

# Iran's Desired Power Status

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## Abstract

Along with the evident trend of Iran's rising power in the region in recent years, one of the issues that have gained less attention is the obstacles and constraints faced with by the emerging powers in the realm of international politics as they try to acquire further power and influence. In fact, the existing great powers do not show any willingness to accept the rising powers or even try to prevent their advancement by ignoring them. However, given the characteristics of Iran's national power and political system, which is based upon its religious values, typically there are different challenges and constraints ahead of Iran, which are not experienced by the other countries. These challenges arise from Iran's ideological confrontation with the prevailing international system. At the same time, Iran has to continue its life in this international system and even to increase its power. Is it possible to suggest a special behavioral pattern for the Islamic Republic of Iran that would enable it to counter the constraints and increasing challenges ahead of it, which would rely on the particular conditions of its political system? This article suggests that the new pattern of 'cooperation and critique' for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran for engaging the arena of international politics under the new conditions in such a way that it could counter the possible challenges and threats, while continuing to acquire and manage power.

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### Introduction

Despite the fact that the main subject of political science and international relations is power and it has always been the main goal of theoreticians to prevent the outbreak of war and violence and to establish peace and tranquility, an opposite trend has been witnessed in practice. In other words, the scholars of this discipline intend to impose obstacles and constraints on the power of states in order to prevent the absolute exercise of power and to provide the grounds for the establishment of peace and security among societies, whereas the statesmen, though they theoretically do not ignore such discussions, seek to advance their country's goals and interests through unconstrained concentration of power in the prevailing materialist international system to. The outcome of this interaction between the two theoretical and practical challenges has been the actual and objective situation of the world of politics and exercise of power in the arena of international politics. The real objective world indicates that the former constraints and hurdles are ignored by the great powers with the intention of preserving and expanding peace and the great powers even seek to prevent the rise of and increase in the power of new and rising rivals in a variety of ways. As a result, the rising powers are always faced with dual challenges; thus, they have no option other than to design thoughtful strategies and agendas to tackle the problem.

Considering the aforementioned discussion and the fact that this is seen more clearly with regard to a rising power like Iran and the challenges arising from its gaining of power, the trend in Iran's



rising national power under new regional and global conditions pose other serious constraints ahead of the state, which are typically different from conventional obstacles and constraints. These are indeed ideological constraints that pose particular challenges to the Iranian foreign policy. For instance, the Palestinian question, support for Muslims and liberation movements, and the like constitute the most challenging issues in the Iranian foreign policy. These issues raise the question about whether it is possible to devise or prescribe a specific behavioral pattern in the area of foreign policy given the conventional constraints ahead of a regional power on the one hand, and the main characteristics of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a political system based on religious ideology on the other. It appears that the unique situation of the Iranian political system demands particular requirements for the effective application of national power in the arena of international politics. On the one hand, as a conventional power at the international level, Iran is faced with certain requirements and constraints, and on the other hand, due to the necessities arising from the religious nature of its political system, it has other requirements, which it is obliged to pursue. Thus, with the rise in Iran's national power in recent years, further attention has been paid to the concept of power in the literature on the Iranian foreign policy. However, since most of the articles and works regarding the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, including those written by Ruhollah Ramazani, Alireza Azghandi, Mohammad Kazem Sajjadpour, Mahmood Sariolghalam, Seyed Jalal Dehghani and other scholars, have not paid attention to the subject matter of this writing while dealing with other aspects of the Iranian foreign policy, this article seeks to address the ways to remove the theoretical and practical challenge arising from the objective constraints of the international system and the requirements derived from the political structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Suggesting the pattern of cooperation and critique, this writing seeks to provide the grounds for Iran's more effective presence in the



international system. Practical constraints at the system's level are meant to be challenges of balance of power and ideological constraints are meant to be duties and obligations arising from the Islamic nature of the guardianship of the jurispudent (Velayat-e Faqih) toward people, particularly the Muslim Community (Ummah).

### I- Scope of Iran's National Power

In the first place the Islamic Republic of Iran, in many respects, is a conventional power with characteristics similar to those of the other powers and nation-states, which have taken shape in a designated geographical area with a distinct history, culture, and civilization and as such possesses geographical, economic, military, and national capabilities. It also has certain needs, goals, and interests similar to those of the other powers at the top of which stands their fear of threats to their national survival. This part of the characteristics, of course, would demand attention to the material means of power and the constraints arising from it. But at the same time, this system, given its theological nature, has certain unique characteristics, which would demand attention from an angle different from other countries, thus distinguishing it from power-centered countries like the Western states. For instance, in the theories of political science, ideology at the first place has a domestic usage intended to consolidate the political system. However in the second place, its exportation is aimed at creating a secure setting devoid of threats in the international system for a great power in order to ensure its survival by enhancing influence and parameters like strategic depth (Walt, 1987: 123). Nonetheless, the Islamic Republic of Iran, according to its Constitution (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1989: Preamble) and statements of the Leader of the Revolution sees ideology as a means to approach God in the domestic sphere.<sup>1</sup> Rather than being an instrument for acquiring dominance and sphere of influence, it pursues ideology in the



foreign sphere with the intention of general good for producing a secure setting for all world nations, particularly the deprived ones-- and not just for itself--; thus it intends to form the united world community (Ummah) for paving the way for the full human perfection envisaged by God. Therefore, naturally such a political system with these characteristics differs substantively from the other materialist and power-centered political systems. On the other hand, in a materialist world, where the realism governing world politics and even the public sphere of the societies has created anarchical conditions in which struggle between states for gaining national power and willingness to preserve security are integral to the system, and diplomacy, international law, and balance of power are ultimately unable to do anything to improve the conditions, Iran cannot ignore these conditions either. Before proceeding, however, we have to see what the factors are for Iran in managing and acquiring power in the new conditions of the existing international system. Accordingly, the requirements, or in fact the constraints, on the Islamic Republic of Iran as a great theological power may be identified.

Like the other nation-states, Iran's power includes geography and territory, government, population, strategic resources, and leadership, which provide the grounds for its national power and strength. Possessing an extraordinarily strategic geographic location, Iran has continued to be one of the most important countries in the Persian Gulf region (Fuller, 1991: 256). Of course, exactly for the same reasons, it has always attracted the attention of great powers, leading to numerous problems for the country as well.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of the past and the impact of the location on Iran's politics, economics, and other sociopolitical aspects of Iran's political destiny, it can be claimed that in all rivalries and conflicts among the great powers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and with the proposition of Iran's question by Lord Curzon in 1892 by the end of the Cold War era and the collapse of the bipolar system, Iran's



strategic position has enjoyed considerable significance. Aspects of Iran's strategic significance include suitable geographic location in the Persian Gulf and its area stretching to the Caspian Sea, sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz in the mouth of the Persian Gulf, dominance on the transit route of oil, possession of huge oil and gas resources, an enormous young dynamic population, a powerful army and military forces, rich ancient history and culture, and a religion shared with most of the Muslim nations of the Middle East. These have created a set of variables that give rise to national power and, consequently, to the sensitivity of the regional conditions. In any case, these conditions seem to have always persisted as the constant factors of Iran's power (Zoghi, 1989: 20) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is worth noting that Iran's unique position and strategic importance was verified during the Cold War era, which led various U.S. administrations from the late 1970s and early 1980s through the collapse of the Soviet Union to engage in meaningful efforts at rapprochement with Iran.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, however, changed the strategic equations in the world, and, as a result, in the Persian Gulf region as a regional subsystem. Even the U.S. authorities claimed that Iran's strategic importance in the region had decreased in the U.S. foreign policy (Lake, Foreign Affairs, 1994). The truth, nonetheless, is that aspects of Iran's importance and power in the region have experienced a transformation. This trend, particularly in recent years, has continued against the American statesmen's will as the outcome of mutual effects of several variables in regional and international politics has brought about an increase in Iran's power in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in such a way that a new Iran has been born; one that is described as a regional superpower by some analysts (Baer, 2008: 2).

**Conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan:** Along with Iran, Iraq



has always represented one of the pillars of the U.S. Middle East policy. Iraq has consistently been one of the major rivals of Iran and has been used as one of the instruments in the U.S. foreign policy against Iran during the Cold War era within the context of checks and balances. With the end of the Cold War and the destruction of Iraqi military capacity as Iran's constant and traditional rival by the United States in the second Persian Gulf war, however, a trend began that culminated in the U.S. war on Afghanistan in 2001 and the overthrow of the Taliban's government as well as another U.S. war on Iraq in 2003 and the fall of Saddam Hussein, which further consolidated Iran's status. Taliban's destruction as an ideological enemy and rival and Saddam's fall as a geopolitical and military adversary and rival of Iran have provided Iran with a unique chance that facilitates other aspects of Iran's power acquisition in the region.

**Hezbollah and Hamas:** The 33-day war between the Lebanese Hezbollah--as Iran's close ally--and the Zionist Regime in 2006 and Hezbollah's successes in the war, though reinforced Hezbollah's status, apparently added to Iran's regional and global status as the main political and spiritual supporter of Hezbollah (Kaye, Nader & Roshan, 2011: 5). The same analysis would also apply to Hamas and its 22-day resistance to the Zionist Regime in 2009. Such resistance gains further importance if we consider the fact that the some Arab adores fought the Zionist Regime for several decades and experienced bitter defeats, but Hezbollah and Hamas, in spite of U.S. and Western political, international, and logistical support for the Zionist Regime, managed to impose a bitter defeat on the country. In addition, the political positions of these groups in general elections and the power structure in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip as well as their public popularity among the peoples is an indicator that has consolidated their place in regional politics.

**Iran's Scientific and Military Capabilities in the Region:**



Although a country's scientific and military capabilities are counted as the traditional sources of a country's power, this situation would be different in the case of Iran. The speed and range of Iran's scientific and military advancements and progress in the recent decade, which coincided with the regional political developments, can be called a scientific leap. For this reason, this phenomenon along with the regional developments has resulted in the reinforcement and consolidation of the foundations of Iran's regional power.

**Destruction of U.S. Traditional Allies:** The sociopolitical movement, which began in January 2011 from Tunisia with the overthrow of Zein el-Abedin Ben Ali, continued with the removal from power of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, and is still going on, has more than anything else targeted U.S. traditional conservative authoritarian allies in the region, challenging the U.S. Middle East foreign policy seriously. In the meantime, the main loser in these developments has been the Zionist Regime, which has been severely isolated with the fall of the governments supporting the West in such a way that the U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and other American officials have admitted it clearly, expressing concerns in this respect.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is clear that these developments have continued to shift the balance of power in the region to Iran's benefit in two aspects: (Kaye, Nader & Roshan, 2011: 5) first, the removal of U.S. allies and the intense isolation of the Zionist Regime and second, the prevalence of Islamic nature in the Middle East movements as evidenced by the results of general elections in Tunisia and Egypt and the rise of Islamists to power in these countries.

Much has been said about the impact of the Iranian Islamic Revolution on these currents. However, in order to recognize the nature of these movements, either the opinions of their leaders or the political conduct and the results of these movements, which will evolve into political systems, have to be taken into consideration.





Statements by the leaders of the movements in Tunisia, Egypt, and even Libya have always been positive concerning the Islamic Republic of Iran within the past months; notably, they have made interesting comments on the role played by the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The future political system in these countries, given the status and popularity of the Islamist movements there, might be influenced by the Iranian Revolutionary model in two ways: 1) being inspired by the original ideas of the Islamic Revolution when it took place, 2) taking advantage of the experiences of the Islamic Republic of Iran's political system in amalgamating Islam and democracy in the form of religious democracy. The system envisaged by the leaders of these movements, of course, has not taken full shape yet. However, it is very unlikely that it will be distant from the religious democratic model found in the Islamic Republic of Iran's system. The reason is the amalgamation of religion and democracy that is plausible in the Islamic commandments can only be found in Iran. Even though we assume that the future political systems of these countries will be based simply upon a democratic structure, if truly free elections are held, Islamic parties and groups will be most likely the winners. In turn, it appears that they would be distant from the Islamic values and a type of Islamic government with native characters, especially considering the deep social foundations of Islam in those societies. Anyway, although these developments are still in their early stages, making any definite appraisal of the process of power acquisition difficult, it will be unlikely that these movements change their nature, considering the deep Islamic character of those societies and long rule of west oriented dictatorships as well as the enormous experiences of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a role model for Islamic governments ahead of their new leaders. In the meantime, struggling against the Zionist Regime will also be considered as a unifying factor between Iran and these movements. Therefore, this process will continue to move ahead in this path for the foreseeable



future.

**The Undermining of the U.S. Credibility:** This variable is derived from reducing the effects of the recent Arab social movements on the status and place of the United States in the region. The departure point for Iran's enhanced power acquisition in the region began with the fall of the Taliban and Saddam in 2003, which coincided with the decline of the U.S. material and spiritual power in the region. Security challenges and challenges to the U.S. military forces in Afghanistan and particularly in Iraq, hefty \$3 billion costs of the Iraq war and American financial crisis of 2007, posed serious threats to both U.S. soft power and hard power. Reductions in the U.S. military budget from \$708 billion in 2010 to \$622 billion in 2012 has been just one of the consequences of these developments. The other consequences of this crisis include the adverse impact on the indicators of investment, employment, inflation, and repression in the American economy as well as on its power.<sup>4</sup>

All these internal and external factors have led Iran to become a regional power, if not a regional superpower, in the past decade. The Washington Center for Strategic and International Studies holds that, given Iran's status, there is currently a serious competition going on between Iran and the United States in the Persian Gulf region (Alsis, Allison & Cordesman, 2011). It is noteworthy that the process of Iranian acquisition of power has not taken place simply under the influence of external involuntary factors. In other words, the fall of the Taliban and Saddam by the United States and the West, U.S. weakness, and the Zionist Regime political isolation alone have not provided the grounds for Iran's power. Although it cannot be denied that regional developments and involuntary factors have provided the required conditions for the realization of Iran's power acquisition acting as precipitating factors in this trend, they alone have not been sufficient for shaping Iran's current status. Nonetheless, even though regional and



international political developments such as U.S. weakness in Afghanistan and Iraq and political awakening movements have occurred in the Middle East, it was not possible for Iran to emerge as a regional power at this level of capability without possessing internal capacities. Furthermore, the outlooks, interests, and strategies of regional powers take shape, to a large extent, in response to internal factors; indeed, these are the variables that can pave the way for further capabilities of a regional power (Flemes, 2010: 406).

## II- Requirements of Iran's Power

It was noted that Iran is mostly a conventional great power in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region, which has needs and conducts similar to other state actors. At the same time, Iran possesses a unique political system with its particular needs and requirements as the problems and challenges it is faced with would demand a search for its particular solutions. Considering these circumstances and the fact that power tends to be exercised and simultaneously, preserving power is more important than its exercise, the main question ahead of Iran in these changing conditions will include: How should Iran act in terms of rules and procedures in order to increase its power while preserving its current authority? What will follow is the cooperation and critique model of power relations at the regional and global levels. Considering the contents of these suggestions and implementation of the following items, the Islamic Republic of Iran, while cooperating with the other political entities for furthering its goals and interests, can take into account the process of critiquing the world system so that it can pursue them on the global scale in future stages. In order to explain this issue, it is necessary to take an inclusive look at all constraints and requirements of Iran's power-conventional and religious.

**Power Maintenance:** Undoubtedly, power brings about some



privileges and consequences, the most salient of which are security and welfare (Walt, 2011). For this reason, a superior world/regional power persistently seeks to ensure that existing balance of power would not shift to its detriment and, as such, a superior power is a power advocating the status quo. This conduct has two sides: on the one hand, it will ensure that its existing capabilities would not decrease; on the other hand, it would monitor the capabilities of other powers so that they would not cause the reduction of the superior power by increasing their own power. In such a game, if A's power increases, it would mean a reduction in B's power; indeed a zero-sum game. As Gilpin puts it, great powers seek an opportunity to strike a new balance that would secure their interests better than in the past (Gilpin, 2002: 132). The rising powers also seek a suitable chance for disrupting the status quo to ask for their share from the superior powers or even replace them. In cases where the states perceive their capability to be more than that of others, they would adopt aggressive strategies intended to expand their sphere of influence. as a matter of fact, a state's ambition in the area of foreign policy has to be regarded as arising from its place in the international system, especially with regard to its military capability (Moshirzadeh, 2005: 131). Thus, given its superior regional status, Iran presently is a power advocating the status quo. It should also be reminded that the balance of power will not persist as such forever and that other dissatisfied actors will try to increase their power and reduce that of their rival. The conducts of the United States and its allies including Israel toward Iran since 2006, and even, since the fall of Saddam Hussein can be explained with reference to their goal of preventing Iran from acquiring power. This has been pursued, by, among other things, forging coalitions, establishing defense missile shield in the region (Turkey and the United Arab Emirates), imposition of intensive sanctions, and even other actions for reducing Iran's power (Kaye, Nader & Roshan, 2011: 5).



**Increase in Power:** A superior power always makes efforts at increasing its national capacity on a daily basis through new investments for expanding its capabilities and elements of national power. The realist scholars, including Mearsheimer, believe that the great powers seek an opportunity to disrupt the balance arising from hegemony to their benefit at the right time (Mearsheimer, 2001: 201). This is the best way for ensuring the continuity and maintenance of the status quo, i.e. the continued security of a hegemonic power. The delicate point regarding this trend is that these efforts by the superior power might at last turn into a power advocating a revision in the status quo because its increased security would mean a reduction in security of rival actors. In this case, a race might take place in the region/world, attracting the capability of the main actor. This might backfire and even might squander the country's resources, finally leading to a fiasco. The conduct of the Soviet Union toward U.S. arms race in the 1980s in the competition over the Strategic Defense Initiative, the so-called Star Wars, clearly exemplified such a situation. In order to avoid entanglement in such a crisis, the best for Iran would be defusing their provocative threshold with the cooperation and critique strategy toward the regional and world actors while maintaining the balance of power to its own advantage.

Turkey's current conduct might be the clearest example of the behavior of a cautious actor in the early stages of power acquisition. Turkey sets out to interact with regional powers including Iran and Saudi Arabia and even trans-regional actors like the United States in order to avoid their provocation against Turkey. Considering its long history of strength, which in some respects goes beyond that of Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran is also able to manage the situation in such a way, while trying to increase its power, Iran can avoid provoking others particularly great powers, neighboring countries, and those with shared interests in the region. At the same time, it has to deter the adversary powers, especially trans-regional



powers, from acting against its national security and interests.

**Advocating Change in the Existing World Order:** The strategic goal of the Southern nation states is to change the status quo and transform the imbalanced situation in international power (Seifzadeh, 2005: 99). It was pointed out that a power protecting the status quo in a designated region is able to make efforts at increasing its power in a rational yet cautious manner so that it would gradually become a great power on the world scale.

China is a salient example during the 1990s and afterwards in this respect. In one of his enduring statements, the Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, stated: "In order to become powerful, China needs a long period of domestic tranquility and peace with the international system" (Sariolghalam, 2010: 58). China has acted in such a way in this period that has created some room for itself by increasing its national power making others accept Chinese share in international interactions.

Brazil has followed suit in Latin America in the past decade. Hence, with Iran's increasing power in the strategically sensitive region of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, given the potentials found in both Iran and the Persian Gulf region, the ground will be provided for Iran's exercise of power at the world level more easily than it is the case for other regions and countries. The role played by Iran in the Muslim World, Latin America, Africa, and East Asia and interactions with the rising powers such as China, Russia, India, Brazil, and Turkey testify that the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran are fully aware of their own capability. Nonetheless, one of the essential characteristics of behavioral pattern of Iranian foreign policy, which is rooted in its national and religious beliefs, involves change in the existing world system, known as the world hegemonic system. In other words, from this perspective, Iran is a status quo power in the region and a power wishing to revise the status quo in the world system. Although this appears paradoxical, as a matter of fact there is no paradox in it. Because a conventional power tends,



by increasing its power in the surrounding area, to exercise its power at the global level--the case of China--. On the other hand, because of its value system, Iran is duty-bound to change the existing world order, which is not anything unusual because an amalgamation of the two is possible. The major point here is that despite tension and tension-making is in the nature of power, particularly at the early stages of gaining power, and naturally, the increase in an actor's power would lead to security concerns for others. Every powerful country has to define a specific limit and threshold for this tension-making in order to avoid the rise of unintended and unfavorable disputes or conflicts at regional and international levels. Most importantly this trend has to be regulated in such a way so to prevent the formation of new coalitions and balances of power vis-à-vis that country. The Islamic Republic of Iran has the chance to pave the way for gradually playing its global part by expanding its leadership role and power in the Muslim World. The main issue here is to pay attention to the balance goals and capabilities.

**Balance of Goals and Capabilities:** This is a general rule in international politics that every political entity has to devise its foreign policy goals and objectives according to its national capabilities, environmental situation, foreign policy priorities, and regional and world powers. In other words, a country's set of objectives has to be in balance with its set of capabilities in the domestic and foreign scenes (Seifzadeh, 2005: 118). For instance, setting such a goal as changing the existing international order as an idea of foreign policy is something desirable for every political entity. Pursuing this goal for Iran as a transcendental goal in foreign policy has to be consistent with its national capabilities and national interest priorities. If domestic and foreign capabilities and constraints do not allow pursuing goals with global range, it would be more rational to set vital goals and interests in a higher place in the hierarchy of national goals by prioritizing them. By making efforts at upgrading its power, it has to provide the grounds for



pursuing ideal goals in the foreseeable future in a better situation. Obviously the Islamic Republic of Iran as a great power possesses its own specific value system and has an outlook and plan for the world order based on its goals arising from Islamic teachings. Thus, it can properly have a universalist value system. Rational management is also required for striking a balance between these goals. This discussion can be combined with the argument respecting the obligations of a great power advanced by some scholars like Paul Kennedy who believes that the increase in commitments (costs of intervention) of a great power should not exceed its power sources, because it would bring about its weakness, and finally, its destruction.

**Peaceful Coexistence:** One of the major rational characteristics in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the recent decade has been emphasis upon peaceful coexistence and collective security in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. The absence of a theoretical plan for practically pursuing and managing this type of peaceful coexistence with the other regional actors and its surrounding nations, nonetheless, is a challenge posed to the theoretical foundations of Iran's foreign policy. This is not derived from the lack of needed willingness to coexist as it seems that all leaders and officials talk about coexistence with other nations; rather, they lack a plan or the needed capability for exercising it. Furthermore, this theory does not contradict the pursuit of a revisionist foreign policy in the international system as claimed by some scholars (Azghandi, 2007: 31). This is because coexistence is intended for the Persian Gulf and the Middle East so that a secure and suitable setting is provided for domestic development in Iran. An expert on the Middle East, Graham Fuller, ascribes this problem in Iran's foreign policy to the cultural and historical layers, which arise from long history of alien invasions of Iran as it has frequently experienced aggression, looting, and treason (Fuller, 1991: 134). He, of course, ascribes this challenge to Iran's capability for coexistence





with foreign (trans-regional) powers, which seems a bit biased. Therefore, one of the methods for acquiring and maintaining power is the ability to coexist with regional powers that at least share goals with Iran concerning the regional stability and security.

**Responsibility:** The discussion of rights and responsibilities represents one of the basic debates in international law (Afsah, June 2006). Moreover, power in international relations and law comes with responsibility as it is the case in the internal law (Telhami, March 2002). The requirement for presenting a new acceptable model for other countries of the world is that the Islamic Republic of Iran acts as a responsible and accountable power in such a way so as to increase its soft power by striking a balance between rights and responsibilities. The principle of commitment to the promises is among the fundamental precepts of Islam in which all Muslims believe. Iranian foreign policy conducts of the past two decades in participating in the resolution of regional crises such as the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, Tajikistan's domestic crisis, and Bosnian Peace Process have to be further enhanced in the Iranian foreign policy. Iran's emphasis upon allegiance to international law (such as Iran's nuclear program under the Non-Proliferation Treaty) and efforts at making other countries follow suit would provide the ground for Iran's acceptance as a responsible power contrary to the propaganda advanced by the West and the countries opposing Iran's power. From this perspective, international law and international regimes, in spite of all the shortcomings and loopholes, can be defined as one of the guiding principles in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in which unequal or oppressive principles and rules are criticized. This method, as a specialized method, can have more general acceptability.

**Respect for Others:** One of the moral and social advices of Islam is to respect the humankind. Both Holy Koran and Prophet's tradition stress such a principle. The Koranic verse "[s]o announce the good news to my servants who listen to the word, and follow



the best (meaning) in it" (Zumar/Verse 18) can be a valuable guideline in this respect. The Prophet of Islam is a good role model, particularly in terms of respect for people, and the Shia Imams are also good models in this regard. The common sense of societies also views respect for others as a good thing and advises it. From the viewpoint of the Muslim scholars, all human beings, irrespective of their appearance, enjoy a particular status and deserve respect. Therefore, it is part of the Prophet's and the infallible Imams, particularly Imam Ali's conduct, to speak to, respect, and treat all human beings, even enemies, in a humane way. This method has to be manifested in the conduct of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy. In customary international law there is a principle known as mutual respect (respect for nations' sovereignty), which in some respects resembles the aforementioned Koranic advice.

**Justice:** The capitalist system in the West, as the prevailing pattern, suffers from many crises, atop of which is lack of spirituality and inattention to rights and justice; of course, this arises from the lack of something higher, which is referred to as modesty and humbleness by the Koran (Seifzadeh, 2005: 38). Iranian foreign policy conducts have gained the attention of the Muslim and non-Muslim nations particularly in recent years, which shows these conducts possess numerous advocates in the world's public sphere. Nevertheless, designing and planning for the establishment of justice-based international institutions and organizations and simultaneous exploitation of the existing international institutions, even changing their structure and amending them in line of establishing justice, have to be atop of the agenda of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy. Scholarly critique based on expertise regarding the unequal and unjust conditions in the international organizations and institutions and making efforts at rectifying them are more efficient than doubting and questioning the foundations and goals of their initial founders.

**National Consensus:** Foreign policy is the continuation of domestic politics. For this reason, it would be wise to say that all the



aforementioned items will be realized properly if they have taken shape by increasing national consensus among the formal and informal elites as well as all the social, economic, specialized, and security strata of the country. It is argued that, in the political realm, a country will be stable if the interests of its rulers are consistent with the public interests and jobs are conducted in line with the country's overall goals and interests. Every political entity has a series of interests and goals, which are called national interests, and states seek to materialize in their foreign policy conducts. National consensus gives rise to enhanced national prestige. Besides, consensus within a political and social system and among the elites of a country concerning national goals and interests as well as international status is the principal condition for promoting foreign policy goals.

### Conclusion

Based on what was discussed, while the Islamic Republic of Iran is a unique system founded upon the belief in God, it is a conventional political system. Through awareness, intelligence, and serious maintenance of its current national power, which has been unprecedented in recent centuries, Iran is able to present a new behavioral pattern in the foreign policy realm. By producing a secure, stable, and desirable surrounding environment for political, social and economic development of Iran, this new pattern can pave the way for Iran's continuity and persistence in the regional and world scenes. Along with the evident trend of Iran's rising power in the region in recent years, one of the issues that have gained less attention is the obstacles and constraints faced with by the emerging powers in the realm of international politics as they try to acquire further power and influence. In fact, the existing great powers do not show any willingness to accept the rising powers or even try to prevent their advancement by ignoring them. However, given the characteristics of Iran's national power and political system, which is based upon its



religious values, typically there are different challenges and constraints ahead of Iran, which are not experienced by the other countries. These challenges arise from Iran's ideological confrontation with the prevailing international system. At the same time, Iran has to continue its life in this international system and even to increase its power. Is it possible to suggest a special behavioral pattern for the Islamic Republic of Iran that would enable it to counter the constraints and increasing challenges ahead of it, which would rely on the particular conditions of its political system? This article suggests that the new pattern of 'cooperation and critique' for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran for engaging the arena of international politics under the new conditions in such a way that it could counter the possible challenges and threats, while continuing to acquire and manage power.

Cooperation and criticizing destructive and unjust conducts in the international system will be possible in foreign policy. The means and requirements for implementing such principles and procedures include specialized and committed human resources, which abound in Iran. To acquire and manage national power without any tension in all soft and hard aspects is the main prerequisite for the realization of goals and values of the Islamic Republic's system. Although the process of power acquisition is tension-making in the early stages, a scholarly and smart management would not allow this tension to turn into continuous crises in foreign policy in such a way that would squander the bulk of the country's energy and capacity. Hence, this assumption will be realizable that with complying with a number of requirements, which were partly discussed here, the cooperation and critique model can become the guideline in the foreign policy of the Iranian religious democratic system for establishing sustainable and stable foreign relations with most countries and the great powers while keeping ties with the world public opinion, particularly the destitute nations.

## Notes

1. See, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Preamble (1989), which describes the method of governance in Islam, and goals and method of formation of Islamic government based on the guardianship of jurisprudent (Velayat Faqih).
2. In this regard, see the author's Master's thesis entitled "Iran's Geopolitics and U.S. Aggressive Foreign Policy towards Iran: 1979-1989," College of International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1995; and Geoffrey Kemp and Robert Harkavy, *Strategic Geography and the Changing Middle East*, Trans. Seyed Mahdi Hosseini Matin, Tehran: Center for Strategic Studies, 2004; Homayoun Elahi, *Iran's Strategic Significance during the Second World War*, Tehran: Center for Academic Publication, 1987; Richard Cottom, *The United States, Iran and the Cold War*, Trans. Mohammad Ali Atashbarg, Tehran: International Translation and Publication Company, 1983; and Barry Rubin, *War among Powers in Iran*, Trans. Mahmood Mashreghi, Tehran: Ashtiani Publications, 1984.
3. For more information, see U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta's statements in an interview with the CBS network (October 2, 2011): [www.cbsnews.com/2012-202\\_162-20114562.html?tag=contentMain;contentBody](http://www.cbsnews.com/2012-202_162-20114562.html?tag=contentMain;contentBody), accessed 17 January 2012.
4. For the global impact of this crisis on American power and on other countries, see Walt, Stephen M. "The End of the American Era," *The National Interest*, (October 25, 2011); Wu Xinbo, "Understanding the Geopolitical Implications of the Global Financial Crisis," *The Washington Quarterly*, (October 2010), Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "American and Chinese Power after the Financial Crisis," *The Washington Quarterly*, (October 2010).

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