domestic affairs, trying to undermine the regime, whereas protestors of the insular country were and are not armed, neither trained, two qualities Iran’s protégés usually possess. The Shia opposition groups in Bahrain and Tehran denied any Iranian involvement in the uprising, beside non-material support, like media coverage. Kuwait and the UAE also adopted their allies view and joined the camp accusing Iran and calling it to stop its actions in Bahrain. Meanwhile Saudi, Emirati and Kuwaiti forces of the GCC’s Peninsula Shield Force were deployed in Bahrain in order to assist the Bahraini security forces handling the uprising. The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry [BICI] issued its report, saying that no evidence for Iran’s involvement was found during the approximately four months long investigation.

The BICI was established in late June 2011, pursuant to royal order. The Commission was tasked with investigating and reporting on the events that took place in Bahrain from February 2011, and the consequences of those events. In the ninth chapter of the more than five hundred pages report, BICI states that:

‘It is the position of the GoB [Government of Bahrain] that the alleged involvement by Iran during the events of February and March 2011 is part of a continuous policy of Iranian interference in the domestic affairs of Bahrain. ... The GoB has expressed its concerns about a possible Iranian armed intervention in Bahrain. The GoB indicated that these concerns were among the principal reasons that it requested the deployment of GCC forces in Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. ... The evidence presented to the Commission by the GoB on the involvement by the Islamic Republic of Iran in the
internal affairs of Bahrain does not establish a discernable link between specific incidents that occurred in Bahrain during February and March 2011 and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Given that most of the claims made by the GoB related to allegations of intelligence operations undertaken by Iranian operatives, sources of which, by their nature, are not publicly available, the Commission has not been able to investigate or independently verify these allegations of Iranian involvement in the events of February and March 2011.’

The Iranian intervention in the rebellions or revolutions of the Arab Spring, as a present day observer can see is surprisingly low profile. Iran changed its way of revolution exporting. In the 1980s, Iran wanted to export a finished product, but most of the addressed were not interested in buying such a thing. Bahrain seems to be another example for Iran’s reformed export policy, but until there is no evidence to prove or either deny this allegation, one cannot state with a hundred per cent confidence that Iran is involved or not involved in the Bahraini uprising. Iran realized that it might be slower, but steadier to sow the seeds of Iranian influence even invisibly then sit back and relax, wait for the seeds to whether sprout, or to grow apace as it seems to happen in Iraq.

Although, the Arab Spring was and is not just a sting of opportunities for Iran to exploit. The picture of revolting Sunni Arab states near and far, which Tehran might have found quite idyllic was soon became overshadowed by the clouds of losing something precious: its ally Syria, or even itself.

When solidarity rallies in Tehran organized to show support for the Muslim Brothers and Sisters fighting oppression abroad, turned into anti-government protests in February 2011, Iran knew that having the same domestic problems like Tunisia or Egypt might ultimately lead to the revolutionary wave reaching Iran. Probably due to fresh memories of young Iranians about Basiji riot control in the breakdown of the series of protests after the 2009 Presidential Elections, demonstrations were not as big and sharply toned as in other countries concerned in uprisings. Iranian police and militia forces handled the situation successfully and the protests did not escalate. However, Iran is not an Arab country, most observers see the Iranian protests as part of the Arab Spring, regarding their anti-regime nature, the Iranian government did and do not recognize the domestic protests as a legitimate part of the region wide events. On
the contrary, Mohammad Reza Naghdi, Commander of the Basij militia accused the West with the organization of the disturbances as one their efforts to overthrow the Iranian regime. ‘Western intelligence agencies are searching for a mentally challenged person who can set himself on fire in Tehran to trigger developments like those in Egypt and Tunisia.’80 – he said. A day after the protests broke out; President Ahmadinejad condemned the action, saying:

‘It is clear the Iranian nation has enemies because it is a nation that wants to shine, conquer peaks and change [international] relations. ... Of course, there is a lot of hostility against the government. But they [the protesters] knew that they would get nowhere. ... They just wanted to tarnish the Iranian nation's brilliance. ... It is a shining sun. They threw some dust towards the sun... but the dust will return to their eyes. 81

The other aspect of the Arab Spring, which is certainly not to Iran’s liking is that the trend also reached Syria, escalating into a bloody conflict (second only to the Libyan one in regard of casualties)82 between the uprising groups and government forces. Iran’s relations with Syria are extremely controversial and based solely on national interests since almost the beginning. Syria is ruled by a Baathist dynasty since 1971, which normally in itself would be enough for Iran to proclaim the Syrian regime as a system has to be overthrown. Syria, however, was one of the few if not the only Arab country which supported Iran in its eight years war with also Baathist Saddam Hussein, with who then-President Hafez al-Assad mutually despised each other. As Iran was in serious need of regional allies during its war and isolation, ties with Syria were quickly developed. Even after the common enemy, Saddam Hussein was eliminated; Iran could maintain outstanding relations with Syria up to the present day, based on their mutual antagonistic opposition to Israel, mutual support for the Palestinians and the Lebanese Shias and also due to denominational similarities (the ruling al-Assad dynasty is Alawi,

which is a minor sub-branch of Shiism, comprising only 10-12 per cent of the total Syrian population).\footnote{Kramer, Martin: Syria’s Alawis and Shi‘ism. http://www.martinkramer.org/sandbox/reader/archives/syria-alawis-and-shiism/. opened: 30.04.2012.}

Protests in Syria started in January 2011, with a man setting himself on fire, imitating the starter or demonstration in Tunis, to protest against the Syrian government and solidarity rallies for showing support to Libyan and other rebels quickly turned into anti-government protests, for which the government’s reaction became more and more repressive, leading to the overtake of the situation by the military. Syrian government forces use excessive force to counter the uprising, including artillery shelling of entire districts and planting anti-personnel minefield in border regions. Government officials and the military consistently calls the rebels terrorists, sometimes even saying that the whole rebellion is organized by al-Qaeda. There is no clear information about Islamism’s influence in Syria, as the local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood is banned for decades, but some say that there is a sensible increase of Islamist sentiments in Syria, for which the uprising most probably was and is a catalyst.\footnote{Alami, Mona: Islamism’s spread in Syria. http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=369759, 27.02.2012. opened: 30.04.2012.}\footnote{Outlawed Muslim Brotherhood supports Syrian revolt. http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/133011/20110411/syria-assad-muslim-brotherhood.htm. 11.04.2011. opened: 30.04.2012.}

Despite all the Iranian principles and idea, former speeches and outbursts against secular nationalist oppressors, Tehran stands as the strongest supporter of President Bashar al-Assad and his regime. The pressure of the international community is growing harder on Syria each day, as reports of and evidences of major human rights violations are published, there is no chance for a foreign intervention in Syria, like it happened in Libya, as United Nations Security Council members Russia and China opposes the idea. However, Iran is engaged in talks with Turkey about the settling of the Syrian question, unambiguously the Assad government would stay in power in all Iranian scenarios of the case.

Iran is strongly devoted to its Syrian friends constituting the Assad administration and knowing that with Assad’s fall it would lose a key ally who has proven its loyalty many times, being a brother-in-arms against Israel and a co-financer of allied organizations Hezbollah and Hamas. Various sources report that Iranian leaders are in everyday contact with their Syrian counterparts since the outbreak of the
uprising, also providing financial and even military support.\textsuperscript{86} Also, Iran regards the Syrian rebellion as a revolt organized and supported by the Western governments to achieve the and regime change, a rhetoric Iranian leaders consistently use to describe and discredit domestic protests and demonstrations as well and Tehran gives voice to this view of its frequently.\textsuperscript{87} Tehran’s former ambassador to Damascus, Ahmad Mousavi put it:

\textit{‘Current events in Syria are designed by the foreign enemies and mark the second version of the sedition which took place in 2009 in Iran. ... The enemy is targeting the security and safety of Syria. ... [The rebels] are foreign mercenaries, who get their message from the enemy and the Zionists.’}\textsuperscript{88}

Even though the Iranian support for most of the Arab Spring uprisings turns the scales in favour of ideologist principles in Iran’s foreign behaviour, its self-contradictious of policies towards Damascus and the uprising in Syria indicates that realist national interests are still superior when it comes to the relation with strategic allies.

3) Iran’s post-Saddam Iraq policy – From foes to friends

A year after the Iranian revolution, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq attacked Iran, which aggression escalated into one of the longest and bloodiest wars of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, leaving behind about a million victims. There were various motives of the war on the Iraqi side: Baathist Iraq sought to be the leading power of Arab World in which ambition Iran as a regional power was seemed as a major obstacle. Also, Iraq and Iran had signed the Algir Agreement in 1975, closing long disputes about the border line between the two countries along the strategic waterway Shatt al-Arab and as Saddam seemed the Iranian leadership illegitimate, he considered the Agreement void. Last but not least, under the Baathist regime Shia majority Iraq was ruled by Sunni elite, who


despite being secular frequently violated basic rights of the Shia population. The emergence of a religious regime in Shia Iran which was very likely to take South Iraqi Shias under its wing, posed serious menace for Iraq. The eight years long war ended with a United Nations proposed cease fire, as a stalemate. Iran, however, claimed victory over Iraq – which claim, regarding the strategic failure of Iran and the huge number of casualties, can be ignored.

Tehran’s relations with Baghdad in the 1990s were shadowed by the “Imposed War”. In the Second Gulf war of 1990-91 Iran declared itself neutral, but condemned Iraq for its aggression. Since the revolution Iran maintained good relations with the Iraqi Shia population, forming and hosting the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) with the ultimate goal to export the revolution to Iraq by overthrowing Saddam Hussein and establishing Islamic government in Iraq. Also, Iran and Iraq mutually supported militant groups and minorities in each other’s country. Iran provided assistance to Iraqi Shia and Kurdish groups, while Baghdad supported Iranian Kurds and opposition groups, like the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK, People’s Mujahedin), a leftist Iranian opposition group – a terrorist movement according to Tehran, Baghdad, Canada and the United States – which fled Iran in the early 1980s after the IRGC launched a campaign against it, and found safe haven in Iraq.89

In the framework of the “war on terror”, the United States invaded Iraq in mid March 2003, with the aim of removing Saddam from power and prosecuting him, for various genuine and false charges. The war itself was short, with the American proclamation of victory in early May 2003, but as the country was destabilized, coalition and American forces had to stay in the country until December 2011. America overthrow Saddam Hussein in slightly more than a month, a deed Iran could not achieve in an eight years war and another fifteen years of proxy-war. Iran felt itself extremely threatened, by enormous American presence all around it and assisted at the very same time. By removing two of its irreconcilably hostile neighbours, the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Baathists in Iraq, the United States created two huge geopolitical vacuums with a power-hungry, long-contained Iran between them, practically handing the two countries for Iran on a plate.

As the overthrow of Saddam’s regime resulted in a civil war in Iraq, with multiple actors, including militias formed on denominational and ethnic basis, Iraqi

security forces and foreign coalitional and American forces. In this turmoil Iran consistently supported the various Shia militias based in South Iraq, fighting Sunni militants, American soldiers and local security forces. Iran’s assistance to the Shia forces was about 36 million dollars annually, according to American sources. This assistance was provided in forms of arms shipments and training in Iran by the IRGC’s Quds Forces. The most important of these Shia militias, the *Jaysh al-Mahdi* (Mahdi’s Army), a group with very close ties to one of Iran’s key protégé in Iraq, a young cleric called Muqtada al-Sadr. As the Iraqi political system and domestic situation was consolidating, the Jaysh al-Mahdi was going in a lower profile until early 2009, when al-Sadr announced that the “Army” puts down its guns, but does not turn them in, in case of future need.

The Iranian assistance provided for the Shia militias was, however, just a small portion of the total amount of 100 to 200 million dollars Tehran annually invested in Iraq since 2003 in order to promote itself and gain influence over the country – at least over its South part, populated by Shias and full of oil. According to an American document released by Wikileaks: ‘Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps - Quds Force (IRGC-QF) officers are active in Iraq, conducting traditional espionage and supporting violent extremists as well as supporting both legitimate and malign Iranian economic and cultural outreach’

The Iranian paradigm shift in regards of the export of the revolution, already discussed in the previous chapter was firstly notable – but not officially confirmed – in Iraq in 2007, when the SCIRI announced, that the Council is about to undergo fundamental changes. As chief SCIRI officials put it:

‘there will be a change in two aspects -- the structure of the group and also in its political language, taking into consideration the political facts on the ground, ... on political language, we will introduce terms more like democracy and elections. Those who follow us closely will

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notice that we have introduced new terms in our speeches for a while, now we are setting it out formally.\(^{94}\)

The shifts included the changing of the Council’s name as well, which is now called Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, abandoning the word revolution. As the officials said, the word revolution was referring to the desire to overthrow Saddam Hussein, but it is more likely that the abandonment of the word revolution is more about pretending a brake with Tehran to be more acceptable for the international community. Just like the communicated will to proclaim Iraqi ayatollah Ali al-Sistani – probably the most respected and followed marja among Shias all around the world, especially in Iraq – who it by the way a passive opponent of the velayat-e faqih, thus an adherent of taqiyya, which means he does not really want to get engaged in politics, more than it is necessary for such an influential person, indirectly passing the guiding role to Iran.

Iran seems to be more like a neo-colonialist power in post-Saddam Iraq than an aggressive exporter of its theocratic revolution, which revolution by the way despise Iran’s actual behaviour in Iraq on principle. The Iranian investment in Iraq seems to be fruiting anyway. Iranian officials reported that trade between the two countries showed a tenfold increase between 2003 and 2010, surpassing eight billion dollars. Iran has also engaged in various reconstruction projects in Iraq, mostly in the South, with which Tehran’s involvement in its western neighbour has become so extensive that in 2009, head of U.S. troops in southern Iraq Major General Michael Oates asserted that ‘the influx of Iranian goods and labour was undermining Iraq’s economic recovery effort.’\(^{95}\)

Although, beside the political penetration of Iraq, the other strategically important development in the two countries’ relations, which can significantly affect other areas of Iranian foreign policy, mostly its Gulf policy, is the military cooperation between Baghdad and Tehran. While President Obama and his Defence Secretary Leon Panetta were quite sure that Iraq will be able to guarantee its own security without American forces stationing in the country and decided to pull out, Iraqi Defence Minister Lieutenant General Babakir Zebari – who said in August 2010, that Iraq will not be able to ensure its own security for at least a decade after the American withdrawal – went to Tehran in November 2011, to discuss a future military


cooperation with Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, Commander of the IRGC and Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpouri, Ground Forces Commander of the IRGC.  

What is most interesting in the visit is that Zebari held talks with the Commanders of the IRGC and not with the Defence Minister, or with Commanders of the Artesh. Iran’s Revolutionary Guards Ground Forces are prepared to pursue asymmetric defence individually on provincial levels and are geared to conduct guerrilla warfare. The IRGC Ground Forces are not responsible for, neither capable to protect Iran’s territorial integrity; it is for making an occupation impossible to carry out successfully, while it is Iran’s traditional army, the Artesh which is designated to pursue classical defence. As the geographic qualities of plain Iraq does not resemble mountainous Iran at all, thus making any regular forces unable to pursue guerrilla warfare in Iraq, it is very much likely that the motives behind Zebari’s visit are much deeper than just to announce what good neighbours Iraq and Iran are. 

With the Americans withdrawal in late 2011, the Iranian penetration of Iraq is very likely to hasten. Iranian agents and advisors do not need to keep on low profile, like they had to in the last eight years. It must be noted, that Iraq is still in the period of transmission, with an elected, mostly Shia Islamist dominated legislation and government, but the country’s new constitution is not adopted yet. So far, on paper Iraq is a secular, federalist and pluralist democracy, with a non-religious legal system, although, some municipalities have already adopted religious laws locally and spontaneous judging according to Sharia law is widespread.  

It is not clear yet if Iraq will be part of the post-Islamic camp likely to emerge on the ashes of overthrown regimes in the wider region or not, but it is also visible, that despite Iraq’s visible rejection of velayat-e faqih, the country – or at least the Southern part of it – is slowly but steadily falling into Iranian hands.

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Conclusion

With the Iranian revolution of 1979 Khomeini created an unique, as a matter of fact an experimental state. In modern history, either before, or after 1979 there was no successful attempt to create an operational or lasting state based on theocracy, the rule of clerics. Though not Khomeini was the only Islamist thinker of the 20th century, the other prominent figures, like Qutb or Maududi lacked the necessary religious education to be acceptable for conservative clerical circles, or at least not be attacked by them, alienating a significant part of their societies from them. Khomeini fused various Islamist thinkers’ ideas with his own religious and political views and created a theory, known as velayat-e faqih, the governance of the jurists. With his outstanding charisma and political tactics, Khomeini managed to bring the revolution to victory and establish an Islamic Republic on the basis of his theory.

Khomeini’s points of view about Islam foreign policy are codified, as they became incorporated in the Islamic Constitution of Iran. These principles call for independence, freedom, protection of Muslims’ rights and peaceful coexistence with other non-belligerent countries. As it was put forward in the hypothesis, Iran did not break completely with its ideology and revolutionary principles, it is just the order of priorities which was changed in order to survive.

Iran still insists to its independence – not just in political means. On one hand, regarding political independence, Iran the target of a series of sanctions and embargos placed upon it by the international community collectively, or various states individually, for its behaviour sticking to its right to enrich uranium. The Iranian nuclear programme became the number one symbol of Iranian independence in the last years. On the other hand, concerning non-political domains of independence, the war with Iraq taught Iranians the necessity of self-sufficiency. In certain senses, no matter how awfully does it sound, the Iraqi attack and its escalation into eight years of bloodshed was very profitable for Iran. Despite the extreme number of casualties, the Iranian system could consolidate and legitimize its power both for its external and internal observers through acting as the vanguard of pious, believing Muslims against the secular nationalist aggressor and by sacrificing hundreds of thousands of young Iranians, who escaped to martyrdom to avoid an unpredictable future in poverty. Beside its power-consolidation, the other returns of the war and Iran’s isolation was its already
mentioned engineering abilities, to provide Iran with most of its technical needs, to be able to stay independent from foreign suppliers, even today. Despite Iran’s cooperation with Russia to finish the Bushehr nuclear plant, Iran still insists to develop and maintain its own full nuclear cycle, but this self-sufficiency is also present in the military industry, medical sciences, space sciences and various other fields of sciences and engineering.

After examining various areas of Iranian foreign policy, one can state that Iran’s freedom encounters one major, and several minor elements. The major elements preventing Iran to exercise its foreign policy in full freedom is the United States’ presence in the region, most importantly in the Persian Gulf. The littoral monarchies relations with Iran were and are overshadowed by their bilateral ties with the United States since the early 1990s. Some Iranians say that the Iraqi attack on Kuwait was a kind of deus ex machina (a god from the machine, divine intervention) for Iran, providing a second chance, a fresh start for Tehran, to lift the Arab countries’ suspicion and hatred towards it. On the other hand, however, Saddam Hussein’s invasion resulted in the United States’ growing presence in the region, due to its security agreements with the Arab states of the Gulf. Be it said in its favour, Iran does not let itself be completely alienated among its maritime neighbours by Washington, as Tehran tries to produce the maximum it can from its heavily suppressed relations with the Gulf monarchies. Whereas, one must note that Iran’s freedom differs from one area of operation to another, and what Iran is doing in Iraq is a very telling example for it.

The last two principles, protection of Muslims’ rights and peaceful coexistence have to be dealt with together, due to the overlaps regarding the areas they are “practiced”. On the one hand, Iran, despite being extremely hostile with some states, did not start; neither provoked any war or military clash with any country since its foundation – at least in its conventional sense, except for two cases concerning Afghanistan. In 1998 Iran made a serious force projection, a mobilization along its border with Afghanistan in 1998, after talibs killed a group of Iranian diplomats and journalists in Afghanistan, but – through the good offices of the United Nations – no Iranian soldier crossed the border. Three years later, in the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks on the United States, Iran engaged in joint military operations with American invading forces, actually deploying the Quds Force to Afghanistan, to assist the American forces in a series of operations.
On the other hand, however, Islamic Iran wages proxy wars since its establishment, through allied organizations, protégés in regional countries. Such an organization is the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Palestinian Hamas, or the Iraqi Shia militias following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Iran spends hundred millions of dollars each year for supporting these organizations; providing them training, weapons, asylum, even combat leadership. This behaviour, is regarded very differently by Iran and the international community. While Iran is fulfilling its constitutional and revolutionary duty by supporting these Muslims, either being oppressed domestically or engaged in a defensive war, a Jihad to protect the Ummah, the international community, especially the West regards Iran’s behaviour as terrorism-supporting.

One can see that Iran is still conducting its foreign policy according to its basic principles, but it must be admitted that only its principle about Muslims’ rights is unique, compared to other countries’ principles all around the world. Yet, Iran’s maybe most interesting foreign policy behaviour, the export of the revolution is not a very common goal of countries in the international arena – at least if the United State’s democracy-export is not regarded as a revolution-export. The Iranian attempt to export the revolution had only one success in its entire history: the creation of Hezbollah in Lebanon. After realizing that during the war Iran’s efforts to export the revolution resulted only in further isolation of the country, the Iranian leadership decided to cease the export and concentrate on survival instead. It is not clear, when did the decision made to modify the methods of the export.

The author of this paper argues, that Iran had to made concessions: to be able to affect other systems to become something similar to the Iranian one, Tehran had to abandon its goal to spread the velayat-e faqih. The theory of the governance of the jurist is completely alien for Sunnis, with no real religious hierarchy and ijtihad, but was also not attractive for Shias living in Iraq or Lebanon, following local marjas, who prefer the behaviour of taqiyya instead of the velayat-e faqih. In the author’s point of view, the Iranian-like theocratic elements had to be removed from the “export package” in order to promote “religious democracy”, or post-Islamism, which should prevail by democratic means.

Proofs for this argument can be gathered, direct and indirect ones alike. Iraq is the perfect direct example, with measurable and visible growth or Iranian influence and pro-Iran sentiments in Iraq, as supported Shia militias maintained the instability in South Iraq, Iran invested millions of dollars, which economic, political and cultural
penetration left its mark on the future of the Southern Shia regions of Iraq. The case of Lebanon is a good indirect example for Iran’s shift in methods. However, the paradigm shift of Hezbollah started in the 1990s, slowly but steadily accepting the rules of pluralist democracy and expanding itself into a network of social facilities, pushing its militant nature in the background, Iran, instead of pushing its protégé to stop its transformation, present day Hezbollah receives more money from Tehran than it did before 2000. Accordingly, the author of this paper suggests that in Iran might try to export its new type of Islamism to Afghanistan, where Tehran has an extensive network of connections due to its support for the Northern Alliance during the 1990s. Many of these former Alliance commanders are now sitting in the Afghan legislation or fulfilling government positions. Anyway, it is almost sure that if there is going to be any kind of Islamization in Afghanistan, it will take place only after the United States withdrawal in 2014.

The export of the revolution thus became a slow, but steady process, probably more costly than the older, aggressive and direct version of it, but one can unambiguously state that it is much more successful at the same time. The Iraqi success’s causes are Iran’s three-decade long interference in Iraq, through the SCIRC, the geographical closeness and most importantly the religious-denominational similarities. It must be noted though, that the result of the Iraqi export is not going to be a universal trend among states currently undergoing Islamization, but a much more receptive and friendlier Middle East for Iran is expectable in the near future, with a loose informal cooperation of new post-Islamist states and Iran, covering fields of common interest, like pro-Palestinianism and the Ummah’s freedom of foreign presence and interference.

Present day Iran can be described as a complex political system, with a very diversified society, which, despite the vast gaps and differences between segments of it, is ultimately unified by factors like strong national identity, rooting in more or less common history and culture dating back millennia, making the Iranian civilization one of the world’s oldest continuous ones and religion, namely Shia Islam, which – due to its minority nature in global sense and unique characteristics – is an extremely strong unifying element in Iranian society.

Most factions of this diverse society, conservatives and reformists alike, believes in the basic ‘eternal’ principles, as reformist President Khatami referred to them. Iran is under serious pressure which is expected to get harder by time, as Iran does not back off
in the nuclear question. Generally supporting the principles, the Iranian society – regardless of their position in domestic questions – backs their’ government’s position in showing independence and freedom (on the international scene) which are articulated through Tehran’s foreign and nuclear policy.

A pragmatic theocracy; a very succinct description for the post-Khomeini Iran. Iran truly shifted towards pragmatism and national interest serving in the 1990s. During the Rafsanjani Presidency, Iran was developing relations with countries despised by Khomeini and regarded as illegitimate regimes. After the inauguration of President Khatami, Iranian foreign policy distanced itself further from the late ayatollah Khomeini, by seeking cooperation and dialogue with the United States, significant changes, changes in long-term goals or means, however, did not take place in Iran’s foreign policy. During dialogue-seeking Khatami Iran was consistently funding its militant allies in the region and started its penetration of Iraq and most likely Afghanistan, as a huge geopolitical vacuum appeared in the wider region, with power-hungry Iran in its centre.

In the framework of the conservative backlash, which was catalyzed by Khamenei’s consolidation, but a result of it at the same time, President Ahmadinejad became President and chose a much more hostile language than his two predecessors. In appearance, Iran’s foreign policy during Ahmadinejad was more like the one of the 1980s. The word to emphasize is “in appearance”. Iran continued to maintain as good relations with its Gulf neighbours as it could, the anti-Zionist outbursts became more frequent, but the support provided for Hamas and Hezbollah did not raise, only after certain achievements, like a victory in elections and a claimed victory in a military conflict. During Ahmadinejad, Iran did not return to the old fashioned method of the revolution-export, rather continued to pursue the same export policy started under the previous President. It is true; however, that Iran turned more towards non-Western regions, like Russia, the Far East, or Latin America, but it had not much to do with the revolutionary principles or the long-term goals of the country.

All in all, Iranian foreign policy is jointly driven by realist national interest and Khomeinist ideology. As Iranian Presidents come and go it is mostly just the language of foreign policy, sometimes short- and mid-term goals, or rarely orientations what change as governments change. The ultimate long-term goals of Iran are pretty much the same as they were when Rafsanjani and Khamenei took power in 1989 and not very different from what Khomeini laid down in 1979. As Iranian Presidents come and g, the
international community is inclined to expect radical changes and inclined to perceive Iranian foreign policy changes, due to its ignorance to take a deeper look at Iran.

Beside the basic principles and ultimate goals, there is another stagnant element in Iranian foreign policy: The Leader of the revolution, ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Becoming the Leader unprepared and lacking of overall respect, it took long time, about a decade for Khamenei to consolidate his power. He did not have any major clash with Rafsanjani during his Presidency, as Khomeini shared Rafsanjani’s views about Iran’s needs. He was more inclined to criticize Khatami’s policies and also crippled him as President through a constitutional coup, but did not interfere in everyday politics. He supported President Ahmadinejad, just until his re-election in 2009, and since then Iranian media report weekly clashes between the Leader and the President. Ahmadinejad is weakened by the Parliamentary elections of 2012 and is likely to have a last year as a weak President like Khatami did.

Ahmadinejad is about to go in 2013, but Khamenei will stay and continue to lay the guidelines for the next President to follow and execute the country’s foreign policy along them. In case there will be a next President of course, as there are rumours circulating in Iran about the possible abolishment of the Presidency. Anyway, there is no news about any protégé of Khamenei for President yet, as – knowing the Iranian political structure, with the powers of the Guardian Council – it is very hard to predict which faction will give the next President, though it is likely to be the traditional conservative one. Another scenario is that the Iranian political elite realizes that it could be left behind in social development by its fellow post-Islamist states, which in Tehran were expected to be its minions and starts long-awaited domestic reforms to lift the growing internal tensions and turn itself into a new and trendy post-Islamist state. It would need to make such concessions in domestic policies Iran already made regarding its foreign policy. One thing is sure: Iran, whoever will be the executor of its foreign policy, is standing before historic opportunities regarding the changes going on in the region.

It will be wise to keep an eye on Iran. The evolution of the revolution continues, and with good governance, as Iranians joke, Tehran could stand an excellent chance of exceeding its imperial predecessor in power and influence, all by itself, through the well-tried Khomeini principles of freedom and independence.
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Abstract

Analysing Iran’s foreign policy is important, while also useful not just to understand a declined but re-emerged Middle Eastern regional great power’s behaviour and actions affecting both regional and international security, but also to assess the strange and unique relationship between religion and politics in the country. Islamic Iran has one of the most complex political structures in the world, with a very well defined and regulated official system of checks and balances and with an unrecognized, informal system of intergroup and interpersonal relations, which one’s influence on politics cannot be measured, but can be explored and analysed by empirical observation. As among all the domains of Iranian politics, its foreign policy is the most sensible and researchable, one can stand a good chance of gaining a better understanding of Iran by approaching the Islamic Republic through studying its foreign behaviour.

This paper does not question the general opinion that Iranian foreign policy has undergone and is undergoing a series of changes, and has visibly shifted towards pragmatism serving national interest and ensuring regime survival instead of aggressively exporting the Islamic revolution. Although, the author this emphasizes that Iran did not break with its religious revolutionary ideology in its foreign behaviour, it was only the priority order of its goals which was changed, introducing new, short- and intermediate term objectives in order to create the suitable conditions for pursuing the long term ultimate goals.

As Iranian Presidents come and go it is mostly just the language of foreign policy what change. The ultimate long-term goals of Iran are pretty much the same as they were when Rafsanjani and Khamenei took power in 1989 and not very different from what Khomeini laid down in 1979. As Iranian Presidents come and g, the international community is inclined to expect radical changes and inclined to perceive Iranian foreign policy changes, due to its ignorance to take a deeper look at Iran.