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Iran's Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad: From Confrontation to Accommodation

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Abstract

Some scholars have observed that Iran's foreign policy has leaned toward assertiveness since Mahmood Ahmadinejad came to power in 2005. They have tried to attribute this assertiveness to some internal and external factors. After reviewing the literature, we argue that the assertiveness of Iran's foreign policy during the first period of Ahmadinejad`s presidency is rooted in psychological (Ahmadinejad belief system), social (the social base of the new government), political (factional rivalries), historical (ideals of the Islamic Revolution), and external (the way Western countries treated Iran during Khatami) factors. On the contrary, it seems that Iran's foreign policy since the recent presidential election in 2009 has somehow softened and it appears to be less confrontational. This change, if real, may have significant implications for Iran's relations with the Western countries, particularly the United States. We seek to identify the main reasons for this change and explicate its main consequences for the Iranian foreign relations. This paper has four sections. First, we discuss the main features of Iran's assertive foreign policy during the first period of Ahmadinejad`s presidency. Secondly, we try to explain the main origins of this assertiveness. Thirdly, the recent developments in Iran's foreign policy, especially Ahmadinejad`s new moderate orientation, will be discussed and the main causes will be spelled out. Finally, the main implications of this change in Iran's foreign behavior will be discussed.

Key words: Iran, Foreign Policy, Ahmadinejad, confrontation, accommodation

Introduction

Some scholars of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy believe that the country's foreign policy has acquired a radical, mainly confrontational-assertive approach since president Ahmadinejad took power in 2005. This paper seeks to examine the following questions: 1) May we say that Iran's foreign policy has been confrontational-assertive during this period?, 2) If we accept that Ahmadinejad's foreign policy has been confrontational–assertive, what factors have contributed to it?, 3) Is there any sign of being accommodationist in the past five years?, and finally 4) What is the prospect of Iran's foreign policy, particularly regarding the Western countries and the United States.? The author believes that Iran's foreign policy has been confrontational-assertive and accommodationist-active simultaneously. Secondly, the origins of the simultaneous confrontational-assertive and accommodationist-active approaches in Iran's foreign policy since Ahmadinejad's taking power may be found in psychological (Ahmadinejad's system of beliefs), Social (social origin of Ahmadinejad's Administration), political (competition among Iranian political factions), historical (the ideals of the Islamic Revolution) and international (the Western states' behavior towards Iran, particularly during Khatami's Administration) factors. Thirdly, some domestic and international developments imply a more confrontational prospect for Iran's foreign policy which may have serious consequences for its relationships with the West, particularly the United States.

This paper surveys briefly the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy from the beginning up until Ahmadinejad took power in 2005. The second section deals with Iran's foreign policy during Ahmadinejad's Administration and tries to track down the origins of its foreign policy which is confrontational-assertive and accommodationist-active at the same time. The concluding section deals with the future of Iran's foreign policy and its consequences for the West.

The IR of Iran's Foreign Policy from the Beginning to Ahmadinejad

The Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy should be studied in its historical context in order to be understood.[1] In fact, as a great country with thousands of years precedence of civilization, Iran was one of the greatest empires of its age (Acamenids in the 6th and 5th centuries BC and Safavids in 1500-1722 AD) but it was invaded by foreign forces (Alexander the Great, Arabs, Saljukid Turks, Mongolians and Afghans) then became a semi-colony for Russia and Britain (its

division in 1907 and occupation in the WWII) which has greatly affected its foreign policy.[2] Since the collapse of the Safavid Dynasty to the formation of modern state in Iran (the Pahlavi Dynasty), due to domestic disorder, we cannot talk about Iran having foreign policy because in this period, Iran did not have specific goals in international scene for which specific strategies be adopted. In other words, in this period, Iran did have foreign relations but did not have foreign policy. But we can say that the condition changed since the formation of modern state by Reza Khan in the 1920s.

Many Iranian scholars argue that the issues of territorial integrity and independence have greatly affected Iran's foreign policy.[3] On this basis, we can understand why Iran's foreign policy from the beginning of modern state, particularly in the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, has been filled with a high dose of nationalism aiming at preserving territorial integrity and independence. Given Iran's long history and its great civilization, it was a natural expectation from every government to restore Iran's glorious past and its real independence, although the expectation was not realized during the Pahlavi Shahs and, thus, we may say that this was one of the most significant factors facilitating the Islamic Revolution. In other words, the main motto of the revolution namely "independence, freedom, and Islamic Republic" indicates the reality that independence has been one of the main concerns of Iranians, at least since the Constitutional Revolution in 1906. The issue was manifested in Mohammad Mosadegh's Administration and was realized by the Islamic Revolution. It is generally perceived that during the Pahlavis, Iran's national interest did not dominate its foreign policy but the main concern for both Pahlavi Shahs was only to preserve their personal power and therefore Iran's independence was not really intended.[4]

There is no doubt that Iran's foreign policy changed as the result of the Islamic Revolution. In this regard, we may find the impact of the Islamic Revolution on Iran's foreign policy in realm of goals and strategies.[5] As it was expected from the revolutionaries, they highlighted the new principles of Iran's foreign policy in the new Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. These principles are as follows: 1) prevention of the foreigners' domination on Iran, 2) non-alignment towards the dominant and great powers, 3) establishment of relations with peace-seeker states, 4) negation of seeking dominance by Iran over other countries, 5) preservation of Iran's independence in all aspects, 6) Islamic-worldism, and 7) Third-Worldism.

Four principles out of seven attest to the fact that Iranians are extremely concerned with their independence and territorial integrity.

The first period of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy began with Bazargan's interim government (in February 1979) and ended with the U.S. Embassy hostage crisis which culminated in Bazargan's resignation (in November 1979). This period of Iran's foreign policy was affected by revolutionary condition and people's new demands, on the one hand, and it immensely perceived threatening to other countries' interests due to the revisionist nature of the revolution, on the other. Although the interim government inclined towards the West and was fearful of the Eastern (in particular the Soviet Union) influence in Iran, but the revolution had an anti-foreigners nature particularly aimed at the West and U.S. In fact, the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution heralded a new era in foreign policy approaches on the basis of Islamic fundamentalism which emphasized on unity and alliance among Muslim nations.

The seizure of the U.S. Embassy and beginning of the hostage crisis in November 1979 became an ordeal for revolutionary idealist foreign policy which put Iran against most countries in the world.[6] Meanwhile, the political Islam of the Islamic Republic of Iran was welcomed by Muslim nations and frightened the superpowers and their allies. The influence of the Islamist movement among Muslim nations and formation of Islamist movements across the world caused concerns for these states. It was obvious that the popular revolution which raised Islam as a plan for all aspects of social and political life was not desirable for the secular governments of the Islamic countries and their great power allies. The Islamic Revolution of Iran was regarded as a threat from the very beginning due to its goals and ideals both at the regional and international levels. Although people across the world supported the Islamic Revolution due to its anti-dictatorship and anti-imperialist character, but the governments were mainly frightened by it. Revolutionary states are usually faced such threats due to their policy and nature but Iran was not only a revolutionary state but also a religious one. The latter evoked the opposition the governments of the Islamic countries because most of them were authoritarian regimes without popular support.[7]

By the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War in September 1980, the revolutionary state found out very soon that it faced almost all countries in the international system. The best evidence was that both the U.S. and Soviet Union supported the Iraqi regime. This problem caused Iran to adopt self-sufficiency strategy in all spheres, particularly in political and economic ones. Of

course the strategy isolated Iran which was not desirable for Iranian leaders but it was the logical consequence of the Iranian Islamic Revolution and foreign policy in its early periods.[8]

By accepting the Resolution 598 in 1988, Iran put in the agenda to accept reality without revolutionary action and started economic reforms. Consequently, rationalism and pragmatism dominated over Iranian foreign policy decision-making system, particularly during President Hashemi Rafsanjani. In fact, the principle of Iran's foreign policy during the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini stated in the motto "neither East, nor West" was affected theoretically and practically by a new principle which may be called "both North and South".[9]

After the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988 and the Cold War in 1991 until 2005 that is during Hashemi and Khatami Administrations, it can be said that coalition-making (of course with great powers and western states) became the dominant strategy in Iran's foreign policy. In this period, Iran tried to find some friends in international scene and develop its relations with other countries, particularly its neighbors so that it could diminish its external threats.[10] This policy required Iran to accept the dominant order of international relations, to respect international rules and principles, to attempt for creating peaceful coexistence with other countries, particularly cooperation with the neighboring and European countries in order to solve economic problems and crises resulted from the revolution as well as the Iran-Iraq War.[11] At the same time, the principle of "export of revolution" was exposed to change. The pragmatists insisted that the Islamic Revolution should be initially nurtured within Iran which was called "stronghold of Islam". Even Ayatollah Montazeri who was regarded as the main advocate of export of revolution reached the notion that the best way for exporting revolution was to make Iran a successful Islamic country so that other oppressed countries pattern theirs on Iran.[12]

Hence we can say that Iran's foreign policy moved from a domestic-oriented and isolationist policy towards an external-oriented and cooperationist one since the end of the Iran-Iraq War and especially after the bipolar system was collapsed. Some observers believe that until 1990, Iran's foreign policy was acting independent of domestic realties but from 1990 to 2005 i.e. during Presidents Hashemi and Khatami, Iran's foreign policy was affected by domestic affairs. In other words, Iran's foreign policy decision-making was extremely affected by economic realities during the Hashemi Administration (1989-1997), and political realities and civil society during the Khatami Administration (1997-2005).[13] But from the author's point of

view, the most important causes of the change namely the experience of war and the consequences of the end of the bipolar system were related to international level.[14]

But adopting cooperationist and accommodationist strategy in foreign policy by Hashemi and Khatami, did not make the Western countries, particularly the U.S., diminish their hostility towards Iran. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Iran was placed in the "axis of evil" and Iran's threat to regional and international security was highlighted again by Israel. When President Ahmadinejad seized power in 2005, he emphasized on inefficiency of the foreign policy based on cooperation and interaction with the West. The new administration believed in two-pronged foreign policy based on confrontation with the West and interaction with other states. In the following we will address this new orientation in Iran's foreign policy.

The Ahmadinejad Foreign Policy: Confrontation and/or Accommodation?

We may consider the classification of the world into the oppressors and the oppressed and adoption of a confrontational-assertive strategy as the main guide for Ahmadinejad's foreign policy. Mohammadi, the former deputy of Iranian foreign minister in Ahmadinejad first cabinet and professor of International Relations at Tehran University, believes that Ahmadinejad's foreign policy may be understood within the framework of dividing the world into two camps: domination and anti-domination.[15] In this section, first we examine the most important issues of Iran's foreign policy during the Ahmadinejad Administration namely, the nuclear issue, Iran's regional foreign policy, "look to the East" policy and Third-Worldism. The author believes that Ahmadinejad has adopted confrontational-assertive and accommodationist-active foreign policy at the same time. Then we deal with the origins of this new foreign policy orientation. It seems that psychological, social, political, historical and international factors are involved in adopting this policy. The author maintains that Ahmadinejad has adopted an accommodationist-active foreign policy towards non-Western mainly Third World states and an active public diplomacy towards the Western states and people in order to prevent the isolation of Iran which was experienced by the country in early periods of the revolution as the result of a confrontational-assertive foreign policy.

Most important issues in Ahmadinejad's foreign policy

In August 14, 2002, an Iranian opposition group (MKO) claimed to disclose Iran's uranium enrichment centers in Natanz and heavy water facilities in Arak. Consequently different states demanded international investigations.[16] This was while in December 13 of the same year, ElBaradei, the former Secretary General of IAEA in an interview with CNN announced that the agency knew about these two facilities. In early 2003, Iran confirmed the existence of enrichment centers in Natanz and heavy water in Arak. ElBaradei visited Iran and inspected Natanz facilities in February 21, 2003. In a press conference, he confirmed Iran's claim regarding peaceful usage of nuclear energy.[17] After coming back from Tehran, he presented his report to the board of governors of IAEA in March 17, 2003.[18] In his first written report to the board of governors, ElBaradei asserted that Iran has violated some of its commitments regarding the NPT. In June 2003, in a statement, the board of governors emphasized on the necessity of solving ambiguities and ratifying the additional protocol attached to NPT by Iran.[19] In August 27, 2003, in a formal letter, Iran declared its readiness to negotiate with IAEA about the protocol.[20] Notwithstanding in September 12, 2003, the first resolution proposed by the European states in the board of governors was approved against Iran in which they requested from Iran to accept the protocol and suspend all of its nuclear activities.[21] In October 21, 2003, the foreign ministers of three European states reached an agreement with Iran about such issues as ratifying the attached protocol by Iran and its enforcement which was published as Sa'ad Abad Declaration. In November 10, 2003, Iran sent IAEA a formal letter in which it declared the acceptance of the attached protocol and in November 21st the board of governors ratified the acceptance of the attached protocol by Iran. In spite of that, in November 26th of the same year, the board of governors approved the second resolution proposed by the European states against Iran's nuclear activities.[22] In November 18, 2003, Iran signed the attached protocol and enforced it voluntarily.[23] In February 24, 2004, Iran and the European states signed another agreement in Belgium. Notwithstanding, in March 15, 2004, the third resolution proposed by the European states was approved in the board of governors against Iran's nuclear activities.[24] In May 21, 2004, Iran presented its 1033 pages letter of declaration of its nuclear activities according to the attached protocol.[25] But again in June 18, 2004 and September 18, 2004, the fourth and fifth resolutions were approved against Iran's nuclear activities.[26] Following negotiations with the European states which resulted in signing the Paris Agreement in November 15, 2004, Iran

suspended its activities in Isfahan Uranium Conversion Facility in November 22, 2004.[27] But in November 29th of the same year, the sixth resolution was ratified against Iran.[28]

Iran's foreign and nuclear policy changed in spring 2005 when Ahmadinejad came to power. Iran's most significant aim of negotiating with the European states and IAEA was to maintain its nuclear enrichment cycle and expected its activities such as voluntarily enforcement of the attached protocol and suspension of nuclear enrichment would culminate in recognition of its nuclear rights. But after a while, particularly after Ahmadinejad's coming to power, Iranian foreign policy officials were convinced that the main goal of the U.S. and Europe was not only the continuation of the suspension but also the end of Iran's nuclear program, so they decided to change their foreign policy orientation.[29]

Thus Iran announced that the European countries have not acted according to their commitments mentioned in the Paris Agreement and thus, in a formal letter, declared to the IAEA Secretary General that it would resume the activities in Isfahan Uranium Conversion Facility.[30] Several days after resuming activities in Isfahan UCF, Europe proposed a comprehensive plan to Iran but Iran rejected it because the plan was still emphasizing on stopping fuel cycle activities.[31] Due to resuming activities in Isfahan UCF, the seventh resolution was ratified by IAEA board of governors in which Iran was requested to suspend enrichment.[32]

The Iranian government appointed Ali Larijani as the new secretary of National Security Council who replaced Hasan Rohani. He immediately declared Iran's decision to continue negotiations with Europe but the three European states cancelled the negotiations. In August 26, 2005, as Iran's nuclear chief negotiator, Larijani visited Vienna and met ElBaradei. In September 2, 2005, the IAEA presented a report in which it declared that Iran has resumed uranium enrichment in Isfahan nuclear center.[33] In his first speech in the UN General Assembly in September 17, 2005, Ahmadinejad said that Iran would not accept that other states provide its nuclear fuel. He also emphasized on the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program and said that producing nuclear weapons is forbidden according to Islamic religious principles.[34] Because Iran had not accepted the EU request for stopping enrichment, the IAEA board of governors issued the eighth resolution in September 24, 2005 in which Iran was asked to resume talks with the three European states, to have the Iranian parliament to approve the attached protocol, and to stop uranium enrichment.[35] It seems that the later resolution paved the way for referring Iran's nuclear case to the Security Council.

As a consequence, Iran revised its nuclear diplomacy which was based on unconditional cooperation with the IAEA and exclusive talks with the European countries. Iran's new nuclear policy was formed on the basis of a multi-layer movement. Firstly Iran declared that it will continue negotiations and cooperation with IAEA but never will negotiate about stopping enrichment. Secondly the Ahmadinejad Administration approved a manual about how foreign states may participate in Iran's nuclear program in May 24, 2005. In November 20, the Iranian parliament urged the government to stop voluntarily accepted activities, including enforcement of the attached protocol if Iran's nuclear case was referred to the Security Council. In January 2, 2006, Iran announced that Russia's plan for enrichment on Russian soil was unacceptable to Iran. In January 3, 2006, Iran declared to IAEA that it would resume R & D activities regarding enrichment.[36] In February 2006, the IAEA urgent session was held and the ninth resolution was ratified against Iran's nuclear activities.[37] Iran reacted to the resolution by suspending all voluntary cooperation with IAEA including enforcement of the attached protocol. Since that time up until now, the Security Council has issued one declaration and four resolutions against Iran.

Ahmadinjead came to the realization that the West would not want to let Iran continue its nuclear activities even within the framework of the NPT. Hence, his administration declared a new approach in dealing with the nuclear issue. As stated by Mottaki, the Iranian foreign minster, the Ahmadinejad Administration designed a new approach regarding the West by assessing sixteen years of Iran's interaction with the West and using the experience of this interaction.[38] In their book, Hamid Molana, Ahmadinejad's advisor and Mohammadi, former deputy of Mottaki, say that from Ahmadinejad's point of view, Khatami's foreign policy did not enjoy enough power as well as resolve in order to prevent foreign states' intervention, particularly regarding the nuclear policies. Therefore, the Ahmadinjead Administration tried to avoid passiveness by adopting a confrontational foreign policy. The Ahmadinejad Administration believes that if Iran avoid passiveness and does not surrender to the West's pressures in this regard and thus, continues enrichment, the West finally retreats.[39]

Iran's regional foreign policy

By adopting geographical prioritization of Iran's foreign policy according to the Constitution, the Ahmadinejad Administration put the improvement and development of relations with regional states as its first foreign policy priority. On this basis, Iran's foreign policy in Ahmadinejad

Administration has been based on active interaction with neighboring, Islamic and Third World countries. The main priority in this policy was improving relations with the Islamic countries since Ahmadinejad believes that the Islamic Republic of Iran "has Islamic nature, function and responsibility" and on this basis, "regards Islam as the first and main element and source for Iranian national identity".[40] For instance, Ahmadinejad Administration believed that Iran's relations with regional states, particularly with the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, should be developed. President Ahmadinejad personally inclined to develop cooperation with these states. During two years, he visited Saudi Arabia four times. He was also the first Iranian president who visited UAE in 2007. He also visited neighboring countries in Central Asia and Caucasus and announced that Iran is ready to resume diplomatic relations with Egypt.

It seems that in this period, Iran sought to firstly develop relations with the regional states, secondly undermine the emerging concerns regarding its nuclear activities, thirdly take stance against allegations based on Iranian hegemonism in the region, particularly those of Iran's attempt at forming a Shiite Crescent, and finally reach an asymmetrical balance against the U.S. through interaction with the regional states. Of course, it should be considered that Ahmadinejad accepted to negotiate with the U.S. within the framework of solving Iraq problems which was a courageous action because the dominant belief in Iran is to avoid negotiating with the US. During the trilateral negotiations with the U.S., Iran tried to prove its good intentions. Principally, negotiating with the U.S. in Iraq was a kind of breaking taboos inside Iran. Iran sought to show its accommodationist intentions and tried to take the opportunity to improve the bilateral cooperation. This attest to the fact that Iran's foreign policy in Iraq is guided by pragmatism and is based on strategic issues. Nowadays without considering the kind of government in Iraq, Iran-Iraq relations are guided by such permanent factors such as Iraq ethnic as well as geopolitical features, regional rivalry and some strategic issues remained from the two states' past relations before the U.S. invasion of Iraq.[41]

But in spite of adopting this accommodationist policy by Iran, it was perceived another way. The Arab states who were concerned with new developments in the Middle East and realized their weakening position, claimed that Iran was forming a Shiite Crescent in the region.[42] In 2004, when Iran's nuclear crisis was at its zenith and Iraq was moving towards internal war, Jordan's King Abdullah, claimed that Iraq war has culminated in forming a Shiite Crescent in the region led by Iran. In fact, two allegations were propounded at the same time.

The first was that Shiites have gained power which has resulted in forming a Shiite bloc. The second was that the Shiite bloc will be led by Iran.[43]

The Ahmadinejad Administration regards the notion of Shiite Crescent as an attempt for controlling Iran through using ethnic-religious differences in the region. Accordingly, the U.S. wants to erect a regional anti-Iran alliance by using the Shiite Crescent notion, Iran phobia and Shia phobia. Iranian leaders have such a perception of the notion. They have declared that the Islamic Revolution is more Islamic than Shiite and the revolution leaders have emphasized on the unity of the Islamic World.[44]

Secondly, Ahmadinejad announced the plan of wiping off Israel from the map and denying Holocaust in 2006 which was apparently raised in order to change the stage of political confrontation with great powers but it faced the West's drastic reaction.[45] It seems that the designers of the policy believed that the strategy of changing the stage of confrontation may decrease the pressures on Iran over its nuclear issue, give Iran the possibility to choose the stage of confrontation so that it would choose a stage in which the rival is more vulnerable, Iran can show that it would not surrender and if pressured has many options at hand to use.[46] In 2006, the name of Iran in the world was accompanied with Holocaust denial.

Meanwhile, the opponents of Iran who seek to accuse it of trying to access the nuclear weapons emphasized that Iran seeks nukes to target Israel. They exploited the Holocaust denial and wiping off Israel from the map and succeeded in making this fantasy more acceptable than before. The Holocaust denial helped Iran's opponents in Europe and culminated in forming the security atmosphere needed by the U.S. for creating consensus against Iran so the European states easily accompanied the U.S. against Iran.[47] Therefore, Iranian statesmen, including President Ahmadinejad, tried to correct their statements on Holocaust and have repeatedly said that they would ask for "scientific investigation about it" instead of denying it.[48]

In sum, Iran's regional foreign policy during Ahmadinejad has been based on power balancing with the U.S. through supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon, continuing strategic alliance with Syria, supporting the opponents of the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq, improving relations with the neighboring countries including the Arab states, and adopting an assertive policy towards Israel. Like any other country surrounded and threatened by an enemy, Iran would use all its capacities for confronting threats.

Look to the East policy

The formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001 as the first post-Cold War regional security arrangement arose reactions by regional and trans-regional actors, particularly great powers. Some of important regional and trans-regional actors including Mongolia, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and the U.S. have expressed their inclination to join the organization. In 2004, Mongolia was accepted as observing member. In the tenth session during the summit of the leaders in June 2005, the main members of the organization approved the membership of India, Pakistan and Iran as observing members.

The main principle of Iran's foreign policy regarding regional security organizations and treaties which include the great powers has been the principle of rejection. The presence of two regional-global great powers, namely Russia and China in the SCO which were opposing the formation of a unipolar international system was too attractive for Iran to reject. Iran thought that it can guarantee its security through membership in an organization that is obviously against the unipolar system and it is a serious challenge for the U.S. global hegemony. The presence of two permanent members of the Security Council and India as observing member in the organization which is at the same time seeking to become a permanent member of the Security Council has produced a considerable potential for the organization to play a significant role in shaping global developments.

It should be considered that one of Iran's basic foreign policy goals has been to pay attention to regional cooperation and integration in order to solve regional problems and reach security and economic welfare and development for the nations in the region. But the change in Iran's old policy based on non-membership in regional security treaties, particularly those in which great powers participate, should have had a profound cause which is the U.S. declining hegemony and formation of a counter-hegemonic organization.[49] In other words, the common interest of Iran and two great powers that are member in the SCO namely Russia[50] and China[51] has culminated in their close bilateral as well as multilateral relations within the context of the SCO.

Iran requested full membership in the SCO because found out that the organization is against unipolar system led by the U.S. During the Khatami Administration, Iran applied for membership in the organization mainly in order to challenge the U.S. hegemony. Although Khatami's foreign policy was mainly based on interaction with Europe and even the United

States, since he believed that Iran's national interests would be more feasible through constructive relationships with the West, but due to some problems created in later years of his presidency with them (the U.S. announced Iran as "axis of evil" and Iran did not gain a desirable result from nuclear negotiations with Europe), Iran manifested its inclination towards the East.[52]

When Ahmadinejad took power in 2005, Iran's foreign policy approach changed and the "look to the East" policy was announced which was mainly to balance the West.[53] It seems that Ahmadinejad wanted to be different from the previous government which he regarded as his political antithesis. But it seems that the more significant point was that Ahmadinejad and his supporters believed that the problem of Iran for the West is Iran's Islamic nature of political system not its policies and behaviors. In other words, Khatami and his colleagues believed that Iran's foreign policy behavior has caused distrust of different states including the Western ones, and Iran might change the atmosphere by a new gesture and more balanced and cooperative behavior for the sake of confidence-building and détente. Hence Khatami proposed the notion of "dialogue of civilizations" and sought detente in order to nurture mutual trust with the Western countries. But Ahmadinejad regards the Western, particularly the U.S., hostility towards Iran as a deeper phenomenon and believes that the U.S. threat to Iran is an existential one so if Iran moderates its policy and behavior towards the West, a just and constructive relations will not form but, as the nuclear negotiation showed, they will enhance their expectations[54]

Policy of Third-Worldism

According to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Third World countries do have a specific position in Iran's foreign policy. When president Ahmdainejad came to power, Iran decided to follow a more assertive/active diplomacy for defending its stances and plans. Therefore, cooperation with the countries of Africa and Latin America became a priority for Iranian foreign policy decision-makers. As the deputy foreign minister of Iran for African Affairs explains, Iran's policy towards Africa during Ahmadinejad has sought to fulfill the following goals: (1) politically to gain African states' support in international organizations regarding the nuclear issue and human rights, and develop relations with the African Union and regional organizations (2) economically to increase trade exchanges with Africa, new investment projects in African states, adopt encouraging policies for opening up trade centers in Africa and hold common economic commissions and (3) culturally to expand Islamic culture and introduce

Iranian culture and literature in Africa.[55] With respect to Latin America too the main goals of Iran for expanding relationships may be said to include (1) undermining threats around Iran and creating new international trends (2) creating new mutual opportunities and capacities and (3) expanding Iran's strategic depth.[56] As Molana and Mohammadi acknowledge because of the revolutionary and anti-imperialist nature of Main countries in Latin America particularly Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Cuba, "Latin America has the capacity to change international system and Iran may challenge the U.S. hegemony in this way".[57]

Origins of Ahmadinejad's two-pronged foreign policy

Among the factors affecting Iran's foreign policy to be confrontational-assertive on the one hand and accommodationist-active on the other in Ahmadinejad's period, we may point out to the following factors: (1) psychological factors, (2) social factors (3) political factors (4) historical factors and (5) international factors.

The *psychological factor* focuses on the President's personal features, particularly his belief system. It seems that Ahmadnejad is highly similar to late Ayatollah Khomeini. As a pure revolutionary who was affected by Iran-Iraq War experience, Ahmadinejad believes that Iran cannot count on foreign countries, particularly the West including the United States. The Iran-Iraq War clearly demonstrated that the so-called international community not only may violate Iran's rights, but also international law and conventions, even the UN, may be manipulated in order to provide the great powers' interests. It seems that the greatest lesson from this war was that Iran should rely on itself.[58] On the other hand, it seems that Ahmadinejad extremely believes that Iran's enemies, particularly the U.S. and Israel are in a weak stance: the U.S. power is declining and the Israeli government is waning. From this viewpoint, the U.S. stuck in Iraq and the Israeli failure to annihilate Hezbollah in the Israeli-Lebanese 33 Day War show the fact clearly. This kind of attitude has increased Ahmadinejad's self-confidence in its foreign policy and move towards being more assertive.

The leadership and decision-making style as well as the quality of information management is another personal variant affecting Iran foreign policy.[59] Ahmadinejad and his team believed that they should pave the way for emerging Mahdi (the Shiite religious hero who will come back in Apocalypse) and establish a Utopia in Iran and the world.[60] On this basis, they seek justice and fair international system and try to change the status quo. In this regard, one of

Ahmadinejad's main tactics was to use public diplomacy for establishing communication with world public opinion. In this direction, Iranian media and international tribunes were used to transmit Ahmadinejad's message to the world. He attended at the universities of other countries in order to communicate with students, held sessions with religious and scientific elite and communicated with ordinary people. Ahmadinejad himself believes that these kinds of communication are more efficient. Hamid Molana an Iranian-American professor of international relations believes that Ahmadinejad has acted as a medium in his speech at Colombia University and succeeded in transmitting his message to millions of people across the world.[61]

The *social factor* points to the social origin of Ahmadinejad's statesmen, particularly his main supporters. Contrary to the previous presidents, namely Hashemi and Khatami, who were supported by the middle classes, particularly by intellectuals and businessmen, Ahmadinejad is mainly supported by low class people. While Iranian middle class believed in establishing relations with the West, the low class people do not trust the West, particularly the U.S. This has greatly affected Ahmadinejad's foreign policy and facilitated his being more assertive.

In his election propaganda, Ahmadinjad said that he is a university teacher and not committed to any political party or group. In fact, he was popular among oppressed, religious and revolutionary people.[62] His supporters regard his victory in 2005 election as a miracle and believe that "Ahmadinejad's victory in 2005 election showed the bankruptcy of political parties' structure. Accordingly, the only result of party system is elitism and being far from the nation".[63] In 2005, Ahmadinejad expressed his wonder about his victory in election and regarded it as his destiny. On the basis of this destiny, he announced, he should create "the third Islamic Revolution". In principle, the victory in this revolution was not much related to pragmatist policies and strategies but it was related to divine will.[64]

Regarding the impact of *political factor* on facilitating Ahmadinejad's foreign policy assertiveness, we may point to three issues. First, it seems that the issue of "being different from Hashemi and Khatami Administrations" was one of effective factors. It can be said that the previous administrations were "others" for Ahmadinejad who tried to be quite different from them. His beliefs in happening of the third revolution by his coming to power, his criticisms of Hashemi, and the dominance of anti-reform discourse after his victory, demonstrate this fact. Secondly, Iranian conservative wing's hostility towards the West has affected Ahmadinejad's

foreign policy. In sum, we can say that the conservative wing is not only seeking to challenge the West but also does not trust it too. Thirdly, Ahmadinejad and his supporters are mostly veterans of the Iran-Iraq War who have seen the West's renegade with Iran so they do not believe in its mottoes such as democracy and human rights. They further believe that "development" (Hashemi's policy) was an American plan seeking to restore the U.S. domination in Iranian culture, politics and economy on the one hand, and "reformists" (Khatami and his colleagues) were also the U.S.-dependent intellectual and political puppets who had only targeted the basis of the Islamic Republic and religious beliefs.[65]

But the *historical factor* relates to the reality that Iran has traditionally been pessimist towards the West. This issue which has deep historical roots has caused Iranian statesmen generally to bee pessimist towards the outside world. This pessimism has affected Iran's foreign policy in general and after the Islamic Revolution in particular. A brief review of the main principles of Iran's foreign policy which are highlighted in the Constitution, particularly independence and national sovereignty, demonstrates this deep pessimism. It seems that the issue has manifested itself more in Ahdmadinejad's Administration. Iranians' historical memory is full of foreign states' influence and its damages for the country. Therefore historical factors affect Iranians' perception about establishing relations with the superpowers, particularly the U.S. which had a great influence in Iranian politics during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah. "The past is always alive for Iran. A paradoxical combination of pride of Iranian culture and the sense of being sacrificed has caused Iranian people have a drastic sense of independence and resistance against force and domination by alien powers. Iran's foreign policy has deep roots in these vast feelings".[66]

And finally, the international community's particular way of treating the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially the West's way of dealing with president Khatami, has reinforced Ahamdinejad's assertive foreign policy. In spite of domestic developments in Iran and the Khatami Administration inclination towards improvement of relations with the outside world, particularly the Western countries and adopting a moderate foreign policy based on détente and peaceful co-existence, Iran was placed in the "axis of evil". In the nuclear issue, Khatami Administration adopted a moderate stance and suspended enrichment but the Western countries did not reciprocate in at least giving Iran security guarantees.

Conclusion: The Prospect of Iran's Foreign Policy and its Consequences for the West

The author believes that one can find out from the study of Iran's foreign policy since the revolution of 1979 that the continuous main strategy in Iran's foreign policy has been "deterrence" which is related to the nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its international threats. The issue is well understood within the framework of defensive realism. But some would like to portray Iran's foreign policy during Ahmadinejad's period a "hegemonism" within the framework of offensive realism. We assert that though Ahmadinejad's "confrontational and active" foreign policy may look like a change of strategy in Iran's foreign policy from deterrence to hegemonism, but Iran is still following the strategy of deterrence. The main question, therefore, is that why did Iran's foreign policy become more confrontational and assertive, what are its prospects and what are its consequences for the West?

The Islamic Republic of Iran was threatened from the beginning due to its revolutionary characters. The Islamic Revolution was threatening at the level of states and although public opinion supported it, the states felt extremely threatened particularly those in Iran's immediate neighborhood. Usually the threats are mainly due to the policies and behaviors the states adopt. But in addition to their policies and behaviors, some states are threatened because of their nature. The Islamic Republic of Iran is a state which has been encountered with both kinds of threats. In our view, since its establishment the Islamic Republic of Iran is being threatened not only because of its revolutionary behavior but also because of its Islamic nature. The threats the Islamic Republic of Iran has been facing since 1979 are strategic ones aimed at its existence due to its nature.

What instruments were at the Iranian decision-makers' disposal to thwart threats and guarantee Iran's survival? From the Iranian policy-makers' point of view, the main strategy for a country like Iran faced with strategic threats should be mainly "deterrence". It seems that in order to deter, the Iranian leaders have assumed three different ways. First they went for a policy of internal balancing. In other words, power amalgamation strategy is a way for deterrence so that the enemy does not act on the first attack. This was the policy dominated Iran's approach to the world from the beginning of the revolution to the end of the Iran-Iraq war. The second way was to pave the way for cooperation with foreign powers so that power amalgamation takes place through aggregating power. This policy of coalition-making was followed during the Hashemi and Khatami administrations. Finally, the third way is to become hegemonic power in

order to confront external threats. Hegemony may be global hegemony which is appropriate for great powers or regional hegemony which is suitable for regional powers. Is Ahmadinejad's Iran following this final policy in order to become a hegemonic power in the Middle East?

To answer this question, we need to go over the three mentioned policies once more. The first and second policies are considered within the framework of defensive realism and the third within offensive realism. States usually use the first and second strategies hence these two strategies namely defensive realism are regarded as a normal matter in international stage. In other words, it is normal to reinforce power and make coalition for preserving survival and security of a country. But the third strategy seems abnormal. If a state seeks to become a hegemonic power, it will face a serious resistance. For instance, in the Middle East region, Egypt of Jamal Abdel Naser and Iran during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah may be said to follow this policy of hegemonism which faced huge resistance.

The author believes that the Islamic Republic of Iran has not been seeking hegemony from the beginning of its establishment. In other words, it seems that the Islamic Republic since its beginning has tried to adopt the first policy namely to enforce its internal power in order to guarantee its survival. We can say that until the end of Iran-Iraq War, the main policy in Iran was power amalgamation for the sake of frustrating external threats. But after the end of the war and during the Hashemi and Khatami Administrations (1989-2005), the dominant policy became the second, namely coalition-making for the sake of thwarting Iran's external threats. Iran tried to find some friends at the regional and international stage and develop its relation with the neighboring counties in order to reduce its external threats. Hashemi started such an attempt and Khatami tried to enforce it through adopting a policy of détente and peaceful coexistence.

But we can say that the Western countries were confused when faced a Khatami who propounded détente and dialogue of civilization, on the one hand, and clandestinely develop nuclear know-how, on the other. It seems to us that the Western countries could not have solved the paradox. Therefore it has been on the air since that time that Iran's nuclear program is attesting to the fact that the Iranian leaders are seeking hegemony in order to preserve their survival and security. When Ahmadinejad took power, Iran's foreign policy became more confrontational and assertive which helped to reinforce this perception in the West that there is no doubt that Iran is seeking to become a regional hegemon.

The fact is that though Iran is experiencing a very dangerous environment internally and externally so it may be leaned towards such a policy of hegemonism, but this is not a main and strategic policy of the Iranian leaders. In the author's view, since Khatami's moderate foreign policy especially its efforts to portray Iran as a peace-loving country, was not reciprocated by the external actors especially the Western countries, Iran may heave leaned towards dismantling its policy of defensive realism but it has a very short living period. It depends wholly on the way the Western countries are going to treat Iran and its security concerns.

In sum, the author maintains that we can explore a constant pattern in Iran's foreign policy i.e. a pragmatist and realistic foreign policy to deter its enemies and guarantee its security, survival and well-being. To realize this goal, Iran has exploited all instruments at its disposal such as Islamism and the Islamic-worldism, Shiism, Third-worldism, nationalism, geopolitics, even Holocaust denial and so on in different conditions. In other words, Iran has been too opportunistic in its foreign policy. Of course, this does not mean that Iran has used all opportunities but like an opportunistic actor has used different instruments in different conditions. On the other hand, Iran has sought deterrence. On this basis, it can be said that Iran pays attention to different tools such as good relations with the Shiites in the Middle East and Palestinian groups, strategic alliance with Hezbollah of Lebanon, specific relations with Muqtada Sadr in Iraq and other policies in order to ameliorate its external threats through the policy of deterrence. Therefore, Ahmadinejad's foreign policy behaviors such as confrontational and assertive nuclear policy, regional foreign policy, look to the East policy and Third-worldism, like his predecessors, can be regarded as a way of deterring Iran's external threats. In brief, Iran seeks instruments in order to guarantee its security against its enemies and will continue this even more radically. The only way for the Western countries is to accept the existence of the Islamic Republic of Iran, guarantee its security, and establish a systematic and rational relation with it. Otherwise, the current trend will continue which may culminate in paying heavy costs by Iran but the West will be the main loser.

NOTES

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