

RETALIATION AND FOREIGN POLICY: A STUDY OF IRAN-USA RELATIONS SINCE 1953

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Abstract

Often, International decision making has been a function of three functionalities or dynamics. These dynamics propel decisions that consequentially nurture actions and in actions, choices and consequences in international arena. These dynamics broadly speaking reveal the positions (of strength or weakness) of the actors which serve as a catalyst to their dominant or weak role. These variables are but not limited to military capabilities, economic viability, and geostrategic location and other considerations that explain causes and course of action and reaction. More still, these variables paint picture of hegemony, resistance, sanctions retaliations. Using the game theory as its analytical tool, the study reveals the reciprocity nature of two actors, one a global powerhouse and the other a regional warlord or mainstay.

Keywords: Retaliation, Foreign Policy, National Interest, Actors, Reciprocity

Introduction

The world as a global system is highly networked or connected and devoid of isolation has propelled the states to indispensably interact, cooperate relate and to pursue core and valued objectives or national interests beyond their borders. No nation or state has the totality of control or resources to solve all domestic challenges within its national sovereignty. The challenges these incapability present forced nations to go beyond its borders in promotion of its national interests. Speaking national interests, Charles Okoli and Okwudiba N. observed that national interest is perhaps one of the most controversial concepts in international relations¹. This is due to the several factors which are also important, these factors are issues in misconception and interpretation, abuse by politicians or decision-makers all over the world. Broadly, the misinterpretation, abuse and lack of universally accepted single definition of the concept and the inability to clearly define it and more importantly, universally acknowledging same is the causation of the very many controversies in international studies or in foreign policy analysis.

The pursuit of national interests which are those core objectives, goals and aspirations which states aspire to achieve for its citizenry and the protection of its territorial sovereignty have proven to be the onion of most cases that incites conflict in international domain. The conflict of interests in international system through its vehicular foreign policy and diplomacy is responsible for the act of retaliation and reciprocity as the case may be. The urgency to pursue, guarantee and safeguard national heritage and interests generate international cooperation, alliances or

institutional enmeshment in global politics.² This politics across borders, more often than not, has brought out friendship in form of allies and enmity in form of rivals. Majorly the very essence of international relation is pursuit of interest. To achieve this, a highly articulated foreign policy is fashioned diplomatically.

Furthermore, it is worthy to note that national interests may be static, but foreign policy assumes constant faces as a result of bureaucratic changes and other determinants. It is a fact that a friend today in international field may turn to be a bitter rival tomorrow as a result of so many considerations. Reciprocity and retaliation as concepts in international relations point to the psychological and moral obligation of states to act in corresponding terms to policies, actions and benefits and so on coming from the external environment³. Reciprocity talks or deals with the return of a proportionate goodwill to an international partner. Reciprocity could be positive or negative. It is believed that when an ally or friend does an act, it should be proportionally returned, politically, economically, culturally or militarily as the case may be. On the other hand, retaliation is purely an offensive act of reprisal, revenge, recompense and payback to an opponent for a policy thought to be working against the national interest of the other. These two terms serve the basis or general description of USA-Iran relation before and since 1953 till date.³

The mandate of national bureaucracies is to pursue their interests using all available arsenal, to obtain widely anticipated outcome using a two-level game philosophy, which implies that such goals are essential and uncompromisable and consequential domestically and internationally. At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favorable policies and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among these groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Neither of the two games can be ignored by central decision makers, so long as their countries remain inter-dependent, yet sovereign.⁴the plain fact remains that the “intermestic” influence of foreign policy remains the core in the external involvement of major powers.

Iran – USA Relation Since 1953

The year 1953 is epochal in the history of contemporary Iran and by extension, Iran-USA relation. This date as a reference point not only to Iran-USA relation but an overview to the study in Western imperialism, domination, interference in the politics of less powerful nations and also a view point in global terrorism, hostage taking and extremity in pursuit of national interests in international relations⁵. Iran-USA relation dates far back before 1953 but the relation then was more or less informal and less monumental. With USA departure from its isolationist doctrine (arising from Monroe doctrine of Isolationism, America for Americans) in 1800 as a result of economic and population measures and the industrial revolution in the 18th century, the need to obtain outlets for surplus products and in search of raw materials forced such departure⁶. Early relations between Iran and the USA dated or began in the mid to late 1800s, but had small significance or controversy until the post-world War II era, Cold War and of petroleum export from the Persian Gulf.

Since then, the sweet rapport between Shah Mohammed Riza Pahlavi's regime and the American government was followed by a dramatic reversal and hostility between Iran and USA after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The reasons for this change of romance between the two countries are not farfetched. Iranian's view on this has it that everything from the natural and unavoidable conflict between Islamic Revolution (Law) with secularism on the one hand, and U.S arrogance and desire for global hegemony on the other, to the regime's (Shah's) need for an external bogeyman to furnish a pretext for domestic repression against pro-democratic forces and to bind the regime to its small but royal and heavily armed constituency⁷.

Political relations between Persia and the USA began when the Shah of Persian, Nasseredin Shah Qajar, officially dispatched Persia's first ambassador, Mirza Abolhassan Shiraz to Washington DC in 1856⁸. In 1883, Samuel Benjamin was appointed by the U.S.A as the first diplomatic envoy to Iran; however there was no ambassadorial relation till 1944. The first Persian Ambassador to the USA was Mirza Abolhassan Khan II Chi Kabir. Even before political relations, since the early to mid-1880's Americans had been traveling to Iran. By end of the 19th century, negotiations were underway for an American company to establish a railway system from the Persian Gulf to Iran to further enhance cooperation.

The World War II presented an ample opportunity for a closer relation with the USA; this was so because the Iranian constitutional revolutionists came to view the USA as a "third force" and a "partner" in their struggle to break free from the humiliating British and Russian exploitation and dominance in Persian affairs. This desire by the Iranians to disassociate with Britain and Russia and its desire to modernize its economy was an opportunity the USA was desiring and anxiously waiting for. The opportunity was well taken by and with full support by the American industrial and business class or leaders.⁹

Given the "battle" for friendship and interest between Britain, Russia and the USA in Iran, the USA embassy relayed to the Iranian desk at the foreign office in London confirming the popular view that the British were heavily involved in the coup that brought Riza Shah to Power. At this point, the USA were not an ally of Britain as far as Persia was concerned at that point in time. This sweet romance came to a halt on the onset of 1950s. Riza Khan Pahlavi and his reign was epitomic as a modernizer just like Mustapha Karmal of Turkey. In 1921, he marched on Tehran (Iranian capital), being very powerful and ambitious, he was appointed minister of war in 1923, and in 1925 he became the prime minister and pressured the constitutional assembly dynasty to dethrone the reigning dynasty and Riza became the king or new shah of Iran.

Shah Pahlavi Khan maintained close ties with America during most of his reign which lasted till 1941 when he was forced to abdicate for pursuing western, modern economic policy, and a strong pro-western foreign policy. With the abdication of Riza Khah Pahlavi II, British and the Soviet Union jointly invaded Iran in September 1941 to establish a supply routes to Soviet army. The invading forces quickly overpowered the Iranian army and forced Riza Shah out of power, and replaced him by his twenty one (21) year old son, Mohammed Riza Pahlavi.¹⁰

When the USA entered the war, its troops were also sent to Iran to provide a balance of power with the British, and Russia in 1942, the USA mission to Iranian gendarmerie (Genmish) and the USA mission to the Iranian Army (ARMISH) were established.¹¹

Clearly put, Iranian-USA relation prior to 1955 was more or less informal and as such at low web. But given Iran's long border with America's cold war rival the USSR (Soviet Union), and its position as the largest, most powerful country in the oil rich Persian Gulf, made Iran a "Pillar" of American foreign policy in the Middle East. Between 1947 and 1948, the USA embassy staff grew considerably, enhancing diplomatic, commercial and cultural interactions between the two countries. With this, the office of strategic service (predecessor to CIA) established a station in Tehran using US military attachés and embassy political officers as cover. Their covert tasks include intelligence gathering and propaganda operations aimed at the USSR and its allies in Iran, cross border espionage and subversion raids into Soviet territory and efforts to map out escape and evasion routes and organize "stay-bind" guerrilla networks in the event of a soviet invasion.

This tension and antagonism continued till late 1940's which brought unrest among the politically active Iranians. In 1949, a group of prominent political figures established the National Front (NF) to press for political reforms and to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (A.I.O.C) assets. The N.F. was extremely popular that they succeeded in electing eight (8) of its members to the Majlis (Iranian parliament) in late 1949. The NF was led by Mohammed Mossadeq a charismatic Majlis deputy from a wealthy land-owning family who was an ardent nationalist and democrat. By all standard and conduct, it was clear that Mossadeq was eyeing the number one seat in Iran. It was also believed that Mossadeq ascended to the throne with the help of the US after the assassination of Razmary.

The reason for the USA support for Mossadeq was to gain access to the oil by causing disaffection between the hitherto monopolistic-Britain. Initially, USA supported the nationalization a program in order to reduce or hand off British excessive and imperialistic control and domination of Iranian oil and to plant a foot hole in Iranian affairs. The USA-Iran relation under Mohammed Mossadeq was good and mutual because of the modernistic policies in the area of agriculture, expansion of education, emancipation of women, secularization of the law and creation of a varieties of new governmental and social welfare institutions. These initiatives were heavily applauded and supported by the USA. At the core, however these policy measures represented relatively, a 'flash on the pan'. The Shah's highly personalized vision for his country, formulated and implemented with little reference to the view of the Iranian people. Key elements of Iranian society, significantly including the Islamic clergy and large segments of the tradition-bound population, rejected both the Shah's objectives and the manner in which he sought to achieve them. The displeasure of the Iranian clergy and traditional bound population with the Shah's regime was on the ground that those policies or program fully suited the USA's own policy objectives in the Persian Gulf. USA foreign policy makers reason that a modern and prosperous Iran could contribute more effectively to those objectives. In the process, it became close, clear and synonymous to associate Shah himself and the "white Revolution" with USA interests in Iran and the Persian Gulf,

“Historic as Mossadeq’s rise to power was for Iranians, it was least as stunning for the British. They were used to manipulating Iranian prime minister like chess pieces, and now suddenly, the faced one who seemed to hate them”¹²

The CIA Coup of 1953 with the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil company, and other policies, the USA began to develop cold feeding, with the democratically elected Mossadeq Mohammed, and the intensification of the cold war, the USA strategize led plans to destabilize, Mossadeq to avoid losing out completely out of Iran and if possible to save the deteriorating relation which might lead a communist union with soviet union. In the spring and summer of 1953, the USA and British through a covert operation of the Central Intelligent Agency (CIA) called operation Ajax, conducted from the USA embassy in Tehran helped organize a coup d’état to overthrow the Mossadeq government the coup of 1953 saw the over throw of Mohammed Mossadeq through the instrumentality of the USA GA. stationed in Tehran. Mossadeq was removed from power in coup on 19th August 1953, at the request of Britain which choose Iranian General Faziollah Zahedi to succeed Mossadeq.

Mossadeq was imprisoned for three years, the put under house arrest until his death. This coup represents a classical case of interference by foreign power on local polities and this remains an anchor by Iranian population for retaliation and tough resistance. With the dethronement of Mohammed Mossadeq and the re-establishment of royal rule, no doubt there was a good report between the Iranian shah government and the USA. The coup brought in Riza Khan, the son of Shah Reza Pahlavi, as the new Shah. By this, America demonstrated its resolve to remain relevant in the polity and politics of Iran. Within three (3) weeks of the coup, US gave Iran \$68 million in emergency aid and later added additional \$ 1.2 million over the next decade. Shah Riza Khan’s regime were brutal, harsh and retaliatory to the enemies of his late father Riza Pahlavi. He revoked lands through his land reform from the enemies of his father in 1962.¹³

This period was the highest era of USA –Iranian sweet jolly affairs. This was so visible as best Iranian universities-Pahlavi University, Sharif University of Technology and Isfahan University of technology were all directly modeled on American institution and curriculum such as University of Chicago, M.I.T and the University of Pennsylvania. This good gesture was return by Shah magnanimously in financial terms. In short, a million dollar donation was given to the George Washington University to create an Iranian studies program (I.S.P), also during this period, so many Americans migrated to Iran for scholastic and business purposes. In America, the 1953 coup was celebrated and considered a triumph of covert action but after 1979, it is now considered by many to have left “a haunting and terrible legacy”. This was reached in the year 2000 by the USA secretary of state, Madeline Albright as “a setback for democratic government in Iran”.¹⁴

Ayatollah Ruhutollah Khomeini

Before the revolution proper, it is imperative to introduce the architect of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini. Ayatolloh Rhutolloh Khomeini was born on 4th September, 1900, and rose to become the supreme Islamic leader. In 1963, June 5, he founded the Islamic Movement of Iran (also known as movement of 15 Khoradad, Persia).

On June 3, 1963 Khomeini made a historical speech against the dependence of the Shah's regime on foreign powers and its support of Israel. He was immediately arrested and later exiled to France. His arrest and imprisonment inspired major public demonstration of support. These demonstrations were crushed by government troops in tanks³. This uprising marked a turning point in the fortunes of the Pahlavi dynasty which finally resulted in Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979.

The background to the revolution could be traced to the January 1963 pronouncement by Shah, declaring the "White Revolution", a six point programme of reform, nationalization of the forests, the sale of state-owned enterprises to private interests, electoral changes to enfranchise women, profit sharing in industry, and an anti-illiteracy campaign in the nation's schools. All of these initiatives were regarded as dangerous Westernizing trends by traditionalists, especially by the powerful and privileged Shite Ulama (religious scholars) who felt highly neglected and threatened⁴.

Ayatollah Khomeini summoned a meeting of his colleagues (other Ayatollahs) in Qom and persuaded the other senior Marjas of Qom to decree to boycott the Referendum on the White Revolution. On January 1963, Khomeini issued strong worded declarations denouncing the Shah and his plans. Two days later, Shah took armored column to Qom, and delivered a speech harshly attacking the Ulama as a class. Khomeini continued with his strong apathy against the Shah's programmes, issuing a manifesto that also bore the signatures of eight other senior religious scholars. Khomeini in his manifestos listed various ways the Shah had violated the constitution, condemned the spread of moral corruption in the country and accused the Shah of submission to America and Israel. He also decreed that the Norooz celebrations for the Iranian year 1342 (which fell on March 1963) be cancelled as a protest against the government policies.

The immediate effect of the Imam's speech was however, his arrest two days later at 3 o'clock in the morning by a group of commandos who hastily transferred him to the Qasr prison in Tehran. As the news broke out in June 5, about the arrest of Khomeini in Qom and then other part of the country, In Qom, Tehran, Shiraz, Mashhad and Varamin, masses of angry Iranians demonstrated and revolted. This demonstration was curtailed by tanks and paratroopers. Order and tranquility were only restored after six days.

After nineteen days in Qasr prison Ayatollah Khomeini was moved first to the Estratabad military base and then to a house in the "Davoudiyah" section of Tehran where he was kept under surveillance. Also to curtail him and his crusade, he was exiled to Iraq. He was later released on April of 1964 and he returned to Qom. From this period to 1979 which eventually became the year of the revolution, Iran and United States experienced moments of instability and unpredictability in their relations. The event of 1963, ten years after the C.I.A coup of 1953, showed that something revolutionary was about to take place and as such a change of face in Iran-US. Relation.

Iran Retaliation of 1953 Coup

Reacting to the statement of the USA secretary of state, Madeline Albright, the Iranian Islamic supreme leader, Ayatollah Khomeini described and condemned the admission as "deceitful" which does not even included an apology. The resentment of the Shah

administration for its pure American posture by popular and Islamic population, and the coup of 1953, was a perfect case of retaliation and revenge the polity and polities in Iran became very unstable and unpredictable that a revolution was undeniable and welcoming. Since the 1953 coup which was masterminded by the imperialist America and the imposition of the puppet Shah, the Regime and America in Iran continued to grow unpopular and increasingly illegitimate among Iranians especially among Islamic fanatic followers.

This resentment grew in various forms, through civil and religious rebellion, followed by harsh response from the government. In 1979, the perfect term for retaliation was the famous revolution in Iran in 1979. The Iranian revolution also known as Islamic revolution of 1979 was due to several factors. The immediate factor was the opposition for the Shah's white revolution which was seen as a program meant to protect the interests of the United States. Secondly, the USA organized CIA Coup of 1953 which to Iranians humiliating, embarrassing and pure interference in their local politics. The later was one so painful to the Iranian and as such must be retaliated.

The revolution which took place on January 16, 1979 after Islamic supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini has gathered a huge followership and sponsors brought heavy bloodshed and forced the Shah to flee from Iran¹⁵. The Iranian work force shot down most of Iran's industries, including state owned oil company. On April, after a landslide victory in a referendum in which only one voice or choice was offered (Islamic Republic: yes or no), Ayatollah Khomeini declared an Islamic republic with a new constitution reflecting his ideals of Islamic government, with him becoming the supreme spiritual leader of Iran.

As expected, the revolution in Iran presented special problem to the United States. First, Iran houses several key American radar installations used to monitor military activities and development within the Soviet Union, which borders Iran, with the revolution, the radars were closed and shutdown. Secondly, the shutting down of Iranian oil company. The cut in supply presented energy shortage in USA as well.

Hostage Taking In Iran

In the months between February 14 and November 4, 1979, the USA government was attempting to adjust to the new reality in Iran created by the fall of ally Shah and to develop a new relationship with his successor that will guard and guarantee continued pursuit of basic USA interests in the Persia Gulf region. Good relation with Shah (pre revolution) regime had been a toast of USA policy in Iran¹⁶

In 1974, November 4th, USA granted asylum to Shah to attend medical treatment for his cancer in the United States and this was seen in Iran by many as a blow and lack of respect by the United States to Iran. This prompted the revolutionist mostly university students to storm USA embassy in Tehran and took 52 USA diplomats hostage for 444 days. The hostage taking event has two broad interpretations. One, to Iranians, the hostage taking was in connection or retaliation to USA over 1953 CIA coup to Iran.

“You have no right to complain because you took our whole country hostage in 1953¹⁷,” In the words of one of the hostage takers. To the United States, the hostage taking was widely seen as an outrage and outright violation of a centuries-old principle of international law granting immunity from arrest and diplomatic compounds sovereignty in the territory of their host county.

In summary therefore, despite the series of effort made to get the diplomats (54 Americans) released immediately which proved abortive and other peaceful initiative instituted by other regional governments to bring to end the impasse between Iran and USA contributed little to the volatile relation till today. Iran-USA relations can be best described as a relation of sanctions, attacks, reprisals and retaliations. Recently, the assassination of Qasan Soleimani, an Iranian Major General, which took place on 3 January 2020 by the United State with a launched drone strike at Baghdad International Airport which targeted and killed Qasan Soleimani. Qasan Soleimani was a commander of the Quads force, one of five branches of Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard (IRGC), and was considered the second most powerful person in Iran after Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.¹⁸

The strike occurred during the 2019-2021 Persian Gulf crisis which began after the US withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran in 2018, reimposed sanctions and accused Iranian elements of fomenting a campaign to harass US forces in the region in 2019. This attack was retaliated by Iran days later by attacking the US embassy in the Greece zone.¹⁹

Conclusion

Iran-USA relation no doubt is controversial, consequential and epitomic in every sense first, it represents one of the classical case of western imperialism, domination, inference into the polities of domestic government especially in Iran. More so, in their relation one can clearly see the role of national interaction *vis-à-vis* the foreign policy posture of hegemony, resistance and flexing of muscle which represent one major controversy in global politics. The hegemonic politics of the major power in the domestic affairs of less powerful nation remains on issue in global discourse.

Retaliation as a foreign policy drive of the USA and Iran represents dilemma in world politics and as such brings about constant threat, arms race and armament and consequentially sanctions and alliances which if not properly checked might explode to war in the long and short run. Today, compromise, mutuality and friendship is preached with little sincerity. The adoption and application of Zero sum game theory should be encouraged for peace to prevail instead of sanctions and counter sanctions.

Recommendations

Most of the conflicts of the present world today are as a result of conflict of interest and foreign policy posters. Iran and the USA no doubt because of individual peculiar consideration have pursued extreme foreign policy among themselves which has not benefited each other maximally rather military conflict, war and polarization. In-view of the above, the following recommendations are made

- ❖ Peace, harmony and compromise remains the juicy aspect of international relation and as such should be rigorously pursued.

- ❖ Extreme pursuit of national interests or foreign policy should be renewed and moderated, since this is obviously one of the major causes of global conflict and war.
- ❖ Iranian opposition to westernization and secularism should be dissuaded and re-oriented. Liberty and freedom remain an ingredient of life and as such should be emphasized.
- ❖ Iran should suspend all the nuclear program and arms race to enhance regional co-operation, peace, equity and friendliness instead of threat and warfare.
- ❖ In view of the later, USA should minimize its sanctions on Iran as this is affecting ordinary Iranian populations.
- ❖ The Middle East region in distant and recent past has been a region of war, terrorism and rivalry, to this end, the US former president George W. Bush described it as 'axis of evil'. This connotation is not admirable as such, peace and development must be pursued at all cost by all in the region.
- ❖ There can be a revitalization of the 1953 sweet report between the two nations without domination and exploitation.

Finally, religious extremity should be outlawed, discouraged and fashioned out globally.

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