

Repeat Success? : The Likelihood of Altering Iranian Foreign Policy via a Combined Approach of Sanctions and Diplomacy as Utilized in the Case of Muammar Qaddafi's Libya

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Abstract

The so called Libya precedent has received much acclaim due to its successfully demonstrating the efficacy of a combined United States policy approach utilizing economic sanctions and diplomatic engagement to alter a state's provocative foreign policy in terms of support for terrorism and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. Given the success of the Libya precedent, it remains a reasonable question to assess whether or not such combined policy will likely prove successful in altering the similar provocative foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which today unquestionably remains the world's most prolific state sponsor of terrorism. Although the Obama Administration has successfully enacted the most robust set of multilateral sanctions against Iran to date and has consistently pledged to seek diplomatic engagement with Tehran this paper questions the likelihood of such policy's success due to the persistence of hard line elements that have dominated the Iranian polity following the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The paper examines the history of United States efforts to sanction and engage Iran and shows that at every turn, Iranian hardliners have refused to countenance engagement or allow the affects of sanctions to alter foreign policy due to strict ideological bents, therein demonstrating that the idea of Iranian foreign policy undergoing a substantial positive change in the near future is largely wishful thinking.

Key Words: Libya Precedent, Iran, United States, Diplomatic Engagement, Sanctions, State support for Terrorism

On May 15, 2006 Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced the rather remarkable news that Libya, at one time considered to be the world's most avid state supporter of terrorism, was to be removed from the State Department's list of states that sponsor and enable terrorist organizations. Not only was Libya to be removed from State Department's list of states that sponsor terrorism, but Secretary Rice also furthered that the United States would resume normal diplomatic relations with the regime of long standing dictator Muammar Qaddafi; relations were to be normalized Rice stated, in response to Qaddafi's 2003 decision to renounce terrorism and to cooperate with US efforts in the War on Terror following the attacks of September 11th. Libya's renunciation of sponsoring terrorism may rightfully be considered a tremendous foreign policy achievement on the part of the United States and other Western nations as it remains inarguable that throughout the 1980s, the regime of Muammar Qaddafi was

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labeled the world's most prolific sponsor of international terrorism. Indeed, Claudia Wright, in an assessment of the then emerging Libyan threat, makes note of a CIA report citing the Qaddafi regime as, "the most prominent state sponsor of and participant in international terrorism" (Wright, 1981, p. 17). Given the undeniable threat to global security that the Libyan regime once posed, much attention has been rendered to the various methods utilized by the international community of states in the effort of halting Libya's continued support for terrorism. Generally, it remains uncontested that multilateral sanctions and persistent diplomatic efforts, as opposed to unilateral military action, proved most effective in altering Libyan foreign policy. Whereas Ronald St. John observes that the 1986 US Operation Eldorado Canyon military campaign that targeted Libya in response to Tripoli's involvement in the bombing of a German nightclub frequented by American soldiers only strengthened Qaddafi's resolve to remain "adamantly opposed to the international status quo and determined to employ all of Libya's resources to overthrow it" (St. John, 2002, p. 139) via the support of terrorism, Jonathan Schwartz notes that multilateral sanctions imposed on Libya by the United States, Great Britain, and France under the auspices of the United Nations brought unprecedented international scrutiny to bear upon the Qaddafi regime to the effect that as the spotlight continued to intensify, "reports of Libya's involvement in terrorism dropped off considerably" (Schwartz, 2007, p. 557). Importantly, as such international pressure brought Qaddafi to the bargaining table, US diplomacy provided the Libyan dictator with a viable means of re-entering into the international arena, without which Daniel Byman contends that Qaddafi "would never have made concessions" (Byman, 2005, p. 302). While certainly a long and at times arduous process, a combined approach of international sanctions and astute diplomacy produced the desired outcome of Libya's discontinued support of terrorism as well as the added bonus of Tripoli's decision to abandon its fledgling weapons of mass destruction program; together these stark changes in Libyan foreign policy precipitated Secretary Rice's 2006 statement. Although much has been written regarding the success of the Libya precedent, surprisingly little has been written as to whether or not such success might be repeated in the cases of other prominent state sponsors of terrorism; most relevant to the current international climate, the Islamic Republic of Iran warrants considerable examination and analysis.

Unquestionably, the Islamic Republic of Iran remains the most prolific state sponsor of terrorism in the world today. Indeed, Matthew Levitt and Michael Jacobson note that "Tehran has a nine-figure line item in its budget to support terrorism, sending hundreds of millions of dollars to various groups each year" (Levitt & Jacobson, 2008, p. 1) including the Lebanese Hezbollah as well as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and HAMAS. Beyond mere financial support, Levitt and Jacobson further that "Iran's al-Qods Force, a wing of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, has a long history of providing all types of support to Hezbollah, including training, guidance, and arms" (Levitt & Jacobson, 2008, p. 1). Most recently, the US State Department's annual Countries that Support Terrorism report cites that "in 2011 Iran only increased its terrorist activity" (Countries Report, 2011, p. 1) as the report calls particular attention to Tehran's plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States on US soil. Given Iran's continual support for terrorism, it is no surprise that sanctions have often been used towards the aim of coercing Tehran to reverse its therefore destabilizing

foreign policy. Despite such efforts however, Iranian support for terrorism as well as Tehran's pursuit of nuclear technology, ostensibly for the purposes of developing WMD, remains unabated. Indeed, Ray Takeyh and Suzanne Maloney note that "even as the Obama administration has imposed the broadest and most robust multilateral restrictions on Iran in history, all of Tehran's most disturbing policies including its aggressive nuclear program and support for international terrorism proceed apace" (Takeyh & Maloney, 2011, p. 1298). Regardless of continued Iranian defiance in the face of such aggressive sanctions, it is noteworthy that attainment of the Libya precedent took decades to accomplish and therefore it is logical to assess the possibility that given enough time as well as economic and political pressure, Tehran, like Tripoli before it, will likewise reconsider its foreign policy and attempt to reengage with the United States. Whereas it is understandable to hope for such an outcome, the persistent dominance of ideologically driven hardliners within the Iranian polity has thus far undermined the efforts of both Iranian moderates and United States policymakers to seek a meaningful rapprochement, therefore casting much doubt as to the likelihood of sanctions and diplomacy effecting a positive change in Iranian foreign policy. Consequently, analysis of the United States' past efforts to sanction and engage Iran, the rise and persistent dominance of Iranian hardliners, as well as the role that ideology plays in Iran's foreign policy reveals the extent to which a reversal in Iranian support for terrorism and pursuit of nuclear technology is either likely, or rather in fact mere wishful thinking.

A Hostage to Hostages: US Policy towards Iran throughout the 1980s

Inarguably, the origins of the United States' efforts to both economically and diplomatically halt Iran's support for terrorism lie within the context of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The seizure of the United States Embassy in Tehran and the taking of American embassy workers as hostages for 444 days by Iranian students acting under the blessing of the Ayatollah Khomeini prompted the administration of Jimmy Carter to institute a combined policy of sanctions and negotiations in order to secure the hostages' release. The Carter Administration's approach indeed relied heavily on economic and diplomatic pressure as Takeyh and Maloney note that resulting sanctions consisted of "a prohibition of Iranian oil imports to the United States, a freeze of all Iranian state assets held by US institutions, and eventually a travel ban and a comprehensive embargo on nearly all forms of trade with Iran" (Takeyh & Maloney, 2011, p. 1299) all of which were designed to drive Tehran to the bargaining table. To this aim, sanctions appear to have generated at least modest results, as then Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher's memoir of the Iranian Hostage Crisis confirms that "the return of all Iranian assets that had been frozen by US sanctions" (Christopher, 2001, p. 109) proved a key demand to be met if Tehran was in fact to acquiesce to the hostage's release. Upon consideration of the effectiveness of the Carter Administration's coercive tactics vis-à-vis revolutionary Iran, Takeyh and Maloney therefore contend that "the hostage crisis may offer the single striking example of the efficacy of sanctions in producing a demonstrable concession from Tehran" (Takeyh & Maloney, 2011, p. 1299). Even such a marginally optimistic analysis however remains not without much debate, as Christian Emery asserts that most of the relevant literature concerning the Iranian Hostage Crisis "judges that the sanctions were not decisive in forcing the Iranians to the negotiating table, even if they provided

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Washington with significant leverage once they eventually got there” (Emery, 2010, p. 372). Indeed, Iranian scholar Amir Taheri notes that “when the Ayatollah Khomeini ordered the release of the American hostages in 1980, he said he had done so as a gesture of Islamic generosity towards their families, not because of months of talks with Washington” (Taheri, 2008, p. 212) generated by any significant economic impetus to remove US sanctions. Khomeini’s deliberateness to couch the release of the hostages in ideological terms only underscores the notion that sanctions played at best a nominal role in Tehran’s decision to free its long held American captives. The Iranian Hostage Crisis may have finally come to an end, but Tehran had established a clear precedent for refusing to allow either economic pressure or diplomatic negotiations to factor significantly into its foreign policy decisions.

Whereas the Iranian Hostage Crisis caused Washington to institute a dual policy of economic and diplomatic pressure in its efforts to curb Iran’s confrontational foreign policy, the taking of more American hostages throughout the 1980s in the Middle East by the Iranian proxy Hezbollah cemented such practice by Washington as the status quo in terms of attempting to coerce Tehran. Although Hezbollah at times acted independently of Tehran, there is little doubt that Iran exerted a significant degree of influence over Hezbollah’s actions, namely its taking of American hostages in Lebanon. Augustus Richard Norton, in his analysis of Hezbollah’s relationship with Iran, notes that “unquestionably, Iran exploited the hostages to serve its interests” (Norton, 2007, p. 74) as confirmed, Norton observes, by then Iranian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Hosein Sheikholeslam’s hope that “the hostage situation would be resolved in a way that serves the objectives for which they were kidnapped” (Norton, 2007, p. 74). Given Tehran’s relationship with Hezbollah, the administration of Ronald Reagan sought to punish Iran by freezing arms sales to Tehran, arms that Tehran desperately needed to further its ongoing campaign against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, and by adding Iran to the State Department’s list of states that sponsor terrorism, thereby levying additional sanctions against the Iranian state. Although the Reagan Administration initially maintained a staunch position of economically and diplomatically isolating Iran, it greatly undermined its own policy by engaging in the now infamous Iran-Contra Affair, which involved the covert sale of arms to Iran in exchange for Hezbollah’s release of American hostages in Lebanon. In terms of the sanction’s effect upon Tehran throughout the Reagan era, Takeyh and Maloney note that “whatever sense of urgency may have been conveyed to Tehran was surely undercut by the nearly simultaneous covert sales of US arms to the revolutionary regime that took place as part of the Iran-Contra episode” (Takeyh & Maloney, 2011, p. 1300). Additionally, John Ehrman and Michael Flamm note that the first shipment of arms only “led to fresh demands from the Iranians, not the immediate release of any hostages” (Ehrman & Flamm, 2009, p. 147) thus encouraging the taking of even more hostages as a means to further leverage Washington to Tehran’s benefit. Consequently, Thomas Friedman, in summation of Tehran’s manipulation of the Reagan Administration concludes that Iran viewed the kidnapping of Americans as simply “diplomacy by other means, a cheap and effective way to gain bargaining chips to trade for future financial and political concessions” (Friedman, 1988, p. 506). Clearly, as long as the Reagan Administration was willing to exchange arms for hostages, Iran could only feel more emboldened to withstand whatever sanctions Washington concomitantly

imposed as the concessions that Tehran received far outweighed the detrimental effects of any penalties accrued via sanctions. Moving forward, Iran's resolve in the face of international sanctions and diplomatic pressure would therefore only strengthen, even as the death of the Ayatollah Khomeini facilitated the rise of a more pragmatic regime in Tehran.

The Princes of Persia: The Dominance of Iranian Hardliners and Iran's Continued Defiance in the Face of United States Pressure

Although the death of the Ayatollah Khomeini in June of 1989 facilitated the rise of a more pragmatic and economically minded regime in Tehran, Iran's revolutionary leader made certain to take necessary measures to ensure that his policies of defiance would continue following his departure. However, ensuring that relations with the United States would not be normalized following his death proved to be a significant, though not insurmountable challenge for Iran's Supreme Leader as the months leading up to Khomeini's departure saw the end of the eight year long Iran-Iraq War which, notes Askari et al., had "resulted in heavy damage to Iran's oil fields, pipelines, refineries, and related oil facilities" (Askari et al., 2003) leading to an estimated cost of 150 billion dollars that could not be as easily replenished due to the imposition of current US sanctions. As the enormous financial and psychological costs of the Iran-Iraq War began to motivate even conservative newspapers in Iran to publish editorials stating that, as related by Kenneth Pollack, "We have nothing to lose by establishing proper relations with the superpowers of the West based on justified rights of the Islamic Republic" (Pollack, 2004, p. 239), as well as eliciting statements from Iranian leaders suggesting that a rapprochement with the United States would be possible if the US were to change its policies towards Tehran and not intervene in Iranian affairs, Khomeini undoubtedly felt the need to reassert the position that normalized relations with Washington would be anathema to the basic tenets of the Iranian Revolution. Conveniently, the Indian born Muslim author Salman Rushdie published his now infamous book *The Satanic Verses* which generated great controversy within the international Muslim community due to an interpretation of Rushdie's depiction of the prophet Muhammad as being blasphemous in nature. In addition to issuing an Islamic fatwa calling for Rushdie's death, an act that prompted members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps to assassinate the book's Japanese translator, Khomeini was able to reassert Iran's defiant foreign policy, contends Pollack, by continuing to rail that *The Satanic Verses* "was proof that the West was implacably hostile to Islam" (Pollack, 2004, p. 240) and that therefore "it was not necessary for Iran to pursue the establishment of extensive ties with the West" (Pollack, 2004, p. 240) regardless of whatever toll US sanctions or the devastation of the Iran-Iraq War exacted upon Iran's economy. Having found the vehicle to overcome any calls for liberalization within Iranian foreign policy, Khomeini, notes Pollack, dismissed "several senior members of the Foreign Ministry who had been most supportive of a new dialogue with the West and the United States" (Pollack, 2004, p. 241), announced that the more pragmatically minded Ayatollah Montazeri would no longer be his successor, and amended the Iranian Constitution to the effect that the powers of the office of Supreme Leader would be greatly expanded. Combined, these factors ensured that Khomeini's

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successor would likewise be able to withstand any calls for a rapprochement with the United States borne out of economic concerns.

Whereas the more pragmatic reformist Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani ascended to the presidency of Iran in the aftermath of the Ayatollah Khomeini's death, the appointment of Ali Khamenei to the position of Supreme Leader by Iran's Assembly of Experts guaranteed that Khomeini's legacy of defiance towards the United States would continue. Although Rafsanjani, as described by Meghan O' Sullivan in her exhaustive analysis of the effectiveness of US sanctions imposed on varying nations, "embarked on a quest to remodernize and rehabilitate Iran after years of war and revolution" (O' Sullivan, 2003, p. 52) by seeking to normalize relations with the US and thereby alleviate the economic stress of American sanctions, any overtures to Washington by Rafsanjani were overshadowed by Khamenei, who in attempting to shore up political legitimacy amongst Iran's hard line elements, began to increasingly ratchet up the anti-American rhetoric. Even as President George H. W. Bush, furthers O' Sullivan, being encouraged by Rafsanjani's attempts to reach out to Washington, "probed prospects of improving relations with Tehran, beginning with the president's intimation that "goodwill begets goodwill" in his inaugural speech" (O' Sullivan, 2003, p. 52), Pollack is keen to point out that "in response to the Bush Administration's overtures, Khamenei led a chorus denouncing the possibility of better relations" (Pollack, 2004, p. 252). Indeed, Pollack notes that a March 1990 speech by Khamenei "blamed all "arrogant powers" with "the satanic and demonic American power" at their head, "for leading humanity toward decadence and mocking and ridiculing all spiritual values" (Pollack, 2004, p. 252). Given the forcefulness with which Khamenei was determined to uphold the Ayatollah Khomeini's legacy of defiance towards the US, Pollack aptly concludes that Iran's hardliners were "able to snuff out Rafsanjani's overtures to the United States almost immediately" (Pollack, 2004, p. 252). Moreover, Khamenei and Iran's hardliners were not about to allow any semblance of a rapprochement with the United States to occur as doing so would undermine the political benefits derived from Iran's support for terrorism. Pollack notes that as the 1980s and early 1990s saw the rise of numerous militant Islamist groups including the Shiite Hezbollah as well as various Sunni Palestinian groups such as HAMAS and Gama'a Islami, who looked to Iran's revolution as a model to emulate in terms of the violent overthrow and defeat of targeted regimes, that therefore Iran had significant incentive "to pursue a radical foreign policy to tap into this tremendous political force that shared many of Iran's goals, particularly the destruction of Israel and the eviction of the United States from the region" (Pollack, 2004, p. 254). Most significantly, support of Hezbollah proved a vital aspect of Iran's maintaining a foothold in Lebanon and thus a sure means of being able to exert greater influence throughout the Middle East. To seek rapprochement with the United States would surely diminish the perception amongst Hezbollah and other groups that Iran's revolutionary model was in fact a standard for Islamist domination. Thus, Pollack is apt to conclude that "for a nation that aspired to play a major role in the Middle East, Iran could not afford to lose its one political foothold" (Pollack, 2004, p. 254-255) in Lebanon. Although President Rafsanjani may have indeed been willing to seek better relations with the United States, the opposition of Supreme Leader Khamenei and the political prestige that Iran enjoyed from supporting groups such as Hezbollah guaranteed that this would not be possible.

The oppositional presence of revolutionary Iran's second Supreme Leader indeed continued to be felt well into the presidency of Rafsanjani's successor, the even more pragmatically minded Mohammad Khatami.

By the time of Mohammad Khatami's election to the office of Iran's presidency in 1997, the Iranian economy had begun to suffer even more extensively from a combination of factors including mismanagement, high unemployment, high inflation, and decreased trade revenues, problems that were only exacerbated by the reality of US sanctions. Indeed, O Sullivan notes that even the mere perception of additional sanctions being imposed on Tehran in April of 1995 "seriously undermined Iran's currency, the rial, causing its free market value to plummet dramatically from around 900 rials to the dollar to 7,000 rials to the dollar by the end of the month" (O' Sullivan, 2004, p. 84). Furthermore, Pollack adds that "US sanctions helped drive up trade costs" (Pollack, 2004, p. 304) to debilitating levels thereby increasing the burden being experienced by Iran's citizenry. Although it is debated as to whether or not Mohammad Khatami campaigned on a clear platform of promised economic reform, the perception amongst Iran's citizenry was very much that Khatami would do everything possible to ameliorate Iran's deepening economic woes. Pollack is keen to note the comments of two Iranian citizens that he argues seemingly encapsulated the mindset of much of Iran's younger generation at the time in that "Khatami will create jobs for the young" (Pollack, 2004, p. 307) and that "the poor and disheartened all vote for Khatami; it is the rich who want Nategh-Nuri" (Pollack, 2004, p. 307), Khatami's conservative and hard line opponent. Upon being elected into office by an overwhelming and surprising majority vote, Khatami did indeed set about the task of implementing pragmatic reforms, including demonstrating a willingness to establish normal relations with the United States in exchange for a lifting of sanctions. Although O' Sullivan contends that this prompted Khatami, in an unprecedented interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour, "to call for a "dialogue of civilizations" between the United States and Iran" (O' Sullivan, 2004, p. 57), she is keen to further that due to Supreme Leader Khomeini's continued intransigence during the Rafsanjani era, "the United States did not warm quickly to the new face of Iran" (O' Sullivan, 2004, p. 57) during the presidency of Bill Clinton. Interestingly, additional comments made by Khatami in the CNN interview proved however to be the selling point by which the Clinton Administration became convinced that Khatami might be able to make good on an effort to seek rapprochement with the United States. Pollack notes that Clinton was greatly encouraged by Khatami's unequivocal statement that "I personally believe that terrorism should be condemned in all its forms and manifestations... Any form of killing of innocent men and women who are not involved in confrontations is terrorism; it must be condemned and we, in our turn, condemn every form of it in the world" (Pollack, 2004, p. 317). Indeed, as Khatami was seemingly willing to take steps to curb Iranian support for terrorism and seek rapprochement with Washington, the Clinton Administration also proved itself willing not only to agree to a partial lifting of US sanctions, but also to meet a long held Iranian demand, an acknowledgment of the United State's involvement in, as well as an apology for, the 1953 coup that overthrew Iranian president Mohammad Mossedeq and installed the repressive Reza Pahlavi as the Shah of Iran. Thus, Secretary of State Madeline Albright did just that in a speech delivered on St. Patrick's Day in the year 2000, hoping

that with the dawn of a new millennium would likewise come the dawn of renewed relations with Tehran. Albright's and the Clinton Administration's hopes were soon dashed however, as ten days later Supreme Leader Khamenei issued what Pollack describes as a "thoroughly negative response" (Pollack, 2004, p. 339) in which Khamenei not only dismissed a US apology as meaningless, but also clearly demonstrated that "Iran's hardliners were just not interested in a rapprochement" (Pollack, 2004, p. 339). Moreover, Khatami was unable to reign in Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, who, notes O'Sullivan, in addition to arresting and intimidating numerous Khatami supporters, "reportedly increased their support to groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Ahmad Jabril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command" (O' Sullivan, 2004, p. 80). In response to the IRGC's intimidation of those aligning with Khatami's pragmatist views, Khatami, though at first displaying a noteworthy resilience, eventually proved less willing to staunchly oppose Tehran's hardliners. Indeed, Pollack observes that "the mere fact that both the Iranian and American administrations were trying to establish some degree of tenuous contact only provoked the hardliners and their followers to go after Khatami harder and faster" (Pollack, 2004, p. 342), resulting finally in Khatami's total deference to Khamenei. Whereas the convergence of Iran's deteriorating economy, the rise and popular support of Mohammad Khatami, and a willingness by the Clinton Administration to engage Tehran to an unprecedented degree perhaps offered the best opportunity to end post-revolutionary Iran's support for terrorism and facilitate Iran's rehabilitation in international relations, the dominance of hardline elements within the Iranian polity simply made this an impossible reality. Following the end of the Khatami era, the rise of the extremely ideologically driven hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Iran's presidency has all but ensured that the combined efforts of sanctions and diplomacy will prove to have little avail in coercing Iranian foreign policy.

On a Mission from God: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the Role of Ideology in Iranian Foreign Policy

Ideology has long played an extraordinarily significant role in shaping Tehran's foreign policy ever since the dawn of the Iranian Revolution. Byman, in a poignant analysis of Iranian support for terrorism, aptly quotes the Ayatollah Khomeini's revealing statement that "we should try hard to export our revolution to the world... we shall confront the world with our ideology" (Byman, 2005, p. 92). Such ideology has countenanced no relationship with the United States as indeed Taheri notes that "Islamic Republic leaders from Khomeini to Ahmadinejad, have taken for granted that the principle obstacle to their dream of exporting their revolution to the whole world is American power" (Taheri, 2008, p. 189). Moreover, Iran's efforts to indeed confront the world with the ideology of its revolution in the 1980s, notes Said Amir Arjomand, "made the Shiite communities in Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan into bases for organizing pro-Iranian fifth columns" (Arjomand, 2009, p. 194), the most notable success of which remains the Lebanese Hezbollah. Iran's success in exporting its revolutionary ideology in the creation of Shiite groups such as Hezbollah has importantly led to the adoption of the Hezbollah model within various Sunni Palestinian groups who share in an ideological imperative to destroy the nation of Israel.

Support for such groups per an ideological imperative has long undermined any attempts for a successful rapprochement between Washington and Tehran as highlighted by the actions of the IRGC during the pragmatic tenure of the Khatami regime. Arjomand calls particular attention to the IRGC's capacity to veritably act as a state within a state during the Khatami era noting that the IRGC was able to operate outside of the Khatami government's authority in "the sending of arms to the Palestinian Authority in a ship called the *Karin A*, which was discovered by the Israelis on January 2, 2002" (Arjomand, 2009, p. 196), an incident that Arjomand contends "led to President Bush's "axis of evil" State of the Union speech" shortly thereafter" (Arjomand, 2009, p. 196). Regardless of President Khatami's pragmatic efforts to seek a rapprochement with the United States, a shared ideology calling for the destruction of Israel between the IRGC and various Palestinian terrorist organizations, which becomes even more considerable as it transcends the long held tension and conflict between the Sunni and Shiite sects of Islam, clearly undermined the success of any such attempts. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the IRGC enjoys a special relationship with Supreme Leader Khamenei to the effect that Alireza Nader, David Thaler, and S.R. Bohandy conclude that ideologically driven "principlists within the Revolutionary Guards emerged as the most powerful component of Khamenei's personal network" (Nader et al., 2011, p. 42) throughout the Khatami era, thus leading to power being further consolidated in the hands of the Supreme Leader. Given the relationship between Khamenei and the IRGC, Pollack asserts that it is "almost certainly with Khamenei's connivance" (Pollack, 2004, p. 333) that the IRGC sent Khatami a threatening letter warning that "our patience is exhausted and in case of nonobservance we can no longer distinguish ourselves through serenity" (Pollack, 2004, p. 333) should Khatami not scale back his pragmatic agenda of seeking a rapprochement with the United States as well as denounce protests occurring against Khamenei's leadership. Khatami acquiesced and consequently the hard line ideology of the Ayatollah Khomeini had effectively quashed its pragmatic contenders, thus facilitating the rise of Iran's most driven ideologue to date, the charismatic and occultly religious Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Whereas pragmatists such as Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami had at least attempted to establish a dialogue with the United States only to be thwarted by Iranian hardliners, current Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad may be rightfully seen as the most confrontational Iranian leader to challenge the United States since the Ayatollah Khomeini himself. Indeed, Ali Ansari notes that at the heart of Ahmadinejad's foreign policy "is a move away from dialogue, as championed by reformists under Khatami, and an increasingly insistence on a robust and confrontational attitude towards the West" (Ansari, 2007, p. 46). The confrontational foreign policy of Ahmadinejad towards the United States is undergirded by an arguably fanatical devotion to the religious belief in the return of the messianic figure known in Shiite Islamic tradition as the 12th Imam, or the Mahdi. Jerome Corsi, in an extensive analysis of the threat to global security posed by a nuclear armed Iran, notes that "even when Ahmadinejad spoke to the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2005, he announced that his divine purpose was to prepare the way for the return of the Mahdi" (Corsi, 2005, p. 265). This is a particularly alarming mindset, especially when conjoined with Iranian ambitions to acquire nuclear technology as indeed Corsi furthers that "the cult of the Mahdi believes

that the world must experience an apocalypse before the Mahdi returns” (Corsi, 2005, p. 265). Although increasing concerns in both the United States and Europe over Iran’s budding nuclear program eventually resulted in additional sanctions being levied against Iran, Ahmadinejad’s belief that it his divine mission to prepare the world for the coming of the Mahdi has led him to continually defy both United States and European attempts to contain Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Indeed, whereas scholars Yonah Alexander and Milton Hoenig are keen to note that “under strong pressure from the United States, Britain, and France, the United Nations Security Council voted unanimously on March 24th, 2007 to adopt resolution 1747, imposing new and toughened sanctions on Iran for failure to suspend its uranium enrichment activities” (Alexander & Hoenig, 2008, p. 160), Ahmadinejad’s response to such efforts have been largely dismissive. Taheri notes that “when confronted with bad economic news, Ahmadinejad has always been philosophical: We are preparing for a transformation of man’s existence, something never before experienced in history; the Mahdi is coming back and Islam is to rule the world; should we allow petty issues of this life to divert our attention from the glory that waits us?” (Taheri, 2008, p. 296). Importantly, such statements by Ahmadinejad have been echoed by Supreme Leader Khamenei as Taheri is keen to note Khamenei’s comments of May 2008 that

“the Islamic Republic of Iran is the heart of the Muslim nation and the center of the worldwide awakening of Islam; this is why the bullying power and oppressors are afraid of increasing attention by Muslims everywhere to this Iranian model; all the political, economic, security, and propaganda attacks of the Imperialists against the Islamic Republic is to prevent Muslims from adopting the model of our Islamic Republic” (Taheri, 2008, p. 296).

It is no doubt that such similar mindset led Khamenei to support the much contested results of Ahmadinejad’s victorious re-election campaign in the summer of 2009. In an afterward to his 2008 work, Taheri notes that Khamenei praised Ahmadinejad’s re-election as “a miracle from Allah” (Taheri, 2010, p. 371) and that when the results were challenged, “Khamenei cast himself in the role of chief spokesman for the Ahmadinejad camp, fighting everywhere on Ahmadinejad’s behalf” (Taheri, 2010, p. 371). Khamenei’s fighting on Ahmadinejad’s behalf came to be understood in a much more literal sense as those protesting the suspect election results in support of Ahmadinejad’s contender, yet another pragmatic reformist, Mir Hussein Mousavi, became subject to violent crackdowns at the hands of the IRGC. Nader et al. confirm that the Guards acted in defense of Iranian Revolutionary ideology against a perceived reformist threat, citing IRGC political bureau chief General Yadollah Javani’s comments that “there are two currents- those who defend and support the revolution and the establishment, and those who are trying to topple it” (Nader et al., 2011, p. 42) and that therefore the Guards would “snuff out any attempts at a revolution” (Nader et al., 2011, p. 42) against the ideological purity of the regime, as represented in Khamenei and Ahmadinejad. Together, Khamenei, Ahmadinejad, and the commanders of the IRGC see themselves as the protectors of the Iranian Revolution and will not countenance any rapprochement with the United States as doing so would taint the purity of the Ayatollah Khomeini’s original ideological triumph. Moreover, Ahmadinejad’s confrontational foreign policy remains in

particular motivated by a belief in the imminent return of the Mahdi that consequently holds little regard for economic considerations. Combined, these factors assure that as long as the current regime remains in power, that dual efforts of sanctions and engagement will not sway Iranian foreign policy as seen in the case of Muammar Qaddafi's Libya.

Conclusions

Although it remains that the Libya precedent demonstrates that the combined efforts of sanctions and diplomacy can achieve success in altering a state's provocative foreign policies, including support for terrorism and the pursuit of nuclear technology, the persistent dominance of hardliner elements within the Iranian polity renders a repeat success of the Libya precedent in the case of Iran to be extremely unlikely in the near future. From the beginnings of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Iran's hardliners have maintained an ardent devotion to protecting what they see as the purity of the Ayatollah Khomeini's ideological triumph in terms of refusing to countenance any negotiation with the United States or acquiescence to American demands. Even when American hostages were released by Tehran in the 1980s, Khomeini himself made certain that such actions were couched in ideological terms rather than because of economic or diplomatic considerations. Following Khomeini's death, his successor Ali Khamenei, along with the formidable Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps at his command, has effectively undermined and sabotaged both American as well as Iranian efforts to normalize relations between the two countries at every turn. Pragmatic reformers such as Hashemi Rafsanjani, Mohammad Khatami, and most recently Mir Hussein Mousavi, have seen their efforts at reform and rapprochement thwarted, their supporters arrested and murdered, and they themselves threatened and marginalized. Whereas the dual efforts of sanctions and diplomacy may have indeed eventually found success if such leaders had remained in power and not faced the incredible opposition of Iran's hardliners, the rise of hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the office of Iran's presidency and his subsequent enforced re-election at the hands of Khamenei and the IRGC have ensured that any abandonment of confrontational policies on the part of Tehran is simply unlikely to occur during their tenure due to a strict ideological imperative to protect the Revolution and, in particularly the case of Ahmadinejad, to usher in the coming of the Islamic Mahdi. Such ideals have consistently taken precedent over economic concerns and thus Takeyh and Maloney are apt to note that although Iran has experienced a number of episodes of severe economic pressure, pressure exacerbated by the reality of both US as well as multilateral sanctions, "none of these episodes of economic pressure have generated any significant moderation of Iranian foreign policy" (Takeyh & Maloney, 2011, p. 1309). As to the possibility of Iran's re-engagement with the United States, its unlikelihood is effectively summarized in Takeyh's and Maloney's reference of Khamenei's 2010 statements that "ours is a fundamental antagonism" (Takeyh & Maloney, 2011, p. 1309). Given the fervor with which Iranian hardliners, as exemplified in Khamenei, Ahmadinejad, and the IRGC, have sought to protect the ideological purity of the Iranian Revolution, it can be assured that for as long as they remain in power, such antagonism will continue regardless of the effects of sanctions and the efforts of diplomatic overtures. The Libya precedent, though remarkable in its success with altering the confrontational

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policies of Muammar Qaddafi, has not, nor is likely to sway the policies of Iran's ideologically driven hardliners. Therefore, to believe that a change in Iranian foreign policy is immanently forthcoming is simply wishful thinking.

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