

The role of soft power in foreign policy of Islamic Republic of Iran

Ebrahim Anousheh ¹

¹: Department of Law and Political Science, Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran
anooshe1389@gmail.com

Abstract: Since the ideological elements entered into Iranian's orientation and guideline, the Islamic revolution of Iran brought Iran's foreign policy to a paradigmatic shift. After this revolution, the secular and west-driven Iran changed into an ideologic and independent player, so that it has defined its orientations, aims, and national benefits in an Islamic ideological framework to a great extent. As far as religion is concerned, Islamic revelation of Iran has a lot in common with many countries in the Middle East, and these common aspects have made Iran more influential among Shiites and Islamic movements. This article intends to study and examine the effect of ideology on foreign policy of Iran and that how this ideology has formed the frame of Iran's foreign policy as a source of soft power. [Ebrahim Anousheh. **The role of soft power in foreign policy of Islamic Republic of Iran.** Journal of American Science 2011;7(7):266-270]. (ISSN: 1545-1003). <http://www.americanscience.org>.

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1. Introduction

Ideology can be defined as the most important and influential element of soft power in Islamic Republic of Iran. As Nye (1990) puts in, soft power is the ability to achieve what you want by attraction, not by reward or compulsion. Because soft power is based on the ability to form others desires and preferences, it uses intangible subjects, such as personality and cultural attractions, political and institutional, as well as appealing policies that are legitimate and have ethical values (Nye, 2004/50).

Middle East offers a textbook example of Iran's direct and indirect impact on Muslim policies. Just as David A. Long mentions the reflection of Iran revolution on Saudi Arabia and other Arabic countries, many in the Western region and capitals, and the thoughts of the Persian Gulf Conservative kingdoms, and would end up in desolation.

Good news about the Persian Gulf could be reported (Sposito/2003/83).

The role of Islamic Republic of Iran in the Middle East changes is an obvious and undeniable reality. Traditionally, Iran has been the master of soft power in the Middle East, and is able to use the means of culture and policy to pursue its strategic benefits. Iraq is a small example that shows how Iran interacts with its neighbors. Iran is active in southern Shiite and northern Kurd communities, and generally has a great impact on Iraq (www.chathamhouse.com).

Further, mentioning the aspects of Iran's soft power in the Middle East, we can refer to the influence of Iran on Hezbollah, and the fact that Hezbollah is called as Iran's poster child. Along with Hezbollah, there are many other radical Palestinian groups that are closely connected to Iran. Besides all those we can mention, Iran's contributions to Shiites is important. Speaking of Iran's role in the Middle East, some even talk about the issue of Shiite

creascent and that how Iran is intending to establish a new order in the Middle East to achieve its goal in this way.

2. Ideology and the foreign policy of Islamic Republic of Iran

After establishment of the Islamic regime in Iran, foreign policy of the country affected by Islam as the basis of the system, and as a result the foreign policy underwent a drastic change compared to the past. Rashed Al. Ghonoushi, a Tunisian thinker, had made a comment before the victory of Islamic Republic of Iran:

Apparently, the strong base of Islamic Revolution of Iran is shiitism, but this revolution is connected to a global current whose purpose is to rise the Islamic spirit of nations and guide them to the stage of leading global civilization (Hadi Nakhei, 1997, page 281).

To have a better understanding of the ideology in foreign Policy of Islamic Republic of Iran, we had better get familiar with the characteristics of Islamic Republic of Iran. The second tenet of the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution reads:

Islamic Republic is a system based on believing in:

- 1- The only God, allocation of sovereignty to him and necessity of submission to his commands.
- 2- Divine revelation and its constructive role on human evolution towards God.
- 3- Future life and its constructive effect on human's evolution towards God.
- 4- Divine justice in creation and religion.
- 5- Continual leadership and its fundamental role in durability of the Islamic Revolution.
- 6- Human greatness and value, and his freedom associated with his responsibility towards God.

Islamic worldview is the basis of Islamic ideology. Worldview is the human's view to the world, environment, and himself.

In his book, entitled "Iran's revolution and its global reflection", Sposito defines ideological elements of Iranian foreign policy as:

- 1- Further emphasis on Islam as an impeccable life style.
- 2- Believing in the fact that acceptance of the secular and western role-model segregation of religion and government is the source of economical, social, political and military problems.
- 3- Firm belief in the fact that regaining Muslim's power and success requires returning to Islam and divine sovereignty instead of western and Russian capitalism inspired by Marxism and Socialism.
- 4- Reintroduction of Islamic jurisprudence as an Islamic plan for an ideal society consisting of fain and moral pious men.
- 5- Willingness to jihad (holy war) against all injustice and dishonesty, even if it demands bearing difficulties or suffering martyrdom for God (Sposito, 2003, 49).

Therefore, we can acknowledge that considering the place and the role of ideology in Islamic Republic of Iran, this factor can account for many Iranian foreign policy tendencies.

Table 1

Country	Populatio n	Entire	Shiites
	%	Population (Million)	Population (Million)
Iran	90	7.68	8.61
Pakistan	20	8.165	2.33
Iraq	65	8.26	4.17
India	1	4.1095	11
Azerbaijan	75	8	6
Afghanistan	19	31	9.5
Saudi Arabia	10	27	7.2
Lebanon	45	9.3	7.1
Kuwait	30	4.2	0.00073
Bahrain	75	0.7	0.00073
UAE	6	6.2	0.00016
Qatar	16	0.89	0.00014

3. Results

One of the aims of foreign policy of Islamic republic of Iran is to propagate revolution, and its source, which is laid in Iranian governors' ideological views. Revolution propagation can be searched in Ayatollah Khomeini's religious interpretations, and his ideologies (Sposito, 2003, 17).

Richard Katem said: Imam Khomeini can be considered as a real pious man who has no campaign, and is proud of having Ideology (Bary Rozen.2000, 15).

Professor Ramezani explained about revolution: As the US and The USSR have fallen back on development of revolution aims for some reasons; Iran had also been trying to guarantee the world for Islam (Sposito, 2003, 20).

Ideological impact on foreign policy of Islamic Republic of Iran and its beat aspect can be studied in the policy of Iran's support for revolution propagation. Iranian help to some Islamic and Shiite movements which has caused some disorders and riots in some countries especially those in the Middle East originates from this ideological view of Iran in foreign policy. Imam Khomeini says: we should propagate our revolution to the world as quickly as possible, and put aside the illusions of disability for propagation because there is no difference between Islamic countries, and as we are supporters of deprived people, we cannot confine ourselves to a limited area. We should show the superpowers that we confront the world with beliefs.

4. Ideology and the soft power of Iran

Ideology, as one of the tools of Iranian power in the Middle East consists of several elements such as martyrdom, jihad anticipation of the 12th Imam, interpretation of divine law, guardianship and dissimulation.

In Ayatollah Motahari's point of view, martyrdom has a magnificent power in Islam. If someone is aware of Islamic concepts, they will see the aura of light surrounding these words, and in Islam's opinion, the martyr is one who has achieved the greatest degrees and positions a human being can achieve (Samih Farson, 2008, p121).

Marvin Zonis says: Imam Hussein sacrificed him and his comrades' life in the 7th century to rule Shiite sovereignty to all Muslims and Ayatollah Khomeini has revived the idea of sacrifice and martyrdom to materialize Islamic aims. Martyrdom was the best and most honorable way to define their beliefs. Attack on the enemy showed their boldness and courage, not disappointment and violence or terrorism (Robin write, 1993, 26).

Promotion of martyrdom culture began from the very first days of revolution, and Imam Khomeini says: our nation has turned from weakness into strength, and wishes martyrdom. Such a nation has no fears (Naghieb Zadeh, 2002, 227).

The word jihad means effort in Arabic which got a vast deep meaning during the centuries and is now, known as fight against cruelty and injustice. This fighting is encouraged in Koran, because anyone who

believes in god must fight for his approval. This is a duty for a real Muslim because he can have a clear conscience only in a free land (Robin write, 1993, 28). Many cases are mentioned in Koran about jihad. Verse 19, in Baqarah surah says that: Fight for God's sake against those who fight you, but do not invade their lands. War for God is the highest degree of Islam, and is the most important and valuable work which leads to God's intimacy.

Anticipation, which is neving have and stability, and believing in appearance of the last Imam, has made Shiites more stable and had saved them from all dangers. This belief has been the real cause of shiites survival (www.montazar.net).

Verse 3b, in Nahl surah, says that fighting against cruelty and supporting deprived people has been one of the main aims of prophets (Sedghi/2007/55). Imam Hussein's rise is an ultimate symbol of fighting against cruelty and injustice in shiites culture and ideology.

Imam Khomeini says: we hate cruelty even against one single person and you (God) know that we have risen just to bring justice and offer it to deprived people. We support those who are oppressed by any means, and Palestinians are oppressed, too (Naghib Zadeh, 2002/225).

Islamic ideology, especially Shiite ideology does not confine life to this world and believes that real prosperity is something beyond this materialistic world. It does not look at death as the end of life, rather the beginning of a new life. So, losing properties and above all, fear of death is not reasonable at all.

In fighting cruelty and injustice, an Islamic society is seeking for fulfilling of and completing its responsibilities more than victory. A Muslim, winner or loser, is considered winner due to completing his duties. Moreover, anyone who thinks of duty fulfillment and achieving god's satisfaction, bear all troubles and difficulties, and is not disappointed by failure. Imam Khomeini says: we are supposed to fulfill our duty not caring about the result (Manuchehr Mohamadi, 2008).

5. Iran and Shiism

Iran was conquered in the first century after hegira, but it was in the second century after hegira that Shiism entered Iran. Shiism first appeared in late 2nd and 3rd century, when Iran was ruled by Abbasids and Imam Reza was staying in Khorasan. Then, Shiism was developed in Al-e Bouye's reign, and finally accepted as the official religion in Safavid's time. Shah Esmail let religious men in the government.

During Shah Tahmasb's reign, religious clerics were promoted to important positions like judge, and at

last in Shah Abbas reign some of them could serve Shiites throughout the government. On the whole, Safavids period was the period of Shiites blossom and power (Hoseinian, 2001/171). Rey and Qom are mentioned as Shiite centers in Iran.

Shiites are scattered in many countries in the Middle East. They are in majority in some countries like Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain, and in the minority in some countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE. Shiites are totally powerful in some countries, like Iran and Iraq after Saddam's fall but they have no power in many countries in the Middle East. Considering the importance of ideology in foreign policy of Islamic Republic of Iran, many of these powerless Muslims in several countries are supported by Iran.

Graham Fuller defines Shiite geopolitics and Iranian's effort to become the political center in the world after revolution.

Walter Posh considers that Iran is demanding too much, which is caused by Shiite geopolitics. Shiite crescent came into existence after Lebanon crisis in 2006, and consists of a geopolitical crescent starting from Iran, covers Iraq and Syria, and ends in Lebanese Hezbollah and Palestinian Hamas. (Hojtahed Zadeh, 2007, 67).

Shiites significance in the region is due to their geopolitics and geostrategic status in the Middle East. In fact, Shiite's geographical status and geopolitics in the Middle East forms a political and economical belt in the region, since shiites are situated in the center of the biggest and richest part of the Middle East. The region contains 75% of the whole world's oil resources and Shiites in Iran, Iraq, and Azerbaijan have access to 30% of the resource. If we add Shiites in Saudi Arabia, it will sum up to 50%. So, Arab Shiites and Iranians can take control of almost all oil supplies in the Middle East and Iran, with the majority of 90% Shiites (65 million), is the heartland of Shiite geopolitics.

Thus, Shiite crescent or Shiite geopolitics is a region which starts from Iran, and after passing Iraq and Syria, gets to the south of Lebanon and Palestine and includes Iran, Iraq and Syria government, and Lebanese Shiites known as Hezbollah movement (Javadani Moghadam , Gohari Moghadam, 2008, 145).

Undoubtedly, Shiism is the main cause of unity between Iran and Iraq. Before having Shiism as the official religion in Iran, Iraq was the locus of Shiite propagation, and Najaf had the main role in educating religious men. The role gradually shifted to Iran by establishment of religious school in Qom, Iran.

Today, both Najaf and Qom play a fundamental role in Shiite faith. Important religious characters such Ayatollah Sadr, Ayatollah Hakim, and Ayatollah

Sistani played an important role in the union of the two countries. Ayatollah Sadr and Ayatollah Khomeini shared opinions of religion and guardianship. So, some authors believe the guardianship theory to be proposed by both. It was during the Islamic revolution when Ayatollah Sadr announced his support of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Hakim was born in Najaf, but lived in Iran for 23 years fearing from Iraq's government. Ayatollah Hakim who was the boss of Shiite house had close relations with Iran sovereignty and was the link road between Shiites in Iran and Iraq. Also, Ayatollah Sistani, originally from Iran, is the first guide of Shiites in Iraq, and has very close relations with Iranian leaders.

So, it can be noted that Iran has had a noticeable influence on Iraq because of Iraqi Shiite characters during Saddam's reign. The influence has increased after Saddam's fall. In this case, Iran's role in renovation of Iraq and providing security can be pointed out.

After 2003, Iran played a constructive role in Iraq. Iran was the first country in the region which sent an official representative to negotiate with Iraq's ruling council (Nasr 2006). Islamic Republic of Iran has had an essential role in the formation of new Iraq so far. For instance, Iran had official recognized all political changes in Iraq in the last 4 years including public election and ratification of constitution (Barzegar, 2006, 43).

Involvement of Shiite elements in Iraq's policy and power had ended in reinforcement of Iran's role not only in Iraq changes, but also in the whole region of Arab world, especially Lebanon (Barzegar, 2009).

In order to limit Iran's influence on Arab world particularly Iraq, U.S.A is supporting those Arab sovereignties opposed to Iran. To fulfill this aim, Washington is trying to strengthen the military power of the Persian Gulf countries. Nicole Berter states that one basic aim of selling weapons to the Persian Gulf countries is strengthening their defensive force, and creating a deterrent against Iran's ambitions in the future (Nasr and Takeyh, 2008).

Close relations between Iran and Lebanon (Shiites) started when Iran accepted Shiism as the official religion in Safavid period, and Iran's relations with Lebanese shiites was developed in two aspects. First, Safavid government invited all Shiite clerics around the world to propagate this new faith over Safavid's territory, second Lebanese Shiites were in bad conditions in competition between Iranian Shiites and Ottoman Sunnis, and headed to Iran under Ottoman pressure. So, the relations between Iranians and Lebanese developed.

Lebanese Shiite's are the largest and the first Shiite sectarian community in the Arab world. When

keeping an eye catching political power is considered, the most important reason is of course Imam Mousa Sadr's role (Fuller and Franke, 2005, 398).

Apart from Imam Mousa Sadr, who was born and educated in Iran, there were other people who were educated in Iran, including Hosein Mousavi, the leader of the Amal Movement. He was particularly supported by Mustafa Chamran, defense minister of Iran, and set up the "Amol Movement" with Tehran's assistance. In a few months, another group of warriors joined the region's Shiite clerics and established another organization called "Hezbollah" (Robin write, 2000, 63).

Outward and inward pliability of Hezbollah from Iran was the reason to consider it as an Iranian party in the world (Asadollahi, 2003, 171).

The main characteristic of Hezbollah is acceptance of Imam Khomeini's guardianship and leadership theory. Iran has always supported Hezbollah with its political, military, spiritual, and material help. For example, the 33-day-war between Hezbollah and Israel in summer 2006 increased Iran's role in Lebanon and the whole region in strategic terms.

Following the victory of the Islamic revolution, Iran entered into the Palestinian's combats. Even before the victory of revolution, Imam Khomeini said: "we are on oppressed people's side, no matter whom or where they are, and Palestinians are oppressed. Israel is oppressing them, so we support them." (Vehayati, 2007, 25).

During the first years of the revolution, Iran opposed to Israel and was supportive of Palestinians (SAF). Iran used to know SAF as the representative of Palestine and Palestinian groups purposes. But later after SAF's reconciliatory policies and its support of Saddam made Iran reconsiders its approach toward SAF.

In late 1995, Iran established its relations with Hamas, which was limited and pale, but got stronger after 1992. In 1999 (10 December), Palestinian leaders arranged a meeting with Iranians and appreciated Iran's financial contribution support against Israel. Some has announced Iran's contributions to be as much as 30 million dollars per year. These were of course apart from military help, such as sending weapons and military trainings.

Even after the victory of Hamas in 2006 election, which had followed international sanctions, it was reported that Iran is ready to pay 120 million dollars to Hamas, when following his victory in elections Khalid Mashaal in a meeting had stipulated Iranian leaders that they have a special plan to develop a radical Islam (Warmser, www.hudson.org). Some analysts believe that Iran looks at Hamas as a profit in its regional ambitiousness. Therefore, the purpose

of Iran's help must be analyzed considering this aspect.

6. Conclusion

Ideology in foreign policy of Islamic republic of Iran acts as a source of soft power in the Middle East. A soft power which has managed to increase the influence of Iran on many countries highlights the role of Iran in geopolitical dynamic. It is within such framework that Iran's actions have influenced the region and such deeds have disrupted the current order in many cases. Although even the boundaries between soft and hard power have been violated by this process, and the soft power has changed into hard power due to some contributions to others, something that is obvious is the importance of ideology in Iranians behavior and that they are following their aims and benefits based on this ideology.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Ebrahim Anousheh
Department of Law and Political Science
Islamic Azad University, Science and Research
Branch
Tehran, Iran
E-mail: anooshe1389@gmail.com

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