

Role of Ideology in Foreign Policy: A Case Study of Iran

**Umbreen Javaid, Uzma Naz, Muhammad Arshad Watoo and
Azhar Rashid***

Abstract

The main purpose of the study is to analyze the role of Ideology and pragmatism in Iranian foreign policy. Main thesis is whether one factor surpasses the other while making the choices and decisions or both impacts equally influence the course of action in global political arena. The focus remains on the Iran's foreign policy towards the western world in general and America in particular. It also focuses the role of cultural disparity and why constructive breakthrough has not been achieved previously. Moreover, the cordial relationship with United States has been held in abeyance due to ideological clash and policy priorities between the two states. Iran remained focused more on ideology rather giving attention to US strategic concerns in the region since the end of cold war. Diplomatic behaviors of the states are results of the historical animosities and cordialities among the states. Moreover, Iranian policy priority has been anti-hegemonic and anti-imperialistic designs of the big powers in the post-cold war era. They kept their ideology alive and remained fixed on their strategic interests and ideology. Moreover, the scenario in the post 9/11 has been changing and global environment continue to be tougher for underdeveloped and the developing countries. Iran has been suffering due to unlimited economic and political bans because it is not bowing before the global superpower. However, things started changing and a shift came up in the policy of Iran with the emergence of new rapprochement in shape of a historical deal with United States. It seems the Iranian policy has tilted more on the side of pragmatism.

Key Words: Foreign Policy of Iran, Ideology of Iran, Role of Ideology in foreign policy

Ideology and Foreign Policy

Foreign policy enables a state to establish its relations beyond the borders. A state formulates its foreign policy to cater its multiplicity of interests which is only possible by building strong and cordial relations with the international community. Foreign policy is a process of interaction with other states in a pragmatic way to maximize one's goals and minimizes losses. In other words it may be taken as a technique to avoid the threats and availing the opportunities of benefits in an unfavorable environment. Many internal and

*Authors are Chairperson, Department of Political Science/Director, Centre for South Asian Studies, and Ph.D. Scholars at Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore – Pakistan.

external factors do play their greater role in the formulations of foreign policy. Ideology is a key factor that is taken under consideration while devising a foreign policy at internal and external levels. At internal level, in the sense how leadership and ruling elite see the issues internally and opts and devise policies accordingly. At external level in a way, a block follows an ideology which suits their system and interests well.

Ideology is “a system of ideas concerning phenomena, especially those of social life; the manner of thinking characteristic of a class or an individual.”

Though this assertion does not completely fulfill the true meaning of ideology rather portrays a vague picture. First part shows the objectivity and later depicts the subjectivity. Ideology is a science of ideas or set of ideas which provide guide lines for future course of action through building coherence between past and presentⁱ.

Historical Background of Ideology

The word ideology was coined for the first time by Destutt de Tracy in the 18th century. He says that ideology is a radical empirical analysis of the human mind. This also dates back to the French Revolution in the European History from where this phenomenon took actual roots. Ideology depends upon strong analysis based on empiricism over a long period of time. Though human nature tends to be changed and owes to new variations and dimensions. Critical analysis or antithesis will help a bit to modify but still essence of the ideology through the process of modification will not be hurt. Ideology in international relations date back to 19th century and even much earlier where ideological cover of political conduct was acquired for the sake of international and international legitimacy.

Hypothesis

Iranian Foreign policy is a unique manifestation of both Ideology and Pragmatism where rational and individual models are equally participating.

Research Questions

What is the role of ideology in Iranian Constitution and foreign policy?
Is Iranian foreign policy is based on Ideology or pragmatism?
Which model of foreign policy formulation attributes in the foreign policy of Iran?

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Scope of Research

The scope of the research is to uncover the role of ideology in foreign policy making that is unavoidable factor. Moreover, Iran is key state in the Middle East having key strategic location in the region. It is also a point of great concern for the world community why Iran behaves in a certain specific mood in the international environment of world politics. Iran's role is strategic in the region so its prospects are greater on the future course of world politics. It also attributes how Iran's foreign policy can impact the global political environment.

Method of Research

Explanatory, exploratory and analytical methods have been used for the research purposes. All the available resources like books; journal etc. has been used for literature review

Role of Ideology in Politics and International Relations

Every ideology, political, religious and economic factors is aimed to provide an umbrella to legitimize the actions of politicians at the national and international level. Ideology can be derived from the history, beliefs system and social system of a state, country or nation states. Role of ideology in politics is greater along with the phenomenon of interests. Ideology assumes key position in the formulation of foreign policy making and interacting with other states. In the history of nation states world witnessed different prevailing ideologies at different point of times. Big power either made the smaller states allies by making alliance or the weaker states aligned themselves with the bigger one with whom their ideology resembled or socio-cultural, political and economic affinities realized. It is old tradition in international relations that every state made alliance with an ideology that can serve their interests well.

In the 19th and 20th centuries ideologies of Marxism, Fascism and even Nazism were proved as a false thinking that were used merely as tools to build and maintain hegemony or to counter one another to rule the world. It demonstrates the domination of one class over the other or struggle of a class to overthrow the existing status quo. Only Marxism reflects utilitarian side of ideology. It sets a clear direction for a state to pursue foreign policy objective with some morality and legality. Many ideologies emerged in the history of the world to counter or challenge the prevailing status quo and bring the new one with revolutionary changes along with it. In the 20th century world community witnessed the ideology of imperialism where many western big powers continued their ideology of imperialistic approach to by legalizing their interference in the affairs of underdeveloped south with the operationalization

of Colonialism. Moreover, many ambiguous ideologies come across but they have to face the destiny of desperation due to their unrealistic agendas that does not work in the real world. However, twenty first century is facing dramatic shifts in the diplomatic course of history because many breakthroughs are quite visible. Iran has undergone severe economic, political and security pressure in past couple of decades. This new political environment, changing diplomatic scenarios and security of national interests has led Iran to deal with United States regarding its nuclear enrichment. Foreign policy of Iran is going through change in the wake of lifting of economic ban as a result of strategic nuclear deal where ideology is coming second to economic, political and security interests. Moreover, regional dynamics of Middle East is another factor in this regard where there are diverse factors of states behavior changes and animosities among the regional players. One of these is Saudi-Iran long standing conflict in which Saudi Arabia has have close alliance with United States and close economic ties. This regional ground reality also led the Iran to review and revise its foreign policy to balance the regional imbalance and maintain her security and economic prosperity where certain cultural and ideological preference has been ignored for broader interests.

Typical ideologies of foreign policies

Ideologies can be classified in three forms vis-à-vis foreign policy.

- 1) Ideologies of status Quo
- 2) Ideologies of Imperialism
- 3) Ambiguous ideologies

Ideologies of status Quo deals with ideological disguises but it has gained moral legitimacy. Status Quo is aimed at preservation of the power as it already is; Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden are the glaring examples in this respect. Peace and propagation of international law in 1919 were also dubbed as status Quo by the allied powers, so that Germany could have not exploited in the post-world war I. Ideology of status Quo attaches great importance to moral and legal principles.

Ideology of imperialism seeks to overthrow the existing power and believe in the distribution of power. Typical ideology of imperialism makes best use of international law which seems to be static but new imperialism asks for dynamism. Imperialism requires a few slogans like colonial imperialism stood for ideological slogans “blessings of Western Civilization”. Japanese ideology stood for East Asiatic “co-prosperity zone”. Arab imperialism during the period of expansion justified as religious duty. Ambiguous ideology does create

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ambiguity as we are not sure either we are dealing with imperialism or status Quo.

Role of Ideology in Foreign Policy

Foreign policy objectives are often derived from political doctrines which are known as ideology. Ideology establishes foreign policy goals, process of evaluation and justification of actions. It is related to political actions and goals in five different ways:

- 1) Ideology helps to establish intellectual frame work. It enables the policy maker to interpret the foreign environment.
- 2) It establishes strong interactions and coherence between the domestic environment and external environment.
- 3) Ideology provides rationalization and justification for the choice with specific foreign policy decisions.
- 4) It expresses the historical development.
- 5) Ideology provides a moral and ethical system which helps to correct attitudes and evaluative criteria.

Foreign policy of Iran

Iran is one of the most important Muslim countries particularly in Gulf and world generally. Islamic Revolution in Iran 1979 changed the whole course of action but Iran's revolutionary ideology left deep imprints on its foreign policy. Post revolution Iran foreign policy is taken as Iran's ideological foreign policy because ideology is deeply rooted in religious. In the changing geo-political environment of the world the dynamics of the world politics are shifting exclusively. Realistic paradigm is dominating the overall case scenario of the world politics. Iran since its revolution is stick to her ideology and never negated the ideological norms and values during foreign policy formulation process. However, Iran has started to change the angle to view the political issues and started it viewing through different lenses. Undoubtedly, Ideology is a major determinant behind the Iranian foreign policy making. Partial shift is visible in the foreign policy of Iran when it looks the attacks on Iraq and Afghanistan differently. It is quite noticeable that Iranian foreign policy despite having ideological factor has started to attain the pragmatic approach to deal the emerging issues and challenges. Iran has opted pragmatic and rational way to cope with the problems irrespective her ideology when there is question of security and survival.

Ideology occupies a dominant position in foreign policy. In case of clash between ideology and interest, supreme leader will set the equilibrium. If regime faces acute danger of its survival then interest will be preferred. This fact clearly shows that though Ideology is a major determining factor in the foreign policy making even then national interests prevail when there is a question of national security and economic stability. Reformists and pragmatic conservatives have given new dimensions to Iran's foreign policy following the death of ImamKhomeini: Reformists and Pragmatic conservatives like Rafsanjani and Khatami perhaps being the best examples. Iran aimed to pursue the policy of peaceful, cordial and diplomatic relations with the rest of the world or to access to Western Technological development. Iran is changing its outlook and aim to develop cordial relations with the southern part of the world. Iranian has started to pursue the look east policy for future course of action. It is only because Iran wanted to avoid the economic deficiencies cause by western ban on her commodities as they wanted to counterbalance the western influence by making strong relations with China, Russia and India. It would be helpful to protect and safeguard their nuclear programme from external western aggression.

Foreign Policy and constitution of Iran

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran was adopted by referendum on October 24, 1979, and went into force on December 3 of that year, replacing the Constitution of 1906. It was amended on July 28, 1989. The constitution has been called a "hybrid" of "authoritarian, theocratic and democratic elements". First two articles explain the sovereignty vested with God and article Six gives the mandate to popular elections for the president and parliament. However all democratic procedures and rights are subordinate to the Guardian Council and the Supreme Leader, whose powers are expressed in Chapter Eight (Articles 107-112).

Preamble

The constitution begins by stating that the anti-despotic movement for constitutional government and anti-colonialist movement for the nationalization of petroleum in 1950s failed because there was no involvement of religion in them. Moreover, centreof the theocracy shall be Quran and Hadith. Preamble further states: The Assembly of Experts for Constitution framed the Constitution after input by the government with the hope that this century will witness the establishment of a universal holy government and the downfall of all others.

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The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran Chapter X Foreign Policy (Article 152)

Foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon the rejection of all forms of domination, both the exertion of it and submission to it, the preservation of the independence of the country in all respects and its territorial integrity, the defense of the rights of all Muslims, non-alignment with respect to the hegemonic superpowers, and the maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent States.

(Article 153)

Any agreement that could result in foreign control over the natural resources, economy, army, or culture of the country, as well as other aspects of the national life, is forbidden.

(Article 154)

The Islamic Republic of Iran has as its ideal human felicity throughout human society, and wanted the attainment of independence, freedom, and rule of justice and truth to be the right of all people of the world. Accordingly, it will refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of the other states and will support the oppressed states against the oppressors in every corner of the globe.

(Article 155)

Iranian Constitution explains that the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran may grant political asylum to those who seek it unless they are regarded as traitors and obstructers according to the laws of Iran.

Iran Foreign Policy: Ideology or Pragmatism

Since the end of Iran – Iraq war and death of spiritual leader Ayaollah Khomeini, Iran has shifted a bit from ideological to pragmatism. It is well institutionalized and proved to be a rational actor in the world affairs.

Iran foreign policy is shaped by three distinct environments.

- A) National environment
- B) Regional environment
- C) Global environment

Islamic ideology is the source of unity and integration at domestic level. Unity and coherence at home enabled Iran to pursue a very good foreign policy. Even national coherence does not allow its enemies to peep into domestic or state affairs. Common and concerted goals and close affinity between leaders and people has shown multiple advantages. Glaring example of resentment vis-à-vis foreign policy of Pakistan between masses and leaders is likely to be escalated. Case is quite reverse in the matter of Iran where there is a strong homogeneity in society and unity between leadership and masses is quite a visible fact. Iran represents a unique where socio-cultural bond are stronger and trust of the masses on the leaders is grater more than in any other nation of the world. These strong bonds internally show the strength of foreign policy of it. This is the biggest difference that makes Iran different from all the developing nations of the world. Obviously, this seems the only reason behind the strong stance in front of the superpower

Since 9/11, 2001, war in Iraq and Afghanistan has largely increased the geo-political importance of Iran in manifolds. Foreign policy of Iran to cope emerging challenges as it could not keep itself isolated from regional repercussions is quite revealing. U.S presence in Afghanistan and Iraq to encircle Iran has largely been defied. Without Iran's co-operation Israel-Palestinian conflict is likely to be fuelled. Once more Iran's commitments regarding regional issues are motivated by ideological concerns. Global environment where loose Uni-polarity is at the threshold, Iran has been able to build up Cordial relations with Russia, India and China. Iran's foreign policy is heading towards pragmatism in an evolutionary pace. Disintegration of Soviet Union brought enormous opportunities for Iran.

The Russian-Iranian alliance soon after the end of cold war urged to resist U.S hegemony and military, nuclear co-operations increased. Iran continuous quietness over Chechnya crises shows its rational and pragmatic approach.

There is a drastic change in the revolutionary Iran's foreign policy. There is a paradigm shift since the end of cold war. Why this happened? And continues to happen? Answer to this question is the theory of realism especially neo-realism. Kenneth Waltz answers this question that states pursue similar foreign policies. Small states have temptations to have a say in international system which is anarchic, but the survival depends on capabilities on the part of the state. Iran as regional power does not long preach the ideological compulsions. Interests demand a change which is varied from time to time but national security is the key which could never be compromised. Iran's open opposition to U.S new mode of imperialism shows its moral and principle stand. State even being at periphery has the equal say at the international level if it is capable enough to make others to listen.

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Foreign Policy Models and Iran Foreign Policy

Broadly speaking, there are three models

- 1) Rational Actor Model
 - 2) Bureaucratic Model
 - 3) Individual Model
- a) Rational Model is based on loss and gains but systematic way of analyzing different steps is called as rational Actor model.
 - b) Bureaucratic Model is based on the hierarchical organization which is aimed to provide expertise in matter of foreign policy.
 - c) Individual model revolves around single personality or leaders which takes immediate and final decision.

Iran falls under rational and individual model. Though Iran foreign policy does not revolve around single personality because guardian council exist which provide some sort of organizational patterns, but still supreme leader is innovative enough to motivate the others. At the global level, Iran clearly defines its goals through the process of rationalization which falls under rational actor model. Foreign policy is quite clearly rational when there is different outlook on the different issues of the states in the world. Individual model in the sense when Iran sticks to its principal stand not to bow down the superior power at any condition and it is part of the constitutional preamble of the state. This is the point where ideology is principal determining factor. It can be regarded as that Iranian foreign policy is mixture of the Pragmatism and ideological stance. Both the factors cannot be ignored. So, Iranian foreign policy is the manifestation and interplay of the rational actor model and individual model.

Iranian president is considered among powerful leaders of the world attain the authority through the popular mandate of the people. This is most striking and magnificent factor that separates the Iranian political system from other systems of the states.

Iranian Ideology: Pre and Post-Revolutionary Era

Before the Islamic revolution, Iran was an ally of USA, and it showed a great tilt towards west and USA. Iran was the Member of SEATO and CENTO through which Iran got Military and Economic Assistance. Iran before the revolution was a monarchy or dynasty where foreign policy revolved around single person which was known as a king or Monarch. After revolution, Iran liberated itself from west and US domination and pursued a policy based on ideological orientations. Supreme leader underlined basic objectives which clearly depicted ideological principles. Previously it was a weak dependent

state like other states in the region under leadership of Monarch. After the revolutionary change some principal ideas devised for future course of action based on certain mindset and Islamic Values. This transformation not only changed the outlook but standing of Iran in the regional and global political scenario. Ideology is part and parcel of the Iranian foreign policy that provides foundation. Though, things are changing with the passage of time and Iran has started to broaden its scope of policy making but still ideology is unavoidable factor.

Conclusion

Iran's foreign policy has undergone the process of transformation keeping its ideology relatively intact. Iran's foreign policy ideological dimension is not vanished but it has added colors of pragmatism and rationality which is more than a state required. Ideology does not be so where security of the state would always be under threat but viable and dynamic ideology sidelines the looming dangers and security threats. Iran's foreign policy is benefiting from both national coherence and security preservation which ideology has success fully provided. The issue of legitimacy is no more there as Iran has developed cordial relations with the rest of the world in the field of economics, politics and even religious as well. Moreover, the recent nuclear deal between United States and Iran has marked new phase of diplomatic history in global political world. This also demonstrated the Iran's tilt towards pragmatism and rational approach of global politics and slight deviance from strict ideological compliance keeping in view the changing diplomatic dynamics of the world.

End Notes

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