

respect as the fundamental condition of interaction, criticism of international institutions signifying the rejection of existing unjust structures, non-alignment with the slogan of neither East nor West as strategic independence in balancing, resistance economy signifying de-dependency and self-sufficiency, and scientism signifying power-building through knowledge — all fall within this category.

4. Historical evolution of the discourse across four decades

In the decade of the 1360s [roughly 1980s], the bipolar atmosphere of the Cold War, Iran's international isolation following the Islamic Revolution, and the Iraqi war against Iran caused a confrontation-oriented discourse to prevail in the foreign policy arena. In this period, the slogan "neither East, nor West" was at its zenith, and the approach of combating the hegemonic system was presented as the sole option. Ayatollah Khamenei, as president and subsequently as leader, emphasized resistance, exposure, and support for the front of the oppressed. The prevailing atmosphere minimized the possibility of engagement with the West, and the priority was the survival of the Revolution against the coalitional threats of its adversaries.

After the cessation of the war and with the commencement of the reconstruction era in the decade of the 1370s [1990s], the foreign policy discourse underwent transformation. Although the principle of anti-hegemony remained intact, the interactionist approach became more prominent. In this period, emphasis on reconstruction, attraction of foreign investment, détente with Europe, and active participation in international institutions increased. Ayatollah Khamenei, with emphasis on dignity, wisdom, and expediency, opened the way for engagement with Europe as well as Asian and regional countries. Nevertheless, relations with the United States remained shrouded in othering, and America continued to be presented as the primary symbol of domination. Importantly, in this very decade, the concept of the export of the Revolution shifted from an outward-looking ideological project to an inward-looking approach based on modeling domestic progress.

The decade of the 1380s [2000s] must be regarded as the period of maximum confrontation. With the start of the Ahmadinejad administration, the confrontation-oriented discourse regained momentum. The referral of Iran's nuclear file to the Security Council, the passage of six sanction resolutions, the intensification of anti-American and anti-Zionist rhetoric, and the strengthening of the Axis of Resistance all indicated a movement toward maximal antagonism. In this period, Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized resistance against bullying, inspiration for the Islamic world, Islamic awakening, and resistance economy. His discourse, during this interval, assumed a civilizational-confrontational strategy more than at any other time, and the West was presented not merely as a political rival, but as a modern ignorant civilization. This period witnessed the apex of othering of America and the West, and the slogans of "Death to America" and "Death to Israel," as identity markers of the discourse, were at their peak.

With the start of the Rouhani administration in the decade of the 1390s [2010s], a new horizon emerged in foreign policy. The JCPOA nuclear agreement, as a watershed moment in engagement with the West, although defined within the framework of active resistance, simultaneously signified

entry into a period of interaction. In this period, although Ayatollah Khamenei consented to the JCPOA, he repeatedly emphasized pessimism toward the West, distrust of European promises, and resistance economy as an alternative to dependency. Following the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, the discourse of resistance was reproduced with a new approach under the rubric of active resistance against sanctions, centered on the policy of looking Eastward, cooperation with China and Russia, and neighborhood diplomacy. At this juncture, the sign of Asia-centrism emerged as a new strategy, and the concept of interactionism with priority to the East and South acquired a special position.

5. Anti-hegemony bloc, othering, and coalition-building

One of the fundamental pillars of the foreign policy discourse of Ayatollah Khamenei is the concept of the anti-hegemony bloc. This concept, in addition to the othering it does with the hegemonic system, signifies coalition-building with countries and currents that are defined in opposition to that system. Within this framework, the world is divided into two principal parts: the dominator countries and the systems dependent upon them on one side, and the freedom-seeking, independent, and non-aligned countries on the other.

The prominent other of this discourse is the West, with America and Israel at its core. Ayatollah Khamenei, in this regard, explicitly introduced the network of global Zionism and the current government of the United States of America as the embodiment of enmity and domination. This othering is not a tactical and temporary matter, but rather an identity-based principle rooted in his perception



Iran's top security official Ali Shamkhani (l), China's top diplomat Wang Yi (c), and Saudi National Security Advisor Musaid al Aiban pose for a photo after Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to resume bilateral diplomatic ties after several days of deliberations between top security officials of the two countries in Beijing, China, on March 10, 2023.
● LUO XIAOQUANG/XINHUA

of the nature of Western civilization.

He explains the cause of the deep and irreconcilable enmity of arrogance toward the Islamic Republic through two components of negation and affirmation: on one hand, the negation of exploitation, the negation of domination-acceptance, the negation of the humiliation of the nation by the world's political powers, the negation of political dependency, the negation of the influence and interference in the country by the world's dominant powers, and the negation of ethical secularism and libertinism; and on the other hand, the affirmation of national identity, Iranian identity, the affirmation of Islamic values, the defense of the world's oppressed, and the endeavor to attain the zeniths of knowledge. From his perspective, America is



Palestinian resistance leaders, including Hamas Political Bureau chief Khaled Meshaal (c) and Islamic Jihad of Palestine Secretary General Ramadan Abdullah Mohammad Shallah (r), meet with Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on February 27, 2010.
● khamenei.ir

absolute evil, and relations with it constitute a master-servant relationship. The Middle East holds a special position in this context; for America, through discrimination, both supports dependent regimes and, under the pretext of democracy and human rights, attacks independent countries. This perspective regards any negotiation with America not as a strategic choice, but as naive and submission to arrogance.

Nevertheless, the noteworthy point is that othering in his discourse is not uniform and unilayered. Based on a rereading of his statements, three levels of othering can be identified within this discourse. First, the identity-civilizational other, of which the West-America is an instance, and which is fundamentally

6. Resistance economy and economic self-sufficiency

One of the most important and coherent components of the foreign policy discourse of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei is the concept of resistance economy. This concept, which was formulated in response to Western economic pressures and international sanctions, constitutes, in effect, a macro-economic-political strategy for de-dependency and self-sufficiency in opposition to the hegemonic system. Resistance economy, in his discourse, is not merely an economic program; rather, it is part of the anti-hegemonic identity of the Islamic Republic. From this perspective, resistance economy possesses three fundamental dimensions. The first dimension is the reduction of dependency on the West. Within this framework, self-sufficiency and domestic production are presented as the primary strategy for reducing vulnerability to sanctions. The second dimension is the diversification of economic partners. In this dimension, emphasis is placed on economic multilateralism and the diversification of export and import markets. This approach has, in practice, led to the strengthening of relations with China, Russia, India, and Central Asian countries, as well as membership in regional organizations such as ECO, SCO, and BRICS. He emphasized the priority of East Asia and the look to the South as alternatives to the West. The third dimension is the knowledge-based economy and scientism. Resistance economy, in his view, signifies not only self-sufficiency, but also the production of indigenous knowledge and technology. In this perspective, the hegemonic sys-

tem in the world is founded upon taking maximally and giving minimally, and the most significant factor in this process is knowledge. From this standpoint, the nuclear program, defense industries, information technology, nanotechnology, and biotechnology are all defined within the framework of resistance economy and power-building through knowledge. These three dimensions, collectively, form a coherent strategy in which the economy is defined as the groundwork for political independence and an instrument for confronting domination, and self-sufficiency is presented as a condition for dignity in the international system.

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7. Palestine question and Axis of Resistance

The Palestine question holds a central position in the discourse of Ayatollah Khamenei. This issue is presented not as an Arab or regional matter, but as a fundamental and principled issue for all Muslims and the Islamic ummah. In this discourse, Palestine is depicted as the epicenter of confrontation with the hegemonic system and the symbol of the oppressed status of the Islamic world in the face of global arrogance, and its issue can be pursued through three paths: first, the rejection of Western solutions; second, the presentation of a democratic and just solution in opposition to Western solutions; and third, the Axis of Resistance as the primary strategy.

In opposition to the New Middle East project proposed by certain Western powers, particularly the United States, his discourse emphasizes the Axis of Resistance and the unified Islamic ummah. From his perspective, the West's New Middle East project means the formation of a region centered on Israel and its economic and political dominance over Arab countries and the oil regions of the Persian Gulf; in contrast, the Axis of Resistance seeks an Islamic-Resistant Middle East centered on the defense of Palestine and the rejection of Zionist domination. This confrontation is, in effect, the opposition of two discourses at the regional level: the discourse of domination and dependency versus the discourse of resistance and independence. Palestine, in this context, is the symbol and epicenter of this discursive battle, and any retreat in support of Palestine is regarded as an exit from the Axis of Resistance and an entry into the axis of domination.

8. Nuclear diplomacy; symbol of confrontation or tool of engagement?

Iran's nuclear file is one of the most complex and controversial subjects of foreign policy in the discourse of Ayatollah Khamenei. This issue, apart from its technical and legal dimensions, is regarded in his thought as a symbol of civilizational confrontation with the West and an instrument of power-building for the Islamic Republic.



In the discourse of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the concept of power is defined as a continuum that encompasses both soft power and hard power. This comprehensive view of power is rooted in his understanding of national power as a combination of material and spiritual capabilities that are employed in the service of national dignity and independence. In the dimension of hard power, deterrence and comprehensive defense are among the principal pillars of this discourse. Ayatollah Khamenei holds the belief that the power and effectiveness of diplomacy are not inferior to military power, PR, and economic capability, and in many cases are even greater; however, defense and military power simultaneously play a vital role as the support of diplomacy and a deterrence factor.