

The Logic of Deterrence in the Foreign Policy of I.R. Iran

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DOR: 20.1001.1.26767368.2023.5.16.5.7

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(Received: 21 November 2022 - Accepted: 16 August 2023)

Abstract

Every country develops defense strategies in response to regional and international threats. Nations that have experienced historical aggression and insecurity are typically more concerned about their existential security than others. Iran's defense system is influenced by its strategic culture, which has evolved due to numerous threats and challenges, significantly impacting the country's national defense approach. Therefore, security and deterrence have remained critical issues for various governments in Iran. Since the Iranian Islamic Revolution, Islam has been at the core of the country's security and defense policies, making it essential to understand Islam's approach to the concept of defense and security in Iran's foreign policy. The present study, by using analytical method, aimed to explore the hidden meaning in texts and analyze the concept of deterrence in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and examine the religious logic of deterrence in the Islamic Republic by evaluating the oral and written documents and fatwas of Iran's supreme leader. The results indicate that Iran's defense strategy within the framework of Islamic thought is based on an active deterrence strategy against regional and international threats while maintaining its second-strike capability to prevent the risk of war against Iran.

KeyWords: IRAN, Security, Foreign Policy, Deterrence, Defense Strategy, Political Culture.

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Introduction

Deterrence is a strategy that is closely related to the realist model of international relations theory, which emphasizes the importance of power and interests. The goal of deterrence is to use the threat of retaliation to dissuade an enemy from attacking or threatening. By employing this strategy, actors aim to make it clear to their rivals that the cost of an invasion is higher than they may realize and is contingent on their behavior (Brodie, 2015 AD: 185).

Deterrence is an ongoing strategy that can be invoked whenever necessary, as it does not have a specific deadline. Deterrence threats are typically explicit because the primary objective is to protect the status quo. However, the main challenge with deterrence is to ensure that the threat is credible and will be implemented if rivals act improperly (Snyder, 1961 AD: 48).

This research employs the method of discourse analysis to explore the latent meanings embedded within texts, with a specific focus on analyzing the concept of deterrence. To accomplish this objective, the discourse analysis theory proposed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe has been employed to elucidate the underlying significance of deterrence. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe developed their discourse theory by drawing upon Michel Foucault's ideas. They sought to apply this theory to the analysis of contemporary society, emphasizing its fragmented and complex nature. They argued that a comprehensive understanding of reality can only be achieved through discursive categorization, and that the interpretation of reality will always be relative. According to Laclau and Mouffe, the process of establishing relationships between elements in a way that shapes and defines their identities is referred to as "Articulation." Discourse, therefore, is the resulting constructed whole arising from the act of articulation (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985 AD: 105).

In their framework, Laclau and Mouffe introduce the concepts of availability and credibility to elucidate the factors contributing to successful discourses. They contend that discourses should be capable of resolving existing ambiguities and semantic gaps, making them accessible to social agents, and ultimately enabling domination and superiority. Moreover, the creation of contradictions and antagonism is deemed necessary for discourses to thrive, achieved through the establishment of political boundaries, the stabilization of those boundaries, and the formation of identity (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985 AD: 134).

According to their discourse theory, agents and groups cannot attain a complete and positive identity without acknowledging the existence of the "Other."

Given Iran's geographical and geopolitical location, it has faced various threats throughout its history, making deterrence a crucial issue for successive governments. Since the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the country's security and deterrence policies have been closely linked to Islamic principles. Thus, examining the Islamic approach to deterrence and its impact on Iran's foreign policy is vital. This raises the question of how Islamic values and beliefs affect the defense and deterrence strategies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. By studying Islamic teachings, it is possible to explore the relationship between deterrence and defense approaches in Iran's foreign policy.

Iran's deterrence strategy has been the subject of several articles. In the article "Intensification of U.S. Pressure and Iran's Propensity to Deterrence Strategy," Eftekhari and Dolatabadi explore the causes behind Iran's inclination towards a deterrence strategy. The study aims to elucidate this tendency by examining two hypotheses: the disruption of the balance of power in the Middle East region and the increasing pressure exerted by the United States on Iran (Eftekhari and Dolatabadi, 2011 AD/1389 SH).

In their article titled "Defense Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Nouroleh Qaisari and Ehsan Khezri endeavor to develop an appropriate defense policy for Iran, taking into account the country's geographical situation and its fundamental values. The researchers analyze documents such as the constitution and the general policies of the system to explicate Iran's defense policy (Qaisari and Khezri, 2017 AD/1395 SH).

Moreover, Kadkhodaei and Askari, in their article "The Security Doctrine of the Islamic Republic of Iran with Emphasis on Active Deterrence and Protecting the Second Strike," investigate the security doctrine of the Islamic Republic. They explore the methods employed by Iran to effectively counter threats in its peripheral environment. The article seeks to address the question of the guiding principles underlying Iran's security doctrine. Drawing on the theory of defensive neoclassical realism, the authors argue that Iran ensures its security and survival in the anarchic international system by adopting an active deterrence approach and enhancing the capability for a second strike against its adversaries (Kadkhodaei and Askari, 2019 AD/1397 SH).

In another article "Deterrence as a Security-Defense Strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Challenges, Requirements, and its Strategic Model," Yousefi and Ansarifard examine which components of modern deterrence align with Iran's strategy. The research asserts that Iran's security-defense strategy predominantly relies on the military aspect of deterrence and may neglect other dimensions. Specifically, in the post-Cold War era, Iran defines deterrence as a military response to the actions

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of both regional and extra-regional adversaries. This article aims to propose a comprehensive model of deterrence suitable for Iran, taking into account all dimensions of deterrence (Yousefi and Ansarifard, 2021 AD/1399 SH).

Furthermore, in their paper on the "Forward Defense Strategy in Iran's Overseas Presence in Oman and Syria," Shariati and Vazirian highlight the geopolitical challenges Iran faces and the need to neutralize peripheral threats beyond its national borders as a deterrent method. They adopt a realist perspective, viewing Iran's deterrence strategy as necessary to protect the country's national interests, including energy security and controlling terrorist threats from groups like ISIS (Shariati and Vazirian, 2021 AD/1395 SH: 389-413). In the article on "Missile Deterrence as a Security Strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Hatami and Sajjadi emphasize Iran's missile power as a critical component of its defense strategy and threat control. Taking a realistic approach, the authors see the country's defense doctrine as centered on developing missile power, which they consider a crucial factor in deterring Iran's regional rivals (Sajjadi and Hatami, 2019 AD/1397 SH: 71-97).

Another article, by Parasiliti, focuses on US-Iran relations. The author discusses the failure of US sanctions and deterrence policy against Iran's nuclear industry and warns that such trends, along with the use of force, cannot divert Iran from its goals. Parasiliti believes that diplomacy is the best option for resolving the issues between Iran and America (Parasiliti, 2009 AD: 5-13).

In a separate article, Ward discusses the development and progress of the Iranian military in dealing with American threats in the region. He explains the evolution of Iran's defense doctrine, the use of missiles, and the threat of unconventional warfare as the primary factors of Iran's deterrence against the United States (Ward, 2005 AD: 559-576).

Finally, Sherrill highlights the danger of Iran possessing nuclear weapons and stresses the need to confront the country before it is too late. He describes Iran's deterrence approach as aggressive and sees diplomacy as ineffective in controlling Iran (Sherrill, 2012 AD: 31-49).

Unlike most articles in this field, our article focuses on Iran's deterrence doctrine's Islamic roots and foundations. Since Iran's defense and deterrence approaches have been explained based on the Islamic thoughts of jurists and leaders of Iran, it is important to examine their opinions in understanding Iran's defense strategy. Given that the defense policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is formulated and communicated by its supreme leader, an examination of the components of Iran's defense-security policy through the analysis of the leader's oral and written statements can enhance our understanding of Iran's defense

strategy. Numerous articles have addressed various significant aspects of Iran's defense strategy within the realm of leadership ideology. Among these aspects, key focal points include the influential role of Islam in shaping the defense strategy, the central involvement of the people in the defense system for deterring adversaries, the significance of Islamic culture, national unity, and self-confidence. Additionally, both soft power and hard power have been acknowledged as important factors in Iran's defense strategy (Qanbari, et al., 2017 AD/1395 SH; Ajurlo and Maghsoudi, 2019 AD/1397 SH; Qahramani, et la., 2019 AD/1397 SH).

1. Theoretical Framework: Deterrence Theory

In general, the concept of deterrence aims to prevent violence and is divided into two general approaches: Type 1, which pertains to the relation between two states and how they deter one another from invasion, and Type 2, which discusses deterring invasion from one state against an ally of another. In response to these approaches, there are generally two types of conventional deterrence: denial and punishment (Snyder, 1961 AD: 15).

Deterrence by punishment involves an actor attempting to make their rival understand that their valuable assets will be attacked if they initiate an attack. The threat is such that the rival refuses to carry out the action after calculating the costs and benefits. Deterrence by punishment sends the message that undesirable behavior is costly for the invader. Therefore, the fear of severe punishment deters the rival from assaulting the actor. On the other hand, deterrence by denial does not focus on the threat element. Instead, the actor tries to convince the rival that if they take violent action, they will not be able to achieve their political-military goals. This type of deterrence is deeply related to the actor's ability to effectively convey the message to the rival for persuasion (Jervis, 1989 AD: 9-11). In other words, this approach prevents the enemy's ability to carry out an attack successfully. Deterrence by denial is generally preferable to deterrence by punishment because the latter requires continuous coercion, while the former involves control.

In this analysis, we will explore the development of deterrence theory and its impact on international politics. According to Overy, deterrence theory in the nuclear age has its roots in pre-1939 thinking, which relied on the assumption that bombers could control the outcome of a war. The fear of air power was the initial driver behind the Western powers' decision to develop devastating weapons capable of deterring any potential aggressor and gaining an advantage in wars (Overy, 2008 AD: 135). The aim was to create a threat of damage to the enemy's sensitive

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and valuable targets, so significant that it would deter them from any aggressive actions (George and Smoke, 1974 AD: 39-40).

Robert Jervis identified three waves in the evolution of deterrence theory, each with its own approach to handling different threats. The first wave emerged after World War II and had little impact on policy-making, as it assumed that total war would never occur. The second wave, proposed in the late 1950s, introduced the game theory model and focused on understanding actors' tactics by emphasizing their rationality and cost-benefit analysis. The third wave challenged the assumptions of the second wave, highlighting the importance of psychological factors in deterrence (Jervis, 1979 AD: 289-324).

The evolution of military technology and changes in attitudes toward the concept of deterrence caused the great powers to shift from conventional to nuclear deterrence. This shift challenged traditional notions of national defense that relied on large quantities of firepower. As a result, scholars began to consider the idea of national security. The United States, with its unique geographical position, traditionally followed a national defense strategy. However, policymakers realized that these traditional strategies from the 1920s-1930s were insufficient in the modern world and could not guarantee national security. The advent of nuclear weapons created different dynamics that required a shift in US defense strategies from conventional weapons to war and deterrence. Most scholars in this field emphasized the need for the US to prepare for possible attacks with nuclear strikes from major powers such as the Soviet Union (George and Smoke, 1974 AD: 30).

The debates over nuclear deterrence began during the Eisenhower administration, and the first doctrine was introduced by Dulles as "Massive Retaliation." Dulles argued that the US needed to prepare itself with nuclear strikes and Strategic Air Command to maintain its national security against any possible attack by major powers (Wells, 1981 AD: 32).

The concept of deterrence, coupled with technological advancements, prompted major powers to develop second-strike retaliatory capabilities for surveillance. American strategists believed stable deterrence could protect national security by focusing on survivable retaliatory capabilities. They argued that mutual nuclear deterrence could control enemy behavior because both sides feared nuclear war and its massive destruction. The balance of terror between the two sides led them to embrace mutual assured destruction (MAD) with their ability for a second-strike. However, scholars like Schelling argued that MAD could not work effectively without controlling destabilizing strategic forces such as

ballistic missiles, testing, and deployments (Schelling, 1980 AD: 241-243).

In the new environment, the concept of deterrence is based on a rational approach to understanding how enemies, as rational actors, behave in different conditions. The condition for deterrence is the existence of a rational adversary who can calculate the possible consequences of a challenge and then re-examine the possible consequences in response to a credible threat of countermeasures. The explanatory power of this theory is based on the theory of microeconomics, which assumes that actors calculate costs and benefits. Thus, according to this theory, the enemy will continue to pose a threat only if the expected benefits outweigh the possible costs of their actions. Therefore, the most critical principle in deterrence is the ability to instill fear in the audience's minds (Trujillo, 2014 AD: 45).

Although some scholars criticize the rational actor approach to deterrence, which focuses only on the cost-benefit analysis of actors, Jervis argues that cultural and psychological factors can influence decision-making (Jervis, 1979 AD: 289-324). Therefore, deterrence is not only a military and technological concept but also a psychological and political one (Kissinger and Dean, 2019 AD: 255-261). Morgan goes further, suggesting that governments are not always rational actors, especially in times of crisis (Morgan, 2003 AD: 11-13).

Thus, it is important to consider the psychological aspect of deterrence, as actors' perceptions of each other play a significant role in preventing conflict (Nye, 2016 AD: 53). Deterrence aims not to fight but to prevent war and maintain peace. It seeks to persuade the other side that aggression and military action are not the most effective options available. In this sense, deterrence not only physically defends actors but also psychologically deters aggression (Collins, 1973 AD: 171).

Despite supporting the validity of the rational theory, Jervis emphasizes that it is not equivalent to the total rationality of actors. Most deterrence theories acknowledge that some incidents are beyond the control of rational actors (Jervis, 2017 AD: 289-324). Schelling argues that actors do not need to be totally rational because the key factor for avoiding war among states is the fear of irrational actions, which leads them to reinforce their deterrence (Schelling, 2008 AD: 87).

One of the criticisms related to the limitation of nuclear power is that it can help with deterrence but not compellence. Jervis argues that deterrence theory does not consider the factor of change and focuses on the stability of the state. In this situation, deterrence theory cannot help policymakers reduce the hostility between actors and fear of war because there is no room for changing the situation between actors. Jervis

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criticizes deterrence theorists for overemphasizing punishment as a means of stabilizing the situation and changing the behavior of enemies and recommends that they pay more attention to the role of rewards (Jervis, 1979 AD: 289-324).

2. The Fourth Wave of Deterrence

In addition to the three waves of deterrence theories described by Jervis, a fourth wave emerged with the end of the Cold War and the emergence of new threats to the international system. Scholars have pointed out that the assumptions about deterrence between superpowers during the Cold War no longer apply in the unipolar era (Knopf, 2010 AD: 2). The old theories were based on rational actors who calculated the cost-benefit of their decisions. However, in the post-Cold War era, this model no longer worked. With the change in the distribution of power and the emergence of new threats, the concept of control and deterrence had to adapt (Morgan, 2003 AD: 26-40). Many weaker states started using the idea of self-help to protect their sovereignty, and with asymmetrical capabilities and inexpensive deterrence, they could challenge traditional deterrence theories (Paul, Morgan & Wirtz, 2009 AD: 15).

After the Cold War and the 9/11 attacks, the concept of deterrence continued to evolve. With the increasing role of religion in world society, new actors emerged who had goals that could not be analyzed with the logic of instrumental rationality. These actors emphasized the importance of national interests and security threats while simultaneously promoting a kind of utopian politics that originated from religion. The goals of these actors, which emphasize values like self-esteem and honor, provide a new model of the logic of rationality. This utopian process, which emphasizes religious values and seeks to establish a distinct identity in the international community, has caused a shift in international relations away from the mainstream of traditional international relations theory.

3. Islam as the Foundation of Deterrence in the Foreign Policy of I.R. Iran

With the rise of modernity and the establishment of nation-states in the West after the Treaty of Westphalia, the role of religion began to decline. The functions that religion had previously performed were taken over by modern institutions, such as the state. This process led to a decline in the importance of religion in the West and the emergence of new ideas and values (Berger, 2000 AD: 41). However, in the rest of the world, religion continued to play a significant role, prompting scholars to revisit the role of religion in the world system (Fox and Sandler, 2004 AD: 3-4).

Some scholars argue that the relevance of religion stems from its legitimizing function, as it can confer legitimacy on political leaders and regimes. Moreover, religion can play a crucial role in conflicts and serves as a source of identity for different groups (ibid., 53). In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, scholars in international relations turned their attention to the relationship between religion and the state, as well as the role of religion in the international system (Sandal and Fox, 2013 AD: 2).

Islam has played a significant role in Iran's deterrence policy since the 1979 revolution, as it is one of the key components of the country's strategic culture (Ramazani, 2004 AD: 555). Therefore, analyzing the Islamic conceptual framework of security and deterrence is crucial. Various challenges and threats have shaped Iran's strategic culture, resulting in a unique deterrence strategy. Given its history of foreign invasions, Iran greatly emphasizes its deterrence strategy.

The Islamic conception of the international order is based on a just and moral system that ensures the happiness and well-being of all humanity. These values, which Islam regards as the foundation of the international system, are not merely contractual but have a real basis in human nature (Dehghani, 2009 AD/1387 SH: 92). They shape the identity and behavior of international actors and could offer a model of peaceful coexistence for the international community.

According to Muslim intellectuals, the values of Islam extend beyond personal life to encompass all aspects of human life, including society, economy, and politics (Nasr, 1994 AD: 67-70). Thus, the Islamic system of government is based on these values, and only a state that adheres to these principles is deemed acceptable (Amoli, 2009 AD/1387 SH: 34). In Islam, politics refers to the observation of the affairs of Muslims, both domestically and internationally, through methods that do not contravene Islamic law (Shakuri, 1998 AD/1376 SH: 71). International relations jurisprudence is a subset of political jurisprudence in Islam that elucidates the foreign policy of an Islamic state.

In the context of Shiite theological jurisprudence, Shia ulama have expressed concern about the interaction of Shiites with foreigners in political, economic, and cultural affairs. The jurisprudence of international relations is a discipline that examines the foreign affairs of Muslims in the international system and establishes guidelines for their actions in accordance with Islamic rules. A key value in this regard, which serves as the foundation for other principles, is adherence to Islamic values in the policies of the Islamic state. The Islamic government is required to follow Islamic laws, and from this overarching principle, other principles are derived from the conceptual framework of Islamic international relations (Amoli, 2009 AD/1387 SH: 39-43).

The principles of Islamic international relations are based on the teachings of the Holy Prophet and the Qur'an. One of these principles is the hadith "al-Islam Ya'lū wa lā Yu'lā 'Alayh," which emphasizes the higher status of Islam above all other beliefs. Another principle is the prohibition of friendship with infidels, as highlighted in several verses in the Qur'an, including verse 138 of Surah al-Nisa'. This verse cautions against seeking pride in non-believers and warns against close and friendly relations with them.

The third principle is the *Qaedeh-ye Wizr* (The Burden Principle), which is one of the well-known rules of Islamic jurisprudence that states harm has no legitimacy in Islam. This principle is supported by several hadiths, including one in which the Prophet says that harming oneself and others in Islam is not legitimate. Another hadith states that Islam increases the good of Muslims, not their harm (Kafi, 1981 AD/1359 SH; Ameli, 1989 AD/1367 SH). According to Imam Reza, God has not made anything lawful except what is in man's best interest and has not forbidden anything except what is harmful and perishable (Majlisi, 1982 AD/1360 SH). These principles guide the policies of an Islamic state and its interactions with other countries in the international system.

The principle of *Qaedeh-ye Tashabbuh*, which prohibits resemblance to infidels, is an important concept in Islamic thought. According to several verses and hadiths, Muslims are forbidden from resembling non-believers. This principle is emphasized in various hadiths, including one where the Prophet stated that anyone who resembles a foreigner is not one of us (Qomi, 1982 AD/1360 SH; al-Tirmidhi, 1975 AD/1353 SH). Imam Ali, the first Imam of Shia, also declared that anyone who resembles a group of infidels would be considered one of them (Nuri, 1988 AD/1366 SH). Furthermore, Imam Sadiq, the 6th Imam, conveyed a hadith where God revealed to one of the prophets to instruct believers not to adopt the clothing, food, or methods of their enemies, as doing so would make them enemies of God, just like the infidels (al-Saduq, 1999 AD/1377 SH).

Finally, *Qaedeh-ye Nafy-e Sabil*, or the Negation-of-Domination Principle, establishes the boundaries for Muslims' interactions with non-believers. According to this principle, no religious ruling should allow infidels to dominate Muslims. Jurists maintain that this principle should apply to all individuals and social relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. In Surah al-Nisa', verse 141, it is stated that God has never given the disbelievers a way to dominate the believers. The Holy Qur'an includes multiple verses that forbid Muslims from befriending infidels and from making infidels their leaders. Therefore, Islam's foreign relations with non-Muslims should be regulated in a way that prevents infidels from dominating or exercising supremacy over Muslims.

Deterrence is a crucial principle in Islamic international relations, which means equipping the Islamic country with both hard and soft power to prevent enemies from attacking it (Amoli, 2009 AD/ 1387 SH: 72-73). In Surah al-Anfal, verse 60¹, God emphasizes the importance of equipping Muslims with military weapons to ensure their security and defense against the enemy. Therefore, the principle of creating deterrence against the enemy is an essential aspect of the Islamic government. This Quranic verse also highlights the importance of instilling fear in the hearts and minds of the enemy as a significant component of deterrence (al-Anfal: 60). According to Islamic thought, the power of the Islamic country should be strong enough to deter its enemies from attacking. In this way, the need to create deterrence against the enemy becomes one of the principles of defensive jihad. Historically, after the establishment of the Islamic government in Medina, God made it mandatory for Muslims to defend themselves and emphasized the need for their strength and ability to do so (al-Anfal: 60).

In Shia belief, the initiation of war by Muslims requires the presence of a prophet or an infallible Imam. Therefore, during the occultation era, any offensive jihad or the initiation of war by Muslims is prohibited, and only defensive war is considered legitimate (Shariati and Azimi, 2018 AD/1396 SH: 201-202). In several verses of the Qur'an, including Surah Hajj, Tawba², and Baqarah³, God calls upon Muslims to defend themselves against foreign invasion and considers it obligatory to protect the Islamic world's territorial integrity. Shia jurists consider defensive jihad obligatory, and permission from the Imam is not required (ibid., 204-205). The clerics issue Jihadi fatwa to defend Muslims and the Islamic land based on the principles of their political jurisprudence.

1. Prepare against them whatever you can of [military] power and war-horses, awing thereby the enemy of Allah, and your enemy, and others besides them, whom you do not know, but Allah knows them. And whatever you spend in the way of Allah will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged.

وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمِنْ رِبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ تُرْهَبُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ وَأَخْرِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ لَأَتَعْلَمُونَهُمُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ يُوَفِّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ

2. (13) **¶** you not make war on a people who broke their pledges and resolved to expel the Apostle, and opened [hostilities] against you initially? Do you fear them? But Allah is worthier of being feared by you, should you be faithful. (14) Make war on them so that Allah may punish them by your hands and humiliate them, and help you against them, and heal the hearts of a faithful folk.

(١٣) أَلَا تَقْتُلُونَ قَوْمًا نَكَثُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ وَهَمُّوا بِإِخْرَاجِ الرَّسُولِ وَهُمْ بَدَّوْكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ أَتَخْشَوْنَهُمْ فَاللَّهُ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَخْشَوْهُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

(١٤) قَاتِلُوهُمْ يُعَذِّبُهُمُ اللَّهُ بِأَيْدِيكُمْ وَيُخْزِيهِمْ وَيُنْصِرْكُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَيُشْفِ صُدُورَ قَوْمٍ مُؤْمِنِينَ

3. Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors.

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ

Therefore, it is obligatory for all people to obey them, join the Islamic army, and engage in jihad against the enemy. According to Mirza Qomi, obedience to the state and jihad against the enemies of Islam is obligatory for everyone (Qomi, 2008 AD/ 1386 SH).

The fundamental precept of Islam is that Muslims should not allow themselves to be dominated by "others." Shia ulama have had bitter historical experiences with Muslim countries' relations with the West and have observed that the West eventually dominates these countries. This experience has taught the ulama to be cautious and to prioritize maintaining their country's independence and deterring their enemies.

As the foundation of Iranian culture, Islam has created a unique strategic culture for Iran's foreign policy in the international system. This foreign policy is rooted in Iran's constitution, which is based on Islamic principles. Article 2 of the Iranian Constitution emphasizes rejecting any oppression and domination and preventing colonization and foreign influence in the country. Article 3 emphasizes the importance of strengthening the national defense to maintain the country's independence and territorial integrity. Article 9 emphasizes the inseparability of freedom, independence, and territorial integrity and the duty of the state and citizens to preserve them. Article 11 obliges the Iranian state to base its general policy on the unity of Islamic nations, with all Muslims considered as one ummah. Article 14 emphasizes the importance of treating non-Muslims with Islamic justice and respecting their human rights, in accordance with verse 8 of Surah al-Mumtahanah (Islamic Republic of Iran's Constitution, 1979 AD/1357 SH).

These Islamic concepts have defined the foundations of Iran's foreign policy and deterrence strategy as enshrined in the Iranian constitution. However, this principle of the Iranian constitution applies only to those who do not conspire or act against Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In this regard, the leader of Iran has communicated the system's general policies to government officials and armed forces commanders, including the crucial defense and security policies. This program aims to reinforce the defense base to enhance deterrence and acquire advanced technologies for the defense and security industries, focusing on achieving self-sufficiency in systems and equipment. To achieve this, the government has allocated a minimum of 5% of the public budget⁴. The program also emphasizes strengthening infrastructure and optimizing public mechanisms to increase resilience against potential threats, particularly cyber, biological, and chemical threats. These priorities and

4 <https://dotic.ir/news/12948>

commands build upon previous policies and aim to strengthen the country's security and defense structure while increasing its deterrence power against possible threats⁵.

Islamic principles do not condone deterrence that results in the loss of innocent lives and prohibit using weapons that cause mass killings, harm to living beings, and environmental destruction. For instance, in the book "al-Nihayah" by Sheikh Tusi, a prominent Shia scholar of the 11th century, it is stated that using any killing tool except poison is permissible in fighting against infidels. However, spreading poison on the enemy's land or water is forbidden according to his fatwa (Tusi, 1980 AD/1358 SH: 62). Mohaghegh Karaki, another Shia scholar, has issued a fatwa that strictly prohibits the use of weapons of mass destruction in his book, "Jame al-Maqasid," stating that their use is forbidden even if the victory of Muslims in war depends on them (Karaki, 1987 AD/1365 SH).

Although the issue of "non-conventional weapons" is a modern phenomenon, there are general principles of jurisprudence in Islam that have been the basis of jurists' fatwas for centuries. Islam prohibits using weapons of mass destruction based on the principles of separating military and civilians, preserving the environment, and protecting the lives of non-combatants. As these weapons are indiscriminate and do not distinguish between military and civilians, they endanger the environment and health of all living beings. Therefore, Shia jurists, including contemporary religious marāji' such as Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, and Ayatollah Javadi Amoli, have issued fatwas prohibiting the use of weapons of mass destruction. Ayatollah Khamenei also considers the use of these weapons forbidden based on jurisprudence and reason. The Supreme Leader has given fourteen reasons, both rational and jurisprudential, for rejecting nuclear weapons, detailed in the table below⁶.

5 <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=37922>

6. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=47392>

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	Discourse Elements	Important Statements in Rejecting Nuclear Weapons
1	Using nuclear weapons is a great sin	Statements at the 16th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, 8/30/2012
2	We do not admit nuclear weapons because of our beliefs	Statements in the meeting with the commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, 9/17/2013
3	Not using nuclear weapons because of Islamic laws	Statements in the meeting with the commanders of the army of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 4/19/2015
5	The Quranic foundation for the prohibition of nuclear weapons	Statements in the meeting with the officials of Jamaran destroyer, 2/19/2010
6	The use of all weapons of mass destruction is forbidden	Message to the first international conference on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, 4/17/2010
7	We believe that nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity	Statements in the meeting with the people of East Azerbaijan, 2/16/2013
8	Nuclear weapons are a source of trouble	Statements in the meeting with eulogists of Ahl al-Bayt, 4/9/2015
9	Stockpiling nuclear weapons is useless and harmful	Statements at the meeting with nuclear scientists, 2/22/2012
10	Nuclear weapons do not bring power	Statements at the meeting with nuclear scientists, 2/22/2012
11	Nuclear weapons are against our national interests	The meeting of the President of Tajikistan with the supreme Leader, 1/18/2006
12	Nuclear weapons are not in the structure of our weapons system	Statements at the 20th anniversary ceremony of Imam Khomeini, 6/4/2009
13	The enemy knows that Iran is not looking for nuclear weapons	Statements in the shrine of Imam Reza in Nowruz 3/20/2012
14	They want to limit and control Iran's power	Statements in the meeting with the Assembly of Experts, 2/22/2021

Source: Authors

4. Religious and Political Foundations of Nuclear Weapons Prohibition

Based on the rational and religious grounds outlined in the table above, Ayatollah Khamenei has prohibited using all weapons of mass destruction, particularly atomic weapons, and has issued a fatwa denouncing their use. This fatwa was read at the first international conference on disarmament and non-proliferation held in Tehran in 2010.

In his fatwa, Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized the prohibition of weapons of mass destruction in general, stating:

"We believe that not only nuclear weapons but also other types of weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical and biological weapons, pose a serious threat to humanity. The Iranian nation, which has been a victim of chemical weapons, is acutely aware of the danger posed by producing and stockpiling such weapons and is prepared to use all its resources to counter such threats. We consider the use of such weapons to be forbidden and believe that everyone must work to protect humanity from this great calamity."⁷

Given these reasons, it is evident that Ayatollah Khamenei's fatwa forbids the use of nuclear weapons, as declared by the leader of Iran.

5. Defense Doctrine of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Ensuring national security and survival in an anarchic international system is a primary concern for countries, often requiring a strong and well-equipped military to defend sovereignty. Governments must make strategic and tactical choices to safeguard their interests and security. The balance of power is a critical factor in maintaining security and survival, providing deterrence for nations in the region (Ghavam, 2006 AD/1384 SH: 321).

In the Middle East, the regional environment poses a geopolitical threat to the existence and survival of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As a result, Iran's security doctrine prioritizes deterrence against potential threats. By adopting an active defense strategy, Iran aims to prevent attacks on the country and safeguard its vital interests. This strategy serves as a deterrent to adversaries by maintaining the possibility of a second strike. Iran's rivals and enemies try to portray Iran's defense-security strategy as offensive in the international system. They label it as aggressive to create a global consensus against Iran. In response, Iran seeks to clarify the nature of its defense strategy and show that active deterrence against threats and maintaining the second-strike capability has a defensive and preventive nature. The objective is to reduce the risk of war in the region.

In the Islamic Republic's defensive strategy, security is achieved by creating a balance of power in the region. Conflict is inevitable in the international system as countries seek to maximize their interests, leading to clashes. To prevent these clashes, countries often balance power to control encounters, and Iran is no exception. Given the possibility of a military attack against its country, Iran seeks to increase its military power

7. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=9171>

to maintain the balance of power in the region. Cooperation among countries in the challenging structure of the Middle East is not an effective strategy for controlling tensions, and governments often resort to war to achieve their goals (Adami and Keshavarz Moghaddam, 2015 AD/1393 SH: 209). In this tense atmosphere, Iran aims to reduce the threat of war in the region and prevent confrontation by using the balance of power mechanism. To achieve this goal, Iran pursues an active defense strategy that prioritizes maintaining national interests and security through a strong presence in the region (Barzegar, 2016 AD/1394 SH: 198).

Iran has always faced strategic threats from the regional and international systems, and deterrence is a less expensive strategy than war, serving as a central pillar of the country's national security. The culture of resistance and internal cohesion are the main principles of deterrence policy, reflecting the core values of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This policy has effectively prevented possible regional or international threats against Iran and removed the shadow of war from the country.

Iran's strategic location and the presence of great powers in the region have led its leaders to prioritize the concept of deterrence for existential security. Additionally, Iran's strategic culture considers the transnational Shia community and the Islamic world, resulting in a focus on power structures and religious ideology. This has shaped Iran's foreign policy based on the principles of 'wisdom, honor, and expediency' (Ayatollah Khamenei, 1991 AD)⁸, leading to a distinct foreign policy.

To understand the significance of defense, security, enemy, and deterrence from Iran's supreme leader's perspective, it is necessary to analyze his speeches and documents. A collection of his speeches from the last three years (2019-2022) was examined, and a word cloud was created to visualize the frequency and importance of these concepts⁹. The table below lists the significant and frequently used words in the speeches of the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This compilation of essential and repetitive words in Ayatollah Khamenei's speeches indicates the significance of specific concepts and topics in his perspective and opinion.

8. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/keyword-content?id=1940>

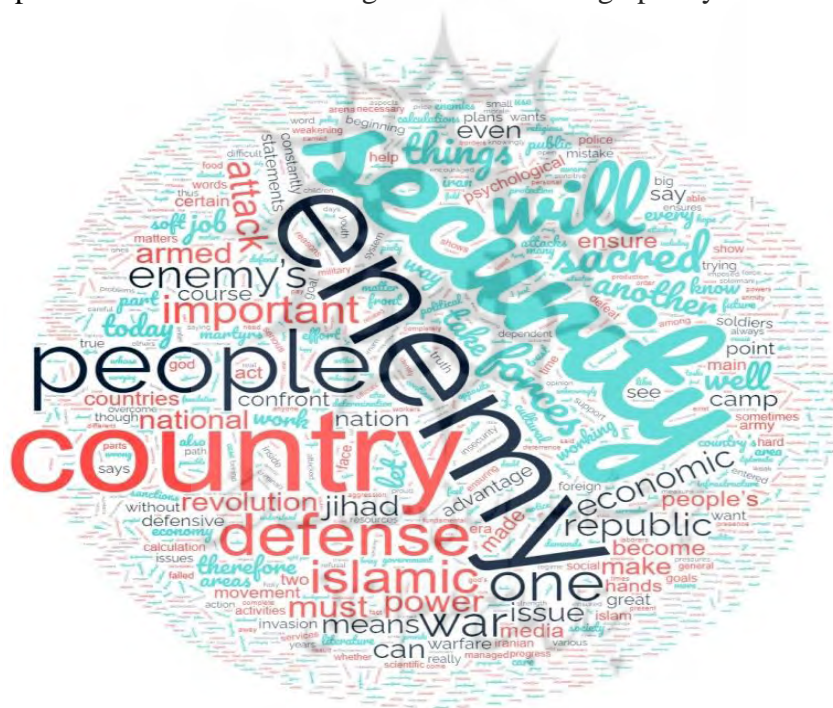
9. <https://english.khamenei.ir/>

Source: Authors

Concept	Enemy	Security	Country	People	War	Nation	Defense
Frequency	248	111	60	50	39	29	28
Concept	Attack	Islam	Sacred	Power	Republic	Jihad	Iran
Frequency	28	27	22	20	15	15	12

Frequency and Significance of the Concepts in Ayatollah Khamenei's Speeches (2019-2022)

The word cloud shows that defense, enemy, security, and deterrence are central to his speeches, reflecting the concerns and priorities of Iran's supreme leader as the main figure in Iran's foreign policy.



Source: Authors

6. Priorities of Iran's Supreme Leader (2019-2022)

Iran is confronted with both conventional and non-conventional threats in the region. Conventional threats from great powers and neighboring countries have led Iran to develop active deterrence capabilities to maintain its security. Non-conventional threats come from the spread of

terrorism and jihadist groups, which pose a direct threat to the stability of Iran. Iranian strategists see a direct relationship between conventional and unconventional threats that could jeopardize the country's security and national interests. Thus, they seek to maintain regional security through a multilateral containment strategy aimed at preventive defense. In this strategy, Iran uses its national resources and geopolitical position advantages on the one hand and strengthens regional cooperation to limit the presence and influence of the US in the region on the other (Barzegar, 2016 AD/1394 SH: 203).

In recent years, the geopolitical landscape in Iran's neighboring countries has changed, leading to a shift in the balance of power in the region. The Israeli regime's influence and cooperation with Arab countries have prompted Iran to enhance the efficiency of its defense system and increase its deterrence capabilities (Altunışık, 2020 AD; Cannon and Donelli, 2020 AD).

Additionally, tensions between Iran's neighboring countries, such as the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, Qatar's evolving relations with Arab countries, and the competitive relations between Saudi Arabia and Turkey, have created an unstable environment. Given these circumstances, it is necessary to prioritize deterrence strategies to address these challenges (Guzansky and Marshall, 2020 AD; Ketbi, 2020 AD).

Iran's defense doctrine centers around the two pillars of conventional and asymmetric deterrence, with a focus on the second-strike strategy (Asgarkhani, 2004 AD/1382 SH: 89).

This strategy based on the statement of Iran's supreme leader that 'we threaten against threats,' practically defines Iran's behavior as a reaction to that of its enemies or rivals (Statements of Ayatollah Khamenei in Imam Ali University, 29 November 2011)¹. This approach shows the defensive nature of Iran's foreign policy. The doctrine relies on the second-strike strategy, which involves responding to threats (Barzegar and Rezaei, 2016 AD/1394 SH: 16).

Regarding conventional deterrence, Iran's security strategy is focused on developing its complex power, with a particular emphasis on enhancing its missile capabilities¹. This is essential for ensuring security and controlling threats against the country. Consequently, negotiations

1 .https://www.aparat.com/v/3zKlk/%E2%9C%85%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A8%D8%B1_%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8_%D9%85%D8%A7_%D8%AF%D8%B1_%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84_%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF_%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF_%D9%85%DB%8C

1 . <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=40264>

over Iran's missile power have been declared prohibited, and improving missile technology is a critical goal of the country's defense strategy.

The country's foreign policymakers have made it a priority to maintain stable security by preventing threats and strengthening relationships with friendly states and non-state actors. This aims to expand Iran's sphere of influence in its peripheral environment (Mottaghi, 2019 AD/1397 SH: 106-135). The strategy focuses on expanding Iran's security area and linking it with the security of the region, with the goal of eliminating security threats not only to Iran but to the entire region. Iran considers security threats to itself as equivalent to security threats to the region. Therefore, this strategy has led to forming of a coalition with Shia communities, alliances with Muslim countries in the region to eliminate security threats, and a defensive approach.

As previously mentioned, the strategic policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region have been shaped by both geopolitical factors and the system's ideology. Since the Islamic revolution, Iran has faced significant pressure from the US and its allies, who have attempted to isolate the country through economic, political, and military sanctions and pressure. In response, Iran has prioritized defense strategies in the region. However, the country's defense doctrine, which is founded on Islamic values, has always emphasized non-aggressive defense strategies (Asgarkhani, 2004 AD/1382 SH: 86). The security dilemma in the Middle East and the high level of tension in the region has compelled Iran to become self-reliant in military weapons production and the advancement of local technology.

7. Efficiency and Legitimacy of the System Inside the Country

The anarchic nature of the international system and Iran's strategic loneliness in the international community have prompted the Iranian government to rely on internal resources (Mesbahi, 2011 AD: 18), strengthening the unity and cohesion of the state and the nation in resistance against external pressures from the mainstream international system. Strategic loneliness refers to the historical fact that Iran has been solitary in developing, implementing, and improving its strategies while effectively countering the strategies of its rivals and enemies. In other words, Iran's strategic loneliness refers to a situation where it lacks any significant natural allies with great power.

Iran's strategic loneliness has led to an endogenous foundation for its independence and national security. This endogenous nature implies that Iran's national security is predicated on the state's and its citizens' relationship rather than strategic alliances with great power or regional non-state actors (Mesbahi, 2011 AD: 23). In other words, the measure of

the country's national interests should be evaluated in the relationship between the state and the nation. In fact, the Islamic Republic of Iran must understand that Iranian rulers have always had only one historical ally, which is the Iranian nation. Therefore, safeguarding Iran's national security and territorial integrity depends on strengthening Iran. The condition of Iran's strengthening is strengthening the relationship between the state and the nation in Iran.

The strengthening of governments is directly linked to a country's efficiency level and, as a result, its citizens' satisfaction with the state. A government that provides its citizens with acceptable efficiency can gain a high level of legitimacy and increase its regional power. Iran's regional power depends on efficient and internally legitimate governance that can establish Iran as the center of regional order (Ashena, 2016 AD/1394 SH: 223). Iran has no strategic allies and does not depend on great powers to ensure its security, making citizens the core of national security and the only strategic ally of the government. In this context, citizens play an essential role in deterrence (Mesbahi, 2011 AD: 24). To make its deterrence threats credible and protect national interests, the government requires the support of citizens and the state's legitimacy. Therefore, unity between the people and the rulers will be crucial in ensuring the country's security against aggression.

Conclusion

The Islamic Republic of Iran's deterrence doctrine is grounded in its Islamic approach. With Islam as the main basis for essential decision-making, it holds a crucial role in shaping Iran's foreign policy. According to Shia ulama's teachings, offensive jihad is prohibited during the absence of the Infallible Imam. Consequently, most Shia jurists do not allow Shia Muslims to initiate a war, but they do deem defensive jihad as obligatory for Muslims. In accordance with Quranic verses and hadiths, Shia ulama consider it an obligation for Muslims to defend Muslims and Islamic lands. They argue that resisting an enemy's invasion of Islamic lands is necessary, and fighting under such circumstances does not require the infallible Imam's permission. Utilizing these principles and recognizing the realities of the international system, the Islamic Republic of Iran aims to establish a foreign policy framework that aligns with Islamic values and acknowledges the international system's reality. The experience of the war with Iraq and the operations of terrorist groups in Iran prompted Iran to prioritize its defense strategies to ensure sovereignty. Deterrence was proposed as a central concept in the country's defense strategy, emphasizing both conventional and non-conventional deterrence to

maintain the system's existential security. Therefore, Iran's defense strategy is based on the balance of power in the region to reduce the risk of war. By emphasizing the punishment of aggressors and presenting a credible threat, Iran establishes a balance of power in the region that prevents war. Demonstrating deterrence through denial and second-strike capability sends regional rivals and great powers a message that their goals cannot be achieved. This defense strategy, which emphasizes Islamic values and the reality of threats to Iran's peripheral borders, has resulted in a culture of resistance based on the defense of the country's territorial integrity. Maintaining Iran's security is recognized as equal to the security of the region, and this defense strategy has created a model of deterrence that achieves active deterrence against its enemies in the anarchic atmosphere of the international system. Iran emphasizes the importance of self-sufficiency in military weapons and the self-help doctrine to achieve this goal. In contrast to the claims of great powers that Iran's defense strategies are aggressive, Iran has used a defense strategy based on Islamic values and the geopolitical realities of the region to maintain its security. Content analysis of religious texts, fatwas, and speeches of the supreme leader show that Iran has a defensive approach to security. This defense strategy, designed based on the principle of "Honor, Wisdom, and Expediency," has based its foreign policy on defending the territorial integrity and reducing security threats.

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