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Iran's Continuous Revolution

When Ayatollah Khomeini and his fellow Islamic clerics captured Iran's government and quickly began to consolidate their version of Islamic rule in 1979, no state or foreign leader at the time would have categorized Iran as a 'normal' country. Iran's professed ideology and policy declarations were a direct threat to its neighbor states, the great powers, and to the entire international structure. But after twenty-eight years of existence, featuring a war for survival, the death of Khomeini, and several elections and presidents, has the revolutionary state of Iran finally become a 'normal' nation fully incorporated into the international system? This paper will argue that the Islamic Republic of Iran is in fact still a revolutionary state whose existence and *raison d'être* depend upon its revolutionary Islamist identity and ideology. The Islamic ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran is central to its domestic legitimacy and how it sees and responds to the outside world. The revolutionary ideals that helped bring about the Islamic Republic, though they have been challenged and in some cases have needed to adapt with the changing domestic and international environment, are still key to the state's legitimacy and have been instrumental in forming the state's foreign policy, whose main features are anti-Americanism and the promotion of Islamic governance abroad.

The dominating neo-realist theory calls a state 'normal' if it follows the rules of the anarchical international system, a world where there is no higher authority than the state and where each individual state will inevitably do whatever it can and must to

secure its own survival.¹ State's interests and security dominate all actions and relations in the world, and factors such as domestic politics, culture, and ideology take a backseat or are entirely ignored. Those who follow this theory, such as Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Walt, and David Armstrong, would argue that the Islamic Republic of Iran is on its way to becoming, or is in fact already, a normal state that will be 'socialized'² into the current international system.

In contrast, the importance of ideology for revolutionary states has been advocated by Fred Halliday, who argues that the realist's³ view of socialization of revolutionary states is a much more difficult process than they would have us believe. He asserts that until there are internal changes within revolutionary states that alter their views and the structures that help turn these views and beliefs into hard policy, revolutionary and non-revolutionary states will remain in conflict.⁴ In other words, as long as Iran remains the Islamic Republic it will continue to challenge its neighboring states, the US, and the international system. This rebellious behavior and foreign policy will at times be detrimental to Iran's national interests, and therefore is not normal state behavior.

¹ From now on, whenever 'international system' or 'international structure' is mentioned, this is what I will be referring to.

² David Armstrong's definition of 'socialization' in Revolution and World Order will be used; 'the process whereby men (states) consciously or unconsciously conform to the conventions of the society in which they live in order to function more effectively within it and whereby an increasing entanglement within an existing structure of relationships brings about an increasing degree of adaptation to the normal behavior patterns of that structure.'

³ This theory of 'socialization' was mainly created and supported by constructivists, such as David Armstrong.

⁴ Halliday, Fred, Revolution and World Politics; The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power, Duke University Press, 1999.

Although, this paper argues that Iran is not a ‘normal’ state, it does not purport that it is a ‘crazy state’ either. The leaders of Iran value their national security and have shown on numerous occasions that they are willing to compromise some of their ideological values to maintain their rule at the domestic level and their state’s security in the international sphere. What will be challenged is the assumption that Iran is a state that acts only in its own self-interest and without regard to its Islamic ideology. In particular, Iran’s deliberate policy of anti-Americanism will be central in this claim. I will argue that this course of action, contrary to the assumptions of realism, has on many occasions gone against Iran’s national interests.

Iran Socialized?

A clear majority of international relations (IR) scholars and Iranian experts view the country as one that at times, mostly during the early stages of its revolution, has had a radical and inconsistent foreign policy that has been damaging to its national interests. However, they have argued that Tehran has for the most part been socialized into the international system and therefore behaves overwhelmingly according to its national interests. These scholars see a regime that uses its Islamic identity and anti-American stance to benefit itself domestically and internationally. Indeed, there is strong evidence showing that as Iran professes its commitment to Islamic governance and a strong anti-West/American/Israeli posture, it uses and contradicts these convictions to benefit and protect the state’s interests and the regimes legitimacy and hold on power. The U.S. embassy hostage episode is a key example of how the newly empowered Islamic clergy,

led by Ayatollah Khomeini, used its Islamic and anti-West/American ideology to consolidate its domestic regime.

Said Amir Arjomand, a leading scholar on the Iranian revolution, along with many others, contends that Khomeini tacitly approved of the storming of the U.S. embassy and the taking of American hostages on November 4, 1979 and effectively used this dramatic incident to consolidate his power. Khomeini successfully exploited widespread anti-American/Western sentiment and became the leading proponent of an issue that was widely popular among the many groups vying for power. In the aftermath of the revolution, he used this episode to begin a clerical coup d'état which caused the downfall of the moderate Prime Minister Bazargan government, which put the cleric-dominated Revolutionary Council in control of the state. Khomeini and his cleric followers then used the legitimacy that they received from their leadership on this issue and consolidated their power in an Islamic constitution, which vested a majority of power in the clerical elite.⁵ In this crucial episode of the Iranian Revolution, anti-American/Western sentiment and propaganda played an integral part in the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, the regime's anti-American and Islamic ideology were not just short-lived opportunistic tools for the aspiring regime, for they continue to be a central aspect of the state's identity and policies today.

Although this use of political exploitation of religion and ideology by the Islamic Republic during its rise to power was no doubt a challenge to its neighbors, the great powers, and the international system, realists argue that for the most part its behavior was

⁵ Arjomand, Said Amir, The Turban for the Crown, Oxford University Press, New York, 1988.

to the benefit of the state's interests. Stephen Walt argues that revolutionary states, with Iran being a prime example, inevitably create an insecure environment for themselves, their neighbors, and for the great powers in a system and that this in most cases will lead to conflict.⁶ Following this argument, state insecurity and the perception of threats were more responsible for Iran's 1980-1988 war with Iraq and its confrontational stance with the United States, who returned this policy and posture of animosity, than just Iran's ideological makeup. To Walt, and other scholars such as Arjomand, Hooman Peimani, David Armstrong, and Houman A. Sadri, this ten year or so period after the revolution, widely regarded as the Islamic Republic's most radical phase, saw a rather normal state whose policies reflected its national interests, but one which found itself in a very insecure environment.

These authors claim that Iran, though it was using anti-American/Western rhetoric and expressing a desire to spread Islamic ideology and governance throughout the Muslim world, was instituting a pragmatic foreign policy that would only become more solidified as the revolution of 1979 faded further into the past. The war with Iraq, which put the survival of the Islamic state and Iran as a nation into question, brought about what were seen by these scholars as very rational and self-interested policies by the Islamic Republic. Walt and Armstrong both refer to Iran's procurement of weapons and arms from Israel and the United States as a blatant example of a state comprising its ideology for its security.⁷ Iran and their desperate search for weapons also caused them to be

⁶ Walt, Stephen M., Revolution and War, Cornell University Press, 1996.

⁷ Walt, Stephen M., Revolution and War, Cornell University Press, 1996.
Armstrong, David, Revolution and World Order, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993.

linked with the United States in the Iran-Contra scandal (1984-1986).⁸ The Islamic Republic based a large part of its legitimacy and constitution on its defiance of Western powers, the U.S. and Israel in particular, but when it came down to their state's self preservation they proved that they were willing to make a deal with both 'Great Satan' and 'Little Satan.'

Besides joining forces with a self-pronounced arch-enemy out of pure self-interest, Iran displayed other actions that support neorealist assumptions during the Iran-Iraq war. Walt and Armstrong both point out that while Khomeini condemned Iraq's 'atheistic' Baathist ideology, he did not hesitate in forming an alliance with Syria, who was ruled by a branch of the same Baathist movement.⁹ Khomeini, who previously stated that Iran "must become isolated in order to become independent," had by 1984 changed his tune, and now desired "relations with all countries" except the United States, Israel, and South Africa.¹⁰ Walt also asserts that the Regime's Revolutionary Guard units dropped much of their revolutionary idealism as the war progressed and grew into more professional military units.

The way the Iraq-Iran war was concluded in 1988 provides greater evidence of a country behaving moderately and within the international system. To begin with, by ending the war without toppling Saddam and therefore not being able to spread the Islamic revolution to a neighboring nation with a Shia majority, and secondly by officially agreeing to United Nations Resolution 598 cease-fire without any

⁸ Sigrid Faath, Anti-Americanism in the Islamic World, Hurst and Company, London, 2006.

⁹ Walt, Stephen M., Revolution and War, Cornell University Press, 1996.
Armstrong, David, Revolution and World Order, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993.

¹⁰ Walt, Stephen M., Revolution and War, Cornell University Press, 1996.

preconditions. Iran, a nation who at first rejected the entire international state system as being illegitimate and oppressive, was now following UN resolutions, making alliances with its sworn enemies, and practicing pragmatic foreign policies. Houman A. Sadri even claims that Khomeini's decision to accept the 1988 cease-fire solidified the position of the realists within the Islamic Republic and ended the direct influence of the Regime's idealists on the nation's foreign policy agenda.¹¹ For realists, the Islamic Republic's behavior in the Iraq-Iran war would have been very similar to any other state in the system if put in the same position.

To Sadri and many others, Khomeini's death in 1989 and the following presidency of Rafsanjani (1989-1997), whose reforms would be carried even further by his successor Khatami (1997-2005), was a major turning point in Iran's foreign and domestic politics. Khomeini was a tremendously charismatic leader, and his widespread appeal and forceful convictions were seen to have passed on with him. Iran was perceived to be headed down a more moderate path. Hooman Peimani and Adam Tarock portray an Iran with a 'reformulated' foreign policy based on national interests after a long war and radical policies that were not only against the country's interests, but also dangerous and unpredictable.¹² Rafsanjani established relations with neighboring Arab countries even though they were considered 'secular,' meaning that they did not truly

¹¹ Sadri, Houman A., Revolutionary States, Leaders, and Foreign Relations, Praeger Publishers, London, 1997.

¹² Peimani, Hooman, Iran and the United States: The Rise of the West Asian Regional Groupings, Praeger Publishers, 1999.
Tarock, Adam, Iran's Foreign Policy Since 1990, Nova Science Publishers, Inc., New York, 1999.

follow Islamic law.¹³ These were the same Arab governments that Khomeini had referred to as ‘illegitimate’ and ‘unjust.’¹⁴

Iran also expanded trade ties with Japan, the European Community (now the EU), Russia, China, and in most African, Asian, and Central Asian countries. Iran’s growing relationship with many European nations, which scholar Ziba Moshaver called a ‘functional accommodation,’¹⁵ is an especially interesting aspect of its so-called ‘socialization’ into the international system, since Europe is a central part of the ‘West’ that Khomeini and his followers spoke so much against during and after the revolution. They even went so far as to declare such beliefs in the nation’s written constitution. Belying such rhetoric and ideals, as of 1999, Iran’s three largest trading partners were Germany, France, and Italy.¹⁶ Iran viewed the EU as a source of foreign loans, credit and investment. These sensible and sociable policies and actions of rapprochement are not what one would expect from a revolutionary state.

From the 1990s until the present, Iran’s foreign policy has shown socialized and normal behavior in a variety of ways and venues. Iran has played a constructive role in several regional issues, continued to work with international organizations such as the United Nations, and has exhibited what many have called pragmatic and rational behavior towards the United States both after 9/11 and during the present Iraq war. Iran’s position supporting the Armenian faction against the Muslim Republic of Azerbaijan

¹³ Peimani, 1999.

¹⁴ Armstrong, David, Revolution and World Order, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993.

¹⁵ Moshaver, Ziba, Revolution, Theocratic Leadership and Iran’s Foreign Policy: Implications for Iran-EU Relations, *The Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2003.

¹⁶ Peimani, 1999, pg. 76.

during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was a pure example of what realists would call ‘balance of power’¹⁷ politics. Iran sided with the Christian Armenians because they wanted to restrict Turkey’s reach into Central Asia. Iran showed with this policy that its regional interests were more important than its Islamic identity and ideology. Iran also displayed similar conservative and rational behavior in its neutral stance in the conflict between Russia and Chechnya, a predominately Muslim region fighting for independence.

Sadri and Peimani also emphasized Iran’s growing use of international and regional organizations in its foreign policy. Peimani asserts that Iran has increasingly intensified its cooperation with the UN and its specialized agencies on numerous issues ranging from peace-building and peace-keeping to combating drug trafficking. He specifically applauds Iran’s efforts with Russia and Pakistan in the UN-sponsored peace negotiations between the two parties in Tajikistan’s civil war. The negotiations lead to a June 1997 peace treaty and praise for Iran by the UN Secretary Generals, Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan.¹⁸ Sadri points out Iran’s increasing use of the UN as a venue to score points against the United States, for instance in 1988 after the U.S.S. Vincennes’s downing of an Iranian commercial flight, instead of using more radical means.¹⁹

¹⁷ David Armstrong describes the Balance of Power in his Revolution and World Order pg. 34, as ‘that since states accepted no higher authority competent to uphold order amongst them, the chief ordering device in a society of states would be the maintenance of a balance of power so that no single state would be able to achieve preponderance over the rest.’ In this specific Iranian/Turkey case, preponderance in Central Asia.

¹⁸ Peimani, 1999, pg. 67-68.

¹⁹ Sadri, 1997, pg. 107.

After the United States was attacked on 9/11 and its subsequent overthrows and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, realists such as Kamran Taremi, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, and Vali Nasr²⁰ have described an Iran that made rational, pragmatic, and self-serving policy decisions which involved cooperating with the U.S. After 9/11, the Iranian population expressed spontaneous compassion and solidarity and regime leaders condemned the attacks. After the U.S. invasion, the Iranian government even deported several Al Qaeda members and was helpful in stabilizing Afghanistan. In Taremi's analysis of Iran's foreign policy during the current Iraq war, he portrays a rational state only interested in its own security and interests. He describes an Iran that was fearful of U.S. aggression, and rightfully so since it was a state that referred to it as being in an 'axis of evil' and surrounded it with the world's most powerful military. He stated Iran desired only two objectives; 1. Ensure no attack on Iran 2. Help Iraqi Shia assume power equal to majority status.²¹ Iran was not seeking to spread its Islamic and anti-American revolutionary ideals; they were just concerned about their own survival and pragmatically hoping to have a friendly Iraqi government as their neighbor in the future.

Iran Untamed

Although it is true that Iran in many ways has acted progressively like a normal state since the 1979 revolution, it is in fact no such thing. Iran is still a revolutionary

²⁰ Taremi, Kamran, 'Iranian Foreign Policy Towards Occupied Iraq, 2003-2005,' *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2005.
Ehteshami, Anoushiravan, 'Iran-Iraq Relations after Saddam,' *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2003.
Nasr, Vali, 'When the Shiites Rise,' *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2006.

²¹ Taremi, Kamran, 'Iranian Foreign Policy Towards Occupied Iraq, 2003-2005,' *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2005.

state whose identity and policies are strongly influenced by its Islamic and anti-American/Western government. The government's legitimacy is staked on these principles, and if it renounces or comprises too fully on either, it will most likely face an internal crisis and loss of power. Iran still poses a challenge to the United States and the world because its government maintains an Islamic identity that is written into its constitution that blatantly rejects the international system, and strives for the emergence of one Islamic Umma, or community. Based on its current governmental system, there can be no complete normalization of relations between Iran and the United States, Israel, or with the international system as a whole. Fred Halliday is correct when he argues that revolutionary states may participate in certain truces, diplomacy, or cut down on their internationalist or antagonistic rhetoric, but that this does not mean that they have been totally socialized. The USSR, Cuban, and French revolutions challenged the system for decades, with Russia promoting revolutions abroad even as it was internally crumbling.²² Iran has and will be no different.

To have a better grasp of Iran's revolutionary status, we need to go back to the ideas of Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini's world vision was centered on two connected beliefs: Islam is the only true legitimate force for governance and rule on earth and in the 'next world,' and that the West, specifically the U.S., is innately an oppressive force that is preventing this type of Islamic governance from coming into being. Khomeini was an amazing figure because he was able to establish these ideas, which are contradictory to the international system, into a constitution with strong and consolidated institutions that

²² Halliday, 1999.

could put them into practice. The Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution has three strongly linked, central elements that have challenged the system since the day they were made into law. The first element is that the Islamic Republic of Iran was Sovereign to God (Hakemiyat-e Illahi), not to the Iranian people. According to Shia theology, there is divine sovereignty passed down from Mohammed to the Imams and for Iran there will be rule by a hierarchy of leading Islamist jurists, starting with Khomeini, who will lead the state and the Umma in the name of God.²³ The Islamic Republic of Iran is a state that's legitimacy does not rest on its people or with a dynastic authority, but with God himself.

This constitutional sovereignty based on God is complimented by the second element, a constitutional emphasis that all Muslims are part of one unified Umma. Khomeini emphasized that "Muslims are one family, even if they are subject to different governments and even if they live in regions remote from one another."²⁴ The importance and radical nature of these two beliefs are unmistakable for Iran's foreign policy. The nation-state in our international system is being directly challenged. All governments not basing their authority on God, every state in the world system except Iran, were considered by Khomeini and the Iranian government to be illegitimate. The radical nature of this type of governance can be heard in Khomeini's own words;

"It is the duty of all of us to overthrow the taghut; i.e., the illegitimate political powers that now rule the entire Islamic world. The governmental apparatus of tyrannical and anti-popular regimes must be replaced by institutions serving the public good and administered according to Islamic law. In this way, an Islamic government will gradually come into existence."²⁵

²³ Sadri, 1997, pg. 90.

²⁴ Khomeini, Islam and Revolution,

²⁵ Ibid., pg. 147.

To Khomeini and his followers, these non-Islamic governments, especially ones ruling over a majority of Muslims, were not only illegitimate but innately unjust, and any struggle against them would be a ‘struggle for justice.’ The following quote from Khomeini clearly articulates this view;

“There is a great difference between all the various manmade forms of government in this world, ... and a divine government, on the other hand, which follows divine law. Governments that do not base themselves on divine law conceive of justice only in the natural realm; you will find them concerned only with the prevention of disorder and not with the moral refinement of the people. Whatever a person does in his own home is of no importance, so long as he causes no disorder in the street... Divine governments, however set themselves the task of making man in to what he should be...”²⁶

For Khomeini, these blasphemous governments are not only invalid, but are actually leading to the destruction of humanity on earth and in the ‘next world.’

The constitution’s emphasis on the Umma, with its integral belief in the sovereignty of God, has tremendous repercussions where ever there are Muslim people in the world. The constitution states;

“According to the Koran all Muslims are of the same and one single religious community, and the Islamic Republic of Iran is bound to base its general policies on the coalition and unity of Islamic nations, and it should exert continuous efforts to realize the political, economic and cultural unity of the Islamic world.”²⁷

This remarkable statement, written into law, is a direct call for revolution in other states. This goes against the realist assumption of national interests being the primary

²⁶ Ibid., pgs. 330-331.

²⁷ Islamic Republic of Iran’s Constitution.

motive for a state, as Khomeini himself stated that ‘the relations between nations should be based on spiritual grounds.’²⁸ These two elements of the Islamic Republic combine to first discredit all states in the system, and secondly, claim that they have the only legitimate form of governance that will lead to salvation. The Islamic Republic has a duty to spread its form of Islamic governance across the Muslim world, for the salvation of all Muslims is on the line.

The final revolutionary element of Khomeini and the Iranian constitution is the inherent struggle against the imperial West and mainly its leader the US, the ‘Great Satan.’ To Khomeini and the clerical rulers of Iran, the United States is an illegitimate governmental body, whose, along with other Western powers, very existence threatens Islam, the Islamic state and the Umma. Khomeini accuses the Western powers of seeking ‘to keep us backward, to keep us in our present miserable state so that they can exploit our riches, our underground wealth, our lands, and our human resources.’²⁹ Khomeini saw a world separated between ‘oppressors’ and the ‘oppressed.’ He identified the ‘oppressors’ as being imperialist superpowers, lead by the U.S., who supported ‘political agents’ in Muslim nations, aka non-Islamic leaders in Muslim lands.³⁰ The Islamic Republic’s constitution explicitly calls upon itself to support ‘the unjust struggle of the oppressed and deprived in every corner of the globe.’³¹ This view, which I argue has been instituted and consolidated into Iran’s government, created what Said Amir

²⁸ Armstrong, 1993, pg. 192.

²⁹ Walt, 1999, pg. 213.

³⁰ Armstrong, 1993, pg. 190.

³¹ Ibid.

Arjomand called Khomeini's 'phantasmagorical struggle with the imperialist Satan.'³² In other words, an internal and external, zero sum struggle between Iran and leader of the West, the United States. The Iranian government has framed this as a cultural/political/ideological battle because they believe the spread of Western/American values puts Iran in 'mortal danger.' The current head of Iran's Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khamenei discusses the danger of Western culture to Iran and the Islamic world;

"Audio and visual waves, which are worse than warplanes, are being used to disseminate a rogue culture, aimed at reasserting the domination of the enemies of Islam, paving the way for the imposition of unethical values and Westernized ideas to captivate and humiliate Muslims."³³

Iran has tempered its relations with much of the West, for example Germany and France, but it has maintained a steady, hostile demeanor to the U.S. which will not dissipate until either the U.S. or Iran changes the values and ideology in which their government and nations are based.

Iran's foreign policies and actions have mainly been rational, in its best interests, and generally not contradictory to the rules of the international system of states, but its institutionalized beliefs in the sovereignty of God, the Umma, and its struggle against the U.S. has at times caused it to pursue policies that have defied the international system and hurt its national interests. Since its 1979 revolution, Iran has implemented policies that would have to be seen as radical for a state actor. In trying to spread its revolution and influence throughout the Islamic world it has inflicted harm on its own interests and been

³² Arjomand, 1988, pg. 139.

³³ Faath, Sigrid, Anti-Americanism in the Islamic World, Hurst and Company, London, 2006. Speech by Khamenei on June 15, 1999.

a destabilizing force in the Middle Eastern region. David Armstrong acknowledges that Iran's support for Iraqi Shia revolutionaries was one factor that led to the Iraq-Iran war of 1980 and also asserted that Iran failed to accept favorable peace terms with Iraq in the mid-1980s because of Khomeini's hopes of replacing Saddam with a friendly Islamist government.³⁴

Iran has been connected to, and a financial and spiritual sponsor, of a multitude of revolutionary terrorist groups, including Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, and Hamas. These groups have committed violent and destabilizing terrorist attacks in Lebanon, Israel, Bahrain, and Kuwait, and have been damaging to the Middle East peace process between Israel and Palestine. The United States has been a direct target of attacks by Hezbollah, including two 1983 attacks in Lebanon that killed a total of 304 people at the U.S. embassy and marine barracks. Iran has emphasized its Islamist and anti-Western ideology on several occasions which almost jeopardized its relations with many European powers. Iran was found to be behind two assassinations, a Kurdish leader killed in Germany and a former Iranian diplomat and opposition leader murdered in Italy. The assassination in Germany led to the indictment of the head of the Iranian intelligence service and the short-term cut of diplomatic ties between the two nations. The fatwa, ordering the death of Salman Rushdie, which Ayatollah Khomeini issued just before he died, caused a strain in Iran's relations with both France and England. Most recently, Iran's seizure of fifteen British sailors in March of this year caused a fissure between these two states. Considering that these European nations were its largest trading

³⁴ Armstrong, 1993, pg. 195.

partners, one must question the rationality of these actions. Clearly, ideology plays an integral role in how they formulate and implement their foreign policies.

Despite flashes of cooperation, Iran's anti-American policies, rhetoric, and stance have been consistently implemented from the Nov. 4, 1979 hostage crisis until the present. Contrary to what many believe, U.S. foreign policy choices and rhetoric have not forced Iran into a position of defense and fear. It is true that the U.S. has provided numerous reasons for Iran to fear its intentions, with the U.S. military's presence in Afghanistan and Iraq along with President Bush's classification of Iran as a member of the 'Axis of Evil' being two prime examples, but the Islamic Republic of Iran is built on an ideology that rejects Western liberal and capitalist beliefs. Iran not only believes that these states and the beliefs that they hold are illegitimate, but that since the West, and the U.S. in particular, actively seek to spread these secular, democratic ideals throughout the world, they also deem them a direct threat to their national and spiritual survival.

Iran has shown a willingness to accept diplomatic relations with nearly every state in the system, but it has not normalized relations with the U.S. or Israel, who it sees as America's puppet, since the hostage crisis. A closer examination of two episodes in which the U.S. and Iran had pseudo relations, the Iran-contra affair and President Khatami's 'dialogue of civilizations' request, shows two states that are still far from having normal relations. Concerning the Iran-contra arms deal affair, Houman A. Sadri states that Iran's ruling clerics viewed it as a one time deal with the 'Great Satan' and describes how it created quite a bit of turmoil within the government.³⁵ It must also be

³⁵ Sadri, 1997, pg. 105.

noted that Iran was in a position to take part in such a deal with the U.S. only because it held influence over terrorist groups in Lebanon which were holding U.S. citizens hostage. Regarding President Khatami's outreach to the American people with his 'dialogue of civilizations' in 1998, it should be known that the real power in the Iranian government, specifically when it comes to foreign policy, is not in the hands of the president or the majlis, Iran's parliament, but instead lies with the ruling clerics, led by Ayatollah Khamenei, who completely rebuffed Khatami's diplomatic proposition. Only a few days after Khatami's speech, Khamenei blocked all attempts by the executive to resume bilateral relations with the U.S., a ban that still exists today. Khatami himself, who was considered to be the most reformist-minded president in Iran's history, stated earlier in 1998 "our revolution delivered us from this master (the U.S.)... We have seen the most harm from the United States before and after the revolution. Even today, American statesmen treat us as if they are our masters."³⁶ Ayatollah Khamenei reiterated his stance as well; "negotiations and restorations of relations with the bully American government is useless for us. It is even harmful for Iran and the international Islamic movements."³⁷

Anti-American rhetoric and propaganda has been institutionalized in Iran since the 1979 revolution and continues to play an important part in everyday rituals and national holidays. Every morning tired school children begin their school day by standing in line and shouting 'marg bar Amrika' (death to America) and the term 'estkebar-e jahani' (world arrogance) is commonly used as a synonym for America. These phrases, along with referring to the U.S. as the 'Great Satan,' are expressed in a

³⁶ Tarock, Adam, Iran's Foreign Policy Since 1990, Nova Science Publishers, Inc., New York, 1999.

³⁷ Ibid.

quasi-ritualistic manner by regime followers during all propaganda events and especially in Friday sermons. Provocatively, Nov. 4 of each year is a national holiday to commemorate the U.S. embassy takeover and on this day a celebration is held in front of the old embassy building which now houses the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.³⁸

Iran has at times played a constructive role in the U.S.'s war on terror, from deporting Al Qaeda agents to providing economic assistance in Afghanistan. However, they have undermined the U.S. through various policies and actions, some of which have to be regarded as radical actions. Iran's financial, political, and spiritual leadership and support of Hezbollah was crucial to that group's successful war against Israel, whom the United States backed, in the summer of 2006. Iran's boisterous and controversial president since 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, insulted the U.S., Britain and Israel and exalted Hezbollah in an August 2006 speech that sounds as if it could have come from an Islamic revolutionary in 1979;

“The corrupt powers like America, the criminal Britain and the shameful and humiliated Zionist regime were armed up to their teeth with laser bombs, advanced aircraft, advanced tanks, an accurate artillery and a wicked and vicious army... On the other hand a group of faithful, pure, divine youth stood against them and with the help of God trusted God's pledge and resisted against the enemy. They could defeat these idolatrous powers within 33 days with the help of God and fly the flag of victory in the proud Lebanon.”³⁹

The U.S. still lists Iran as a state sponsor of terror that continues to provide funding, weapons, training, and sanctuary to numerous terrorist groups. In March 2006, Secretary

³⁸ Faath, Sigrid, Anti-Americanism in the Islamic World, Hurst and Company, London, 2006.

³⁹ BBC News, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, August 2006.

of State Condoleezza Rice said, “Iran has been the country that has been in many ways a kind of central banker for terrorism.”⁴⁰

Iran’s actions in Iraq, which the U.S. believes to be nefarious and counterproductive to its efforts to stabilize its nascent government, for the most part have been cautious and pragmatic as Taremi, Ehteshami and Nasr have argued. Still, antagonizing and some would say, provoking, the world’s only superpower can be a dangerous gambit. Iran’s seizure of the 15 British soldiers, their illegal presence in Iraq, and their support for Hezbollah and other Islamic terrorist groups showcase a regime that desires not only power and influence in the Middle East, but also one that seeks to weaken and challenge Western powers, with the U.S. being their main target. As this provocative statement from Ahmadinejad illustrates;

“To those who doubt, to those who ask is it possible, or those who do not believe, I say accomplishment of a world without America and Israel is both possible and feasible.”⁴¹

Iran’s anti-Americanism, in conjunction with its extremist foreign policies, has harmed the nation’s national interests in many ways. Although the anti-American rhetoric and policies may help sustain the Islamic Republic’s domestic and Islamist’s legitimacy, being on the bad side of the world’s only economic and military superpower has tremendous drawbacks. The U.S. put a trade embargo on Iran soon after the hostage crisis ensued in 1979 and in 1994/5 President Clinton’s administration put in place

⁴⁰ Council on Foreign Relations, State Sponsors: Iran, July 2006.

⁴¹ President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Addressing a conference in Tehran, 2006, speech titled “The World Without Zionism.”

economic sanctions, which included the oil and natural gas sectors, that President Bush renewed in 2003. These U.S. policies and Iran's defiant stance has complicated its bilateral diplomatic and economic relations with various states, especially Japan and Europe, as well as made it difficult for Iran to improve its international image. A study by the Iranian Studies Group at MIT argued that the sanctions undermined Iran's overall economic growth, stymied its oil and natural gas production, and curtailed its efforts to update its oil production facilities, with capacity falling by 1.5 million barrels a day every year since 1997.⁴² The U.S. has also denied Iran development funds from the World Bank and IMF and limited the number of visas for family visits and academic exchanges. It must also be noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran's deviant stance and policies towards the U.S. combined with their pursuit of nuclear weapons could in the near future lead to an American-led attack and removal from power of the Islamic cleric elite, as the Bush administration has refused to take the military option of the table.

Conclusion

As Fred Halliday has argued, until a revolutionary state's internal composition reverts to match the 'conventional orders' of other powers and states in the system, it will remain a revolutionary state and continue to be in conflict with non-revolutionary states.⁴³ Iran is such a nation. Until its internal political composition changes, it will be in conflict with the international system and particularly with its self-proclaimed menace,

⁴² Hafezi, Mohammad, Mostashari, Ali, Alvandi, Roham, The Impact of U.S. Sanctions on Iran: Economic and Social Assessment, Iranian Studies Group at MIT, June 2004.

⁴³ Halliday, Fred, "The Sixth Great Power: Revolutions and the International System," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 16, 1990, pg. 216.

the United States. No changes in U.S. foreign policy, in the geopolitical landscape, or in the realm of economics could reverse Iran's stance against the international system or the U.S. Only a complete alteration in the structure and identity of its government could accomplish this turnabout.⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ Conclusion side note: The United States can also be viewed in nearly the same way, except on a much larger scale of influence and power. The U.S. has been a revolutionary force for liberal democratic values since its inception, while, like Iran, protecting its sovereignty and interests a majority of the time. The Bush administration's foray into the Iraq in 2003 to spread democracy in the Middle East was a policy bent on spreading American revolutionary ideals, but it has hurt U.S. national interests. Iran and the U.S. are both in a way, revolutionary states, whose ideals and identities are in complete contradiction, and it is no surprise that they have found themselves in conflict nearly the entire time of their coexistence.

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