Political Culture and Iran`s Foreign Policy: A Comparative Study of Iran`s Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad and Rouhani

Amir Mohammad Haji-Yousefi

Associate Professor, Department of Political Sciences and International Relations, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran (am-yousefi@sbu.ac.ir)

Abstract

Political culture represents a society`s widely held, traditional values and its fundamental practices; foreign policy decision makers tend to make policies that are compatible with their society`s political culture because they share, if not all, many of those values. Among the various factors influencing Iran`s foreign policy, the role of political culture seems to be rather underestimated. This article seeks to analyze the role of Iran`s political culture in shaping the country's foreign policy, through a comparative study of the hardline foreign policy of former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the moderate foreign policy of current president Hasan Rouhani. Accordingly, this paper`s main question is the following: What is the role of political culture in the change in Iran`s foreign policy during Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's presidencies? Our main hypothesis is that the oscillation of Iran`s foreign policy between aggressiveness and moderation reflects Iran`s two simultaneous contradictory political cultures. In this theoretical-analytical paper, we apply a descriptive-explanatory method to examine our hypothesis. First, we will have a very short discussion of the various factors shaping Iran`s foreign policy. In the second section, we will shed light on the main elements of Iran`s political culture, which seem to influence the country's foreign policy. The third section of this article will compare Iran's foreign policy during President Ahmadinejad and President Rouhani; we will try to demonstrate how Iranian leaders who are stuck in Iran`s contradictory political cultures, have reacted and why. Finally, the impact of Iran`s political culture on its foreign policy change will be analyzed.

Keywords: Ahmadinejad, foreign policy, Iran, political culture, Rouhani.

Introduction

This paper is based on a small section of an ongoing research on Iranian foreign policy after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. It covers a very extensive area in which various elements, which might have influenced Iran`s foreign policy, are examined, including the country's political culture. Our main concern in this article is to understand whether or not changes in Iran`s foreign policy could be explained by the Iranian political culture. Further, if we accept that Iran`s foreign policy (and thus its changes) is somehow related to its political culture, an important question arises as what are the main manifestations of this relationship. In other words, what are the main trends of Iran`s foreign policy behavior which might be traced to its political culture.

Our main argument is that Iran`s foreign policy, both in its principles and its external behavior is shaped, from among other factors, by its political culture. However, in this paper, we do not seek to discuss how and to what extent the principles of Iran`s foreign policy are affected by its culture including its political culture (Adib-Moghaddam, 2005). What we seek to understand is how changes in Iran`s foreign policy behavior can be explained by its political culture. We can categorize Iran`s foreign policy behavior since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 as conflict-cooperation or aggressive-moderate continua. Iran`s foreign policy, on the one side of the continuum, has been revolutionary and confrontational, while on the other end of the continuum, its foreign policy behavior in some periods (especially during president Khatami and president Rouhani's presidencies) has been moderate and accommodative. We do not intend to open the issue of Iran`s foreign policy rationality, though we believe it is rational. What we do try to show is why Iran`s foreign policy behavior has oscillated between aggressiveness and moderation and consequently hypothesize that the fluctuation of Iran`s foreign policy between

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aggressiveness and moderation reflects Iran`s two simultaneous contradictory political cultures. In this theoretical-analytical paper, we apply a descriptive-explanatory method to examine our hypothesis.

In this first section of this paper, we will present a short discussion about the various factors that shape Iran's foreign policy (behavior). In the second section, we will shed light on the various components of Iran`s political culture, which seems to have bearing on its foreign policy. To some extent, we will see how Iranians, including the elites, feel about themselves and their country, how they view others, what role they think Iran should play in the world, and what they see as moral behavior. Then, by comparing Iran`s foreign policy during Ahmadinejad and Rouhani, we will try to demonstrate how Iranian leaders who are stuck in Iran`s contradictory political cultures, have reacted and why. Finally, the impact of Iran`s political culture on its foreign policy change will be analyzed.

Literature Review

There is an extensive amount of books, articles, manuscripts and reports about Iran`s foreign policy and the main elements shaping it. Some analysts of Iran`s foreign policy have emphasized the importance of the external factors such as the structure of the international system in shaping the foreign policy orientations of the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the contrary, some scholars have highlighted the importance of domestic factors shaping Iran`s foreign policy. We have always referred to external factors shaping Iran`s foreign policy and argued that the structure of international system has the most influential on the fluctuations in Iran`s foreign policy behavior (Haji Yousefi, 1384 [2005 A.D]). However, the majority of Iran`s foreign policy scholars, especially inside Iran, have pinpointed domestic factors, which they believe greatly

influence the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Factors such as ideology, religion, traditions, economics, ethnicity, geography and history play a considerable role in this regard. In this vein, few have mentioned culture in general and political culture in particular, which may also have certain impacts on Iran`s foreign policy.

Our in-depth review of the current literature, especially the literature written inside Iran in Persian language, indicates that the research on the impact of political culture[1] on Iranian foreign policy is underdeveloped. Two books, however, stand out. One is written by Graham Fuller (1991), who served for twenty years in the CIA Foreign Service. In his book, *the Center of the Universe*, he examines Iran`s foreign relations (geopolitics) as influenced by its history and culture. In Fuller`s view, Iranian relations with its neighbors can be examined by what he refers to as Iran`s personality or culture. The other book written in Persian by Naghibzadeh (1381[2002 A.D]), a professor of political sciences at the University of Tehran, substantiates the connection between Iran`s culture and its foreign policy.

One important shortcoming of the literature on Iran`s foreign policy is its ambiguity about the exact subject of the study. Three concepts, in our view, need to be distinguished in order to better understand Iran's foreign policy One is the principles and sources of Iran`s foreign policy. When studying Iran`s foreign policy, certain scholars reduce it to the principles of Iran`s foreign policy and by concentrating on Iran`s constitution, they try to explain the main sources of the country's foreign policy such as Islam, tradition and history. The other second concept is Iran`s foreign policy cases. Many researchers seek to explain Iran`s foreign policy in action and usually select some cases

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1. By political culture we mean "deep-seated ideas, beliefs, values, and behavioral orientations" that Iranians (elites and non-elites) have toward the political system (See Wiarda, 2014: Introduction). In our definition of political culture we include Iranian view of how Iranian foreign policy ought to be implemented.

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such as Iran-US relations, the nuclear issue, Iran-Iraq war, Iran and Israel, Iran and the Shanghai Organization, etc., in order to understand Iran`s foreign policy.

The third concept that needs to be understood in order to completely understand Iran's foreign policy is the concept of foreign policy behavior, which is the focus of this paper. Certain scholars have attempted to understand Iran`s foreign policy behavior and to do this, they have pinpointed several factors including history, geopolitics, ideology, culture, international system, and economics. Among them, few scholars have focused on cultural factors, especially political culture in order to analyze Iran`s foreign policy behavior. Fuller (1991) and Naghibzadeh (1381[2002 A.D]), focus on Iranian national culture including its political culture. They, nevertheless, do not explain the changes in Iran`s foreign policy. In other words, their main thesis is that the culture of Iran is both monolithic and static and argue that one can easily understand and even predict Iran`s foreign policy behavior through understanding its national culture.

In our view, Iran`s culture, including its political culture, is neither a fixed nor a monolithic phenomenon. Iran`s political culture has changed through its history, though it does not change easily or quickly (Sheikholeslami, 2000). Further, we believe that we cannot speak of one uniform Iranian political culture, but we have to speak of several political sub-cultures existing in Iran at the same time.

Contrary to the existing literature about Iran's political culture and its relationship with its foreign policy behavior, this paper, assuming that Iran`s political culture is neither static nor monolithic, seeks to examine why major shifts in Iran`s foreign policy behavior have occurred, a phenomenon that has puzzled many Iranian specialists. We try to contribute to the academic endeavor by this last group by relating Iranian political culture

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to its foreign policy behavior through a comparative analysis of Ahmadinejad`s aggressive and Rouhani`s moderate foreign policy behaviors.

Iran`s Contradictory Political Culture

Iran, i.e. its people and of course its elites especially the political elites, has demonstrated a very contradictory political culture throughout the history. For centuries, Iran has been ruled by authoritarian monarchs. This has resulted in an authoritarian political culture, including respect and obedience for the government in power. However, Iranians have demonstrated distrust of their governments and considered them corrupt and suspect. They, at least in the 20th century have gone through various uprisings against the tyrants in power such as the constitutional revolution of 1906-7, a decade of uprisings from 1941 to coming to power of Dr. Mossadeq in 1951-53, and the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Accordingly, we can witness in Iran a political culture of authoritarianism, which exists alongside an anti-authoritarian one (Behnam, 1986).

Another contradiction in the political culture of the Iranian people is their simultaneous trust/mistrust of foreign countries, especially the Western powers. In the modern era, successive Iranian governments have sought to keep their power by allying themselves with foreign powers and in turn, external powers have intervened in Iranian domestic politics. This has resulted in a deep mistrust of foreign powers and their domination of Iran. People in Iran never forget the damages Iran received as a result of Russian and Great Britain rivalries during the 19th century in Iran and especially they have a very deep distrust of the latter. The special relationship between Iran and the United States during the second Pahlavi monarch also resulted in a deep distrust of the US. This mistrust was one of the most important causes of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In other words,

Iranians and religious leaders of the 1979 Revolution opposed Mohammad Reza shah`s dictatorship, not so much for his tyranny, but his unconditional alliance with the United States and Israel. A glance at the core principles of the Islamic Revolution in Iran namely (1) independence (cultural, political and economic), (2) resistance against US interference in regional and domestic affairs, and (3) diplomatic and ideological mobilization against Zionism, demonstrates the substantial weight of foreign factors in the Iranian political culture.

The opposition to the Pahlavi monarchy during the Islamic Revolution demanded a redefinition of Iran`s regional and global position and a redirection of its relations with the whole world, and in particular the world's dominant powers. This, however, did not result in an isolationist foreign policy after the Islamic revolution. Iran did want to have cordial relations with other countries even the so-called Great Satan. Except for relations with Israel, which has become ideologically forbidden, the Iranian people, although rather skeptical of foreign countries, especially Western Powers still like to have cordial relationships with the whole world. This has brought a dilemma for the outside observers of Iran`s foreign policy. Iranians and their decision makers are perceived as both rational and irrational at the same time in their approach towards the international community. On the one hand, they always feel to be victims of the international system and subjugated by it; however, on the other hand, they pretend to desire normal relations with the outside world.

Another contradictory element in the political culture of Iranians, which is highly strengthened after the Islamic Revolution, is their simultaneous nationalist and internationalist way of thinking. Iranians have deep nationalistic sentiments, but it seems that after the Islamic Revolution in Iran the revolutionaries tried to substitute Iranian nation and nationalism

with concepts such as 'Islamic nation' and 'Islamic internationalism'. This dichotomy in Iran's political culture brought about numerous debates inside Iran among those who adhered to the notion of Iran and national interest of Iran on the one hand, and those who tried to undermine it on the other. These debates, although they have been decreased especially after the war imposed on Iran by Saddam Hussein, had significant repercussions for Iran's foreign policy. In sum, Iranian leaders have tried to preserve the two concepts of 'Iranian nationality' and the 'Islamic nation' in spite of their inherent incompatibility, which in turn have made foreign policy decision makings rather complicated.

Finally, yet importantly, we can mention the issue of interference in the domestic affairs of other countries and ask if the Iranian theocratic establishment, including the government, adheres to a policy of abstention from interventionism or intervention. In other words, a contradictory political culture has emerged with respect to this issue, which directly affects Iran's foreign policy. While the current Iranian constitution prevents the government from any aggressive intervention in the internal affairs of other nations (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Article 154), the Iranian revolutionaries did as much as any revolutionary state to propagate their message abroad. The Iranian leaders explicitly endorsed the export of the revolutionary ideas of the Islamic Republic while always cautioned against any use of force in this regard.

In sum, Iranians, especially the elites and decision makers, seem to all be part of a contradictory political culture which has considerable impacts on Iran's foreign policy behavior. Given Iran's long history and its remarkable civilization, it seems natural for the government monarchical or theocratic, to wish and attempt to restore its glorious past and its real independence, by which I mean cultural and political independence as well as

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economic autarky. In addition, Islamic ideologies, especially the ideals of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, have guided Iran`s foreign policy particularly with respect to the USA and Israel. Moreover, the Islamic Revolution, like other revolutions, has had great repercussions for other countries, especially third world countries, and thus the Iranian government has been suspicious of intervening in the internal affairs of these countries. As a result of this contradictory political culture, certain Iranian presidents, such as President Hashemi Rafsanjani and President Khatami tried to achieve their goals through an accommodationist and cooperationist foreign policy.

On the contrary, other presidents, such as President Ahmadinejad, believed that an aggressive foreign policy would better fulfill Iranian foreign policy dreams and goals (Zibakalam, 23 Mehr 1391 [14 October 2012 A.D]; Gasiorowski, 2007). Keeping in mind the meaning of political culture and our main question about how Iran`s foreign policy ought to be carried out, we can see that this has had two contradictory answers: aggressive and moderate ways. In the following section, we will present the foreign policy behavior of President Ahmadinejad and President Rouhani.

A Comparative Study of Iran`s Foreign Policy Behavior

By comparing Iran`s foreign policy during Ahmadinejad and Rouhani, we will try to demonstrate the way in which Iranian leaders who have to work within the country's contradictory political culture have reacted and why. Our main argument is that change in Iran`s foreign policy behavior from an aggressive one during Ahmadinejad to moderate one during Rouhani, is mainly due to this contradictory political culture. We further argue that Iran`s foreign policy is highly influenced by the ideologies of the Islamic Revolution and thus has not witnessed any change in principles.

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The eight years of Ahmadinejad's presidency resembles the eight years of Iran-Iraq war during which Iran was at war with the Western powers and their allies. The difference is that the Iran-Iraq war was imposed upon Iran, whereas Ahmadinejad was democratically elected by Iranians. Upon election in 2005, the new president declared a confrontationist and aggressive foreign policy. Iran`s nuclear file was referred to the Security Council by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) after it ratified nine resolutions against Iran's nuclear activities (Haji-Yousefi, 2010). The United Nation`s Security Council passed six resolutions against Iran from July 2006 to June 2010. All of these resolutions (1969 in July 2006, 1737 in December 2006, 1747 in March 2007, 1803 in March 2008, 1835 in September 2008, and 1929 in June 2010) demanded that Iran suspend all processing and enrichment-related activities; in addition, the Security Council either threatened to enact or imposed various types of sanctions on Iran[1].

In reaction to the resolutions and sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, Ahmadinejad declared a Look-to-the-East policy and tried to boost cordial relations with Russia and China through several means including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). However, these two powers joined the Western powers to approve the imposed resolutions in order to halt Iran's nuclear program. Third-Worldism again became the dominant approach in Iran's foreign policy and Ahmadinejad's overtures with the Third World countries especially Latin American countries raised many questions about the country's foreign policy. At the same time, Iran's relations with its neighbors did not go very well. Despite Ahmadinejad`s endeavor to improve relations with the Arab countries, Iran was accused of hegemonic behavior through establishing a Shiite Crescent in the Middle East (Haji-Yousefi, 2009). The Arab countries` endeavor to create an atmosphere of Shiaphobia and

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1. see UN Security Council Resolutions on Iran (August 6, 2017)

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Iranophobia was aimed at distracting the United States' attention from their own internal affairs. "The stated U.S. policy of democracy promotion in the Middle East in 2004 came to being while the U.S. was intoxicated with its success in Iraq, calling for democratization in the Middle East and as a result creating a crisis for many Arab countries and to their eventual disagreement" (Haji-Yousefi, 2009). As acknowledged by Yamani (2008), it was Saudi Arabia who first created the idea of a Shia crescent; this idea was later restated by King Abdullah of Jordan so that the American attention could be directed at the Shia revival in the Middle East. Ahmadinejad's denial of the Holocaust, in addition to wishing Israel to be wiped off the World map, had severe consequences for Iran. Iran was portrayed as an aggressive country that attempts to destabilize the international security. This, in turn, hastened Iran`s isolation in the international community (Michael, 2007).

In sum, Ahmadinejad's foreign policy behavior was in tune with Iran's political culture. The election of a radical, neo-conservative president in Iran was, among other issues, due to the Western, in particular American treatment of the Reformist Khatami`s cooperationist foreign policy. The main result of Iran`s moderate foreign policy during president Khatami in the eyes of his opponents was that Iran was included in an axis of evil by the United States (See for instance Molana & Mohammadi, 1384 [2005 A.D]). Iranians who elected the new president believed that the Reformist Khatami`s foreign policy did not enjoy enough power to prevent foreign states` intervention in domestic affairs of the country, particularly regarding nuclear policies. Therefore, the Ahmadinejad administration tried to avoid, in their view, the passiveness of Khatami by adopting a confrontational foreign policy. This administration believed that if Iran avoids passiveness and does not surrender to the West`s pressures, they would finally retreat (Molana & Mohammadi, 1384 [2005 A.D]: 124).

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President Rouhani came to power as a result of victory in a nation-wide election in 2013. His main promises during the presidential campaign were as follows: Iran should engage in serious negotiations with the Western countries, reduce regional conflict through constructive engagement with its immediate neighborhood, and concentrate on its economic recovery and the general well-being of the Iranian society (Afkar News, 3 Mehr 1395 [24 September 2016 A.D]). His victory in the 2013 presidential election gave him a popular mandate to change Iran`s domestic and foreign policies. In addition, his position at the highest levels of the Iranian political system as well as his close relations with the supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei enabled his government to start a more conciliatory political course. The declaration of 'heroic flexibility' (Fars News Agency, 2013) in dealing with the West by the supreme leader just few months after Rouhani`s inauguration to presidential office, boosted his agenda of mending fences with the Western powers.

Rouhani, in contrast to his predecessor, believed that to kick start Iran`s economic recovery, as well as improve the well-being of the Iranian people, international sanctions have to be lifted. He and his allies i.e., a coalition of reformist and centrist conservatives, argued that economic development and diplomatic engagement with the international community would keep the Iranian people's support for the Islamic Republic. To achieve this, they believed that Iran must integrate into the global economy and attract foreign investment. Further, they tried to convince their internal political rivals not to see Iran`s relations with its rivals in purely zero-sum games. This, in Rouhani's view would require an immediate action to resolve the nuclear standoff with the five plus one countries. Therefore, a new round of negotiations was to start (Nader et al., 2017).

To set a new course in Iran`s foreign policy toward the West,

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Rouhani took various constructive measures. Rouhani seemed to believe that past negotiations have failed in large part due to mistrust between Iran and the P5+1. The historic telephone conversation between Rouhani and Obama on September 27, 2013, as well as the direct meeting between Iranian foreign minister, M. Javad Zarif, and his counterpart U.S Secretary of State, John Kerry, on September 26, 2013 put a crack in the wall of mistrust between Iran and the United States and were considered as a major confidence-building measure.

During Ahmadinejad's presidency, negotiations with the 5+1 countries always came to a standoff. However, President Rouhani took the following measures to end the standoff. He assigned Mohammad Javad Zarif, a career diplomat who was a main member of some though Iran`s international negotiations such as Resolution 598 negotiations, as the minister of foreign affairs (Iranian Diplomacy, August 12, 2013). In addition, Rouhani decided to bring back the task of nuclear negotiation from the National Security Council to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Finally, the overarching discourse of resistance by Iran in the nuclear negotiations, which was dominant during Ahmadinejad's presidency, was replaced by a conciliatory approach that focused on incremental steps and reciprocity. Rouhani was aware that making concessions was necessary to break the stalemate. This meant that "Iran should give all necessary assurances to the IAEA including granting intrusive inspections that ensure its nuclear program will not be diverted toward weaponization" (Monshipouri & Dorraj, 2013: 138). As a result, the nuclear negotiations with the P5+1 started in a new atmosphere and resulted in a historic agreement in April 2015.

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A quick look at Iran`s foreign policy after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 raises numerous questions including what

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are the foundations of Iran`s foreign policy? What principles determine Iran`s foreign policy? Comparing internal and external factors shaping Iran`s foreign policy, which one is the most important? What is the role of the country's supreme leader in foreign policy decision-makings and how can this role be explained? One of the most important questions regarding Iran`s foreign policy concerns its change and continuity. In other words, the main question whether or not the Islamic Republic of Iran`s foreign policy has changed during the last 35 years, for what reasons?

This article has focused on the question of *change* in Iran`s foreign policy and whether or not political culture can give a hint in this regard. Comparing Iran`s foreign policy during Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's presidencies, we can see a drastic shift in Iran`s foreign policy behavior. In other words, the change in Iran`s foreign policy behavior from a radical and aggressive one during Ahmadinejad to a moderate and accommodative foreign policy during Rouhani needs explanations. Some say that the main principles of Iran`s foreign policy during the last 35 years have not transformed and the few changes in Iran`s behavior are mostly tactical not strategic (Dehshiri, 2001; Haji Yousefi, 1387 [2008 A.D]). According to this view, these tactical changes in Iran`s foreign policy are due to issues such as socialization of the decision makers, internal pressures on the government, economic sanctions, the need for change for the survival of the current regime, as mentioned by certain elites. Scholars who share this perspective further believe that the Iranian supreme leader is the final arbiter in Iran`s foreign policy decision-making process and thus Iran continues to act and make decisions based on the ideologies of the Islamic Revolution (Hunter, 2010; Ramazani, 1989).

A second perspective argues that the Iranian state is a rational one like other states and thus its survival is the most important determining factor shaping its foreign policy. In other words, the

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proponents of this idea think that the Iranian foreign policy decision-making is based on cost and benefit analysis by the elites, whose staying in power and the survival of the Islamic political system in Tehran is the focal concern. According to this view, the foreign policy of Iran has gone through major strategic shifts during the last few decades. For them, Iran`s acceptance of the 598 Security Council Resolution regarding the termination of Iran-Iraq war, the foreign policy of dialogue and cooperation adhered to by president Khatami, and the foreign policy of confrontation and conflict carried out by president Ahmadinejad, are just few examples of the principle changes in Iran`s foreign policy (Kazemzadeh, 2007; Abedin, 2011).

Apart from this debate between those who insist on continuity and those who believe in change in Iran`s foreign policy, what is common among the adherents of these two schools of thought is that Iran`s foreign policy behavior has oscillated between aggressive and accommodationist approaches since the Islamic Revolution. If we take this for granted, the main question that comes to mind is how can we explain this change? In this article, we believe that the political culture of the Iranian society and the elites is the most efficient explanation of this change in Iran`s foreign policy behavior. The contradictory political culture of Iranians can best explain these drastic shifts in Iran`s foreign policy behavior.

In order to substantiate the argument that political culture best explains the changes in Iran's foreign policy behavior, we can first state the main determinants of Iran`s foreign policy, then distinguish between the permanent and temporary determinants, and finally argue why political culture has the utmost importance.

In the two tables below, we compare the main determinants of Iran's foreign policy. Table 1 indicates a matrix in which the main determinants of Iran's foreign policy are drawn along domestic/ external and temporary/permanent axis. The permanent determinants obviously cannot explain changes in Iran`s foreign policy behavior. If we want to calculate the main

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reasons for shifts in Iran`s foreign policy behavior, we have to concentrate on the temporary determinants. Table 2 presents a brief notional comparison of the impact of political culture and geopolitics on shifts in Iran`s foreign policy behavior. In the concept of 'political culture' we include how Iranian elites feel about themselves and their country, how they view others, what role they think Iran should play in the world, and what they see as moral behavior. In the concept of "geopolitics" we include changes in Iran`s neighborhood, the institution of sanctions, and the policies of the big powers in Iran`s immediate region.

Table 1. Determinants of Iran's foreign policy

	Permanent	**Temporary**
Domestic	Nationalism, Islam, Ethnicity, National Character, Institutions, Economic System	Political Culture
External	International System	Geopolitics

source: Author

Table 2. Comparison of temporary determinants of Iran`s foreign policy

	High	**Low**	**Low**
Change from foreign policy of confrontation to foreign policy of accommodation	Political culture of the Ahmadinejad administration and the faction that supported him relative to political culture of the Rouhani administration and the faction that supports him	Institution of sanctions	US foreign policy in the Middle East

source: author

We accept that these concepts are vague enough that when applied to specific policies, their implications are not clear. Nevertheless, the changes in Iran`s foreign policy behavior coincide better with certain determinant factors than others. For example, while the institution of sanctions as well as the policy of great powers, especially the United States, in the Middle East are unchanged, Iran`s foreign policy behavior changes significantly when president Rouhani comes to power. This

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change can therefore be attributed to the change of government in Iran. To our understanding, each president in Iran represents a political faction as well as certain societal forces with a particular political culture. For instance, if we accept the conventional classification of the Iranian society to the traditional and modern sections/forces or to lower and middle classes, we can say, based on common sense as well as existing facts, that Ahmadinejad mostly represented the traditional societal forces and lower classes with their particular political culture. On the other hand, Rouhani mostly represents the modern sections of the Iranian society and the middle class with their specific political culture (Ghasemi Siani et al., 1395 [2016 A.D]; Haji Yousefi et al., 1391 [2012 A.D]). In general, we suggest that in Iran we can recognize two general political cultures in the decision- making processes, which may be named dogmatic and pragmatic ones (For this I am indebted to Gheleji, 2013). While the political culture of the traditional and lower classes is predominantly dogmatic, the modern and middle classes political culture is mostly pragmatic. This may suggest that the shift in Iran`s foreign policy behavior since the inauguration of president Rouhani, is mainly related to the change in the political culture of the decision makers, not for instance the institution of sanctions or the foreign policy of the United States in the Middle East.

In addition, the reactionary nature of the Iranian foreign policy supports our suggestion that political culture plays an important role in shaping Iran's foreign policy behavior. Although Iran`s foreign policy "may be guided by broad strategic principles such as striving for regional supremacy, Tehran more often than not develops its position in response to a crisis" (Esfandiari & Tabatabai, 2015: 5). The reactionary foreign policy feature of Iran in turn offers and devotes a considerable place for personality and political culture to play significant role in shaping Iran`s foreign policy behavior.

Presidents and other foreign policy decision-makers in Iran therefore may react to foreign policy issues affected by their political culture i.e., how they (and their supporting faction) feel about themselves and their country, how they view others, what role they think Iran should play in the world, and what they see as moral behavior.

Conclusion

In our ongoing research, we endeavor to understand if and how political culture affects Iran`s foreign policy behavior. In this short article, we have suggested that compared to other elements, political culture can better explain radical shifts in Iran`s foreign policy behavior. By comparing Ahmadinejad and Rouhani approaches to foreign related issues, we see a change in the political culture of the Rouhani administration and the faction that supports him might cause great implications for Iran`s foreign policy behavior at the international arena. Considering other temporary determinants of Iran`s foreign policy, i.e. geopolitical factors including the institution of sanctions and the foreign policy of the great powers in the Middle East, unchanged during Ahmadinejad and Rouhani presidency, we suggest that the change of political culture (from a dogmatic political culture during Ahmadinejad to a pragmatic one during Rouhani) has had the most effect in changing the foreign policy behavior of Iran.

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