

# Revolution and Foreign Policy of Iran: The First Decade Revised

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## Abstract

This article tries to explain the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy towards the Middle East during the first decade of its existence in the framework of the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence. The goal of this strategy is to pressure the revolution and the new political system by expanding the revolution's borders and creating a favorable regional environment for the survival of the Islamic Revolution and its expansion. This article tries to answer the question of what were the most important factors contributing to the introduction, continuation and decline of the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence in the I.R.I's foreign policy in the related period, drawing upon the conceptual potentials and elements of neo-classical realism to explain this strategy. It also seeks to study the different dimensions and changes of this strategy. Along these lines, it argues that the structure and developments of the international and regional systems have been the independent variables contributing to the introduction, continuation and decline of the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence in the I.R.I's foreign policy towards the Middle East. However, the impact of these variables on foreign policy has been carried out through intermediating variables of domestic policy such as ideology, identify of the new political system, leaders' perception of developments and capability of mobilizing resources along with the goals of foreign policy.

Keywords: strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence, the I.R.I's foreign policy, neo-classical realism, Iran- Iraq war, revolution export, Middle East

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## Introduction

The emergence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 completely transformed Iran's regional status and its policies towards the Middle East. Iran's foreign policy in the period before the revolution was characterized by its alliance with the West and maintaining the status-quo. In fact, the strategy of Iran's foreign policy during the Pahlavi era was to union with the West and in this context, its foreign policy agenda made sense. But, the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution radically changed Iran's strategy of foreign policy transforming it from alliance with the West into a strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence.

The strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence contains some elements which distinguish it from the conventional strategies adopted by states in the field of foreign policy. States accordingly to their needs, domestic issues, geographical situation and geopolitics and also under the influence of the structure and function of the international system, adopt particular orientations and strategies to reach their goals and to ensure their national interests. These are manifested in different forms such as isolation, neutrality, non-alignment, alliance and coalition or a mix of two or more of these. But, revolutionary governments because of their special conditions move towards adopting revolutionary strategies in order to secure the conventional goals of foreign policy such as survival and national interests as well as to safeguard the revolution.

In one sense, a revolutionary strategy is a set of policies aimed at creating movement among the people of other countries to forge a



kind of harmony between the political system of those countries and the mother country to confront the common enemies. A revolutionary strategy may be pursued at the state-to-state level, but in this form. It approaches alliance and coalition policy (political-military partnership) which is one of the main orientations of foreign policy seeking to ensure national interests, despite the fact that many analysts believe that separating national interests and ideological preoccupations is not an easy task. In fact, revolutionary strategy should be viewed from the perspective of the state which adopts and implements it. An ideological state may formulate all of its relations with the outside world including those established with other states or movements in line with its strategy to promote the revolution in order to realize its ideological goals. Also, whenever it explicitly tries to secure its national interests, it pretends that all of its efforts are carried out to safeguard the revolutionary headquarters. However, it can be said that a revolutionary strategy includes a range of policies and actions – from political and moral support to consultation, training, economic aid, military assistance, and deploying troops- to changing the status-quo and reaching an ideal. Of course, the realization of each action or policy depends on the capabilities of the revolutionary status.

The strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence could be defined as a type of strategy with a distinct orientation. In fact, this strategy tries to safeguard the revolution and new political system by expanding its borders abroad. This is done according to the goals and ideals of the revolution and the perception of regional and international situations by the revolutionary leaders. Of course, maximizing influence is not simply confined to political and security dimensions and can include ideological and cultural issues as well. As for the Islamic Republic of Iran, except for the short period of Islamic revolution when foreign policy strategies had not become coherent and institutionalized, the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence can be applied to explain the I.R.I's foreign



policy especially towards the Middle East during the first decade of its establishment. In this framework, this article argues that the Islamic Republic of Iran sought to transform regional order by maximizing revolutionary influence given the Islamic ideology of the revolution and its perception of the regional situation. But at the same time, we should not overlook the fact that regional and international threats posed against the new political system forced the I.R.I to try and maximize its influence and find state or non-state allies in the region.

Since the I.R.I foreign policy can be considered the most important characteristic and heritage of the Islamic revolution. The most impressive change occurred by the advent of revolution in Iran and the fall of Pahlavi regime is related to the way for interaction with international actors and developments, especially in the Middle East, this article tries to explain the I.R.I's foreign policy towards the Middle East during the first decade of its establishment each covers the period from the emergence of revolution to the end of Iran-Iraq war on the basis of the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence. Along these lines, the question is that which factors were influential in the introduction, continuation and decline of the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence in the I.R.I's foreign policy towards the Middle East during the first decade after the revolution? To answer this question, a transitory hypothesis is proposed in which regional and international developments constitute an independent variable and the aspects related to domestic politics – ideology and the identification of a political system, the leader's perceptions and outlooks, and the capability to mobilize resources – are considered as mediating variables in the formation, continuation and weakening of the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence in the I.R.I's foreign policy towards the Middle East. This article explain the I.R.I's foreign policy on the basis of neo-classical realism and for this reason, first this theory and its analytical variables are briefly mentioned. Then, it explains regional and international developments relevant to the strategy of maximizing revolutionary



influence as well as mediating variables related to the domestic politics. Finally, the different stages of the introduction, continuation and decline of this strategy are studied by discussing its components.

## **I- Frame of Analysis**

Each of the realist approaches has their own view on foreign policy. Having studied these approaches, it can be realized that neo-classical realism has the highest capacity for studying the foreign policy of different states because of posting foreign policy as an independent variable and emphasizing it (Assadi, 2010: 225-246). In neo-classical realism, the focus is placed on foreign policy behavior and like the claims made by neo-realists, foreign policy cannot be considered as a function of systemic conditions (Schmidt, 2005: 543-545). Neo-classical realism dismisses the perception of state as a black box and advances factors such as leaders' characters and understanding relations between state, society, and the state's interests in explaining foreign policy. This theory believes that systemic constraints influence the foreign policy behavior of states through mediating variables. Another important point is that offensive neo-classic thinkers like Schweller believe that states are seeking to maximize their influence in the international environment, rather than emphasizing power and security as their main goals (Schmidt, 2005: 543-545).

In explaining the foreign policy of states in the framework of a neo-classical realist theory, it should be noted that systemic constraints do not directly influence foreign policy. Instead, mediating variables play the main role in this respect. Although balance of power in regional and international environments and the anarchic nature of the international system are among the main factors of foreign policy-making, the leaders' perception of these factors and state structure mostly consisting of relations between state and society are influential in formulating foreign policy. Another important point is that solidarity among elites or their differences have a significant impact on the foreign policy of states. In neo-classical realism, there is



a complicated relation between system-level variables and unit-level ones in shaping "states" foreign policy. But in most cases, system-level ones including domestic politics, and leaders' perception of relative power and systemic conditions are mediating and states' foreign policy is dependent variable. States are facing major threats and opportunities and unit-level variables and opportunities and variables limit or facilitate the ability of any sort of states such as great powers and small states to react against systemic constraints.

Neo-classical realism conceptualizes powers as an instrument for achieving envisioned results, not as a goal in itself. For neo-classical realists, the dominant behavioral model resulting from enforcing power – which is considered foreign policy output – is to maximize influence. This reveals a key innovation in neo-classical realism as opposed to maximizing power in the framework of offensive realism and maximizing security in the thoughts of defensive realists. Neo-classical realists agree with classical realists that interests are defined on the basis of power. Therefore, neo-classical realists believe that since an increase in resources often leads to more ambitions, states are seeking to maximize influence not power (Schmidt and Thomas, 2012).

In sum, to explain the I.R.I's foreign policy during the first decade of the Islamic revolution in the framework of neo-classical realism, we can study first the structural factors, as well as regional and international developments as an independent variable determining foreign policy of a state. Then, mediating variables influencing Iran's foreign policy consisting of factors related to domestic politics such as the identity and ideology of the I.R.I, perceptions of people involved in foreign policy and their ability in extracting resources for implementing the goals of foreign policy are studied. Finally, the foreign policy behavior of the I.R.I in the relevant period in the framework of maximizing revolutionary influence is studied.



## II- Regional and International Structures

Since in neo-classical realism, the independent variable determining states' foreign policy is the structure and development of their peripheral regional and international system, here, we should have a clear understanding of the regional and international situation during the first decade of the Islamic revolution. At the time of the advent of the Islamic revolution and during the first decade of the existence of the I.R.I, the power structure in the international system was bipolar and the policy of two superpowers towards the Middle East was balanced. In other words, the bipolar structure of power in the international system dictated the power structure and the kind of relations that actors in the Middle East had with each other. For this reason, prior to the emergence of the Islamic Revolution, the power structure in the Middle East was shaped by rivalry between the two superpowers and a bipolar structure consisting of pro-western conservative countries and pro-Soviet radical countries. But the emergence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and Iraq's attack on Iran followed by an eight year war between the two countries, transformed regional arrangements which in turn had repercussions on Iran's strategy towards the region.

The emergence of the Islamic revolution in Iran in February 1979 changed the balance of power in the Middle East which was previously in favor of the Western world. In fact, with the advent of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the order previously governing the Middle East collapsed and the process of shaping a new order began taking into account the Islamic ideology and foreign policy of the new political system established in Iran. Graham Fuller maintained that Iran's Islamic revolution changed the geo-strategic game in the Persian Gulf and derived Iran, the strongest actor in the region, into hard-liners' camp from the conservatives' camp (Fuller, 1994: 101-102).

In fact, Iran's Islamic Revolution led to the shaping of a new



political system in the Middle East and changed the regional balance of power in three ways. The first issue was that Iran withdrew from its alliance with the West upsetting the balance of power in the Middle East to the disadvantage of the West. The second issue was that despite Iran's withdrawal from the Western bloc, it did not enter into strategic relations with the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. Instead, Iran adopted an independent approach on the basis of the slogan "No East, No West" which could be interpreted as revolutionary non-alignment. It means that one of the main actors in the Middle East defined an independent status far from alliance with great powers for itself in the bipolar system and rose as a new political force in the region. However, the political and ideological consequences of the Islamic Revolution for regional countries had a significant role in determining the foreign policy of these countries and power configuration in the region.

Generally, the emergence of the Islamic revolution in Iran upset the balance of power in the Middle East, on the one hand, and changed the attitude of great powers and regional actors towards the situation of the Middle East. Beyond the previous polarization, a new actor emerged in regional equations seeking to present a new definition of regional order not compatible with the criteria and interests of other regional actors. For the West and the U.S. the I.R.I was a force capable of destructing regional order to their disadvantage and threatening the stability and security of their allied conservative Arab states and the Israeli regime. More importantly, the I.R.I was gradually strengthening its anti-American tendencies. For the Soviet Union, despite its initial hope, growing concerns about the spread of revolution into its Muslim republics as well as Iran's policy towards Afghanistan prevented it from supporting Iran or foreign strategic relations with Iran. Also, some regional actors negatively reacted against the I.R.I due to their concerns about Iran's new regional policy and its Islamic ideology. Therefore, the I.R.I faced an incompatible international and regional environment and the negative





approach of international powers and regional actors against itself.

Iran's attack on Iraq in 1980 was another important development affecting the regional system in the Middle East. Saddam's military attack on Iran was supported by a wide range of regional and international actors in order to confront Iran and to contain its revolutionary system. Therefore, it was claimed that the Islamic revolution of Iran was contained by a composition of West's material powers and Iraq (Hashmi, 2009: 223). In fact, Iraq's attack on Iran affected the approaches taken by the two superpowers towards the Middle East and the regional order took on new characteristics given the stances adopted by regional actors towards the Iran-Iraq war.

The main pillar of the U.S. strategy towards the Middle East during Iran-Iraq war was supporting Iraq and striking balance in the war. The US' definite and ultimate goal in Iraq's imposed war on Iran was managing the war so that no parties could win. The Soviet approach on the Iran-Iraq war experienced more ups and downs and was more complicated. Despite the fact that the Soviet Union had always had warm relations with the Iraqi regime, during the initial phase of the war when the Baath regime needed foreign support badly, the Soviets became doubtful to accord full support to it. But, with the passage of time, the Soviet Union which had not obtained any results from expanding its relations with Iran and because of tilting the balance in favor of Iran in war theaters shifted its policy towards, Iraq from neutrality to more effective support. However, developments subsequent to battles occurred in spring and summer 1987 when the war came to its close had positive effects on Iran-Soviet relationships and reduced the level of Soviet support of Iraq (Shemesh, 1992: 208).

Also, Iran-Iraq war produced some change in regional coalitions due to the stances taken by Arab countries towards the war. While the majority of regional Arab countries, especially the Southern Persian Gulf Arab states, Egypt and Jordan overtly gave their full support of



Iraq, few countries like Syria and Libya took side with Iran. In fact, the prospect of Iraq's defeat in the war entailed some major political change in the Arab world. Arab conservative oil producing countries which in the past had considered Iraq as a major threat became the main supporters of this country in its war with Iran (David, 1990: 112-124).

In sum, in explaining the developments of international and regional systems from the advent of the Islamic revolution until the end of war, it can be said that the Islamic revolution upset the regional balance of power to the disadvantage of the West, as a result of which the West led by the U.S. considered the Islamic revolution and Iran's new regional policy as a threat against its interests in the middle East and tried to contain and balance Iran. On the other hand, the Soviet Union initially evaluated the Islamic revolution as a positive development but given Iran's non-alignment policy and its opposition to both superpowers, it decided to not support Iran. Also, many regional actors showed their hostility towards the I.R.I and posed threats against this country; these attitudes were influential in shaping Iran's foreign policy.

## II- Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy

Although regional and international conditions played an important role during the first decade of the existence of the I.R.I, we should not overlook the role of domestic politics variables in maximizing revolutionary influence. In fact, the impact of the above mentioned regional and international factors through domestic politics variables as mediating variables has shaped Iran's foreign policy strategies. Along these lines, we address three main mediating variables influencing the I.R.I.'s policy towards the Middle East: ideology and identity of the new political system; political leaders' perception of regional and international developments; and the state's capability for extracting and mobilizing resources to enforce their foreign policy actions.



The emergence of a new political system out of an Islamic revolution shows the importance of Islamic ideology in the behavior patterns of the Islamic Republic of Iran. For this reason, one of the most influential variables determining the I.R.I's foreign policy is Islamic ideology. Therefore, in the field of foreign policy, Islamic-Shiite ideology is a discourse consisting of concepts and assumptions which serve to understand foreign policy events and structures. It also influences the actions, reactions and behavior pattern of Iran's foreign policy (Dehghani Firoozabadi, 2009: 89-90). Islamic ideology played a much more extensive role in the I.R.I's foreign policy towards the Middle East during the first decade of the establishment of the I.R.I, and was considered one of the essential components in defining the identity of the I.R.I. Also, the interpretation of regional developments by the political leaders and the imperatives and red lines of Iran's regional policy were formulated in the framework of this ideology. Although, the influence of Islamic ideology has not been always exerted in the same form and at a fixed level, and objective factors as well as realities on the ground have imposed some imperatives on foreign policy behavior leading to some extent of flexibility and a mix of idealism and pragmatism in different periods and issues, it is clear that during the initial years after revolution, idealism and compliance to ideology were much more stronger than pragmatism.

Undoubtedly Islamic ideology has been the major factor shaping policy. However in explaining the identity of the I.R.I, other factors should not be neglected. The identity of the I.R.I, as a political system realized in the framework of a territorial sphere and resulted from the Islamic revolution which proceeds on the path of development, could be defined as a quadratic formula with four sides of Islamic, Iranian, revolutionary and non-aligned. This four-sided identity expresses the I.R.I's self-perception as well as its perception of others and is verified in practice. Of course, the factors which constitute the identity of the I.R.I do not have the same weight and status. Without any doubt, being Islamic is at the top of this square. It can even be claimed that



being Iranian, revolutionary and non-aligned are subsumed by being Islamic. In other words, being Islamic involves being Iranian, revolutionary and non-aligned. Therefore, we can summarize the identity of the I.R.I in "being Islamic" as understood from its title (Dehghani Firoozabadi, 2009: 54).

The important manifestations of ideology and Islamic, revolutionary and independent identity of the I.R.I in its foreign policy towards the Middle East during the first decade of its existence were: supporting Islamic movements and groups, defending the rights and interests of Muslim nations in the Middle East, and emphasizing Islamic values, structures and functions in the regional setting; emphasizing the export of the Islamic revolution to the region and supporting revolutionary movements and groups in the Middle East aimed at creating a favorable regional atmosphere to sustain and expand the revolution; criticizing and dismissing the dominant international and regional order influenced by the interests and will of the two Eastern and Western superpowers and making efforts to establish an independent regional order by adopting an independent foreign policy; rejecting domination and submission and putting an emphasis on national and regional pride and independence; struggling against oppression, seeking justices and combatting arrogant powers at the regional level as well as confronting the Israeli regime as a part of the arrogant system; and protecting the oppressed and liberation movements, and establishing contact with peoples in the region and independent governments and those opposed to the U.S. and Israel.

Political leaders' perception of regional and international systems and its developments could be considered as another important mediating variable in foreign policy in the framework of neo-classical realism. In other words, it can be said that regional and international developments and variables do not directly determine the actions of foreign policy rather it's the leaders' perception of these developments that determines consequences and actions. Because in the final evaluation of these leaders and the people involved in



foreign policy have their own personality.

Since organizational weakness has a direct relation with the role of individuals, during the first decade after a revolution, given the fledgling political structure including in the domain of foreign policy, on the one hand, and the special status of a revolutionary leadership in the new circumstances, on the other hand, the attitudes of political leaders has had a great impact on the nature of foreign policy behavior of the I.R.I. After a brief period immediately following the emergence of the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini was the main political leader who had a great part in formulating the I.R.I's foreign policy towards the Middle East. Therefore, his perception of the development of regional and international system contributed significantly to shaping the I.R.I's foreign policy behavior towards the Middle East.

The most important principles constituting Imam Khomeini's foreign policy insight were as follows: unjust nature of the international system based on superpowers' domination and the necessity to confront the oppressors and protecting the oppressed as well as the imperative of bringing about change in the international system;(Javadi Arjamand, 2011:98) dismissing the domination and interference of great powers in the affair of Islamic countries and the Middle East and rejecting alliance with Eastern and Western superpowers; taking a decisive stance against Israel and opposing the Zionist regime on the basis of principles as well as emphasizing the struggle of Muslim people against this regime while supporting Palestinian people and resistance groups; exporting the Islamic revolution and revolutionary values to regional countries, gives to the cultural and soft nature of the revolution; criticizing the dependence of Islamic governments on extra-regional powers, especially those monarchies that adopted non-Islamic approaches; paying attention to the efforts made by the West and great powers for countering the Islamic revolution and the I.R.I, because of its defense of Islam and Islamic rule, the invitation for Islamic unity, and struggling against



international Zionism, (Tahaii, 2009: 96-97) putting emphasis on, Islamic fraternity and supporting Islamic and liberation movements in the region and all over the world; the I.R.I is in service of the Islamic revolution, not vice versa, and is a factor for consolidating it, in the same vein, the I.R.I's foreign policy is a program for heralding the revolution (Tahaii, 2009: 99).

One of the other mediating variables that have had a significant impact on foreign policy actions is the capability of a state for extracting and mobilizing resources to realize the goals of foreign policy and to implement its strategies. In other words, a state should have appropriate means to achieve its foreign policy goals. Although a country may have great potentials in terms of national power, this power is not necessarily available to be used in furthering foreign policy objectives, therefore, the government should be able to extract and mobilize required resources. Of course, given the kind and level of required resources and means for different fields of foreign policy, all things are not the same for every country.

The I.R.I inherited an economic-social system based on oil in the division of labor in the framework of international economy from preceding governments. While during the early years after the revolution, new elites tried to reorganize the economy, the war with Iraq prevented them from achieving any success in reorienting the economy and reducing its dependency on oil. As a result, the hopes for changing Iran's relations with capitalist international systems dashed (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, 1997: 35) Therefore, oil and the revenues obtained from its sale are the main economic resources of a government for realizing its foreign policy goals during the period after the revolution. In other words, the type of strategies and actions pursued by the I.R.I is related to its oil revenues. Thus pursuing more ambitious goals would be possible when Iran has access to new oil resources. Following the breakout of the Iran-Iraq war, oil prices increased globally. Because both countries are among major oil producers and it was likely that the war would spread to other Persian



Gulf oil producing countries or influence them in other ways.

This remarkable increase in oil prices occurred in the first year of the 1980s leading to Iran's higher oil revenue which in turn increased its budget. For example, while in 1980, Iran's revenue from selling crude oil reached more than 11 billion U.S. dollars, three years later in 1983, Iran's oil revenue amounted to more than 20 billion dollars. Some believe that this increase in oil revenues provided Iran with sufficient financial resources to fund revolutionary missions abroad (Yaseen Alnahas, 2007: 112). But in late 1984 and early 1985, as the war continued, the I.R.I faced different economic problems. Iran's economic problems such as increasing inflation and the shortage of liquidity were deepened. On the other hand, Iran needed weapons for continuing the war. At the same time, oil prices, unexpectedly dropped, so that Iran's oil revenue fell to 15 billion dollars in 1984 and 13 billion dollars in 1985. However, the heaviest blow struck the Iranian economy in 1986 with lowering its oil revenues to only 6 billion dollars (Yaseen Alnahas, 2007: 116). This sharply reduced Iran's economic and military capabilities and undoubtedly was effective in Iranian leaders' decision to end the war.

### III- Maximizing Revolutionary Influence

During the first decade after the emergence of the I.R.I, Iran not only distanced itself from the strategy of alliance with the West in the Middle East as a policy for maintaining the status-quo, but also adopted the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence for organizing its foreign policy behavior. A strategy which sought to revise the established order and to present a new definition of regional order in the Middle East. There are three distinct periods for the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence: first, the shaping period from the advent of the Islamic revolution in February 1979 until the beginning of the war; second, the consolidation and continuation period from the beginning of the war until the acceptance of Security Council resolution 598 by Iran; and third, the



declining period from the acceptance of resolution 598 until the end of war.

With the emergence of the Islamic revolution, the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence did not suddenly prevail in Iran's foreign policy, rather it passed a shaping period. Because during the early years of the Islamic revolution, foreign policy was still not completely guided by a distinct and cohesive strategy due to the lack of the consolidation of domestic political structures and the unclear nature of Iran's relationship with great powers and regional actors. For this reason, shaping a strategy for maximizing revolutionary influence was on the one hand, the result of developments in the international and regional environment, and internal subjective and structural factors, on the other hand.

Some believe that Iran's foreign policy was gradually constructed through an interactive process completed somewhat after the liberation of Khorramshahr in 1982. Initially Iranian leaders had a negative, oppressive and exploitative picture of dominant international systems, based on which they had presented a preliminary identity of themselves. Yet what formed the new foreign policy was their interaction with the regional and international environment. In other words, Iran's foreign policy was constructed through an interaction between Iran and the great powers as well as regional countries. In the process, concerns about the defeat of the revolutionary government and the repetition of the 1952 coup, and more importantly Iraq's invasion against Iran were the most important issues that laid the foundation of Iran's new foreign policy as well as the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence at the regional level.

In addition, the U.S. embassy hostage taking in Tehran and the beginning of Iran's victories in battle fronts which culminated in the liberation of Khorramshahr played an important role in that process (Shoori, 2011: 83-101). The foreign policy of the transitory government could be termed as the transition period for entrance into





the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence. The priority of the transitory government in the field of foreign policy was to end the alliance with the West and adopt the policy of non-alignment (Ramezani, 2009: 60). But a series of domestic, regional and international issues weakened these orientations in Iran's foreign and regional policy and helped the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence become dominant.

Following the creation of relative cohesion among Iranian revolutionary leaders, the hostage taking crisis, and the beginning of the war revealed the hostile and confrontational attitudes of the international system and a large part of the regional actors towards the I.R.I. This and the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence characterized by the export of the Islamic revolution to the Middle East, the continuation of war against Iraq and the opposing conservative Arab countries became the core of the I.R.I's foreign policy towards the Middle East.

The export of the Islamic revolution can be considered as the main pillar of the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence during the first decade after the revolution. In fact, Iranian political leaders advanced and pursued the idea of exporting the revolution given its Islamic, popular, supranational and universal nature. The Middle East is the most fertile region for accommodating the Islamic revolution due to its geographical proximity and the existence of Islamic cultural and social grounds (Dehghani Firoozabadi, 2008: 206-208). Irrespective of different supposed meanings and methods the export of the revolution in the framework of the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence towards the Middle East can be emphasized in the following points: protecting against the regional order and the policies of regional countries; supporting non-governmental currents and groups, especially Islamic and pro-Iranian revolution groups; expanding the moral and political influence of the Islamic revolution through finding allies and creating a favorable regional atmosphere; opposing the presence and intervention of the



superpowers in the region aimed at dominating Islamic countries, confronting the Islamic revolution and supporting the Israeli regime.

One of the other dimensions of the regional policies of the I.R.I during the first decade after the revolution was conducting, managing and continuing the war against Iraq. Iraq's attack on Iran which was carried out by Iraqi leaders as a result of the calculation of new threats and opportunities provided by the emergence of the Islamic revolution was the main preoccupation of the country during this period, and this played a significant role in shaping the other dimensions of Iran's regional policy. The consequences of Iraq's attack on Iran for the formation and stabilization of a new identity for Iran's foreign policy were much beyond the bilateral implications. In fact, the Iran-Iraq war created a frontline between regional countries in terms of their stance in supporting or opposing Iran and clearly delineated a dividing line between Iran's foes and friends. The Iran-Iraq war was an important factor in shaping the I.R.I's security policies and attitudes and its perception of regional security arrangements, because during this war different regional and extra-regional actors supported Iraq.

The imposed war against Iran was interpreted as a widespread attempt to threaten the existence of the Islamic revolution and the most serious security threat against Iran during the first decade after the revolution. For this reason, conducting and directing the war in its various military, economic and human aspects, drawing upon all resources and regional and international allies became the top priority of foreign policy. In the time when some parts of Iran had been occupied by Iraq, the I.R.I pursued the policy of driving out the enemy from its soil and safeguarding its territorial integrity. However after this, Iran gained the upper hand in the war theatrics, especially after the liberation of Khorramshahr which upset the balance of power in favor of Iran. In the process, a number of resolutions were issued by the UN Security Council to end the war and many regional actors and superpowers urged both countries to end their hostilities.



Despite UN Security Council resolutions as well as regional and international opposition to the continuation of war, the I.R.I practically preferred to continue the war. Although the UN, at the request of Saddam, urged Iran to accept a ceasefire, there were many obstacles on the way of a ceasefire. On the one hand, Iraq still insisted on the violation of the Algiers treaty and its sovereignty over Arvandrood. On the other hand, Iraq still occupied some parts of the Iranian soil and the Iranian leadership insisted on the fall of Saddam. For this reason, Iran did not accept the UN Security Council resolution 598 which proposed a ceasefire.

From one point of view, Iran's decision to continue the war resulted from not realizing its envisioned conditions for a ceasefire as well as the perception that there were still serious threats against the Islamic revolution at the regional and international levels and international actors and organizations could not be trusted for ending the war and threats. However, some others believed that Iran tried to defeat Iraq in the war relying upon its upper hand in the battle fronts and its greater economic and human resources, (AL-Rubaimi, 2002: 298). It also exploited this as a major achievement for ensuring its national security and regional status. Along these lines, it was argued that when Iraq offered a ceasefire in 1981, while some Iranian leaders welcomed this move, others believed that Iraq's defeat would pave the way for Iran's revolutionary influence to spread into the Persian Gulf and the Middle East (Yaseen Alnahas, 2007: 110-111).

In sum, despite the continuing threat, perception was the most important factor for the continuation of Iran-Iraq war. It would not be too difficult to understand why some Iranian leaders considered that defeating Iraq could be an important turning point for maximizing the influence of the Islamic revolution at the regional and international levels which could at least prevent the spread of threats against the revolutionary government of Tehran.

One of the other axes of the strategy of maximizing Iran's revolutionary influence in the Middle East was opposing Arab



conservative regimes, especially in the Persian Gulf region. Iran under the Pahlavi regime was allied with conservative Arab regimes, especially in the Persian Gulf and other monarchies such as Jordan. But, with the emergence of the Islamic revolution, essential differences were gradually created between Iran and these Arab regimes in the Middle East. The Islamic ideology of the Iranian revolution and the gradual consolidation of its popular, Islamic, supranational and anti-Western features worried conservative Arab political regimes, especially in the Persian Gulf. During this period, the general perception of regional conservative governments was that the Islamic and Shiite ideology of the Iranian revolution and especially the issue of exporting the revolution and its impact on regional nations and communities would lead to regional instability and insecurity. For this reason, a rather integrated security front was formed against the I.R.I with the support of Western powers, especially the U.S. Of course, the I.R.I as a fledgling revolutionary state concerned about its national security regarded the many approaches adopted by regional countries as a threat to its existence. Therefore, the Islamic ideology of Iran's new political system and the reactions of the Persian Gulf countries towards it intensified confrontations between Iran and these conservative Arab regimes.

At the regional level, Iran had tense relations with Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and North Yemen during the 1980s. Only Syria was considered an ally of Iran, while South Yemen and Libya had friendly relations with it. Although the I.R.I maintained its normal relations with Algeria, Pakistan and Turkey, the two latter countries were non-Arab and none of them established strategic relations with Iran (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, 1997: 297). In fact, under new regional conditions and being in a war situation, Iran was faced with a range of conservative Arab regimes who while supporting Iraq had tried to confront Iran's new policies through creating the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and thereby containing Iran's revolutionary influence (Ehteshami,



1999: 74).

The I.R.I was faced in the first decade of its existence with serious challenges, constraints and reactions at the regional level preventing it from realizing its strategy for maximizing its revolutionary influence. Along these lines, Iran sought to find strategic allies among governments as well as to organize or support effective non-governmental groups and movements in the region. Iran's regional policy concentrated on the Mediterranean, especially Syria and Lebanon. Iran tried to deepen its new alliance with Syria and to invest on politicizing the Shia community in Lebanon as well as to organize its sympathizers in this country. The most important achievement of Iran's policy towards Lebanon was helping the formation of Hezbollah. The importance of Lebanon for Iran also lied in its geopolitical factors, because Lebanon provided some opportunities for bypassing Iraq and having access to more supporters in the Arab world (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, 1997: 298).

During the 1980s, Iran was able to establish close strategic relations with Syria which continued in the subsequent decades. Both countries took distance from the West, rejected peace with Israel, and confronted Saddam Hossein's regime during the decade after the Iranian revolution. In addition, the Alavi government in Syria like Iran hated Sunni extremists. Both countries also tried to use Lebanon's Shia population to struggle against Israel. While most of the Arab world supported Iraq in its war with Iran, Damascus took sides with Tehran (Byman and others, 2001: 81). Ehteshami believes that given the lack of similarity between the governments in Iran and Syria – one is Islamic and the other is secular and pan-Arab -- systemic factors played a significant role in the strategic alliance between these two nations during the post-revolutionary period. Opposing the U.S. and Western hegemony in the Middle East at the international level, confronting common threats like Iraq and Israel, and balancing Western-oriented actors such as Egypt and Saudi



Arabia are among systemic variables worth mentioning (Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, 1997: 87-88).

Supporting non-governmental groups and Islamic movements as Iran's strategic allies in the region began after the Islamic revolution. This was especially manifested in supporting Hezbollah. These efforts constituted the core of Iran's strategy of maximizing its revolutionary influence, and in fact, Iran tried to establish close links with non-governmental actors in the framework of movement politics, given the lack of close relations with many regional states. Although, the I.R.I tried to bypass Shia-Sunni divisions and support all movements, developments such as the Iran-Iraq war created some limitations for this policy. As a result, regions populated by Shias had greater potentials for being influenced by Iran's endeavors. Despite the beginning of some movements in different countries including Iraq, the establishment and activities of Hezbollah were one of the most successful experiences of the I.R.I along these lines. Therefore, the I.R.I could support a non-governmental ally which played a significant role in the framework of its regional policies during the subsequent decades.

One of the other pillars of the strategy of maximizing Iran's revolutionary influence has been to confront the Israeli regime. While abandoning the Pahlavi regime's interactions with Israel, the I.R.I tried to adopt a strong anti-Israeli approach, condemned any contacts made by Arab countries with Israel and protected states and groups opposing Israel. Along these lines, Iran closed Israel's embassy and delivered its premises to the P.L.O. It severed its diplomatic relations with Egypt as a result of the Camp David treaty, harshly criticized conservative Arab regimes because of their stances towards Zionism, expanded its relations with Syria and protected Palestinian and Lebanese resistance groups. Given the ideological look of Iran's leadership to Israel as well as the threatening approach of the Israeli regime towards the I.R.I, confronting Israel became an important axis in the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence.



The strategy of maximizing Iran's revolutionary influence which was designed and operationalized in the Middle East was challenged till the middle of the war but weakened during the final period of the war and finally ended with the acceptance of the UN Security Council resolution 598 and the termination of the Iran-Iraq war. In this regard, a series of new regional and international developments along with internal problems and obstacles led to the reevaluation of regional policies by Iranian leaders. It focused on ending the war leaving aside the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence. In the process, international and regional systemic variables played a central role leading to a new evaluation of the situation by Iranian leaders and a shift in the strategy of their foreign policy.

At the international and regional levels, the decision made by the two superpowers and other important regional actors to prevent Iran's victory in the war and thereby exert various pressures on this country played the main role in Iran's new evaluations in regard to foreign policy issues. In fact, Iran's victories in war operations and the change in the military balance of power in favor of Iran led to more serious regional and international support for the Iraqi regime, upsetting the political balance of power to Iran's disadvantage. Actions aimed at confronting Iran during the final period of war were instrumental in this regard.

With the amelioration of Iran's situation in the battle field, Iraq's supporters tried to prevent the end of war while Iran had the upper hand. Along these lines, decisions made by U.S. and the Soviet Union were of great importance. The Reagan administration tried to retrieve Washington's lost credentials and did not allow the war to end with I.R.I's victory. The Soviet Union also took a similar position with the West and while emphasizing the necessity of ending the war, opposed the removal of Saddam from power and adopted a harsher tone against Iran. Given the above point, a new round of pressures began to be exerted against Iran by regional and extra-regional powers which were more systematic, more purposeful and unprecedented



compared to the past. At this stage, economic pressures exerted on Iran reached their highest level. Lowering oil prices and not buying Iranian oil was the most important move in this regard. European countries and Japan, the main buyers of Iranian oil, explicitly declared that they would not buy Iranian oil until Iran settled its problems with the U.S. (acceptance of peace). From a political point of view, the U.S. and the Soviet Union tried to increase their pressures on Iran either individually or in the framework of bilateral and multilateral conferences, while beginning concerned efforts at the UN, the result of which was the ratification of resolution 598. In the military sphere, unlike the past, the U.S. in addition to increasing its military assistance to Iraq directly entered into war with Iran. This culminated with the shooting down of an Iranian Airbus (Mehdizadeh).

In the internal sphere, the Iranian government was not able to extract and mobilize resources for realizing its foreign policy goals, and with the war costs, it faced significant challenges in this regard. In late 1984 and early 1985, with the continuation of war, the I.R.I faced various economic problems. In fact, Iran's economic woes such as increasing inflation and liquidity shortages intensified by war and these problems coincided with Iran's need for arms to continue the war. While intensifying economic problems and weapons shortages created major difficulties for the ruling elite, the most painful problem for the Iranian economy was the unexpected fall of oil prices. Iran's revenue from oil in 1983 was more than 20 billion dollars, but it reached 15 billion dollars in 1984 and only 13 billion dollars in 1985. However, the most serious reduction in oil price was in 1986 which lowered Iran's revenue from oil to 6 billion dollars (Yaseen Alnahas, 2007: 116).

Therefore, given the new international and regional circumstances and internal factors as well as the evaluation of existing threats and opportunities, the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence lost its momentum for it to be implemented longer. With the end of war, a new stage began for the I.R.I's regional policies. In





fact, Iranian political elites realized that international and regional structures and challenges as well as the lack of internal resources had made the continuation of the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence out of the question. The continuation of that strategy could have led to the emergence of essential dangers and threats for the survival of national security of the entire country through the weakening of national power. However, the decline and end of the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence was not tantamount to the end of revolutionary and Islamic ideals and goals in the I.R.I's foreign policy during the subsequent periods.

## Conclusion

The main strategy of Iran's foreign policy towards the Middle East during the Pahlavi period was alliance with the West and cooperation with the U.S. and Western-oriented conservative regimes in the region. The emergence of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 had a great impact on Iran's foreign policy paving the way for the domination of the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence during the first decade after the revolution -- that is until the end of the eight-year war with Iraq. The strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence in addition to safeguarding survival and security, the common feature of all foreign policy orientations, pursued an expanding revolution. Given the above, the influential factors in the introduction, continuation and decline of the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence in the I.R.I's foreign policy can be summarized into two groups.

What was explained in this article in the theoretical framework of neo-classical realism regarding the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence in the I.R.I's foreign policy during the first decade after the revolution was that developments in regional and international environments were the main factors determining the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence. Certainly, this decisive impact was exercised through mediating variables that were the



components of Iran's domestic politics-ideology and the identity of the new political system, perception of leaders and those involved in implementing foreign policy and available resources. In other words, regional and international developments influenced by the Islamic revolution and its related implications such as Iraq's military invasion, on the one hand, and the approach of regional and international actors, on the other hand, shaped the new strategy of Iran's foreign policy that was the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence through internal mediating variables.

Although the Islamic revolution of Iran has had regional and international goals and ideals and rejected the international and regional bipolar order, the security and confrontational approach taken by many regional and international actors toward the new political system in Iran prompted the I.R.I to create a favorable regional environment for its survival by adopting the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence. The adoption of this strategy instigated by regional and international approaches toward the Islamic revolution of Iran and Iran's new political system was highly compatible with Islamic ideology, multi-dimensional identity-Islamic, revolutionary, Iranian and non-aligned, political leaders' insight, and available economic resources. Therefore, after a short initial period, and especially with the beginning of the war, the strategy of maximizing revolutionary influence dominated the realm of foreign policy and manifested itself in components such as exporting the Islamic revolution, continuing the war with Iraq, opposing conservative Arab states allied with the West, confronting the Israeli regime, and finally supporting governmental and non-governmental allies. However, intensifying regional and international pressures and hostilities towards the I.R.I and the shortage of internal resources gradually led people involved in the implantation of foreign policy to shift their strategy towards the Middle East to safeguard the I.R.I's existence and to ensure its vital security interests.



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