

Iran and the United States

Challenges & Opportunities

Iran US Relations during the Shah

- 1) Iran US Relations during the Shah described as that of a Super Client of a Super Power
- 2) Iran was an important client of the U.S. arms industry
- 3) The Shah protected U.S. interests in the Gulf by assuring an uninterrupted flow of oil
- 4) Checkmating Soviet expansionism in the region.
- 5) The US provided covert support to the Shah during the Revolution

Strategic allies turned into bitter enemies

- 1) There are several groups in both countries interested in fuelling the conflict (the best example is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which pursues Israel's interests in the US).
- 2) Iran as a player that seeks to maximize its power in the international arena and particularly challenges US hegemony in the Middle East.
- 3) The conflict is rooted in divergent and contradictory interests. In a sense, the two countries' foreign policy orientations and agendas are incompatible to the extent that they have led to increasing confrontations.
- 4) The tension results from the nature of political systems in the two countries (The Islamic values is at odds with the values and norms of Western liberalism)

Relations with US

Seculars Vs Conservatives

Seculars

- Diplomatic ties

- Iran needs West to balance the influence of the East

- Nov 1979 PM Bazargan met USNSA Brzezinski

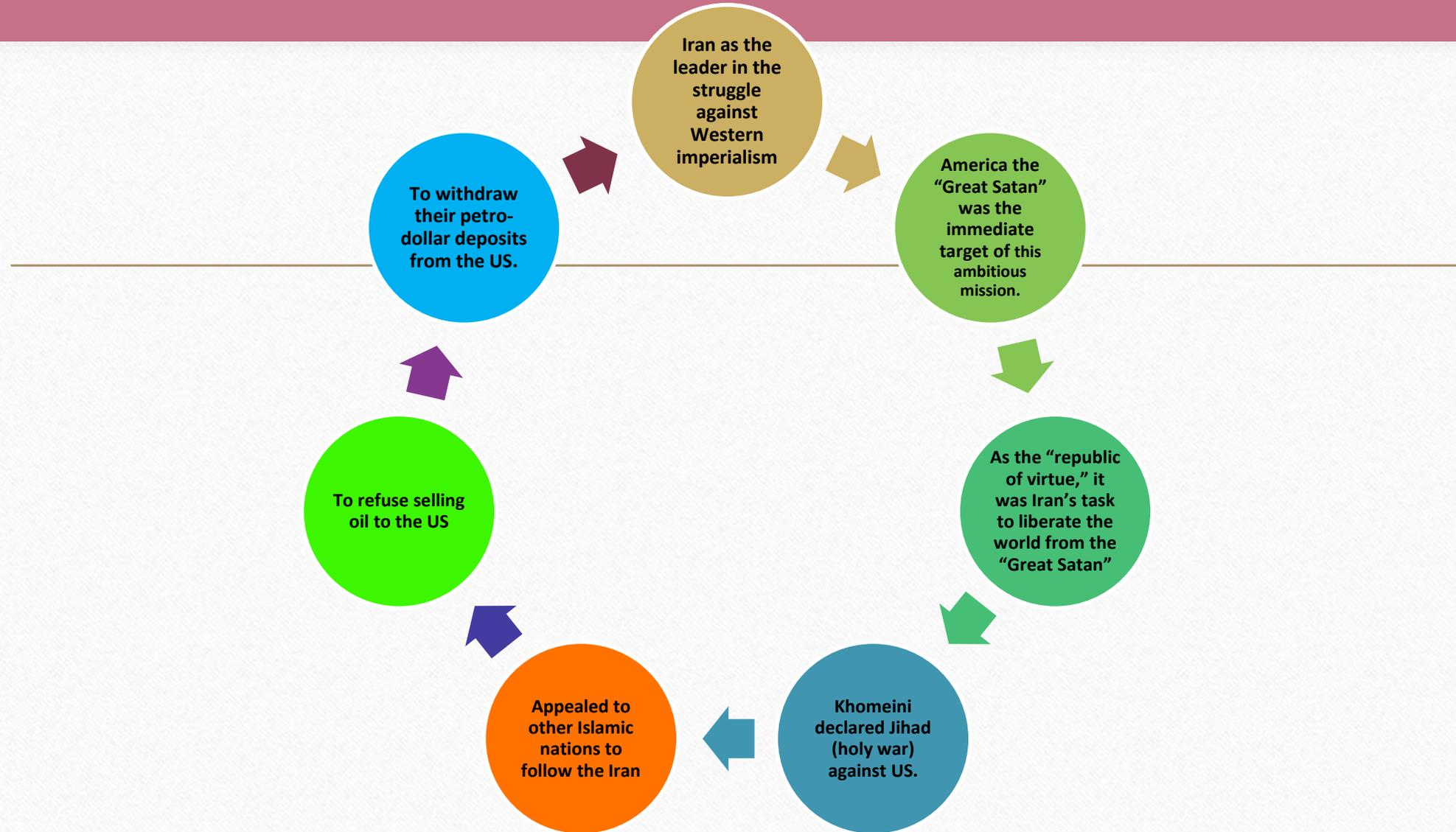
Conservatives

- Fear of a 1953-style coup

- A chance to consolidate power by eliminating secular leaders

- Conservatives occupied the US embassy, Bazargan resigned

US-Iran “Institutionalized Enmity”



Ending diplomatic relations

- **The hostage crisis:** On Nov. 4, 1979, Militants belonging to the Students Following the Imam's Line seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, taking more than 60 American diplomate hostages for 444 days.
- **Ending Diplomatic Ties:** April 7, 1980, the United States cut off diplomatic relations with Iran.
- **Sanctioning Iran:** US frozen \$6 billion of Iranian assets in the United States.
- **Attacking US forces in the region:** Iran started aiding the suicide bombing in the region. (the bombings of the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon and Kuwait, the barracks of U.S. Marine in Lebanon, which killed 241 U.S. military personnel).

**State
Sponsor of
Terrorism
1984**

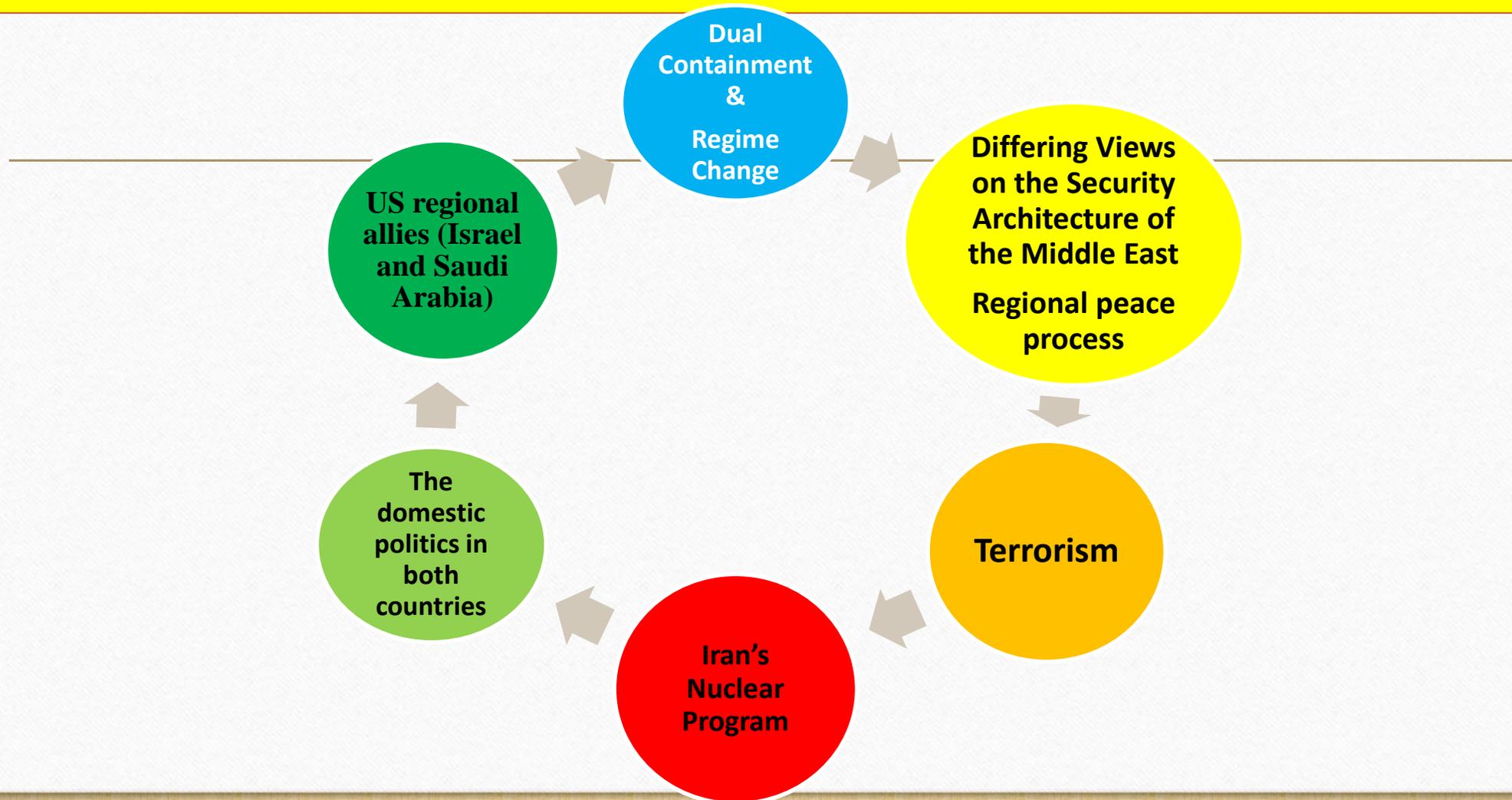
**The Iran-Iraq war /
US support to Iraq/
Shooting down of
Iranian passenger plane**

US

**Islamic
Fundamentalism
/
Rogue State/
'Axis of Evil'**

**More
Sanctions
Arms
Embargo,
freezing
Iranian Assets**

Clash of Interest Bilateral/Regional/Global



Tehran-Washington Relations Hinged on Three Issues

Israel invasion of Lebanon

- Convinced Iranians that it was time to confront US because it traditionally supported Israel
- Provided Iran the opportunity to challenge the regional status quo that favored the United States

Support of the Afghan Resistance

- In Afghanistan, US & Iran were strategic allies because they were pursuing similar foreign policy goals (withdrawal of the Soviets and destabilization “of the communist regime in Kabul).
- But Iran separated US & Iranian support for Afghan Mujahedin by asserting that America wants to promote a pro-American Islamic movement in Afghanistan.

Iran-Iraq War

- Iran saw US & Iraq as allies whose aim was to destroy IRI.
- US providing military intelligence to Iraq, giving loans and credit to Iraq, and reestablishing formal relations with Iraq in 1984 convinced Iran that US is actively siding with Iraq, despite the U.S. declaration of neutrality in the war.
- At the same time, US began Operation Staunch, refused to release frozen Iranian assets, and Arms embargo on Iran that the Shah had already paid.”

Three Shocks Hit Iran-US Relations

Hanging of Lt Col Higgins

- In 1988, footage was released showing the hanging of Higgins, a US Marine who had been abducted in February 1988 while serving with the UN in Lebanon

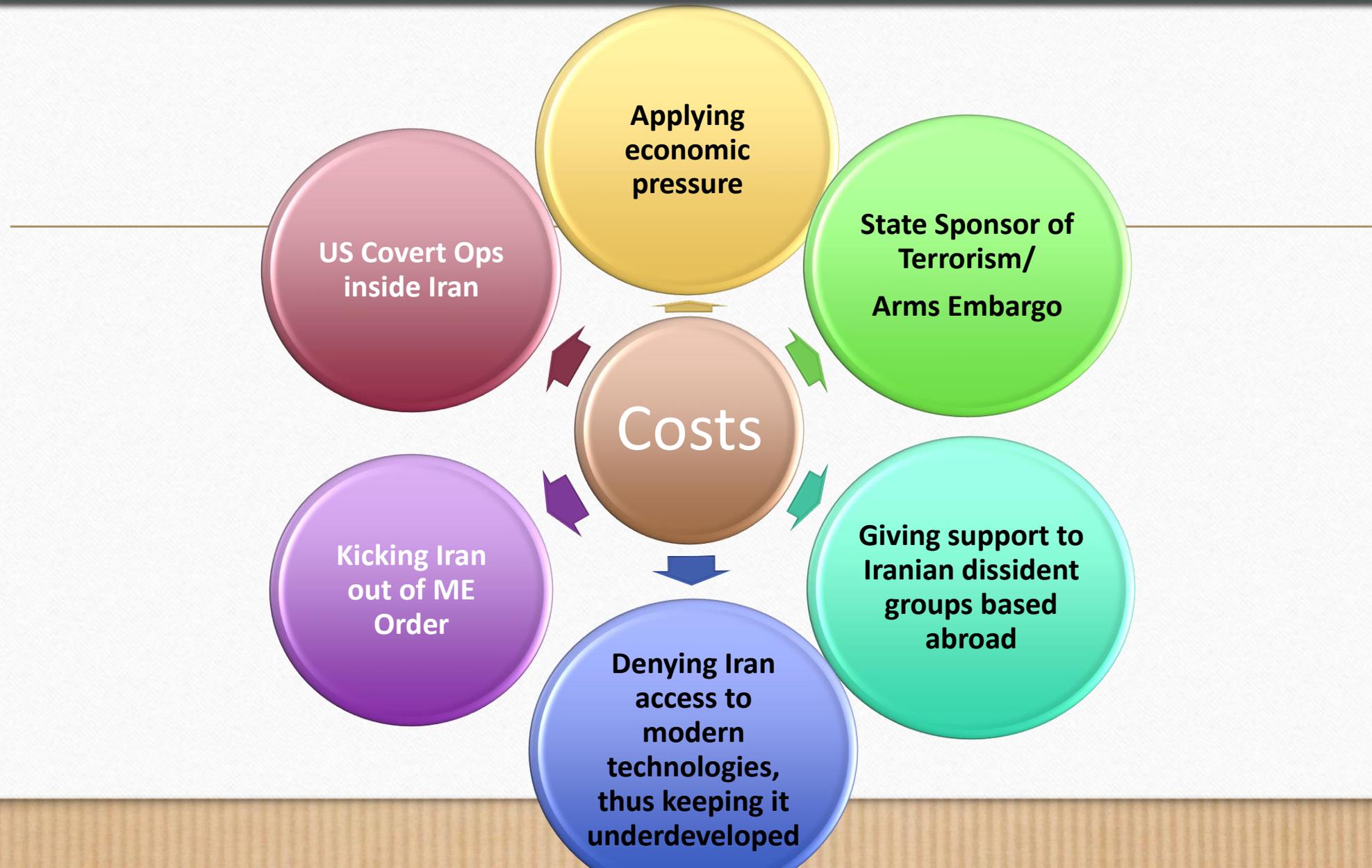
Khomeini Fatwa/Salman Rushdie 1989

- Khomeini Issued a Fatwa against Salman Rushdie for his *The Satanic Verses*

Khomeini Death 1989

- **Khomeini Death 1989** and the subsequent **appointment of Khamenei as his successor**)
- **Washington hoped that Rafsanjani would be able to marginalise hardliners**

Cost of Idealistic Defiance of the U.S.



Rafsanjani & Khatami Critical Engagement Trust Deficit

**Hashemi
Rafsanjani
1989–97**

- launched what was to become known as the “[reconstruction era](#),”
- called on the United States to restore relations with Iran
- opened up Iran’s oil and gas sectors for foreign investors in the early 1990s.
- deliberately opened a number of fields only to US firms

**Mohammad
Khatami
1997-2005**

- Proposing the exchange of visits between the US & Iranian academics/writers to promote better understanding between the two nations.

Rafsanjani Failure

- **Khamenei was consolidating his power-base by bringing all the military, security, and intelligence agencies under his control.**
- **And opposed Rafsanjani plan to open up to the United States.**
- **Rafsanjani positive move could not culminate into any tangible outcome because of severe 'trust deficit' in their bilateral relations.**

Iran-US

Shared Interest & Cooperation

Iran-Contra Affairs **1985-6**

Afghanistan (1979-89) Iran-US were strategic allies because of similar foreign policy goals: withdrawal of the Soviets, destabilization of the communist regime in Kabul)

Then they separated American and Iranian support for the Afghan Mujahedin by asserting that US wants to promote a pro-American Islamic movement in Afghanistan.”

The post 9/11 regional security environment brought the US and Iran closer: US brought down two main regional rivals of Iran;

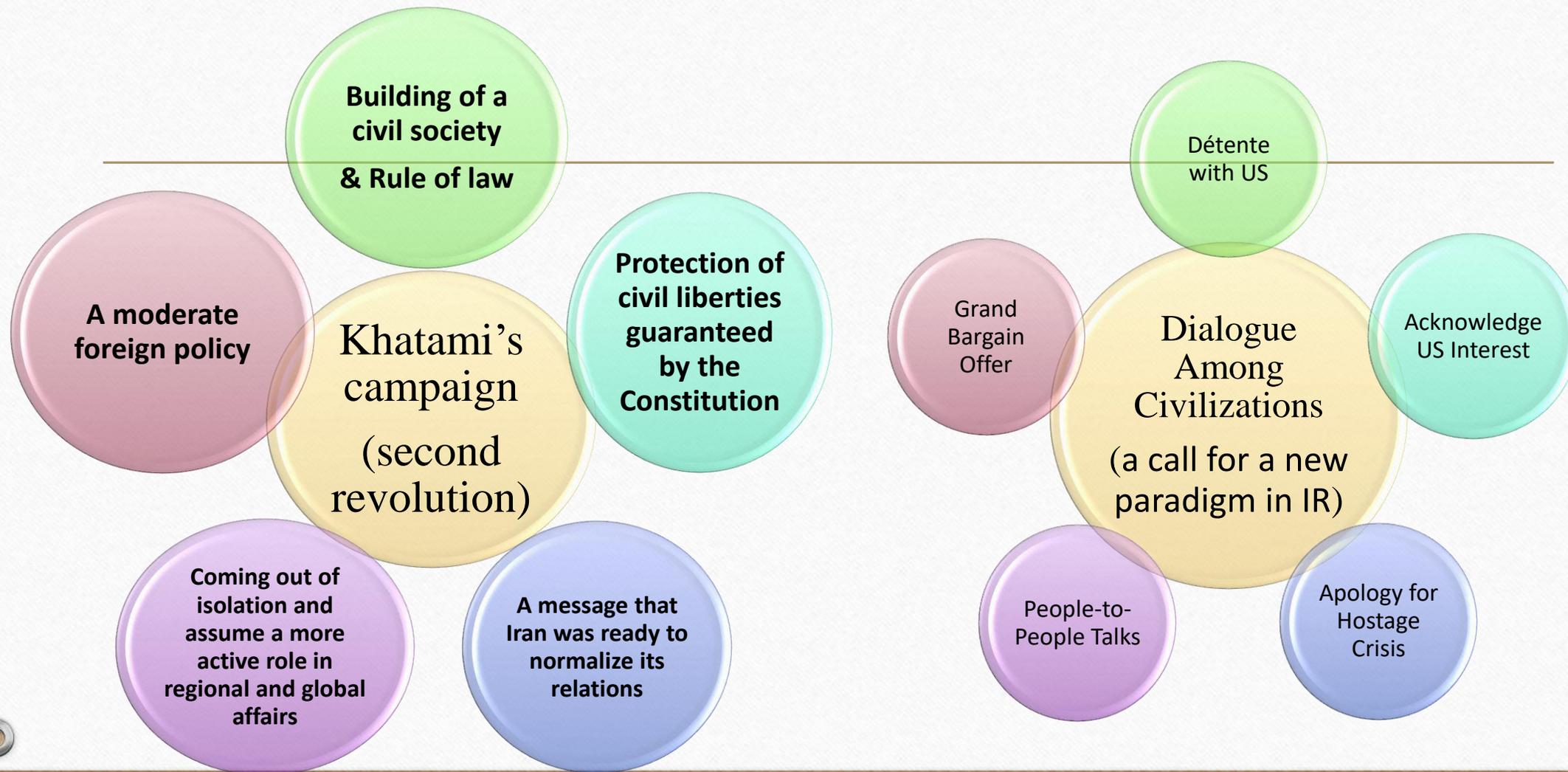
1. Taliban the ideological threats in Afghanistan in 2001
2. Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003, a regional security threat to Iran.

Iran-US had three shared goals in Iraq

1. Iraq was contained.
2. Its territorial integrity preserved.
3. Saddam Hussein who was still seen as a formidable threat to Iran's territory, and the Islamic revolution was removed.
4. US effort to establish democratic institutions, practices and values has turned power in Iraq to Shiites who are 60 percent of the population. That enabled Iran to shape the future of Iraq and the region.

Khatami Presidency (1997-2005)

A reformist & campaigner for greater political pluralism



1)The White House Devised a Roadmap to normalized relations with Iran

1)Facilitated cultural and academic exchanges

1)Lifted Sanctions on Iran's most lucrative non-oil exports

1)Designated MEK as a terror group

1)Streamlined procedure for obtaining visas for Iranian citizens

1)Initiated a Secret Channel to Khatami

1)Apologized for US role in 1953 coup that deposed the nationalist PM Mohamed Mossadegh

1)Planned to release Iran's assets that had been frozen since 1979

US Response to Khatami Outreach Welcoming the gesture

Failure of Khatami Outreach: Three Factors

Domestic Factor

- 1. US faith in demographics was at odds with the reality in Tehran
- 2. Iran conservatives felt threatened and betrayed by the dialogue, insisted the revolution must be preserved from the West & Americans.
- 3. The Supreme Leader warned that Khatami's conciliatory approach was a "Trojan Horse that enabled our enemies to strike [against] Islam at home"

Nuclear Factor

- **For the US which was anxious about proliferation, Khatami's stand on the nuclear issue had mattered the most.**
- **No evidence that Khatami tried to clamp down on either the public or the secret parts of the Project**
- **MEK 2002 Revelations**
- **Nuclear Progress: the Rafsanjani period 25 %, Khatami 65%, Ahmadinejad added only 10 % because sanctions**

Ahmadinejad Principalist Doctorin 2005-2013

Pillars of Foreign Policy

- **Cooperation with “oppressed powers”:** he planned to help Muslim countries against imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism.
- **Confronting the United States:** , the leader of the “imperialists” and the “infidel” camp.
- **More Support for Global Jihad:** more robust help for militant groups such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas and Hezbollah.
- **Attacking Israel:** . Holding conferences entitled «World without Zionism» «Wiping Israel from the page of history»
- **Challenging NPT:** he intended to dramatically alter the status quo in the international order.

Ahmadinejad's undiplomatic behavior

- 1) Ahmadinejad lacked political experience and was not truly aware of the true impact of his belligerent rhetoric, highly confrontational foreign policy style, and erratic behavior.
- 2) Ahmadinejad's shrillness against United States and Israel was a reaction to decades of US sanctions, the American covert operations, American and Israeli repeated threats of bombing Iranian nuclear facilities.
- 3) Ahmadinejad thinking was influenced by his patrons in the Revolutionary Guards.
- 4) Those familiar with Ahmadinejad's religious beliefs disagreed that the provocative rhetoric should be written off as gaffes by an inexperienced politician. According to this view, Ahmadinejad believed himself to be a "soldier" of Mahdi, the 12th Imam whom he still directs the affairs of the world, an idea that was the cornerstone of Ayatollah Khomeini's belief.

Rouhani-Obama Presidency

Restarting Diplomacy

- **Military Option?** As luck would have it, both US and Iran had leaders of the time (Barack Obama and Hassan Rouhani) who were skeptical of military action and inclined to explore what diplomacy might bring to fruition.
- **Restoring Diplomacy:** After decades of mutual demoralization and intense Geopolitical rivalry, the two countries which were on the verge of war, miraculously managed to make a move for peace.
- **Nuclear Agreement 2015:** For Rouhani/Obama the JCPOA represented more than a nuclear agreement; it was a historic gamble on temping Iran to rejoin the community of nations.
- **Sanctions:** in the United States, a powerful coalition of the Jewish lobby and the Republicans, almost derailed the deal by trying very hard to restrict the economic ben.efit of the JCPOA for Iran