Radosław FIEDLER
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
https://orcid.org/ 0000-0003-1573-9898

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INTERNAL FACTORS AND ITS IMPACT ON IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY

A state's foreign policy is the process interconnected with several influential factors and complicated interplay between internal (domestic) and external policies. The external policy always reveals internal conditioning, but also in reverse (Rosneau, 1967).

In the democratic model the state's foreign policy is thoroughly discussed and should have minimal societal acceptance. In case of collisions between societal expectations and the chosen course of foreign policy, it could bring about severe criticism, empowering the opposition, but in the long run it may bring rising support for the government. The problem of the nature of a democratic system is the electoral calendar. It is a relatively short time for a deep change of foreign policy and to convince the public opinion of its main assumptions. The main ambitious projects are difficult to achieve. However, the assumption of public support as a precondition of a steady governmental policy is often misleading. The most evident example is Neville Chamberlain's appeasement strategy towards Hitler's demands. It gained heavy societal support and was pursued according to public's its expectations. Picture the moment when the triumphant Prime Minster Chamberlain was greeted as the only savior of peace just after Munich. In 1940 the opposition condemned this as a naïve and dangerous course which even accelerated the war. The appeasement policy is treated as a historical mistake and improper answer to the rising power of the Third Reich. Taking into account another example of public opinion, the vast majority of a shocked American society supported G. W. Bush's controversial global War on Terrorism after 9/11 with an invasion of Iraq, considered an evident harbor for Al-Qaeda and as a threat of possessing an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. As it turned out, most of these accusations were not based on facts and the public's rising criticism finally urged Washington to withdraw American troops from Iraq, which is far from stable as of now (Mintz, DeRouen, 2010: 41–45).

In a model democracy there are constrains and institutional frameworks affecting foreign policy. Likewise, there are several influential actors in the United States within the presidential administration alongside the president and state secretary, including security advisory staff, Congress, the judiciary system, groups of interest, the intelligence community, think-tank networks, media and many minor actors as observers, activists, local leaders, et cetera. Theoretically, the public opinion is empowered with many tools through which it can evoke the debate on controversial issues related to internal and external policies and ultimately correct it. For the executive branch to pursue goals which are difficult or unacceptable for the public, is difficult and risky in the

long term. However, there are examples of misguiding the public opinion on foreign and security policy goals. In a properly functioning democracy, the public opinion, through the media system and activists and NGO's networks, would certainly demand more precise information and an explanation of the costs and difficulties of a chosen foreign policy course. Historical examples of misguiding of the American public opinion are the Vietnam War, Iran-Contras affair, and the motives behind the Iraq War in 2003. These collisions with the public opinion forced decision makers to correct its foreign policy course. Negatively affecting the public opinion's perception is a fake news phenomenon and a visible factor leading to misperceptions on foreign policy issues. It is quite a new problem and potentially destructive for democratic systems and decision-making processes. The abovementioned tools in the American system are strong enough to face this challenge (Brancati, 2014: 313–326).

In a classical model of the autocratic system, it seems like there are not as many actors involved in foreign policy debate. However, this does not mean they are nonexistent. Investigating autocratic systems in its different forms, in between the autocratic and totalitarian state, it seems that only one evident and omnipotent decision-making center exists. Such a simplification is misleading and superficial, it depends on the autocratic system and its specific nature. The autocratic power is not only based on terror but also on a hammered-in consensus among different players. In case of some Arab, African and Central Asia states, the stability is achieved through clan, intersect or interethnic compromise. The instability of Libya, Iraq, Syria, Yemen or the civil war in Tajikistan (1992–1997) is an evident example of undermined and broken consensus. After the downfall of an autocratic system it is difficult to rearrange a new consensus which assures stability. The problem is related to the internal perennial strife that is additionally fueled by the involvement of external actors. Gaining a minimum of legitimacy is a significant factor for the stability of an autocratic system. Likewise, in a democracy as well as in an autocratic model, foreign policy reveals internal conditioning and specific decision-making arrangements to some extent. The role of public opinion and other actors is limited but some differences on foreign policy can be located in institutional framework, especially with a semi-dual system like in Iran (Burnell, 2006: 545–562).

The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) is an example of more complicated decision-making processes, including the specific link between ideology and national interests, or dogmatism versus pragmatism in analyzing Iranian foreign policy (Ramazani, 2004: 549–559). The first example are the specific institutional arrangements of the IRI's political structure. Noteworthy is that it is composed of theocratic institutions which seem to have republican characteristics (Rakel, 2007: 159–87). The IRI is based on the Islamic law and Shia politicized ideology. The main feature of the IRI is an imbalance in favor of theocratic power, but with noticeable rivalry and factionist tendencies within the political system. Debates and different opinions are an effect of representing a wider spectrum and also a choice, naturally within the IRI's framework, which may be perceived as an effective strategy for a stronger legitimacy factor. However, controversies arose when the societal expectations of candidates from the reformer faction went too far, as in case of the Green Movement, which was suppressed through harsh repressions.

The IRI's political system is based on the ideological foundations derived from the concepts of Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. His idea is based on the concept of velayat-e faqih. According to Khomeinism, the velayat-e faqih, commonly known as the Supreme Leader, is the legal leader of the ummah (Islamic community). His function is thus equal to that of the imam. After the Islamic Revolution, the velayat-e faqih is located centrally within the IRI's political system and is the most significant guarantor of the status quo as of now, able to suppress changes which may potentially undermine the basic tenets of the Islamic Revolution. The Supreme Leader is an ultimate decision maker. Article 110 specifies some of the powers of the Supreme Leader, including: (1) delineation of grand policies for the regime; (2) supervision of the execution of the grand policies; (3) commander in chief of all armed forces, such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), paramilitary Basij, regular armed forces, and the police; (4) declaration of war and peace; (5) appointment and dismissal of the head of the judicial branch, the six clerical members of the Council of Guardians, the head of the state radio and television monopoly, the head of the IRGC, the head of the regular military, the chairman of the joint chiefs of all armed forces; and (6) dismissal of the president after a vote by the Majles (parliament) or a decision of the high court. The Supreme Leader has the religious supervisory bodies to his disposal (the Council of the Guardian [Majles-e Khobregan], the Expediency Council [Majma'-e Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nezam], and the Assembly of Experts (Shoraye Maslahat-e Nezam). (Riefer-Flanagan, 2013: 55–61). This does not mean that the power of the Supreme Leader is unlimited. The Supreme Leader shares power with the republican institutions to some extent. There are three governmental branches: the executive, the judiciary, and the legislative. The Iranian people elect the members of Parliament every four years. Since the death of Khomeini, the parliament's political importance has increased significantly. It drafts legislation, ratifies treaties, approves states of emergency, approves loans and the annual budget, and can remove the president and ministers from office. In 1979, the constitution initially divided the power of executive power between the president and the prime minister. Actual leadership over the executive power was in the hands of the prime minister, who, in contrast to the president, was not elected by the Iranian people. This was designed in order to avert competition between the elected president and unelected Supreme Leader. However, when Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani became president in 1989, the office of prime minister was abolished and his tasks taken over by the president as the sole head of the elected executive branch (Riefer-Flanagan, 2013: 59–75).

As of now, the president is the head of government and appoints and dismisses ministers, who have to be confirmed by parliament. The president controls the Planning and Budget Organization, appoints the head of the Central Bank, and chairs the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC, shura-e amniat-e melli). The SNSC has twelve permanent members who coordinate governmental activities in defense, intelligence services, and foreign policy. The president acts as the chairman of the SNSC. The Supreme Leader has personal representatives at the SNSC. Formally, the presidency holds the second most influential political office, but the president cannot make final decisions on foreign policy and has no control over the armed forces (Stolarczyk, 2001: 268).

The IRI's system seems to be dualistic with religious and republican institutions. Such a complicated system provokes factions within the IRI's political spectrum. As observed by Ray Takeyh, the Iranian political system consists of three intensive factions: conservatives, pragmatists, and reformers (Takeyh, 2007: 32), who compete within the IRI's frameworkIn addition, each faction has different political representatives and ideas, resulting in a competition for influence and power within the institution of the IRI. Within the Iranian political spectrum, there are no legal political parties. At least three factions play the role of prohibited political parties. Rivalry among different political factions has an impact on the process of political decision-making and forms an obstacle to the formulation of coherent domestic and foreign policies in some cases.

The Islamic Revolution was anti-Western from its beginning. It brought about the final break with the United States. Prior the Islamic Revolution, Iran was envisioned as a strategic state, allied with the United States. The largest change resulted from breaking alliances with the United States and with Western powers in general. The new principles of Iran's foreign policy were introduced in the new Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. These principles were as follows: (1) to refuse all forms of "external domination," (2) "preservation of Iran's independence and territorial integrity," (3) "defense of the rights of all Muslims without allying with hegemonic powers," and (4) "the maintenance of peaceful relations with all non- belligerent states" (Ehteshami, Zweiri, 2008: 13).

The IRI's foreign policy consists of five phases:

1) from 1979–1989, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was the Supreme Leader;
2) from 1989– 1997, during the presidency of Hojatolislam Hashemi Rafsanjani;
3) from 1997–2005, during the presidency of Hojatolislam Mohammad Khatami;
4) from 2005–2013 during the presidency of Mahmud Ahmadinejad;
5) from 2013 onwards, during the presidency of Hasan Rouhani.

Khomeini deeply imprinted Iranian theocracy on its foreign policy. He linked confrontation with the West to the elimination of liberal and moderate forces from the Iranian political scene. The seizure of the US Embassy on November 4, 1979 and the 444-day hostage dispute that followed became the crucible of an idealistic revolutionary foreign policy that set Iran against much of the rest of the world. Radicalism outraged moderates (Axworthy, 2013; Bowden, 2006).

In 1981, Abu al-Hasan Bani Sadr, elected as president in 1980, was forced to resign because he openly criticized the overly dominant role of the Supreme Leader and the concept of dominance of the clergy over other factions. Iran's confrontational foreign policy brought the country into isolation and its only ally in the Middle East remained Syria. In response to this perceived threat, as well as that of the spread of the Iran-Iraq war and the perspective of the spread of Khomeinism, the six Arab Gulf states established the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981 as a preventive and protective institution. Iran supported radical groups and even dispatched Revolutionary Guards to Lebanon to assist Hezbollah. This group was responsible for the attempted coup in Bahrain in 1981, as well as the suicide car bombings on American and French forces in Lebanon in October 1983 and acts of violence in Kuwait (Thaler, Nader, Chubin, Green, 2010: 75–116).

The deteriorating position of Iran in the region and harmful losses in the war with Iraq forced Khomeini to opt for more pragmatic acts, such as the secret purchase of arms from the United States, "the Great Satan," and Israel, "the lesser Satan." Iran's defensive war against Iraq occasioned such a bold move. A deal was struck through intermediaries. American and Israeli arms were to be shipped to Iran in return for Iran's help with the release of Western hostages in Lebanon. These moves did not improve the deteriorated relations with the West, but revealed a pragmatism, even from hardliners. However, it was kept a secret within the Iranian decision-making community and was not a convenient fact.

After Khomeini's turbulent decade, the divisions within the Iranian government between hardliners and pragmatic faction was evident. The pragmatic Rafsanjani understood the limits and weaknesses of the IRI and proposed a more conciliatory policy to Iranian neighbors and rapprochement with Western Europe. Rafsanjani's policy was incomplete due to internal tensions with the Ali Khamenei (the new Supreme Leader), a collision between ideological tenets and pragmatism and Iranian national interests (Osiewicz, 2017: 115–125). The attempt of reconciliation with Western Europe was undermined by the Mykonos affair. Iran was listed by the US State Department as a sponsor of terrorism and broad sanctions were imposed, which were also harmful for American allies who would like to do business in Iran. Rafsanjani was restricted in international politics and blocked by the hardliners' faction.

In May 1997, a new president was elected, and Muhammad Khatami gained strong support, mostly from Iranian youth, and reached a victory of 70 percent. His major aims were to seek the rule of law and the people's participation in political, social and cultural matters. The new president was aware that positive relations with especially the West were needed to help Iran's ailing economy and obtain much-needed foreign investments and transfers of high technology. His inaugural speech laid a clear emphasis on national pride, the importance of Iranian national interest and the dialogue between nations. While president Khatami initiated a "dialogue between civilizations," Supreme Leader Khamenei undermined these attempts by continuing the support of Islamist radical groups in other Muslim countries, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank. Additionally, the emphasis on improving foreign relations and international dialogue was a continuation of a trend that begun under Rafsanjani. As B. Kaussler observed: "Ironically, President Khatami himself was to blame for the deadlock. Since 2000, Khatami had been under pressure from two groups. His reformist allies, who had been pushing for him to take an active stance against the hardliners and had time and again approached him to shift to a more confrontational approach, which they considered as the only language Iran's nomenklatura would understand" (Kaussler, 2008, 276). It is noteworthy that the Khatami cabinet was composed of nineteen technocrats and only three clergymen. He kept many individuals close to Rafsanjani and selected a few candidates out of compromise to appease the conservatives, led by Majlis speaker Nateq-Nouri and close to Khamenei. He made these concessions in order to employ his own key allies, Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi, Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Ataollah Mohajerani, and Interior Minister Abdollah Nuri (Khalili, 2016: 28–34).

In 2002 a nuclear crisis erupted, which deeply hampered Khatami's attempts to reconcile with the West. The nuclear program and its negotiations were under control of hardliners. For example, the chief negotiator, Hassan Rouhani, works directly with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was responsible for appointing him to the National Security Council (Takeyh, 2003).

After failed reform attempts in 2005, Mahmud Ahmedinejad assumed the office of president as a result of hard presidential elections. As the new president, he differed from his predecessors in several regards. Unlike most previous presidents of the Islamic Republic, with the exception of the short presidencies of Bani-Sadr and Mohammad Rajaei, Ahmadinejad was not a cleric or even the son of a cleric. Ahmadinejad's election brought a marginalized minority branch of the conservative faction to power, which had become radicalized after the Iran-Iraq war, in which it was excluded from policy-making by the then dominant factions of the Iranian political elite.

The 2005 presidential elections presented a choice among the pragmatist, but still very popular former president Rafsanjani, three relative moderates (former speaker of the Majlis Mehdi Karroubi, former cabinet minister Mostafa Moin, and former vice president Mohsen Mehralizadeh) and three conservatives (national law enforcement head Mohammed Baqr Qalibaf, government official Ali Larijani and Tehran mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad). Rafsanjani led in the first round of voting and posed a challenge to the Supreme Leader, making Ahmadinejad the Ayatollah's preferred choice (Kwapiszewski, 2006: 19). In the second round Ahmadinejad was elected by a margin of 62 percent to 36 percent for first time in the history of the IRI. There were allegations of voter fraud (Nasr, 2005: 18).

Initially, Iranian foreign policy was consistent with the line of hardliners, opting for the development of a nuclear program. Nevertheless, Ahmadinejad was a great troublemaker in many aspects as a devote Muslim who sought and was publicly expecting the hidden Imam, who denied the Holocaust and who made many hostile announcements against Israel. The president was not experienced in pursuing careful diplomacy, his style was confrontational, accelerated the imposition of hard sanctions and brought a condemnation and the international isolation of Iran. All was caused by the militarization of the nuclear program and Ahmadinejad's blunt statements on undeniable right of Iran to develop nuclear weapons. During his first term, Ahmadinejad followed the course of the Supreme Leader and there were no serious controversies, though the price of such conduct became high. The internal crisis erupted with the fraud of the presidential elections in 2009. Ahmadinejad was very unpopular and was treated as the Supreme Leader's puppet. The Guardian Council approved only three challengers to Ahmadinejad: two moderates, Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hussein Mousavi, and one traditional conservative, Mohsen Rezai. All opposing candidates heavily criticized Ahmadinejad's problematic and controversial presidency. Due to secret polls, reformer Mousavi would win the election against Ahmadinejad by roughly 10 million votes (Bahari, 2009). The election fraud evoked massive protests by the Green Movement and apparent discontent among the Iranian youth. The demonstrations were broken up with arrests and indiscriminate use of violence.

The second term of the Ahmadinejad presidency seemed to be more subordinated to the Supreme Leader, especially in matters of foreign policy. In 2010, the president escalated tensions with the hardliners and the Supreme Leader himself, which culminated in Ahmadinejad's firing of Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, the former campaign manager for Ali Larijani's presidential candidacy. The crisis was hidden by Khamenei to avoid the appearance of an elite division. The president was encouraged by his victory, in 2011 he demanded the resignation of the Minister of Intelligence, Heider Moslehi. The Supreme Leader opposed and revealed tensions with the president to the public. Hardliners and the old guard removed close associates of Ahmadinejad, such as deputy Foreign Minister Mohammed Sharif Malekzadeh and later the president's press adviser and head of the Islamic Republic News Agency (Javanfekr, Sherril, 2013: 69).

Divisions among conservatives and hardliners and the harmful effects of international sanctions opened the door for Hassan Rouhani. He served for many years on the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) and was personally nominated for the function of chief nuclear negotiator by the Supreme Leader. Although he is a hardliner, he developed a reputation for his moderation and pragmatism. According to official vote totals, Rouhani won by 50.7 percent of votes; Mohammad Baqr Qalibaf got 16.6 percent, Saeed Jalili 11.4 percent, Mohsen Rezai 10.6 percent, Ali Akbar Velayati 6.2 percent, and Mohammad Gharazi 1.2 percent. The conservative Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel withdrew prior to the election (BBC News, 2013).

Rouhani dedicated his foreign policy to achieving a nuclear deal in order to remove sanctions and end Iran's isolation. This aim was also accepted by the Supreme Leader to avoid rising Iranians dissatisfaction caused by the deteriorating economic situation. After intensive negotiations, a nuclear agreement was reached in July 2015, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In January 2016, all sanctions against Tehran had been lifted, the Islamic Republic reduced its program and accepted intensive international inspections. The nuclear deal worked well, took Iran from a recession to an estimated 7% of annual economic growth, reduced the inflation rate from 40% to less than 10%, rebounded oil exports to pre-sanction levels, and attracted roughly $12 billion in foreign investments (Mousavian, 2017).

The Iranian economy is still weak and stagnant, and the long period of isolation combined with ineffective and bureaucratic processes caused the largest demonstration since the Green Movement. The high unemployment rate of 12.5% is painful, especially for the Iranian youth. The wide scale of demonstrations and discontent apparent in different cities in Iran resulted in the renouncement of proposed cuts in subsidies. The protests are a clear signal: Iranians are waiting for an improvement in the economy and more foreign investments to create additional jobs and are dissatisfied with the high costs of the Iranian involvement in Syria, Yemen and other places in the Middle East.

Both in the first and second term, president Rouhani has avoided conflicts with Khamenei. However, some tensions are noticeable and could deepen in the movement towards the western powers. Under the Donald Trump administration, the nuclear deal is treated as imperfect. Washington would like to force Iran to stop almost all components of its nuclear program. A harsher stance towards Iran would encourage hardliners to conduct a more confrontational policy.

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The Iranian political system, with its elements of duality in pursuing foreign policy, provokes tensions in decision-making levels from top to bottom. At least three factions exist within the political system: conservatives with their hardliner vanguard, pragmatists, and reformers. All factions influence the Iranian political system. Even during his revolutionary favor, Khomeini ultimately decided to attain achievable goals. The 1979 hostage crisis basically hit moderates and ousted them from the Iranian political scene.

The president's role is minor compared to the Supreme Leader and it is almost impossible for the president to formulate a foreign policy without the consent of the Supreme Leader. Since 1989, presidents after Ahmadinejad presented a more moderate approach in regard to internal and external policies. Rafsanjani was focused on a pragmatic foreign policy and reconciliation with the West. This policy was curtailed by hardliners to open Iran's support for Hezbollah, Hamas and the Islamic jihad, all listed by Israel and USA as terrorist organisations.

Reformer Khatami initially gained massive support but was not prepared enough as a political leader to face hardliners and conservatives. Beyond the president's power was the development of the nuclear program, which caused a crisis with western powers.

After failed reforms, Ahmadinejad won the elections twice with support of the Supreme Leader. During his presidency, Ahmadinejad contributed to the isolation of Iran and his confrontational foreign policy and radical statements were accepted by the Supreme Leader. In 2009, suspected fraudulent elections gave rise to the Green Movement and the greatest protests since the Islamic Revolution. Ahmadinejad was unable to change the course of foreign policy, although he had some tensions with Khamenei over personal nominations.

After Ahmadinejad's turbulent double tenure, the new president, Hassan Rouhani, agreed on concessions on the nuclear program with the consent of the Supreme Leader in order to lift harmful sanctions. Rouhani's achievement, the nuclear deal, meant that Iran accepted a more limited nuclear program and more insightful inspections. In the end of 2017, social discontent erupted, caused by the high rate of unemployment and the stagnant economy. However, the protests were curtailed for a moment. Still, the hardliner faction has an ambition to reinstate the revolutionary favor and the isolation of Iran, contrary to societal expectations and the support of the Iranian youth to moderates and reformers.

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ABSTRACT

The Islamic Republic of Iran has a political structure with co-shared and competitive activity in the field of foreign policy. There are two power centres the president and the supreme leader. Iranian political elite is composed of factions of the conservatives, moderates, pragmatists, and reformers. Each faction has influence on the course of Iranian foreign policy. The dominant faction, conservatives, has caused isolation and imposition of severe sanctions on Iran during Ahmadinejad's presidency Although domestic sources of foreign policy reveals

competition among different factions there is consensus in principal goals of Iranian foreign policy.

Keywords: Iran, Foreign Policy, Supreme Leader,

CZYNNIKI WEWNĘTRZNE I ICH WPŁYW NA POLITYKĘ ZAGRANICZNĄ IRANU

STRESZCZENIE

W Islamskiej Republice występują dwa ośrodki władzy, które współdecydują w zakresie polityki zagranicznej Iranu. Najszersze prerogatywy posiada Najwyższy Przywódca, a jedynie pewien zakres kompetencji w polityce zagranicznej posiada prezydent. Mimo to, dochodzi do różnego rodzaju napięć oraz rozbieżności w formułowaniu polityki zagranicznej. Dodatkowym czynnikiem wywierającym wpływ na wspomniane ośrodki władzy są następujące frakcje: konserwatywna, umiarkowana, pragmatyczna i reformatorska. Przedstawiciele poszczególnych frakcji rywalizują ze sobą, także chcą mieć wpływ na politykę zagraniczną

Słowa kluczowe: Iran, polityka zagraniczna, Najwyższy Przywódca