

An Ideology of Convenience: Iran's Defense of Muslims to Drive Foreign Policy

Middle East/North Africa

Capstone

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Abstract: Understanding the formation and foundation of a state's foreign policy provides detail into their decision-making process. The Islamic Republic of Iran has developed a foreign policy on an ideology of convenience. This ideology of convenience was created by revolutionary leader Ruhollah Khomeini when he sought an opportunity to spread his ideology. When he took control of the Republic, its actions mirrored his desire to export his ideology and the Islamic Revolution. The paper will compare Iran's global positioning to Noam Chomsky's disapproval of the United States actions, examine the power structure and constitution of Iran, and provide regional examples of Iran acting out of its ideology of convenience. The research and paper will

challenge the perspectives on the Islamic Republic of Iran's actions while illustrating the foundation of its foreign policy.

Introduction

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 set off a shock wave throughout the Middle East when a coalition of forces overthrew Reza Shah and the Pahlavi dynasty. As the Shah's monarchy was collapsing, Ruhollah Khomeini returned to Iran to declare the Islamic Republic of Iran and craft a new constitution. Prior to the declaration of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini had bigger plans than just a revolution in Iran. He envisioned a revolution that would implement Islamic law around the world. He also understood that he needed to gain the support of the masses before he could see his vision come to life. Ruhollah Khomeini's rhetoric during the revolution became entrenched in support of the people oppressed by the previous regime.

While speaking out on behalf of the oppressed, Khomeini's rhetoric was also

fixated on Islamic principles, primarily Islamic Populism and Veliyat-e Faqih.¹ Khomeini seized on the growing unrest towards the Shah in Iran and backed revolutionary efforts that would steer the revolution towards Islam. Khomeini's belief that Islamic populism would be the future of Iran, the Middle East, and the rest of the world propelled him into the most powerful role in the Revolution and the newly founded Republic.

In the powerful role of Supreme Leader, also known as Ayatollah, he formed a republic on the principles of Islam and used the Republic to export his Islamic Revolutionary ideals. Although Khomeini had a plan to expand his revolution throughout the region and eventually the world, he needed to find ways to influence others in a more covert way. Since Khomeini was an outspoken critic of both American and

¹ Moghadam, Val. "The Revolution and the Regime: Populism, Islam and the State in Iran." *Social Compass* 36, no. 4 (1989): 415-50.

Soviet influence in the Third World, he did not fall into the footsteps of the Cold War powers. Khomeini used Islam, the religion of most Middle East countries, to spread the influence discreetly. The method he used to implement was through the constitutional article and foreign policy decision that the Islamic Republic of Iran (Islamic Republic of Iran) would defend all Muslims and oppressed people. Ayatollah Khomeini's support and defense of Muslims and oppressed people was more an ideology of convenience than an ideology of advocacy.

A state's ideology of convenience justifies its decision-making while that ideology is not necessarily the true objective. People, organizations, and states all take positions of convenience which makes it easier for them to succeed with set goals. In this case, Iran uses an ideology of convenience to push specific policy-decisions or to justify unorthodox actions that seem unjustifiable on the outside looking in.

Setting a policy or ideology of convenience helps to increase the effectiveness of the state's goal. The theory behind state ideology of convenience has rarely been researched or applied to current state actions. Gaining an understanding of how Iran developed the ideology and uses it to its advantage will provide an example of the theory, and of Iran's regional actions.

Ideology of Convenience

The prominent American linguist and philosopher, Noam Chomsky, is an outspoken critic of the actions of the United States of America, domestically and internationally. Chomsky theorizes that the United States is run by the government, corporations, media, and public relation industries and those determine policy decisions. He has often criticized how the American economic system of "state capitalism" sets the course of their actions

overseas.² As the only remaining superpower, its actions internationally are essential for maintaining its superpowerdom. For the importance of this paper, comparing Chomsky's theory on how the United States has constructed Iran vs. the realist view on how Iran has constructed its own principles will illustrate how scholars and politicians have not fully investigated the motivations of Iran. It is important to note that scholars have often placed unwarranted blame on the role of the United States as a constructor of an Iranian imagine.

In his article titled, "The Iranian Threat" Who Is the Gravest Danger to World Peace?" Chomsky discusses how the United States has perceived the Iranian threat and intentionally constructed a negative global view of the Islamic Republic. He ties this construction to the oil production and military alliances with Iran's opponents. At

one point, he discusses that Iran is not a military threat, and the only threat they pose is the threat to instability. In Chomsky's view the threat is not to regional instability, but a loss of stability of American influence. Throughout this piece, Chomsky acknowledges the support of terrorist organizations, radical regimes, and other dangerous actions to the region, but contributes Iran's threat perception to regional stability and its world view to the United States interests. The United States has an ideology of convenience towards the Islamic Republic of Iran, Chomsky would argue, because it is in American interests to have positive relations with the oil powerhouse of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and maintain positive relations with Israel to balance the power of the region. This same thought process is applied when discussing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

² Chomsky, Noam. "Who Runs America?" Interview by Adrian Zupp. *The Boston Phoenix*, April 1, 1999. Accessed April 14, 2019.

(JCPOA) it was expected that it would limit Iranian nuclear strength and ability. Chomsky believes the United States pursued the JCPOA to decrease the chance of Arab states improving relations with Iran to avoid attack or fall under its nuclear umbrella.³

Chomsky believes that the United States has cornered the Islamic Republic of Iran into global isolation. He fails, however, to consider the actions Iran has taken and more significantly, the motive behind those actions. Although it may be easy to blame the United States for the global isolation of Iran, Chomsky fails to look at the writings, rhetoric, and actions of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding why it has become one of the most destabilizing actors in the Middle East. Iran has manufactured its own ideology of convenience to justify their actions within the region, a justification that the West has not examined deep enough. The Islamic

Republic of Iran has crafted its own position in the world because of its regional aspirations. The Islamic Republic of Iran's construction of an ideology and policy decision to defend the oppressed and Muslims of the world was the beginning of a smokescreen to export the Revolution it experienced in 1979.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

Tensions began to rise in Iran after years of poor economic performance in the oil market and increased oppression by the Shah. The transition away from Shia influence towards an increased capitalistic approach did not satisfy Iranians. It was believed that the Shah undermined the Shia leaders and traditions that are embedded in Iran. As tensions rose, so did the prospects for revolution. This unlocked the gates for more oppositional influence. Initially, there was a

³ Chomsky, Noam. "The Iranian Threat." Chomsky.info. July 2, 2010. Accessed April 15, 2019.

coalition of anti-Shah groups that worked towards the common goal of dethroning the Shah. However, the coalition of organizations left a power vacuum of who would lead the charge against the Shah's government, and who would control Iran after. This vacuum allowed for the Ruhollah Khomeini to reemerge as a powerful Shia leader. In a series of taped speeches and written work, Khomeini advocated that Iranians protest and assemble against their government. In those prerecorded speeches, Khomeini called for Iranians to rediscover their Shia identity, channel it to overthrow the Shah, then form a government from the Islamic principle, *Veliyat-e Faqih*. *Veliyat-e Faqih*, or the *Guidance of the Islamic Jurists*, is both a book and principle of governance that Khomeini wrote. "The fate of the Iranian Revolution depended on what came out of Mr. Khomeini's mouth," according to former

aide and first president of Iran, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr. From his book and speeches, Khomeini developed the framework for the Revolution and the Republic.⁴

After the book released in 1970, a decade of turmoil and protesting followed. The Revolution took flight in 1978 when Iranians of all classes assembled and interrupted the everyday routine in the country. While the protests picked up, the domestic, state-run newspapers printed stories that attempted to delegitimize Khomeini and his Islamic revolutionary ideology. This had the opposite effect and steered Iranians towards the Islamic uprisings Khomeini promoted. After the protests suffocated the already crippling economy and rule of law in late 1978, Iranians took control of the country after the Shah fled to the United States. The vacancy of office resulted in an absence of all government and left

⁴ Ganley, Elaine. "Khomeini Launched a Revolution from a Sleepy French Village." AP NEWS. February 01, 2019. Accessed April 17, 2019.

Khomeini with the opportunity to solidify the revolution as an Islamic one. The opportunity allowed him to complete the Islamic Revolution and form the Islamic Republic.

This would not have been possible without the rhetoric or leadership Khomeini provided in *Velayat-e Faqih*, in which he wrote that “We [Iranian Revolutionaries] must propagate our cause to the people, instruct them in it, and convince them of its validity.”⁵ By targeting and convincing revolutionaries that Islam granted them freedom, Khomeini knew he would be able to gain influence and spread his visions more easily. He called fighters to the Islamic cause, “Come to the aid of Islam; save Islam! They [Jews and Christians] are destroying Islam!”⁶ The Ayatollah used fear and Islamic Populism to reach Muslims. He told Iranians that not only were their rights attacked by the Shah, but their religion was under attack by

the entire world. This was a simple tactic to gain their attention and support.

The recruitment of fighters through Islamic Populism proved successful, but the formation of his Islamic government through Velayat-e Faqih, within those principles were yet to be seen. Khomeini simply laid out his new ideology of convenience and eventual foreign policy of Iran in one of his speeches. He prayed and asked Allah to:

“Grant that the younger generation studying in the religious colleges and the universities may struggle to reach the sacred aims of Islam and strive together, with ranks united, first, to deliver the Islamic countries from the clutches of imperialism and its vile agents, and then to defend them.”⁷

Khomeini labeled his intentions to come together, to deliver, and to defend Islamic countries for Muslims under

⁵ Khomeini, Ruhollah. *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist*. Alhoda, UK: Manor Books, 1970.

⁶ Khomeini’s “Islamic Government.”

⁷ Khomeini’s “Islamic Government.”

oppression and control of imperials. The continuance of populist rhetoric called for Muslims to “strive together.” Delivering Islamic countries meant having them undergo Islamic Revolutions. After execution for wishful revolutions, those countries would fall under the control of Iran, in theory creating one unified Islamic Republic.

To create that Republic, Khomeini wanted to infiltrate vulnerable groups that posed threats to the status quo of non-Shia governments (Sunni or Israeli governments). By infiltrating and supporting these groups, his ideology would be accessible to more people and his influence would continue to grow. To make this possible and conspicuous, Khomeini developed the ideology to defend Muslims. No one would question his intention to expand his influence and the revolution to neighboring non-Shia governments, but the actions of Iran would be concealed behind the curtain of the defense Muslims. Khomeini believed that defending

Muslims was an important factor in legitimizing his revolutionary ideology.

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

After returning from exile, Khomeini arrived in Iran for the first time since 1964 ready to shift the Islamic Revolution into the Islamic Republic. Shortly after he arrived two major events occurred; the creation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the vote on the ratification of the new constitution. First, the IRGC was created because Khomeini and rest of his revolutionary inner circle needed enforcers to act as the defense of Muslims and Iran externally, while also exporting the revolution. That group would be known as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The IRGC became permanently active after the 1979 Revolution and as the defender of the Islamic Revolution and the Republic’s principles. The IRGC reports directly to the Supreme Leader, who was Ruhollah Khomeini, and would mainly act outside of

Iran's borders to enforce the ideology of defense to export. The appointment of its leaders and the IRGC actions are enumerated in the constitution that was ratified shortly after its creation.

The vote on the new constitution established the power structure for the Islamic Republic of Iran's international action. The constitution, which passed almost unanimously, gave Khomeini the role of Supreme Leader and unchecked power in the country. Once power was secured, the mission to expand and export the Islamic Revolution began. To properly export the Revolution, Khomeini knew he needed a way to embolden Muslims outside of Iran. "If we want to export this revolution, we must do something so that the people themselves take government in their own hands, so that the people from the so-called third stratum come to power."⁸ The pathway to spread the

revolution and "empower" Muslims throughout the region is specified in the Iranian Constitution.

The Ninth Chapter of the Constitution concludes with a section on the Islamic Pasdaran Revolutionary Corps (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps). In Section 2 of Chapter 9, the Constitution specifies that the IRGC, "will remain in effect in order to continue in its role of protecting the revolution and its achievements."⁹ It also declares that the duties and responsibilities would be further created through laws, "with an emphasis on fraternal cooperation and harmony among [of the Corps]."¹⁰ With the Supreme Leader as the one who can heavily influence laws, the actions of the IRGC come indirectly from the Leader. IRGC would also act "in accordance with the venerable Quranic verse, "Muster against them all the men and cavalry at your command, so that

⁸ "Khomeini Urges Export of Iranian Revolution." The New York Times. October 15, 1981. Accessed April 01, 2019.

⁹ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Translation published by *Iranian Studies*. 1989.

¹⁰ Article 150 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic.

you may strike terror into the enemy of God and your enemy and others beside them who are unknown to you but known to God” (8: 59).”¹¹ The influence of the Ayatollah’s Veliyat-e Faqih is evident here. The Constitution establishes the IRGC as an Islamic Force that would band together to defend the Revolution and Muslims. The key to the phrasing is that duties would be not specifically stipulated which leaves it in the hands of no other than the Ayatollah, who appoints the leader of the IRGC and influences lawmaking.

The IRGC’s duty to spread the revolution outside of Iranian borders is implemented directly from the Quds Force, a unit responsible for unconventional operations outside of Iran. The word “Quds” in Persian translates to “The Holy City,” meaning the city of Jerusalem, a city that Iran believes belongs to Muslims, not Jews

and Christians as well. It has long promised to liberate the city and have Islam, primarily the Islamic Republic of Iran rule over Jerusalem.¹² The force is said to have a mission to liberate the land of Muslims, which supports Iran’s ideology of convenience in justifying its international actions and support of various non-state actors in the region.

The Quds Force was established immediately following the 1979 Revolution. It played a major role in the Iran-Iraq War, where previous leader, Qassem Soleimani’s military career took off as they fought for what Iran called, the Scared Defense. In later years, Soleimani was appointed as General of the Quds Force and played a major role in the craft, development, and action of dozens of attacks on international soil and armed forces through IRGC proxy forces. General Soleimani, was a close ally

¹¹Article 151 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic.

¹² Filkins, Dexter. “The Shadow Commander.” *The New Yorker*, The New Yorker, 23 Sept. 2013,

www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/30/the-shadow-commander.

of Ayatollah Khomeini's successor, Ali Khamenei, which provided him an open avenue to help shape foreign policy and military decisions until his death in January 2020. In a text conveyed to former CIA Director General David Petraeus, Soleimani said, "General Petraeus, you should know that I, Qassem (Soleimani), control the policy for Iran with respect to Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza, and Afghanistan. And indeed, the ambassador in Baghdad is a Quds Force member. The individual who's going to replace him is a Quds Force member."¹³ The Quds force, as Soleimani reporting texted, has complete over regional policy and operations, including high-level personnel inside those governments. Through its control of policy, The Quds Force, alongside the rest of the IRGC, has been able to operate through proxy actors

and governments. All of this, as understood by its name, has been justified in its defense and liberation of Muslims as justification for its actions in the countries Gen. Soleimani listed in his text to Gen. Petraeus and in the examples listed later in this paper.

Power Structure in the Islamic Republic

The main player in the creation of the Islamic Republic was the Supreme Leader. The Supreme Leader of Iran is the "dominant executive" and holds the most powerful office in Iran.¹⁴ Along with the creation of the position specifically for revolution leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, it gave him unrestricted power within the Iranian political system. The direct powers of the Leader are stipulated in Article 110 in the Iranian Constitution, but more indirect powers were derived out of Ayatollah Khomeini's practices between 1979 and his

¹³ Chulov, Martin. "Qassem Suleimani: the Iranian General 'Secretly Running' Iraq." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 28 July 2011, www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jul/28/qassem-suleimani-iran-iraq-influence.

¹⁴ O'Neil, Patrick H., Karl J. Fields, and Donald Share. *Cases in Comparative Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015.

death in 1989. As for the powers that are stipulated, the Supreme Leader is the commander of the armed forces, which allows him the power of “declaring war, peace, and mobilizing forces,” upon the recommendation of the Supreme National Defense Council.¹⁵ Coincidentally, the Supreme Leader holds the power to appoint the majority of the Council. Article 176 in Chapter Thirteen states, the Council holds the duties of “determining the defense and security policies” and “coordinating political, social, informational, cultural, and economic activities in relation to general defense and security concerns.” With power over the military, the IRGC, and almost all foreign policy, he was easily able to implement the ideology of Veliyat-e Faqih into the crafting of foreign policy. Although the ideology and the duties are clearly stated in the constitution, there are some aspects of

foreign policy the Supreme Leader does not control. Regarding the Supreme National Defense Council, few checks or balances that are visible is the ability to appoint or eliminate the President to or from the council.

As another lesser, but key player, the president is said to be the one who oversees the everyday decisions of foreign policy. However, this oversight is either with the consultation of the Supreme Leader or within parameters set.¹⁶ No treaty is ratified or put into effect without the signature of the President, allowing him some say in how agreements with other states are negotiated. The President also holds the responsibility to appoint ministers of Iran’s cabinet, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs.¹⁷ As expected, the President and the Minister both are held to constraints of the Supreme Leader’s wishes and have little room to act on their own. The President is a figurehead of

¹⁵ Article 176 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic.

¹⁶ O’Neil, *Cases in Comparative Politics*.

¹⁷ Article 133 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic.

the state, primarily inside the Islamic Republic, while the Minister of Foreign Affairs is the figurehead for the Republic's foreign policy.

Foreign Policy in the Iranian Constitution

As seen in the previous section, the constitution clearly stipulates the powers of the Islamic Republic's leaders. The constitution also provides insight into the decision making of Iran's domestic and foreign policies. Prior to the chapter regarding foreign policy, the constitution establishes what the Islamic Republic's government would be based on. "The concept of Islamic government, based on the *Governance of the Jurisprudent (Veliyat-e Faqih)*, which was provided by Imam Khomeini at the height of the repression and oppression by the despotic regime, produced a clear and unifying goal among Muslim people."¹⁸ The concept of the Republic is to

promote Islamic Populism and defend Muslims around the world, with the goal of forming a larger, unified Islamic Republic. This is the general foreign policy goal of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The constitution further clarifies that its foreign concerns are "based on Islamic criteria, fraternal commitment to all Muslims, and unrestrained support for the impoverished people of the world."¹⁹ The Islamic criteria Iranian policy is based on both *Veliyat-e Faqih* and the Quran, which verses are included in the constitution. "According to the Quran: "The believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: they promote virtue, and prohibit vice" (9: 71). This only affirms the belief that Iran is the defender or protector of Muslims and must look out for its brothers and sisters."²⁰

¹⁸ "Islamic Government" in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic.

¹⁹ Article 3:16 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic.

²⁰ Article 8 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic.

With various examples of the Ayatollah's desire of defending Muslims and the oppressed, while exporting the Revolution already, Chapter Ten of the constitution lays out the exact framework. Within the chapter, there are two articles that are essential to the illustration of Iran's convenient foreign policy of defending Muslims to export the Revolution around the Middle East.

Article 152: The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on the rejection of any kind of domination, both its exercise and submission to it; the preservation of the all-inclusive independence of the country and its territorial integrity; **the defense of the rights of all Muslims**; non-alignment in relation to the domineering powers; mutual peaceful relations with non-aggressive states.

Article 154: The Islamic Republic of Iran considers human happiness throughout human society as its ideal. It considers independence, freedom, and the governance of justice and truth as the right of all the people of the world. Consequently, while it completely abstains from any kind of intervention in the internal affairs of other nations, **it supports the struggles of the oppressed for their rights against the oppressors anywhere in the world.**

Stated within Article 152, Iran believes it is responsible for the "defense of the rights of all Muslims," which has been the driving force behind its policy of convenience. But another reoccurring theme is "supporting the struggles of the oppressed for their rights," which Iran believes it once was. To Iran, the Islamic Revolution represents a break free of governments oppressing Muslims. It also represents a new

future for Islamic governments taking control. The Ayatollah saw his vision become a realization in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The government and its clerics believe it is its right to support the oppressed Muslims and, of course, to export its influence onto.

The Convenience of Defending Oppressed Muslims: Bahrain

Most people are familiar with the relationship that the Islamic Republic has with Hamas and Hezbollah, which will be discussed later. Prior to that relationship, Iran's first policy decision that stemmed from its ideology of convenience was in Bahrain. Bahrain, which was granted independence by Iran less than a decade before the Revolution, is a majority Sunni state that exiled many prominent Shia leaders after granted sovereignty. After the 1979 Revolution, Iran would not tolerate those oppressing actions. Iran also believed that the Muslims living in

Bahrain deserved to be living under Clerical rule, similar to what the Revolution brought to Iran.²¹ As a result, Iran backed an attempted coup in 1981 by the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. The new Islamic Republic of Iran distributed money and intelligence. At the same, the Revolutionary Guards, Iran's revolution exporter helped train and execute the attempted coup.²² Ultimately the Islamic Revolution failed, but Iranian and IRGC support left the oppressed Shia community with the impression that Iran would support their efforts moving forward.

That support continues to this day with Iran being alleged to have supported assassinations and bombings by militant groups often supported by the Quds Force. After the Arab Spring failed to overthrow the Bahraini regime, "militants have launched deadly bombings and shooting attacks

²¹ Clerical rule refers to the direct rule from Islamic clerics. This rule stems from the appointed 12-member council that holds great influence over domestic and international decisions.

²² Hinnebusch, Raymond. "War and Order in the Regional System." *The International Politics of the Middle East: Second Edition*, 175-224. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015.

against security forces” which has been blamed on Iranian support for the groups.²³

The most recent example was an explosion on one of Bahrain’s largest oil pipelines.²⁴

Bahrain’s Interior Minister said, “Terrorist acts witnessed by the country in the recent period are carried out through direct contacts and instructions from Iran.”²⁵ Iran has dedicated money, intelligence, and training to non-state actors to conduct operations that follow through on the ideology of convenience to promise to defend all Muslims. Iran remains devoted to propping up non-state and proxy actors to carry out its regional policies. Through the actions of the IRGC and non-state actors, Iran has successfully begun exporting its revolution to Bahrain.

The Convenience of Defending Oppressed Muslims: Israel and Palestine

The dedication to non-state and proxy actors to defend Muslims continues in its aggression against Israel. The oppression of Muslims has been Iran’s greatest defense in its aggressive approach towards the State of Israel and support in a Palestinian state. Ayatollah Khomeini was an outspoken critic of Israel and often called for its destruction, he saw their statehood as an impediment on the existence of fellow Muslims and Palestinians. “I pray for the success of all those dear ones who continue to deal blows to Israel and its interests in the occupied territories or next to that usurped country by relying on the weapons of faith and jihad. I assure you that the Iranian nation will not abandon you.”²⁶ When the Ayatollah said that, he set the parameters of foreign policy

²³ Hunter, Shireen T., *Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Revisiting the New World Order*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010.

²⁴ Shamseddine, Reem. "Bahrain Calls Pipeline Blast 'terrorism' Linked to Iran." Reuters. November 12, 2017. Accessed February 25, 2019.

²⁵ Shamseddine, “Bahrain Calls Pipeline.”

²⁶ "Excerpts from Khomeini Speeches." The New York Times. August 04, 1987. Accessed March 29, 2019.

to support groups that focused attacks against Israel. This was merely a convenient policy decision to support Palestinians and export Iranian influence. The convenience of defending Muslims vindicates Iran and its proxy attacks against Israel, Iran defends itself by being the defender, never accepting the role as aggressor.

The support of the 1980s has been followed through each presidency, most notably with previous President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who constantly referred to Israel as “tumor” during his presidency and said it will eventually be eliminated.²⁷ The rhetoric of referring to Israel of being a tumor was reiterated by current President Hassan Rouhani in 2018.²⁸ The support has spanned from the Islamic Consultative Assembly (the Iranian Parliament) chanting of “Death to Israel” to the regime funding actors, such as

Hezbollah and Hamas. While both actors are used by Iran to export its revolution and its ideology, both are also designated as terrorist organizations by the majority of the international community, including some regional states.

Hamas has a different relationship with Iran than Hezbollah. Iran is the benefactor of Hamas but does not have much control over their actions. In 2006, Iran announced financial aid in terms of \$50 million, some allege this was a monthly contribution.²⁹ After a few years of rocky relations, the Hamas leader publicly stated that relations with Iran were mended with financial and military support beginning again, even stating that Iran “is the largest backer financially and militarily.”³⁰ To easily move arms to Hamas, Iran summoned its ally, the Syrian Arab Republic, arguing that they

²⁷ Charbonneau, Louis. "In New York, Defiant Ahmadinejad Says Israel Will Be "eliminated"." Reuters. September 24, 2012. Accessed March 29, 2019.

²⁸ "Iran's Rouhani Calls Israel a 'cancerous Tumor', in Rare Outburst." News | Al Jazeera. November 24, 2018. Accessed March 29, 2019.

²⁹ "Iran Supports Hamas, but Hamas Is No Iranian 'Puppet'." Council on Foreign Relations. January 7, 2009. Accessed March 29, 2019.

³⁰ "New Hamas Leader Says It Is Getting Aid Again from Iran." CNBC. August 29, 2017. Accessed March 29, 2019.

both have the mutual goal of protecting Muslims within Israeli territory. The arms allowed Hamas to grow as a major military and political actor in the Gaza Strip, the primary territory of Palestine. Through various military exchanges between Hamas and the Israeli military, Israel has imposed blockades over imports and exports in the Gaza Strip that have hurt Palestine's economic revenues. Iran believes that this is an example of Israel as the oppressor of Muslims, and uses such examples to validate support for Hamas to defend and fight for the Muslim community living in Israel.

The Convenience of Defending Oppressed Muslims: Lebanon

The relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Lebanese Republic is one with a common interest in defending the Muslims in Lebanon and Palestine, against Israel. When Israel invaded the southern region of the Lebanese Republic in 1982, a relationship of convenience began.

Iran wanted more influence over Muslims and the ability to attack Israel, while Lebanon needed help to stop the invasion. Iran responded by backing militant groups and providing its own military personnel from the IRGC, primarily from the specialized Quds Force. Even though Israel publically said the invasion as necessary for its security, Iran saw it as an attack on Muslims and had a constitutional power to provide support against it.

To ensure the safety of Muslims in the Lebanese Republic, Iran sought to seize more influence over their political system. Iran helped create the terrorist and political organization Hezbollah, or the Party of Allah. Immediately following the 1982 invasion, followers of Ayatollah Khomeini began to form the militant group to combat Israeli forces in Lebanon. Its formation would not have been possible without assistance from Iran. This included financial support, administrative facilities, and military

training.³¹ Upon initial creation of Hezbollah, the Islamic Republic deployed five thousand members of the IRGC to build military camps, train the militants, and assist with finances. Iran against summoned its ally Syria to assist. Hezbollah received the assistance due to a bribe from Iran to subsidize oil in exchange for Syria to house and provide immunity to the new militants.³² The dedication to supporting Hezbollah's military operations against Israel was not the entirety of the reason for Iran's support.

The Islamic Republic of Iran suspected that their financial contributions to Hezbollah could be used for more than just military action. It could be used to gain the support of the Lebanese people through social and political action. By encouraging Hezbollah to act as a political actor in a bureaucratic setting, assistance to Hezbollah

would result in more support from those who were struggling financially, particularly the Lebanese Shia community.³³ Iran decided Hezbollah should focus on was one of the poorest in the country, the Lebanese Shia community. Some of the more notable methods that Iran and Hezbollah used to win over that support were social programs; healthcare, education, and garbage cleanup. The social programs translated to political support within the Lebanese Republic. Currently, Hezbollah holds about 10% of parliamentary seats and is part of the March 8 Alliance, the coalition government. The political power Hezbollah has achieved under the direction of the Islamic Republic has given both a stronghold in the government and the community.

³¹ DeVore, Marc R. "Exploring the Iran-Hezbollah Relationship: A Case Study of How State Sponsorship Affects Terrorist Group Decision-Making." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 6, no. 4/5 (2012): 85-107.

³² DeVore, "Exploring the Iran-Hezbollah Relationship"

³³ DeVore, "Exploring the Iran-Hezbollah Relationship"

The Convenience of Defending Oppressed Muslims: Saudi Arabia

The relationship between the Saudis and the Iranians is as contentious as any, even being labeled the new Cold War. The Sunni-Shia rivalry and fight for regional dominance has strained any attempts at reconciliation. Those tensions are built on the idea that Iran believes the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia oppresses the Shia minority inside and outside the kingdom. This was prevalent in the 1980s when the two powers clashed over the Grand Mosque of Mecca. Iran believed that Saudi Arabia could not claim the entirety of Mecca since it is the birthplace of the Prophet Mohammed, and holy to not only Sunni Muslims³⁴. Iran felt that it should have some sort of claim or control over it, partially because they felt that Shia Muslims were not being treated fairly while making Hajj.³⁵ Iran

has never been able to claim Mecca but it has made its presence known through a series of protests. Iran has backed various clashes with the Saudi's, including one in 1987 leaving 202 Iranians wounded.³⁶ Once again, Iran saw this as an oppression of Muslims and ever since has countered Saudi influence in the region. Iran has applied its ideology of convenience to take a more aggressive stance against Saudi Arabia.

Iran has focused its countering policy on two regional disputes; the Syrian Civil War and the Yemeni Civil War. In Syria, the Saudi Kingdom backed the Sunni protestors against the Assad regime, which is an ally of Iran³⁷. Once Saudi Arabia began to back the protestors, Iran accused them of being supported by the United States and Israel,

³⁴ Amiri, Reza Ekhtiari, Ku Hasnita Binti Ku Samsu, and Hassan Gholipour Fereidouni. "The Hajj and Iran's Foreign Policy towards Saudi Arabia." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 46, no. 6 (December 2011): 678-90.

³⁵ Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam that instructs all able Muslims to make pilgrimage to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, at least once in their life.

³⁶ Amiri, "The Hajj and Iran's Foreign Policy"

³⁷ Amiri, "The Hajj and Iran's Foreign Policy"

two accused oppressors of Muslims.³⁸ Iran responded by supplying weapons and money to Hezbollah fighters in Syria and deploying Revolutionary Guards.³⁹ Similar events occurred in Yemen, where this time the Saudi's backed the government and the Iranians took the opposition side, the protesting Houthis. Once again, Iran responded with supplying the Houthis with weapons, training, and money.⁴⁰ The implantation of Article 152, the defense of all Muslims, is different in this case because this is an action of precautionary defense. Iran and Saudi Arabia are competing to limit the influence of the other over the Middle East. To limit the influence of Saudi Arabia, Iran continues to use its convenient ideology to defend Muslims that could be influenced by revolutionary ideology.

Conclusion

More than four decades after the Islamic Revolution, the foreign policies of Iran are still misunderstood. Some scholars believe Iran hates the West, others believe it wants to create a better life for all Muslims. Neither of these are correct, Iran's true intention is hidden in the Constitution and constant rhetoric. The defense of Muslims written in the constitution and spoken by leaders is nothing more than a disguise for its true desires. The desire to export the Islamic Revolution and establish a great Islamic Republic in the region, and eventually the world. Ayatollah strategically built the ideology of defending Muslims as an ideology of convenience. He wanted to see an Islamic Revolution centered in Iran. The approach to expanding the Republic and Revolution is unlike any other. Khomeini successfully built the Islamic Republic around his own expansion of Veliyat-e Faqih.

³⁸ Bremmer, Ian. "Syria War: The Conflict Is Becoming Even More Complex." *Time*. April 06, 2018. Accessed March 30, 2019.

³⁹ Bremmer, "Syria War"

⁴⁰ Munteanu, Razvan. "Saudi Arabia, Iran And the Geopolitical Game in Yemen." *Research and Science Today* no. 2 (11, 2015): 57-62.

To complete the approach Khomeini took a three-step approach where he theorized the revolutionary ideology, established an exporter, and targeted vulnerable groups.

First, the theorizing of the revolutionary ideology and advancement of Veliyat-e Faqih was the spark that lit the flame. Khomeini believed that Iran and other states would be better off under the control of an Islamic government or clergy, as the Quran states. While believing this, he understood the complexity and difficulty of establishing such republic. He developed a following and sought out an opportunity to implement the ideology. The initial protests in the 1970s in Iran created that opening, and Khomeini forced his way to the front of the protests and the eventual Revolution. As his ideology spread through Iran and the Revolution, he became the face of both. This offered him the perfect opportunity to build the Islamic Republic, one that would not end in Iran.

To transition the Revolution into a Republic and the continue to expand of the Revolution, Khomeini needed an arm that would be up to the task. He established the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which has the constitutional duty to “protect the revolution and its accomplishment,” along with a blank check that allows the Ayatollah to heavily influence its actions. The IRGC is the arm of the exportation of the Islamic Revolution. It was created to help form the Republic and has stayed to expand it. The range of actions by the IRGC from financing and training terrorist organizations to deploying militants to defend foreign land exemplifies its purpose. Behind the curtain of defending Muslims, the IRGC has become the sole exporter of the Islamic Revolution and Khomeini’s ideology.

The exportation of the Revolution was Khomeini’s goal. He had focused his ideology of convenience on the backs of vulnerable people. The Islamic Republic of

Iran and the IRGC have targeted vulnerable and oppressed groups throughout the region to gain support, influence, and eventual control. Khomeini and Iran have designated these groups as vulnerable and oppressed, who that need defense and assistance from Iran in order to live a free and better life. Exporting the Iranian influence over these vulnerable groups behind a curtain of action and “defense” has become the true ideology of convenience.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has simply acted under an ideology that was created out to push its own self-interest, an ideology of convenience. Khomeini saw the exportation of his Revolution to vulnerable groups to ensure the expansion of the Islamic Republic’s rule. Iran has used its defense of Muslims to gain influence and power in the region to combat and delegitimize its adversaries, while also attempting to strengthen itself. The more Iran can defend

oppressed Muslims, the more power it believes it can acquire. Slowly but surely the Islamic Republic of Iran is moving towards the goal of expanding its borders and engulfing more states into one Republic. For now, the Republic is focused exporting the revolution to as many as it can under the false narrative that it is defending Muslims. Iran has deliberately created a false narrative that acts as an ideology of convenience. Scholars like Norm Chomsky who have defended Iran’s international standing as a product of American construction, have simply analyzed the situation incorrectly. The creation and application of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s ideology of convenience is the sole explanation for its the standing on the international stage because it is in its own laws and rhetoric.

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