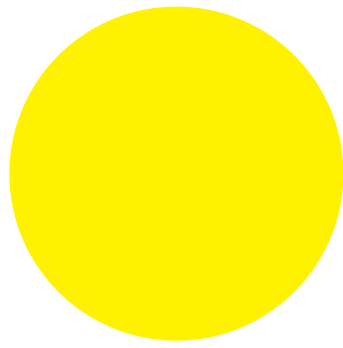


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The photo released by the Leader's official website on July 10, 2026, shows the resting place of the martyred Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and his family members at the holy shrine of Imam Reza (رضای) in the northeastern city of Mashhad, Iran. khamenei.ir

Four decades of Leader's military statecraft

Ayatollah Khamenei saw dependence as red line

By Shadab Asgari
Political & military affairs expert

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Iran's martyred Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei was an exceptionally well-rounded and unparalleled figure in Iran's modern history over the past two centuries. Throughout his life, he consistently engaged with experts across a wide range of fields, including military affairs.

Early days of revolution

Following the Revolution in 1979 and upon taking office at the Ministry of Defense, Ayatollah Khamenei issued a landmark directive stipulating that no military contract was to be canceled and no new military agreement signed without his approval. The order came at a time when the provisional government was seeking

to terminate military contracts with the United States, a move that Ayatollah Khamenei blocked, drawing on his deep understanding of the strategic environment. His decision was driven not by militarism but by the belief that competing interests among major powers would inevitably draw Iran into future conflicts, making a strong defense capability indispensable.

That assessment was soon borne out in confrontations with counter-revolution groups in Kurdistan, Khuzestan, Sistan and Baluchestan, and Turkmen Sahara, before reaching its peak with Saddam Hussein's military invasion of Iran (1980). One of his most consequential decisions during this period was preventing Iran from returning its F-14 fighter jets. Those aircraft played a crucial role throughout the eight-year Iran-Iraq War, supporting numerous military operations. In later years, Iranian Air Force personnel upgraded and kept the fleet operational, allowing the aircraft to remain in service until the recent

40-day war.

He also strongly opposed retaining American military advisers in Iran under newly created titles. As a result, the chapter of the US military presence in Iran was permanently closed.

Direct involvement in Iran-Iraq war

During the eight-year war, he played an active and influential role on the battlefield.

One of the most enduring episodes of the war was the battle for Susangerd. Then-President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr had ordered military brigades to pull out of the city and redeploy elsewhere, but Ayatollah Khamenei strongly opposed the move. In a handwritten note—now preserved in a museum—addressed to the division commander in the area, he warned that the withdrawal would be a grave mistake and would result in the fall of Susangerd. With a thorough understanding of the battlefield situation, he convinced the commander

to reverse the decision. Susangerd was subsequently saved and liberated.

The episode reflected his ability to rise above political divisions and narrow considerations. Every decision, in his view, was measured against Iran's national interest.

In 1983, the late Imam Khomeini tasked him with reviewing every aspect of the military situation, including developments within the armed forces and the war with Iraq, and reporting directly to him.

Although he was serving simultaneously as president and chairman of the Supreme Defense Council, Ayatollah Khamenei effectively acted as Imam Khomeini's deputy on armed forces affairs.

His absence from certain front-line areas, however, stemmed from a religious exemption granted by Imam Khomeini.

Strategic foresight in prisoner exchanges

Following the end of the eight-year war

and his election as Leader, one of his less-publicized achievements was the careful management of prisoner exchanges.

In 1990, while Iran held around 40,000 Iraqi prisoners of war, he ordered that one Iraqi prisoner be released for every Iranian captive returned. The remaining roughly 30,000 Iraqi prisoners were released gradually under his direction. Until Saddam Hussein's downfall, a number of prisoners—including non-Iraqi detainees—were deliberately retained to prevent Saddam from using Iranian prisoners as leverage. The policy reflected his long-term strategic outlook.

Separation of Army, IRGC missions

At a time when calls to dissolve the Army were gaining traction in various quarters, he strongly opposed any plan to merge the Army with the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC).

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Mashhad opens eternal embrace to Martyr Khamenei

National Desk

Millions of Iranians on Thursday paid their final respects as martyred Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei was laid to rest after days of nationwide mourning.

The burial ceremony took place at the holy shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH) in the northern city of Mashhad late on Thursday.

The funeral prayer over his body was held followed by a private farewell ceremony for the family of the martyred Leader and four members of his family, who were assassinated in a US-Israeli airstrike in February.

On Thursday morning, the final funeral procession in Mashhad saw an endless sea of mourners accompany the vehicle carrying the blessed bodies through the streets of the city.

The prayer for the deceased was led by the martyred leader's eldest son, Seyyed Mostafa Khamenei, who performed the ritual prayers over the bodies.

The funeral ceremonies began last Friday with tributes from political officials from over 45 countries and scholars from more than 90 nations.

This was followed by farewell ceremonies at Tehran's Grand Mosalla over the weekend, where hundreds of thousands paid their respects.

On Monday, the bodies were carried through Tehran with similarly massive participation, and on Tuesday, ceremonies were held in Qom and at the Jamkaran Mosque.

The remarkable participation continued internationally, with about 10 million Iraqis gathering in Najaf and Karbala on Wednesday to pay their respects.

Iraqi officials confirmed it as one of the largest funeral gatherings in recent history, with tribal groups accompanying the funeral convoy for miles.

Mourners from Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Turkey, and Nigeria crossed geographical boundaries to participate in the historic farewell.

Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky, the leader of



Mourners hold a mass procession on the day of the burial of Iran's late Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, who was assassinated on February 28 in Israeli and US airstrikes, in the holy city of Mashhad, Iran on July 9, 2026

● leader.ir

the Nigerian Islamic Movement, was also present among the mourners, underscoring the global resonance of the martyred leader's message of resistance against oppression.

Mourners carried banners condemning US President Donald Trump and chanting slogans demanding vengeance, with chants of "Revenge! Revenge!" echoing through the streets.

Ayatollah Khamenei was assassinated alongside several members of his family on February 28, the opening day of the 40-day war of aggression launched by the United States and the Israeli regime against Iran.

Among those martyred were the new



Leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei's wife, the late leader's son-in-law, a daughter, and his 14-month-old granddaughter.

Top security official warns anti-Iran attacks will trigger retaliation

International Desk

The head of Iran's top security body on Friday warned that the country will retaliate against any attack on its infrastructure as fighting between Tehran and Washington has flared again following the US attacks on several Iranian cities. "As we have previously declared, any attack on [Iran's] infrastructure will be met with reciprocal response," Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr said in a statement. Zolghadr added that the Israeli regime, which is behind such mischievous acts, will not be safe from the response of Iranian forces.

Fighting picked up again this week between the US and Iran in the most significant exchange of fire since the two sides signed a Pakistan-brokered Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on June 17, which calls for a permanent end to hostilities across all fronts and includes a commitment from both sides to hold further talks on a final agreement in the next 60 days.

Under the 14-point deal, Iran is required to ensure toll-free passage for commercial vessels for at least 60 days, with full restoration of traffic in the Strait of Hormuz within 30 days. Iran's Foreign Ministry said US strikes on Iran constitute a "flagrant violation" of the agreement.

The US military carried out heavy



Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr
● IRNA

strikes overnight between Wednesday and Thursday, saying it targeted 90 military sites in response to what it called Iran's attacks on ships in the Strait of Hormuz.

Targeting civilian infrastructure

But Iran accused Washington of also targeting civilian infrastructure in order to detract from the funeral of martyred Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. Bridges and railway links between the capital Tehran and northern city of Mashhad, where the Leader was buried on Thursday, were hit.

Two days of US strikes against Iran have killed 14 people and injured 78, according to Iran's Health Ministry. In response to the attacks, Iran's Armed Forces launched a major retaliatory operation, striking 85 US military targets in Bahrain and Kuwait, including facilities linked to the US Fifth Fleet, Camp Arifjan, Ali Al Salem Air Base, and bases in Juffair and Sheikh

Isa.

The office of Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that the Israeli premier spoke on Thursday with the US president, who informed him of the latest American moves in the Persian Gulf.

Later on Thursday evening, Iranian state media reported an attack on a military headquarters near Bushehr, where a nuclear plant is located. A US defense official however said that Washington was not carrying out any strikes on Iran at the time.

Israeli minister of war affairs, Israel Katz, said Tel Aviv was prepared to resume its military campaign against Iran if needed, vowing to do so "with even greater force."

Qatar also urged the US and Iran to honor their memorandum of understanding and continue talks to prevent further escalation. Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, said in a post on X that he had made the appeal during a call with Egypt's Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty. He also stressed the need to protect freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, warning that safe passage remains essential to regional security. Tasnim news agency reported that a Qatari delegation visited Iran on Friday in an effort to de-escalate tensions and create conditions for broader negotiations.

Pezeshkian hails 'historic presence' at Leader's ceremonies, thanks Iraq hosting

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian expressed profound gratitude for the "historic presence of the people," and the "global accompaniment" witnessed during the funeral processions and mourning ceremonies of martyred Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

Addressing the great Iranian nation, Muslim nations, and all freedom-loving peoples of the world, the president on Thursday described the millions-strong gatherings in Tehran, Qom, the holy city of Mashhad, Najaf, and Karbala as a magnificent and enduring manifestation of loyalty, national solidarity, and Islamic unity.

"The glorious and million-strong presence of the people in the farewell and mourning ceremonies... is a lasting symbol of the Iranian nation's devotion and a renewal of the pledge to the ideals of dignity, independence, justice, and progress," Pezeshkian stated.

The ceremonies, part of the multi-day funeral rites for the late Leader, who was assassinated in a US-Israeli airstrike on February 28, have drawn unprecedented crowds across Iran and the holy sites of Iraq. Seas of mourners in black, many traveling long distances and enduring hours of waiting under the summer sun, turned the processions into powerful displays of love and allegiance.

President Pezeshkian highlighted how



● president.lir

this historic turnout went far beyond a simple farewell. It represented a collective reaffirmation of the path of the Islamic Revolution, with participants from all walks of life, from ordinary citizens to clergy, security personnel, and media, standing shoulder to shoulder in grief and resolve.

The warm hosting by the Iraqi government and people in Najaf and Karbala further exemplified the deep fraternal ties binding the two nations.

Pezeshkian in a separate message posted in Arabic on the social media platform X on Friday thanked the Iraqi government and people for hosting the funeral ceremonies of the martyred Leader of the Islamic Revolution, saying Iranians will never forget the historic scenes of solidarity and support.

Pezeshkian expressed his gratitude to Iraqi President Nizar Amidi, Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi, Iraqi officials, religious authorities and the people of Iraq for hosting the body of Ayatollah Khamenei.

'Iran answers vulgarity with action': Araghchi chides Trump

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi deplored the US president's rhetoric against Iranian officials, saying that Iranians will respond to Trump's "derogatory language" with their actions.

"Addressing the Civilized and Courageous Nation of Iran with derogatory language does not diminish its Greatness," Araghchi said in a post on X.

"Iranians are known for their civility, culture, and strong moral values. We do not answer vulgarity with vulgarity, but with action: fearlessly and with great valor," the top Iranian diplomat added.

Araghchi's remarks came after the US President Donald Trump in an interview on the sidelines of a NATO summit in Turkey called Iranian offi-



Abbas Araghchi
● TASNIM

cial "scum". When asked about a Pakistan-brokered ceasefire agreement reached between Tehran and Washington, Trump said, "I think it's over. I don't want to deal with them any more, they're scum... they're led by sick people and they're vicious, violent people."

He accused Tehran of violating the interim deal signed by both countries

in June that called for an end to the conflict, adding that they "lie" and "cheat."

However, in a later news conference, Trump told reporters he did not think the Iran war would start again and said, "Anything that happens will be over quickly."

His comments have prompted responses from several Iranian officials. A senior adviser to Iran's Leader, Ali Akbar Velayati, warned new strikes from the US would be met with an "immediate response."

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi also said Trump's comments "are not a sign of strength, but rather an admission of the failure of a policy built on brute force, sanctions, and threats for years, which could not bring the Iranian nation to its knees."



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



FAO forecasts Iran's wheat output to rise 14.2% in 2026 despite global decline

Economy Desk

The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) predicts Iran's wheat production to increase by 14.2% in 2026, even as global wheat output is expected to weaken by 3.8%, according to the agency's latest Food Outlook report cited by Tasnim News Agency on Friday.

The US-Israeli joint war on Iran that began on February 28 disrupted shipments of fertilizer raw materials through the Strait of Hormuz to global markets. FAO estimates that the disruption will contribute to a 3.8% drop in global wheat production during the current

crop year, with world output expected to fall to 810 million metric tons. Despite the global plunge, FAO projects that Iran would harvest 13.7 million metric tons of wheat in 2026, up from 12 million tons a year earlier. Among major wheat-producing countries, Iran is forecast to set the second-largest surge in wheat output in 2026. Turkey is expected to post the biggest increase, with output soaring 26.7%. According to FAO forecasts, US wheat production could fall 21.3% this year to 42.5 million metric tons. Wheat output is also expected to decrease by 22.2% in Kazakhstan, 19.4% in Argentina and

5.6% in the European Union.

FAO also expects Iran to rank as the world's 14th-largest wheat producer in 2026 with output of 13.7 million metric tons, unchanged from its ranking last year.

China will most probably remain the world's largest wheat producer this year, cranking out 140 million metric tons, followed by the European Union with 136.2 million tons and India with 120.2 million tons.

Russia, the United States, Canada, Australia, Pakistan, Turkey, Ukraine, Argentina, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are expected to rank fourth through 13th, respectively.



MOSLEH PIRKHEZRANIAN/IRNA

RAI restores one of US-struck tracks; second to reopen within hours



IRNA

Economy Desk

The head of the state railway company announced on Friday that one of the two railway tracks damaged in the latest US attacks was fixed and resumed passenger train services on the Tehran-Mashhad route, while repairs to the second track were expected to be completed within hours.

According to Tasnim news agency, Jabbar Ali Zakari, chief executive of the Railways

of the Islamic Republic of Iran (RAI), said technical and operational teams were deployed immediately to Torbat station after US attacks early on Thursday targeted railway infrastructure in the provinces of Golestan and Khorasan Razavi. "They managed the transfer of passengers to and from the holy city of Mashhad using buses and railbuses," Zakari said. "In less than 15 hours, one of the two railway tracks on the Teh-

ran-Mashhad route was successfully rebuilt and returned to service," he said. Zakari said that reconstruction of the second track was continuing and was expected to be completed within hours. Meanwhile, Ali Qanbarzadeh, the RAI's public relations director, told ISNA on Friday that the attacks hit the Torbat-e Heydariyeh section in Khorasan Razavi Province and the Aq Qala area in the northeast. Fars news agency re-

ported that the United States targeted the Aq-Tekeh Khan railway bridge near Aq Qala in Golestan Province on the Incheh Borun-Garmsar railway line with cruise missiles early on Thursday. The agency said the attack caused no casualties.

According to Fars, the bridge lies on the China-Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Incheh Borun transport corridor, which enters Iran through its northeastern border before running from Gorgan to Tehran. The route forms part of China's Belt and Road Initiative and the eastern branch of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

Fars said Russia had been shipping goods through the route since last November, while freight traffic from China had tripled.

Rosatom says first Bushehr nuclear plant staff returning to Iran

Economy Desk

Russia's state nuclear corporation Rosatom said the first six employees of Iran's Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant had begun returning to the site, RIA news agency reported on Friday, citing the company's CEO Alexei Likhachev.

Rosatom, which is building two new reactors at the Bushehr plant in southern Iran, evacuated hundreds of employees after the United States and Israel launched a war against Iran on February 28.

The company halted work at new units of the Iranian nuclear power plant in the port city of Bushehr because of the US-Israeli air assault on Iran, Likhachev said in early March.

Likhachev had earlier warned of the threat posed by strikes near Iranian nuclear facilities, and said explosions could be heard "just kilometers away" from the plant, although the facility itself was not targeted. The Bushehr nuclear power plant is currently operating, while its second and third units are under construction.

The plant has a net generating capacity of 915 megawatts (MW), accounting for 1% of Iran's total electricity generation capacity, and has annual electricity production of about 6 to 7 terawatt-hours.

Its first unit was built with Russian cooperation and was designed to generate 1,000 MW of power. As of July 1, it had produced a cumulative 80 million megawatt-hours of nuclear-generated electricity supplied



A view of Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant outside the southern city of Bushehr, Iran

MEHR

to Iran's national power grid, according to Tasnim News Agency.

Last June, Rosatom signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Iran to cooperate on the construction of small nuclear power plants in the country.

The agreement was signed in Moscow following talks between Mohammad Eslami, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), and Likhachev.

Rosatom said the MoU set out specific steps for implementing the strategic project in Iran.

According to Iran's ambassador to Moscow, Kazem Jalali, the agreement signed was "worth \$25 billion."

"This is Iran's largest atomic project, being carried out by Iran's private sector in cooperation with Rosatom," he said.

Four decades of...

In his view, each institution had a distinct constitutional mission. The Army's primary responsibility was defending Iran's borders, while the IRGC was tasked with safeguarding the achievements of the Islamic Revolution—a mission that could extend to Tehran, border regions, or beyond Iran's frontiers.

Accordingly, the deployment of the Army abroad would generally be viewed as "military intervention," whereas overseas IRGC operations could fall within the framework of "protecting the achievements of the Revolution."

He also established a clear division of labor between the naval branches of the two forces. Responsibility for the Persian Gulf was assigned to the IRGC Navy, while the Gulf of Oman, the Indian Ocean, and the Caspian Sea were entrusted to the Army Navy, preventing operational overlap.

Backing missile program

Among his most significant strategic decisions was his unwavering support for Iran's missile program.

In 1985 and 1986, Martyr Hassan Tehrani Moghaddam, regarded as the father of Iran's missile program, proposed dismantling missiles purchased from Libya and Syria to gain access to their underlying technology. Ayatollah Khamenei welcomed and supported the initiative.

In the early 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, newly independent states were prepared to sell advanced missile systems to Iran. While many officials enthusiastically supported the purchases, Martyr Khamenei stood alone in firmly opposing the idea. Instead, he issued a clear directive: "Go and build them yourselves." He even prohibited further discussion of purchasing foreign missiles.

His insistence on self-sufficiency and indigenous development ultimately

laid the foundation for Iran's advanced missile capabilities.

He also repeatedly stressed the importance of missile accuracy, particularly precision-strike capability. The rationale behind that emphasis became evident during operations against the Daesh in Syria. In some instances, American military bases were located only two or three kilometers from Daesh positions, while civilian populations were present on the opposite side. The high precision of Iranian missiles allowed the operations to be carried out without creating unnecessary complications or causing harm to civilians.

Ayatollah Khamenei correctly recognized that Iran would never possess air power and air-defense capabilities on the same scale as the United States and the Israeli regime. Consequently, deterrence had to be built through missile capabilities and carefully calibrated military strategy.

For that reason, he consistently opposed including Iran's missile program in negotiations, arguing that diplomacy without power carries little weight. Without credible defensive and missile capabilities, he believed, the opposing side would regard Iran as a "cash cow" and seek to exploit the country's God-given resources for its own benefit.

Lessons from 12-day, 40-day wars

During the 12-day war, he concluded that US military bases across the region—particularly radar installations—should be targeted. That assessment was later put into practice during the 40-day war.

Through close battlefield management, he also instructed commanders at every level to designate successors in advance to ensure continuity of command under all circumstances.

Possessing a comprehensive command of military affairs, Martyr Khamenei

examined lengthy reports line by line and assessed every detail with meticulous care. His broad strategic outlook enabled Iran to maintain a military balance with the United States throughout the regional conflict.

Convinced that dependence on foreign suppliers would inevitably constrain Iran's strategic freedom, he consistently emphasized self-reliance in developing indigenous fighter aircraft, including the Azarakhsh, as well as hypersonic missile technology.

Overall, Martyr Khamenei was a cleric with exceptional military brilliance—a quality that was also recognized by Martyr Major General Mohammad-Vali Qarani, the Army's chief of staff and one of Iran's most distinguished military commanders. Qarani remarked that had he pursued a career in the armed forces, he would have risen to one of the highest military ranks—an assessment that underscored the depth of his military aptitude.

Intellectual paradigm of Iran's martyred Leader in foreign policy

Rereading discourse of anti-hegemonic interactionism



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ANALYSIS EXCLUSIVE

The foreign policy of every nation constitutes a comprehensive mirror of that nation's identity, values, and strategic orientations within the international system. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Leadership, functioning as the supreme decision-making authority, executes a foundational role in the definition of principles, the determination of objectives, and the delineation of the foreign policy trajectory.

This piece, through the utilization of the speeches and correspondences of the martyred Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei during the temporal interval spanning the Persian calendar years of 1368 to 1398 (roughly equivalent to 1989–2019), undertakes a rereading of his intellectual paradigm in the domain of foreign policy.

The principal argument of this piece is that the foreign policy discourse of Ayatollah Khamenei has been formulated around the axis of "anti-hegemonic interactionism"; a discourse that rests upon two pillars, namely the negative and the positive. This discourse, through its susceptibility to three factors — the personal characteristics of the Leader, the internal exigencies of the system, and the transformations of the international system — has evolved across four decades and, at each juncture, has encompassed divergent approaches, from sheer resistance to critical engagement, in accordance with prevailing conditions.

Through an examination of key components such as the anti-hegemony bloc, resistance economy, neighborhood diplomacy, the Look East policy, and hybrid deterrence, the author arrives at the conclusion that the intellectual paradigm under investigation in foreign policy offers a comprehensive and coherent strategy for the management of threats and the exploitation of opportunities within an environment filled with uncertainty and, simultaneously, by virtue of institutionalization from discourse, possesses the requisite flexibility to respond to the transformations of the international system.

Position of the Leadership in Iran's foreign policy

In the Islamic Establishment of Iran, the Leadership is not merely the ultimate decision-making institution in the macro-affairs of the country, but rather the symbol of the ideological continuity of the Islamic Revolution and the determining reference for the principles and frameworks of foreign policy. This special status is rooted in three domains — religious, legal, and charismatic legitimacy — which empower the Leadership to function beyond managerial and executive exigencies as the "final arbiter" in the determination of ob-



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei tends to a sapling that he had planted earlier, in his office premises on March 5, 2024.
● khamenei.ir

jectives, priorities, and orientations of foreign policy. The significance of this status is of such magnitude that any comprehension of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic, absent an understanding of the Leader's intellectual paradigm, would remain incomplete and superficial.

The Islamic Republic perceives itself as the most prominent critic of the hegemonic system upon the international stage and ascribes to itself an inspirational and mobilizing role in the contemporary world; a role that acquires heightened relevance, particularly in relation to the Islamic world and freedom-seeking nations. This perspective, which, more than any other factor, is influenced by the role of the Leadership within this political unit, indicates that Iran's foreign policy must be considered among identity-value policies.

Hence, the discourse of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in the domain of foreign policy constitutes

preserving revolutionary identity, responding to domestic demands, and ensuring national security; and third, the structural transformations of the international system, encompassing everything from the bipolar system of the Cold War to the contemporary multipolar order. This discourse, across four decades, while preserving fixed principles, has demonstrated considerable flexibility in methods and tactics.

Foundational principles and intellectual bedrocks of foreign policy

1. Triangle of dignity, wisdom, and expediency

The principles of "dignity, wisdom, and expediency" may be considered the fundamental and immutable triangle of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic in the thought of Ayatollah Khamenei. These three principles, which are also foreseen in the country's 20-Year Vision Document as the bases of Iran's interaction with the

from principled stances is regarded as a violation of national dignity.

Wisdom signifies "acting sagaciously and judiciously". Within this framework, no imprudence should be permitted in diplomatic statements or in anything pertaining to foreign policy. Wisdom, contrary to certain superficial interpretations, signifies not passivity or retreat, but rather the precise calculation of cost-benefit, understanding the time, and understanding the place in the international arena. This principle immunizes foreign policy against rashness and emotionalism and emphasizes the necessity of meticulous and long-term planning. Expediency, which is defined in opposition to "personal expediency," signifies the expediency of the Islamic Revolution and the comprehensive expediency of the country. In this view, if an action is in the expediency of the country and the Revolution, yet is not in my personal expediency, what importance does that possess? Expediency in this discourse does not signify sheer utilitarianism; rather, it signifies Revolutionary rationality, which weighs material and spiritual interests upon a single scale and regards the long-term preservation of principles as identical with expediency. These three principles, in practice, constitute a mandatory triangle for the framework of international communications, and no infringement upon them is acceptable.

2. Rejection of dominator-dominated relations

One of the most fundamental principles of the foreign policy discourse of Ayatollah Khamenei is the rejection of any dominator-dominated relationship in the international arena. This principle, which is rooted in the Qur'anic teaching and Article 152 of the Constitution, operates as a foundational value in all dimensions of foreign policy.

From the perspective of Ayatollah Khamenei, the greatest injustice in the global community is the domination, the imposition of hegemony, and the division of the world's countries into dominator and dominated by the powerful. On this basis, all countries that do not wish to be under domination and do not desire to exercise domination, irrespective of race or language, are



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei tends to a sapling that he had planted earlier, in his office premises on March 5, 2024.
● khamenei.ir

considered friends of Iran. Conversely, any acceptance of domination implies submission and the encouragement of dominators, which, from an ethical standpoint, results in the humiliation of nations and the robbing of their identity; from a political standpoint, signifies the seizure of a nation's destiny; and from an economic standpoint, constitutes the plunder of a country's resources. The rejection of domination, in his discourse, is not merely a strategic principle but also an identity.

This perspective has transformed Iran's foreign policy, from the very inception of the Islamic Revolution, into a counter-discourse against the global hegemonic system. Iran, as a country that neither accepts domination nor seeks domination itself, endeavors to exhibit a model of independent existence within the international system. This approach, which is defined as independence in opposition to political dependency, signifies, in practice, the adoption of independent stances even in the face of global consensus. In this sense, if all the world were to reach a consensus on a particular issue, yet that issue was incompatible with the foundations of the Islamic Republic, Iran would explicitly reject it and preserve its independent positions.

3. Semiotics of the discourse of anti-hegemonic interactionism

The central signifier of the foreign policy discourse of Ayatollah Khamenei must be sought in the concept of "anti-hegemonic interactionism". The important point is that this discourse, contrary to initial perception, is not merely confrontational; rather, it is a combination of negation and affirmation. On one hand, it vehemently rejects any pursuit of domination and any acceptance of domination; on the other hand, it emphasizes constructive engagement with countries situated within the anti-hegemony chain. This duality, in effect, defines the anti-hegemonic identity of the Islamic Republic, which seeks the realization of its ideals not in passivity and isolation, but in critical engagement with the external world.

Within this framework, numerous concepts are identifiable as subsidiary signs of this discourse, each of which represents a portion of this intellectual paradigm. The preservation of territorial integrity and independence as identity-based and territorial red lines, the export of the Islamic Revolution as a transnational mission and the propagation of discourse, the unified Islamic ummah as an identity framework transcending the nation-state, dignity-wisdom-expediency as the strategic triangle of decision-making, principledism signifying adherence to foundations and non-compromise on principles, support for the oppressed as a justice-oriented and anti-hegemonic orientation, Islamic awakening as the vision for regional transformation, mutual



A member of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps walks past a mural painted on the walls of the former US embassy in the capital Tehran in 2019.
● AFP

a continuation of the path of Imam Khomeini, which has been reread and reproduced with the centrality of anti-hegemonic interactionism and under the influence of three key factors: first, his personal characteristics and civilizational view of Islam and its relation to the modern world; second, the internal exigencies of the Islamic Establishment, including the necessity of

world, provide a comprehensive framework for the regulation of foreign relations.

Dignity, in this view, signifies national honor and independence and is rooted in the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. Ayatollah Khamenei explains dignity in the following manner: "The Islamic society and establishment must not, in any of its international encounters, conduct itself in a way that culminates in the humiliation of Islam and Muslims." Dignity functions as a red line that no expediency should permit to be transgressed. Within this framework, the Iranian nation will not yield to any power, and any retreat



The discourse of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in the domain of foreign policy constitutes a continuation of the path of Imam Khomeini, which has been reread and reproduced with the centrality of anti-hegemonic interactionism and under the influence of three key factors: first, his personal characteristics and civilizational view of Islam and its relation to the modern world; second, the internal exigencies of the Islamic Establishment, including the necessity of preserving revolutionary identity, responding to domestic demands, and ensuring national security; and third, the structural transformations of the international system, encompassing everything from the bipolar system of the Cold War to the contemporary multipolar order.

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



considered non-interactable. America and Israel, as symbols of global arrogance and domination, stand in fundamental opposition to the identity and values of the Islamic Republic, and any engagement with them signifies compromise on principles. This level constitutes the red line of foreign policy.

Second, the strategic-competitive other, of which some regional countries are instances and which are interactable and even transformable. For example, the relationship with Saudi Arabia demonstrated the flexibility of the discourse in confronting changing conditions. Third, the situational-temporary other, of which some European countries are instances. At this level, othering is defined on the basis of behavior, not identity. For example, European countries during the JCPOA period were considered interactable others, but with the US withdrawal and Europe's hesitation in fulfilling its commitments, they transformed into untrustworthy others. This level indicates his situational view of international relations.

This typology demonstrates that his discourse, despite its emphasis on principles, possesses considerable flexibility in confronting in-

ternational realities, and othering therein is not absolute, but rather highly dependent on the type of behavior and strategic calculations. In contrast to the dominator countries, his discourse emphasizes coalition and convergence with freedom-seeking and independent countries.

This coalition-building is pursued at three levels. First, convergence with the Islamic world, wherein the unified Islamic ummah is presented as an identity framework for coalition-building. Second, convergence with the Axis of Resistance, which at the regional level, includes Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Palestine as a chain that is on the same level as the hegemonic system. Third, convergence with the emerging powers of the East. With the shift in the balance of power in the international system and the increasing role of China, Russia, India, and the BRICS countries in recent years, the approach of Look East has been highlighted as a new strategy in his discourse. This approach has, in practice, resulted in the conclusion of a 25-Year Strategic Partnership with China, membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and accession to the BRICS group.

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.

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.

From his perspective, the nuclear program encompasses the central subject of the Islamic Revolution: the struggle for independence, protest against the inequality of foreign powers, the necessity of self-sufficiency, and the high credibility of Islam for possessing knowledge.

Nevertheless, the nuclear file in his discourse is not merely a symbol of confrontation; rather, it is also an instrument of engagement, an opportunity for power-building, and a factor in increasing bargaining power. His consent to the JCPOA and his emphasis on nuclear diplomacy indicate that this issue can also serve as critical engagement with the West.

From this perspective, the nuclear program in his discourse possesses three fundamental functions: the identity function, which entails the demonstration of independence and national dignity through the acquisition of advanced technology; the strategic function, which includes the creation of deterrence against external threats and the augmentation of bargaining power in negotiations; and the interactive function, which enables the creation of a foundation for dialogue and the reduction of pressures, as occurred in the JCPOA. These three functions demonstrate that the nuclear file in his discourse is not a zero-sum issue, but rather a fluid and multidimensional issue that assumes different roles according to circumstances.

9. Neighborhood diplomacy and regionalism

One of the most significant transformations in foreign policy within the discourse of Ayatollah Khamenei in recent years is the prominence of neighborhood diplomacy and regionalism as a key strategy. This approach, which culminated in the Raisi administration with the restoration of Iran-Saudi relations mediated by China, is rooted in his view of the priority of neighbors and the management of the peripheral environment.

Ayatollah Khamenei holds the belief that the priority of foreign policy is neighboring and regional countries, and the strengthening of relations with neighbors is presented as a strategic necessity. This perspective stems not from weakness or passivity, but from a precise understanding of political geography and the intelligent management of threats and opportunities. Within this framework, regionalism is defined as a strategy for reducing security costs, increasing economic cooperation, and creating a regional order centered on Iran. He believes that regional countries must, relying on their own capacities, provide regional security, and the presence of foreigners not only does not contribute to security, but is itself a source of insecurity.

This approach has, in practice, led to policies such as the strengthening of North-South and East-West transit corridors; membership in regional organizations such as ECO, SCO, and the Eurasian Economic Union; the conclusion of trade agreements with neighbors; and the restoration and expansion of relations with Arab countries of the region. The restoration of Iran-Saudi relations in 2023, mediated by China, is one of the most important achievements of neighborhood diplomacy in recent years. This event is analyzable within the framework of interactionism and conflict management.

Within the framework of neighborhood diplomacy, connections and transit corridors hold a special position. Iran, due to its strategic location at the crossroads of North-South and East-West, can play the role of a bridge connecting Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, and



Iranian President Seyyed Ali Khamenei (front-right) reviews an honor guard in front of the Great Hall of the People during an official visit to Beijing, China, on May 9, 1989. ● REUTERS

the Indian Ocean. This role is presented in his discourse as an opportunity for power-building and an instrument for de-dependency. The North-South Corridor for connecting India, Iran, the Caucasus, and Russia, and the revival of the Silk Road with China's cooperation in the Belt and Road Initiative, are two prominent examples of this strategy.

10. Power continuum; from deterrence to public diplomacy

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.

Deterrence signifies the creation of a capability that dissuades the enemy from any aggression against Iran, and comprehensive defense signifies the preparation and employment of all human capital and material and spiritual resources for the prevention and confrontation of any threat and aggression by enemies. 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.

Within this framework, the extraterritorial deterrence strategy, which encompasses four layers from Iran's borders to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, has been designed as a coherent strategy. This strategy, relying on missile, drone, and proxy forces of the Axis of Resistance, provides the groundwork for in-depth defense and the management of threats beyond the borders.

In the dimension of soft power, public diplomacy and discursive power hold a key position. Public diplomacy means communication with nations rather than governments and the explanation of the values and ideals of the Islamic Revolution to global public opinion. Within this framework, he emphasizes support for freedom-seeking movements across the world, exposure of the dominators, and the propagation of the justice-seeking discourse.

Overall, the power continuum in

his discourse demonstrates that power is manifested not only in armaments and economics, but also in discourse, values, and cultural soft power. This perspective transforms Iran's foreign policy from a mere confrontational policy into a discursive-authoritative policy in which soft power and hard power exist in interaction with one another.

11. Look East Policy and engagement with China and Russia

One of the most significant transformations in the foreign policy discourse of Ayatollah Khamenei in recent years is the emergence of the Look East strategy and engagement with emerging powers, particularly China and Russia. This approach, which was formulated in response to Western pressures and the shift in the balance of power in the international system, has, in practice, led to the conclusion of strategic agreements and membership in new international institutions.

The People's Republic of China, as the second-largest economic power in the world and a permanent member of the Security Council, plays a dual role in his discourse. On one hand, China is an economic partner for exiting sanctions and diversifying energy sources; on



Iranians mourn the death of their martyred Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in Tehran on March 1, 2026. ● ATTA KENARE/AFP

the other hand, it is considered a strategic ally against American hegemony. The 25-Year Strategic Partnership document between Iran and China, signed in 2021, is a watershed moment in these relations. This document, which emphasizes economic, political, and security cooperation, indicates Iran's long-term view toward the East.

Nevertheless, relations with China in his discourse do not signify dependency on the East, but rather intelligent balancing. Iran, by adopting the Look East strategy, seeks to create diversification in foreign relations and prevent complete isolation in the face of the West. China, for Iran, in addition to being a consumer market, is a source of technology, investment,

and consumer goods, and this relationship is defined on the basis of mutual benefit.

Russia, as a major power and permanent member of the Security Council, also holds a special position in his discourse. Iran-Russia cooperation in defense-military domains, including the purchase of S-300 and S-400 missile systems; energy domain, including cooperation in OPEC and OPEC+; and political coordination regarding the crises in Syria, Afghanistan, and the Caucasus, indicate the depth of these relations. Ayatollah Khamenei holds the belief that Russia can play an important role in establishing a multipolar order, and Iran-Russia cooperation can contribute to countering American hegemony in the region and the world.

Iran's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and accession to the BRICS group are two important events in Iran's foreign policy that are analyzable within the framework of Look East and multilateralism. These memberships, in addition to reducing dependency on the West, can lead to increased bargaining power, diversification of economic partners, and the strengthening of Iran's regional position. The discourse of Ayatollah Khamenei



regards these memberships not merely as an economic action, but as a movement toward the multipolar order and a confrontation with unilateralism.

12. Will the discourse of Ayatollah Khamenei persist?

In sum, the foreign policy discourse of Ayatollah Khamenei may be considered a discourse in evolution that, while adhering to principles, possesses considerable flexibility. This discourse, although confronted with serious challenges, on the whole provides a coherent strategic framework for the management of threats and the exploitation of opportunities in an environment filled with uncertainty. The future of this discourse depends, to a significant extent, on its capacity to maintain a balance between principles and expediencies, to manage relations with the West intelligently, to exploit maximally the capacities of the East, and to strengthen eco-

nomics and regional diplomacy. In this context, the new generation of Iran's foreign policy agents will play a decisive role in the evolution and innovation of this discourse, and it appears that, given the institutionalization efforts undertaken during the period of Ayatollah Khamenei, the continuation of his discourse is more reinforced than at any other time.

In final analysis, the foreign policy of Ayatollah Khamenei is founded upon the rejection of domination and the rejection of submission to domination. In this understanding, the world has always consisted of two parts: first, a minority that has sought to exercise hegemony and plunder nations; and second, a majority that has lived under their domination. The history of the world has been the history of conflict and engagement between these two sides. In the thought of Ayatollah Khamenei, the Islamic Republic is one of the few countries in history that has confronted and criticized this process.

The discourse of anti-hegemonic interactionism possesses two interconnected domains: first, the negative approach of combat with the dominant hegemonic system on the international stage; and second, the positive approach of solidarity with freedom-seeking countries, particularly Islamic countries, to construct a front against the imperialist desires of the hegemonic system. This discourse, which has evolved over four decades and, at each juncture, has encompassed different approaches in accordance with conditions, has experienced a dynamic transformation from sheer resistance in the 1980s to critical engagement in the 2010s and finally, to the Look East and neighborhood diplomacy in the recent decade.

The achievements of this discourse include: the strengthening of the independent and anti-hegemonic identity of the Islamic Republic, the creation of a broad social base among the nations of the Third World and liberation movements, the consolidation of Iran's regional role as the dominant power in West Asia, the acquisition of advanced defense and nuclear technologies, and the reduction of strategic dependency on the West through the Look East. Nevertheless, challenges, such as the high costs of confrontation with the hegemonic system, the economic limitations resulting from sanctions, and the difficulty of simultaneous engagement with the West and the East, continue to confront this discourse. For the future, the foreign policy discourse of the martyred Leader is evolving with three new approaches: first, resistance economy and self-sufficiency as a de-dependency strategy, which has crystallized in the Second Step Declaration of the Revolution; second, neighborhood diplomacy and regionalism, which has experienced a significant leap with the restoration of relations with Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf littoral states; and third, joining the new global order and synergy with emerging powers, particularly within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS, which has provided a framework for multilateralism and evasion of American hegemony. The legacy left by Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei is the "institutionalization" and "systematization" of a discourse whose substructure is an ideology based on dignity, wisdom, expediency, the rejection of domination, constructive engagement, and active participation in the international system, while preserving Revolutionary identity and principles. Hence, the replacement of the technocrats executing this discourse will not effect any change in the strategic trajectory of Iran's foreign policy.



The future of this discourse depends, to a significant extent, on its capacity to maintain a balance between principles and expediencies, to manage relations with the West intelligently, to exploit maximally the capacities of the East, and to strengthen economic and regional diplomacy. In this context, the new generation of Iran's foreign policy agents will play a decisive role in the evolution and innovation of this discourse, and it appears that, given the institutionalization efforts undertaken during the period of Ayatollah Khamenei, the continuation of his discourse is more reinforced than at any other time.

All-Iranian coaching cast signals new era for Persian Gulf Pro League

Sports Desk

When Mahdi Tartar was appointed Persepolis head coach last week, replacing Brazilian Osmar Loss Vieira, it marked a rare milestone in the history of the Persian Gulf Pro League. For only the second time in the competition's 26-season history, every top-flight club will begin the campaign with an Iranian in the dugout.

With the FIFA World Cup set to conclude in just over a week, clubs across Iran are stepping up preparations for the expanded 18-team 2026-27 season despite persistent financial and logistical challenges.

The coaching landscape has been reshaped by developments over the past year, most notably the regional military conflict involving Iran and a U.S.-Israeli coalition. Coupled with the country's economic difficulties, those factors have led to a sharp decline in the number of foreign coaches willing or able to work in Iranian football.

As a result, all 18 clubs will start the new season under Iranian head coaches.

The only previous instance came in the pandemic-hit 2020-21 campaign. The preceding season had begun with seven foreign managers across the league's 16 clubs, but COVID-19, travel restrictions and mounting financial problems triggered a mass exodus. Some, including Zob Ahan's Montenegrin coach Miodrag Radulović, never returned after leaving Iran, while others – such as Italian Andrea Stramaccioni at Esteghlal and Argentine Gabriel Calderón at Persepolis – had already departed amid financial disputes with their clubs.

The 2025-26 season initially appeared to buck that trend. Patrice Carteron and Ismail Kartal declined to return to Sepahan and Persepolis respectively, paving the way for Moharram Navidkia and Vahid Hashemian, but Portuguese coach Ricardo Sá Pinto took over at Esteghlal and Croatian Dragan Skočić



L-R: Sepahan's Moharram Navidkia, Esteghlal's Sohrab Bakhtiarzadeh, Persepolis's Mahdi Tartar, and Tractor's Mohammad Rabiei will be among the Iranian head coaches at the upcoming Persian Gulf Pro League season. **FOOTBALL360**

continued with Tractor. Later in the campaign, Osmar replaced Hashemian at Persepolis, en-

surging foreign coaches still had a presence on the touchline. That, however, has now

changed. The absence of foreign managers presents what many view as

a significant opportunity for Iranian coaches to establish themselves at the highest domestic level. At the same time, financial constraints and security concerns have discouraged many overseas professionals from pursuing opportunities in Iran, reducing foreign involvement in the league to its lowest level in years.

The domestic coaching contingent is also relatively inexperienced at the elite level. Among the 18 head coaches, only Mes Rafsanjan's Mojtaba Jabbari has won a major trophy as a manager, lifting the 2024-25 Hazfi Cup while serving as Esteghlal's interim coach. Even that distinction could disappear if Jabbari departs Mes Rafsanjan or if the club fails to survive the relegation playoff.

Whether the new season, which kicks off on August 7, heralds the emergence of a new generation of successful Iranian coaches or exposes the drawbacks of the league's lack of international expertise remains to be seen.

Sitting Volleyball World Championships:

Iran men survive early scare to beat Poland in opener



GETTY IMAGES

Sports Desk

Iran's men's and women's teams got off to winning starts at the Sitting Volleyball World Championships in Hangzhou, China, defeating Poland and Rwanda, respectively, on Friday.

Chasing a record-extending ninth title in the tournament's 14th edition, the Iranian men were stunned in the opening set by Poland, slipping to a 25-23 defeat before bouncing back in emphatic fashion to take the next three sets 25-13, 25-10 and 25-15.

Hossein Golestani led the scor-

ing for Iran with 23 points, including eight aces, while Davoud Alipourian and Meisam Alipour also reached double figures with 12 and 10 points, respectively.

Tomasz Labocha was Poland's leading scorer with 11 points, followed by Marcin Polak with 10.

The victory lifted Iran to second place in Pool D behind familiar rival Bosnia and Herzegovina, which cruised past Japan in straight sets (25-14, 25-16, 25-12).

Iran and Bosnia will meet later today in what is expected to decide top spot in the group. The clash will be a repeat of the previous two World Championship

finals as well as the gold-medal match at the 2024 Paralympic Games, all of which were won by Iran.

Earlier in the day, the Iranian women swept Rwanda 25-11, 25-11, 25-11 in Pool A, which also features two-time champion China and Kenya.

Zahra Nejati spearheaded Iran's victory with a match-high 19 points, while Farzaneh Heidari added 12.

The Iranian women will return to action later today against Kenya before concluding the pool stage against host China on Sunday.

Iran's women's team is making

its fifth appearance at the World Championships after qualifying with a runner-up finish behind China at the 2025 Asia-Oceania Championships, also held in Hangzhou.

Back-to-back eighth-place finishes in 2000 and 2002 remain Iran's best results at the tournament. The team finished ninth in the 2022 edition.

The top two teams from each of the four groups in both the men's and women's competitions will advance to the quarterfinals, while the two champions will secure qualification for the Los Angeles 2028 Paralympic Games.

World Para Taekwondo Open Challenge:

Iranians finish with five medals in Chuncheon

Sports Desk

Iran claimed five medals, including one gold, across the men's and women's competitions at the Chuncheon 2026 World Para Taekwondo Open Challenge in South Korea.

Two-time Asian silver medalist Amirmohammad Haqiqatshenas led Iran's medal haul, claiming gold in the men's K44 -70kg division after Uzbekistan's Kudratulla Sunnatov withdrew from the final.

Meanwhile, 2024 Paralympic silver medalist Alireza Bakht had to settle for silver in the men's K44 -80kg category after losing to South Korea's Jeong Hun Joo, a two-time Paralympic bronze medalist, in the final.

Iran's third men's medal came in the +80kg division, where Hamed Haqshenas claimed bronze after falling to an Uzbek opponent in the semifinals.

Abolfazl Imani, Mohammadtaha Hassanpour, Mahdi Pour-Rahnama, and Saeid Sadeqian were the other members of the Iranian men's squad, all missing out on podium finishes in their respective weight classes.



Iran's Alireza Bakht (L) is seen in action against South Korea's Jeong Hun Joo in the men's K44 -80kg final at the World Para Taekwondo Open Challenge event in Chuncheon, South Korea, on July 9, 2026. **WORLD TAEKWONDO**

Iran added two more medals in the women's competition, with Maryam Abdollahpour and Marziyeh Nasrollahi each taking bronze.

The event brought together 165 athletes from 36 countries, as well as the Refugee Team and World Taekwondo (Costa Rica), and featured 21 Paralympic medalists from the

Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024 Games over two days of competition.

Taekwondo action in Chuncheon will continue with the one-day Demonstration and Breaking Championships on Monday, followed by the World Cup Team Championships, which get underway the following day.

AVC Gala Awards:

Iranian duo wins Fans' Choice prize in men's beach volleyball

Sports Desk

The Iranian duo of Abbas Pourasgari and Alireza Aqajani has won the Fans' Choice Men's Beach Volleyball Players award ahead of the inaugural AVC Gala Awards.

The Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) announced the winners on Thursday following a month-long public vote that attracted nearly 400,000 votes from fans across the continent. As the only categories determined entirely by public voting, the Fans' Choice Awards gave supporters the opportunity to recognize the athletes who inspired them most throughout the 2025 season.

The Philippines' Cherry Ann Rondina and Bernadeth Pons were voted the Fans' Choice winners in the women's beach volleyball category.

In the indoor categories, China's Zhu Ting was named Fans' Choice Women's Volleyball Player, while the Philippines' Bryan Bagunas claimed the men's honor.

AVC President Ramon Suzara welcomed the overwhelming response from fans and highlighted



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the importance of their participation in making the inaugural AVC Gala a resounding success.

"The Fans' Choice Awards embody the spirit of the AVC Gala by placing our fans at the heart of the celebration. The almost 400,000 votes cast through AVCGala.com demonstrate the incredible passion that exists for volleyball across Asia and the special bond between our athletes and their supporters. "Congratulations to Zhu Ting, Bry-

an Bagunas, Cherry Ann Rondina, Bernadeth Pons, Abbas Pourasgari, and Alireza Aqajani on receiving this special recognition from the fans. We look forward to honoring them alongside all of our AVC Gala awardees during the 1st AVC Gala Awards Night in Bangkok this August as we celebrate Asian volleyball excellence together." All winners will be formally honored at the 1st AVC Gala Awards Night, which will be held in Bangkok on August 8.

From collections to communities

Revised ethics code charts new course for museums



The Executive Board of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), comprising (right to left) President Antonio Rodríguez, Vice Presidents Nasir Al Darmaki and Golnaz Golsabahi, and Treasurer Goranka Horjan, during the 41st ICOM Ordinary General Assembly in Paris, France, on June 25, 2026. ● IRAN DAILY

By Hamideh Hosseini
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

The adoption of the revised ICOM Code of Ethics at the 41st Ordinary General Assembly of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), held on June 25, at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, marks one of the most consequential developments in international museum governance in more than two decades. The updated Code reflects the evolving role of museums in addressing contemporary challenges ranging from cultural diversity and social responsibility to digital transformation, climate change, and the restitution of cultural property.

In an interview with Iran Daily, Golnaz Golsabahi, Vice Chair of ICOM, discusses the years-long process that led to the adoption of the revised Code, the debates that shaped its final text, and its implications for museums worldwide. She also outlines Iran's contributions to the revision process, assesses the standing of Iranian museum professionals within the international museum community, and explains how the new ethical framework is expected to guide museums in an increasingly complex global landscape.



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IRAN DAILY: As Vice Chair of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), what do you consider the most significant achievement of the 41st Ordinary General Assembly?

GOLSABAH: In my view, the most significant achievement of ICOM's 41st Ordinary General Assembly, held on June 25, 2026, at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, was the adoption of the revised ICOM Code of Ethics.

The Code was comprehensively reviewed for the first time in more than two decades and now has the potential to shape the future of professional museum ethics and institutional practice worldwide. It serves as a global statement on the social, cultural, and human responsibilities of museums, establishing ethical commitments and obligations for museums, museum professionals, and museum institutions in their missions, visions, policy frameworks, and day-to-day operations.

The revised Code of Ethics was

adopted with approximately 86% approval. How was such broad consensus achieved, and which provisions generated the most debate?

This broad consensus was the result of several years of sustained work by the professional members of ICOM's Ethics Committee (ETHCOM), extensive consultations with specialists and ICOM's Executive Board, and inclusive participation by the membership through multiple surveys and rounds of feedback.

Throughout the revision process, the Ethics Committee, the Legal Affairs Committee (LEAC), ICOM's National and International Committees, subject-matter experts from a wide range of disciplines, and representatives from across the world carefully reviewed successive drafts of the Code and its guiding principles at multiple stages.

Numerous webinars were also organized throughout the process to familiarize members with the proposed revisions and to explain the rationale behind them.

The most extensive discussions centered on provisions concerning the legacy of colonialism, the return and restitution of cultural property, the role of Indigenous communities, and museums' social responsibilities.

Ultimately, through carefully negotiated revisions and the inclusion of more adaptable language, a broad consensus was achieved, and the revised ICOM Code of Ethics was adopted with more than 85 percent of the vote.

Why did revising the ICOM Code of Ethics become a necessity after nearly two decades?

Quite simply, because the world has changed profoundly over the past two decades.

The pace of those changes has been extraordinarily rapid, often unpredictable, and, for many of us, beyond anything we could have anticipated. These transformations have been nothing short of revolutionary, encompassing technological innovation, digitalization, climate change, large-scale migration, heightened social awareness, public health crises, armed conflicts, and the evolving role of museums themselves.

Museums are no longer viewed solely as institutions dedicated to preserving, safeguarding, and exhibiting collections. Increasingly, they are recognized as social institutions with broader responsibilities and deeper engagement with the communities they serve.

As a result, the previous Code, adopted in 2004, could no longer adequately address the realities and expecta-

tions facing today's museum sector. Museums now stand at the center of global conversations on cultural justice, diversity, inclusion, and social responsibility. Revising the 2004 Code was therefore not simply desirable, it had become an undeniable necessity.

The revised Code is grounded in the new museum definition adopted in 2022. How will this change influence the mission and responsibilities of museums worldwide?

The new museum definition, adopted during ICOM's General Conference in Prague in 2022, recognizes museums as participatory, inclusive, sustainable institutions committed to serving society and advancing social justice.

This updated perspective reinforces the idea that museums should play a more active role within their communities and assume greater responsibility toward diverse audiences, particularly underserved and marginalized groups. It also positions museums to make more meaningful contributions to cultural policymaking and encourages their evolution from institutions primarily focused on preserving collective memory into active agents of social engagement and public participation.

The revised Code of Ethics embraces this vision as its guiding principle. Its five core pillars, and their accompanying provisions, were deliberately designed to reflect this contemporary understanding of museums and to encourage museum professionals to actively engage with these evolving responsibilities.

During the deliberations, issues such as artificial intelligence, digital technologies, climate change, and the legacy of colonialism featured prominently. Which of these proved the most challenging?

All four issues were, and continue to be, highly challenging. In truth, it would be difficult to rank one above another in terms of significance.

Over the course of the Ethics Committee's multi-year work on revising the Code, artificial intelligence and digital technologies emerged as relatively new concerns, whereas climate change and the legacy of colonialism had already been longstanding topics within museum discourse.

As I mentioned earlier, the pace of global change has been extraordinarily rapid. Given the Committee's mandate and the timeline for completing the revision, it was neither realistic nor feasible to anticipate or comprehensively address every new challenge that continued to emerge. Artificial intelligence and digital tech-

nologies have introduced complex ethical questions surrounding data governance, the responsible use of digital information, and the protection of community rights. Climate change has prompted serious discussions about museums' responsibility to raise public awareness, reduce their own environmental impact, and safeguard heritage that is increasingly at risk.

At the same time, the legacy of colonialism remains deeply intertwined with difficult questions concerning the legitimate ownership of cultural property, historical justice, and the restitution of cultural heritage.

In addition, broader societal developments, including armed conflicts, migration, cultural diversity, and museums' expanding role in fostering dialogue and social cohesion, have become impossible to ignore.

Because it was not feasible for a single Code of Ethics to comprehensively address every one of these complex issues, the preparation of complementary professional guidelines became essential. This responsibility has therefore been entrusted to a joint effort between ICOM's Ethics Committee (ETHCOM) and the Legal Affairs Committee (LEAC).

These guidance documents will provide practical recommendations and more detailed frameworks on issues that are only briefly addressed, or not addressed at all, in the Code, as well as on emerging challenges that museums and museum institutions are likely to face in the future.

Now that the revised Code has been formally adopted, work is set to begin on practical guidance covering international conventions and related declarations, acquisition and deaccessioning practices, fundraising, the ethical use of emerging and digital technologies, natural heritage, and sustainable development.

One of the defining features of the revised Code is its emphasis on flexibility in applying ethical principles. How does this approach benefit countries with different capacities and institutional structures?

Rather than prescribing rigid or impractical requirements, the revised Code establishes ethical principles that can be adapted to different legal, cultural, and institutional contexts. This approach enables countries with limited resources or different governance structures to implement ethical standards in ways that are appropriate to their own circumstances. It allows them to make gradual, meaningful progress toward internationally shared standards without facing unrealistic institutional or structural burdens.

Ultimately, the objective is not uniformity, but the consistent application of shared ethical values across diverse museum environments.

To what extent are Iranian museums aligned with the principles of the revised Code, and what steps are needed to implement it fully in Iran?

Overall, Iranian museums are broad-

ly aligned with many aspects of the revised Code's five core principles, particularly in the areas of professionalism, research, and community engagement.

However, fully implementing the Code will require three key measures. First, comprehensive training should be provided for museum professionals, both in general museum practice and, more specifically, on the principles and framework of the revised Code of Ethics.

Second, greater transparency and accountability must be strengthened across museum governance and management.

Finally, sustained investment is needed in digitization initiatives and in improving public access to museums, ensuring that museum resources and services become more accessible to all members of society.

Did Iran put forward any specific proposals or perspectives during the drafting and adoption of the revised Code that influenced either the negotiations or the final text?

Yes. Iran sought, through various channels, to contribute to the discussions by emphasizing several key principles.

These included the importance of upholding professional ethics, recognizing cultural diversity while respecting local communities and their particular circumstances, and ensuring that the implementation of ethical principles takes into account countries with limited resources.

We also stressed the critical importance of safeguarding cultural heritage and supporting museum professionals working under crisis conditions, particularly during armed conflicts.

As Vice Chair of ICOM, how do you assess the standing and reputation of Iranian museum professionals and ICOM Iran within the international museum community?

Iranian museum professionals enjoy considerable scholarly and professional credibility within the international museum community.

Today, we are witnessing an unprecedented level of Iranian representation on the executive boards of ICOM's International Committees.

Iranian museum professionals currently serve as Vice Chairs of the International Committee for Communications, Marketing and Audience Engagement (ICOM COMMS) and the International Committee for Money and Banking Museums (ICOMON).

Iranian experts also play active roles within the executive structures of the Alliance of Asia-Pacific Regional Organizations (ASPAC), the International Committee for Museum Architecture and Museum Techniques (ICAMT), the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Natural History (NATHIST), the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Science and Technology (CIMUSET), the International Committee for Exhibition Exchange (ICEE), and the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Music and Musical Instruments (ICOM Music).

Through their substantive contributions, participation in international projects, and expert engagement, Iranian museum professionals have earned recognition as committed, responsible, and trusted members of the global museum community.

There is no doubt that this position should continue to be strengthened through greater international engagement. At the same time, it must

be sustained and enhanced through continued knowledge production, professional collaboration, and active participation in the international museum sector.

Following the adoption of the revised Code, what is ICOM's next priority? Are there plans for training, evaluation, or monitoring its implementation across member countries?

Supporting the implementation of the Code of Ethics has always been one of ICOM's core objectives, and that commitment will certainly continue.

With the revised Code now formally adopted, one of ICOM's immediate priorities is to support the timely development of complementary guidance documents by the Ethics Committee (ETHCOM), in close collaboration with the Legal Affairs Committee (LEAC).

ICOM's goal is for the Code of Ethics to remain a living document, one that evolves in response to emerging needs and continues to serve the museum profession in a timely and meaningful way. It should not exist merely as a written text; rather, it should become an integral part of the everyday professional conduct and decision-making of museums and museum professionals.

Training, evaluation, and implementation support will naturally vary according to circumstances and institutional contexts. ICOM regards the Code as a guiding framework that ethically binds museums and museum professionals to uphold its principles. That said, ICOM does not serve as a legal regulator, enforcement authority, or executive oversight body responsible for monitoring compliance within individual countries.

Ultimately, the Code's effectiveness depends on the professional integrity, ethical commitment, and sound judgment of museum professionals themselves. Nevertheless, documented breaches of the Code by individual members or member organizations may affect their relationship with ICOM and, in certain circumstances, may even have implications for their standing or membership within the world's leading professional museum organization.

Museums today play a far more prominent social role than ever before. In your view, what is their foremost ethical responsibility toward society?

While accountability to society has rightly become the cornerstone of contemporary museum practice, museums' foremost ethical responsibilities also include safeguarding cultural heritage, respecting cultural diversity, creating spaces for dialogue, and supporting vulnerable communities.

Today's museums should foster a sense of belonging, security, and inclusion among the communities they serve, first at the local level and, increasingly, at the regional and global levels. Regardless of where their audiences are located, museums should ensure that people feel represented, respected, and heard.

If you could convey one central message from this General Assembly to museum directors and professionals in Iran, what would it be?

The ethical responsibility of museums and museum professionals no longer ends with preserving, safeguarding, and exhibiting collections. Our ultimate mission is to help build a more humane future for society.