

## A musical portrait of martyred Leader

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## Foreign policy doctrine, strategy of Ayatollah Khamenei

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### OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Political scientists have long proposed different models to explain how states formulate foreign policy. Graham Allison, for example, identified the rational actor model, the bureaucratic politics model and the governmental politics model. Yet one factor has often received less attention: the personal characteristics of those who make foreign policy, particularly national leaders. While many scholars argue that personality has only a limited effect on a country's broad strategic direction, in some political systems it shapes the entire decision-making process. Iran has been one of the clearest examples of this dynamic.

Following the passing of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei assumed Iran's leadership and became the country's highest authority on foreign policy. Having previously served as president, he built his diplomatic doctrine around three guiding principles of dignity, wisdom and expediency. From the beginning of his leadership until his martyrdom, these concepts served as the strategic framework for Iran's external relations. Broadly speaking, his foreign policy can be understood through five central pillars.

#### Triad of dignity, wisdom, expediency

At the core of his foreign policy stood a framework he personally articulated.

Dignity meant rejecting domination by foreign powers while preserving national authority and independence. Within this framework, yielding to or pleading with major powers was considered unacceptable.

Wisdom emphasized rational decision-making grounded in careful assessment of international realities and collective judgment.

Expediency recognized that when the preservation of the state and national interests required it, pragmatic flexibility was permissible, provided it did not come at the expense of fundamental principles.

#### Rejecting hegemony, pursuing strategic independence

A defining feature of his worldview was opposition to what he described as the international system of domination, particularly that led by the United States. This outlook was rooted in Iran's historical experience, including Washington's role in the 1953 coup and its support for Saddam Hussein during the eight-year Iran-Iraq War.

He argued that frameworks dictated by a hegemonic power should never shape Iran's foreign policy. In his view, independence was not simply a political slogan but a form of strategic self-reliance that allowed Iran to make decisions according to its own interests rather than external pressure during critical moments.

#### Regional priorities, Axis of Resistance

Another defining element of his doctrine was the belief that military strength underpinned diplomatic leverage.

He viewed West Asia as Iran's strategic depth and regarded support for resistance movements not only as an ideological commitment but also as a practical means of keeping threats away from Iran's borders while strengthening deterrence against Israel and the United States. Throughout his leadership, he consistently emphasized the expulsion of extra-regional military forces from the region.

#### Looking East, building ties with emerging powers

Iran's relationship with Russia formed an important part of what became known as the "Look to the East" strategy, reflecting broader changes in the global balance of power.

In international relations theory, adopting a Look to the East policy generally means reducing dependence on traditional Western power structures while strengthening engagement with emerging powers across Asia and the Pacific. For Iran and Russia, this approach centered on building a strategic partnership designed to resist external pressure and challenge a unipolar international order.

Their cooperation rests on several foundations. First is the balance of power. From a realist perspective, both countries seek to counterbalance powers they regard as threatening their security, making cooperation a tool against regional unilateralism.

Second is energy security and economic cooperation. As two of the world's largest energy producers, Iran and Russia have sought to expand collaboration on energy infrastructure, transport corridors such as the International North-South Transport Corridor, and financial arrangements that reduce dependence on Western systems, including SWIFT.

Third is technological and defense cooperation. With access to Western technology increasingly restricted, industrial partnerships and technical exchanges have become another pillar of bilateral relations.

Although the late Leader repeatedly stressed that Iran's foreign policy should not be confined to any single geopolitical direction, in recent years he placed particular emphasis on two complementary strategies.

The first was deepening strategic relations with China and Russia as the center of global power gradually shifted toward Asia, creating a counterweight to Western pressure and unilateral policies. Iran's long-term strategic agreements with both countries reflected this approach.

The second was support for multilateral institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS as vehicles for moving beyond a unipolar international order.

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# Mourners bid farewell to Leader in holy city of Qom

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People hold a mass funeral procession for Iran's martyred Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and his family members, who were assassinated on February 28 in Israeli and US airstrikes, in Qom, Iran on July 7, 2026. [khamenei.ir](http://khamenei.ir)