

Iranian foreign policy and discourse of divine justice

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Abstract

Iran nuclear negotiations, which resulted in an agreement in Vienna on the 14 July 2015 after signing The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and its aftermath is one of the key topics of inquiry in recent decade. The density of the debate is primarily emanating from concerns related to the security questions of the Middle East and to the sensitivity of Israeli security situation. Moreover, it arises from the complexity of the whole negotiation process. Such issues like Supreme Leader's Ali Khamene'i's *fatwa* designating sinfulness to the nuclear capacity, his after-deal speech, calling for the enmity between Iran and the United States, Iran's declared aim to implement global justice and other cases are not customary acts of the state and the study of Iranian foreign policy is not substantive using customary instruments of analysis of International Relations. The article refers to the problem of knowledge production on Iran, and suggests that it mainly resulted from the lack of exchange between International Relations and Middle Eastern studies. This article aims to point at the authority of the ideas in Iran's foreign policy that Islam or Islamic ideologies like Khumaynism produce. Therefore the article focuses on the main narratives of the First Supreme Leader Ruhullah Khumayni's concept of justice in order to, first, explain the key points in Iran's position during negotiations and its aftermath and, second, to introduce the study of the concept of justice as a productive source of information and an approach for further analysis of Iranian foreign policy.

Keywords

Iranian foreign policy, Khumayni, Islam, justice, nuclear negotiations, shi'ite doctrine.

Introduction: problems in knowledge production on the Iranian foreign policy

After 2002, when the existence of *Iran's* secret *nuclear programme* was revealed by an opposition group Mujahideen e-Khalq, scholars as well as journalists and politicians are engaged in speculations about Iranian foreign policy objectives. Due

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to the inexorable rise in the number of international players and ongoing process of globalisation, a state's responsiveness in international relations have grown ever more complex. Iran's case is even more obtruse for the conventional International Relations (IR) to cope with as post-revolutionary foreign policy of Iran has been less responsive to external interactions and more based on a number of specific cherished ideals, which are not taken into steady consideration by the mainstream analysis.

To show the core problem in knowledge production on the Iranian foreign policy objectives and responsiveness to international restraints, I invoke the James Sebenius and Michael Singh approach to the analysis of international nuclear negotiations between Iran and P5+1.¹ Scholars argue that whether a nuclear deal was feasible depends upon the existence of a 'zone of possible agreement' (ZOPA),² wherein variations of possible agreements mostly depend on the set-up of the negotiation and, in particular, on the interests of the parties and no-deal options.³ Though Sebenius and Singh claim that in the case of the Iranian regime, objectives of the state must be inferred from actions, behaviour and the numerous studies on the regime's ideology, their further analysis on Iran's objectives and responsiveness is implicit. Sebenius and Singh's 'analysis assumes that Iran, or more precisely, the hard-line Iranian regime, has a keen interest in and is pursuing a nuclear weapons capability'.⁴ This conclusion is derived from specific substantive assumptions⁵ that do not necessary correspond to Iran's intentions, but more to its supposed certain type of rationality.

¹ James Sebenius and Michael Singh, 'Is a Nuclear Deal with Iran Possible?: An Analytical Framework for the Iran Nuclear Negotiations', *International Security*, no. 37(3) (2012): 52–91.

² Sebenius and Singh, 53. ZOPA stands for the range of potential deals that are better in terms of each party's perceived interests than the best alternative to a negotiated agreement (or 'no deal option') of each party.

³ Sebenius and Singh, 56.

⁴ Sebenius and Singh, 59. Sebenius and Singh derive support for their assumption from the deductive type of argumentation, as they claim that the martial dimension of the program is 'obvious from the collection of nuclear activities in which Iran is engaged: fuel fabrication, weaponization research, and missile delivery systems, which together are the key components of a nuclear weapon' (Sebenius and Singh, 60). I would claim that they cannot be as well. Further authors' presumptions are the same deductive and prescriptive type: they suggest that 'Iranian regime's overriding interests appear to be its own survival and the persistence of the current *velayat-e faqih* system of government ("guardianship of the Islamic jurist" or absolute power of a ruling cleric)' and the authors conclude that 'the development of a nuclear weapon would serve these interests. <...> A nuclear weapon would serve other likely regime interests as well, by strengthening Iran's would-be hegemonic military and political position in the Gulf region and admitting it to the exclusive global club of nuclear powers' (Sebenius and Singh, 60).

⁵ Sebenius and Singh's study was coherently criticised for such assumptions, which they present as the most pro-Iranian outcomes. For example, P. R. Pillar, 'Correspondence on Nuclear Negotiations with Iran', <http://goo.gl/kg1OUJ>.

In this case, the knowledge production was based on IR realist and neo–realist approach, which suggests that the security level of a country depends on its nuclear deterrence power and, consequently, every state striving for power and being a rational actor experiencing pressures of international system is willing to gain such deterrence power and to maximise it. The nature of this assumption points at, as one of the post-colonial academics Kamran Matin phrases it, symptoms of a ‘wider intellectual problem in classical theories [would it be IR or social theory] <...>, namely the construction of the general categories by reference to a particular European experience’,⁶ values and development.

IR, in general, and realism and neo–realism, in particular, are invariably criticised by researchers working in the analytical framework of post-colonial approaches, mainly with micro-theoretical or narrative accounts, for prescriptive type of assumptions, and not having inter-disciplinary exchange with Middle Eastern Studies to support its theory building despite wide recognition of the importance of identity and norms in Middle East politics.⁷ Eurocentrism or more broadly speaking Occident-centred wisdom induces a ‘specifically internalist mode’⁸ of comprehending international relations, and it mostly produces knowledge, which does not reflect multiple ontology and plural nature of political consciousness.

⁶ E.g., Kamran Matin, *Recasting Iranian Modernity: International Relations and Social Change* (Oxon: Routledge), 2013, 2; Simon Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics: State Formation and Development* (Cambridge: Polity), 1994, 6.

⁷ Barnett and Telhami, like many other scholars, observe that analysis of Middle Eastern politics provides an important reservoir for theorising and for contributing to broader debates in international relations (Morten Valbjørn, ‘Towards a “Mesopotamian Turn”: Disciplinarity and the Study of the International Relations of the Middle East’, *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* (2004): 47–75, 48, <http://goo.gl/zaGISZ>). Indeed, a strategy to bring IR and Middle East studies together is a long-standing effort. There are several studies in this regard, to name a few:

Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1987; Birthe Hansen, *Unipolarity and the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin’s Press), 2001; Leonard Binder, ‘The Middle East as a Subordinate International System’, *World Politics* (1958): 408–429; Bahgat Korany Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, eds., *The Foreign Policies of Arab States* (Boulder: Westview), 1991; Bahgat Korany, Paul Noble and Rex Brynen, ‘The Analysis of National Security in the Arab Context: Restating the State of the Art’, In *The Many Faces of National Security in the Arab World*, eds. Korany, Noble and Brynen (New York: St. Martin’s Press), 1993, 1–23; Tareq Y. Ismael, *International Relations of the Contemporary Middle East – A Study in World Politics* (New York: Syracuse University Press), 1986.

Still Brand calls attention to how it has traditionally been rather unusual for IR scholars to seek a career by applying or testing IR theory to areas as the Middle East (Leonard Brand, ‘Middle East Alliances: From Neorealism to Political Economy’. In *Area Studies and Social Sciences – Strategies for Understanding Middle East Politics*, eds. Mark Tessler et.al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1999, 135). Even within the constructivist strands of IR, only few have focused on the Middle East for theory building.

⁸ Matin, 3.

Engaging into critics on knowledge production, I seek to spotlight that Iranian foreign policy objectives and responsiveness in international relations can be different from these implied by mainstream theories of analysis.

If we draw attention to the Iran's rhetoric and behavioural discourse, we can observe several declarations and acts of Iranian leaders that are not customary, but could be informative: in the process of negotiations, Ayatullah Ali Khamene'i issued a *fatwa* declaring nuclear weapons being a sin.⁹ Associatively, we can also refer to Iran–Iraq war decisions: Ayatullah Ruhullah Khumayni decided not to respond to the usage of chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein's regime against Iranian soldiers, claiming that the equivalent response, causing several deaths, would contradict justice. This type of Khumayni's and Khamene'i's discourses have several references and cannot be perceived as irrelevant to the Iranian leadership's actual intentions regarding nuclear weapons (as it was, for instance, in the study of Sebenius and Singh).

The reference to the divine justice in Iranian politics is one of the most prevalent and indicative discourses.¹⁰ Iran's objectives and responsiveness in international relations are inter-related with the state's self-perception as an advocate of global justice, and the study of the narratives, which the concept of justice contains, can be a productive source of information on Iran's conduct in international relations. Yet none of these Iran's claims are perceived as a source of considerable information and consequently are excluded from research inquiry, as they are not consistent with the conventional knowledge on the nation-state's genuine conduct.

IR in this case suggests that no nation state is capable of systematically engaging in pursuit of global justice. Hans Morgenthau noted that international morality had deteriorated with the rise of the modern nation-state and democratic rule.¹¹ What he suggests is that nation-state is only capable of implementing social justice, other claims in this regard are political simulation.¹² Theorists would deliberately

⁹ "Khamenei: Nuclear Weapons Are a 'Sin,'" *United Press International*, <http://goo.gl/VMHBUP>

¹⁰ The discourse of justice as an explanatory factor of Iranian politics was never an object of a wider study. Thomas Juneau and Sam Razavi (eds.) in a book „Iranian Foreign Policy since 2001: Alone in the World” mention that Islamic political thought and political activism (due to the influence of Ali Shari'ati) inseparably related to the principal of justice. Still in their study as in many others further object of the research is not the concept of justice.

¹¹ Hans Joachim Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: the Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: McGraw–Hill), 1993, 235–41.

¹² This kind of suspicion has a long tradition in realism writing. For example, Edward Hallett Carr suggests that “ethics were used to justify and further the particular interests of powerful states” (E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 2001, 71. From David Chandler, *Constructing Global Civil Society: Morality and Power in International Relations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 2004, 14.

argue that any attempt to bring in universal values because of the specifics of international system could only lead to conflict and instability.¹³ Whereas a state being a rational actor would not risk peace and stability. Even social constructivists, who are more attentive towards decisive nature of ideational factors (as norms and values) have certain image of the nation-state as not capable of value-oriented action in international relations.

Though, for instance, Alexander Wendt concludes that the state itself is not a barrier for such profile politics, but the restraining order of the international system is preventing a nation-state from value-orientated conduct.¹⁴ In recent decades, growing consensus that there is a growing normative claims for IR is mostly related to the emergence of new international actors, orientated around more universal beliefs and motivations,¹⁵ but the state is further seen as a source of restraint of such processes.

The suspicion towards Islamic Republic's declared political objectives extends to the employment of Islamic doctrine itself to denounce Iran's claims. Iranian leaders were imputed of pursuing *taqiyyah* (Islamic doctrines of disguise)¹⁶ when Khamene'i's *fatwa* denouncing nuclear weapons was issued. *Taqiyyah* is a practice in the Shi'a Islam denomination in which a Muslim can mislead enemies about

¹³ Morgenthau argued that universal ethics was a threat to world peace and the international order (Morgenthau, 235–41). 'English School' of international society theorists similarly warned of the dangers of universal morality as a threat to peace (Robert James Martin Wight, *International Theory: The Three Traditions* (London: Continuum), 1991, 83–4. From Chandler, 14–16). See also: Carl Brown, *Sovereignty, Rights and Justice: International Political Theory Today* (Cambridge: Polity), 2002, 41; Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. Basingstoke (Palgrave Macmillan), 1995, 74–94.

¹⁴ Alexander Wendt asserts that "states do not have conceptions of self and other, and thus security interests, apart from or prior to interaction... [Rationalist] claims presuppose a history of interaction in which actors have acquired 'selfish' identities and interests; before interaction... they would have no experience upon which to base such definitions of self and other. To assume otherwise is to attribute to states in the state of nature qualities that they can only possess in society. (A. Wendt, "Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics", *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391–425, 401–2).

¹⁵ Chandler, scholar working on global civil society issue, asserted that there is an ongoing process of extension of the rule of law and political community, *societas civilis*, beyond national boundaries and "domestication of international relations" (Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (Cambridge: Polity), 2003, 13, 78). He related these processes with the emergence of non state actors and made this argument as a key one in his book "Constructing a Civil Society". Chandler notices that even Constructivist theorists (also critical theorists, normative theorists and postmodernists) locate global civic actors as the source of moral action and their break from conventional state-based politics (Chandler, 3, 11).

¹⁶ It's a form of religious dissimulation in Shi'ism, or a legal dispensation whereby a believing individual can deny his faith or commit otherwise illegal or blasphemous acts, especially while they are in fear or at risk of significant persecution.

the nature of his beliefs to avoid religious persecution. *Taqiyyah* was extensively practiced by Shi'ite people in the Khalifate, but after the establishment in 1501 of Iran – Shi'ite state – the practice of *taqiyyah* was denounced, as Shi'ite minority was not under suppression and persecution anymore. Though Iran perceives itself as being persecuted by Western powers, Ayatullah Khumayni strongly supported the inhibition for practicing *taqiyyah*. Therefore this kind of effort to employ Islamic doctrine to promote suspicion towards Iranian political thought is counterproductive, as it suggests not to engage in analysis of Iranian self-perception and political declarations, though Iranian self-identification with specific, ideational discourses can be affecting the state's behavior, even if it is ostensible in its essence.

In the article, I bring forward main questions in reference to nuclear negotiations: the inquiry why is Iran so determined to acquire peaceful nuclear energy programme, and what is the stance of Iranian leadership towards acquisition and, particularly, use of nuclear weapons. Recently, it is inquisitive to understand why Iran declines U.S. offer to cooperate in fighting Daesh, proceeds with supporting Hezbollah and Shi'ite rebels in Yemen.

In reference to the latter critical remarks, I assert that the response to such inquiries can be diverse and moreover insufficient, if Khumaynistic ideology, as the main source of the knowledge production, and the main narratives of Khumayni's concept of justice are not taken into consideration. Respectively, in following sections of the article I characterise the particular nature of Iranian political thought, define the status of justice and scrutinise narratives of justice in Iranian politics, and how these narratives reflect themselves particularly in international nuclear negotiations.

The authority of Islamic ideas in Iranian foreign policy

Most of the explanations of Iran's ideational, transnational claims and particular state behaviour lie in the peculiar state formation process in the Middle East, as well revival and reproduction of relevant Islamic ideas.

Realism has a narrow ahistoric conception of the state. Even social theory and its generalising assumption on state formation¹⁷ and social development (from

¹⁷ "Eurocentrism rests on four interrelated historical, normative, prognostic, and stadial assumptions. The historical assumption posits the endogenous and autonomous emergence of modernity in Westerns Europe. From this result the second normative assumption regarding the superiority of

religious to secular ideas becoming dominant and not *vice versa*) are not efficient in explaining the complexity of the Middle East state profiles. After the fall of Ottoman Empire in the 20th century, further development of nation-state system in the Middle East was accompanied by grave dissatisfaction and resistance with the policies of colonial powers.¹⁸ Hence the process of modernisation was not equivalent to Western experience, mainly because of the rise of political Islam in its pan-Islamic form as a path to modernisation and independence. It encouraged the solidarity of Muslim *ummat* (Muslim community) and formation of transnational Muslim identity and transnational protective stance, mostly noted as Muslim sense of brotherhood. Many scholars, including regional specialists Elie Kedourie and Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, claim that: ‘the very notion of a state is quite difficult to fit into the political thought that is traditional to the Middle East, namely, Muslim political thought’.¹⁹

Though Iran does not have an Ottoman background, the intrusion of colonial powers into Iranian affairs and sustained resistance was as intensive as in the rest of the Middle East. Such experiences shaped the pattern of Iranian political thinking and inspired devotion for Islamic expediency together with systematic filtering of the Islamic doctrine. Khumayni, Ali Sha’riati and other Iranian Islamic ideologists singled out Islamic motifs and events from Islamic history, which amplify the rebellion against oppressive powers and partition of the *ummat* along with the strong commitment to divine justice as a supposed model behaviour of the Islamic state.

After the Iranian Revolution, which was launched against the Shah’s rule and American exploitation policies in Iran, Iran gained a specific profile – it became the sole theocratic state in the world, which describes itself as not a nation-state (though it is in its form), but as an Islamic state. The contradiction between two is that Iranian

Europe to the rest of the world. These two assumptions relate to a third prognostic assumption according to which European modernity and its associated institutions and practices are universal and universalizable through mechanisms implied by the first, historical, assumption. This prognostic assumption in turn generates the fourth stadial assumption according to which internal process of development – seen as “progressive” both normatively and historically – unfold in stages, albeit in time –lags, in every society throughout the world and will in time converge to form a homogeneous global space inhabited by an essentially European sociality” Matin, 2). Matin argue that religious form of state and Iranian Revolution, which produced it, “defied the secularization assumption of all classical theories of modernity”. “Revolution is exceptional because it does not fit existing general theories” (Matin, 1).

¹⁸ King - Crane Commission Report of year 1919 (1800 petitions).

¹⁹ Elie Kedourie, “The Nation–State in the Middle East”, *The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations* (1987), 1; Panayiotis Jerasimof Vatikiotis, *Islam and the State* (London: Routledge), 1987; Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over–Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris), 1996; Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State – Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris), 1993.

regime subjects itself to not stressing on nationalism and emphasises global orientation of its social justice policies. Iran cannot have or at least declare national aspirations unless they support interests of all Islamic *ummat* or in a long run can contribute to the rising strength of *ummat*. Such political self-consciousness determines politics of the ideational profile along with the distribution of social justice and protection beyond the state boundaries, which can notionally have a global extent.

It can barely be claimed that Iran has ideational political direction, because the pressure on a state in the Middle East system is different. I suggest that ideational restraint is dominant in Iranian political thinking²⁰ and subjects Iran towards being less responsive to the international factor. Ideational restraint in Iranian case is not only constructive, but also constructed as antagonistic towards material interests, which does not correspond to the state's Islamic profile. Iranian regime is influenced and influential in being strict and judgemental towards violation of such an order. More over institutional arrangement, like Guardian Council and Expediency Council, Assembly of Experts, the type of law, called *fiqh maslahat* (which corresponds to Islamic interests) are erected for the purpose of controlling material interests and even security issues that might emerge and challenge main ideas and self-perception as an Islamic Republic.

Consequently, further analysis is based on the proposition that the state with religious type of political thinking and the special arrangement of institutional control, even experiencing certain restraints of international system, can struggle to advocate global value politics and that the reference of Iranian politicians to Islamic doctrine and especially principle of justice, which includes many other ideational regulations, can be as restrictive as any other kind of political reasoning.

Khumaynistic production of knowledge: justice and revolutionary Iranian ideology

Shi'ite doctrine holds that the principle of justice is the prime principle.²¹ Following the Ja'fari jurisprudence (legal tradition of Shi'ite Twelvers (*isna'ashariyah* or *imami* Shi'ism)), there are ten ancillary pillars (*furu' al(d)-din*), among which

²⁰ Parson suggested that every state is influenced by material, institutional and ideational restraints (Craig Parsons, Introduction to Political Science: Understanding Human Interaction (Pearson, 2016, 10–19).

²¹ Every Islamic confession group has different priority system regarding its principals (*usul-e din*). For example, in Sunni doctrine the principal of justice is not considered a prime principal.

doctrines of *amr bil maruf wa nahy an al munkar* (promoting good and preventing evil),²² *tawalla* (love those who are in God's path) and *tabarra* (disassociation with those who oppose God) are typically Shi'ite. These are doctrinal justifications found in Quran for social and political action both for leaders to lead the community justly and to be cautious as community has an obligation to criticise their leadership if it is *jawr* (unjust). Moreover, the predominant theological school in Shi'ism called Mu'tazilat (based on reason and rational thought) is defining itself as *ahl al-'adl va al(t)-tawhyd* (people of justice and monotheism).

Certainly, none of these doctrines would be describing Iranian politics – as none of them has inherent political meaning²³ – if not a sustained tradition of political intention to include the principle of justice into the political system, which was adopted by Iranian first Supreme Leader Ayatullah Khomeini. Most of his writings indicating his strategy of building and content of his political thought are gathered in a twenty-one volume collection *Sahyfe-ye Nur/Imam* and present in his books *Kashf-e Asrar (The Unveiling of Secrets)*, *Velayat-e faqih (Guardianship of Islamic Jurist)*, among others.

The strategy for inclusion the principle of justice into politics is based on three Shi'ite beliefs: (1) Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, should be succeeded by his descendants, the imams (the principle of Imamah); (2) salvation is vouchsafed to those who believe in the restoration of God's justice, to be accomplished by the last twelfth Imam Mahdi when he reappears on earth (principle of Last Judgement); (3) every historical period requires a 'proof' of God, incarnate in the line of these descendants (principle of Justice).²⁴

Shi'ites must accept the fact that imam Mahdi, twelfth and the last imam in a line after Prophet Muhammad, is absent for an indefinite period of history, hence imamah is terminated; yet, the doctrine specifies that every historical age must feature a proof of God manifested in the imam and his justice.

After Mahdi's occultation (*ghaibat*) in 10th century, the highest ranking clergymen, the *mujtahid*, and their efforts to implement justice became the post-*ghaibat* proof and the source of the legitimacy of their rule. Ayatullah Khomeini

²² Quran 9: 71.

²³ I follow "constructionist approach," and concept of religion suggested by James Beckford, he perceives religion not as a generic and, in principal, invariant object, but rather as a social construct that varies in meaning, form and, perception over time and place. (James Beckford, *Social Theory & Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2003, 11–29. From Dietrich Jung, "Islam and Politics: A Flexible Relationship," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 16, no. 1 (2007): 19–35, 20.

²⁴ Shahrugh Akhavi, "The Ideology and Praxis of Shi'ism in the Iranian Revolution," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25, no. 2 (1983), 203.

followed their tradition. He claimed that hidden in occultation twelfth imam Mahdi whose return all Shi'ite community is longing for (as it would mean the restoration of Shi'ite Golden age) would come back to the earth for the Last Judgement only if people would strive for justice and implement it on earth.²⁵ Khomeini invoked Shi'ite Twelvers doctrine of imam's justice in his writings and public speaking to initiate the overthrow of the Iranian Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi in 1979. In March of the same year, through the national referendum, he initiated the establishment of the Islamic Republic. He referred to Shi'ite doctrine to firm his leadership as *Vali-e Faqih* (guarding Islamic jurist until the return of imam Mahdi)²⁶ and the high political position of *ulama* (Islamic clerics) in Iran.

Hence Islamic Republic in this regard has to become the creed and peddler of divine justice in order to legitimise its own existence and overthrow of the Shah's government.

According to Shi'ite doctrine, the prime principle of justice cannot be suspended for any occasion or interests, even would it be Islamic interests (*maslahat*). Justice is one of the 99 names of the God (*asma' al-husna*), so its suspension is equable not only to rejection of the path of God, salvation and *imami* tradition, but also to an effort to suspend God himself. In practice, the initiative to suspend justice in Iran has a precedent of political consequences: Ayatollah Motazeri (the candidate for the supreme leader's position after Khomeini) was exiled from the political life after he expressed his stance on suspension of prime principles through the exceptive procedure under emergency situations, when Islamic state is experiencing danger.²⁷ This initiative was perceived as a nationalistic, sordid aspiration, which would distant Iran from its Islamic mission. Moreover, if clerics step back from the justice implementation mission, their rule over democratic forces, persecution of

²⁵ There are multiple evidences both in Quran and Suna where Muhammad is reported as saying about the return of Mahdi as follows: „Even if the entire duration of the world's existence has already been exhausted and only one day is left before Doomsday, Allah will expand that day to such length of time as to accommodate the kingdom of a person from my Ahlul-Bayt who will be called by my name. He will fill out the earth with peace and justice as it will have been full of injustice and tyranny (by then)”. (*Sahih Tirmidhi*, vol. 2, 86 ; vol. 9, 74–75). From VII to XVI century Shi'ites were a minority in kalifate, and their prescribed to themselves a mission to create chaos in kalifate and to create conditions for Mahdi to come and to end it. Interpretation changed after Safavid dynasty (Shi'ites) established a state. Efforts to create chaos were replaced by erection of order and justice. Clerics claimed that these efforts would not stay unnoticed by Mahdi and he will come to support Shi'ites in their mission.

²⁶ Article 5 of the Constitution of the IRI: „During the occultation of the *Vali-e 'Asr* (may God hasten his reappearance), the leadership of the Ummah devolve upon the just and pious person, who is fully aware of the circumstances of his age, courageous, resourceful, and possessed of administrative ability, will assume the responsibilities of this office” (http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/ir00000_.html).

²⁷ Haghghat, 124.

their own citizens and terrorisation of Muslim states blaming them of treason of a true path of salvation are not approvable anymore.

Indeed, in the course of Iranian Revolution, images of imams, their justice and other Shi'ite doctrines were a tool to encourage and legitimise a popular social act. Ayatullah Khumayni availed the opportunities that Islamic doctrine could provide. Yet later they reversed into constraints for political leadership, definitely to a smaller extent for Ayatullah Khumayni himself, but on a much larger scale for further generation and rule of current Supreme Leader Ayatullah Khamene'i .

Though it does not mean that there is no fraction or opposition for clergy rule. Justice politics might endanger Iran, as it was obvious during the presidency period of Mahmud Ahmedi-Nejad (2005–2013). He yearned for Mahdi's justice, risking state's security, and certain political groups inside Iran strongly challenged his commitment.

According to Iranologist Shahrouh Akhavi, fractions and splits have characterised the Iranian Revolution and the politics of the Islamic Republic. The divisions are characteristic not only of relations between clerical and secular groups, as might be expected, but within the clergy itself.²⁸

These divisions deepened subsequently, as a hardline (*tundru*) position crystallised against a moderate (*miyanabru*) one. This split can best be viewed in the revolution period in the respective arguments of Ayatullah Khumayni and the influential Ayatullah Shari'atmadari,²⁹ Na'ini, Talegani, Mutahhari and others.

After Khumayni's death, politically moderate presidents Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989–1997) and reformist Muhammad Khatami (1997–2005) were trying to bring Iran to post-revolutionary period, to constitutional politics of post-revolutionary institution building, and empowerment of civil society while encouraging social development ideas. However, the 2004 *Majles* (Parliament) elections and Ahmedi-Nedjad's rule once again brought back to the revolutionary ideology. Ahmedi-Nejad revived the revolutionary populism, coupled with aggressive foreign policy, including nuclear programme, approval of violence and suppression of popular will in the path to divine goals and enhanced the Mahdiist ideology with the exceptional stress on implementation of global justice.³⁰

²⁸ Akhavi, 208.

²⁹ An examination of the conflicts between Khumayni and Shari'atmadari may be found in Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period* (State University of New York Press), 1980, 172–80. Shari'atmadari consistently used terms such as national, nationalist, democratic, sovereignty, whereas Khumayni even more consistently anathematized them as Western terms intended to undermine Shi'ism. Shari'atmadari was encouraging social will and action, and wanted to empower people.

³⁰ Mohebat Ahdiyih, "Ahmadinejad and the Mahdi", *Middle East Quarterly* (autumn 2008), 27–36.

From 2013, President Hassan Rouhani is turning the wheel of Iranian politics back towards Khatami's policy. Rouhani came to power with Khatami's slogan to launch a 'dialogue between civilizations'. At the moment, he and political moderates (mostly reformists) are experiencing a strong opposition from hardliners, consisting of religious elites and Revolutionary Guards. The Guards are economic–military cartels who enjoy de facto semi-autonomy³¹ and benefit from Iranian 'Export of Revolution' policies: funding of Hezbollah and other military and propaganda networks, which supposingly should restore the justice in Muslim community.

Iranian politics is like a swing: revolutionary justice ideology of Khomeini is interchanged with post-revolutionary nationalistic policies.³² Iran's stand in international relations does not look solid as these efforts are highly contradictory: post-revolutionary policy to centralise the revolutionary power structures and to rationalise them into a 'developmental state' are different from revolutionary anti-nationalistic policies – 'aim at destroying the state'.³³

Said Amir Arjomand claims that 'the greatest misunderstanding concerning Iran after the revolution stems from the assumption that the revolution is over, either with the victory of pragmatism and Hashemi Rafsanjani's program of economic reconstruction in 1989, <...> or with the rise of the reform movement under Khatami in 1997'. He claims that 'the truth is that the death of Ayatollah Khomeini as the Imam and charismatic leader of the Islamic Revolution in June 1989 did not mean the end of the revolution, but only the beginning of the prolonged struggle among the children of the revolution over his heritage'.³⁴

In this manner, Arjomand emphasised on the lasting power of Khomeini's heritage even if current politics of President Rouhani's seems inherently of a distinct type.

The claim of this article is similar, I argue that the persistent political heritage of Khomeini and his stress on justice politics still defines today's Iranian politics and that it is grounded in four sources: (1) Khomeini's religious and political authority, (2) weak status of the second Supreme Leader Khamene'i, (3) tradition of persecution of traitors and (4) institutional arrangement and constitutional implications.

³¹ Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2009, 8.

³² Changing winning positions could be easily observed in the course of negotiations: Iranian negotiators were changing their positions and making the process even more complex. Ahmedi–Nejad replaced pragmatic negotiator Ali Larijani with devoted Mahdist Said Jalili. Afterwards president Rouhani replaced the former with Muhammad Javad Zarif (*Farda News*, Oct. 25, 2007; *Ansar News*, Oct. 25, 2007; *Iran Diplomacy*, Oct. 23, 2007).

³³ Arjomand, 7

³⁴ Arjomand, 3–4.

Khumayni not only had a very high political authority and respect, which he gained as a leader of the most intense rebellion, the Iranian Revolution, he also had the highest rank religious authority of *marja-e taqlid* (the source of emulation in Islamic legal tradition). Moreover, Khumayni was called ‘imam’, referring to the Imam tradition. The title in Shi’ite tradition belongs only to twelve Shi’ite imams.³⁵ This refers to the Iranian belief that Khumayni was divinely guided³⁶ and that he was *ma’asum* (infallible like all imams). The second and current Supreme leader Ayatullah Khamene’i, though he is *marja-e taqlid*, he never gained such a status. It even might be suggested that the legitimacy of his leadership lies in his ability to preserve the heritage of Khumayni.

It is important to notice that ideologisation of Khumayni’s *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) is not consistent with the evolutionary nature of Shi’ite doctrine, which has inner requirements for reformation (*islah*) and renewal (*tajdid*). One of the main principles of Shi’ism is the principle of ‘time and space’, which means that Revelation should be revised correspondingly to changing knowledge, social development, scientific advancement, Islamic interests, international challenges and other aspects that describe the Muslim community at certain time and place. Khumayni himself referred to the conventionality of perception of justice: he used in his writings such references as ‘favourable conditions’.³⁷ Although ideologisation of Khumayni’s *ijtihad* is not valid, his ideas have become ideological code of Iran politics.

One more feature of Khumayni’s rule, which retains his legacy and revolutionary ideals along with justice politics relevant, is his proficiency to relate the political oppositional ideas with the treason of Islamic values in general.³⁸ This practice until now sheds suspicion towards any kind of efforts to oppose revolutionary ideals and the political opposition in general.

Certainly, the persistent discourse of Ayatullah Khumayni’s justice has several narratives and they can be traced in the current politics of Iranian regime both during negotiations and its aftermath. References to such narratives grants the

³⁵ Eric Hooglund and William Royce, “The Shi’i Clergy of Iran and the Conception of an Islamic State,” *State, Culture, and Society* 1, no. 3 (spring 1985), 107–108.

³⁶ Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (W. W. Norton & Company), 2007, 119. Ayatullah Mehdi Haeri Yazdi claimed that ayatullah Khumayni was led by divine wisdom, which he gained during the inner journey, he performed following Mula Sadr’s writings (Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, *History of Islamic Philosophy* (Qom: Ansariyan Publications), 2008, 635).

³⁷ For instance, *Sahyfe-ye Imam*, 21 (vol.): 57 (p.).

³⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (University of California Press), 1993, 130–131.

legacy of the performed politics and Iranian politicians don't miss a chance to invoke them. Most certainly, these narratives are not only an object of political exercise, but also shape political consciousness of many Iranian high-ranking politicians.

The main narratives of justice in nuclear negotiations and its aftermath

Four main questions may be put forward, which reflect the complexity of negotiation process, and the most intensive coherence with Khumaynistic ideology: (1) Why is Iran so determined to acquire peaceful nuclear energy programme? (2) What is the attitude of the Iranian leadership towards acquisition and use of nuclear weapons? (3) Why does not Iran want to balance nuclear negotiations and to strengthen the deal through further cooperation with the West? (4) Why is Iran risking the deal in supporting Palestinian aspirations and Hezbollah?

These questions pertain to several dimensions of the concept of justice and aspects of Khumayni's political heritage: Islamic interests (*maslahat*), resistance to oppression (*zulm*, opposite to justice – *adalat*), perception of justice as equality, just means of warfare, courage of the leader in the path of justice, *taqiyyah*³⁹ and Islamic pragmatism. The case of negotiations also has direct references to Khumayni's and Khamene'i's legal opinions (*futuwa*).

Literally, the Arabic word '*adl* (justice) itself is an abstract noun, derived from the verb '*adala*, which means: first, to straighten or to sit straight, to amend or modify; second, to run away depart or deflect from one (wrong) path to the other (right) one; third, to be equal or equivalent, to be equal or match, or to equalize; fourth, to balance or to counter balance, to weigh, or to be in a state of equilibrium. Finally, '*adl* may also mean 'example' or 'alike' (Quran 5:96).⁴⁰ So word '*adl* represents many variations of meanings and describes vast spectrum of action defined by Shari'at (God's guidelines), awareness of which assists in answering mentioned questions.

(1) The first inquiry concerns the fact that Iran is persistent in keeping its nuclear programme though the price – sanctions and international isolation –

³⁹ See footnote no. 17

⁴⁰ Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Johns Hopkins University Press), 2001, 6. From dictionaries: Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab*, XIII, 457–58; al-Fayruzabadi, *al-Qamus al-Muhit*, I, 431; II, 415–16; IV (pt. 2), 6; al-Zabidi, *Taj al-'Arus*, VIII, 9–10 and etc.

Iran is paying is considerably higher than any oil-rich country could benefit from peaceful nuclear programme. Though nuclear energy provides diversification of energy sources, but is not vital necessity for Iran. Iranian leadership acknowledges the alarming proportion of the nuclear programme cost, but argues it's worth paying.⁴¹ The question is what possible grounds Iran's detriment obstinacy can have except an aspiration to produce nuclear weapons.

I would suggest a chain of beliefs that Iran might follow: firstly, Iran's leadership (both moderate and hard-liners) is confident that international restrictions applied for Iran's peaceful nuclear programme is depriving Iran from its legal right and violate the principle of justice as equality between signatory states of Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Thereby the notion of justice as equality can result in stressing on principle of equality before the law. Khumayni claimed that 'Islam is when the first and the last human is equal before the law'.⁴² And, certainly, Iranian political consciousness is more driven by 'how it should be', and what kind of amendment or modification should be implemented or struggle launched to reach the fair Islamic disposition of equality, than 'how it can be', corresponding to the international law in case of its violation.

In 2003, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) launched an investigation into Iran's nuclear programme and concluded that Iran had systematically failed to meet its obligations under its Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Safeguards Agreement to report 'nuclear materials, and its processing and use, as well as the declaration of facilities where such material has been processed and stored' to the IAEA⁴³ while IAEA reported no evidence of links to a nuclear weapons programme. The IAEA Board of Governors following Article XII.C of the IAEA Statute⁴⁴ reported that non-compliance to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in February 2006. Following this, the UNSC demanded that Iran suspend its enrichment programmes⁴⁵ and imposed sanctions after Iran refused to do so.

This entire process caused a clash between Iran and the international community: NPT guarantees the right to perform a peaceful nuclear programme, but Iran

⁴¹ Khamene'i argued that it is an acceptable price for independence, sovereignty, and pride (Khamene'i speech for Air Forces, 2006 Feb. 7).

⁴² Sahyfe-ye Imam, 9 (vol.):425 (p.).

⁴³ "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran", IAEA, 10 November 2003. "IAEA GOV/2003/40: Implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran", IAEA, 20 September 2009.

⁴⁴ "About IAEA: IAEA Statute", IAEA, 24 February 2008.

⁴⁵ UN Resolution 1696.

violated the agreement and was punished for performing a clandestine programme. The actions of UNSC was perceived by Iran as depriving Iran of its inalienable right to peaceful nuclear technology. In 2005 the newly elected president Ahmadi-Nejad argued that the sanctions are 'illegal', imposed by 'arrogant powers'.⁴⁶ He noticed that Western countries 'should know that the Iranian nation will not yield to pressure and will not let its rights be trampled on'.⁴⁷ Ali Khamene'i also stressed that the 'red line' in the negotiations is the right to enrich uranium'.⁴⁸

Clearly, Iran has a specific understanding of international justice, which exceeds international law and appeals for moral justice and equality. International law is respected to the extent it does not violate divinely secured equality.⁴⁹ Iran claims that eight countries in the world have nuclear weapons: all the states negotiating with Iran, as also its most deadly enemy, Israel. Hence the impaired possibility for equality at least in scientific and energetic fields infuriated Iran's regime.

Thus, second, the restrictions applied by international community on Iran's technological advancement are perceived as the act of political oppression by unjust powers.⁵⁰ Khamene'i prescribes political meanings to the equal possibilities for technological advancement. In his speeches, he related scientific advancement, economic self-sufficiency and political independence. Khamene'i stressed that 'colonial powers are aware, that political and economic dependence appears when the scientific progress is prevented'.⁵¹ Khamene'i's conclusion is that what the United States is expecting is not security guarantees from Iran, but submission to its hegemony: he asserts that 'it is the real motive hidden behind the anxiety regarding production of nuclear weapons, human rights violations and lack of democracy in Iran'.⁵² Moreover, he is certain that U.S. antagonism towards Iran is based upon Islamic profile of his country and its power and courage to disclose U.S. plots.⁵³

⁴⁶ "Ahmadinejad: Iran's nuclear issue is 'closed,'" *MSNBC*, 25 September 2007.

⁴⁷ Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad told a crowd 31 August 2006, in a televised speech in the northwestern Iranian city of Orumiyeh.

⁴⁸ Anshel Pfeffer, "Nuclear talks hit standstill as Iran demands right to enrich uranium, sanctions relief," *Haaretz*, 22 November 2013.

⁴⁹ Iran signed NPT in 1968, which means the Treaty was signed by the Shah M. R. Pahlavi. Iranian regime claims that it commits to every treaty Iran is involved as a party, still it also claim that commitment cannot hurt Islamic interests.

⁵⁰ Sahyfe-ye Imam, 4:317.

⁵¹ Khamene'i speech for University personale and academic elite, 13 October 2005; Khamene'i speech for school children, 14 March 2005. All Ali Khamene'i speeches quoted in the article are from this internet site: *The Center of Preserving and Publishing the Works of the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei*, <http://english.khamenei.ir//index.php>.

⁵² Khamene'i speech for Shahid Beheshti University students, 12, 14 May 2003.

⁵³ Khamene'i, speech for Shahid Beheshti University students, 28 May 2003. Following the Iranian

The antonym of *‘adl* (justice) is word *jawr* (unjust) and its synonyms: *tughayan* (tyranny), *mayl* (inclination), *inhiraf* (deviation) and *zulm* (wrongdoing, oppression). The words ‘inequity’ and ‘oppression’ are mentioned in the Prophetic tradition a considerable number of times.⁵⁴ The mentions point to the pre-Islamic period *jahilya* – the time of ignorance – that was marked with inequity and oppression, which has to be abolished through struggle (*jihad*).

Ayatullah Khomeini, in his book *Kafsh-e Asrar* and in numerous speeches, asserted that ‘the ones, who are silent when they observe oppression will find themselves in the same level of hell as the tyrants. To oppose tyranny is the personal duty of every person’.⁵⁵ And that ‘the surrender to the oppression is worse than oppression itself’.⁵⁶

Iranian leadership would recognise oppression in a vast spectrum of international issues: corruption of the autocratic regimes of the Muslim countries, nationalistic aspirations of the Muslim countries, apostasy imposed by secularisation processes, unequal rights of the states in UN, among others, but the interventional policies of the Western states were always extremely demonised, claiming that ‘all the misery of Muslim people rise from the Western states and their influence on Muslims’.⁵⁷ The biggest share of Khomeini’s criticism was directed towards the United States and Israel. The actions of both states, moreover, existence of Israel is seen as illegal, affecting the unity of the Muslim community and depriving it of its rightful power and divine charisma.

In the Quran, Sura ‘kinship of Imran’ God calls Muslim community the best of nations and prescribes its mission to lead other nations to the path of justice (Quran 3:110). Obviously, currently Muslim community has forsaken its duty as the solidarity, unity and success is recognised to be deprived. Consequently, Iran’s self-prescribed mission is to restore characteristics and privileges of Muslim *ummat*.

Therefore, Iran’s goal at the negotiations is to represent not only Iranian interest, but *ummaic* Islamic interest (*maslahat*). Ayatullah Khomeini, in his personal page, is naming himself a Supreme Leader of the continuing Revolution and all Muslims. According to Khomeini, ‘the advancement achieved by Iran is a shared achievement and honour for all *ummat*. Respectively, Iran’s failure to represent its interest would harm the interests of all Islamic world’.⁵⁸

Revolution of 1979, the United States imposed sanctions against Iran and expanded them in 1995 to include firms dealing with the Iranian government.

⁵⁴ Khadduri, 8, 10.

⁵⁵ Sahife-ye Imam, 5:192, 1:409.

⁵⁶ Sahife-ye Imam, 11:199.

⁵⁷ Sahife-ye Imam, 17:208.

⁵⁸ Khomeini’s speech for official guests, 2 June 1999.

Third, Iran defines itself as *umm al-qura* (Muhammad's Medina had the same exemplary status), which imposes mission both to demonstrate the example of resistance to oppression and to be technologically, scientifically,⁵⁹ militarily advanced enough to become a source of emulation for Muslim community instead of admiring Western advancement.

Khamene'i, at the commemoration ceremony of Ayatullah Khomeini, stated that the youth of the whole Muslim world is observing Iran and is learning Islamic Revolution.⁶⁰

To sum up, several Islamic narratives were invoked and could be observed in Iran's striving for the peaceful nuclear programme: resistance against unjust restraints in Iran is perceived as an obligatory act of fighting oppression. Obligation refers to the belief that Iran's advancement is in the interest of all *ummat* and prosperity of the *ummat* is an Islamic interest. So Iran prescribed itself an Islamic duty: Iranian Constitution, article 8 states: 'In the Islamic Republic of Iran, 'al-'amr bilma'ruf wa al-'nahl 'an al-'munkar' [promoting good and preventing evil - I.K.] is a universal and reciprocal duty that must be fulfilled by the people with respect to one another, by the government with respect to the people, and by the people with respect to the government. The conditions, limits, and nature of this duty will be specified by law. (This is in accordance with the Koranic verse 'The believers, men and women, are guardians of one another; they enjoin the good and forbid the evil.' [9:71]).' Moreover, God commands in the Quran to lead Muslims (Quran 3:110) to be an example for Muslim community, which Iran is internalising in both, demonstrating its technological superiority and in demonstrating the power of resistance.

The last Islamic narrative, which can be traced in order to explain Iranian persistence in acquiring peaceful nuclear programme, is the narrative of uncompromised courage of the Islamic leader in his mission to implement justice.

It was already mentioned before that the suspension of justice is not valid under any circumstances, though it is the international sanctions that are harming the Iranian economy,⁶¹ or any other threat. Khamene'i made a comment on the

⁵⁹ Khamene'i speech for University personnel and academic elite, 13 October 2005.

⁶⁰ Khamene'i speech for 25th commemoration ceremony of Ayatullah Khomeini passing, 6 June 2014.

⁶¹ Numerous governments and multinational entities impose sanctions against Iran. In 2006, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1696 and imposed sanctions after Iran refused to suspend its uranium enrichment program. U.S. sanctions initially targeted investments in oil, gas and petrochemicals, exports of refined petroleum products, and business dealings with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. This encompasses banking and insurance transactions (including with the Central Bank of Iran), shipping, web-hosting services for commercial endeavors, and domain name registration services.

possible outcomes of negotiations, stressing that Iran would choose the disrupted negotiations and its consequences instead of the poor agreement.⁶²

(2) The second question was what is the attitude of Iranian leadership towards acquisition and use of nuclear weapons.

It is possible to trace several references to high Iranian officials mentioning the advantage of nuclear deterrence capability. Hojat al-islam Saidi (Khamene'i's representative at the Revolutionary Guards) asserted that nuclear programme 'transforms Iran into dominant regional power'.⁶³ Khamene'i himself has stated that 'To be equipped with power is a lesson learned from Mahdi himself. Expected justice, justice of Mahdi, which belongs to all the world cannot be achieved through preaching and persuasion. The aspiration for justice is demanding that just and righteous people would have enough power to deflect their enemies. Prophets of God were armed while preaching'.⁶⁴

Mahdists are more outright in nuclear deterrence discourse: hojat al-islam Mohsen Gharavian, member of 'Rayehe-ye Khosh-e Khedmat' movement led by the radical conservative Ayatullah Mesbah Yazdi, mentioned in an interview to the newspaper *Ma'refat* that 'the power of deterrence does not belong only to big powers'. According to Gharavian, he bases his 'claim in Quran (8:60) where the encouragement to enhance one's own power is found' though no case can be found when Supreme Leader or his counterparts are speaking of usage of nuclear weapons (except some comments of radical Mahdist⁶⁵).

Supreme Leader Khamene'i issued legal document *fatwa* declaring that production and usage of nuclear weapons is sinful and thereon forbidden for Muslims.⁶⁶ Similarly, Khamene'i delivered a speech in which he claimed that Iran would not launch offensive against any nation.⁶⁷ Khumayni is recorded frequently quoting 5th *sura* (chapter), 8 *aya* (line) from Quran, where it is said: 'you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness <...>' The same *aya* is rephrased and recorded in the Constitution of IRI. It stands for the encouragement not to use violence as a response or revenge for the incoming aggression.

⁶² Ali Khamene'i: world must seize opportunity of nuclear deal', *Al-Jazeera*, 11 February 2015.

⁶³ *Sobh-e Sadegh*, 16 June 2007; *Islamic Republic of Iran Radio*, 14 December 2001.

⁶⁴ Khamene'i public speech, 30 January 2006.

⁶⁵ *Hemayat*, 7 January 2006.

⁶⁶ Ali Khamene'i fatwa was quoted in the official meeting with IAEA, 10 August 2005, Vienna. *Mehr News Agency*, 10 September 2005, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/iran/nuke/mehr080905.html>.

⁶⁷ "Iran: Is There a Way Out of the Nuclear Impasse", *International Crisis Group Middle East Report No. 51*, 23 February 2006.

According to Ayatullah Mohammad Emami Kashani (member of the Experts Assembly and Leader of Tehran Friday prayers), Supreme Leader of Iran Khamene'i is excluding a possibility to arm Iran with namely nuclear weapons and that his *fatwa* should be trusted: '[Khamene'i] — has made it abundantly clear, as have others, that the destruction of nations, any nation, women and children, large or small — the massacre of innocents is wrong. The same is true of the atomic bomb and atomic weapons. The very idea of an atom bomb is forbidden, the very deed is a sin'.⁶⁸

The current president Hassan Rouhani explained the power of *fatwa* as saying if 'the leader of Iran issues such *fatwa*, it means that the country has given political, religious, and ideological guarantee, that the production of nuclear weapon will not be performed'.⁶⁹

On 15 October 2015, Iran ratified the motion whose provisions set out certain obligations that the administration has to observe in its implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Article 1 of the motion forbids either the production or application of nuclear arms by the government.⁷⁰

Thus prohibition of usage of nuclear weapons has several references to historic precedents and religious regulations.

First, usage of nuclear weapon can cause several deaths and prevent from choosing the victims. While particular theological school in Islam, called Kharijites (such as ISIS/Daesh), can approve such an act, Mu'tazilat theological tradition of Shi'ites has moderate perception of *takfir* (accusation of apostasy and isolation from the creed (anathema)) category. In Mu'tazilat theology, the person committing a sin is not *kufir* (apostate) and does not deserve capital punishment. Every particular case of apostasy has to be analysed.

In the Takfiri conference Ayatullah Khamene'i quoted *sura* 60, *aya* 8 and 9, where it is said that enemies should be approached in a just way. According to the Supreme Leader, all the means which prevent from distinguishing between a fighter, woman, child, old person, someone not performing aggression, or does not provide a possibility for the enemy to surrender, are not just.⁷¹ Respectively, nuclear weapons cannot assure such conditions.

⁶⁸ "Islam Forbids Nuclear Weapons: Tehran Friday Prayer leader," 9 November 2007, <http://icga.blogspot.com/2007/11/islam-forbids-nuclear-weapons-tehran.html>

⁶⁹ Hassan Rouhani interview for Iranian National Broadcast, 8 February 2005. "Iran's security strategy contradicts WMD possession: official," *Xinhua News Agency*, 5 June 2005, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-06/05/content_3048610.htm.

⁷⁰ *Iran Daily*, 15 October 2015.

⁷¹ Khamene'i speech at the conference „Extremist and Takfiri Orientations from the Viewpoint of Islamic Scholars”, 25 November 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bo9p2cNChKA>.

It can be noticed that Iran is blaming Western regimes and Israeli government of committing crimes on humanity, but stresses that Western people and Jewish people are not responsible for these crimes. Consequently, massive punishment is not be approved.

Second, the decision to launch the war and to take responsibility for several deaths can be taken and an offensive *jihad* can be launched only by infallible leader, which is the imam. Unfortunately, Shi'ite community is leaderless. The ruling cleric (Supreme Leader) is just a temporal ruler until the returning of Mahdi and can perform only defensive *jihad*, which is in Shi'ite tradition considered to be *fard al-ain* (personal duty for all Muslims; when offensive *jihad* is *fard al-kifaya* (communal duty) and can be approved only by the infallible leader)).

Indeed, the production of nuclear weapons for the deterrence purposes is difficult to recognise as an equal sin for Muslims as usage. Exactly this speculation rises mentioned doubts if Ayatullah Khamene'i was not using *taqiyyah* for the case of production with the purpose to soften international tensions.

(3) The third question concerns the cooperation issue with the West. During nuclear negotiations and after the deal was made, Iran surprisingly was avoiding any commitments to cooperate with the Western powers in bringing stability to the Middle East, for instance, in fighting IS/Daesh in the joint coalition.⁷² Even it was made clear by Western leaders and in particular US President Barak Obama that such commitment could balance nuclear negotiations and would strengthen the deal.

Iran is a member state of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and took its Chair NAM in 2012. On the wall of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is written 'No East, no West – Islamic state'. In the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, article 152 states that Iran is abstaining from alignment with respect to the hegemonic superpowers, and the maintains mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent states.

The conditions of non-alignment with oppressive powers are defined in several articles of the IRI Constitution: in the Article 146, it is stated that foreign military base in Iran, even for peaceful purposes, is forbidden. Article 153 directs that any form of agreement resulting in foreign control over the natural resources, economy, army, or culture of the country, as well as other aspects of the national life, is forbidden.

⁷² Non-alignment policy can best be observed through some examples: Iran dismissed U.S. proposal to unite offensive force against ISIL; Iran was launching offensive campaign against Afghanistan's Taliban, but rejected U.S. claim to use its territory for military actions against Taliban.

Iranian sociologist Ahmad Ashraf has noticed that observers have variably referred to this relatively high degree of mistrust of Islamic regime as ‘paranoid style’, ‘conspiracy-mindedness’, ‘xenophobia’, ‘cynicism’ and ‘suspicion’.⁷³ He maintains that ‘the appeal of conspiracy theories’ among Persians ‘is more widespread than in other societies’.⁷⁴ Ervand Abrahamian also suggests that ‘political paranoia’ in Iran is only ‘a political style and mode of expression’.⁷⁵ As Halliday suggests, the political culture of modern Iran, one in which myths about the power and motives of foreign states have a vivid life, is in part a product of these earlier, and by no means imagined, external interventions. This supposedly paranoid streak in Iranian nationalism has its historical national roots.⁷⁶

Ayatullah Khamayni considered cooperation with unjust powers to be an act of oppression of justice.⁷⁷ One of the *furu al(d)–din* (ancillary pillars of Shi’ite Islam), *tawalla* doctrine commands the disassociation with those who oppose God. The second motive was distinguished by Khamene’i. In his speech for Shahid Beheshti University students, Khamene’i stressed that any kind of cooperation with arrogant powers ends up with rising requirements. He said, ‘at first they require to recognise illegitimate regimes [Israel], after they command to deny Islamic origin of the Constitution. They never step back and step by step force you to renounce your values and principles.’⁷⁸ Thus conflict and confrontation with US is something natural and unavoidable’.⁷⁹

The third motive of non-cooperation policy was delivered by Khamene’i on numerous occasions.⁸⁰ He claimed that Daesh emerged out of the Middle Eastern policies and initiatives of the United States and Israel. He blamed these two states for the financial support for the change of the orientation in *takfir* category. According to Khamene’i, *takfir*’s target should be the enemies of Islam, i.e. the United States and Israel; however, Muslims are fighting their brother Muslims. In his opinion, the United States and Israel simulated this fight and Iran is not willing to contribute to such a project.

⁷³ Ahmad Ashraf, *The Appeal of Conspiracy Theories to Persians* (Princeton Papers), 1997, 544.

⁷⁴ Ashraf, 545.

⁷⁵ Abrahamian, 115–16.

⁷⁶ Fred Halliday, “The Iranian Revolution and Great–Power Politics,” in Nikki Keddi and Mark Gasiorowski, eds., *Neither East Nor West* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1990, 1.

⁷⁷ Sahyfe–ye Nur, 4:523.

⁷⁸ Khamene’i, speech for Shahid Beheshti University students, 28 May 2003.

⁷⁹ Khamene’i, speech for Shahid Beheshti University students, 12 May 2003.

⁸⁰ Khamene’i speech at the conference „Extremist and Takfiri Orientations from the Viewpoint of Islamic Scholars”, 25 November 2014; Khamene’i speech for 25th and 26th commemoration ceremony of ayatullah Khamayni passing, 6 June 2014, 2015; Ali Khamene’i speech at Expediency Council, 12 June 2015.

Incidentally, Iran is willing to reassess its stance on cooperation in case it can be for the benefit of Islamic *ummat*. According to Khamene'i, the day when relations with United States is valuable, Iran will be the first to firm it.⁸¹

(4) The last question asked was why is Iran risking the nuclear deal by supporting Palestinian aspiration for freedom and Hezbollah's fight.

The question might be answered referring to the perception of the nationalism in the positive terms. In Islamic tradition, nationalism is seen as an evil implication, which encourages Muslim states to give up Islamic interests (*maslahat*) for their particular interests and self-preservation. Certainly, the survival of Islamic Republic of Iran is considered as a high priority, as Iran is a bridgehead for Islamic values and a performer of Islamic mission. Thereby survival can be approved only if the Islamic mission – implementation of the global justice – is performed. Thus Supreme Leader Ayatullah Khamayni distinguished two types of nationalism: negative and positive one, where the latter is the one has to be embraced.

Positive perception of nationalism suggests that object of justice politics cannot be only citizens of Islamic Republic. Islamic government should be engaged in bringing to salvation all of the Islamic community and to help to fight the oppression in the whole *ummat*.⁸²

Article 154 of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran clearly suggests that the protected ones by Iran is not only Iranian citizens, but Iran is committing to protect the rights of all Muslims: 'The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon the rejection of all forms of domination, both the exertion of it and submission to it, the preservation of the independence of the country in all respects and its territorial integrity, the defense of the rights of all Muslims, nonalignment with respect to the hegemonic superpowers, and the maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent States'.

In Article 154 of the Constitution the same motive is evident. It indicates that Iran 'has as its ideal human felicity throughout human society, and considers the attainment of independence, freedom, and rule of justice and truth to be the right of all people of the world. Accordingly, while scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the internal affairs of other nations, it supports the just struggles of the *mustad'afun* (oppressed) against the *mustakbirun* (oppressors) in every corner of the globe'.

⁸¹ Khamene'i speech for Yazd students, 3 January 2008.

⁸² Traditionally the world is divided into dar al-Islam and dar al-harb (these concepts are not Quranic or derived from Sunah (Phropeitic tradition), they were suggested by later Islamic scholars, more precise legal scholar Abu Hanifa). Wheres politics between these two can differ.

Article 3, par. 16 confirms the same policy directions and indicates that framing the foreign policy of the country on the basis of Islamic criteria, fraternal commitment to all Muslims and unsparing support to the freedom fighters of the world.

Khumayni has occasionally alleged that Iran is eager to respond to every call for help, which comes from ‘people tired of life under the shadow of vanity and oppression of America, also to these ones who want to embrace the freedom’⁸³. According to him, struggle against apostasy (which he considered to be the form of oppression for human *fitra*) and political oppression is a personal duty (*fard al-ain*) and ‘everyone is obliged to participate in it one by one or all together’⁸⁴.

Thus Iranian military’s stance in support of Hezbollah is called ‘holy defense’ inasmuch as Iran’s understanding of defense is not subjected to the state boundaries. Consequently, Iran’s key goal to implement justice through its domestic policies expands to the extent of the effort to implement global justice.

It is important to notice that Iranian mission to implement divine justice was never reflective towards the rules of the international state system. Iranian international relations are not conducted solely through inter-state agreements: Iran is supporting and collaborating with non-state actors, as well as acting implicitly. Though most of international relations theorists warn that ‘theories of international morality are the product of dominant nations or groups of nations’.⁸⁵ This means that attempts ‘to impose its own principles of government upon the rest of mankind’ would fail in the face of inevitable compromises of power or the unintended consequences of their actions⁸⁶. Respectively, states should be aware of such consequences and avoid corresponding policies.

This position notwithstanding, Iran is committed to the doctrine of the ‘Export of the Revolution’, which encompass several means of intrusion into other countries’ affairs: financial support for the ones in the Muslim countries, who seek to subvert unjust ruling elites, support for Islamic education and cultivation of Islamic piety and similar missions.

Such foreign policy orientation certainly has numerous implications not characteristic of a nation-state profile and not recognisable as just by other nation-states.

⁸³ Haghghat, 129.

⁸⁴ Sahyfe-ye Imam, 5:34.

⁸⁵ Carr, 74.

⁸⁶ Morgenthau, 247–9; 48–9.

Conclusions

It was asserted that Iran has specific profile, which contrasts customary state conduct in international relations. This assertion is directed towards two inferences: first, it suggests that the source of Iranian political thought is non-customary. Second, that knowledge production on Iran needs non-customary approach. Mainstream theories of analysis denounce Iran's claims for global justice. Consequently, does not engage into the study of the Khumaynistic concept of justice and does not avail the explanatory power which this concept implicate.

Iran perceives itself as an Islamic Republic and derives its identification, political symbolism, values, legal system and institutional arrangement from the Shi'ite doctrine. Certainly, religious doctrines take the shape and gain legitimacy in their interplay with political development and dominant political will, which was mostly concentrated in the hands of Ayatullah Khumayni – the ideologist and first Supreme Leader of Islamic Republic. His selective choice of ideas, especially the narrative of justice, is, as I claimed in the article, the formative principle and the restrain of today's Iranian foreign policy.

The political decision of Ayatullah Khumayni to commit to the tradition of power legitimisation through the imami tradition and imam's proof of justice Shi'ite doctrine to the core of modern Iranian political consciousness. Consequently, the legality of the Islamic regime becomes grounded in the commitment to divine justice, whether the devotion to it is simulated.

The perception of divine justice in Iran is not limited to social institutional justice and international law. Divine or revelational justice is in contrast with positive justice. It coincides with reason and may well fall in the category of natural justice.⁸⁷ It is inter-related with divine ethics and law. Consequently, this kind of perception of justice determines morally orientated political practices, rejection of international law regulations, which do not coincide with moral divine wisdom and has heightened global dimension. Justice in this case is not subjected to national aspirations and doesn't have local objects, aims or operation.

In general, it was suggested that the complexity of understanding why Iran is claiming holy defense in the case of Hezbollah is questioning international law, avoiding cooperation with Western powers, giving hostile and even frightening speeches towards the negotiating countries can be unravelled to some extent with due attention to the Khumayni's narratives of justice. Consequently, the purpose of the article was to disclose these narratives.

⁸⁷ Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (London: The John Hopkins University Press), 1984, 2.

Analysis of nuclear negotiations exposed that two main Khumaynistic narratives of justice could be evident in the whole negotiation process and its aftermath: first, politics of Islamic state should be subjected to Islamic principles, among which divine justice is prominent. Second, opposition should be present in every case, which contradicts justice and can be described as oppression. Both submission and creation of oppression are unjust acts.

Commitment to the principle of justice determines specific behaviour that was evident in negotiation process: (1) ongoing support for the aspiration of Palestine freedom and antagonism towards Israel, support for Houthi Shi'ite rebellion in Yemen and enmity for Saudi Arabia, funding of terrorist groups and extension of the networks of influence in the Middle East. (2) Violation of International law for the sake of implementation of divine justice. (3) Antagonism towards the United States and other Western powers, along with non-cooperation politics. (4) Crucial objection towards efforts to contract Iran's power and technological advance.

The emphasis on the role of the justice in Iranian foreign policy does not necessarily suggest that Iran is nothing like others. Iranian leaders are responsive to domestic or international constraints, and have material considerations necessary to secure and sustain the existing regime. As Iranian scholar Seyed Sadegh Haghghat suggests, Iran is following several practical provisions: ethics in politics must be practical, the employment of Shi'ite principles must not put Iran in danger, Iran must develop the awareness of Sunni discourse as Shi'ites are in minority.⁸⁸ Still, certain constitutional and traditional restraints suggest that ideational factor is dominant in Iranian political thinking and that certain beliefs, like resisting the oppression of justice, might drive Iranian foreign policy decisions stronger than external restraints, for example, threats to Iran's national security or slowdown of economic development caused by international sanctions. Consequently, the analysis of the idea of justice in Iranian foreign policy is an analytical approach for better understanding Iranian stance in international relations.

⁸⁸ Seyed Sadegh Haghghat, *Mabani-e andiše-ye siyasi dar eslam* (en. Backgrounds of Political Thought in Islam) (Teheran: Mufid University Press), 1392 (2013), 121-128.