

## Iran's Dual Political Voice—Part One

*Does Iran's governing framework and prevailing religious ideology create mixed political messages for the West? Why is the Iranian leadership fixed on the notion of nuclear development and the eventual acquiring of a nuclear weapon? Is there reason to believe that Iran will use its future growing Eurasian alliances to influence geopolitical outcomes in the Middle East? Does the Bible give us a future perspective for the people of Iran?*

Iranian leaders know the challenges they face as they walk a thin line between achieving modernization—while positively participating in a globalizing world—and preserving a Muslim national identity for the Islamic State of Iran.

Complicating this religious and political balancing act is an apparent dual political voice that resonates from Iran's leadership, which has certainly—in the decades following the 1979 Iranian Revolution—opened the door for critical misunderstandings regarding Iran's political, social and economic goals, which has further muddled Iran's on-going political and economic conflicts with Western nations.

How, then, are we to understand the nature of this dual political voice in the context of Iran's social, political and economic goals and what does this dual political voice mean for the future of Iran?

To grapple with this question we need a starting point that demonstrates that there is

indeed a [dual political voice](#) in the first place, and that point of beginning is the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

With the 1979 Revolution the world witnessed the demise of the last monarch of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and the world also saw the rise to power—and to political office—of the Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. But, more than this, with the 1979 Revolution the world also saw the establishment of a Sharia-based [Iranian Constitution](#) for the then newly founded Islamic Republic of Iran.

This constitution, which would seem peculiar in some ways, perhaps in many ways to Western thinking, is nonetheless a document that established Islamic law (Sharia) as a foundation for the political, economic and social aspirations of Iran. While at the same time Iran's constitution became a testimony to the significance of the Islamic faith as a guiding principle for State governance.

Consequently, one could question the validity of such a constitution and whether or not it has or has not allowed for a modernization of Iran without losing a Muslim national identity. One could also question whether or not Iran's constitution has allowed for a people's voice in determining the political direction of the country, especially when this same constitution allows for the supreme leader to be the most important religiopolitical administrator in the government of Iran.

Leading us then to consider what this constitutional form has created for the political voice of Iran.

In a sense, we could say that what took place with the 1979 Iranian Revolution was an attempt at social and political engineering where some principles of secular governance became melded with the tenets of Islam—more specifically Shi'a Islam (Shi'ism). Bringing us then to consider the result of this social and political engineering in the decades following the revolution, because since the 1979 Revolution we can say with some confidence that the world has become increasingly aware of a nation-state that voices two aspects of its constitutional framework to the Western world.

This is certainly due in part to the nature of the Iranian Constitution, which gives the appearance that Iran is fronting two different and conflicting political faces—one that is pseudo-democratic and one that is theocratic—which has led some political analysts to refer to the Iranian Constitution as a “hybrid” social contract, and one that is notably contrasted against the political, social and religious ideals of the predominantly Christian-professing nations of the West and also the country of Israel.

Something that became apparent with the rise to power of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who announced that: “we will export our revolution throughout the world... until the calls ‘there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah’ are echoed all over the world.” Khomeini is also understood to have said that “Islam is politics or it is nothing,” which one might reasonably say casts an aura of religious zeal over the political ambitions of Iran.

Thus, the religious statement becomes the political statement in an attempt to seek a political heritage in Islam's beginning, while also pursuing some form of social justice in a new historical narrative for Iran that became defined in the Iranian Constitution.

Creating then a dual political voice—religiopolitical—that comes from the leadership of Iran.

This same dualism was later advanced when Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad voiced a condemnation of the West and publicly denied the significance of the Jewish holocaust. It was President Ahmadinejad who has been quoted (perhaps misquoted) as saying that “as the Imam said, Israel must be wiped off the map,” and this comment only served to confirm the Iranian position regarding the region of Palestine, because the Iranian's will not accept the two-state solution for the Israelis and Palestinians. (Supporting the two-state solution would mean that Iran recognizes Israel's right to statehood in the Middle East.)

Consequently, such a political position has only served to further disenfranchise Iran from amicably participating in a globalizing world.

Notably, from a biblical perspective it should be understood that in a larger context this same political standing held by Iran is clearly in opposition to what is reflected in biblical prophecies regarding the people of Israel.

So, one could reasonably see why such political rhetoric would not go over well in the West as it certainly was not well received by the State of Israel.

To some degree we could also say that Iran's political posturing does not sit well with Saudi Arabia, which is a country that sees Iran as a threat militarily and a competitor in exporting a different branch of Islam (Shi'ism vs. Sunnism). Noting importantly that this exporting of Islam as a religion around the world—by both Iran and Saudi Arabia—may be seen as giving a political relevance to the otherwise weak social institutions of these two strategically located countries, both of which sustain their economies largely as modern-day rentier States.

Rentier States rely on fixed income from the sale of their resources, and in the cases of Iran and Saudi Arabia their main export and self-limiting resource is oil, which means that oil is indeed a strategic commodity—not only for Iran and Saudi Arabia—but also for Western Europe and particularly India and China.

This, of course, tells us what is at stake for Iran.

That is to say that if Iran cannot uphold the political relevance of Islam as a foundation for State governance, then it cannot uphold the legitimacy of a Muslim State.

If one falls, so goes the other.

Meaning that if State sovereignty should fail it would cast doubt on the significance of Islam in the governing constitutional framework of Iran, because it is believed that only an Islamic government can bring social justice and the freedom such justice promises for the people of Iran.

Such is the legacy of an Islamic jurist's view of a government framework based on guardianship as proposed in the [treatise of the late Ayatollah Khomeini](#).

Leading us then to consider that in this context the nature of Iran's constitution is seen to be legitimized by Iran's exporting of Islam, which allows us to further surmise that Islam may be viewed as an imperialistic religion, or complicit with imperialistic politics, and to place this religion in this context may help us better understand the politics of Iran.

Now, there are those who would say that Islam is not an imperialistic religion, and often these same individuals or groups point out that there are Muslims who live in a civil, productive and respectable manner all over the world.

And they do.

There is no reason to doubt this.

It is a worthy and meaningful testimony to the individual Muslim who chooses to live a civil and respectable life, and it is clear that many Muslims do contribute sincerely to setting a good example and bettering society.

But, unfortunately, there are some individual Muslims or organized Muslim groups who do not, and we have a record of their testimony in their political and social actions. Giving room for other religions to think about their political and social conduct in the world as well.

However, in regard to Iran, this raises an issue as to whether each individual Muslim or group is acting according to the fundamental tenets of Islam. Or, is one individual or stylized group choosing to adhere to the teachings of Islam more so or less so than the other, and can we determine the result of that difference in religious practice for those who

follow the tenets of Islam in a country where this religion is embedded in its constitution.

The point being that when an individual is subject to the rules of government, and the religious belief of the individual is related to the structure of State governance, and that State holds to Islam as the guiding principle for a nation, then it becomes more difficult to separate the view of the people from the actions of government, especially when there is an apparent lack of representative government according to its constitution.

So, for Iran—as a nation—if it adopts the tenets of Islam as the foundation for governance, with the leadership taking a strict view of the application of Islam, then it creates a challenge for both the Iranian people and the leadership to prove the validity of Islam as a governing principle, noting that Iran's political actions appear imperialistic and in confrontation with values held to be important to the West and in some cases to the rest of the world.

In this regard we may point to Iran's involvement in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.

Thus, it is the people of Iran who must address whether or not their government reflects not only their social and political views, but also reflects an accurate view of their personal religious beliefs as such beliefs relate to their geopolitical actions in the world. (Something that Christianity and Judaism should also address because both of these religions have for the most part politicized themselves by adopting national cultures and political ideals into their belief systems—conservative or liberal, for example—and this has affected the degree to which both have divided themselves away from the teachings of the Bible.)

However, people seldom choose to address the issue of religion and its inherent influence on politics if that influence is thought to be indirect, but when it is constitutionalized as State religion then it is worth the time and effort to see how that religion affects political conduct—such as with Iran.

Unfortunately, for the purposes of one-sided political posturing, or for diplomatic reasons, or for reasons of willing ignorance, many politicians in the West have often played down the significance of the Islamic faith in predominantly Muslim States. While at the same time some politicians claim for the sake of political expediency that “Islam is a peaceful religion,” which is an often cited statement that seems accepting, or perhaps compromising, or even embracing of Islam, but it is a phrase that does not really mean anything because of its obvious ambiguity, and it certainly does not explain the nature of Islam.

In reality, such phrases do not actually explain the nature of any religion for that matter—including the monotheistic religions of Christianity and Judaism—and therefore those who take a superficial view of Islam have too often dismissed out of hand the importance of Islam in the governance and diplomatic dynamics of Iran. (Calling people or States Islamophobic has sometimes been used to summarily deflect or foolishly ignore a forthright discussion of the nature of Islam and its relationship to constitutional governance for some States.)

The result of this dismissal of Islamic influence in politics has more often than not created uneasy negotiations with agreements founded on mutual mistrust, or perhaps distrust, which has led to reprisals for any

breach of any given treaty, even though such breaches of treaties were inevitable from the beginning, with a notable case in point being the Iran Nuclear Deal ([Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA](#)).

Naturally, as we should expect, this type of agreement (UN Resolution 2231) has been complicated by Western views of national security and by Iran's apparent dual political voice that projects mixed signals by putting forward an imperialistic religiopolitical view, which is typically contrary to the Western perspective that more or less separates religion and politics for the purpose of finding mutual diplomatic ground upon which to solve political problems between States.

Presenting, then, a dilemma for the West.


For in attending to this dual political voice—religion as politics and politics as religion—the West is brought to confront a question about Iran's geopolitical behavior, particularly in the light of the JCPOA.

And it is a simple question.

Why would a “peaceful religion” that is entwined in the constitution of Iran allow for Iran to pursue the acquisition of a nuclear weapon?

Revealing a political conundrum of the Iranian Constitution.

Understood in this question.

Does Iran's constitution and State action reveal that Islam is a driver of foreign policy and complicit with political agendas, giving some legitimacy to the view that Islam is indeed an imperialistic religion? 

[Continued in part two of this series.](#))