Iran’s Foreign Policy Decision Making

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Visions and Divisions: Prospects for a Reorientation in Iran’s Foreign Policy

- Normalizers: Integration of Iran into the International Community
- Principalists: No Change in Iran’s International Posture
Why we cannot make a conclusive statement on the interplay of these groups? Iran is not like any other states in terms of political system.
Negotiated Political Order

- **State**
  - President
  - Government & Bureaucracy
- **Parastatals**
  - Revolutionary Guards
  - Basij
  - Foundations (Bonyads)
- **Supreme Leader**
  - Rahbar’s Office
  - Quds Force
Negotiated Political Order

- Iran’s Foreign Policy
IRI Supreme Leader
the top religious/political figure in Iran
(a.k.a Commander-in-Chief of the Iranian Armed Forces or Farmandehe Koll-e Qova, the ultimate authority of all the Armed Forces)

Appointing

Heads Of:
- Judiciary
- Expediency Discernment Council
- IRIB (National Television)
- Intelligence Services
- Military Orgs (IRGC/Artesh/Law Enforcement)
- 5 Ministries (Intelligence, Interior, Culture, Defense, Foreign Affairs)
- Financial Organizations (Bonyads)

Assembly of Experts (88)
Empowered to designate/dismiss the SL (8 Years)

President
Executive Power
4 Years

Parliament
(270 MPs)
(Rejecting Majlis Legislation)

Members of:
The Guardian Council of the Constitution
(Including Six Faqih (Expert in Sharia Law)
Six Jurists)
It is charged with:
- Supervising elections
- Interpreting the Constitution
- Approving of candidates to:
The Position of the Various Groups

- Ideological Normalizers
- Principalists
- Pragmatic Normalizers
- Tentative normalizers
What Drives Iran’s Regional Policies
Five Core Factors

- Imperial Legacy
- Shi'ite Islam
- Anti Imperialism
- Paranoia & Regime Security
- Domestic Politics
Policy of Exporting Revolution
What did Khomeini mean by revolutionary export?

Khomeini was Iranian equivalent of Trotsky

- Protecting Shiites
- Gaining Hegemony in the Middle East
Anti-Trotsky Camp Formed

Idealist in the regime committed to exporting the revolution

Pragmatists who said it’s really too much & too soon
How did they want to export the revolution and to dominate over the middle east?

The plan was simple

We don’t fight ourselves

We use proxies

Center for Borderless Security Doctrine Analysis
The ideal end run and their image of the ideal expansion of the revolution and hegemony
Engaging the Masses in the ME

Shiite Crescent

Expanding Regional Role & Power

Building Ideological belt of sympathetic Shiite governments & political factions in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Gulf States
It happened because of a number of fortuitous breaks

Israel Invasion of Lebanon 1982

Arab Spring 2011

U.S. invasion of Iraq 2003
1st Break: Israel Invasion of Lebanon 1982

To dismantle the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)

Yasser Arafat & PLO fighters fled to Tunisia.

IDF pulled back/ IRGC organized Shiite militants under one roof/form Hezbollah.

Global Condemnation (Christian fighters massacred hundreds of Palestinian civilians and the Israeli army stood by)
Second Break: U.S. invasion of Iraq 2003

Invading Iraq will:
- Destabilize Iraq & the entire ME
- The post-Saddam authority would face a deeply divided society
- Significant chance that domestic groups would engage in violent conflict with each other

Will give the IRGC the opportunity to increase its effort to:
- Expand its influence
- Recruit extremists
- Strengthen reliable, pro-Iran Shiite militants
- To establish a friendlier Shiite-led regime in Baghdad.
Third Break: Arab Spring and Iran’s Strategy

- Supporting the oppositions in the countries which were allies of Saudi Arabia
- Exerting full support to its own allies which were on the brink of collapse
- Shiites in KSA Eastern provinces
- Bahrain: Pro-democracy protests were staged against the Sunni monarchy of Al Khalifa in Manama to push the island into the Iranian sphere of interest.
- Yemen: financial & military aid for the Houthi rebels.
- Syria: Military (Some 8,000 to 10,000 fighters) and Financial aid ($15 to 20 billion).
- Iraq: Creating Strong Shiite paramilitary forces, Forming Pro-Iranian political factions
The Meaning of Normalization

Implementing the JCPOA

Limiting Terror/ Regional Involvement

Bank Reforms

Human Rights
Implementing the JCPOA

❖ Both the Normalizers and the their opponents apparently agree that loyalty to the JCPOA in the realm of enrichment, and weaponization is the core of the normalization project. Any violation would lead to snap-back sanctions.

❖ The JCPOA did not cover ballistics missile program. UNSC Resolution 2231 of July 20, 2015 created a loophole by complicating the definition of what kind of missiles are capable of carrying a nuclear payload.
Limiting Terror and Military Actions: Revolutionary Guards and Quds Force

- Terror Ops in the Middle East
- Assisting Terror Groups in the Middle East
- Revolutionary Export
- Regional Conflicts
  - Syria
  - Yemen
- Naval Conflicts
  - The Persian Gulf
  - Bab al Mandab
Policy of provocations in the waters of the Gulf by the IRGC-NEDSA (the IRGC Navy Special Force)
75 incidents since December 2015

2015 22
2016 30
2017 16
2018 6
2019
Reforming the Iranian Economy
(Domestic Aspect)

❖ President Rouhani promised to reform the economy by focusing on the banking system.
❖ The Banking Overhaul Plan
❖ Accessing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)
Reforming the Iranian Economy
(International Aspects)

❖ Iran’s economy is in dire needs of FDI.
❖ International banking and investment laws have been tightened to reflect terror/ security considerations.
❖ In June 2016 Iran has joined the Eurasian Group, a TFC-style regional body, which is expected to provide assistance with implementation of the anti-money laundering laws.
❖ In August 2016 the Majlis passed a legislation to join the TFC.
❖ The IRGC position?
The Revolutionary Guards Banking Dilemma

- Desperately needs FDI (South Pars, telecommunication, transportation projects)
- Banking laws require transparency (a third or more of Guards companies operate behind front)
Owning companies that seem to be private but run by IRGC veterans.

IRGC Pyramid Ownership

Company A is a subsidiary of company B which itself is a subsidiary of company C.
The Normalizers Tactics Against Guards

- “Clean banks,” (Melli, Sepah)
- Criticize business practices
- Cancel contracts
- Revolutionary Guards Companies
Improving the Human Rights Records

❖ The poor human rights record of the Islamic Republic has concerned the international community for decades!
❖ Iran has been accused of a wide range of violations such as minority rights, gender rights, religious rights, civil rights, and political rights! One of the major concerns of the international community is the excessive use of capital punishment.
❖ Over the years, Iran has been censured for its poor human rights record by a variety of international bodies including the United Nations, the EU and individual countries such as the United States.
The Human Rights Problematique

❖ The Islamic Republic enforces the Sharia-based life style that pertains to many facet of personnel behavior both in private and public. Enforcing life style edicts are under the control of parastatals such as the Basij and some vigilante groups.

❖ Certain course, such as Revolutionary Court are outside the realm of state and are presided over by hard-core judges. Revolutionary Courts have handed down harsh sentences for a verity of offense, including what is described as sedition.

❖ Intelligence services have arrested a number of dual-nationals Iranian—American, Iranian-Canadian and Iranian-British citizens. (e.e, Siamak Namazi and Reza “Robin” Shahini). Because of their dual nationality, these cases have been covered in the West.

❖ Executed Shahram Amiri, a former nuclear expert who defected to the United States and returned to Iran, where he was initially sentenced to 15 years in prison. Amiri’s execution was extensively covered by international press.
The Normalizers Dilemma: How to Improve the Human Rights Record?

- Majlis: eliminated death sentence on drug offense, will reduce by 80 percent the death penalty.
- Intelligence Services: Little state influence.
- Courts: Special Courts are expected to defy the normalizers.
Normalizers and Opponents on Regional Issues

- Saudi Arabia
- Syria
- Israel
- Turkey
Negotiated Political Order & Regional Issues: Decision Makers

- President Rouhani
- Ali Jafari
- Supreme Leader
Saudi Arabia

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<th>Normalizers</th>
<th>Opponents</th>
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<td>• Avoid direct provocations, try detente with Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>• Verbal confrontation, avoid kinetic actions</td>
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<td>• Withdraw from Yemen</td>
<td>• Increase support for the Huthis in Yemen</td>
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<td>• Don’t Meddle In the Gulf States</td>
<td>• Continue mobilization of Shiit minorities &amp; other proxies</td>
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Syria

Normalizers

- Rational Choice Approach
  - Don’t squander limited economic resources
  - Reduce support for Assad

Opponents

- Syria is Iran’s outpost
- Assad is essential to prevent a Saudi–Sunni Syria
- Support for Assad regardless of cost
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<td><strong>Symbol</strong>s</td>
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<td>• Eliminate offensive declarations</td>
<td>• Use offensive rhetoric, i.e. Holocaust denial, “wiping off Israel from the map”</td>
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<td>• Keep Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad on a Leash</td>
<td>• Restrain Hezbollah, Hamas</td>
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Turkey (Normalizers and Opponents Share the View)

Mutual Benefits
- Syria
- Assad
- Kurds
- ISIS

Economy

Mosul Operation and beyond
- Iraq
Moderates & Conservatives
View on the United States

Normalizers

• Symbol
  • Restoring Diplomacy

• Action
  • We need U.S. to balance the influence of the East (Russia/China)

Opponents

• Symbol
  • Fear of America’s interference in Iran affairs
  • Suspicious of American intentions and feared a 1953-style coup
  • Verbal Attack

• Action
  • Harrasing US Navy in the Guld
  • Countering US forces in Iraq/Syria
Moderates & Conservatives
View on Russia

Normalizers

Balance between West/East

- Both have welcomed Putin’s strong defense of the JCPOA in the face of American pressures.

Opponents

- Sharp tilt towards Moscow because of their strong military and nuclear cooperation
- Weakening EU
- Undermining NATO