



## SHORT BIOGRAPHY



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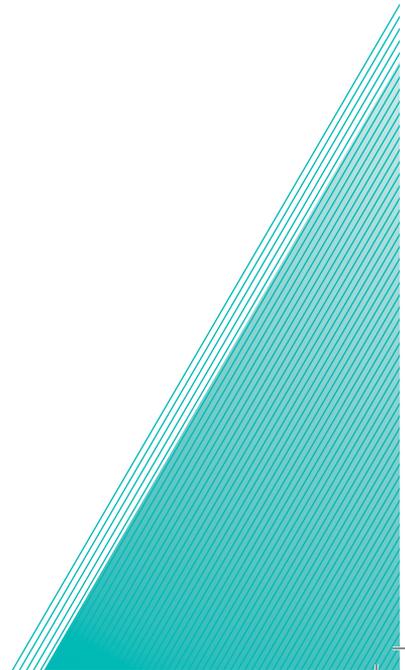
# IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THE IMAGE OF THE WEST

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POLITICAL THOUGHT

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## Introduction

Iran is settled with the Persian Gulf region with an extraordinary strategic geographical location and is the largest Shia country in the world with a population of over 79 million<sup>1</sup>. By virtue of its long and eventful history, Iran is a home to a variety of ethnic, religious and linguistic groups. Its 1259 kilometres long coast in the Gulf and large number of islands and the ownership of 15.5 per cent share of the Persian Gulf reserves of gas which amount to 40 per cent of world's gas reserves, contribute to Iran's status as one of the most important countries of the region<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, it is not far to argue that Iran has always attracted the attention of foreign powers and great powers, in particular. During the past century, various (though mainly western) powers have maintained a foothold on Iranian soil, either by economic or political means.

The article at hand deals with the image of the West in Iranian foreign policy, or, more precisely, with how the West became the "other" – the admired one, the hated one, the grand foe. Sketching the West's image in Iranian political history is hampered by much considerations ranging from the abundant history of inter-relations with specific Western entities and the West in general, the ample range of those relations (economic, cultural, political, military), the vast impact of Western ideas and values in the public and political discourse, imported, infused or adopted, on one hand, and rejected, questioned and abandoned, on the other (due to many reasons, Iran's patchwork of ethnic and regional diversity<sup>3</sup> being one of them). Furthermore, some issues that have grave importance and sway in the examination of the subject, such as the rise and content of Iranian nationalism, bilateral relations with specific parties, or the impact on the negotiations, brokering and scope of the Nuclear deal, will not be analysed, due to the restrictions imposed by the format of the article. Consequently, the temporal scope of the article encompasses the period until 2013 or the election of Hassan Rouhani as President. The subject is limited to the examination, analysis and critical overview of the perception of the West in general, rather than discussing specific countries. And finally, the analysis aims to outline how foreign policy issues have impacted and been projected into Iranian political history. The main hypothesis of the paper is that the image of the West in Iran has been a major factor in foreign policy creation and policy response. The supportive hypothesis is that Iranian foreign policy has been foremost domestically driven, while its utilisation has had a profound implication on Iranian affairs. The analysis will integrate findings, reviews and perspectives from many scholars across the spectrum and address these hypotheses within the limitations mentioned above.

1 Fuller Graham, *The Center of the Universe: the Geopolitics of Iran* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 256. AFET, *An EU strategy for relations with Iran after the Nuclear Deal*, June 2016 –PE 578.005, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578005/EXPO\\_IDA\(2016\)578005\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578005/EXPO_IDA(2016)578005_EN.pdf).

2 Sajedi Amri, *Geopolitics of the Persian Gulf security*, IPRI Journal IX, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 88.

3 Abbas Amanat, Introduction: Iranian Identity Boundaries: A Historical Overview, in *Iran Facing Others – Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vejdani (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 1-39, 26.

## Encounter with the West

Iran's first encounter with the West dates back to the XV<sup>4</sup> or XVI century,<sup>5</sup> when Portuguese suppliers of firearms and cannon arrived on the Persian Gulf in 1498 or 1507, respectively. Yet, despite this commercial relationship, Iranian knowledge of Western Europe continued to be rudimentary until the accession of Shah Abbas I in 1588 and the celebrated audience in 1562 granted by Shah Tahmasp to the English merchant-adventurer Anthony Jenkinson.<sup>6</sup> The audience was interrupted by the Shah himself when he discovered that the guest was not a true believer. Roger Savory underlines "*the calm assumption on the part of the Shah until he was advised otherwise, that a visitor to his court, even from such a benighted region as England would be a Muslim*".<sup>7</sup> According to Savory, this merely demonstrates Shah Tahmasp's ignorance of Europe.<sup>8</sup> Needless to say that lenses, through which Iran looked at the West at that time, was religious one.

After the Portuguese, the Persian Gulf became inseparably linked to the commercial and political rivalries between western maritime powers such as the Dutch, the French and, finally, the British. Abrahamian refers to that time as an "era of concession hunting" in Iran.<sup>9</sup> Once the oil resources of the Gulf region were discovered in 1908, the first British oil extraction company in Iran was created under the name "Anglo-Persian Oil Company" (APOC).<sup>10</sup> The British interest in the oil concession was related to the imminent conversion of the Royal Navy to fuel, so that the British government provided indirect financial assistance and political backing to the company, especially during the World Wars.<sup>11</sup> APOC soon developed rapidly, spreading its operations throughout most of Iran's provinces and creating subsidiary companies that became part of a greater consortium effectively under the control of the British government. After the end of World War II, Iran decided to nationalise the company, and the decision was implemented in 1951.

Given the world's growing dependency on oil products, other than British embedded interests in Iran, there were additional stakeholders whose involvement in the region, and

4 Sajedi, *Geopolitics*, 77-78.

5 Savory Roger, Muslim perceptions of the West, *Comparative Civilizations Review* 13, No. 13 (January 1985): 75.

6 On arrival at the Persian court, Jenkinson presented the friendly letter of Queen Elizabeth I, the purpose of which was "to treat of friendship and free passage of our Merchants and people, to repair and traffique within his dominions, for to bring in our commodities, and to carry away theirs, to the honour of both princes, the mutual commoditie of both Realmes, and wealth of the Subjects." Savory, Muslim, 75.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Abrahamian Ervand, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 54.

10 Later on, in 1935, APOC was renamed "Anglo-Iranian Oil Company" (AIOC), and in 1954, it became the "British Petroleum Company" (BP), -ne of the antecessorsdef the modern British Petroleum BP. According to Encyclopaedia Iranica, the first concession was given to a British financier William Knox D'Arcy in 1901. Furthermore, as indicated byhis source, by employing complicated financial arrangements and intricate political maneuvers in 1909, the original D'Arcy concession became the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC). See more in Sajedi, *Geopolitics*, 78 and Kazemi Farhad, *Anglo-Persian Oil Company*, in: Encyclopaedia Iranica, Vol. II, Fasc. 1, 1985: 61-65. Iranica Online (Last Updated: August 5, 2011), accessed October 26, 2016. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/anglo-persian-oil-company>

11 Kazemi, *Anglo-Persian*, 61-65.



Iran in particular, influenced the political history of the country and altered the geopolitics of the region.<sup>12</sup>

By the middle of the XX century USA taken over Great Britain's dominion in the greater region of the Middle East and Persian Gulf, while the Soviet Union emerged as a new international player on the ground. According to Ehteshami, Iran managed to accumulate considerable strategic value during the Cold War era, as a weighty pawn in the Cold War chessboard that straddled much of Asia and Europe.<sup>13</sup> Ayman posits that during World War II, Iran's spiky relations with the West entered a new stage since the British Empire and the Soviet Union jointly invaded and occupied the independent kingdom of Persia and installed Reza Pahlavi as ruler to the throne to serve the British interests.<sup>14</sup> The occupation of Iran by foreign interference was further fuelled in 1952 by a coup that was engineered by the US and the UK to bring down Mohammed Musaddegh who served as prime minister at the time and was known as the architect of the project of Iranian's oil industry's nationalisation.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Ayman notes, the coup's effects were long-lasting, accompanied by an erosion of trust in the relations between Iran and the West, especially due to the American and British interference in Iran's domestic affairs.<sup>16</sup> In a way, the coup managed to ruin the democratic credentials of the West, but also fortified the belief that the strategic interests of the West always came first, seconding the democratic rights of Iran<sup>17</sup>. Hence, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 heavily employed the idea of bringing foreign intervention to an end, and the decline of the relations between Iran and the West advanced. But more importantly, the 1979 Revolution made Iran stand out on the international scene and, due to the wide ranging coalition of Islamist, liberal, and radical domestic forces, it emerged on the international scene as a defiant, fierce, independent, proactively religious, and non-aligned power,<sup>18</sup> or, as Matin identifies it - *a new Iran has been born*.<sup>19</sup> The latter contributed to the increase of Iran's power in the beginning of the 21st century and paved the way for its allot as a regional superpower<sup>20</sup> and a growing force to reckon with.<sup>21</sup>

On the turn of the XX century, little had changed with regard to the Iranians' perceptions of the West, as Savory argues. According to him, the basic perception of the West

<sup>12</sup> Sajedi, Geopolitics, 78. Also see in Duane Chapman and Neha Khanna, The Persian Gulf, Global Oil Resources, and International Security, *Contemporary Economic Policy* 24, no. 4 (2006): 507-519.

<sup>13</sup> Ehteshami Anoushiravan, The foreign policy of Iran, in *The foreign policies of Middle East states*, edited by R. Hinnebusch and A. Ehteshami (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner, 2002): 283-309, 283.

<sup>14</sup> Ayman Gülden, Afghanistan as a bridge, in ed. Parsi Rouzbeh and Rydqvist John, *Iran and the West- Regional Interests and Global Controversies*, Swedish Defence Research Agency - FOI, (March 2011): 39-54, 41.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ehteshami, The foreign policy, 283.

<sup>19</sup> Hosseini Matin, Seyed Mahdi. Iran's Desired Power Status, *Iran Review of Foreign Affairs*, vol. 3, no.1, (Spring 2012): 183-206, 188.

<sup>20</sup> Baer Robert, *The Devil We Know-Dealing with The New Iranian Superpower*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 2008), 2.

<sup>21</sup> Ehteshami, The foreign policy, 283.

persisted, as a sink of corruption and a source of unwanted ideas, on one hand, and the perception of the intellectuals for whom it was a panacea, persisted.<sup>22</sup> The first signs of rapprochement occurred after the Second World War when Iranian intellectuals (mainly the ones from the so-called National Front) who had adopted a special strategy to promote western ideas joined forces with the Muslim clergy to overthrow the Shah.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, now it was the lens of culture through which Iran was looking at the West. The profound effect of reflecting the image of the West into Iranian politics has shaped and influenced much of its policies, and foreign policy in particular. Iran's relations with Great Britain had the strongest influence by far, playing an important role not only in Iran's diplomacy and economy, but also in shaping its political identity.<sup>24</sup> Amanat underlines that Great Britain captured the Iranian imagination not only as a world power of extraordinary capabilities to conquer, conspire, and control, but also as the ultimate *Farangestan*— a land of marvelous prosperity, security, justice, and, of course, maritime power.<sup>25</sup> So according to him, Britain became the ultimate example of external "other" versus Iran's emerging nationalist "self" in the modern Iranian consciousness, in a manner that others could not compete with, not even Russia, nor Germany, nor France or the United States. Since the end of World War II, the latter had eclipsed Britain as a superpower, and its vital interest in Iran remained during the Cold War and beyond, even though, in the late twentieth century, it superseded Britain in the Iranian post-revolutionary narrative of victimisation as the Great Satan.<sup>26</sup>

### Approaches utilized by Iran's foreign policy

Rakel argues that, after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, particularly during the first ten years, Iran's foreign policy developed an approach according to two main ideological principles: first, "*Neither East nor West, but the Islamic Republic*," which, according to her, translated into an aversion towards Western (especially US) influence, and second, "*Export of the Revolution*" in order to free Muslim countries and non-Muslim countries from their "*oppressive and corrupt rulers*," which served as a means of mobilization of the Iranian people to support the eight-year war with Iraq (1980-1988).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Savory, Muslim, 85.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Abbas Amanat, Through the Persian Eye: Anglophilia and Anglophobia in Modern Iranian History, in *Iran Facing Others – Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vejdani (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 127-153, 128.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Rakel, P. Eva, Iranian Foreign Policy since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006, *Perspectives on global development and technology*, vol.6 (Leiden, Brill Publishers, 2007): 159-187,160.



According to Azghandi, between 1979 and 2005, Iran pursued four theoretical foreign policy approaches: a realist, an ideological, a pragmatist, and a reformist approach.<sup>28</sup>

The pursuit of the *realist approach* was advanced throughout the reign of Mehdi Bazargan and ended with the Iranian-American crisis. The background of Iran's foreign policy was based on national interest rather than ideological or Islamic values, and predisposed to mend Iran's foreign relations with others but mainly with the USA.

The *ideological approach* was predominant from 1981 to 1989 and led to a more interventionist foreign policy, promoting Islamic principles and values. During this period, Iran hoped to endorse Islamic Revolution outside of its borders, making it a regional issue that could further produce same revolutionary events in other countries. Hence, this foreign policy approach generated enmity between Iran and Persian Gulf states.

The *pragmatist approach* was the essence of the the foreign policy created under President Rafsanjani (1989-1997), who envisaged a reconstructed and economically stronger Iran. After the eight-year-long clash with Iraq that had run down the economy, Iran began a far-reaching military build-up aimed at reconstructing, enlarging and modernizing its armed forces and determining itself as a regional military power.<sup>29</sup> Much of the foreign policy's focus was on post- Iran/Iraq war economic reconstruction and Iran's reintegration into international economy, while the priority was to improve relations with Persian Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, but also with the newly independent states of Central Eurasia (CEA) and Russia.<sup>30</sup> Rafsanjani's main foreign policy aim was to normalise Iran's foreign relations, with other countries and to acknowledge realities of international politics as well as consent to standards of international law. However, Iran's foreign policy during the so-called pragmatist era was principally determined by its geopolitical interests. Ehteshami argues that Iran has always been a rational actor in the classic realist mould, even though some of its excesses could be observed as calculated risks or opportunist moves in complicated settings.<sup>31</sup> He also notes that, looking back at the era after Khomeini, one cannot help but be struck by how normal, largely non-aggressive, and pragmatic Iran's foreign policy has been since 1989.<sup>32</sup>

The *reformist approach* was pursued by president Khatami from 1997 to 2005. In fact, according to Azghandi, his policy was much similar to Rafsanjani's, i.e. his approach was pragmatist, but its domestic aspect support was much different. Khatami's foreign policy was principally aimed at continuing Rafsanjani's foreign policy towards Iran's neighbours, but also at improving relations with the European Union (EU) and its

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 157-187.

<sup>29</sup> Eisenstadt Michael, *Iranian Military Power: Capabilities and Intentions*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1996, xv.

<sup>30</sup> Raketl, *Iranian Foreign Policy*, 160.

<sup>31</sup> Ehteshami, *The foreign policy*, 284.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

member states.<sup>33</sup> Namely, Iran became more aware, respectful, and supportive of issues that were internationally significant, such as civil rights, freedom of speech, rule of law and pluralism, hence Iran's foreign policy record was more concerned with dialogue, peaceful coexistence and détente with other countries. Yet, according to Raket, during Khatami's rule, the Shi'i ideological doctrine, embedded in a nationalist yearning that rejects any "westernisation" of the country and the people, managed to prevail among some elements of the Iranian political elite, preventing major changes in its foreign policy orientation.<sup>34</sup>

A major shift in Iran's foreign policy occurred after 2005, when Ahmadinejad was elected president. Raket names it as a shift away from the pragmatic approach under presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami, to a more hostile attitude towards the West and Israel.<sup>35</sup> Pirsalami argues that foreign policy under Ahmadinejad was characterized by justice-oriented principalism and that speaking about détente was out of question at the time.<sup>36</sup> Hence, he notes, the foreign policy witnessed an unexpected and deep transformation from interaction with the world to a focus on different countries, broadly called the "third world," given the removal of grounds for cooperation with the West<sup>37</sup>

In 2013, Hassan Rouhani was elected president. He used his first year in office to improve the Islamic Republic's image in the international community and to portray himself and his government as being ready to deal seriously with the West.<sup>38</sup> The majority of his cabinet held PhDs from US universities, which did not imply that they were proponents of Western social values, but that they were quite familiar with the West and had a much better understanding of Western perceptions of Iran than many of their predecessors.<sup>39</sup> Iranian foreign policy under Rouhani envisaged a principled, sober and wise critique of the foreign relations by the previous administration.<sup>40</sup> Zarif advances it as a prudent moderation approach based on realism, self-confidence, realistic idealism and constructive engagement.<sup>41</sup> Yet, according to Shanahan, while Rouhani's foreign policy approach differs markedly in style from Ahmadinejad's, ultimately, the aim of both has been to maximise Tehran's influence in the region — a core foreign policy goal of the Islamic Republic's since its inception.<sup>42</sup>

33 Raket, *Iranian Foreign Policy*, 161.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*

36 Pirsalami Fariborz A., *Third Worldism and Ahmadinejad's Foreign Policy*, *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Summer 2013): 81-109, 92.

37 *Ibid.*

38 Shanahan Roger, *Iranian foreign policy under Rouhani* (Sydney - Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2015): 1-15, 3.

39 *Ibid.*

40 Mohammad Javad Zarif, *What Iran Really Wants: Iranian Foreign Policy in the Rouhani Era*, *Foreign Affairs* (May/June, 2014): 49-58, 55, [http://quito.mfa.ir/uploads/ZarifFinalProofs\\_\(1\)\\_28065.pdf](http://quito.mfa.ir/uploads/ZarifFinalProofs_(1)_28065.pdf).

41 Zarif, *What Iran Really Wants*, 56.

42 *Ibid.*



## From “Gharbzadegi” to “Dialogue of Civilizations”

As it has been said before, the impact of western ideas on Iranian social history can be traced back to as early as the XV century. But even though rudimentary communication existed, the exchange of ideas was embedded fairly late and one in particular – nationalism. Cottam rightly asserts that at the time when Westerners considered nationalist values pivotal, the concept was esoteric for the vast majority of Iranians.<sup>43</sup> Despite the fact, according to him, that Iran is an excellent example of a state in which national consciousness can be clearly identified for many centuries, the importance of nationalism as a primary determinant of Iranian attitudes and political behaviour is largely confined to the twentieth century, thus making it a century late behind the West. Furthermore, the penetration of the idea of liberal democracy in the Iranian political milieu due to western influence has been labelled as intervening because of the historically present fear and perception of foreign interference.<sup>44</sup> The latter is related to Iranian nationalism, which, for generations, has been intertwined with the issue of ensuring Iran’s territorial integrity, thus creating an intensely Irano-centric view of the world.<sup>45</sup> The Iranian Islamic Revolution can be partly understood as one in a series of events that developed as a reaction to the foreign power domination in Iran as well as exploitation of Iran’s wealth and resources by foreign companies: the Tobacco Monopoly Revolt (1890-1891), the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1906), the Oil Nationalisation Movement of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq (1951-1953), and the Islamic Revolution (1978-1979).<sup>46</sup> Raket emphasises the fact that all four revolts/ revolutions were actually led by the ulama (clergy) as representatives of the nationalist movement, and that all events were intimately linked to Iran’s historical experience of foreign influence and penetration: the rivalry with other empires (e.g. the Ottoman Empire), two centuries of experience in intrusion into its internal matters by European and world powers (France, Russia, Great Britain, and the US), repeated attempts to modernise the country, and intermittent displays of close relations with the West in general.<sup>47</sup> Fuller ascribes the Iranian stance towards the West relationship and Iran’s foreign policy to the cultural and historical layers which, according to him, are a result of the Iranians’ long history of alien invasions, as it has frequently experienced aggression, looting, and treason.<sup>48</sup>

Bulliet argues that the historical pattern of relations between Iran and the West is reasserting itself as western propensity going back to Herodotus and Aeschylus to

<sup>43</sup> Richard Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), 5.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted from Ehteshami, *The foreign policy*, 284. See more in Richard Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979).

<sup>45</sup> Ehteshami, *The foreign policy*, 284-285.

<sup>46</sup> Raket, *Iranian Foreign Policy*, 160.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Fuller, Graham, *The Center of Universe: the Geopolitics of Iran* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991, 134.

fantasize Iran as a threatening force of cosmic dimension<sup>49</sup>. He also points out that “Iran’s destiny always lays to the East, not the West” and that Iran is repeatedly “configured as a mortal threat to its western neighbours”.<sup>50</sup> According to Ghahremanpour, the confrontational nature of the Iranian-Western relationship stems from the conflicted Iranian appraisal of the West, both as a concept which is related to modernity and a political reality the Great Powers game from the 19th century onwards.<sup>51</sup> He further argues that, in Iran, history is interwoven with a sense of national grandeur and victimisation at the hands of great power<sup>52</sup> and relays his arguments to Moshirzadeh’s claim that the perception of geography in Iran has two aspects, the : a negative one of rejecting foreign dominance and a positive one of seeking to realise one’s identity.<sup>53</sup>

More importantly, the external image of Iran has been altered and changed from within over the past decades. At the time of Shah Pahlavi’s reign (1941-1979), Iran seemed as a rapidly modernising, secularizing society allied with U.S. values and policy objectives, except regarding autocracy.<sup>54</sup> In comparison, according to Keddie, during the reign of the Qajar dynasty (1796-1925), Iran was seen by westerners as a very backward Oriental society with very different and often irrational values.<sup>55</sup> Hitherto, the Iranian obsession with the West has been so profound that during the Pahlavi era, the term “*Gharbzadegi*” (Occidentosis) was coined to express Iranian national submission to the West and its technology.<sup>56</sup> The term „weststruckness” or “Westoxication” was created by Jalal Al-e Ahmad in his 1962 essay, which has been commonly described as probably “the single most important essay published in modern Iranian history”.<sup>57</sup> According to Dabashi, Al-e Ahmad’s idea was to frame, in a way, “the excessive and rather awkward preoccupation of certain influential segments of Iranian society with manners and matters “Western” in origin. He considered this preoccupation a major malady that had gradually but incessantly weakened the Iranian national character, the major component of which he considered to be Shi’a ethos.”<sup>58</sup> Asgard also identifies the potent message send by 1973 film *Mogholha* (The Mongols) by filmmaker Parviz Kamiavi, in which “the perceived Western cultural onslaught was attacked”<sup>59</sup> as one of the key moments of the anti-Western discourse in Iran. He further denotes the stance that it is an “obsolete political

49 Bulliet W. Richard, Iran between the East and West, *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 60, no.20, 2007:1-14, 1.

50 Ibid., 4.

51 Ghahremanpour Rahman, Iran looking West: identity, rationality and Iranian foreign policy, in *Iran and the West- Regional Interests and Global Controversies*, ed. Parsi Rouzbeh and Rydqvist John, Swedish Defence Research Agency – FOI, (March 2011): 54-73, 54.

52 Ibid. 54.

53 Moshirzadeh Homeira, Discursive Foundations of Iran’s Nuclear Policy, *Security Dialogue*, 38(4), 2007: 521-543.

54 Keddie Nikki, Iran: Understanding the Enigma: A Historian’s View, *Middle East Review of International Affairs* Vol. 2, No. 3 (September 1998): 1-10, 1.

55 Ibid.

56 Vakil Sanam, Iran: Balancing East against West, *The Washington Quarterly*, 29:4, 51-65, 52.

57 Ramin Asgard, U.S. Cultural Diplomacy: A Historical Perspective, *The Fletcher School Online Journal for issues related to Southwest Asia and Islamic Civilization*, Spring 2010, [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/116001/Full\\_Text\\_Spring\\_2010.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/116001/Full_Text_Spring_2010.pdf), 5.

58 Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New Brunswick NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 173-174.

59 Asgard, U.S. Cultural, 5.



culture”<sup>60</sup> that is in question, and that the “paranoia associated with this conspiratorial view of politics (which) is largely cross-class and cross-ideological. It is, however, according to him, widespread among Iranian political elites and intelligentsia, who continue to use it as a weapon against political enemies or for the manipulation of their followers.”<sup>61</sup> Hence, the view imposed by these authors to determine “outside cultural influences as “a disease” or “an invasion” still shapes Iranian thinking about the outside world today.”<sup>62</sup>

Based on these arguments, one can construe that Iranian foreign policy is much dependent on domestic issues and views. The latter has been repeatedly argued by many Iran scholars. Ramazani, for one, asserts that “generally, the relationship between foreign policy and domestic conditions is easily underestimated.”<sup>63</sup> Matin affirms that foreign policy is the continuation of domestic politics.<sup>64</sup> Ehteshami says that “the roots of this transformation in Iran’s international relations must be found in Iran itself.”<sup>65</sup> Ghahremanpour pushes the argument even further, indicating that the anti-Western rhetoric of the Islamic Republic of Iran has served as an instrument in its domestic politics and was used to cement its legitimacy.<sup>66</sup> He also stresses that the formulation of Iran’s foreign policy toward the West is based on domestic sources that are independent of the immediate instrumentalisation value, referring to the state identity of Iran as the leader of the anti-hegemonic movement in the Islamic world, which, according to Moshirzadeh, is a significant variable in analysing Iran’s foreign policy behaviour,<sup>67</sup> Still according to Ghahremanpour, “anti-Western trends in Iranian politics are not completely dependent on the type of political regime in power in Tehran”,<sup>68</sup> but part of a multi-layered phenomenon that he labels “an identity dilemma in Iranian society”, since “the majority of Iranians are not satisfied with their current role in the region nor in the international system and Western policies—perceived or real—aimed at restricting and isolating Iran intensifies this sense of frustration.”<sup>69</sup>

Khatami aimed to reach out beyond Iran by promoting the so-called “Dialogue of Civilizations”, as a direct denial of Huntington’s “clash of civilisations” doctrine. He advocated his idea in the UN, which, subsequently, adopted it with the declaration of

60 Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 111.

61 Hooshang Amirahmadi, *Revolution and Economic Transition: The Iranian Experience*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 283-284.

62 Asgard, U.S. Cultural, 5.

63 Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *Iran’s Foreign Policy 1941-1973, A Study of Foreign Policy in Modernizing Nations* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975), 389.

64 Hosseini Matin and Seyed Mahdi, Iran’s Desired Power Status, *Iran Review of Foreign Affairs*, vol. 3, no.1 (Spring 2012): 183-206, 200. More on Iran’s domestic predicaments see in Abootalebi Ali, The Struggle for democracy in the Islamic Republic of Iran, *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Fall 2000): 43-56.

65 Ehteshami, The Foreign policy, 284.

66 Ghahremanpour, Iran looking West, 54.

67 Moshirzadeh, Discursive Foundations, 521.

68 Ghahremanpour, Iran looking West, 55.

69 Ibid., 55-56.

2001 as the Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations.<sup>70</sup> Khatami's idea had little impact on improving relations with the West, due to several reasons and circumstances, but it managed to initiate the process that years later helped both sides to further their dialogue and cooperation in the framework of the Nuclear Deal process.

## Concluding remarks

The impact of the West on Iranian political discourse has been intrinsically linked to Iranian political history. Hence, a variety of values and ideas that derive out of modernisation and progress have been labelled Western per se, time and time again, and furthermore written off as unwanted or dangerous. One of the most outstanding issues is the very nature of the state and its inherent struggle (Islamic or democratic republic), and the fact that Iran's labyrinthine political system (and competing sources of power) do complicate diplomacy.<sup>71</sup>

It is valuable to strike out the manner in which the Iranians perceived the West at the time of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's reign. Namely, one 2007 research showed that a majority of Iranians had a positive view of Europe and would prefer for Europe to have more influence on Iran than the United States.<sup>72</sup> The research also showed that their view of France (but not Jacques Chirac) was positive by trend, while a majority had a negative view of Britain (and Tony Blair).<sup>73</sup>

Still, the understanding of rationale behind Iran's foreign policy is foremost linked to the rejection of foreign dominion, and especially the influence of the United States which ensued after the 1979 Revolution.<sup>74</sup> That revolutionary moment, according to Ostovar was based on anti-Americanism and anti-imperialism that were utilized in the popular slogan— "*neither East nor West*" in order to assert the desire for Iran to strike an independent path, politically and ideologically.

The approach to foreign relations pursued by successive elites in Iranian society can be seen as aggressive or pragmatic,<sup>75</sup> determined by the admiration or the opposition to western influence, framed as religious or nationalistic policy, yet there is no doubt that its ultimate goal has always been the self-interest.<sup>76</sup> Iran's stamina lays in its lush past,

<sup>70</sup> In depth analyses in Fabio Petito, Khatami' Dialogue among Civilizations as International Political Theory, *Journal of Humanities* (2004) Vol. 11 (3): 11-29.

<sup>71</sup> Robin Wright, The Challenge of Iran, in *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy*, ed. Robin Wright, (Washington: USIP, 2010): 1-10, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Kull Stephen, *Public Opinion in Iran and America on Key International Issues*, A WorldPublicOpinion.org Poll conducted in partnership with Search for Common Ground and Knowledge Networks, January 2007, <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org>

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Afshon Ostovar, *Sectarian Dilemmas in Iranian Foreign Policy: When Strategy and Identity Politics Collide*, 2016 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CEIP\\_CP288\\_Ostovar\\_Sectarianism\\_Final.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CEIP_CP288_Ostovar_Sectarianism_Final.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.



culture, political and economic power, which should not be condensed to the status of a pariah state to be contained and marginalised<sup>77</sup> by anyone, and its potential should be fostered and respected by everyone.

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