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THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING ME SUCH A HUGE THREAT:  
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

By Elizabeth C. Boyer

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College

Oxford, Mississippi  
May 2020

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## **Abstract**

The United States has long held the idea that Iran poses a threat to our interests as well as global stability, implying that Iran is irrational and makes decisions rooted purely in ideology. After creating an independent framework based on rational choice theory, descriptive decision theory, and the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, I determined four possible ways to describe Iran's foreign policy: rational-constitutional, irrational-constitutional, rational-unconstitutional, and irrational-unconstitutional. I then apply this framework to six cases which I have identified to be vital to understanding Iran's foreign policy: Iraq, Israel, United States of America, China, the nuclear program, and proxy groups, and in doing so, I attempt to answer the question of to what extent does Iranian Foreign Policy reflect the goals outlined by the Iranian constitution ratified in 1979 (with its subsequent amendments); and how does a constitutional reading of foreign policy illuminate our understanding of the drivers of Iranian Foreign Policy? The following sub-questions will also be considered: Is an ideological foreign policy exclusive from a practical foreign policy? If Iran does not act within the goals of the Constitution, why not? In considering these cases, I found that Iran's foreign policy is quite nuanced depending on the case at hand, with three cases being determined as rational-constitutional, two as irrational-constitutional, one as rational-unconstitutional, and zero as irrational-unconstitutional.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Section 1.1: Introduction and Research Question

Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, an understanding of the strategic intent of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been essential for both regional actors and global powers. From the standpoint of the United States, Iran's regional ambitions are frequently cited as one of the most critical foreign policy and security challenges facing the Western world in the twenty-first century. Former President George W. Bush declared in his 2002 State of the Union Address, "States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world."<sup>1</sup> The American concept of the "axis of evil" implies not only that members of that axis serve the same purpose and strive for the same goals as terrorist organizations, but more importantly that states which pursue goals outside of American interests can be compared to terrorist organizations in the first place.

Although the term "axis of evil" was coined by the Bush Administration, the Obama Administration harbored similar sentiments regarding Iran. While the Obama Administration is responsible for implementing diplomatic efforts with Iran which led to the Iran Nuclear Deal, a statement given by President Obama in 2016 gives insight into how the United States continued to view Iran despite these collaborative efforts: "Of course, even as we implement the nuclear deal and welcome our Americans home, we recognize that there remain profound differences between the United States and Iran. We remain steadfast in opposing Iran's destabilizing behavior elsewhere..."<sup>2</sup> In a separate speech given by President Obama at American University, Obama

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<sup>1</sup> *National Archives and Records Administration*. <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

<sup>2</sup> "Statement by the President on Iran." *National Archives and Records Administration*. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/01/17/statement-president-iran>.

was quoted as saying, “Let’s not mince words: The choice we face is ultimately between diplomacy and some form of war – maybe not tomorrow, maybe not three months from now, but soon.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Obama Administration may not have been as aggressive in their characterization of Iran, but they perpetuated the ideas that interactions with Iran have a high potential to result in violence and that peaceful diplomatic relations with Iran are thanks to American, not Iranian, efforts.

Nearly two decades after Bush’s “axis of evil” declaration, these attitudes continue to be reflected by means of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence’s yearly threat report, which assessed in 2019 that “Iran’s regional ambitions almost certainly will threaten US interests in the coming year.”<sup>4</sup> This assessment is a culmination of nearly two decades of perpetuating of the idea that Iran is an aggressive foreign power with an irrational, ideological foreign policy that threatens the security of nations across the globe. However, this line of thinking drastically undermines the fact that what lies in Iran’s best interest as a sovereign nation does not have to coincide with what the United States’ best interest is. Iran is one of the most critical challenges to the United States but is simultaneously one of the most misunderstood challenges the United States faces. In order to determine an effective policy towards Iran, the United States must step back and look at the broader picture, rather than allowing counter-productive attitudes and beliefs that Iran’s foreign policy is aggressive and radical in every aspect to hold a monopoly over our policy decisions. Thus, the purpose of this thesis will be to analyze Iran’s foreign policy from a more holistic perspective, focusing less on how their foreign policy affects the interests of the United States.

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<sup>3</sup> Staff, Washington Post. 2015. “Full Text: Obama Gives a Speech about the Iran Nuclear Deal.” *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/08/05/text-obama-gives-a-speech-about-the-iran-nuclear-deal/>.

<sup>4</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence. 2019. “Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community.” <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/2019-ATA-SFR---SSCI.pdf>.



In order to assess the rationality and ideology of Iran's foreign policy, I will turn to a document which marks the legal shift in Iran's foreign policy ambitions: the Islamic Republic of Iran's Constitution. In my examination of Iran's foreign policy in the context of this document, I will attempt to answer the following questions: to what extent does Iranian Foreign Policy reflect the goals outlined by the Iranian constitution ratified in 1979 (with its subsequent amendments); and how does a constitutional reading of foreign policy illuminate our understanding of the drivers of Iranian Foreign Policy? The following sub-questions will also be considered: Is an ideological foreign policy exclusive from a practical foreign policy? If Iran does not act within the goals of the Constitution, why not?

## **Section 1.2: Historical Background**

Although the framework for this thesis was ratified in 1979 and amended in 1989, it is necessary to jump further back in history to understand the conditions in which the current Constitution had the opportunity to come about because the Constitution is a reflection of the revolutionary sentiments held at the time of its inception. Without understanding the Pahlavi dynasty and the White Revolution, which is thought to have led to the Pahlavi dynasty's downfall, one cannot understand the rise of Khomeini and the reason for the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

The Pahlavi dynasty was formed in 1925 when Reza Khan was named the new Shah, four years after he helped orchestrate the 1921 coup, which used Iran's military forces to combat the ruling Qajar dynasty. Reza Khan's role in replacing the inefficient and weak Qajar Dynasty in the coup paved the way for him to be War Minister, Prime Minister, and eventually Shah.<sup>5</sup> However, Reza Khan's rise to being Shah was not a natural transition of power, and it required Iran's parliament to amend the 1906 Constitution, replacing the Qajar dynasty with the Pahlavi dynasty

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<sup>5</sup> Mostofi, Khosrow, and Janet Afary. 2020. "Rise of Reza Khan." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Iran/Rise-of-Reza-Khan>.

as the legitimate sovereigns of Iran.<sup>6</sup> The ushering in of this new dynasty also marked the ushering in of a new Iran, with ambitious plans for the modernization of Iran. These plans included implementing new infrastructure projects, strengthening the middle and working classes, and establishing a public education system, among other goals. However, the idea of having a strong central government which heavily relied on the individual decisions of the Shah created discomfort among religious and intellectual elites.<sup>7</sup>

In 1941, British and Soviet forces occupied Iran in a military invasion, forcing Reza Shah to abdicate his power to his son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. This created enough political stability in Iran that Iran became a major conduit of British and American aid throughout WWII in a supply effort known as the Persian Corridor.<sup>8</sup> The transition of power from father to son went smoothly, with the Pahlavi Dynasty now having the backing of the Allied Powers. More than a decade later, this alliance would continue to benefit Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, with those who originally installed him into power interfering once again to keep him in power.

The leadership of Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddegh marked a political shift in which Iran attempted to nationalize Iran's oil industry and expel foreign corporate representatives from the country. This greatly impacted the control of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), a British company which had control over Iranian oil reserves. As Soviet forces never withdrew from Iran in the aftermath of WWII, there was a growing fear that Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddegh would pave the way for communism to take hold in Iran once British and American friendly businesses were nationalized. Acting on this fear, the CIA orchestrated a coup in 1953, which

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<sup>6</sup> Berger, Miriam. 2020. "The divisive legacy of Iran's royal family." *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/01/16/divisive-legacy-irans-royal-family/>.

<sup>7</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. 1979. "The Iranian Constitution: A Reference Aid." <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP80T00942A000600070002-0.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> *The Persian Corridor and Aid to Russia*. <https://history.army.mil/books/wwii/persian/index.htm>.

removed the Mohammed Mosaddegh from power and Fazlollah Zahedi replaced him as Prime Minister.<sup>9</sup> In the aftermath of the 1953 CIA coup, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi ruled more firmly as a monarch, and he continued to rely heavily on support from the United States.

Although Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was installed and kept in power by way of foreign influence, he attempted to reform Iranian society in many of the same ways his father had. This included pursuing a policy of increasing Iranian power and independence by minimizing foreign influence. Ultimately, Pahlavi's dream was for Iran to reclaim its place as a Great Civilization, which prompted many of his industrial, military, economic, and social reforms. The peak of these reforms occurred during the White Revolution, which was ushered in with the intention of transforming Iran into a global power.<sup>10</sup> However, the Shah's wish to better Iran's standing on the global stage would ultimately lead to his downfall.

The White Revolution, named for being a bloodless revolution, stemmed from a series of social, economic, and political reforms begun by the Shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, in 1963. The reforms were aimed to modernize Iran and legitimize the Pahlavi dynasty by finding support in groups that were typically disenfranchised such as the peasantry. Despite the attempt to reform a system which the Shah saw as unreliable for long-term stability, his reforms actually led to new social tensions which would inevitably create some of the same problems he had been hoping to avoid.<sup>11</sup> However, it is not as if the Shah was blind to these newfound tensions, although he believed that it was in the way he had implemented the reforms, not the reforms themselves. In a 1973 interview, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was asked whether he would deny that he was a rather

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<sup>9</sup> Kinzer, Stephen. 2003. *All the Shah's men: the hidden story of the CIA's coup in Iran*. Wiley.

<sup>10</sup> Mostofi, Khosrow, and Peter William Avery. 2020. "The White Revolution." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Iran/The-White-Revolution>.

<sup>11</sup> Maloney, Suzanne. 2019. "1979: Iran and America." *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/1979-iran-and-america/>.

authoritarian ruler, to which he responded, “No, I wouldn’t, because, in a sense, I am. To go through with reform, one can’t help but be authoritarian... only the strictest authoritarianism can ensure reform; otherwise nothing can be achieved.”<sup>12</sup>

The White Revolution contributed to economic and technological advancement for Iran, but the revolution also contained reform programs which were utter failures or brought no change at all. Failed programs only flamed the resentment of the demographics which the Shah was targeting for support through these reforms. This coupled with anger from those that had previously benefited from the more traditional system, such as religious leaders and landowners, would lead to the Shah’s downfall and the 1979 Iranian Revolution – the exact thing the White Revolution was put in place to prevent.

Changes from the White Revolution also challenged the role of Iran’s religious leaders as a dominant force, with most fearing that they would lose power and authority under the Pahlavi dynasty. Not only were religious figures disgruntled by these changes which upended their traditional way of life, but other portions of the population were beginning to become frustrated with the Shah as well. For instance, academics who had long been annoyed with autocratic rule and corruption hoped for more democratic reforms during the White Revolution. The middle class also became angry because they received little benefit from neither the White Revolution’s development plans nor the growth of the oil industry throughout the 70s.<sup>13</sup> Although arguably the aims of the revolution were to counter the already growing hostilities of the middle class rather than appeal to them, their further alienation did not help the Shah in any way.

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<sup>12</sup> “The Shah of Iran: An Interview with Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.” 1973. *The New Republic*. <https://newrepublic.com/article/92745/shah-iran-mohammad-reza-pahlevi-oriana-fallaci>.

<sup>13</sup> Armajani, Yahya. 1979. “What the U.S. Needs to Know About Iran.” *Worldview* 22(5): 13–19.

These factors helped contribute to the rise of leaders such as Ruhollah Khomeini, better known as Ayatollah Khomeini, who was arguably a relatively unknown figure until these reforms began. He was one of the first clerics to openly criticize the White Revolution, framing it as an injustice to the masses, the exact opposite of what the Shah had in mind.<sup>14</sup> By fearlessly critiquing the Shah's reforms, Khomeini was able to capture the support of religious leaders and the disgruntled middle class, allowing him to further spread his revolutionary ideology.

Khomeini was exiled from Iran by the Shah in 1964, after two years of preaching sermons and passing out leaflets critical of the Shah's regime, as well as on the Shah's land reform and women's rights programs. Despite being exiled, Khomeini continued to broadcast his message to his following in Iran from Iraq. He was subsequently thrown out of Iraq a few years later from the fear of the Iraqi government that his message would resonate with Iraqis and create the same currents of frustration as seen in Iran. However, exile did not stop Khomeini, and he continued to send his messages to Iran via audio tapes he would record in France. Examination of these speeches by the Central Intelligence Agency found that Khomeini continuously argued that the Shah was anti-Islamic and the monarchy as an institution had become opposed to Shia Islam. In his wish to replace the Pahlavi dynasty, Khomeini proposed an Islamic Republic for which "the only reference point would be the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the Imam Ali," a vague proposal meant to unite his vast population of followers who all could find different purposes in his message.<sup>15</sup>

The culmination of these increasingly revolutionary attitudes occurred on what is known as Black Friday, one of the most notorious clashes between the opponents of the Shah and the

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<sup>14</sup> "Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Iran." 2010. *History.com*. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/ayatollah-khomeini-returns-to-iran>.

<sup>15</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. 1978. "The Politics of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini." <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP80T00634A000500010002-9.pdf>.

Shah's security troops. On September 08, 1978, nearly 20,000 demonstrators were fired on in Tehran, with hundreds being killed and thousands more being wounded. Many of these demonstrations were to call for an end to Western corruption in Iran, an issue in which much of the blame was placed on the Shah.<sup>16</sup> Two months later, on December 10 and 11 of 1978, a group of soldiers held a mutiny by attacking the Shah's security officers. Subsequently, Pahlavi's regime collapsed, and he fled Iran.<sup>17</sup>

Khomeini returned to Iran in February of 1979, and he began to establish control within the power vacuum left behind by the no longer standing Pahlavi dynasty. He cleaned house by removing officials left behind by the Shah and appointed a new Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan. Bazargan was thought to favor democracy, leading many to believe that the new government would succeed where the White Revolution failed.<sup>18</sup> In March of 1979, Iranians voted on the new form of government via referendum, and Khomeini declared the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran as "the first day of a Government of God" on April 01, after receiving 98.2% of the vote.<sup>19</sup> The Constitution of this newly formed government was ratified in December of the same year with 99.5% of the vote, giving the young Islamic Republic a document in which revolutionary goals could be pursued within the confines of government.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "Timeline of the Iranian revolution." 2019. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-revolution-anniversary-timeline/timeline-of-the-iranian-revolution-idUSKCN1Q017W>.

<sup>17</sup> Maloney, Suzanne, and Keian Razipour. 2019. "The Iranian revolution-A timeline of events." *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/01/24/the-iranian-revolution-a-timeline-of-events/>.

<sup>18</sup> Youssef. 1979. "IRAN'S NEW PREMIER NAMES 7 TO CABINET; KHOMEINI ASKS CALM." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/02/14/archives/irans-new-premier-names-7-to-cabinet-khomeini-asks-calm-a-foe-of.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Jaynes, Gregory. 1979. "Khomeini Declares Victory in Vote For a 'Government of God' in Iran." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/04/02/archives/khomeini-declares-victory-in-vote-for-a-government-of-god-in-iran.html>.

Although the Islamic Republic of Iran was in its earliest days, the newly formed government was extremely quick in taking actions which fell in line with their revolutionary ideals, even though they resembled much more spontaneous decision making than strategic policy at this point. In November of 1979, Iranians stormed the United States Embassy in Tehran, taking more than sixty Americans hostage. Khomeini declared that he would not release any of the American hostages until the United States apologized for its support of the Shah, among other demands. The hostages were eventually released in January of 1981 when Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as President of the United States of America, succeeding President Jimmy Carter.<sup>21</sup>

At first glance, the timing of the release would imply that the hostage crisis strategically occurred due to the Carter Administration's friendly relations with the Pahlavi dynasty which had just been overthrown, a relationship which had led President Carter to even label Iran an "island of stability" just one year prior to the revolution.<sup>22</sup> However, the hostage crisis represented something much larger than liking one Presidential administration more than another, it was a dramatic event which signified a break with American interference in Iranian affairs.

Khomeini used the fervor of the hostage taking to mobilize radical Islamic students against Bazargan, one of the pillars of reason in his administration. Khomeini became the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and he used his unlimited powers to eliminate opponents.<sup>23</sup> After

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<sup>20</sup> Basravi, Zein. 2019. "Iran's referendum and the transformation to the Islamic Republic." *Middle East | Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/iran-referendum-transformation-islamic-republic-190330210626860.html>.

<sup>21</sup> *U.S. Department of State*. <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/iraniancrises>.

<sup>22</sup> Glass, Andrew, and Politico Magazine. 2018. "Carter lauds shah of Iran, Dec. 31, 1977." *POLITICO*. <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/12/30/this-day-in-politics-december-31-1077103>.

<sup>23</sup> James. 1979. "20 MORE SHAH AIDES SAID TO FACE DEATH IN START OF A PURGE." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/02/17/archives/20-more-shah-aides-said-to-face-death-in-start-of-a-purge-regime.html>.

continuous attacks on those who took a more liberal stance, including his own President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, who fled Iran in February of 1981, he went on to even repress religious figures he believed to be his political opponents.<sup>24</sup>

Khomeini went on to fill key positions in government with those he believed to be his closest religious allies. He also conducted a purge of Western (or “un-Islamic”) elements from universities, newspapers, and other cultural institutions, thereby limiting the freedoms which Iranians once held. Many Iranians quickly found themselves living under a politically and socially repressive regime.

Although the clerical regime was designed to fix Khomeini’s insecurities, it led to more problems and ideological conflicts. For instance, conservative clerics in the Council of Guardians, the group created to ensure adherence to Islamic code and the constitution, vetoed reform legislation proposed by the less conservative Iranian Parliament. Those who wished for reform wanted to nationalize industries and change the way land was distributed, while more conservative clerics, who controlled much of the land, were clearly opposed to such reform. Clerics not only opposed such reform, but also wanted to take it a step further by pursuing a stricter religious policy than their opponents. These disagreements led to a blatant stalemate which ultimately paralyzed their ability to do anything domestic policy related.<sup>25</sup>

In September 1980, Iraq invaded Iran. This conflict allowed for a temporary distraction from the internal issues taking place with domestic policy. The invasion was caused in part by

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<sup>24</sup> “Khomeini regime committed gross human rights abuses, finds tribunal.” 2012. *The Guardian*.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/04/khomeini-regime-human-rights-abuses>.

<sup>25</sup> Borden, Emma, and Suzanne Maloney. 2016. “Iran's Guardians' Council has approved a record-low percentage of candidates. What will that mean for the upcoming vote?” *Brookings*.  
<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/02/24/irans-guardians-council-has-approved-a-record-low-percentage-of-candidates-what-will-that-mean-for-the-upcoming-vote/>.



Saddam Hussein's desire to end propaganda directed towards his regime.<sup>26</sup> Iran was not able to turn the tide of the conflict their way until the spring of 1982, when they began to utilize child "martyrs" in their fighting.<sup>27</sup> Emboldened by this shift, Khomeini showed his true colors by declaring that he was determined to see his revolutionary goals be spread throughout the region. This led those nations put at risk by this declaration to attempt to contain Iran, even seeking the support of the United States in order to do so.

As the costs of the war grew exponentially – both human and financial – attention turned back to Iran's internal failures and pressure grew to stop the stalemate between hardline conservatives and reformers. Khomeini eventually intervened on behalf of the reformers in Parliament, in order to give certain institutions more authority. Khomeini was also encouraged to end the war with Iraq and start economic reconstruction, which led Khomeini to create a new body called the Expediency Council, which was given the power to override vetoes.<sup>28</sup> In order to legitimize this new power, Khomeini supported the amending of the constitution, which was passed after his succession by Ali Khamenei.<sup>29</sup>

As Iranians hoped that this new version of their constitution would bring them greater social freedom, like they had pre-Iranian Revolution, many supported the changes in part because President Rafsanjani instilled that hope in people. However, the amended constitution may have

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<sup>26</sup> History.com Editors. 2009. "Iran-Iraq War." *History.com*. <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/iran-iraq-war>.

<sup>27</sup> Hardy, Roger. 2005. "Middle East | The Iran-Iraq war: 25 years on." *BBC News*. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4260420.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4260420.stm).

<sup>28</sup> "The Expediency Council." *Iran Data Portal*. <https://irandataportal.syr.edu/political-institutions/the-expediency-council>.

<sup>29</sup> "Iran Lawmakers Ask Khomeini to Amend Constitution 'Flaws'." 1989. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-04-17-mn-1964-story.html>.

placed clerics on equal footing with politicians, but it also gave the government more power to impose its decisions on the masses. Subsequently, the goals of the Iranian Revolution were institutionalized through political figures who now held the power to legally pursue them.

### **Section 1.3: Methodology and Framework**

In order to answer the question of to what extent does Iranian foreign policy reflect the goals outlined by the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and how does a constitutional reading illuminate our understanding of the rationality of Iranian foreign policy, I will first attempt to define the parameters of when foreign policy is constitutional, when it is rational, and how these two competing ideas interact with one another. The objective of this is to approach the topic of Iran's foreign policy through an independent framework in order to deliver new information on this under-researched topic.

The starting point for this framework will be to set a base understanding of what it means for Iran's foreign policy to be "constitutional." Essentially, this will determine whether or not Iranian foreign policy acts in accordance with their constitution. In order to do so, I will turn to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran because it serves as a constant, long-term strategic document which can be applied to any of the foreign policy cases which will be presented throughout this paper, whereas individual policies would not serve as a good starting point due to being much more tactical and short-term in nature. As constitutions are thought to embody the fundamental principles under which a state is governed, examining the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran offers a first-hand view of Iran's governing philosophy.

The legitimization of power in post-revolution Iran came by way of a two-day referendum held on March 30, 1979, and March 31, 1979. The referendum asked a simple question of voters: should Iran become an Islamic Republic? Although the results of the referendum were highly

criticized internationally, the referendum passed with 98.2% of the vote. A second referendum was later held in December of the same year in which Iranian voters showed an overwhelming support (99.5%) for the ratification of the new Islamic constitution.<sup>30</sup> Despite these nearly unanimous passages, these referendums are only indicative of what *voters* wished for, not what the *electorate* wanted. For instance, Kurdistan saw heavy boycotts of the referendums so many voters did not vote despite their clear distaste for the passage of either referendum.<sup>31</sup> Ballots were also done in the open, with different colored “yes” or “no” ballots being easily seen by any observers. However, a spokesman for Khomeini still declared the referendums to be a “completely free vote,”<sup>32</sup> and the referendums of 1979 serve as a cornerstone for the democratic creation of a theocratic system – fusing religion and politics in order to create the Islamic Republic of Iran. Essentially, all eligible voters legally gave a green light to a regime which would in turn, solidify the revolutionary aspirations for generations to come through official government documents.

This includes not only the Constitution’s original version in 1979 under the rule of Ruhollah Khomeini, but also the subsequent amendments passed via referendum by 97.6% in 1989 which shifted power sharing within the government. Although the amendments were passed after the death of Khomeini and upon the rise of Ali Khamenei to the position of Supreme Leader of Iran, a lack in continuity in power should raise no concern as to how amendments may contradict the original document because Khomeini was the one to appoint a twenty-five man Council for

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<sup>30</sup> Koven, Ronald. 1979. “Khomeini Decrees Islamic Republic After Vote in Iran.” *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1979/04/02/khomeini-decrees-islamic-republic-after-vote-in-iran/c4d11a54-8981-4b91-8ca0-7d9771a8cf2c/>.

<sup>31</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. 1980. “The Kurds of Iran: A Rugged People in a Rugged Land.” <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP81B00401R000500080004-8.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Koven, Ronald. 1979. “Khomeini Decrees Islamic Republic After Vote in Iran.” *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1979/04/02/khomeini-decrees-islamic-republic-after-vote-in-iran/c4d11a54-8981-4b91-8ca0-7d9771a8cf2c/>.

the Revision of the Constitution prior to his death.<sup>33</sup> The Constitution has many articles dedicated to outlining the goals in formulating Iran's foreign policy.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran outlines the foreign policy goals of the Islamic Republic in Chapter X: Foreign Policy:

“Article 152: The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon the rejection of all forms of domination – both the assertion of it and submission to it – preservation of the country's all round independence, its territorial integrity, defense of the rights of all Muslims, non-alignment with hegemonic superpowers, and the maintenance of peaceful relations with all non-belligerent States.

Article 153: Any kind of agreement resulting in foreign control of the country's natural resources, economy, army, culture, and other aspects of national life, is forbidden.

Article 154: The realization of human felicity throughout human society is the ideal of the Islamic Republic of Iran and it considers independence, freedom, and the rule of justice and truth to be the right of all people of the world. Accordingly, whilst scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the internal affairs of other nations, it supports the struggle of the mustad'afun (oppressed) against the mustakbirun (tyrants) for their rights in every corner of the globe.

Article 155: The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran may grant political asylum to those who seek it unless they are considered to be traitors and criminals according to the law of Iran.”<sup>34</sup>

The Preamble of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran provides further context on how the Constitution intends to embody the goals of the Revolution as an ideological document:

“The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran sets forth the cultural, social, political, and economic institutions of Iranian society on the basis of Islamic principles and norms, which represent the earnest aspiration of the Islamic Ummah. This basic aspiration was made explicit by the very nature of the great Islamic Revolution of Iran, as well as the course of the Muslim people's struggle, from its beginning until victory, as reflected in the decisive and forceful slogans raised by all segments of the populations. Now, at the threshold of this great victory, our nation, with all its being, seeks its fulfilment.

The basic characteristic of this revolution, which distinguishes it from other movements that have taken place in Iran during the past hundred years, is its ideological and Islamic nature... The idea

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<sup>33</sup> Youssef. 1989. “Iran Quickly Appoints Successor to Khomeini.” *The New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/05/world/iran-quickly-appoints-successor-to-khomeini.html>.

<sup>34</sup> “Islamic Parliament of Iran.” *Islamic Parliament of Iran - Constitution*.  
[https://en.parliran.ir/eng/en/Constitution#chapter\\_10](https://en.parliran.ir/eng/en/Constitution#chapter_10).

of Islamic government based upon wilayat al-faqih (rule of the jurist), as presented by Imam Khomeini at the height of the period of repression by the despotic regime, was pathbreaking for a genuine struggle based on Islamic teachings. It produced a new well-defined and consistent motive for the Muslim people, giving a new impetus to the struggle of militant and committed Muslims both within the country and abroad.”<sup>35</sup>

Through examining the foreign policy chapter of the Constitution, six prerequisites for what I will deem as a “constitutional” foreign policy can be found: reject forms of dominance, preserve independence, preserve territorial integrity, defend the rights of all Muslims, avoid alignment with hegemonic superpowers, and maintain peaceful relations with non-belligerent states. So, a constitutional foreign policy must meet a simple majority of the criteria outlined in Chapter X of the Constitution. A majority will be met when half of the actively pursued criteria are met or not met. If any portion of the criteria are not thought to be met because they do not pertain to the policy at hand, they will be characterized as being met passively and not count towards the simple majority of criteria. However, other descriptive factors which show that a constitutional foreign policy in the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran is separate, though not necessarily exclusive, of a rational foreign policy can be found in the Preamble of the Constitution. The Preamble reflects the idea that this document is inherently ideological, as evidenced by the idea that the Constitution is to reflect the aspirations made explicit by the Islamic Revolution of Iran. The revolution itself is then described as “ideological and Islamic” in nature.

As a constitutional foreign policy does not immediately exclude rational foreign policy, the rationality of Iran’s foreign policy will be adapted from rational choice theory and descriptive decision theory. Rational choice theory rests on the idea that it is sufficient to know an actors’ interests and assume that they pursue them rationally, with history and culture being largely

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<sup>35</sup> “Islamic Parliament of Iran.” *Islamic Parliament of Iran - Constitution*.  
<https://en.parliran.ir/eng/en/Constitution#preamble>.

irrelevant to understanding political behavior.<sup>36</sup> However, as rational choice theory relies on quantitative data, I will place the standards of rational choice theory against the mechanics of descriptive decision theory. Descriptive decision theory operates on the idea that observed behaviors can be described often under the assumption that the decision-maker behaves consistently.<sup>37</sup> So, I argue that Iran's foreign policy operates rationally, and rationality will be determined by whether or not they have factors other than ideology, history, and culture, as the primary determinant of their policy. Foreign policy decisions do not have to be completely exclusive of these three factors to qualify as rational, but these factors must not be the primary drivers of the policy in question.

Since Iran's foreign policy is made by a collective group rather than any singular individual, I will also use the framework of rationality as the goals of the national policy rather than the individual interests of those who put the policy in place. Therefore, Iran's foreign policy does not rest on the rationality of any man or woman, but rather on the rationality of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a collective governing body.

Based on these definitions of rationality and constitutionality, both ideas do not automatically exclude the other. So, each case presented throughout this paper will be determined through empirically rooted analysis as being rational-constitutional, rational-unconstitutional, irrational-unconstitutional, or irrational-constitutional. These labels will allow me to better determine how a constitutional reading of foreign policy affects our understanding of the rationality of Iran's foreign policy.

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<sup>36</sup> Riker, William H. 1995. "The Political Psychology of Rational Choice Theory." *Political Psychology* 16(1): 23.

<sup>37</sup> "Overview of Descriptive Decision Theory." *An Introduction to Decision Theory*: 311–322.

The methodology of this research relies on a qualitative approach. First, I have identified three areas of foreign policy which highlight the different characterizations within Iran's foreign policy: engagement with regional actors, interactions with global actions, and exportations of intersectional domestic and foreign policy. These three categories are rooted in a commonality of preserving the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as emphasized by the Constitution; however, their differences will provide a more accurate assessment of the fluidity of their foreign policy. Upon further examination, the preservation of interests is created through different means depending on how close to home the issue stands.

Although Iran's approach to foreign policy will shift depending on the case at hand, my analysis will not differ throughout the three areas. Rather, I will use open source analysis to collect data from primary sources such as government documents, political speeches, news articles, and intelligence reports, as well as secondary sources such as scholarly articles. Open source data, primarily that which comes from government or intelligence agencies will play a considerable role in my research as these sources tend to rely on consolidating raw, factual data, which I can in turn use to create my own analysis.

As I am operating with primary sources, I will also rely on textual analysis in which I compare the letter and action of documents against one another, as opposed to a larger theory. I am not arguing whether or not Iran's foreign policy is rational on a global scale, but whether or not Iran's foreign policy is rational for Iran; therefore, Iran's foreign policy can only be analyzed against its actions and its constitutional framework. This also allows for me to operate within the grounded theory in which data has been collected, analyzed, and then debated.

In order to understand the full picture of Iran's foreign policy, I strategically selected cases in which Iran strikes a fine balance between constitutionality and rationality. Additionally, it was

imperative to the research to restrict cases due to time constraints and the plentiful material available on this topic. This holds true in all three areas of research with juxtapositions between Iraq and Israel, United States of America and China, and the nuclear program and proxy groups.

In Iran's foreign policy, this balance has been struck depending on the time and the place. Even when the exportation of Iran's ideology was at its peak in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, this dissemination of ideas was primarily confined to the Gulf region. The balance was also never tipped 100% in favor of expansionist goals but actually was kept in check by times of pragmatism, such as the release of American hostages by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1981.

In order to comprehend the balance between Iran's ideological goals as presented by the Constitution and practical foreign policies, I will apply the previously identified goals of the Constitution to actions taken by Iran in the context of Iraq, Israel, the United States of America, China, the Iran Nuclear Program, and the use of proxy groups, to determine whether or not Iran has taken a practical stance, an ideological stance, or a combination of the two. By examining these six key areas of Iran's foreign policy, I will make the determination that Iran does make rational, pragmatic policy decisions, and that these decisions are necessary for the success of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

#### **Section 1.4: Overview of Chapters**

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is complex with subtle shifts that create an evident pattern that Iran's foreign policy is not static, but rather fluid and practical. In order to defend this idea, it is necessary to examine critical cases of Iranian foreign policy which differ in goal and outcome regarding regional, global, and intersectional interactions.

In chapter two, I will begin by analyzing two key cases in Iran's regional policy: Israel and Iraq. These two cases most directly relate to a more mainstream understanding of foreign policy



as they encapsulate direct interaction between two countries in the countries themselves. Regional actors also relate most directly to the regional dominance Iran wishes to obtain.

Chapter three will explore Iran's interactions with global superpowers such as the United States of America and China. In the context of this chapter, we will observe two global powers who primarily interact with Iran in the Middle East, not within their own borders. In this case, global powers either pose a threat to Iran's regional interests (United States) or offer relief to Iran (China).

Chapter four will once again break the boundaries of what is more generally regarded to be foreign policy. This chapter will focus on the intersectional issues which are domestically engineered but not confined to the borders of Iran, primarily in the context of their nuclear program and their exportation of the revolution through the use of proxy groups. These intersectional policies will be found to be deterrence policies rather than expansionist, which falls squarely in the realm of foreign policy despite being domestic programs.

After exploring these three areas of foreign policy, I plan to further analyze these six cases of Iranian foreign policy in order to determine the relationship between rationality and constitutionality in their foreign policy. This chapter will look at Iran's foreign policy as a whole rather than by the individual policies which Iran pursues.

## **Chapter Two: Regional Interactions**

Any country with a foreign policy doctrine will have policies which are applicable to neighboring states. The differences in regional foreign policies are not whether or not a country has one, but what the purpose of that policy is. Is the policy one rooted in friendly diplomacy, or is it an expansionist policy which threatens the sovereignty of surrounding nations? Either way, countries should be invested in the well-being of its neighbors, as instability in one can be disruptive to the welfare of others. Countries can diverge as to how they go about pursuing regional security, but no nation is exempt from having a regional foreign policy, Iran included.

This chapter will focus on Iran's regional foreign policy, specifically in the Middle East. Iran's regional foreign policy is absolutely crucial in comprehending its broader foreign policy as the majority of Iranian interests are in the region. So, in order to gain a comprehensive view of Iran's regional interactions, I will examine Iran's foreign policy towards Iraq and Israel. These two countries were selected simply because Iran's direct engagement with these two places is known globally. Second, Iraq and Israel offer different vantage points for our understanding of Iran's foreign policy in the Middle East. This is due to Iraq and Israel being located in different geographical regions within the Middle East – Israel is squarely situated in the Levant, while Iraq is located in the Gulf region. The two also differ in their religious demographics, alliances, regional interests, and their purpose for Iran's regional interest, which provides a more comprehensive perspective into regional interactions.

First, I will start with examining Iran's relationship with Iraq by detailing how their relations have evolved since the 1979 revolution, what Iran's involvement in Iraq typically looks like, and what Iran's goals in Iraq are. After that, I will analyze Iran's policies towards Iraq in the context of this thesis' framework in order to determine the constitutionality and rationality. I will

then repeat this process in the context of Iran's foreign policy towards Israel by outlining their history, direct involvement, and future goals, before analyzing this information against the framework. After examining Iran's foreign policy towards Iraq and towards Israel, I will then conclude this chapter by discussing what these insights mean for Iran's larger regional foreign policy.

## **Section 2.1: Introduction to Iran's Iraq Policy**

Although Iran and Iraq share a history that can be traced back millennia, this thesis will only consider modern relations between Iraq and Iran that can be traced back to when Saddam Hussein, former president of Iraq, launched an invasion on Iran just months after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Saddam Hussein deliberately started the war against Iran, a nation still disorganized by revolution yet fueled by revolutionary fervor, in what is now a disputed thought process as to whether it was over territorial disputes (as Hussein claimed) or over a fear that the revolution would cross over into Iraq.<sup>38</sup> Either way, Saddam Hussein had drastically miscalculated the intensity in which Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini would lead his country, with Khomeini declaring in the early days of the war that Iran's armed forces would fight until they had achieved "total victory."<sup>39</sup> Khomeini was not exaggerating that Iran's forces would fight on no matter the cost, even employing child martyrs to run across minefields on the Iran-Iraq border so that troops could safely cross.<sup>40</sup>

In 1988, after eight years of conflict, the war ended with the acceptance of UN Resolution 598. Khomeini did clarify in the days following the ceasefire that for him, "taking this decision

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<sup>38</sup> Riedel, Bruce. 2019. "What Iran's revolution meant for Iraq." *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/01/24/what-irans-revolution-meant-for-iraq/>.

<sup>39</sup> Ap. 1981. "KHOMEINI REBUFFS IRAQ AND URGES WAR UNTIL 'VICTORY'." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/01/29/world/khomeini-rebuffs-iraq-and-urges-war-until-victory.html>.

<sup>40</sup> "Iran's child soldiers and the world's silent complicity." 2019. *Arab News*. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/>

was more deadly than taking poison.”<sup>41</sup> The Iranian leader also warned that “accepting the resolution does not mean the question of war has been solved. By declaring this decision, we have blunted the propaganda weapon of the world devourers against us.”<sup>42</sup> Based on Khomeini’s statements during this time period, the official war might have been over, but Iran harbored bitter sentiments, especially against Saddam Hussein.

Iran’s involvement, or lack thereof, during the 1990-1991 Gulf War was a divisive policy within Iran. The National Security Council declared that Iran would take a neutral stance in the Gulf War, a decision which was made in the rare attendance of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the successor to Ayatollah Khomeini. Prior to this declaration of neutrality, Ayatollah Sadegh Khalkhali, another Shia cleric most notable for advocating for turning conflicts into holy wars during his tenure in the Parliament of Iran from 1980 to 1992, argued before Parliament that Iran should not stay neutral. Rather, he believed that “we should not leave the Iraqi people standing alone in this battle, since if the United States emerges victorious it will not leave the region easily.”<sup>43</sup> Even with the declaration of neutrality, Iran had supported UN resolutions against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait while simultaneously breaking a trade embargo against Iraq by trading across their shared border.<sup>44</sup> Although this was still a time of strained relations between Iran and Iraq, tensions had fallen relatively quickly considering the short time span between the Iran-Iraq

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<sup>41</sup> Pear, Robert. 1988. “U.N. SENDING MISSION.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/21/us/khomeini-accepts-poison-of-ending-the-war-with-iraq-un-sending-mission.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Pear, Robert. 1988. “U.N. SENDING MISSION.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/21/us/khomeini-accepts-poison-of-ending-the-war-with-iraq-un-sending-mission.html>.

<sup>43</sup> “Iran Decides to Stay Neutral in Gulf Conflict.” 1991. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-01-20-mn-889-story.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Krauss, Clifford. 1991. “IRAN SAID TO PLAY BOTH SIDES IN GULF.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/31/world/war-in-the-gulf-iran-iran-said-to-play-both-sides-in-gulf.html>.

War and the Gulf War in large part because Saddam Hussein began to withdraw Iraqi troops from disputed territories out of fear that Iran had the power to forcibly expel the Iraqis from said territories.<sup>45</sup>

## **Section 2.2: Aftermath of the 2003 Invasion of Iraq**

The fall of Saddam's Ba' thist regime as a consequence of the 2003 invasion of Iraq on the part of the United States led to a normalization of relations between Iran and Iraq, although in this context normalization implies a return to friendly relations and largely ignores the fact that an opportunity had been presented for Iran to capitalize on Iraq's insecurity to mold it into a stable and secure neighbor for Iran.<sup>46</sup> With the evolution of their relationship from foes to friends to opportunities which must be taken advantage of, Iraq has been a foreign policy challenge for Iran. However, Iraq is also a critical foreign policy target for Iran as the two are neighboring countries whose stability relies on the stability of the other.

Since 2003, Iran and Iraq have increased their diplomatic and economic relations with one another. In March 2008, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the first President of Iran to visit Iraq since the 1979 revolution.<sup>47</sup> Former Prime Minister of Iraq, Nouri al-Maliki, also made several state visits to Iran during his tenure from 2006 to 2014.<sup>48</sup> Such diplomatic relations were largely unprecedented for the two countries which shared a border, but it did not take long for them to become increasingly reliant on one another. In 2010, General Qassem Soleimani of the

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<sup>45</sup> *U.S. Department of State*. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/gulf-war>.

<sup>46</sup> Maloney, Suzanne. 2016. "How the Iraq War Has Empowered Iran." *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/how-the-iraq-war-has-empowered-iran/>.

<sup>47</sup> Kabul, David Blair in. 2008. "Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in historic Iraq trip." *The Telegraph*. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1580479/Mahmoud-Ahmadinejad-in-historic-Iraq-trip.html>.

<sup>48</sup> "How Nouri al-Maliki fell out of favour with the US." 2014. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/19/how-nouri-al-maliki-fell-out-favour-with-us-iraq>.

Quds Force visited Iraq days after Vice President Joe Biden had returned to America from his official trip to Iraq for a military transition ceremony. A former Iraqi official anonymously revealed that Soleimani had said in a meeting with top Iraqi officials that “the Americans will leave you one day, but we will always remain your neighbors.”<sup>49</sup>

Outside of these official shifts in relations, Iran has also been able to capitalize on Iraq’s insecurities by increasing Iranian influence in Iraqi politics by way of direct influence over politicians and through the presence of Iranian backed militias. Iran has pursued this key interest by building close relations with Shia factions which believe in establishing strategic relations with Iran.<sup>50</sup> The bulk of this success has occurred in post-2003 Iraq, with Tehran playing a major role in the consolidation of Shia political and militant groups. Iran initially supported a large number of groups, ensuring that it would back eventual winners. Iran also frequently supported the formation of splinter groups when it feared that an ally was growing autonomous or less reliable. These groups were smaller and more dependent on Tehran and thus were more likely to act on the basis of Iranian interests.<sup>51</sup> Some of Iran’s successes will last, as it is today and will remain for the foreseeable future the most influential external player in Iraq, especially as the United States continues its withdrawal from Iraq. The main Iraqi Shia groups are likely to maintain close ties with Tehran and remain dominant in Baghdad, especially the Popular Mobilization Forces, a proxy

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<sup>49</sup> Khedery, Ali. 2014. “Why we stuck with Maliki - and lost Iraq.” *The Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-we-stuck-with-maliki--and-lost-iraq/2014/07/03/0dd6a8a4-f7ec-11e3-a606-946fd632f9f1\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-we-stuck-with-maliki--and-lost-iraq/2014/07/03/0dd6a8a4-f7ec-11e3-a606-946fd632f9f1_story.html).

<sup>50</sup> Correspondent, Tehran Bureau. 2015. “What do Iraqis think of Iran?” *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2015/mar/17/iran-viewed-from-iraq-fight-against-isis>.

<sup>51</sup> “Iran's Goals in Iraq.” *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/irans-goals-iraq>.

group trained by the IRGC, who won forty-eight seats in Iraq's 2018 Parliamentary elections.<sup>52</sup> In addition, rivalry between Shia groups will continue to allow Iran to consolidate its position as an indispensable power broker.

As the main Iraqi political parties have become more autonomous and focused on serving the interests of their domestic constituents, support for smaller, more violent militias has come to occupy an increasingly prominent role in Iran's arsenal. This narrows its options and confronts it with consequences, such as Iraqi resentment, of supporting violence. Although Iran primarily relies on militias in order to exert its influence in Iraq, this does not indicate that Iraq must be in a state of war for Iran to prosper in Iraq, rather the militias have shifted themselves into a peace-time role of running for political office.<sup>53</sup>

This growing influence in a more unofficial capacity has helped ensure that Iran's key interest in Iraq has been fulfilled: that Iraq would be neither led by a pro-United States or anti-Iran Sunni Arab nationalist regime, nor that it would collapse or break apart.<sup>54</sup>

Iran's foreign policy towards Iraq is formulated by Iran's National Security Council, which has determined that the Iranian government would like to see a secure, stable, balanced, and united Iraq, as insecurity in Iraq could lead to insecurity in Iran. This spread of Iranian influence is more commonly known as the formulation of the "Shia Crescent," an idea which plays upon the sectarian divisions in the region by pitting nations which are influenced by Iran and primarily Shia in

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<sup>52</sup> Al Jazeera. 2018. "Iraq elections final results: Sadr's bloc wins parliamentary poll." *Iraq News | Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/iraq-election-final-results-sadr-bloc-wins-parliamentary-polls-180519071930804.html>.

<sup>53</sup> "More Than Militias: Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces Are Here to Stay." 2018. *War on the Rocks*. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/04/more-than-militias-iraqs-popular-mobilization-forces-are-here-to-stay/>.

<sup>54</sup> RAND. 2019. "Iran's National Security Debate." [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE300/PE344/RAND\\_PE344.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE300/PE344/RAND_PE344.pdf).

religious demographics against their Sunni counterparts in non-crescent countries.<sup>55</sup> Although it is clear through either of these arguments for Iran's intentions with Iraq that Iran wishes to spread its influence, the latter implies that it is for ideological reasons while the former argues that an Iranian-stabilized Iraq is what is best for Iran.

### **Section 2.3: Analysis of Iran's Policy Towards Iraq**

Although the usage of the term "Shia Crescent" implies that Iran's growing influence in Iraq plays on sectarian divisions, a case for a rational foreign policy from Iran towards Iraq can still be made. Yes, the two nations have a long, shared history which may inform some of Iran's policy goals; however, historical and cultural similarities are not the driving force of Iran's Iraq policy. Rather, the idea which Iran's National Security Council has put forth is that Iran's vision is to see a secure and stable Iraq, a vision largely irreverent towards ideology, history, and culture, taking current instability much more into account.

The fluidity of Iran's policy towards Iraq also signifies the rationality of the policy. The first decade of the Islamic Republic of Iran's lifespan had a majority of its time taken up by the war with Iraq, a war which Iraq started. Despite this, Iran did not allow its grievances against Saddam Hussein to be the primary driver of its foreign policy, choosing to become allies with Iraq against the United States rather than carrying out an aggressive and hostile foreign policy towards Iraq. Although there may be semblances of ideology, history, and culture in Iraq-Iran relations, they are by no means the primary driving factor of Iran's Iraq policy, making this policy rational based on rational choice theory.

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<sup>55</sup> "King Abdullah II of Jordan." 2004. *NBCNews.com*. [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6679774/ns/msnbc-hardball\\_with\\_chris\\_matthews/t/king-abdullah-ii-jordan/#.XqisMdNKhQJ](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6679774/ns/msnbc-hardball_with_chris_matthews/t/king-abdullah-ii-jordan/#.XqisMdNKhQJ).



As outlined by the Islamic Republic of Iran's Constitution, the six primary goals of Iranian foreign policy should be to reject forms of dominance, preserve independence, preserve territorial integrity, defend the rights of all Muslims, non-alignment with hegemonic superpowers, and maintain peaceful relations with non-belligerent states. Based on the state of Iran-Iraq relations today with Iran's growing influence in Iraq, it is easily inferred that Iran is most certainly not dominated by Iraq nor is Iranian independence directly threatened by Iraq. The only time which Iran's territorial integrity has been threatened by Iraq would be in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War, which was resolved as Saddam Hussein withdrew his troops in order to not provoke further embarrassment at the hands of Iran.

As Iran's policy towards Iraq is independent of alignment with hegemonic superpowers as well as relations with non-belligerent states, these two criteria are not applicable in determining constitutionality. The final criterion is that Iran must defend the rights of all Muslims; however, this leaves ambiguous as to who all Muslims are to be defended from. So, if Iran is defending all Muslims from an outsider (ex: the United States) then they are successful in this goal; however, if Iran itself is not supposed to be the one to prey on Muslims, then their solidarity with Shia militias who may pose a threat to Sunni Muslims would not allow Iran to be successful in this goal. Either way, Iran meets a majority of the outlined constitutional goals so their foreign policy towards Iraq can be labeled as constitutional. Therefore, Iran's policy towards Iraq is rational-constitutional.

#### **Section 2.4: Introduction to Iran's Israel Policy**

In order to understand the evolution of relations between Iran and Israel, we must take into account what relations between the two looked like prior to the 1979 revolution and how they changed in the aftermath of the revolution. During the time of the Pahlavi dynasty, there was a friendly relationship between the two nations, with Iran even being the second Muslim-majority

country to recognize Israel as a sovereign state in 1950.<sup>56</sup> In the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Iran severed all diplomatic and commercial ties with Israel, although military cooperation continued as Israel supported Iran during the Iraq-Iran War. In the early days of the war, it was estimated that Israel sold Iran \$500 million-worth of arms, paid for primarily in Iranian oil.<sup>57</sup>

## **Section 2.5: Effects of the 1990s Geopolitical Reconfiguration**

Israel-Iran relations shifted to a state of hostility in the early 90s as the United States began to move into the region by way of the first Gulf War. At this point, the United States to Iran was “Great Satan” and Israel was “Little Satan” due to its close ties with the United States. A large part of this reaction was due to the United States’ official foreign policy at the time known as “dual containment,” which was an attempt on the part of the United States to contain Israel’s two most important adversaries, Iran and Iraq, in order to ensure that these two adversaries of Israel could not interfere with the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.<sup>58</sup> This policy also capitalized on a geopolitical reconfiguration in the Middle East onset by the end of the Cold War and fall of the Soviet Union. With the Soviet Union no longer in a position to provide security measures for Iran

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<sup>56</sup> Green, David B. 2018. “From friends to foes: How Israel and Iran turned into arch-enemies.” *haaretz.com*. <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/iran/MAGAZINE-how-israel-and-iran-went-from-allies-to-enemies-1.6049884>.

<sup>57</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. 1984. “Iran-Iraq: Buying Weapons for War.” <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00283R000500120005-5.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> Sachs, Natan. 2019. “Iran's revolution, 40 years on: Israel's reverse periphery doctrine.” *Brookings*. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/01/24/irans-revolution-40-years-on-israels-reverse-periphery-doctrine/>.

or Iraq and the United States increasing its role in regional affairs, a turning point occurred in Israel-Iran relations.<sup>59</sup>

This is also the time that rhetoric between Iran and Israel became more hostile, which coincides with Iran's support for Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and former president Shimon Peres began to spout rhetoric which harped on the danger that they believed Iran posed with Rabin referring to Iran as a "dark, murderous regime," and Peres calling the regime "more dangerous than Hitler."<sup>60</sup>

Current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has continued this rhetoric brought forth by his predecessors by being one of the world's most outspoken critics on Iran's policies, particularly regarding the nuclear program, informing Iran to "not test Israel's resolve" by continuing such policies.<sup>61</sup> However, this dangerous form of rhetoric has also been used by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who called for Israel's "annihilation" and talked about the "stinking corpse of the usurping and fake Israeli regime."<sup>62</sup>

Even with the former Iranian president's 2007 declaration that "Israel must disappear from the map," Iran's Foreign Affairs Minister Javad Zarif explained that "Ahmadinejad was quoting the Ayatollah Khomeini who said that Israel would disappear from the pages of history."<sup>63</sup> Zarif

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<sup>59</sup> "Shifts in the Middle East Balance of Power: An Historical Perspective." *Al Jazeera Center for Studies*. <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2018/09/shifts-middle-east-balance-power-historical-perspective-180902084750811.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Green, David B. 2018. "From friends to foes: How Israel and Iran turned into arch-enemies." *haaretz.com*. <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/iran/MAGAZINE-how-israel-and-iran-went-from-allies-to-enemies-1.6049884>.

<sup>61</sup> Bennhold, Katrin, and Isabel Kershner. 2018. "Netanyahu to Iran: 'Do Not Test Israel's Resolve'." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/18/world/europe/netanyahu-iran-drone.html>.

<sup>62</sup> 2018. "Ahmadinejad: Israel is a 'stinking corpse' doomed to disappear." *haaretz.com*. <https://www.haaretz.com/1.497850>

<sup>63</sup> Bar, Zvi. 2019. "Does Iran really want to destroy Israel?" *haaretz.com*. <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/premium-does-iran-really-want-to-destroy-israel-1.6822030>.

went on to explain that it would not be Iran's policy to destroy Israel, as Iran's policy and conduct would lead to its being destroyed by itself. To further solidify Iran's stance on not wishing to lay destruction upon Israel, a spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry issued a statement that "Zarif's remarks are consistent with the permanent policy of Iran... Khomeini and Khamenei did say that Israel would disappear from the face of the earth within 25 years because of its policy, but they did not say Iran would be the one to destroy it... Iran does not threaten to destroy Israel, Israel is the one threatening to destroy Iran."<sup>64</sup>

Just as Iran believes that Israel poses a genuine threat to its well-being, Israel holds the same opinion of Iran. In 2018, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made the following claim: "Our policy is clear, Israel will defend itself against any aggression and any attempt to violate its sovereignty." However, Netanyahu then stressed that "Israel seeks peace" with Iran.<sup>65</sup> The indication that Israel has peaceful intentions with its relationship with Iran would be the first time Netanyahu made such a remark, as he is normally known to call for the destruction of Iran. The intentions of Netanyahu's statement largely place blame on Iran for any conflict which may occur between the two nations, while also mirroring Iran's statements that it is not its intention to enter into conflict with the other.

Although there is plenty of rhetoric as evidence of the hostility between the two, their mutual hostility also extends far beyond rhetoric. However, neither side has directly attacked the other, and war would not be in the strategic interest of either country. Instead, they have engaged in what could best be described as low-intensity conflict. Since Iran does not possess extensive

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<sup>64</sup> Bar, Zvi. 2019. "Does Iran really want to destroy Israel?" *haaretz.com*. <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/premium-does-iran-really-want-to-destroy-israel-1.6822030>.

<sup>65</sup> "Netanyahu: Israel will hit Iranian and Syrian targets as needed." 2018. *The Jerusalem Post* | *JPost.com*. <https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Netanyahu-Israel-will-hit-Iranian-and-Syrian-targets-as-needed-542256>.

economic tools or conventional military assets to shape events, it must instead rely on ties to militant groups and the appeal of its anti-status quo policies. These limited options can constrain what Iran has the ability to do in the region: it can do little more than raise the costs for its adversaries of taking certain courses of action. So, Iran focuses much more on reducing Israel's margin of influence. This is done through Iranian support for groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, although these groups are not under the complete control of Iran, they have common interests in curbing Israeli influence.<sup>66</sup> Iran is also a champion for Palestinian rights, much to the concern of Israel. In the aftermath of the 1979 revolution, Palestinian Liberation Organization Chief, Yasir Arafat, was the first foreign leader to visit Iran, with Arafat stating, "today Iran, tomorrow Palestine."<sup>67</sup> Since then, Iran has offered significant financial support to Palestinian groups, namely Hamas, to fight against Israeli expansion into Palestinian territories.

## **Section 2.6: Analysis of Iran's Policy Towards Israel**

As long as the current regimes of Israel and Iran remain in power, it is highly likely that the two will continue to have hostile relations with one another in the form of inflammatory rhetoric. This is in part due to Iran's foreign policy with Israel, in which Iran exerts a rational-constitutional policy.

The rationality of Iran's foreign policy is based on the fact that Iran's interactions with Israel are not dictated by historical, ideological, or cultural, differences between the two. First, there are no historical actions between the two which would offer an explanation for any inflammatory rhetoric which has taken place as Iran was the second majority-Muslim nation to

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<sup>66</sup> "Iran Supports Hamas, but Hamas Is No Iranian 'Puppet'." 2009. *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/israel/iran-supports-hamas-but-hamas-no-iranian-puppet/p18159>.

<sup>67</sup> James. 1979. "Arafat, in Iran, Reports Khomeini Pledges Aid for Victory Over Israeli." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/02/19/archives/arafat-in-iran-reports-khomeini-pledges-aid-for-victory-over-israel.html>.

recognize Israel as a sovereign state. As the two have also not engaged in any direct conflict, it is impossible for any historical relations to have dictated the current policy of Iran to simply hurl insults at Israel. As far as ideological and cultural differences go, an argument could be made that statements made by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad could be interpreted as anti-Semitic, which would be an ideological and cultural difference between the two. However, the fact that the statements in question were clarified as meaning the Israeli government is a threat unto itself largely neutralizes any threat that such statements may have posed to Israel as a Jewish state. Interpreting such rhetoric as anti-Semitic and being rooted in cultural differences would also be a poor interpretation as Iran has the largest Jewish population in the Middle East outside of Israel.

Outside of inflammatory rhetoric, the final area to analyze would be statements made as there is little direct interaction between the two. As President Rouhani stated in a televised speech regarding Israel, “the government is working daily to prevent military confrontation or war.”<sup>68</sup> As it is clear that neither Iran nor Israel want to engage in direct conflict with one another, and will only attack the other if attacked first, I would conclude that Iran’s policy towards Israel is rational. Neither country has reacted violently or irrationally to any claims the other has made, and all statements are rooted in their interpretation of they believe the other views them. It may be a vicious cycle of pointing fingers and calling names, but that does not mean it is irrational.

Iran and Israel share few direct interactions, which makes determining the constitutionality of Iran’s policy towards Israel difficult to determine as most of the qualifications of constitutionality will be met passively. For instance, while Israel may want to see the destruction of the Islamic Republic of Iran and both countries would be happy to engage in conflict if

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<sup>68</sup> Prince, Cathryn J. et al. 2020. “Rouhani says Iran wants dialogue, working daily to 'prevent war'.” *The Times of Israel*. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/rouhani-says-iran-wants-dialogue-working-daily-to-prevent-war/>.

provoked, their current situation does not pose any threat to Iran's independence or territorial claims. There are also currently no threats from Israel to dominate Iran's sovereignty. Israel is not a non-belligerent state in the eyes of Iran, so they are not impeding any friendly relations with non-belligerent states in their Israeli policy. Nor is Iran aligning itself with a hegemonic superpower in its policies against Israel as Israel is the one who is aligned with hegemonic superpower America. So, many of these constitutional criteria are met passively as they are not directly called into question based on the nature of Iran's Israel policy.

The final criterion of constitutionality is to "defend the rights of all Muslims," and this is the only criteria which I would argue Iran actively pursues. Through Iran's policy of supporting the Palestinian territories, they are directly supporting and defending the rights of Muslims from persecution. Although Iran offers its support indirectly through groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, it allows Iran the opportunity to defend these rights without directly engaging in conflict with Israel. So, it can be inferred by these criteria that Iran's policy towards Israel is also constitutional, deeming this foreign policy rational-constitutional.

### **Section 2.7: Discussion on Iran's Regional Foreign Policy**

Israel and Iraq pose different sets of challenges for the Islamic Republic of Iran; however, both cases have been determined as the Islamic Republic of Iran exercising a rational-constitutional form of foreign policy. This implies that Iran's regional policies, which I have determined to be a top priority for the Islamic Republic, are crafted so that their foundations do not rest on ideology, culture, or history, despite there being a lot of overlap between those three categories and the relationships between Iran and Iraq as well as Iran and Israel.

For the constitutionality of both of these cases, constitutional criteria were met for the benefit of Iran actively or passively, with neither case meeting unconstitutional criteria. Its policies

allow Iran to either have an upper-hand when there is direct interaction or not directly interacting if Iran does not have the capabilities to have the upper-hand. This indicates that Iran crafts its regional policies so that Iran understands its own capabilities and ensures that neither constitutionality nor rationality are threatened.

While Iran's foreign policies towards Iraq and Israel are both rational-constitutional, Iran achieves this designation in different ways depending on the country in question. For Iraq, the policy has an air of expansionist goals in which Iran has increasingly gained power and prominence in Iraq through militias and government influence. This has been through direct interactions with Iraq, and these direct interactions have shifted over the decades based on what will be most beneficial for Iran at the moment. For Israel, Iran's policy is much more hands off, doing its best to cause frustration for Israel but never directly engaging. Iran and Israel swap heated statements; however, neither has any intention to be the first to attack, making this policy less fluid but more hostile than Iran's Iraq policy.

Therefore, while Iran's regional policy can be inferred to be rational-constitutional based on the results of these two cases, Iran's policies are crafted specifically for the nation they are dealing with, rather than having a blanket policy for the entire Middle East. The goal of that policy might be the same – to achieve a regional security which benefits Iran – but Iran is aware that different countries pose different challenges to regional security. However, Iran is also careful to ensure that its regional policies are made in the context of that moment and help it pursue its ideological goals as outlined in the constitution, meaning that the framework can be applied to a host of other regional cases and it will be highly likely that those policies will also be rational-constitutional, even if they all take different forms.



### Chapter Three: Global Interactions

When the United States drives the notion that Iran poses a threat to global stability because of their regional policies, the reasoning behind how a regional policy can have global ramifications tends to be left unanswered. In doing so, a key to our understanding of Iran's foreign policy is excluded, which is that there are key players in the Middle East who are not native to that region. Iran's foreign policy is indeed largely limited to its regional policies; however, Iran must also interact with global powers who have inserted themselves into the Middle East, whether that be through military or diplomatic means. So, when examining Iran's foreign policy in terms of its interactions with global powers, we must keep in mind that Iran interacts with these powers because they placed themselves in a position in which Iran must interact with them.

Whereas Iran's regional policies tend to take the form of direct interactions between two countries within their own borders, Iran's interactions with global powers, or great powers, tend to take a different shape. Iran's foreign policy goals were once stated by General Qassem Soleimani, former head of the Quds Force, as, "today we see signs of the Islamic Revolution being exported throughout the region, from Bahrain to Iran and from Syrian to Yemen and North Africa."<sup>69</sup> So, Iran's foreign policy is predominately executed regionally rather than globally as evidenced by the fact that their sphere of influence resides in the Middle East. Furthermore, this is backed up by the fact that Iran seems to typically interact with global powers when those powers attempt to exert their influence across the Middle East, an idea which will be explored throughout this chapter.

The two global powers whose interactions with Iran I will be examining are those of China and the United States. These two cases offer different perspectives on Iran's global foreign policy,

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<sup>69</sup> Nashashibi S. 2015. "Iran's regional ambitions are clear and worrying." Middle East | Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/03/iran-regional-ambitions-clear-worrying-150322132016267.html>

one could be best described as reactionary while the other will be found to be much more remedial. In the case of Iran, reactionary policies tend to take shape in their interactions with the United States. These policies are often the result of action on the part of the United States, with Iran being provoked rather than being the primary instigator. Remedial policies are more prominent in their relationship with China, where these policies help Iran overcome stumbling blocks, such as a weak economy, in the way of pursuing their desired policies.

I will begin with Iran's interactions with the United States – how has the relationship between the two evolved since the 1979 revolution, do they have a shared or competing interest, and how does Iran typically respond to the actions of the United States in the region. I will then analyze this data to determine the rationality and constitutionality of Iran's foreign policy towards the United States. After I conclude this section, I will then repeat this process with the data that has been collected on China. I will then move on to the final section to discuss what these two cases say about Iran's foreign policy towards global actors.

### **Section 3.1: Introduction to Iran's United States of America Policy**

The 1979 Iranian Revolution saw a shift from Iran and the United States being allies to adversaries, largely due to the revolution's goal of freeing Iran from the control of the Shah and American influence in the country. However, it should be noted at the height of great relations between the two prior to the revolution, Iran was still independent of the United States, aligned with but not controlled by America. In remarks given by President Trump on Iran, he stated that, "For far too long – all the way back to 1979, to be exact – nations have tolerated Iran's destructive and destabilizing behavior in the Middle East and beyond. Those days are over. Iran has been the leading sponsor of terrorism, and their pursuit of nuclear weapons threatens the civilized world. We will never let that happen... As we continue to evaluate options in response to Iranian

aggression, the United States will immediately impose additional punishing economic sanctions on the Iranian regime. These powerful sanctions will remain until Iran changes its behavior.”<sup>70</sup> The true strength of Iran’s independence from America has continued revealing itself as many presidential administrations have attempted to alter the behavior of the Islamic Republic of Iran with little success, despite the wide range of tools used in US foreign policy such as economic sanctions, military threats, and diplomacy.<sup>71</sup>

Although relations between the two countries significantly cooled after 1979, avenues for collaboration were not completely shut down but more difficult to navigate. Throughout the Reagan presidency, the closest which Reagan came to working with Iran would also be an affair which would taint his and his successor’s presidencies. In the mid-1980s, Iran approached the Reagan Administration to help Iran purchase weapons for its war with neighboring Iraq. Although the United States had a trade embargo with Iran at the time and Reagan’s Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense both opposed giving support to Iran, National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane argued that an arms deal with Iran would help the United States with other problems it was facing in the Middle East at the time, such as the holding of American hostages by Hezbollah in Lebanon.<sup>872</sup> This collaboration between Iran and the United States helped Iran in its time of need

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<sup>70</sup> *Remarks by President Trump on Iran*. The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-iran/>

<sup>71</sup> Maloney S. 2016. *America and Iran: From Containment to Coexistence*. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/america-and-iran-from-containment-to-coexistence/>

<sup>72</sup> *Address to the Nation on the Iran Arms and Contra Aid Controversy: Ronald Reagan Presidential Library - National Archives and Records Administration*. Address to the Nation on the Iran Arms and Contra Aid Controversy | Ronald Reagan Presidential Library - National Archives and Records Administration. <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/111386c>

but created a scandal in America as \$18 million of the \$30 million which Iran paid for the weapons had been diverted to support the Contras in Nicaragua.<sup>73</sup>

### **Section 3.2: Aftermath of Iran-Contra**

The Iran-Contra scandal did not stop with the election of President George H.W. Bush and was so eager to work with Iran to win the freedom of the remaining hostages in Lebanon that he was tricked into taking a phone call by an unknown Iranian pretending to be Iran's Parliament Speaker Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, relations between Iran and the United States during this time were largely stagnant, with little interaction let alone progress. This would also be the case for President Bill Clinton and President George W. Bush until Bush's "Axis of Evil" reference in his 2002 State of the Union address.<sup>75</sup> Although that reference did not single handedly freeze relations between the two countries, it did make the idea of friendly relations between the two much more difficult.

Of all the presidents since 1979, President Barack Obama has been most closely identified with breakthroughs in Iran-America relations although any developments were not done by Obama single handedly. Rather President Hassan Rouhani's 2013 election helped pave the way for any negotiations between the two countries. Collaboration between the two peaked with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was a large policy effort under the Obama Administration to keep an eye on Iran's nuclear program.<sup>76</sup> Although the JCPOA will be discussed

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<sup>73</sup> Walsh Iran / Contra Report - Chapter 31 Edwin Meese III: November 1986.  
[https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/walsh/chap\\_31.htm](https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/walsh/chap_31.htm)

<sup>74</sup> *Iran Primer: The George H. W. Bush Administration*. PBS.  
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/11/iran-primer-the-george-hw-bush-administration.html>

<sup>75</sup> *The Clinton Administration*. The Iran Primer. <https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/clinton-administration>

<sup>76</sup> *Iran Deal*. National Archives and Records Administration. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/foreign-policy/iran-deal>

in more detail in the fourth chapter, it should still be noted that although the United States utilized economic sanctions throughout Iran's noncompliance with the deal, only to step back from the deal under the Trump Administration.<sup>77</sup> Now that Iran has also left the deal, there is no current American oversight on the Iranian nuclear program, which allows Iran to be out of the jurisdiction of nuclear-related sanctions.

The Trump Administration has said that “Peace and stability cannot prevail in the Middle East as long as Iran continues to foment violence, unrest, hatred, and war. The civilized world must send a clear and unified message to the Iranian regime: Your campaign of terror, murder, mayhem will not be tolerated any longer. It will not be allowed to go forward.”<sup>78</sup> Just from this quote alone, it is clear that Iran's interests will be threatened by the United States, with any means necessary. The United States sees Iran as the destabilizing factor, while Iran believes the same thing regarding the United States. Ayatollah Khamenei has stated that, “Our number one enemy is America. It is the most wicked, sinister enemy of Iran... its leaders are terrorists...”<sup>79</sup>

A tweet from Ayatollah Khamenei is telling on how Iran views their interactions with the United States, “The villainous US govt repeatedly says that they are standing by the Iranian ppl. They lie. If you are standing by the Iranian ppl, it is only to stab them in the heart with your venomous daggers.”<sup>80</sup> This tweet implies that Iran's most powerful citizen holds the idea that the

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<sup>77</sup> *Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action*. The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-joint-comprehensive-plan-action/>

<sup>78</sup> *Remarks by President Trump on Iran*. The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-iran/>

<sup>79</sup> Hafezi P. 2020. *Iran's Khamenei rejects U.S. help offer, vows to defeat coronavirus*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-iran/irans-khamenei-rejects-u-s-help-offer-vows-to-defeat-coronavirus-idUSKBN21909Y>

<sup>80</sup> Khamenei.ir. 2020. Twitter. [https://twitter.com/khamenei\\_ir/status/1218141834842660864?lang=en](https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/1218141834842660864?lang=en)

United States is the instigator of Iran-America hostility. Although the United States could argue that Iran has also used inflammatory rhetoric through “Death to America!” chants and characterizing the United States as the “embodiment of evil,” Khamenei has also clarified these comments from a 2019 gathering of Iranian air force officers. The Supreme Leader’s website stated that, “I am telling the Americans, ‘Death to America’ means death to [President] Trump, [national security advisor] John Bolton, and [Secretary of State Mike] Pompeo. It means down with the American politicians in charge. We have no fight to pick with the American people.”<sup>81</sup> However, he continued these remarks by adding, “As long as the United States shows viciousness and savagery, the Iranian nation will never cease shouting these words,” implying that although they named members of the Trump Administration, these feelings were not exclusive to Trump’s presidency.<sup>82</sup>

There is also much more to the interactions between Iran and the United States outside of inflammatory rhetoric. By looking to direct actions taken between the two countries, their relationship can be better understood. These interactions also tend to take place outside of Iran, where Iran has a vested interest, but Iran’s interests also compete with those of the United States. The most recent example of both of these trends would be in Iraq, where both the United States and Iran want stability for the country; however, they both seem to believe that stability brought about by the other will be unstable conditions for themselves. One prominent example of the tit for tat policies which the two seem to engage in with one another would be evident in the United

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<sup>81</sup> Cunningham E. 2019. *Iran's supreme leader says 'Death to America' actually means to Trump, Bolton and Pompeo*. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/02/08/irans-supreme-leader-says-death-america-actually-means-trump-bolton-pompeo/>

<sup>82</sup> Cunningham E. 2019. *Iran's supreme leader says 'Death to America' actually means to Trump, Bolton and Pompeo*. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/02/08/irans-supreme-leader-says-death-america-actually-means-trump-bolton-pompeo/>

States' decision to assassinate General Qassem Soleimani. As tensions between Iran and the United States have escalated over the years, the Trump administration claimed that it was necessary to take out the General in order to prevent an ensuing attack against the United States by Iran in Iraq.<sup>83</sup> After Soleimani was killed, Iran claimed to unintentionally shoot down a Ukrainian jetliner, with President Hassan Rouhani blaming the United States as being the reason that Iran was agitated enough to accidentally take such an action.<sup>84</sup> A minor reaction from Iran, but a reaction, nonetheless. Of course, Iran could also be biding their time, but the lesser reaction to a greater attack is still indicative of Iran's typical response to US actions.

Iran also tends to react when the United States places sanctions on Iran. For instance, on June 24, 2019, President Trump announced sanctions against Iranian and IRGC leadership after President Rouhani blamed high tensions between the two nations of the United States' "interventionist military presence" in the aftermath of Iran shooting down a US drone which was thought to be flying over Iranian airspace.<sup>85</sup> U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin later claimed the sanctions would block "billions" in assets for individuals being sanctioned.<sup>86</sup> Iran responded to these sanctions by stating that they prompted a "permanent closure" of their diplomatic ties and refused to any future negotiations until the sanctions were lifted. The Foreign Affairs Minister of Iran even tweeted that the sanctions were not an "alternative to war; they ARE war."<sup>87</sup> Sanctions

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<sup>83</sup> *Remarks by President Trump on the Killing of Qasem Soleimani*. The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-killing-qasem-soleimani/>

<sup>84</sup> Collins S. 2020. *Iran makes plane crash arrests but continues to blame the US for the disaster*. Vox. <https://www.vox.com/world/2020/1/14/21065218/iran-ukrainian-plane-crash-arrests-soleimani-blame-us>

<sup>85</sup> Wong E. 2019. *Trump Imposes New Sanctions on Iran, Adding to Tensions*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/24/us/politics/iran-sanctions.html>

<sup>86</sup> France 24. 2019. *Latest sanctions on Iran will block 'billions' in assets: US*. France 24. <https://www.france24.com/en/20190624-latest-sanctions-iran-will-block-billions-assets-us>

<sup>87</sup> Zarif J. 2019. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/jzarif/status/1144231928469622786?lang=en>

towards Iran are nothing new for the United States to implement; however, a complete shutdown of diplomatic relations also indicates that Iran does not want to be bullied by the United States. For the most part, in interactions between the United States and Iran, it is clear that Iran is only in a position to defend itself from the United States, never to attack.

While these incidents have all taken place under the Trump Administration, every United States president has interacted with Iran either through a short-term policy objective or a longer-term attempt at normalizing relations, according to declassified records published in 2019 by the National Security Archive. From the earliest days of the Islamic Republic of Iran, President Jimmy Carter attempted to establish positive relations with the newly formed government, despite have friendly ties to the recently overthrown Shah.<sup>88</sup> These relations never came to fruition and were further strained by the hostage crisis which did not come to an end until President Reagan's inauguration day.

Ultimately, every president has had Iran on their foreign policy agenda, but relations between the two largely rely on how perceptive Iran is to American wishes. What is also notable about relations between the United States and Iran over the past four decades is that although the two most recent administrations are dichotomous in the way Iran has worked with them, Iran's feelings towards America do not rest on whether or not there is a Democrat or Republican in office. Rather, Iran works with America when it is beneficial for Iranian interests and does so irrespective as to who is in office.

### **Section 3.3: Analysis of Iran's Policy Towards the United States**

The key elements in Iran's policy towards the United States which must be taken into consideration to determine rationality and constitutionality are the way in which they interact and

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<sup>88</sup> *The Hostage Crisis in Iran - Research - The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum*. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum. [https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/research/hostage\\_crisis\\_in\\_iran](https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/research/hostage_crisis_in_iran)



the time in which that interaction took place. Iran's policy towards the United States is confusingly historical while also not being rooted in history. First, it should be noted that Iran's policy towards the United States is its policy towards the United States, not towards any one administration. Therefore, Iran does not rest its policy in any sort of historical differences between Democratic and Republican administrations. However, this also turns a blind eye to the fact that different administrations have tried more than others to restore friendly relations, meaning that Iran's policy towards the United States has been unwavering despite there being opportunity for it to change.

Although there are cultural and ideological differences between the United States and Iran, Iran's policy against the United States seems to be much more rooted in the fact that the United States' involvement in the Middle East poses a direct threat to Iran's regional interests rather than in those innate differences themselves. So, I argue that Iran's opposition to the United States is not based on ideological or cultural differences, but rather that those differences impact the aggressiveness of Iran's unforgiving policy towards the United States. So, the historical, cultural, and ideological drivers of Iran's foreign policy towards the United States indicated that this is an irrational foreign policy based on our understanding of rational choice theory. That does not mean that the United States' actions in the region do not prompt Iran to have a more aggressive policy, but the aggressiveness of the policy is not primarily driven by said actions.

In terms of constitutionality, Iran has largely fought against any action by the United States which puts Iran's dominance and independence at risk, especially in battleground countries such as Iraq. However, because Iran's interactions with the United States tend to take place outside of Iran's borders, there is little threat to Iran's territorial integrity.

The fact that most direct interaction between Iran and the United States takes place outside the borders of both nations and on the land of another sovereign nation does pose a problem for

Iran's relations with non-belligerent states. However, as Iran believes that too much American influence in the region poses a direct threat to the rights of Muslims, the failure to keep non-belligerent states happy with this policy is nullified by Iran's necessity to follow this policy.

Finally, the issue of Iran aligning with hegemonic powers is difficult to determine in this case because Iran has not necessarily allied itself with the United States, but Iran has collaborated with the United States. These instances of collaboration both benefited Iran, such as the Iran-Contra affair and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. However, because both of these instances required Iran's cooperation and both instances are no longer applicable at present day, I argue that Iran has not aligned itself with a hegemonic power through its interactions with the United States; therefore, Iran's foreign policy towards the US is irrational-constitutional.

### **Section 3.4: Introduction to Iran's China Policy**

Unlike many of Iran's relations with foreign countries, Iran's relations to China saw minimal impact in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution as the two had very little contact. Over the past few decades, China and Iran have developed a broad and deep partnership centered on China's energy needs and Iran's abundant resources as well as significant non-energy economic ties, arms sales and defense cooperation, and strategic balancing against the United States. In particular, China's policies have hampered U.S. and international efforts to dissuade Iran from developing a nuclear weapons capability.<sup>89</sup>

The Iranian regime views China as a potential ally against the United States, and Beijing views Iran as a potential partner for limiting U.S. influence in the Middle East. The foundations of the economic partnership between Iran and China are Iran's abundant energy resources and

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<sup>89</sup> Kuo MA. 2019. *US-Iran Tensions: Impact on China-Iran Ties*. – The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/us-iran-tensions-impact-on-china-iran-ties/>

China's growing energy needs, but China is not overwhelmingly dependent on the Islamic Republic for its energy needs. On the flipside, Iran relies heavily on the support of China.<sup>90</sup>

China is arguably Iran's most important trade partner and oil client. Despite a drop in China's importation of crude oil from 3 million to 600,000 tons from April to November of 2019, China has remained Iran's sole liquefied petroleum gas client.<sup>91</sup> Iran has also found itself with long-term potential to find economic development from China. With the Belt and Road Initiative, China announced plans to invest \$400 billion in Iran's energy, petrochemical, transport, and manufacturing infrastructure over the next twenty-five years.<sup>92</sup> One such project is the Tehran-Qom-Isfahan high-speed railway which will be constructed by China's state-owned China Railway Group Limited and financed by Chinese credit.<sup>93</sup> What is notable about China's economic development is that it stands in defiance of mounting US sanctions on Iran; however, Chinese development of Iran also implies that Iran needs Chinese financial resources far more than China needs Iran as an economic partner.

Outside of their economic relationship, China and Iran largely turn a blind eye to what the other does. Because of this, their relationship is best described as a convenient business partnership

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<sup>90</sup> Berman II. 2011. *To Stop Iran, Lean on China*. The New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/09/opinion/irans-nuclear-program-and-china.html?searchResultPosition=48>

<sup>91</sup> Rapoza K. 2020. *China Wants To Save Iran Nuclear Deal As It Leaves Their Oil Market Behind*. Forbes.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2020/01/06/china-wants-to-save-iran-nuclear-deal-as-it-leaves-their-oil-market-behind/#11f90ba27ecd>

<sup>92</sup> Girard B. 2018. *China's BRI Bet in the Middle East*. – The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/07/chinas-bri-bet-in-the-middle-east/>

Rapoza K. 2019. *Drone Wars: China Has \$400 Billion At Stake In Iran Oil*. Forbes.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2019/09/16/drone-wars-china-has-400-billion-at-stake-in-iran-oil/#717c25ad468a>

<sup>93</sup> *Tehran-Isfahan High Speed Rail (Construction)*. Center for Strategic and International Studies.

<https://reconnectingasia.csis.org/database/projects/tehran-isfahan-high-speed-rail-construction/08745c54-5441-4c84-900e-11454e62360e/>

rather than being strategic partners. China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, stated at a meeting with Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, that, "We need to stand together against unilateralism and bullying practices."<sup>94</sup> These bullying practices reference the United States' predominant use of crippling economic sanctions against Iran, implying that Iran and China's partnership is one of economic defiance.

### **Section 3.5: Ignoring the Uighur Muslims**

Outside of their economic partnership, a key case study in how Iran's best interest is not always in following a strict version of their guiding legal document is clear in the case of China, where Muslims are constantly persecuted, but it is in Iran's best economic interest to turn a blind eye to these transgressions in order to not collapse. For instance, the mass detention and violence against Uighur Muslims in the Xinjiang region of China would be an issue which any country wanting to "defend Muslims at home or abroad" would surely condemn.<sup>95</sup> Not only has Iran taken no action against China for the persecution of Muslims, but Iran has not spoken out about the issue either. This lack of response implies that Iran is careful to extend their interactions with China outside of the economic realm due to their over-reliance on China for economic development. The Director for China at Human Rights Watch has explained that this is a larger trend with many Muslim countries, not just exclusive to Iran, that "China has managed to win these countries' support because they need Chinese investment."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *China, Iran Ministers Meet, Criticize 'Bullying Practices'*. Voice of America. <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/china-iran-ministers-meet-criticize-bullying-practices>.

<sup>95</sup> Ramani S. 2018. *Iran's Careful Approach to China's Uyghur Crackdown*. – The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/09/irans-careful-approach-to-chinas-uyghur-crackdown/>

<sup>96</sup> LEDUC S. 2019. *Muslim countries' silence on China's repression of Uighurs*. France 24. <https://www.france24.com/en/20191127-china-communist-uyghurs-xinjiang-muslim-silence-camps-repression>

China's role as a strong economic partner and a crucial provider of the investment and technology necessary for Iran's economic development and modernization. Faced with U.S. and international sanctions, Iran lacks access to foreign capital and expertise to develop its struggling economy, which is essential to Iran's regional and intersectional foreign policies. Outside of economic collaboration, there is little relation between China and Iran.<sup>97</sup>

### **Section 3.6: Analysis of Iran's Policy Towards China**

Iran's relationship with China is necessary for the sake of Iran's economy. For the most part, the two have nearly zero interaction with one another outside of trade, and this has been true for the history of both countries, not just in recent decades. In terms of ideological and cultural differences between the two countries, these are largely ignored simply because Iran needs China's support to help keep the Iranian economy afloat, as evidenced by Iran's ignoring of the persecution of the Uighur Muslims in China. So, the policy Iran holds towards China is rational simply because it is one of economic necessity for Iran.

While Iran's policy towards China is rational, it is at the sake of constitutionality. First, Iran has made itself economically dependent on another nation so that Iran can pursue its desired foreign policy against other nations. Since Iran's more irrational foreign policies, such as that against the United States, are only able to be pursued because China is keeping Iran afloat, Iran has not preserved its full independence against China.

Second, Iran has betrayed the idea of defending the rights of all Muslims as there are Muslims persecuted in China. More than just not taking direct action against China for fear of retaliation, Iran has not even issued a statement to condemn China for such actions. So, Iran has compromised this portion of the Constitution because they believe it to be a necessary sacrifice.

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<sup>97</sup> Harold, W. S, Nader, Alireza. 2012. *The Nature of the Chinese-Iranian Partnership and the Challenges It Poses for the U.S.* RAND Corporation. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional\\_papers/OP351.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP351.html)

In terms of rejecting forms of dominance, China may have control over Iran's economic independence; however, China does not dictate any policies that Iran must pursue. If anything, China's relationship with Iran is one of convenience, and China does not wish to dominate Iran. This is also true for Iran's preservation of territorial integrity where China does not necessarily have an interest in taking territory away from Iran. Also, Iran's relationship with China neither helps nor harms its relations with non-belligerent states.

The final criterion is the most nuanced for Iran's China policy as it states that Iran must not align with a hegemonic superpower. Although China is a great power, I would argue that it is not a hegemonic power. In foreign policy, hegemonic stability theory indicates that the international system is more likely to remain stable when a single nation-state is the dominant world power, or hegemon. With this background information, it is clear that there can only be one hegemonic power, and as China is a rising power that may one day take on the title of hegemonic power, it is not the world's hegemonic power at the time this thesis is being written. Rather, that designation goes to the United States. So, although Iran has aligned itself with a great power, it has not aligned itself with a hegemonic power through its policy with China. However, the fact that Iran's China policy allows China a form of dominance over Iran as well as allows for the persecution of Muslims outweighs the fact that Iran is not aligned with a hegemonic power, making this policy rational-unconstitutional.

### **Section 3.7: Discussion on Iran's Global Foreign Policies**

Iran's global foreign policy in the context of the United States and China has produced mixed results, with the United States policy being categorized as irrational-constitutional and the China policy being categorized as rational-unconstitutional. Although I cannot make a call regarding the rationality and constitutionality of Iran's global foreign policy based on these results,

there are still a couple of key takeaways as to what these characterizations mean for Iran's global foreign policy.

First, Iran's policies towards the United States and towards China have repercussions for how Iran can pursue its policies towards regional actors. Any action that Iran takes against the United States will be made regarding the United States' involvement in the Middle East, where the two countries have goals which directly conflict with the goals of the other. In terms of China, Iran relies on its economic help so that Iran can pursue any of its policies, especially its more irrational ones which may be more costly.

Second, the fact that both China and the United States are global powers yet have attained different rationality-constitutionality outcomes indicates that Iran does not have a singular policy for all global powers. Rather, it indicates that Iran pursues policy options which benefit Iran's interests, and it can be reasonably inferred that this would be the case for any global power this framework was used against, even if different results are found at the end of each case.

Finally, and most importantly, the cases of the United States and China are complementary to one another. Whereas the United States is the primary reason that Iran's economy is in a state of disarray due to crippling sanctions, China's involvement with Iran helps keep the Iranian economy from completely going under. So, this indicates that Iran is willing to compromise on the foreign policy goals as they are outlined in the Constitution, in order to offset its more irrational foreign policy goals. Therefore, Iran's global foreign policy is much more of a balancing act, although it cannot be determined from this research as to whether Iran balances other global powers against only the United States, or if an irrational foreign policy would be the case for all Western nations.

## **Chapter Four: Intersectional Policies**

This chapter will focus on intersectional issues which are best described as the exportation of domestic policy, or domestic, intersectional policies which are not confined to the borders of Iran and have international implications. However, there is a difference between these policies and Iran's foreign policy towards a specific country. These intersectional policies do not require Iran to interact with other countries in order to advance the policy; however, that it is not to say that the international community has to be indifferent to these policies. These policies will also be found to be primarily rooted in the idea of deterrence, rather than Iranian expansion, allowing them to both fall in the realm of foreign policy. In order to gain a proper understanding for how Iran's domestic goals are able to intersect with their foreign policy, I have selected two cases which I believe capture just how wide of a range the idea of intersectional policies can cover while still capturing the idea that these policies are reflections of domestic goals being exported outside the boundaries of Iran.

This chapter will proceed by examining the Iranian nuclear program to determine its place in our framework of rationality in comparison to constitutionality. The Iranian nuclear program is a prominent example of an intersectional policy because although it is squarely situated within Iran, the nuclear program has been highly contentious within the international community since undeclared nuclear facilities were discovered in Iran in 2002. While the nuclear program is located domestically yet has international implications, proxy groups are physically located in other areas yet carry much of Iran's domestic ideological ideas. So, I will then examine Iran's involvement with proxy groups through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a means to export ideological beliefs, which intersects domestic policy goals with foreign policy.



For both sections, I will provide background and context into how these policies have been developed and what the intent of each policy is. I will then provide analysis on the individual policies regarding the framework of this thesis by determining the rationality-constitutionality of both policies. I will then conclude this chapter by providing discussion into how intersectional policies as a whole fit into the context of our understanding of rationality and constitutionality of Iranian foreign policy.

#### **Section 4.1: Introduction to The Nuclear Program**

The Iranian nuclear program relates to foreign policy in two primary ways: the reasoning behind why such a program is necessary and the concern the nuclear program brings global and regional powers. The original Iranian nuclear program was cut off in the immediate aftermath of the 1979 revolution, a consequence of the program's heavy reliance on international cooperation with countries Iran had just cut ties with, such as the United States.<sup>98</sup> In 1984, Khomeini expressed interest in renewing the Iranian nuclear program, and Iranian leaders began to focus their energy on revamping the nuclear program once they were freed from the time and cost restraints of the war with Iraq.<sup>99</sup> During this time, US intelligence agencies suspected Iran of using its civilian nuclear program as a cover for clandestine weapons development, which lead the United States to pressure potential suppliers, particularly Russia, to limit nuclear cooperation with Iran.<sup>100</sup> This forced the young program to take an independent approach with little to no help from the

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<sup>98</sup> 2016. Iran Watch. <https://www.iranwatch.org/our-publications/weapon-program-background-report/history-irans-nuclear-program>

<sup>99</sup> Warrick J. 2012. *Iran's supreme leader embraced concept of nuclear arms, archival document suggests*. The Washington Post. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/irans-supreme-leader-embraced-concept-of-nuclear-arms-archival-document-suggests/2012/04/20/gIQAnvMTWT\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/irans-supreme-leader-embraced-concept-of-nuclear-arms-archival-document-suggests/2012/04/20/gIQAnvMTWT_blog.html)

<sup>100</sup> *Iran*. Nuclear Threat Initiative - Ten Years of Building a Safer World. <https://www.nti.org/learn/countries/iran/nuclear/>

international community, a step which is thought to have drastically slowed down their program. While the capabilities of the Iran nuclear program may be of concern to the international community, prompting agreements such as the JCPOA, it is estimated that what they have done in forty years is generally completed by other nuclear programs within the first ten years.

Today, it can be difficult to ascertain why Iran wants a nuclear program, and this lack of understanding primarily stems from the idea that the costs of pursuing a nuclear program have far outweighed the benefits up until this point, or at least they have from a Western perspective.

One significant downfall of Iran's pursuit of a competitive nuclear program is that it has been excessively costly. Disproportionate sanctions have resulted from Iran's limited nuclear gains, which limit the conventional options Iran can take. Sanctions have also had a crippling impact on the Iranian economy, which has contributed to high levels of inflation, stagnation, and unemployment.<sup>101</sup> However, these are complex economic issues and current problems would not be completely fixed in the event that nuclear-related sanctions were lifted. Although Iran's economy would find some relief in the lifting of those sanctions, there are still plenty of non-nuclear sanctions, which deal that would remain in place and continue to cripple the economy, especially those centered around Iran's support for groups the United States has deemed terrorist organizations such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.<sup>102</sup> From an economic standpoint, the nuclear program has been detrimental to other sectors. This would lead to the assumption that the economic loss is not worth the cost; however, the nuclear program is actually worth the cost when looked at from security and ideological viewpoints.

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<sup>101</sup> *Six charts that show how hard US sanctions have hit Iran*. 2019. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48119109>

<sup>102</sup> *Iran Sanctions - United States Department of State*. U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/iran-sanctions/>

From an ideological standpoint, the nuclear program is arguably something much larger than a simple nuclear program to Iran – it is a program which embodies Iran’s willingness to stand up to other powers. Former President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, framed the nuclear issue as a matter of national sovereignty and greatness, and that the resistance of international pressure to restrict the nuclear program has become a rallying point for the nation.<sup>103</sup> As the nuclear program has become more and more linked to the ideas of national pride and independence, strides in the nuclear program become symbols of Iranian strength. Essentially, the nuclear program has become intertwined with Iranian ideology to the point that Iran would want to continue the program because losing it or having it be unsuccessful would be seen as not only a nuclear failure, but as an Iranian failure.

From the security standpoint. Iran argues that its nuclear program is necessary for a balance of nuclear power in the region. Ali Larijani, the former chief negotiator of the nuclear program and the current speaker of the Majlis, Iran’s parliament, has argued that “Iran has a strategic perspective with respect to its nuclear program. When other nations of the region such as Egypt and Turkey have managed progress, there is no reason why Iran shouldn’t also be able to do so.”<sup>104</sup> Thus, Iran harbors the idea that their nuclear program is unjustly regulated in comparison to other actors in the Middle East.

While Larijani has mentioned Egypt and Turkey, two nations with nuclear programs but no nuclear weapons, it is also significant to mention that nations in close proximity to Iran don’t just have nuclear programs but have nuclear weapon capabilities or have presumed nuclear weapon

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<sup>103</sup> Fisher M. 2015. *The real reasons Iran is so committed to its nuclear program*. Vox. <https://www.vox.com/2015/2/25/8101383/iran-nuclear-reasons>

<sup>104</sup> Barzegar K. 2009. The Paradox of Iran's Nuclear Consensus. *World Policy Journal*. 26(3):21–30

capabilities: Israel, India, and Pakistan.<sup>105</sup> Based on Iran's wish to have nuclear programs which can compete with those of Egypt and Turkey, it can be reasonably inferred that they would want to further balance the nuclear power in the region by obtaining nuclear weapons so that Iran would be able to compete in the event of nuclear warfare. Although this is much more extreme than having a nonviolent nuclear program, it returns to the same concept prevalent in Larijani's argument regarding Egypt and Turkey – that Iran does not want to be outmatched for regional power.

Although Israel and the United States have attempted to portray the Islamic Republic of Iran as a nation that the basic logic of nuclear deterrence does not apply to, Iran's wish for the acquisition of nuclear weapons does not automatically indicate that Iran would use them as offensive weapons. Rather, any offensive use of nuclear weapons would invite massive retaliation and risk destroying Iran.<sup>106</sup> It is far more likely that if Iran desires nuclear weapons by means of a national nuclear program, it is for the purpose of providing for its own security, not to improve its offensive capabilities which would lead to its own demise. Some observers and policymakers do hold dear to the idea that a nuclear weapon would embolden Iran, providing Tehran with a shield that would allow it to act more aggressively. This line of thinking directly contradicts the official stance of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, who has publicly stated that, "We [Iran] have never sought nuclear weapons... With or without the nuclear deal, we will never seek nuclear weapons."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Fact Sheets & Briefs*. Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What at a Glance | Arms Control Association. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Nuclearweaponswhohaswhat>

<sup>106</sup> Morgan PM. 2017. The Concept of Deterrence and Deterrence Theory. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*

<sup>107</sup> Al Jazeera. 2020. *Iran will never seek nuclear weapons: President Rouhani*. Iran News | Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/iran-seek-nuclear-weapons-president-rouhani-200122200450824.html>

Even if Iran were to change its nuclear policy from a peaceful program to one which manufactures nuclear weapons, the idea that it would allow Iran to take more aggressive measures against its adversaries also contradicts the record of every other nuclear weapons state going back to 1945. History shows that when countries acquire *the* bomb, they feel increasingly vulnerable and become acutely aware that their nuclear weapons make them a potential target in the eyes of major powers.<sup>108</sup> This awareness in turn discourages nuclear states from bold and aggressive action, and there is little reason to believe that Iran would break this mold.

In short, the Iranian nuclear program is necessary because it has become a larger symbol of Iranian ideals and because it is seen as a tool for deterrence. Although it may not be good economic policy, it is necessary for ideological and security reasons. While nuclear weapons can stand as a tool of deterrence, which would take care of Iran's regional worries, nuclear weapons can also be seen as a critical need in any attempt to solidify Iran's superiority in the region, or even the world. Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said as much in November 2013 when he released a video to articulate Iran's position on their nuclear program. In the video, Zarif spent less time talking about the fine details of nuclear policy and rather focused in on how Iran wished to continue their nuclear program because, "We [Iran] expect and demand respect for our dignity."<sup>109</sup> This is what makes the JCPOA such a standout policy on the part of Iran is that in relinquishing the smallest bit of control, they were given nuclear credibility on an international stage. To once again reference Zarif's video which was released the same year the JCPOA was signed, he used rhetoric

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<sup>108</sup> *Nuclear weapons: Which countries have them and how many are there?* 2020. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-51091897>

<sup>109</sup> Fisher M. 2015. *The real reasons Iran is so committed to its nuclear program.* Vox. <https://www.vox.com/2015/2/25/8101383/iran-nuclear-reasons>

which implied Iran was looking for “equal footing” and “mutual respect,” two attributes which Iran gained through international nuclear negotiations.<sup>110</sup>

The second primary area to understand about the Iranian nuclear program is how it indirectly engages with global and regional powers. First, Iranian suspicion of the current international order relates to why a disarmament agreement would be unsuccessful – disarmament requires a state to relinquish some sovereignty in exchange for security. In terms of a weapons of mass destruction program, once a state renounces its program, it should have the assurance and support from the international community that it will be safe in the event that it is threatened by another state in possession of arms.<sup>111</sup> Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran has formed this idea that the only way to truly safeguard their interests is to develop a nuclear deterrent. This makes engagement with other countries difficult in terms of nuclear agreements because both sides become distrustful of the other, and these agreements rely on trust.

#### **Section 4.2: The Significance of the JCPOA**

One of the most monumental examples of Iran’s nuclear related engagement with global powers is best witnessed through policies such as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), informally known as the Iran nuclear deal. The JCPOA is an agreement between Iran and six world powers with the intent of curbing the lack of supervision over the Iran nuclear program in exchange for economic relief by the US, the European Union, and the United Nations Security Council, rolling back nuclear related economic sanctions.<sup>112</sup> The JCPOA relied on the

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<sup>110</sup> Fisher M. 2013. *Five lessons from the Iranian foreign minister's video asking for peace*. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/11/19/five-lessons-from-the-iranian-foreign-ministers-video-asking-for-peace/?arc404=true>

<sup>111</sup> O'Hanlon ME. 2016. *Is a World Without Nuclear Weapons Really Possible?* Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/is-a-world-without-nuclear-weapons-really-possible/>

<sup>112</sup> *Iran nuclear crisis in 300 words*. 2020. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48201138>

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to monitor and verify Iran's compliance with the agreement, and subsequent inspections have verified that Iran has been in compliance with the nuclear deal.<sup>113</sup> Although the deal is thought to have set Iran's nuclear program back for anywhere from 5-10 years, President Trump withdrew the United States from the deal in October 2017.

In January 2020 after the killing of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, Iran declared that it would no longer abide by the JCPOA; however, Iran also announced that it would continue to coordinate with the IAEA, leaving open the idea of further compliance in the future. At the same time, the falling out of the JCPOA could lead to Iran to consider the acquisition of nuclear weapons to be a more significant objective on their political agenda.<sup>114</sup> Iran's departure from officially following the JCPOA was declared by Javad Zarif as the "final remedial step."<sup>115</sup> The ambiguity of this statement leaves room for Iran to further develop its enrichment capabilities without completely closing the door on future negotiations.

### **Section 4.3: Analysis of Iran's Nuclear Policy**

In order to determine the rationality and constitutionality of Iran's nuclear policy, we must keep in mind both the reason behind the nuclear program and the way in which the program engages international actors. Iran's program doubles as a way in which Iran can preserve national identity and gain international recognition, while also serving as a potential tool of deterrence. Starting with constitutionality, these inferences which we have made about the nuclear program

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<sup>113</sup> *Fact Sheets & Briefs*. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) at a Glance | Arms Control Association. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance>

<sup>114</sup> *Iran preserves options over the nuclear deal*. IISS. <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/survival-blog/2020/01/iran-preserves-options-over-jcpoa>

<sup>115</sup> Zarif J. 2020. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/JZarif/status/1213900666164432900>

further imply that the nuclear program serves as a way in which Iran can reject forms of dominance, preserve its independence, and preserve its territorial integrity from any potential aggressors.

The idea of defending the rights of all Muslims is not necessarily applicable in this policy area because there is no evidence that Muslims suffer disproportionately from nuclear based violence. Just as vague, there is no proof that any non-belligerence state has turned aggressive or hostile against Iran for the development of its nuclear program. Therefore, these two criteria are not applicable to our understanding of the constitutionality of Iran's nuclear program.

In terms of non-alignment with hegemonic superpowers, I would argue that the best case against Iran doing this would be its coming to the nuclear deal agreement with the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, France, China, and Germany. However, only the United States is a hegemonic superpower out of these six nations, the two did not necessarily have to directly work together once the framework for the agreement was set, and neither nation currently complies with the agreement. So, Iran has not aligned with hegemonic superpowers by way of its nuclear program. So, it can be reasonably concluded that the Iranian nuclear program would be considered a constitutional foreign policy.

In terms of rationality, the determination is less cut and dry because of the reliance on both the preservation of ideological identity and the potential deterrence capabilities which stem from the nuclear program. However, I have determined that the deterrence capabilities are much more fundamental and necessary to the Iranian nuclear program, whereas ideological identity is not preserved through having a nuclear program but by the strength of that program. As deterrence relies on the existence of the program, I would argue that it takes precedence over national identity. If anything, the strength of national identity regarding the nuclear program innately relies on deterrence capabilities. So, if Iran is developing its nuclear program with deterrence of other



nuclear powers in mind rather than only following the reason more strongly rooted in ideology, then the case for rationality is stronger than the case for irrationality. With that, the Iranian nuclear program can be concluded to be rational-constitutional.

#### **Section 4.4: Introduction to Proxy Groups**

As I have already discussed Iran's foreign policy towards Iraq in Chapter Two: Regional Interactions, I will now focus on Iran's development of proxy groups most closely related to that case, for the sake of simplicity and continuity. By examining Iran's development of proxy groups in the region by way of the Quds Force, I hope to establish the role that these groups play in allowing ideological interests to be spread without having direct ties to the Iranian government.

Iranian proxies collectively represent a new power dynamic within the region, relying on the capitalization of regional unrest and insecurity. Advances through the use of proxies in places such as Iraq and Syria are largely examples of success for Iran. However, when examining Iranian proxy forces, it is important to keep in mind that some organizations are more "proxy" than others. To put it more plainly, the extent which certain proxies go to advance Iran's ambitions depend largely on how developed the relationship is between the group and its primary benefactor.<sup>116</sup> In order to fully comprehend the issue of Iranian proxy forces, it is essential to turn to the core group which the Islamic republic regularly relies on to do its bidding: the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

The debate over the role of the IRGC within the Islamic Republic can be traced back to its legal roots through the Constitution. On December 04, 1979, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini formally created the IRGC by decree, although it had existed in some form for several

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<sup>116</sup> Gardner F. 2019. *Iran's network of influence in Mid-East 'growing'*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50324912>

months before.<sup>117</sup> The statute of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps provided the earliest legal framework for the organization's operations.

The Islamic Republic had ratified its first constitution the day before, on December 3, 1979.

Article 150 declared,

“The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps ... is to be maintained so that it may continue in its role of guarding the revolution and its achievements. The scope of the duties of this corps and its areas of responsibility, in relation to the duties and areas of responsibility of the other armed forces, are to be determined by law with emphasis on brotherly cooperation and harmony among them.”<sup>118</sup>

A strict reading of Article 150 shows that the Guards' intervention in politics is not constitutionally mandated, yet at the same time such behavior is not legally prohibited. Nowhere does the constitution define the "enemies" against which the IRGC is obliged to guard the revolution, and this ambiguity allows for the group to be utilized both internally and externally as protection for the regime. It is even unclear whether the IRGC's primary role will be defense against external threats, in which case it should act as an army, or internal threats, in which it might act as a police force.

Again, the Guards provided their own guidance on these issues. On March 19, 1980, "Obligations of the Guards" appeared in *Payam-e Enghelab*.<sup>119</sup> In this IRGC monthly publication, the IRGC stated that

“Cooperation with the government in military and security matters, including pursuit and arrest of armed counterrevolutionary movements.... Disarming unauthorized persons.... Investigation and intelligence gathering.... preservation of the public order at demonstrations and gatherings in order to prevent disruption of law and order... and support for freedom and justice-seeking movements of oppressed people under the

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<sup>117</sup> *Iran's Revolutionary Guards*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/background/irans-revolutionary-guards>

<sup>118</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. "Iranian Constitution." <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP81B00401R000500100033-2.pdf>

<sup>119</sup> Alfoneh A. *The Revolutionary Guards' Role in Iranian Politics*. Middle East Forum. <https://www.meforum.org/1979/the-revolutionary-guards-role-in-iranian-politics>

supervision of the Council of the Revolution, and with authorization from the government.”<sup>120</sup>

#### **Section 4.5: The Quds Force in Action**

Internal IRGC operations can still serve as a model for what many paramilitary groups can do to increase their political prominence within a given nation: run for office. The 2008 parliamentary elections solidified the IRGC's political infiltration and demonstrated that the supreme leader supports the IRGC's growing role.<sup>121</sup> While the role of the IRGC on the basis of the Constitution is largely internal with a disputed political role, the IRGC has branches which serve specialized roles outside of Iran such as the Quds Force, a unit in Iran's IRGC which specializes in unconventional warfare and military intelligence operations. Although the exact size of the organization is not known, the Quds Force is closely linked to Iranian proxy groups as this unit operates across the Middle East.<sup>122</sup>

Many in the United States and in other governments, particularly in the intelligence community, are keen to identify a clear operational relationship between the Iranian regime and its regional allies. This, however, misses the point of the Iranian model: proxies serve their own interests as well as some of Iran's more ideological interests.<sup>123</sup> Very rarely is Iran found guilty of giving direct instructions to their proxies, rather Iran uses the Quds Force to train and develop proxy groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).<sup>124</sup> One of

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<sup>120</sup> *Payam-e Enghelab*, Mar. 19, 1980.

<sup>121</sup> *Revolutionary Guards Soar in Parliament*. The Iran Primer. <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/sep/19/revolutionary-guards-soar-parliament>

<sup>122</sup> Berger M. 2020. *What is Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps that Soleimani helped to lead?* The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/01/04/what-is-irans-revolutionary-guard-corps-that-soleimani-helped-lead/>

<sup>123</sup> Becca Wasser AT. 2019. *Analysis | Iran's network of fighters in the Middle East aren't always loyal to Iran*. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/05/21/how-do-irans-proxies-actually-work/>

<sup>124</sup> Pike J. *Intelligence*. IRGC Proxy Groups. <https://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iran/proxy-groups.ht>

the oldest proxy groups is Hezbollah, which was first created when Iran aided the Shia population of Lebanon after the country had been invaded by Israel. Following this model, Iran is able to create a presence of proxy groups when they identify vulnerable populations that need to be protected by an aggressor, often with the aggressor being an adversary of Iran.<sup>125</sup>

This same pattern can be found when the 2003 Iraq War provided fertile ground for the growth of Iranian proxies and supported groups. The Quds Force was once described as a “unit deployed to challenge the United States presence” in Iraq by arming and aiding Shiite militias. Iran likely has invested in these groups in part out of true concern over instability and fragmentation in both countries, which do not serve its regional interests.<sup>126</sup> Tehran wants a moldable government but a functioning state in Iraq. This interest has been primarily served by way of the Popular Mobilization Forces, an umbrella group for many Iranian backed militias. In the most recent Iraqi parliamentary elections, the PMF was able to win forty-eight seats, making one of the most powerful blocs in Parliament one which has close ties to Iran.<sup>127</sup>

#### **Section 4.6: Analysis of Iran’s Proxy Group Policy**

Iran’s use of proxies as a way to create a pathway for plausible deniability for Iran while still exporting ideology creates a complex situation for our understanding of rationality. First, the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif denies that Iran has proxies, replying to a President Trump tweet about “Iran or its proxies” with “Iran has FRIENDS: No one can have MILLIONS of ‘proxies.’”<sup>128</sup> By this purposeful distancing between Iran and its “friends”, these

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<sup>125</sup> Associated Press. 2019. *AP Explains: Who are Iraq's Iran-backed militias?* AP NEWS. <https://apnews.com/57a346b17d6da07ae732ba1437520fd2>

<sup>126</sup> Wright, Robin. 2009. *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East*. Penguin. 333-4.

<sup>127</sup> Al Jazeera. 2018. “Iraq elections final results: Sadr's bloc wins parliamentary poll.” *Iraq News | Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/iraq-election-final-results-sadr-bloc-wins-parliamentary-polls-180519071930804.html>.

<sup>128</sup> Zarif J. 2020. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/JZarif/status/1245592834175946754>

groups serve as a backdoor for Iran to pursue its more extreme, ideological-centered policies without being held responsible for them. So, we cannot confuse an ingenious policy for what we have defined as rational within this thesis.

Despite the cleverness of Iran's use of proxy groups, I argue that the use of proxy groups to largely export Iran's policies that they do not want directly linked to themselves insinuates that any Iranian foreign policies pursued by way of proxy groups are actually quite irrational. They largely rely on ideological beliefs and prey on sectarian divides, and the overreliance on ideology as a primary driver of Iran's policy on proxies makes this policy irrational.

As the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was created by the Constitution and they play a large role in the development of Iran's proxy groups, Iran's usage of proxy groups would be constitutional. However, this preliminary determination must still be put against the framework of this thesis to determine if the policy is constitutional based on the six criteria identified in the foreign policy section of the Constitution.

First, Iran's usage of proxy groups allows for Iran to expand its dominance without compromising its independence or territorial integrity. By creating a system of plausible deniability, any action these groups take which Iran does not want to be identified with can be easily denied, which allows for Iran to take the actions of each group into careful consideration. This means that any nation which Iran angers by way of its proxy groups cannot directly link Iran to any such action, thereby allowing Iran to pursue more irrational policies without compromising constitutionality.

In terms of how Iran's policy for proxy groups interacts with hegemonic superpowers and non-belligerent states, these two criteria are largely not applicable in this case. First, proxy groups

have a sense of security in their relationship with Iran, but other than that, they largely work as independent, non-state actors. So, Iran would be detached from any interaction these groups would have with a hegemonic superpower, and such interactions would be highly unlikely as the United States denotes many of these proxy groups as terrorist organizations. In terms of non-belligerent states, proxy groups are primarily located in conflict zones so it is highly unlikely that a peaceful state would be threatened by these groups as they would not come into direct contact with one another.

Finally, defending the rights of all Muslims does occur through Iran's use of proxy groups in the sense that Muslim's are defended in a way which Iran best sees fit. For instance, in Iraq where proxy groups are used to fight against other Muslim groups, it could be argued that Iran's policy of proxies might harm Muslims. But this argument may not hold up as our understanding of "defending the rights of all Muslims" once again leaves ambiguous as to who Muslims must be protected from. If a group of Muslims is threatening the rights of other Muslims, then conflict between the two would theoretically be allowed by the Iranian constitution; however, that will largely be based on our understanding of the situation at hand. So, because this final criterion is much more flexible and difficult to generalize, I will not use it in determining the constitutionality of Iran's policy of proxies. Therefore, Iran's policy of supporting proxy groups is irrational-constitutional.

#### **Section 4.7: Discussion on Iran's Intersectional Foreign Policies**

I have now determined that Iran's nuclear policy is rational-constitutional and Iran's proxy policy is irrational-constitutional. Despite there not being an overall consensus as to how Iran approaches its intersectional policies, there are still a few key ideas which I believe can be taken away from our understanding of how Iran implements these policies.

First, our understanding of both of these policies largely hinges on the idea that Iran utilizes these policies as a way to protect and pursue Iran's more ideological foreign policy goals. In terms of the nuclear program, the nuclear program has been a way for Iran to gain international credibility and preserve national identity. For Iran's usage of proxy groups, the exportation of ideology is much more directly linked to Iran's constitutional goals; however, both closely relate to ideology. As the Constitution is an ideological document in itself, it is not surprising that both policies are constitutional due to them both being rooted in domestic ambitions.

Although the two policies differ in rationality, I propose a simple explanation for why that might be. Iran's nuclear policy was the intersectional policy which I determined to be rational, and it is the policy which Iran publicly promotes. Although the nuclear program is tied to national identity, there are other purposes the nuclear program can serve for the security of Iran. On the other hand, Iran's usage of proxy groups engages much more with history, culture, and ideology. It would be nearly impossible for such groups to operate independently of such factors, and Iran is able to deny direct involvement which allows them to pursue a more emboldened irrational proxy policy. Therefore, however publicly tied Iran is to the policy determines how rational the policy is, in the case of these two examples.

Finally, both the nuclear program and the use of proxy groups are unconventional tactics which Iran largely relies on in order to operate below the threshold of more conventional warfare tactics. Essentially, these two policies are used to help shape regional situations to Iran's, whether they are rational foreign policies or not. So, Iran is aware of its military shortcomings, exacerbated by a failing economy, and in this awareness, Iran has discovered ways in which it is able to pursue its regional interests.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

### **Section 5.1: Analysis of Constitutionality-Rationality for Iran's Foreign Policy**

The three categories of Iranian foreign policy covered in this thesis are regional policies, global policies, and intersectional policies. In chapter two, I analyzed Iran's regional policy in the context of its interactions with Israel and Iraq in which I determined both of these policies to be rational-constitutional. Chapter three contained an exploration of Iran's interactions with two global superpowers: United States of America and China. Within these interactions, we observed two global powers whose primary interactions take place with Iran in the Middle East, a determination which implies that Iran's primary interests are regional, not global. These two cases were determined to be irrational-constitutional and rational-unconstitutional, respectively. In chapter four, our two intersectional policies were Iran's development of a nuclear program and development of regional proxy groups through the IRGC. While policies regarding the nuclear program were determined to be rational-constitutional, the use of proxy groups as a way to further ideological goals were determined to be irrational-constitutional.

Now that these three areas of foreign policy have been explored through individual policies, we can take a macro-level view of Iranian foreign policy to determine the relationship between rationality and constitutionality in their foreign policy. The Islamic Republic of Iran was founded through revolution, with the goals of this revolution solidified in their Constitution. However, having an ideologically rooted Constitution evidently does not give Iran free reign to do as they please. Rather, Iran must balance its revolutionary, ideological goals with the practical demands of any nation-state.

We have three cases which have been determined to be rational-constitutional, a feat which showcases that a revolutionary, ideological foreign policy doctrine can intersect with a practical



foreign policy. These three cases are those of Iraq, Israel, and the nuclear program. For the most part, these are the three cases primarily defined by Iran's regional ambitions and policies. Although the nuclear program is an intersectional policy rather than regional, the idea which permeates throughout the nuclear program is that it is needed to bring a balance of power to the region. These three cases are arguably the bread and butter of Iranian foreign policy, where Iran has enough historical reasoning to have policies which will be sustained and not dimmed with time. However, they all also have separate reasons for rationality, which arguably makes the general idea of their foreign policy even more rational in that they tailor their policy to who they are dealing with, rather than having one broad policy for all of their regional ambitions.

For irrational-constitutional, there are two cases which stand out: global interactions with the United States and the development of proxy groups through the IRGC. Iran's use of proxy groups is an inventive, clever policy which is rooted in ideological beliefs. In the case of the United States, both the United States and Iran act rather irrationally towards the other based on perceived ideological differences and historical distrust. It should be noted that neither policy is invalid nor lacks credibility simply because it is irrational. These determinations were simply made because historical, ideological, or cultural reasons *outweighed* any other reason Iran may have for pursuing that specific policy.

Our final case, China, is the only case which qualified as rational-unconstitutional within the framework of this thesis. This policy shows that although Iran wishes to pursue its ideological goals, it is not blind to the economic constraints it faces in doing so. Quite simply, a rational-unconstitutional policy is a simple payoff for Iran to pursue its irrational-constitutional policies. Iran's China policy is an economic counterweight to US sanctions, making part of Iran's foreign policy a balancing act.

Finally, we had no cases which were found to be irrational-unconstitutional. Although the argument could be made that this paper only included six cases and criteria which would not allow for there to be an example of an irrational-unconstitutional policy, I would argue that it would be nearly impossible to find an irrational-unconstitutional policy. For one, rationality and constitutionality are complementary to one another. Rationality rests on the idea that foreign policy decisions must not be made primarily on ideological, historical, or cultural claims. However, rationality is not exclusive of these. In cases where rationality and constitutionality do exclude the other, then the characteristic which has not been excluded is the primary reason behind the decision. Constitutionality in the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran sets forth a policy that is rooted in ideological and historical reasoning. For a foreign policy to be irrational but also unconstitutional, the country would have to be in the midst of a major ideological shift in which the goals of the Constitution are no longer applicable. So, it would not be impossible for foreign policy to be exclusive of both rationality and constitutionality, but there are currently be no feasible irrational-unconstitutional cases for the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy.

Overall, there is one clear fact about Iran's foreign policy which goes directly against preconceived notions held about Iranian foreign policy: it is extremely nuanced. Here are six cases, a comprehensive, though not conclusive, representation of Iran's foreign policy, and there were three cases deemed rational-constitutional, two deemed irrational-constitutional, and one deemed rational-unconstitutional. Every case posed a different set of circumstances in which those determinations were made, and I cannot determine one label to fit the entirety of Iran's foreign policy because it truly just depends on the case at hand.

Therefore, Iran is not just a member of the "axis of evil" or a nation which will be the cause of war. Rather, Iran is a country who does what it believes is in its best interest for the case at hand.

There is no one simple characterization of Iranian foreign policy, and if there were, it would not be irrational as the majority of its policies are quite rational.

### **Section 5.2: Limits of this Research**

Although I am confident regarding the findings of this thesis, that is not to say that there were no limits to this research. The first issue which I will address is the amount of case studies I used, then I will address the data which was collected on those cases.

As I had time constraints, I had to balance the quantity and quality of research I was able to do. In order to dutifully ensure that the cases which I selected were done justice, I restricted myself to two cases per division of foreign policy. These cases were strategically selected as they brought to light different aspects of Iran's regional, global, and intersectional policies. At the same time, Iraq and Israel do not represent the entirety of the Middle East nor do China and the United States represent the entirety of the globe. Rather, these were the most prominent cases which I believed to be most relevant to this research because of the fine balance Iran must strike between constitutionality and rationality in each. Foreign policy is nuanced and is tailored for the country on the receiving end of the policy. If any category of foreign policy were to be researched individually, then a more complete picture could be drawn regarding Iran's regional, global, and intersectional policies, including any outliers that I did not have the ability to capture with this thesis. This could include, but is not limited to, nations which are considered non-belligerent states by Iran, non-state actors, or allies and adversaries in different regions.

A second limitation to this research was the ability to ensure that sources used were as unbiased as possible. As I worked primarily with government statements and documents, it is difficult to know the accuracy of those documents. This is especially true for statements made in Farsi or Arabic, as I relied on translations of those documents into English. Apart from translation

issues, I worked with open-source data as opposed to data which could contradict what is publicly pushed by the governments of each country discussed in this thesis.

### **Section 5.3: Looking Forward**

As far as future opportunities for this research go, this thesis was not intended to offer any policy recommendations, but rather serve as an analytical product to understanding Iran's approach to foreign policy. This new understanding relies on the framework introduced by this thesis, with rationality and constitutionality serving as the designations for Iran's foreign policy doctrines. So, there is opportunity for research to be expanded through the application of this new framework to other areas of Iranian foreign policy.

Outside of the practical application of this framework for future research, this thesis also presents an opportunity for there to be a shift in the way the United States views, discusses, and interacts with Iran. Referring back to statements from President Bush, President Obama, and President Trump, the United States has pushed a message for nearly two decades that because Iran clashes with the United States, Iran poses a threat to global stability. Rather, this thesis has determined that Iran does not pose a threat to global stability but rather offers a challenge to US interests in the Middle East.

After the United States imposed sanctions on him in 2019, the Foreign Affairs Minister of Iran Javad Zarif tweeted, "Thank you for considering me such a huge threat to your agenda."<sup>129</sup> The spirit of this tweet translates well for Iranian foreign policy – as a sovereign nation, what is in Iran's best interest does not have to coincide with what is in the United States' best interest. And having competing interests has led the United States to characterize Iran as a much larger threat than Iran actually is.

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<sup>129</sup> Zarif, Javad. 2019. *Twitter*. <https://twitter.com/JZarif/status/1156664257020334081>.

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