

# INSIDE THE COMPLEXITY OF IRAN-TUNISIA RELATIONS: KHOMEINISM, BOURGUIBISM, REALPOLITIK

Hafssa Fakher El Abiari





Center for Iranian Studies in Ankara

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## Inside The Complexity Of Iran-Tunisia Relations: Khomeinism, Bourguibism, Realpolitik

İran-Tunus İlişkilerindeki Karmaşıklığın İç Yüzü:  
Humeynicilik, Burgibacılık, Reel Politik

بررسی ماهیت روابط ایران و تونس:  
خمینی گرایی، بورقیده گرایی، سیاست واقع گرایانه

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BACE</b>	Belief in the Ability to Control Events	<b>KSA</b>	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
<b>BP</b>	British Petroleum Company	<b>LTA</b>	Leadership Trait Analysis
<b>CC</b>	Conceptual Complexity	<b>MB</b>	Muslim Brotherhood
<b>CNLT</b>	Conseil National de Libertés en Tunisie	<b>MEK</b>	Mujahedeen-e-Khalq
<b>CPS</b>	Code of Personal Status	<b>MENA</b>	Middle East North Africa
<b>DIS</b>	Distrust	<b>MTI</b>	Mouvement de Tendance Islamique
<b>DT</b>	Dinar Tunisien	<b>NAM</b>	Non-Aligned Movement
<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>EU-3</b>	France, Germany, UK	<b>NCA</b>	National Constituent Assembly
<b>FPA</b>	Foreign Policy Analysis	<b>NCA</b>	National Constituent Assembly
<b>GCC</b>	Gulf Cooperation Council	<b>OIC</b>	Organization of the Islamic Conference
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product	<b>OPEC</b>	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
<b>IAEA</b>	International Atomic Energy Agency	<b>PWR</b>	Need for Power
<b>ICCIMA</b>	Iran’s Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture	<b>RCD</b>	Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique
<b>ICRO</b>	Islamic Culture and Relations Organization	<b>SC</b>	Self-Confidence
<b>IGB</b>	In-Group Bias	<b>TASK</b>	Task Orientation
<b>IKCO</b>	Iran Khodro Company	<b>TLDH</b>	Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights
<b>INS</b>	Institut National de la Statistique	<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates
<b>IR</b>	International Relations	<b>UGTT</b>	Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail
<b>IRGC</b>	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps	<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>IRI</b>	Islamic Republic of Iran	<b>UNFT</b>	Union Nationale des Femmes de Tunisie
<b>IRNA</b>	Islamic Republic News Agency	<b>UNGA</b>	United Nations General Assembly
<b>ISIS</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria	<b>UNSC</b>	United Nations Security Council
<b>JCPOA</b>	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action	<b>US</b>	United States
		<b>WMDs</b>	Weapons of Mass Destruction

## SUMMARY

- By cautiously marrying ideology and foreign policy making, the Ahmadinejad Administration confronted the West and accommodated the non-West.
- Iran's approach to foreign policy has not been rigid because Tehran did not hesitate to display signs of goodwill vis-à-vis the United States and to let the traditional rivalry with Saudi Arabia resurge.
- The victory of Rouhani in the presidential elections of 2013 marked a departure from conservatism to moderate pragmatism.
- President Rouhani sought to strengthen the economic sector, solve the nuclear issue, and re-assert Iran's major role in international affairs.
- Rouhani's Iran embarked on an era when the formulation of foreign policy is based on national interests rather than the blind replication of Khomeini's principles.
- In Tunisia, President Bourguiba exerted massive control over the religious sphere.
- The success of the Iranian Revolution empowered many Tunisians who had believed in the importance of Islam in politics.
- By repressing Tunisian Islamists and turning a blind eye on Shiites, Ben Ali's Tunisia fostered good political, economic and cultural relations with Iran.
- With the eruption of the Arab uprisings, Tehran started to display increasing levels of interest towards Tunis; Shiite associations in Tunisia began to operate more freely and bilateral trade reached interesting levels.
- With the election of President Essebsi, a figure of the Old Regime, Iran-Tunisia relations remained cordial without developing any further, thereby questioning the symmetry of the parties' interests and commitments..

**Keywords:** Iran, Tunisia, Iranian Revolution, Shiism, Trade

## ÖZET

- Ahmedinejad yönetimi tedbirli bir biçimde ideolojiyi ve dış politikayı birleştirmiştir. Böylece Batı'yla yüzleşmiş ve Batı olmayana da uyum sağlamıştır.
- İran'ın dış politikaya yaklaşımı katı bir hâl almamıştır çünkü Tahran, Birleşik Devletler'e ilişkin olarak iyi niyet göstermekte tereddüt etmemiş ve Suudi Arabistan ile arasındaki geleneksel husumetin tekrar su yüzüne çıkmasına izin vermemiştir.
- Ruhani'nin 2013 başkanlık seçimlerindeki zaferi, muhafazakarlıktan pragmatizme doğru bir geçişin işaretçisidir.
- Devlet Başkanı Ruhani, ekonomik sektörü güçlendirmeye, nükleer meseleyi çözmeye ve İran'ın uluslararası münasebetlerdeki esaslı rolünü tahkim etmeye çalışmıştır.
- Ruhani döneminde İran, Humeyni'nin ilkelerinin körü körüne tekrar edilmesinden ziyade milli menfaate binaen formülize edilen bir dış politika devrine girmiştir.
- Tunus'ta Devlet Başkanı Burgiba, din sahasında kuvvetli bir kontrol elde etmiştir.

- ایران Devrimi'nin başarısı birçok Tunuslu'nun İslam'ın siyasetteki önemine dair inancını pekiştirmiştir.
- Tunuslu İslamcılar bastırmak ve Şiileri görmezden gelmek suretiyle Bin Ali dönemindeki Tunus, İran ile siyasi, ekonomik ve kültürel çerçevede iyi ilişkiler kurmuştur.
- Arap ayaklanmalarının ortaya çıkışı ile beraber Tahran, Tunus'a karşı artan bir ilgi göstermeye başlamıştır. Tunus'taki Şii kuruluşlar daha özgür bir biçimde hareket eder olmuş ve ikili arasındaki ticaret dikkat çekici seviyelere ulaşmıştır.
- Eski rejimin isimlerinden olan Es-Sıbsi'nin başkan seçilmesiyle İran-Tunus ilişkileri başka bir ilerleme kaydetmeksizin sahip olduğu samimi vaziyeti korumuştur. Buradan hareketle tarafların ilgi ve bağlılıkları arasındaki simetri birtakım sorgulamalara konu olmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İran, Tunus, İran Devrimi, Şiilik, Ticaret

### چکیده

- دولت احمدی نژاد به نوعی ایدئولوژی و سیاست خارجی را با هم تلفیق کرد و بدین وسیله به مقابله با غرب و همراهی با دیگر کشورها پرداخت.
  - با این حال، در آن دوران رویکرد ایران در سیاست خارجی انعطاف پذیر بوده است. از یک طرف حسن نیت خود را به ایالات متحده نشان داده و از طرف دیگر اجازه نداد تا خصومت دیرینه اش با عربستان سعودی دوباره تشدید شود.
  - پیروزی روحانی در انتخابات ریاست جمهوری سال ۲۰۱۳، نشانگر تغییر در سیاست جمهوری اسلامی از محافظه کاری به عملگرایی بوده است.
  - روحانی تلاش کرده است اقتصاد کشور را تقویت، مسئله هسته ای را حل و نقش اساسی ایران در مناسبات بین المللی را تقویت نماید.
  - در دوره روحانی، سیاست خارجی ایران به جای تکرار اصول مورد تأکید آیت الله خمینی، بر اساس اصل تأمین منافع ملی تدوین شده است.
  - در تونس، رئیس جمهور این کشور بورقیه نظارت دقیقی بر فعالیتهای دینی اعمال می کرد.
  - پیروزی انقلاب اسلامی در ایران موجب تقویت اعتقاد به اهمیت دین در سیاست در میان طیف وسیعی از مردم تونس شده است.
  - با سرکوب اسلامگرایان [اهل سنت] و نادیده گرفتن شیعیان در تونس، این کشور در دوره بن علی روابط خوبی را با ایران در زمینه های سیاسی، اقتصادی و فرهنگی برقرار کرد.
  - با ظهور بهار عربی، تهران توجه روزافزونی به تونس نشان داده است. سازمانهای شیعه در این کشور آزادانه تر فعالیت کرده و تجارت بین دو کشور به سطح قابل توجهی رسیده است.
  - با انتخاب سبسی که یکی از سیاستمداران رژیم سابق بود، اگرچه بهبودی در این روابط ایجاد نشده، اما دو کشور روابط دوستانه خود را همچنان حفظ کرده اند.
- کلیدواژه ها: ایران، تونس، انقلاب ایران، تشیع، تجارت.

### INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, the Tunisian experience has occupied headlines. In January 2011, Mohamed Bouazizi, a young merchant, immolated himself in protest against social injustice, subsequently, Tunisia became the pioneer of the Arab uprisings. Hundreds of people began protesting in solidarity with Bouazizi, as they too desired change. For, since Tunisia's independence in 1956, the Tunisian people saw only two political figures, Bourguiba and Ben Ali. The events spread across the region, causing a butterfly effect and unleashing what Marc Lynch calls "the new Arab wars."

In Iran, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei advocated the overthrow of resilient autocracies. Iranian officials started paying frequent visits to Tunis. However, Iran-Tunisia relations date back to the Shah's era. Moreover, the eruption of the Iranian Revolution in February 1979 increased the Tunisians political maturity. The youth, in particular, commenced challenging the legitimacy of Bourguiba by joining the Jema'ah al-Islamiyah, Ennahda's predecessor. Secular Bourguiba attempted to immunize his authority by repressing Islamists from the entire spectrum. Nevertheless, this liberalized authoritarianism increased the Tunisians' thirst for political Islam, and thus, resulted in Ennahda's landslide victory in 2011.

How have Iran-Tunisia relations evolved, particularly since 2011? In response to this question, this report studies Iranian Foreign Policy under Ahmadinejad and Rouhani using Leadership Trait Analysis and axial coding. Then, it examines Iran-Tunisia relations under Bourguiba and Ben Ali. Finally, it studies Iran-Tunisia relations under Marzouki and Essebsi.

## PART 1

### THE FOREIGN POLICY OF IRAN: BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND ADHOCRACY

*Passive acceptance of the existing political and economic currents in the world is a great danger for our society and if one thinks carefully, one would realize that these conditions have to be changed through a movement (...). Never confuse rational calculations with conservative calculations: they are two different things. (Khamenei, 2005b)*

Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei

In August 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won the presidential election in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). In June 2013, Hassan Rouhani rose to power at a time when domestic and regional crises were burgeoning. Whereas the former's victory represents a shift from the liberal-pragmatic motto that prevailed under President Khatami (1997-2005) to a revolutionary-populist stance, the latter's succession exemplifies a move towards a moderate-pragmatic approach. Under Ahmadinejad, Iran's foreign policy began mirroring some of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's principles. Those principles, being the basis of the constitution, reveal idealism and revolutionism, and imply continuity in foreign policy making. However, Iran's foreign policy, since 1979, has regularly displayed pragmatism and flexibility when Tehran's national interests are in jeopardy. Under Rouhani, Iran sought diplomatic re-engagement to end years of economic

and political strife. Purportedly, "hostility begets hostility" (Limbert, 2009:188).

The diametric profiles of President Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) and President Rouhani (2013- ) falsify the simplistic belief according to which the IRI has a unique foreign policy paradigm. Instead, they demonstrate that the IRI uses various paradigms that vacillate between continuity and adhocism.<sup>1</sup> As Saikal explains, the political system of the IRI "has a measure of internal elasticity" because its foreign policy is shaped by "nuanced Islamic pragmatism rather than ideological considerations" (2016:22-24). In the first section, Iran's foreign policy under Ahmadinejad and Rouhani in the realm of discourse analysis is examined.

<sup>1</sup> Ali Khamenei, head of the state, holds the jurisdiction of setting Iran's policies. When I refer to Presidents Ahmadinejad and Rouhani or to their respective administrations, I do not conflate their authorities with those of the Supreme Leader.

## I. Foreign Policy Analysis of Iran: A Framework

In this work, the foreign policy analysis of Iran is based on the analysis and axial coding of discourses. The IRI's constitution specifies that the Supreme Leader chairs the executive branch, whereas the president heads the executive branch. Furthermore, Article 110 specifies that Khamenei's jurisdictions are unparalleled. He governs the layers and institutions of the state, military, economy, and media (Iranian Constitution, art. CX). The President's jurisdictions, limited compared to the Supreme Leader's, make him the second-highest official of the IRI (Iranian Constitution, CXIII).

Acknowledging the authorities of the leadership and executive branches of the Iranian government, the discourse analysis was carried out in reference to Khamenei, Ahmadinejad, and Rouhani (see Addendum). From the period 2005-2019, annual speeches of Khamenei were unsystematically chosen. For the 2005-2012 period, Ahmadinejad's addresses at the UN General Assembly meeting from four years (2005, 2009, 2011, and 2012) were deliberately selected.<sup>2</sup> In the 2013-2018 period, Rouhani's speeches at the UN General Assembly Meeting from four years (2013, 2015, 2017, and 2018) were intentionally designated.<sup>3</sup> To conduct the

discourse analysis, ProfilerPlus.org's Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) was used. Specifically, Margaret G. Hermann's seven traits because they capture the relevant features of a speech (1999:10). Nevertheless, the LTA's quantitative output is insufficient to determine the evolution of Iran's foreign policy. Accordingly, axial coding of Khamenei, Ahmadinejad, and Rouhani's speeches were conducted for the following three reasons:

1. Determine how Khamenei's discourse changed between 2005 and 2019.
2. Identify the recurrent topics in Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's discourses.
3. Assess the place of ideology in the IRI's foreign policy.

## II. Ahmadinejad's Iran: Confrontation of Convenience, Cooperation of Convenience

Ahmadinejad's election in 2005 changed the trajectory of Iran's foreign policy. The newly elected President replicated many of Ayatollah Khomeini's teachings, drawing a sharp contrast between Iran's perception of itself and its view of others, i.e., the West and the non-West. In this sphere, the foreign policy behavior of Iran under Ahmadinejad oscillated between two activisms; regional activism and global activism. Mutually exclusive, those activisms fit in two dichotomous trends; confrontation and cooperation. Revelators of duality, those trends have

<sup>2</sup> I deliberately chose speeches that were delivered in 2005, 2009, 2011, and 2012 because of four reasons. In 2005, President Ahmadinejad was newly elected. The International community had just witnessed the ascent a profile who would be referred to in the subsequent years as conservative/hardliner. In 2009, Ahmadinejad won the presidency in the context of what some referred to as controversial elections. In 2011, the Arab uprisings erupted. In 2012, Ahmadinejad was in his final year of the presidential mandate.

<sup>3</sup> I deliberately chose speeches that were delivered in 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2018 because of four reasons. In

2013, President Rouhani was newly elected. In 2015, Iran signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with the P5+1 and the EU. In 2017, tensions between Iran and the US increased as President Trump displayed deep dissatisfaction with the terms of the nuclear deal. In mid-2018, the US withdrew from the deal.

been mirrored in Khamenei and Ahmadinejad's speeches between 2005 and 2012.

### A. Iran between 2005 and 2012: A Return to Ayatollah Khomeini's Principles

During Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran securitized IRI-West relations and consolidated IRI-non-West relations. This foreign policy shift embodies an approximate return to the principles of Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the IRI (Iranian Constitution, art. III, CLII, CLIII, CLIV). Khamenei, in 2008, declared that the precepts of Ahmadinejad's Iran descend from those of the Iranian Revolution and emphasized the importance of that characteristic (Khamenei, 2008).<sup>4</sup> Pertaining to foreign policy, Articles 152, 153, 154, and 155 of the constitution expose the revolutionary principles of the IRI, significantly reflected under the Ahmadinejad administration (Iranian Constitution).

#### 1. Confrontation of the West

Iran's first policy has been confronting the West, manifest at the regional and global arenas. In reference to the condemnation of the US, Israel, and their allies, the discourses of Khamenei and Ahmadinejad promote three overarching rationales.

First, historical records on West-Iran relations reveal asymmetry of commitment, reliability, and credibility. The unleashing of the Iran-Iraq War had been accompanied with American

and French backing of Baghdad because they had sought to fade Ayatollah Khomeini's resolution to export the Revolution (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2009). President Khatami (1997-2005) attempted to improve Tehran's relations with the West (Juneau & Razavi, 2013:1).<sup>5</sup> However, the display of goodwill did not deter President Bush from classifying Iran with Iraq and North Korea in the so-called "Axis-of-Evil."

Second, the Leader and the Executive perceive the behavior of the US and Israel from the lens of hegemony, imperialism, and colonialism (Khamenei, 2011b; Ahmadinejad, 2009). The analysis of Khamenei's speeches reveals the recurrence of specific attributes when the US and Israel are dealt with. Stretched over a large spectrum, those attributes fluctuate between 'moderate' hostility (e.g., arrogant power, multifaceted domination, Zionist influence) and 'extreme' hostility (e.g., Death to America, Great Satan, satanic global Zionist network). Moreover, in 2007, the Supreme Leader highlighted the failure of American policies to bring justice, referring to the interminable Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Khamenei, 2007). In 2011, he criticized NATO's intervention in Libya, arguing that it damaged the infrastructure of Libya and resulted in the death of innocent people (Khamenei, 2011b). In 2012, Khamenei stated that the US possesses "instruments of hegemony," namely unilateralism (2012a). Referring to the Cold War, Khamenei underscored, in paradox, the defect of American unilateralism and the significance of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) (2012a).

<sup>4</sup> The Constitution of the IRI mirrors the revolutionary principles that Ayatollah Khomeini had set in the context of the 1979 Revolution. When simplified, those precepts deal with comprehensive independence, territorial integrity, and self-sufficiency.

<sup>5</sup> In reference to the internal political factionalism in Iran, it is important to note that the conservatives had been inhibiting President Khatami's attempts of rapprochement with the West. The political profile of the Executive is not the end criterion that determines the orientation of the IRI.

Third, Ahmadinejad calls attention to the opacity of the West, particularly the US. A few weeks after his first election, the President displayed high levels of mistrust vis-à-vis Washington. Referring to 9/11, Ahmadinejad questioned the credibility of American intelligence services. He states (Ahmadinejad, 2005):

“After September 11, a particular radical group was accused of terrorist activities – although it was never explained how such intelligence gathering and security organizations failed to prevent such an extensive and well-planned operation.”

Another display of opacity, according to Ahmadinejad, is the inconsistency of Western policies in Iraq and Afghanistan (Ahmadinejad, 2005). Allegedly, the so-called “powers” had supported Saddam Hussein and the Taliban, although they did not hesitate to crack down on

the two (Ahmadinejad, 2005). The President implicitly asserted that the national interests of the referred-to states’ reign over humanitarian values, opposite of Iran, a nation “focused on the respect for the rights of human beings” (Ahmadinejad, 2005). A third instance of obscurity is the killing of Osama bin Laden. Ahmadinejad criticizes the unilaterally set circumstances in which the Al Qaeda leader had been killed, insisting that a better world requires the prevalence of transparency and honesty (Ahmadinejad, 2012). For a newly elected President, those statements are bold enough to draw international attention to the IRI. However, unlike Khomeini, Ahmadinejad’s stance concerning the West, particularly the US, has not been static. Reflective of the 2005-2012 period, the table below gathers Khomeini’s linguistic references to the US and Israel.

**Table 1 – Khomeini’s Linguistic References to the US and Israel**

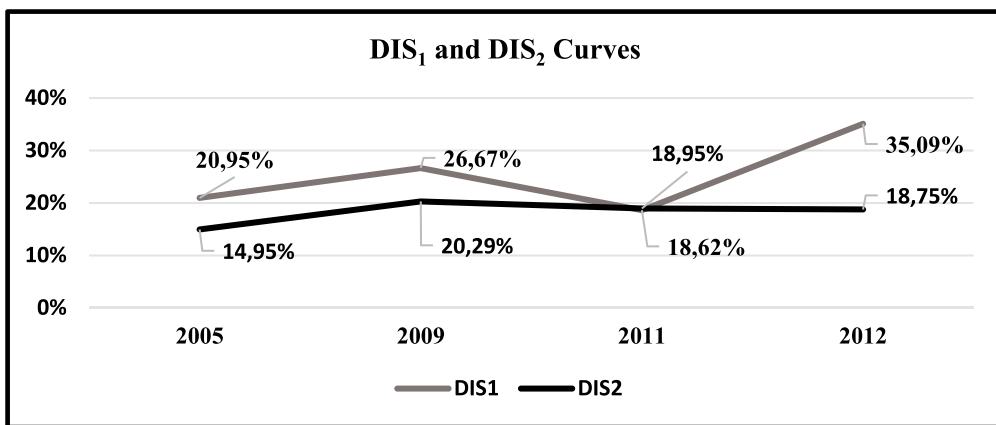
Speech Year	Linguistic References to the US	Linguistic References to Israel
<b>2005</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Outrageous and foolish move (US President)</li> <li>▪ Great Satan</li> <li>▪ Domination and imperialism</li> <li>▪ Global hegemony</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Zionist wealth</li> <li>▪ Zionist influence</li> <li>▪ Collapse of the Zionist regime</li> </ul>
<b>2006</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Foreign challenge</li> <li>▪ Heir of the West</li> <li>▪ Shia Crescent American invention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Foundations of Israel</li> </ul>
<b>2007</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Multifaceted domination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Satanic global Zionist network</li> </ul>
<b>2008</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Arrogance</li> <li>▪ Westoxification</li> <li>▪ Bullying</li> <li>▪ Domination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Arrogance</li> </ul>
<b>2009</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bully</li> <li>▪ Interference in global affairs</li> <li>▪ Death to America</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Death to Israel</li> <li>▪ Arrogance</li> </ul>
<b>2010</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Domination of the Iranian nation</li> <li>▪ Empire</li> <li>▪ Arrogance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Arrogance</li> </ul>

<b>2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Arrogance</li> <li>▪ Dim-witted (US President)</li> <li>▪ Imperialism/ colonialism</li> <li>▪ Political domination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Zionist government</li> <li>▪ Arrogance</li> <li>▪ Hegemony</li> </ul>
<b>2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Arrogance</li> <li>▪ Instruments of hegemony</li> <li>▪ Aggressive government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ferocious Zionist wolves</li> <li>▪ Usurping Zionist regime</li> </ul>

Clearly, Khamenei's language fits in the realm of a deep-rooted mistrust of the US and Israel. On ProfilerPlus.org, a variable named Distrust (DIS) displays the percentage of words

that express suspicion towards the other. The graph below displays two curves DIS1 and DIS2, corresponding to the speeches of Ahmadinejad and Khamenei.

**Figure 1 – Graphical Representation of the DIS Values in Khamenei and Ahmadinejad's Speeches (2005, 2009, 2011, 2012)**



The respective averages of DIS in Khamenei and Ahmadinejad's speeches are  $\bar{X}(\text{DIS1}) = 25.33\%$  and  $\bar{X}(\text{DIS2}) = 18.25\%$ . The large discrepancy between DIS1 and DIS2 shows that Khamenei primarily stamps the ideology of the IRI with Anti-Americanism and Anti-Zionism. Put differently, the language of the Supreme Leader perpetuates the ideological foundations of the IRI. Conflating the results of Table 1 and Figure 1, it is apparent that the positive and negative evolutions of DIS value do not imply an approximate dissociation from

Iran's revolutionary principles. Contrarily, the language and the behavior of the President demonstrate that Iran can withdraw from the chicken game to prevent direct collisions.

In 2006, President Ahmadinejad sent a letter to President Bush, highlighting international developments, condemning repressive behavior, and advancing the values of the IRI ("Ahmadinejad's Letter to Bush," 2006). This move, a milestone in IRI-US relations, was not reciprocal. Kasra Naji explains that the letter is an indication that the conservatives, isolated,

can be open in some contexts (Naji, 2008:197). Another attempt took place when Barack Obama won the 2008 presidential elections. Ahmadinejad sent a congratulatory letter writing that the people expect the US to shift from assertive foreign policy to peaceful behavior in accordance with morals and ethics (Fathi, 2008). In the two instances, did Ahmadinejad behave under the jurisdiction of Khamenei? Regardless, the response is inconsequential compared to the political gestures.

During the presidency of Ahmadinejad, the so-called West occupied headlines. The President and the Supreme Leader stigmatized the US and Israel in the frame of untrustworthiness, hegemony, and opacity. The discourse analysis of those personalities reveals two details. First, Khamenei's references to the West corroborate the principles of Ayatollah Khomeini. Whereas the axial coding shows the prevalence of West-bound themes, the DIS variable of the LTA verifies the Leader's perceptions. Second, Ahmadinejad's stance regarding the West is less confrontational, at the discourse level, than Khamenei's. Although a hardcore conservative, the President did not hesitate to evince signs of goodwill, which, albeit minor, back what Amir M. Haji-Youssefi portrays as a softening of Iran's foreign policy after 2009 (Haji-Youssefi 2010). Those details, aside from exhibiting the complexity of foreign policy making in the IRI, help revisit the place of ideology. The joint analysis of Leadership/Executive discourses helps place the stigma of the West in the domain of justification rather than guidance.

## 2. Accommodation of the Non-West

Iran's second motto has been the accommodation of the non-West, visible at the regional and global arenas. During the presidency of Ahmadinejad, Tehran acknowledged the gravity of dialogue and cooperation with countries of Latin America and Asia, and regional neighbors of Africa and the Middle East (to a lesser extent) (Warnaar, 2013:170). An amalgam of push and pull factors accounts for Iran's pivot to the non-West. On the one hand, Tehran aspires to counterbalance the influence of Washington and its allies through the creation of a global axis of resistance. On the other hand, it endeavors to enhance 'major power' status regionally and globally.

### a) A push-factor for Iran's counterbalancing behavior

Three mainstream rationales outline Iran's need to counterbalance the power vacuum in Afghanistan and Iraq after 2001 and 2003, the presence of faithful US allies in Iran's proximity, and the existence of historical-cultural ties with the Shiites outside Iran. The toppling of the Taliban and the Ba'ath regimes broadened Iran's maneuvering space but increased security concerns as well. Furthermore, Post-Saddam Hussein Iraq has been benign for neighboring Iran because it entailed the arrival of Shias to power and the weakening of the Majahedeen-e-Khalq Party (MEK) (Zweiri, 2008:115-128). However, the stretched deployment of American forces increased Iranian security stakes. Though the US supported the Shiites

in Iraq, Iran was fearful of Iraq's internal issues spilling over, had a full-fledged civil war broke out.

The presence of faithful US allies in the region creates a second push for Iran to offset. Since 2001, a progressively ferocious wave of sectarianism has shaped regional affairs. Regional politics have been conducted in the area of the IRI-KSA rivalry and its bifurcations, which intensified the existence of a threatening "Resistance Bloc" led by Iran and a "Moderation Bloc" led by Saudi Arabia (Lynch, 2016:10), legitimized the repression of Shiites, and increased American meddling in the region. To illustrate, Riyadh has articulated the 'Iranian threat' from a sectarian/identity lens, labeling it a "Persian threat," thus recalling Persia, Shiism, and the Iranian Revolution (Warnaar, 2013:117).

The presence of Shia populations outside Iran is a third incentive to counterbalance. After the collapse of the Ba'ath Party, Iran succored the territorial integrity of its western neighbor. This geopolitical vision required a set of mainstream regional maneuvers. First, is the preservation of ethnic and sectarian rights (Barzegar, 2013:87-103). Then, is the protection of a balance of power that diminishes the risks of separatist dissatisfaction, especially among the Kurds and the Arabs (Barzegar, 2013:87-103). Third, is the construction of Iraqi infrastructure, for which

Iran devoted \$100 million (Zweiri, 2008:115-128). Acknowledging the security concerns behind Iran's project of de-Ba'athification, Warnaar highlights the relevance of the Shia factor. She explains (Warnaar, 2013:118):

"Historical ties with the Shia majority in Iraq aided the identification of the Iraqi government as a brother to the Iranian regime despite the horrifying legacy of the Iran-Iraq War."

### b) A pull-factor for Iran's counterbalancing behavior

At the regional and global levels, Iran seeks to reach the status of 'major power.' Moreover, Tehran's officials have continually portrayed Iran as the guardian of humanitarian values, to different extents. After all, the protection of the oppressed against the oppressors is one of the IRI's revolutionary principles. Under the Ahmadinejad administration, the dialogues of the President and the Supreme Leader have unprecedentedly highlighted Iran's historical heritage, grandeur, and presumed guardianship. Moreover, the axial coding of their speeches reveals the recurrence of five central themes: idealistic values, evil values, the Iranian nation, history, and oppressed/ oppressors. Table 2 gathers Khamenei and Ahmadinejad's linguistic references to the aforementioned topics.

**Table 2 – Five Central Themes in Khamenei and Ahmadinejad’s Speeches**

Central Themes	Khamenei (2005-2012)	Ahmadinejad (2005-2009-2011-2012)
<i>Iranian Nation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peaceful – brave nation</li> <li>Wisdom – courage</li> <li>Great country</li> <li>Our nation</li> <li>National dignity</li> <li>Iranian wisdom</li> <li>Our international position</li> <li>Outstanding position</li> <li>High status</li> <li>Talented nation</li> <li>International glory – prestige</li> <li>Cultural image of Iran</li> <li>National self-confidence</li> <li>Grandeur</li> <li>Greatness – unity</li> <li>Permanence – grandeur</li> <li>Powerful – influential</li> <li>Great achievements</li> <li>Unstoppable</li> <li>National power</li> <li>Progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our nation</li> <li>Noble society</li> <li>Great nation</li> </ul>
<i>History</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oppressive regime of the Shah</li> <li>Qajar/ Pahlavi dynasties</li> <li>Successful Revolution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Islamic Revolution</li> <li>Iran-Iraq War</li> <li>Saddam Hussein and WMDs</li> <li>Occupation of Palestine</li> </ul>
<i>Oppressed / Oppressors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oppression of others</li> <li>Communal sins</li> <li>Tyranny</li> <li>Helping the oppressed</li> <li>People killed/ massacred</li> <li>Bombardment</li> <li>Situation in Syria</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Occupation</li> <li>Repression</li> <li>Murdering of women and children in Palestine</li> <li>Imprisonments</li> <li>Barbaric attacks</li> <li>Coercion and oppression</li> <li>Humiliation of other nations</li> </ul>
<i>Idealistic Attributes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transparency</li> <li>Solidarity</li> <li>Justice</li> <li>Freedom</li> <li>Public morality</li> <li>Trust</li> <li>Rationality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dignity</li> <li>Human rights</li> <li>Democracy – freedom</li> <li>Justice – compassion</li> <li>Well-being</li> <li>Integrity – honesty</li> <li>Purity – love</li> </ul>
<i>Evil Attributes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jealousy</li> <li>Greed</li> <li>Arrogance</li> <li>Hypocrisy</li> <li>Avarice</li> <li>Social morality</li> <li>Discrimination</li> <li>Injustice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poverty</li> <li>Inequality – discrimination</li> <li>Lack of morality</li> <li>Intimidation</li> <li>Hypocrisy – lies</li> <li>Selfishness – greed</li> <li>Hatred</li> <li>Corruption</li> </ul>

Khamenei and Ahmadinejad's references to the Iranian Nation depict attributes of guardianship, grandeur, power, and prestige, to varying degrees. The two personalities place the former characteristics in a shared context via the inclusive pronoun 'our' (e.g., our great nation, our international position). The use of inclusion implicitly allows Iranian officials to build a national consensus on Iran's image. A nation's quest for regional/ international status ultimately requires the trust of the people.

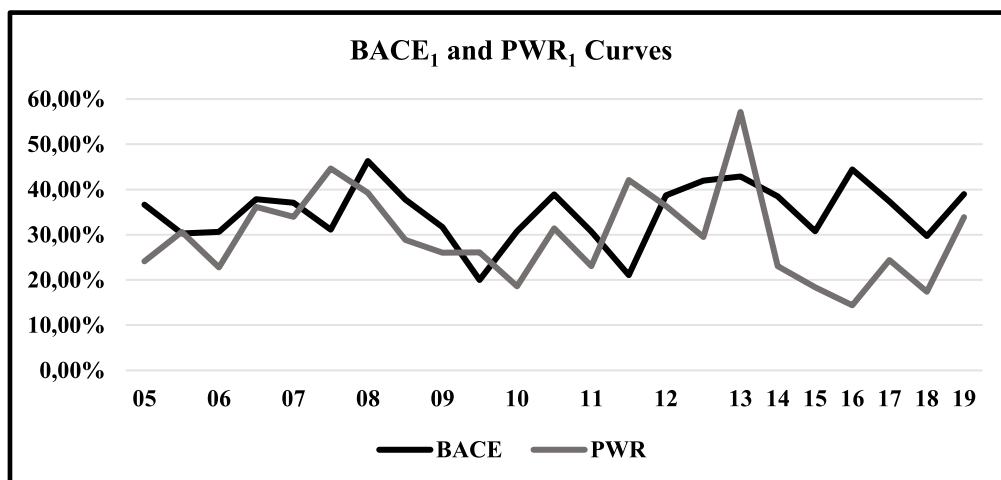
History is another topic that reveals the Iranian mindset. Khamenei frequently refers to pre-1979 Iran and post-1979 Iran, highlighting the paradox between the former ruling dynasties (e.g., Qajar and Pahlavi) and the Islamic Republic. The purpose of this contradiction is to characterize the IRI as a nation that honors progress and revolution, but that resists oppression and domination. Ahmadinejad's historical references are not limited to the celebration of the Iranian Revolution. The President reminds the international community of the hostile Iran-Iraq War and Saddam's use of chemical weapons, victimizing the Iranian and the Iraqi people (Ahmadinejad, 2005). Moreover, he refers to nations that employ and finance "heinous" WMDs and to humanitarian values that presumably prevail in the IRI (Ahmadinejad, 2005). A third topic is oppression, which recalls Ayatollah Khomeini's principle of safeguarding the oppressed from the oppressors. The Supreme Leader and the President expose a wide range of wars, crises, and protracted conflicts during which civilians were humiliated, repressed, and killed. Khamenei adds an ideological touch, labeling nations' mistreatment of the people a "communal sin" (Khamenei c, 2005). Ahmadinejad, in contrast, places oppression in the arena of state-terrorism, asserting that the oppression of the Palestinians is a blatant violation of international law (Ahmadinejad, 2005). He further points out

that the "humiliation of other nations" fits in the realm of oppression (Ahmadinejad, 2012). A final topic is idealistic features as opposed to evil elements. Khamenei and Ahmadinejad equally contrast justice, solidarity, and purity to discrimination, selfishness, and hypocrisy (see table 2). The discourse of the Leader and the President converge around drawing paradoxes between the self (i.e., Iran) and the other (i.e., allies and rivals). Put differently, the consolidation of Iran's image as a peace-seeking nation that condemns all forms of evil immunizes its quest for regional/ international status. Having tackled Iran's self-perception through axial coding, the LTA output helps study the Leader and the President's introspection.

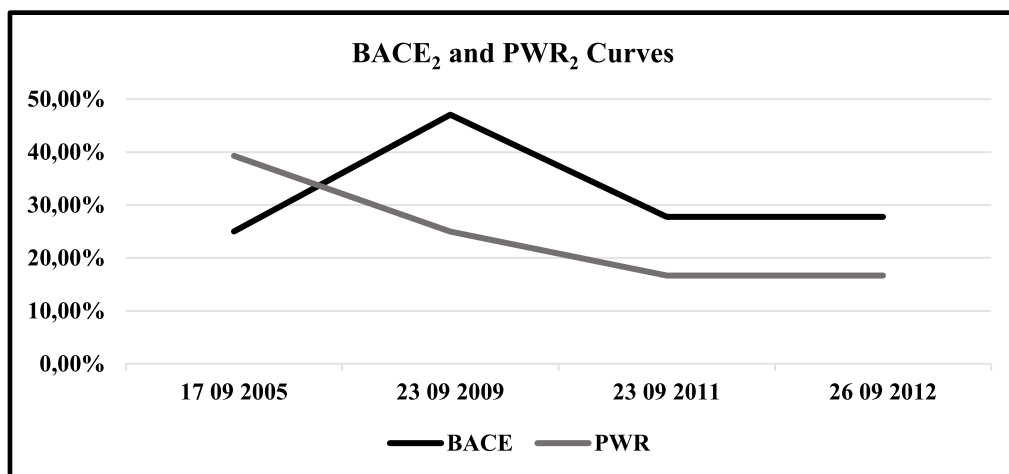
The recurrence of specific themes upholds Iran's quest for 'major power' status. Quantitatively, BACE and PWR (see Addendum) indicate Khamenei and Ahmadinejad's belief in the ability to control events, and need for power. The choice of these variables helps discern Iranian officials' view of themselves. A high BACE value entails sympathy for dynamic foreign policy making. A high PWR value implies deep concern with one's position and impact. The graph below displays the BACE and PWR curves that correspond to Khamenei's speeches between 2005 and 2019. Khamenei and Ahmadinejad's speeches both record high BACE and PWR values. In reference to Hermann, this infers the decision-maker's ability to exert direct and indirect influence (Hermann, 1999). A second detail is the shape of the curves. Figure 2 and Figure 3 display the BACE and PWR values of Khamenei and Ahmadinejad.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Khamenei's LTA output is based on 23 speeches. Ahmadinejad's LTA output is based on four speeches. Therefore, it would be fallacious to compare the average of BACE and PWR under the Supreme Leader and the President.

**Figure 2- Graphical Representation of the BACE and PWR Values in Khamenei's Speeches**



**Figure 3- Graphical Representation of BACE and PWR Values in Ahmadinejad's Speeches**



Between 2005 and 2012, BACE<sub>1</sub> and PWR<sub>1</sub> curves steadily fluctuate in the respective ranges [20% - 44.44%] and [18.6% - 44.68%], showing that Khamenei's belief in his potential to control events and need for power expand and shrink according to specific contexts. For example, the re-election of Ahmadinejad in 2009 coincides with a marginal decrease of PWR<sub>1</sub>, drawing a positive connection with foreign policy assertiveness. In the same period, BACE<sub>2</sub> and PWR<sub>1</sub> sharply evolve, [25% - 47.06%] and [16.67% - 39.29%]. The first curve's slope increases, decreases, and then, stagnates in 2011. Hermann

explains that a high BACE value is intertwined with the use of words that call for action. Unsurprisingly, BACE<sub>2</sub> at 47.06% corresponds to Ahmadinejad's 2009 address at the UNGA, which called for the initiation of structural changes to settle global issues. The president used terminology such as "collective determination," "settlement of global problems," "worldwide efforts," "restructuring," and "reforming" (Ahmadinejad, 2009). This denotes the advocacy of dynamism in foreign policymaking. The second curve's slope sharply decreases but stagnates in 2011. The 2009 election marks a sharp and con-

tinuous fall of the president's need for power.

Overall, the evolution of BACE and PWR in Khamenei and Ahmadinejad's speeches mirror their self-perception. Furthermore, the quantitative output, combined with the axial codes, is evidence that Iran's pursuit of status is a reality that Iranian top officials strive for by portraying Iran as the guardian of the oppressed. Subsequently, President Ahmadinejad sought to bolster Iran's relations with Arab neighbors, including the Gulf countries (Warnaar, 2013:117).

## B. Ahmadinejad's Iran and the Middle East

This section deals with Iran's relations with the following countries: Syria and the Gulf, namely Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Moreover, those relations fit in Eduard Soler i Lecha's "solid alliances" and "liquid alliances" (Soler i Lecha, 2017).

### 1. Iran and Syria

Iran and Syria are traditional allies for three conventional reasons: irrelevance of divergences, trustworthiness, and common interests and enemies. First, the two have managed to surmount significant differences, focusing instead on Realpolitik. Whereas Tehran's regime is theocratic, the Baathist regime of Damascus is secular. Moreover, Syria's ruling family belongs to the Alawi sect, a branch of Shiism. Iran and Syria have also overcome their national power gap. It is plain that Iran possesses more territory, population, military power, and natural resources than Syria. Accordingly, the Iran-Syria nexus is a balanced asymmetrical relation whose success has been made possible

thanks to the prevalence of mutual trust, the second reason.

Contrarily to Arab states that had opposed Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, Syria had been supportive.<sup>7</sup> In January 2006, a few months after the presidential elections, Ahmadinejad paid a visit to Syria. Damascus reacted positively, describing the visit an endeavor to improve its image (Warnaar, 2013, 119). In 2009, the anti-government protests did not alter Syria's perception of Iran's government. President Assad asserted that the Syrian-Iranian relation aims at making peace, regionally and globally ("Syria welcomes Iranian election results," 2009). Furthermore, Shawkat Abu Fakhr, an editorialist, further declared that the election results prove the "rightness of Ahmadinejad's course and policy" (Syria welcomes Iranian election results," 2009). The eruption of the Arab uprisings in 2011 did not challenge the 'solidity' of the traditional relationship. Contradictorily, Khamenei had been exceedingly supportive of the regional protests in Tunisia and Egypt and their corresponding outcomes but was silent on the Syrian case. Referring to Akbarzadeh and Conduit (Akbarzadeh & Conduit, 2016:1-16):

"The spread of the Arab Spring in 2011 proved a mixed blessing for Iran. Iran had loudly touted its revolutionary credentials as Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes fell in North Africa, but was silent when the uprising spread to Syria. [...] The collapse of the Assad dynasty would have dealt a considerable geopolitical blow for Iran."

This muted stance mirrors the level to which a weak/ failed state in Syria would threaten Iran's interests.

<sup>7</sup> Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, North Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia.

Third, Iran and Syria share common interests and enemies. First, both countries are allies of Hezbollah. Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's 2005 assassination and the subsequent withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon tarnished Syria's image and highlighted its economic weaknesses. In this context, Hezbollah's successful confrontation of Israel motivated a tripartite alignment (Iran-Syria-Hezbollah). This bold move reinforced Damascus, augmented Tehran's advantage in the Levant, and threatened Israel. Second, the American impediment and regional developments invigorated economic and military collaboration between Iran and Syria. On the one hand, Ahmadinejad's Iran and Syria signed numerous cooperation agreements, covering sectors such as telecommunication and agriculture (Risseuw, 2018). Furthermore, religious tourism in Syria enjoyed a push because Iranian pilgrims traveled to Syria to visit Shiite shrines (Risseuw, 2018). On the other hand, the two countries sought to enhance mutual defense by signing defense pacts. In June 2006, they signed a strategic defense pact, which strengthened Syria's position and gave Iran the upper hand regarding Iraq, Hezbollah, and Palestinian factions (Mansour, 2008). The year 2007 witnessed the ratification of another military agreement that constituted Iranian missiles sales, intelligence cooperation, and training (Risseuw, 2018).

Iran-Syria relations are an example of solid alliances whose basis is trustworthiness, they have disregarded their fundamental differences and made their common perception of national interest the grounds for their historical cooperation. Although, Iran's perception of the Gulf countries is driven by short-term interest.

## 2. Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar: A Nuanced Accommodation

Ahmadinejad's Iran established comity with Saudi Arabia. Tehran attempted to foster positive relations with Riyadh, turning a 'blind eye' to the historical acrimony, which Iran-Saudi relations had been anchored. Additionally, Doha engaged in a nuanced rapprochement with Tehran, largely to balance Saudi Arabia. Mehran Kamrava explains that Iran's relations with the Arab states "are determined by the flow of regional power politics and by Iran's attempts to play the role of a regional power" (Kamrava, 2013:104-119). However, this does not mean that the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia have been continuously auspicious. Ahmadinejad and the late King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud did not hesitate to launch a "war of words," borrowing Florence Gaub's expression (Gaub, 2016).

In 2005, Khamenei appointed Ali Akbar Velayati, a foreign policy adviser, to initiate communication with Saudi Arabia (Keynoush, 2016:18). During that year, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki made a trip to Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE (Warnaar, 2013:115). In 2006, Ali Larijani visited Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, and later, Algeria, Egypt, and Yemen (Warnaar, 2013:115). In 2007, Ahmadinejad attended an OPEC summit in Riyadh. In the same year, he received an invitation from Qatar to attend the GCC Summit in Doha. During that meeting, the President affirmed, "a new chapter of cooperation has been opened in the Persian Gulf" (Mabon, 2013:1). Whereas Saud al-Faysal, the Saudi Foreign Minister, approved this positive move, the editor of al-Sharq al-Awsat criticized Qatar,

labeling it a “microphone state” in reference to Al-Jazeera channel (Wehrey et al., 2009).<sup>8</sup> In this context, Qatar’s behavior towards Iran fits in the domain of balance and accommodation. Doha wants to balance the stretched influence of Riyadh by carrying out a connection with Tehran. Iran, from a Qatari perspective, has been considered a neighbor rather than an enemy (Wehrey et al., 2009). For example, Qatar rejected the UNSC resolution that had called for Iran to stop uranium enrichment (Wehrey et al., 2009). However, this closeness did not prevent Ahmadinejad from emphasizing the Persian identity of the Persian Gulf region when Qatar’s Emir called it the “Arabic Gulf” (Warnaar, 2013:116). Clearly, Saudi Arabia interpreted this incident as expansionism. In mid-2007, one of Khamenei’s top advisors warned of the risk of retaliation against the Gulf States in case the US hits Iran’s nuclear facilities (Smith, 2007). In 2008, the Saudi King pushed for a military strike against Iran, asking the US ambassador to Iraq to “cut off the head of the snake” (Gaub, 2016). Furthermore, he accused Tehran of interfering in “Arab Affairs” (Gaub, 2016). In an escalatory move, Ahmadinejad criticized Saudi domestic politics, pointing to the continuity of the al-Saud family and the inability of women to drive (Gaub, 2016). In 2011, Saudi Arabia and the US accused Iran of preparing a plot against Riyadh’s ambassador in Washington (Gaub, 2016).

The IRI sought to build positive relations with the Arab states, including Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This joins Warnaar’s “cooperation among the rest” (Warnaar, 2013:170). Iran-Saudi relations have been a

cooperation that was performed in mistrust. Therefore, the resurrection of traditional rivalry is expected. Iran-Qatar relations, on the contrary, have been more peaceful because of the State’s refined foreign policy.

During the presidency of Ahmadinejad, Iran’s foreign policy behavior mirrored some of Ayatollah Khomeini’s revolutionary principles. In fact, Iran confronted the West (e.g., the US and Israel) and accommodated the non-West (Arab countries, Latin America, Africa). The axial coding of Khamenei’s speeches shows that the latter frequently associates the US and Israel with arrogance, hegemony, and imperialism. Moreover, the Leader is more distrustful than the President. Accordingly, Khamenei’s discourse on the West perpetuates the ideological print of Ayatollah Khomeini. Equally relevant, the Ahmadinejad administration engaged in a nuanced rapprochement with Arab states, paving the way for Iran’s quest for ‘regional power status’. In addition to Syria, a historical ally, Iran fostered positive relations with Arab states. Whereas the Ahmadinejad administration had been labeled conservative, the President did show signs of goodwill towards the US. Similarly, Iranian-Arab relations have not been continuously fluid. In this enigma, the Ahmadinejad presidency proved the existence of comity between ideology and foreign policy making. Put differently, recalling Ayatollah Khomeini’s teachings has justified, rather than shaped, the foreign policy of the IRI. However, this balance did not prevent the deterioration of Iran’s economy. Since 2013, the Rouhani administration has sought to correct the fallouts of its predecessor, leaning towards moderate-pragmatism.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Sharq al-Awsat is a Saudi-owned newspaper; Al-Jazeera is a Qatari-owned channel.

### III. ROUHANI'S IRAN: TRUE ENMITY ENGENDERS ENMITY<sup>9</sup>

"If a country wants to develop, all principal organs of the State must be development-oriented... a development-oriented government requires a development-oriented foreign policy, along with collaboration, consensus, unification, and stability."

President Hassan Rouhani (Rouhani, 2009:69)

In 2013, in a moment of domestic unrest and regional turbulence, President Rouhani won the elections. The economy of Iran had reached a standstill, and a potential spillover from regional protests haunted state officials (Chubin, 2012).<sup>10</sup> The regimes of Ben Ali and Mubarak were toppled. In Egypt, President el-Sisi had overthrown Morsi. Syria had become an epicenter of instability. Israel severed its position towards Iran. The GCC underwent deep fragmentation because its members accused Iran of supporting protests in Bahrain (Santini, 2017). The MENA region embarked on a period of comprehensive securitization that touched upon religious sects, identities, and states. These dynamics fueled Iran-Saudi rivalry, transforming it into a cold war with ramifications extending across and beyond the region.

#### A. Iran since 2013: A Departure from Khomeini's Principles

During Rouhani's presidency, Iran sought to strengthen the economic sector, solve the nuclear issue, and re-assert a major role in international affairs. This threefold foreign policy

vision places President Rouhani in a moderate frame, but it does not symbolize a total departure from the revolutionary principles of the IRI. As Ferhad Rezaei has explained, "Rouhani tried to balance the theological dictates with a dose of realpolitik" (Rezaei, 2019:236).

#### 1. Politics Precede Economics:

##### Inside Rouhani's Trickle-Down Logic

In the final years of Ahmadinejad's second term, the UN, the UNSC, and the US had all imposed financial and oil sanctions on Iran, transforming it into "one of the most sanctioned worldwide" (Borszik, 2014). Accordingly, the exports of Iranian crude oil dramatically fell, the rates of unemployment and inflation exponentially rose, and the GDP shrunk (Borszik, 2014). With the election of President Rouhani, Iran has become fully aware that the cost of international sanctions is unbearable for its oil-based economy.

The President, the Foreign Minister, and, to a limited extent, the Supreme Leader, believed that political elasticity would help cancel international sanctions and improve the country's international image (Akbarzadeh & Conduit, 2016b:1-16). Borrowing Rouhani's logic, "it would be good to [...] have internal politics and foreign policy pay for the economy" (Akbarzadeh & Conduit, 2016b:1-16). Similarly, in "What Iran Really Wants," Zarif coins the expression "prudent moderation" in reference to Rouhani's foreign policy signature (Zarif, 2014). Simply deconstructed, prudent moderation comprises the defense of revolutionary ideals, realism, dialogue, and the balance between needs and means (Zarif, 2014). In his deliveries at the UNGA (2013, 2015, 2017, 2018), Pres-

<sup>9</sup> This is a reference to Limbert's "hostility begets hostility."

<sup>10</sup> In 2011, the value of the Iranian Rial fell by 50% compared to the American Dollar, and the dramatic increase of the inflation rate negatively affected people's purchasing power.

ident Rouhani repeatedly emphasized the importance of dialogue and cooperation. The axial coding of his speeches reveals the recurrence of anomalous topics such as multilateralism/ uni-

lateralism, and win-win logic/ zero-sum logic. Table 3 depicts the President's linguistic references to collaboration, or in the words of Zarif, "the hallmarks of the era" (Zarif, 2014).

**Table 3- Two Central Themes in Rouhani's Speeches**

Speech Year	Celebrated Themes	Condemned Themes
<b>2013</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Collective collaboration</li> <li>▪ Bilateralism</li> <li>▪ Multilateralism</li> <li>▪ Moderation</li> <li>▪ Interaction</li> <li>▪ Constructive engagement</li> <li>▪ Mutual respect</li> <li>▪ Trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Zero-sum logic</li> </ul>
<b>2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Win-win solutions</li> <li>▪ Multilateralism</li> <li>▪ Global interactions</li> <li>▪ Negotiation</li> <li>▪ Cooperation</li> <li>▪ Moderation</li> <li>▪ Synergy of ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unilateral sanctions</li> </ul>
<b>2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Synergy of ideas</li> <li>▪ Foreign investments</li> </ul>	
<b>2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cooperation</li> <li>▪ Coordination</li> <li>▪ Dialogue</li> <li>▪ Multilateralism</li> <li>▪ Expansion of relations with neighboring countries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Zero-sum logic</li> <li>▪ Confrontation of multilateralism</li> <li>▪ Inefficiency of international institutions</li> <li>▪ Unilateralism</li> <li>▪ Authoritarian understanding of IR</li> <li>▪ Imposition and bullying</li> </ul>

It is clear that multilateralism-related topics are more frequent than unilateralism-related topics. This discrepancy indicates a shift in Iran's foreign policy and diplomacy after 2013. On the contrary, Ahmadinejad who had seldom tackled the importance of dialogue and

coordination, Rouhani's agenda prioritized moderation.

Rouhani's commitment to multilateralism and win-win interactions manifested in two ways. First, Iran widened its trade relations with China, Eastern Europe, and some Gulf

states. In Beijing, Chery had been an important partner of Iran Khodro during international pressure (Kalbasi, 2015). Since 2007, the Iranian automobile market has attracted more than twenty Chinese companies (Kalbasi, 2015).<sup>11</sup> Second, car production, which, due to sanctions, had reached a standstill between 2011 and 2013, rose from 736,948 to 1,130,164 vehicles produced in the first year of Rouhani's presidency (Kalbasi, 2015). The inflation rate decreased from 40% in 2013 to 16% in 2015 ("Rouhani hails to govt's economic job as a 'miracle'," 2015). Between 2015 and 2016, GDP grew by 13.4% (World Bank Group). Third, Iran attracted numerous overseas investors. In 2016, Indian Foreign Minister Narendra Modi paid an official visit to Iran that culminated into three mainstream economic benefits. India accepted to invest \$85 million to develop a container terminal and a multifunction berth at Iran's Chabahar Port (Dominguez, 2015). Moreover, the two countries endorsed a free trade zone (Bilgrami, 2017). Finally, India's oil imports from Iran reached new levels, which fits in the 2017 BP Energy Outlook according to which the annual growth of India's energy consumption is 4.2% (Bhat, 2018). Frankly, invigorating a damaged economy requires a multifaceted engagement. The openness of post-Ahmadinejad Iran on international markets has been Rouhani's first aspect of pragmatic moderation. A second aspect is the quest for recognition, a task bound to Iran's uncertain status and reputation under Ahmadinejad.

<sup>11</sup> The Chinese companies include Lifan, Haima and Dongfang.

## 2. The Quest for Recognition:

### Iran and the International Community

Under the Rouhani administration, Iran sought to break the cycle of isolation inherited from the previous administration. Furthermore, the IRI's foreign policy makers became fully cognizant of the benefits associated with regional and global re-engagement. Accordingly, Tehran initiated a new chapter of foreign relations based on national interests rather than the blind replication of revolutionary principles. For example, Iran-Armenia/ Azerbaijan relations are an accurate illustration of Tehran's quest for recognition. James Barry explains that the historical amity between Tehran and Yerevan makes Tehran-Baku re-engagement a special juncture (Barry, 2016:59-74). Pierre Pahlavi and Afshin Hojati explain that Iran's engagement with Central Asia is a demonstration of the "smart politics of prudent realism" (Pahlavi & Hojati, 2010:215-238). To reset relations with Azerbaijan, President Rouhani and FM Zarif addressed the allegation of Iran supporting Christian Armenia over Shia Muslim Azerbaijan concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Playing the role of a broker, the Iranian President informed his Azerbaijani counterpart, "Iran, as a neighbor of Azerbaijan and Armenia, has always sought to pave the way for negotiations and the settlement of disputes" ("Iran ready to help resolve Karabakh crisis vis dialogue: Rouhani," 2016). Rouhani further declared that Iran seeks to preserve the territorial integrity of every country, including Azerbaijan ("Iran ready to help," 2016).

Rouhani and Zarif lead diplomatic engagement with Azerbaijan and Armenia. Barry explains that this deliberate designation has helped the President to corroborate the sincere commitment of the IRI towards Azerbaijan (Barry, 2016:59-74). Consequently, Tehran and Baku signed numerous agreements and memo-

randa to foster multisector relations (e.g., transport, healthcare, culture, energy, security) (“Iran ready to help,” 2016). For instance, Rouhani’s official visit to Azerbaijan in November 2014, was deemed fruitful by the Iranian ambassador. Moreover, in March 2019, Farhad Dejpasand attended a meeting in Azerbaijan to enhance bilateral relations (“Iran’s economy min. in Baku for joint economic commission,” 2019). Between 2018 and 2019, the trade volume between Iran and Azerbaijan during January, February, and March increased 3.4% from \$162,235,000 to \$230,637,000 (“Iran-Azerbaijan trade exchanges up by 3.4%,” 2019). In July 2019, an Iranian delegation visited Baku to discuss economic cooperation and take measures to pave the road for the Iranian private sector in Azerbaijan (“Iranian delegation visits Baku to discuss bilateral trade ties,” 2019).

Under Rouhani, Iran set aside its traditional differences with Azerbaijan to build a relation based on national interest rather than political and ideological affinity. Ultimately, Azerbaijan supported NATO and assumed positive relations with the US and Israel (Barry, 2016:59-74). Furthermore, this falls into Rezaei’s statement on the blending of theology and realpolitik to shape a realistic foreign policy (Rezaei, 2019:236). The third aspect of Rouhani’s rational moderation has been the nuclear issue, which the administration has strived to find a solution that fits in the norms of multilateralism and a win-win situation.

### 3. The JCPOA (2015-2018): An Unfulfilled Solution of the Nuclear Concern

Under Ahmadinejad, the IRI recommenced the nuclear program. In a highly mistrustful environment, the US and other powers disregarded Tehran’s continuous emphasis on the

civilian use of nuclear energy. This uncertainty surrounding the other’s intentions pushed the EU-3 to consider the use of coercion towards Iran and President Bush to turn Iran’s nuclear program into a global issue by transferring the corresponding file from the IAEA to the UNSC (Borszik, 2014). With Rouhani’s climb to the presidency, Iran embarked on a new era in which the de-securitization of foreign relations was believed to alleviate the economic distress inherited from the Ahmadinejad administration. The Rouhani administration’s initiation of talks on nuclear issues falls in the context of de-securitized foreign relations that aim at securing Iran’s uranium enrichment, legalizing its nuclear program, and healing its economy. Borrowing Rouhani’s statement: “it is good for centrifuges to operate, but it is also important that the country operates as well and the wheels of the industry are turning” (“Iran elections: Hassan Rouhani in his own words,” 2013). Zarif further declared that nuclear weapons damage Iran’s security and role in the region (Zarif, 2014).

On July 14, 2015, Iran and the P5+1 signed the JCPOA in Vienna. Being the result of complex negotiations, the nuclear agreement has been a milestone in Iranian foreign policy. According to the terms of the nuclear agreement, Tehran observes the right to use nuclear energy for civilian purposes and to benefit from the lifting of the sanctions (JCPOA Text). However, it must limit uranium enrichment to 3.67% and the enrichment activity at the Fordow facility (JCPOA Text). Consequently, the Supreme Leader sent a letter to Rouhani, in which he recognized the importance of the nuclear deal but doubted the intentions of the signing members (Khamenei, 2015b). Furthermore, much of Rouhani’s speeches at the UNGA in 2013 and 2015 tackled the nuclear concern and potential benefits associated with setting a legal nuclear frame.

**Table 4- Rouhani's Discourse on the Nuclear Concern and the JCPOA**

Speech Year	References to the Nuclear Concern / JCPOA
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Iran's nuclear energy for peaceful purposes</li> <li>WMDs have no place</li> <li>Nuclear rights</li> <li>Readiness to start talks</li> </ul>
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fruitful negotiations</li> <li>JCPOA beginning of further achievements</li> <li>Result of intensive negotiation</li> <li>Model for global interactions</li> <li>Nuclear weapon-free Middle East</li> <li>JCPOA an example of moderation</li> </ul>

In the realm of pragmatic moderation, resuming nuclear talks between Iran and the P5+1 and the subsequent signing of the JCPOA have been major achievements for the Rouhani administration. However, Rouhani's belief that the nuclear deal would open the door for further negotiations has been a one-sided exhibition of trust. In their 2015 article, Sezgin Kaya and Zeynep Şartepe explain that the JCPOA is not clear evidence that Iran-US rapprochement would continue long-term (Kaya & Şartepe, 2015). Indeed, the election of US President Donald Trump and Washington's foreign policy proved that mistrust towards Iran is a substantial obstacle for the achievement of Tehran's foreign policy goals under President Rouhani.

## B. Iran's External Relations

### 1. Iran and the United States

The IRI's national interest has been the premise of President Rouhani's discernment of the US, rather than the revolutionary ideals. Unlike his predecessor, who condemned the US, Rouhani had declared in 2002 that Iran supports "any kind of relations between the two nations" (Ditto, 2013:68). However, Rouhani the presi-

dent is different than Rouhani the adviser. Prior to the 2013 elections, he stated that it is difficult to disregard the historical tensions between the IRI and the US, but this traditional animosity does not warrant severing ties (Ditto, 2013:69). Consequently, Rouhani's ambivalence validates the ideology's fluctuating role, i.e., between guidance and justification. Ultimately, reverberating the reality of Iran-US relations has been a central component of the President's campaign process. In parallel, opening the room for negotiation and interaction has successfully portrayed Rouhani as a moderate figure who would advance a foreign policy agenda that prioritizes Iran's long-term interests.

Inside the Rouhani mindset, holding diplomatic talks with the US would sustain the legitimacy of the Iranian regime. Recalling the revolutionary principle of non-interference, the newly elected President declared that Iran-US talks should be carried out in the context of non-interference and multilateralism. The Supreme Leader, on the contrary, has continued to condemn American policies (Khamenei, 2015b). The axial coding of those personalities' speeches verifies the ideological gap in the language of Khamenei and Rouhani.

**Table 5- Khamenei and Rouhani's Ideological Gap**

Speech Year	Khamenei	Rouhani
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Historical dependence on America</li> <li>Independence</li> <li>Self-sufficiency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Iran does not want increased tensions</li> <li>Iran expects consistency from the US</li> <li>Globalization of Western values</li> </ul>
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arrogant powers</li> <li>Imperialist goals</li> <li>Blood-thirsty desire of the Zionists</li> <li>Zionist aggressors</li> <li>Helping the oppressed</li> </ul>	
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arrogance (US)</li> <li>Crocodile tears (US)</li> <li>Death to America, not the people of America</li> <li>Mistake of relying on America (history)</li> <li>Zionist regime</li> <li>Iranian Revolution</li> <li>Dignity</li> <li>Rationality</li> <li>National sovereignty</li> </ul>	
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The JCPOA should not become of a tool for American pressure</li> <li>Renewal of sanctions is a violation of the JCPOA</li> <li>Religious democracy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any potential US withdrawal would be wrong</li> <li>A potential withdrawal would erode US credibility</li> <li>Lack of US compliance with the terms of the JCPOA</li> </ul>
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zionist regime</li> <li>Broken-neck prime minister (Israel)</li> <li>US support for some Middle East countries</li> </ul>	
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Imposition of sanctions as an external obstacle</li> <li>False information</li> <li>National dignity</li> <li>Self-confidence</li> <li>Independence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The US plans to overthrow the Iranian government</li> <li>Unilateral and illegal withdrawal from the JCPOA</li> <li>Flimsy excuses</li> <li>Open violation of commitments</li> <li>Economic terrorism</li> <li>Bullying and imposition</li> <li>Artificial creation of insecurity</li> <li>Artificial crisis</li> </ul>
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Iran subject to injustice</li> <li>Independence</li> <li>Non-subservience</li> <li>US domination (history)</li> <li>Negotiation is a deception</li> <li>Oppressive sanctions</li> <li>US ally of Saudi Arabia</li> <li>Foolish desires</li> <li>Dignity</li> </ul>	

Table 1 and Table 5 confirm that the language of the Supreme Leader plays a decisive role in the continuity of revolutionary ideals. Between 2005 and 2019, Khamenei continuously spoke about the West, particularly the US and Israel, from the angle of arrogance, imperialism, mistrust, and authoritarianism. Moreover, with the use of expressions such as “crocodile tears” and “arrogance” in reference to the US, the signing of the JCPOA in 2015 has not exerted a remarkable change in Khamenei’s discourse. It is important to note that Khamenei’s condemnation of the West is often followed, or preceded by, emphasis on Iran’s ancient history, the flaws of the Pahlavi Dynasty, or the Iranian Revolution. This crescendo portrays the IRI as a major power that has been progressing in perpetuity, regardless of the external obstacles it encounters.

Whereas the signing of the deal seemed to initiate a new chapter in Iran-US relations, President Trump’s 2016 election dramatically reversed the consolidation phase of this détente. A few months after his election, Trump strongly criticized the JCPOA, describing it, “a catastrophe for America, for Israel and for the whole of the Middle East” (Begley, 2016). In Iran, Khamenei’s language implied that the principles of independence and non-subservience would prevail and that the signing of the JCPOA would not become a pressure tool for the US. Rouhani’s 2016 speech at the UNGA echoed this, but the phrasing sharply differed from the Supreme Leader’s. For example, the President asserted that a potential US withdrawal would resurrect mistrust. In 2018, the actual withdrawal of Washington hardened the language of Khamenei and Rouhani. Similarly, the two personalities believe that Washington’s unilateral departure and subsequent imposition of sanctions are harmful to the IRI. Essentially, they perceived sanctions as a form of economic terrorism (Rouhani, 2018) (BBC Hard Talk,

2019). Differently, Rouhani pointed to the unfortunate trajectory of Iran-US relations, employing the expressions “artificial creation of insecurity” and “artificial crisis.”

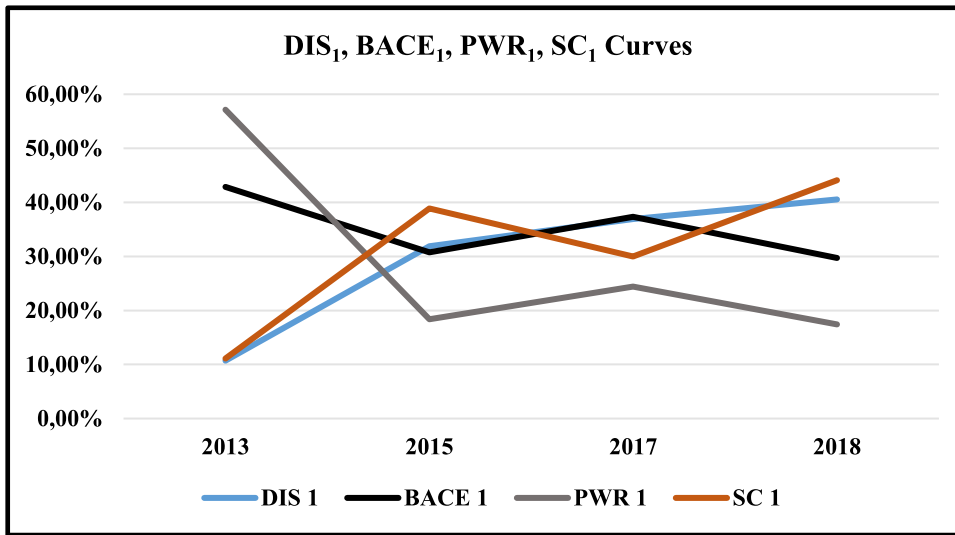
On the LTA output of Khamenei and Rouhani, the evolution of DIS, BACE, PWR, and SC provides valuable insights. The joint analysis of Figures 1, 2, and 4 shows that Khamenei’s discourse has not drastically evolved between 2005 and 2018. Specifically, the arrival of Rouhani to the presidency does not correlate with a remarkable evolution (positive or negative) of the variables.<sup>12</sup>

At the level of distrust, DIS1 and DIS2 curves slightly increase between 2016 and 2018, which positively correlates with the stances the Trump administration has taken regarding the IRI. At the level of self-confidence, the SC1 and SC2 curves sharply diverge. Whereas Khamenei’s self-confidence level progresses in the range [11,11% - 44,09%], Rouhani’s develops in the range [0% - 30,77%]. This is an obvious indication of the degree to which the Supreme Leader’s language matches Iran’s revolutionary posture.

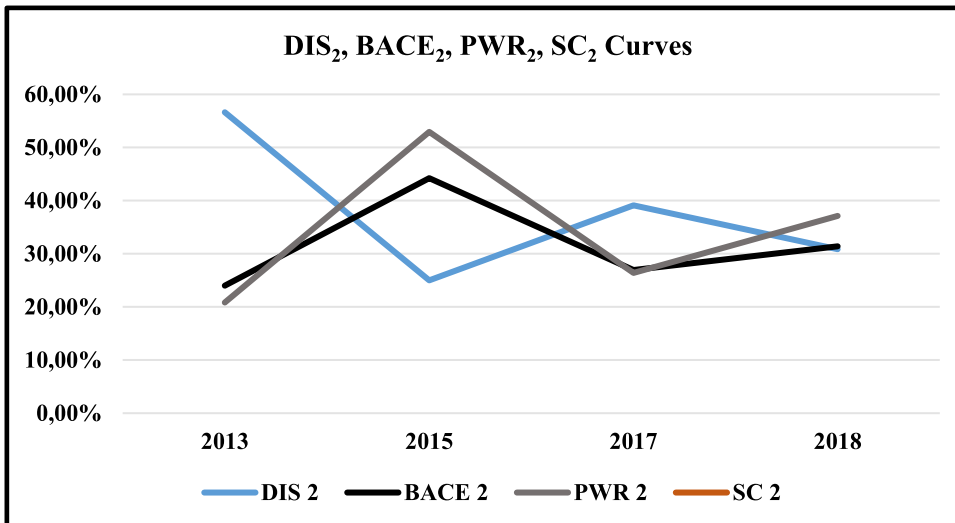
So, as soon as Iran and the US embarked on a new era by ratifying the nuclear deal, the 2016 US presidential elections halted the prospects of a perpetual agreement. Since then, the US animosity towards Iran has occupied headlines, culminating in Washington’s unilateral withdrawal from the negotiating table. Consequently, Iran resumed uranium enrichment beyond the ceiling percentage allowed under the JCPOA. In response to this, Zarif resorted to the principle of dignity, saying that the enrichment of uranium aims at preserving the dignity of Iran (BBC Hard Talk, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that SC is a new variable. It was not dealt with in the previous sections.

**Figure 4 - Graphical Representation of DIS<sub>1</sub>, BACE<sub>1</sub>, PWR<sub>1</sub>, SC<sub>1</sub> Variables (Khamenei)**



**Figure 5 - Graphical Representation of DIS<sub>2</sub>, BACE<sub>2</sub>, PWR<sub>2</sub>, SC<sub>2</sub> Variables (Rouhani)**



## 2. Rouhani's Iran and the Middle East

In reality, the administrations of Rouhani and Ahmadinejad converge on the solidity of the Iran-Syria nexus, but not on the liquidity of Iran-Gulf relations. Under President Rouhani, the historic hostility between Saudi Arabia and Iran has become unprecedentedly concrete. It is neither a collaboration nor a hostility of convenience. Rather, a continuous show of animosity that extends beyond the Middle East.

### a) Iran and Syria

President Rouhani won the elections at a time when the Syrian conflict reached 'an' apotheosis. Whereas Iran's post-2013 approach to Syria has been a speculative topic, Rouhani indirectly confirmed that Iran would not alter its relation concerning its sole traditional regional ally. However, the IRI had to soften its presence in Syria to advance its main foreign policy goals (Akbarzadeh & Conduit, 2016a:133-154).

Accordingly, Rouhani's discourse has sharply contradicted the regime's behavior. In August 2013, the newly elected President emphasized the seriousness of reaching a political solution to solve the Syrian crisis. Moreover, he listed three strategies that corroborate his stated position (Akbarzadeh & Conduit, 2016a:133-154).

"The Syrian people should make a decision about the Syrian issue – whether they are from among the supporters of the government or the rebels. First, the others [other states, UK, USA] should pave the way [for a solution]. Second, they should not interfere. Third, they should stop sending weapons and encouraging terrorists."

Unsurprisingly, the presidential discourse falls into the sphere of pragmatic moderation and portrays Iran as a peace-seeking state pursuing an end to regional crises. On the ground, Tehran sees no benefit from a peace deal with a basis of collaborating with the rebels. Such a move would threaten President Assad's survival and the IRGC's presence in Syria and Lebanon. Therefore, Rouhani chose Brigadier Hossein Dehghan to be his Defense Minister. During the 1980s, Dehghan was a senior commander of the IRGC and played a senior role in the formation of Hezbollah (Fulton, 2013). As a result, Rouhani's choice guarantees the continuity of the Iran-Syria nexus and the unlikelihood of a potential restructuring of Iranian patronage (Akbarzadeh & Conduit, 2016a:133-154). Moreover, more than 5,000 Hezbollah troops entered Syria in early 2013 (Akbarzadeh & Conduit, 2016a:133-154). Akbarzadeh and Conduit explain that the involvement of Iran's proxy is clear evidence that the events in Syria posed an actual threat for Tehran (2016a:133-154). In July, Iran provided military assistance (equipment, advisors, technology) and granted a \$3.6 billion credit to acquire oil products (2016: 133-154). In the context of international sanctions on Syrian oil and a sharp currency de-

valuation, Iran's economic assistance has been highly valued among Syrian trade officials. As one official has mentioned: "if it had not been for Iranian support we could not have survived the crisis" (Al-Khalidi, 2014).

In February 2019, President Assad met with Khamenei in Tehran for the first time since the beginning of the Syrian War. During this visit, the Supreme Leader informed Assad that Iran proudly supports Syria because it has resulted in the continuity of the regime and the axis of resistance ("Iran proud of supporting Syria," 2019). From Ahmadinejad to Rouhani, Iran's stance towards Syria has remained unchanged, which renders solid relations. At the early years of the Rouhani administration, it had been thought that Iran would calibrate its involvement if the conflict had become protracted. In response, Rouhani attuned his language, although the Revolutionary Guards and the Supreme Leader continued to support the Assad regime.<sup>13</sup> This has indeed helped the IRI to reassert its role in regional and global affairs.

### b) Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar

Rouhani's moderation has proved inutile in easing Iran-Saudi Arabia relations. Between 1989 and 2005, he had been at the top of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) (Guéraiche, 2016:75-92). This entails that the would-be president possesses an amassed set of diplomatic skills and knowledge on the regional security of the Gulf sub-region. Subsequent to his election, FM Zarif toured numerous regional countries (e.g., Kuwait, the UAE) save Saudi Arabia (Guéraiche, 2016:75-92). In addition, the House of al-Saud was unreceptive to Iran's moderation because a myriad of regional and international developments have threatened Riyadh's interests.

<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that Khamenei and Qasem Soleimani are the actors that shape Iran's policy in Syria.

Under the Obama administration, the political opening between the US and Iran created a rift between Washington and its Arab allies, particularly Saudi Arabia. In 2013, Iran displayed a gesture of goodwill by adhering to the terms of the interim nuclear agreement. In 2015, the actual signing of the JCPOA between Iran and the P5+1 actualized the ‘Iranian threat.’ Lynch explains, “the Iran negotiations provoked a historically public spat between Washington and its regional allies, and palpably shaped the course of events in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen” (Lynch, 2016:225). Inside the mentality of Saudi officials, it has been out of the question that Iran’s influence grows because that would be detrimental to Saudi-American relations.

In Yemen, the Houthis seized the capital Sanaa in September 2014 and placed President Hadi under house arrest. The GCC members, supportive of the President, interpreted the events as a declaration of “Iranian expansionism” that should be deterred before reaching undesired levels (Lynch, 2016:225). Saudi Arabia, in particular, became increasingly wary of the urgency of securitizing the Yemeni conflict (Lynch, 2016:225). Hence, it disregarded the Houthis and considered them a Shiite movement that benefits from the IRI’s patronage (Lynch, 2016:236).

In March 2015, Saudi Arabia launched Operation Decisive Storm, or in the words of Ghassan Charbel, “Operation Restore Balance” (Lynch, 2016:237).<sup>14</sup> One of the main purposes is closely bound to the American-Iranian easement, i.e., Saudi Arabia sought to counterbalance the perceived growth of Iran’s regional power and prestige. Indeed, Nawaf Obaid, a former advisor to the Saudi government, criticized Obama’s policy towards Iran and confirmed the rationale behind the deployment of Saudi troops in Yemen. In his words (Obaid, 2015):

“Ever since the Obama administration embarked on its disastrous policy of rapprochement with Iran, Saudi Arabia has been working to establish a new defense posture whereby it can use its own military assets – not those of traditional allies like US, UK or France – to defend its interests. Thus, when Iran attempted to overthrow the democratically-elected governments in Yemen, a key ally of Riyadh, Saudi-led forces were deployed.”

It is speculative to consider Yemen a proxy battlefield where the Saudi-Iranian rivalry manifests. İrem Aşkar Karakır has developed a four-fold typology that bestows valuable insights into the relations between Riyadh and Tehran in the context of the Yemeni conflict. First, domestic discontent, rather than Iranian influence, is the prime rationale behind the resurrection of the Houthis (Karakır, 2018). Second, the enmity between the Saudi Kingdom and the Islamic Republic did not dissolve in the conflict (Karakır, 2018). Moreover, the securitization of religious sectarianism imported the Sunni-Shia divide to Yemen. Third, Saudi Arabia’s direct involvement in Yemen is attributed to President Hadi’s support and heading military operations (Karakır, 2018). By definition, the term ‘proxy war’ is applied when actors are indirectly involved. Finally, Saudi Arabia and Iran are not equivocally committed to the conflict (Karakır, 2018). Geography plays a prominent role as the Kingdom shares its largest border with Yemen, whereas the IRI is geographically remote. Esfandiary and Tabatabai corroborate Karakır’s explanation arguing that Saudi Arabia has frequently intervened in the domestic affairs of its neighbor to bolster the leverage and prestige of the al-Saud family (Esfandiary & Tabatabai, 2016). Furthermore, in June 2017, Saudi Arabia, with the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt, imposed a blockade on Qatar. In reference to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), an Islamist organization, and other mainstream terror organiza-

<sup>14</sup> Ghassan Charbel is a Lebanese Journalist.

tions (e.g., ISIS, Al Qaeda), the quartet accused Qatar of sponsoring terrorism (Adams, 2018). The Qatar blockade, an intra-GCC crisis, has been a scourge for Saudi Arabia. In fact, Qatar boosted its relations with the IRI although severing ties had been a requirement for the lifting of the blockade (“Arab states issue 13 demands to end Qatar-Gulf crisis,” 2017).

In 2017, the Qatari Emir described Iran as “a big power in the stabilization of the region” (Ulrichsen, 2017). Similarly, Iran has supported Qatar in the intra-GCC crisis. In August 2017, a few weeks into the blockade, Doha announced that it would send its ambassador to Tehran to resume diplomatic tasks, and accordingly strengthen bilateral ties on multiple fields (“Qatar announces Return of its ambassador to Tehran,” 2017). This decision took place following a phone call between the two Foreign Ministers whose aim had been to discuss methods of fostering robust Iranian-Qatari relations (“Qatar to reinstate ambassador to Iran,” 2017). In the same month, President Rouhani held a phone call with Emir al-Thani to express Iran’s condemnation of the quartet’s behavior. He declared, “Iran’s air space, ground, and sea will always be open to Qatar as a friendly nation” (“Iran: Hassan Rouhani condemns ‘siege of Qatar’,” 2019). At the material level, Iran counterbalanced the air blockade on Qatar by expanding the number Qatar Airways flights to Iran. In his interview with a technician at Hamad International Airport, Luciano Zaccara (May 2019) explains that Iran lowered the time between aircraft (from 3 minutes to 2 minutes). In November 2017, the triad Iran-Qatar-Turkey

signed a transport deal that aims at enhancing trade flow (“Turkey, Iran, Qatar sign transportation deal,” 2017). In November 2018, an official at Qatar Airways affirmed that Qatar is cultivating positive relations with the IRI regardless of Washington’s re-imposition of sanctions. In fact, the airline initiated two weekly flights to Isfahan and expanded services to the capital and Shiraz (“Qatar Airways to expand Iran flights despite sanctions,” 2018). Food supply is another facet of Iran-Qatar relations. In 2017, Iranian company Shirin Asal Food Industrial Group entered Qatar’s confectionery market to expand its activity (“Iran Confectionary Giant Makes Inroads into Qatar Market,” 2017). Between 2016 and 2017, Qatari imports from Iran grew exponentially by 181% (Coville, 2019). In June 2019, President Rouhani acknowledged Qatar’s positive moves, saying that they aim at “reducing tensions,” the exacerbation of which is “detrimental” (“Iran: Rouhani welcomes developing relations with Qatar,” 2019).

Therefore, with the eruption of the Arab uprisings in 2011, the traditional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia reached a sectarian landmark. Saudi Arabia perceived the political opening between Iran and the US and the signing of the JCPOA as a reversal of the regional balance of power that would strengthen Iran. Consequently, it launched a process of sectarian securitization to boost its authority. Since 2015, the Yemeni people have been witnessing the repercussions of this process. Iran’s involvement in the Yemeni conflict has taken a ‘soft stature,’ an illustration of which is the Houthi fundraising campaign for Hezbollah.

## **PART 2**

### **BOURGUIBA, ‘TUNISIAN SECULARISM’ AND AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI**

*“Tunisia is a free, independent, sovereign state; its religion is Islam, its language Arabic, and its system is republican.”*

Article 1, Constitution of Tunisia

(Tunisian Constitution, art. I)

*“The state is the guardian of religion. It guarantees freedom of conscience and belief, the free exercise of religious practices and the neutrality of mosques and places of worship from all partisan instrumentalization.”*

Article 6, Constitution of Tunisia

(Tunisian Constitution, art. VI)

The signature of the Bardo Treaty in May 1881 marked the beginning of the French protectorate in Tunisia. The Treaty places colonization in a consensual context, showing that Tunisia had not displayed opposition to French expansionism. However, it would be fallacious to infer the peaceful continuity of imperialism, especially in the presence of a young population. By the end of WW1, the young generation had represented more than 25% of the total pop-

ulation. This force, combined with the availability of European education (limited access) and the unleashing of anti-imperialism waves in the MENA region, helped develop a strong sentiment of nationalism (Perkins, 2014:95). It is in this context that Habib Bourguiba adopted the Tunisian cause and founded the Neo-Destour party in 1934. This party gained prominence during the reign of Bourguiba between 1956 and 1987.

## I. BOURGUIBA'S TUNISIA: A RENDEZVOUS OF AUTHORITARIANISM AND SECULARISM

Bourguiba's ascent to the presidency was accompanied by enthusiasm. After all, he was associated with the departure of France from Tunisia. The President swiftly enacted major domestic changes. At the domestic sphere, he blurred the limits of his presidential jurisdiction and introduced rapid, if not hasty, changes to the Tunisian society. These changes cover a wide range of national stratifications, such as education, gender justice and equality, and religion. If Bourguiba wanted to replicate the concept of 'modern state,' his lust for supremacy and continuity culminated in the emergence of a liberalized authoritarian state (Hopwood, 1992:83).

Aside from removing actors that could wobble his reign (Hopwood, 1992:80),<sup>15</sup> Bourguiba endeavored to reproduce the idea of a 'modern state' in Tunisia while constructing the image of a supreme leader (Hopwood, 1992:82). Derek Hopwood equates Bourguiba with Louis XIV, declaring that the former "did not distinguish any longer where he ended and the state began" (Hopwood, 1992:82). "L'Etat c'est moi" (Borel, 2018) - the personalization of power - can be summed up as Bourguibism. Under Bourguibism, President Bourguiba closely monitored the work of institutions and bureaucracies (Hopwood, 1992:84). Bourguiba's purpose, unsurprisingly, was the absorption of the state apparatus, a task for which he obtained support from the Neo-Destour party.

One exhibition of Bourguiba's suprema-

cy was the restrictions he had placed on trade unions. In 1957, he adopted numerous attitudes relating to trade unions, i.e., prevented some from operating and cracked down others, particularly those linked to Salah Ben Youssef (Hopwood, 1992:85). Consequently, between 1957 and 1987, any form of opposition was harshly condemned. Another example is the prioritization of unilateralism. This includes the disregard for domestic opinion when issuing foreign and domestic policy decisions. For example, Bourguiba supported the US in the context of the Vietnam War, although the population opposed US behavior in Vietnam. Similarly, the President unilaterally assumed the presidency for life in 1974 (Hopwood, 1992:85).

### A. Bourguiba's Reforms

In short, the profile of Bourguiba fits in the realm of authoritarianism. To protect his desire for power, the President had introduced a string of reforms, many of them bound to education, gender justice/ equality, and religion. In terms of 'Tunisian secularism,' he attempted to set up a new system of education, introduced a series of changes to the Tunisian Family Law, and promulgated the system of religious endowments.

#### 1. Education

Bourguiba believed that improving national education would have a positive effect on social values, thereby, affecting the performance of social roles (Perkins, 2014:143). In 1957, he issued a policy mandating schooling (De Bouttemont, 2002). Under this policy, Arabic was the language of instruction, and French was the 'gate' to economic development. Bourguiba's policy had relative success. For example, the

<sup>15</sup> Salah Ben Youssef, a prominent figure in the Tunisian nationalist movement, was among the rivals.

number of primary schools in the 1975-2000 period increased from 2,319 to 4,465 (De Bouttemont, 2002). The illiteracy rate in the 1956-1990 period dwindled from 84% to 35%. In comparison to Morocco and Algeria, two North African countries that respectively record decreases of 50% and 42%, Tunisia is advanced (De Bouttemont, 2002). Bourguiba advocated educating women to advance their position within society. Moreover, between 1956 and 1965, the literacy rate among women rose (Perkins, 2014:143).<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, this move was part of the President's plan to promote gender equality, because, for him, the emancipation of women was a central component of modernity (Hopwood, 1992:83).

## 2. Emancipation of Women

In their biographical work on Bourguiba, two female authors wrote: "No modernity is conceivable without it [emancipation of women]. For thirty years he tried to make his fellow-citizens share this attitude" (Hopwood, 1992:83). Tunisia, under Bourguiba, witnessed a major improvement in the status of women, according to four interconnected axes (Sraieb, 1999).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Prior to the enacting of Bourguiba's policy on education, Tunisia recorded 96% of illiteracy among females.

<sup>17</sup> It is crucial to note that prior to Bourguiba's advocacy for gender equality, Tunisia had witnessed the contribution of another figure, Tahar Haddad (1898-1935). Haddad is a reformist who called for a modern interpretation of the Quranic verses because Islam is a religion whose basis is equality and justice. In his work entitled *Notre Femme, la Législation Islamique et la Société* (1930), he called for numerous changes, such as the abolition of forced marriages and the education of women. For Haddad, patriarchal societies continue to exist because some individuals disregard the spatial and temporal contexts, replicating the interpretations that had been carried out by their predecessors.

On August 13, 1956, the President broadcasted the Code of Personal Status (CPS) according to his personal experience, in the form of a presidential decree (Khedher, 2017). In fact, he had observed the repercussions of divorce on his grandmother (humiliation, deterioration of financial status), and the toil his mother encountered rearing him (Murphy, 2007). First, Bourguiba abolished polygamy and redefined divorce. For him, the understanding of Islamic jurisprudence should follow the principle of *Ijtihad*, i.e., the effort of interpretation (Tobich, 2008:89-126). Borrowing his words, "the human spirit in its evolution, gives to the concept of law a variable concept according to the time: what was admitted fourteen centuries ago is not admitted anymore in our time" (Tobich, 2008:89-126). In this context, divorce acquired a legal meaning, according to which repudiation became illegal, and women became able to declare divorce. Second, Bourguiba set the minimum age of legal marriage for Tunisian women (seventeen) and men (twenty), with the need for consent prior to marriage. Third, cases of abusive divorce by the husband require him to provide the wife with monthly compensation. Incessant until the wife's death, this compensation aimed at providing the wife with the means that make her life post-divorce similar to life pre-divorce (Tobich, 2008:89-126).

Second, in 1957, women acquired the right to vote in the municipal elections and later in the national elections. The 1959 Constitution specifies that the totality of Tunisian citizens (minimum age of twenty) is able to vote (Tunisian Constitution, art. XX). The exertion of electoral rights joins the increase of the female workforce. The percentage of employed women went from 6.8% in 1966, to 18.9% in 1975, and

reached 21.8% in 1984 (Chater, 1994).

Third, Bourguiba supported the establishment of the Union Nationale des Femmes de Tunisie (UNFT), to reinforce the emancipation of women and girls (Attia, 2017).<sup>18</sup> The UNFT focused efforts on funding literacy classes, developing awareness towards female reproductive health, and encouraging women to vote (Perkins, 2014:143). Moreover, Murphy explains “the UNFT acted as a channel for women to be elected onto the lists of candidates for the Neo-Destour Party in local and national elections” (Murphy, 2007). The Union’s effort paid off as the female literacy rate grew and the overall fertility rate fell (Perkins, 2014:143). By 1960, approximately 40,000 individuals claimed memberships in the Union. The success of the UNFT went beyond its achievements as it gave impetus to the foundation of other organizations that sought to empower Tunisian women (e.g., the commission of women in the labor union (UGTT), the informal group of democratic women) (Ben Achour, 2001).

Bourguiba’s mobilization to enhance the position of women portrays him within a modern frame. However, assessing one facet of the data would be inaccurate. Prior to Tunisia’s independence, the President had supported the Union of Muslim Women to allow its members to express interests without challenging the Neo-Destour. Similarly, he backed the UNFT to gain supporters. Hence, was Bourguiba’s sympathy for the emancipation of women a survival strategy? In response to this question, Ben Achour argues that state-sponsored feminism rendered Tunisian women hostages of the political sphere.

Paraphrasing her work, the advocacy of gender justice and equality was a political instrument that helped ensure political stability during Bourguiba’s reign (Ben Achour, 2001).

### 3. Religion

Bourguiba’s advocacy for ‘Tunisian secularism’ had become clear when he initiated religious reforms. By definition, secularism is the separation of the state from religion. In post-independence Tunisia, a distinct form of secularism had emerged. De jure, Islam was the official language of post-independence Tunisia, as Bourguiba had understood the position of religion among the people. Furthermore, he criticized the religious elite for failing to end colonial rule in Tunisia, and for disregarding the weight of Ijtihad in understanding a society that perpetually evolves (McCarthy, 2014). In “Re-thinking secularism in post-independence Tunisia,” Rory McCarthy (2014) explains that religion had been instrumentalized because President Bourguiba deployed religious references on an ad hoc basis, i.e., according to the circumstances.

First, he dissolved the Habus Council (religious endowments). In the first article of a presidential decree issued in July 1957, he prohibited the Habus foundations (Bourguiba, 1957). Ordinarily, the Habus Council manages land to support mosques and Islamic religious institutions. But, Bourguiba’s Tunisia beheld state control of the Habus budget. Accordingly, the institutions that had been dependent on the Council became heavily reliant on the state. Second, the President abolished Islamic law in 1956, replacing it with judicial law. This move was accompanied by the appropriation of the

<sup>18</sup> A group of Tunisian women founded the UNFT in 1956. Fathia Mzali and Radhia Haddad, Bourguiba’s nieces, belong to the founding group.

two sharia-based courts (destined for Maliki and Hanafi adherents), which paved the way for the decree of the CPS and consolidated much of the judicial authority in the hands of the new regime (Perkins, 2014:140; McCarthy, 2014).

In parallel, Mohamed Tahar Ben Achour was appointed head of Zaytuna (Moore, 1965:51).<sup>19</sup> However, the institution became under the aegis of the Ministry of National Education, and, specifically, part of the University of Tunis, a parastatal university. Furthermore, graduates had to become secondary-level teachers of Arabic, religion, and civic studies. Simultaneously, the President issued heavy criticism apropos religious scholars and practices (e.g., pilgrimage, fast during Ramadan, veil). In 1981, he issued the soi-disant controversial Circular 108, banning women from being veiled in public institutions. Subsequently, veiled women were subject to encroachment (e.g., harassment, exclusion from the private sector, expulsion from academic institutions) (“It is a way to destroy our lives,” 2016).

It is important to note that Article 1 refers to Islam as the religion of Tunisia, not the state of Tunisia, and Article 74 specifies that the president of the Republic must be Muslim (Tunisian Constitution, art. I & LXXIV). These two clauses open the possibility for the deployment of religious symbols in the quest for legitimacy. McCarthy thus states (2014):

“Many of the innovations and reforms introduced at this time came with ostensibly religious justification and, to some degree, the reforms were limited by religious law.”

<sup>19</sup> Mohamed Tahar Ben Achour was among the most moderate Maliki theologians in Tunisia. He supported the reforms of President Bourguiba. Zaytuna: mosque-university in Tunis.

A first illustration of this marriage of convenience is the President’s support for religion in the pre-independence era. In fact, Bourguiba had equated the defense of the nation with the defense of Islam. Moreover, he disfavored the French endeavors to ban traditional clothing and condemned the burial of Tunisian Muslim citizens who had been naturalized as French in Muslim cemeteries (Perkins, 2014:96). Perkins, in this context, argues that Bourguiba was trying to capture the attention of the masses; he states (2014:97):

“Portraying the French as again meddling with Islam, and summoning Tunisians to defend their faith that lay at the heart of their identity, Bourguiba and his colleagues assailed both protectorate officials and the collaborationist ulama in the pages of *L’Action*.”

The second level of religious instrumentalization is bound to the CPS. Bourguiba abolished polygamy on the principle of *Ijtihad*. However, he adhered to Islamic jurisprudence on the share of inheritance between males and females. It was until the presidency of Béji Caïd Essebsi (2014-2019) that the debate on equal inheritance gained prominence. Third, Bourguiba opposed the traditional definition of secularism, for he thought it was too simplistic. For him, a secular Tunisia is where the state control over religion is calibrated, not suppressed (McCarthy, 2014).

As time wore on, it had become evident that the President endeavored to achieve his version of modernization by prioritizing reason and *Ijtihad*. Nevertheless, a fierce opposition grew in response to what was seemingly anti-Islamic. In this regard, Ben Yusuf asserted that the President wanted to “prohibit what God has autho-

rized and authorize what God had prohibited” (Perkins, 2014:142). Similarly, veiled women faced rejection, although, some of them continued to wear the veil to challenge the state (“It was a way to destroy to destroy our lives, 2016).

### B. Bourguiba and Jema’ah al-Islamiyah et al.: A Fragmented Relation

President Bourguiba’s relation with the Jema’ah al-Islamiyah, and what would later be the MTI and then, Ennahda, had fluctuated between confrontation and accommodation. In 1981, Rashid Ghannouchi, a student influenced by the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood and specifically by the writings of Sayed Qutb, returned to Tunisia from the Arab orient (Al-Jourchi, 2013). He met with Abdelfattah Mourou, an influential young Sheikh, and a group of students, to compose the nucleus of Jema’ah al-Islamiyah. The newly born organization had pledged allegiance to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. However, drifting from Qutb’s thought towards extremism pushed the leadership to adopt a political mission through the prioritization of Ijtihad.

Salah Eddine al-Jourchi has argued that three factors have exemplified the Jema’ah’s integration of the Tunisian political scene. First, the Tunisian authorities had launched a massive crackdown on the UGTT in 1978, which resulted in a heavy death toll (Al-Jourchi, 2013). Second, the Tunisian youth had developed a high political awareness by the 1970s (Al-Jourchi, 2013). Third, the Iranian revolution had been an outstanding source of empowerment for the Jema’ah (Al-Jourchi, 2013). In 1979, Mourou affirmed that: “The Revolution was certainly interesting to us, it showed us a totally new di-

mension of Islam and what role it can have in politics.” (Wolf, 2017:48). Anne Wolf adds that the Iranian Revolution allowed the leaders and members of the Jema’ah to customize social notions in an Islamic context. Thus, Ghannouchi confessed: “[The Revolution] enabled us to Islamize some leftist social concepts and to accommodate the social conflict within an Islamic context” (Wolf, 2017:48).

Later, the leaders of Jema’ah al-Islamiyah dissociated themselves from the Iranian Revolution because they preferred to anchor their organization to Tunisia’s socio-economic-political landscape. In July 1979, the name of the organization changed to the Mouvement de Tendance Islamique (MTI). With Ghannouchi the leader and Salah Karker his deputy, the movement became a prominent player in the Tunisian scene (Wolf, 2017:51). At the same time, Bourguiba became increasingly aware that the MTI would challenge his authority. Consequently, he initiated a wave of repression to crack down on the Islamists, be them pragmatics like Mourou or dogmatists like Karker (Wolf, 2017:53).

In June 1981, Ghannouchi and Mourou petitioned the government for legal recognition to terminate operating underground. In July, the government rejected the request. The repression continued and Ghannouchi, Mourou, and Karker were arrested in what Driss Guiga declared to be an overreaction (Wolf, 2017:53).<sup>20</sup> Those events built up the MTI’s reputation. In response, Bourguiba declared that he would grant parties official recognition in the elections of 1981. Theoretically, acknowledgment shows

<sup>20</sup> Driss Guiga was the Interior Minister. He believed that the prison sentences were reasonable since the people who had been arrested belonged to the pragmatic branch of the MTI.

presidential goodwill towards the Tunisians. In practice, the President wanted to secure his legitimacy (Wolf, 2017:58). In November 1985, Prime Minister Mohamed Mzali informed Ghannouchi and Mourou that the government was seeking an agreement (Wolf, 2017:62). However, MTI operations were drastically restricted. For example, the leaders were prohibited from preaching at mosques, and former prisoners were not allowed to enroll at a university or join the public sector (Wolf, 2017:62).

### C. Ben Ali's Tunisia: A pragmatic Replication of Bourguibism

President Ben Ali (1987-2011) prudently mirrored the ideals of Bourguiba. In fact, he maintained a delicate balance between Tunisian secularism, Islam, and politics. In the weeks that followed his grab over power, the President granted Zaytuna autonomy and agreed that it be the training center for clerics (McCarthy, 2014). Moreover, he allowed the call for prayer to be broadcasted on television and on the radio. In March 1998, he went on a pilgrimage in Mecca, which Tunisian media accorded high importance. In mid-1998, he freed Ghannouchi, who had been sentenced to death during the reign of Bourguiba, and other Islamist detainees under a presidential pardon (McCarthy, 2014). Those

instances help draw a sharp difference between the use of Islam under Bourguiba and Ben Ali. Bourguiba instrumentalized Islam to construct a moral frame for his policies; Ben Ali put Islam among the pillars of Tunisian identity.

Second, Ben Ali portrayed Islam as a religion threatened by Islamism and, therefore, emphasized the state's protective role. In response to the development of Ennahda as the largest opposition party in the 1989 elections, the President shed light on Tunisian secularism and asserted that no place should be granted for politics and religion simultaneously. In 1997, the ratification of the constitution banned religion-based parties.

Noticeably, President Ben Ali's rise to power in 1987 further complicated the domestic landscape for Ghannouchi and Mourou. After a short period of peace, the President initiated a brutal wave of subjugation on the Ennahda Movement, MTI's successor, which resulted in Ghannouchi's exile. In a pivot to foreign policy, it is vital to note Tunisian secularism had not obstructed foreign policy. With Ahmadinejad's Iran, Ben Ali's Tunisia developed good relations, setting aside three differences: the political regime, the Sunni-Shia divide, and regional/global status.



### **PART 3**

## **INSIDE THE IRANIAN MINDSET (2005-2011): TUNISIA IS A NON-WESTERN COUNTRY**

*Africa is not poor, it is oppressed. The current international landscape will continue to evolve in favor of Africa and Iran; this evolution is beneficial for all those who seek justice and freedom.*

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

(Ahmadinejad, 2014)

Between 2005 and 2011, the Ahmadinejad administration maintained positive relations with Ben Ali's Tunisia at the level of diplomacy, trade, and culture. In 2005, the Tunisian ambassador in Tehran stated that Tunis would persist to defend the right of Iran in developing nuclear technology for civilian purposes (Wellman, 2010). In 2007, the UNSC imposed economic sanctions and the US unilaterally imposed "the first toughest sanctions" on Iran for its alleged support of terrorism ("Timeline: sanctions on Iran," 2012). At the height of international pressure, President Ben Ali firmly asserted that the IRI has the right to possess nuclear energy for civilian purposes (Wellman, 2010). In February

2008, the Tunisian Minister of Industry and Energy Afif Chelbi paid an official visit to Iran to meet with the first Vice President Parviz Davoudi. During this visit, the Iranian official emphasized the need for greater cooperation between Iran and Tunisia based on mutual benefit and considered Tunisia as the gate that would help promote cooperation between Iran and North Africa ("Coopération: Afif Chelbi en Iran," 2008). The Tunisian official, on the other hand, congratulated Iran on nuclear achievements and acknowledged the nation's right to possess civilian nuclear technology (Wellman, 2010). In 2010, Ben Ali sent a message to Ahmadinejad in the context of the Revolution anniversary cel-

eburation (“Ben Ali félicite Ahmadinejad,” 2010). The President expressed his willingness to advance unity and cooperation between Tunisia and Iran (“Ben Ali félicite Ahmadinejad,” 2010).

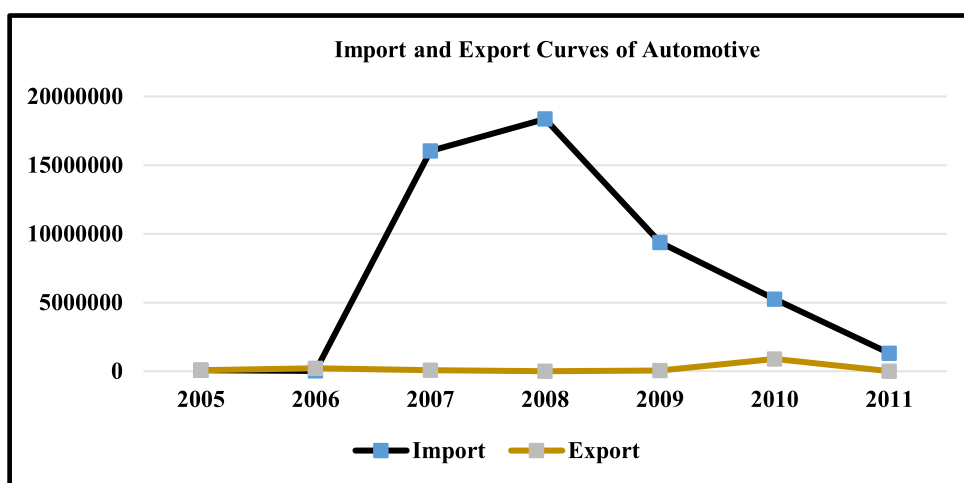
## I. IRAN-TUNISIA ECONOMIC RELATIONS UNDER AHMADINEJAD

During the presidency of Ahmadinejad, trade had been a principal vector in Iran-Tunisia relations. On January 16, 2007, the two countries signed a preferential trade agreement to expand trade relations in sundry sectors, decrease trade tariffs on specific industrial products, and create a permissive environment for sustainable development and commerce (“Preferential trade agreement”). In the same year, an Iranian official met with the Tunisian Minister of Agriculture to sign a memorandum on strengthening collaboration in the fishing sector (Wellman, 2010).

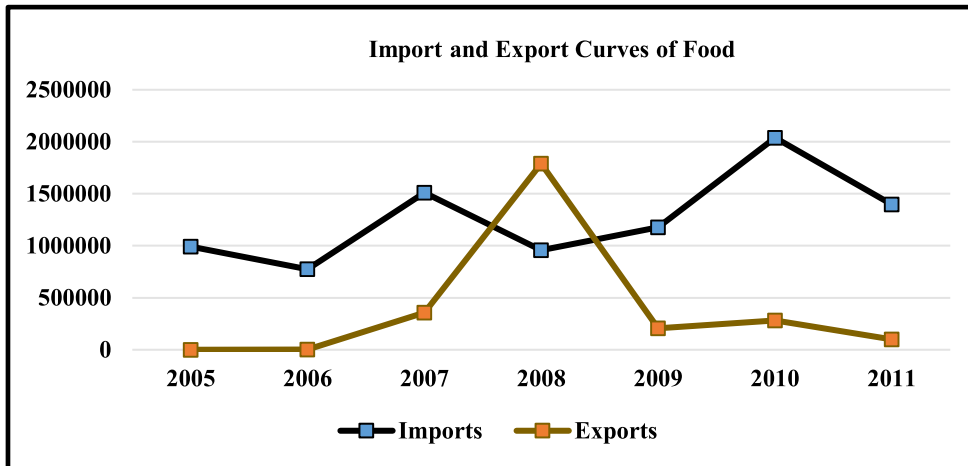
To delineate Iran-Tunisia economic relations, statistical data on Tunisia’s bilateral trade with Iran from the Institut National de la Statistique (INS) was retrieved. Specifically, the trade categories were classified according to four axes: automotive, foods, industrial/ chemical goods, and consumer goods.

Figure 6 displays Tunisia’s import and export curves of IMP Auto and EXP Auto. During the 2005-2006 exception period, the evolution of IMP Auto largely outpaces EXP Auto. In 2007, Tunisia imported 16,043,722 DT and exported 82,050 DT worth of automotive. The 15,961,672 DT difference is not surprising since Tunisia and Iran had signed a preferential trade agreement in the same year. The IMP Auto curve reaches its apex in 2008 (18,359,667 DT) and the EXP Auto curve reaches its minimum (0 DT). Between 2009 and 2011, the import curve decreases to 1,306,819 DT and the export curve reaches 7,180 DT. Hence, the IRI is a chief player in the Tunisian automotive market.

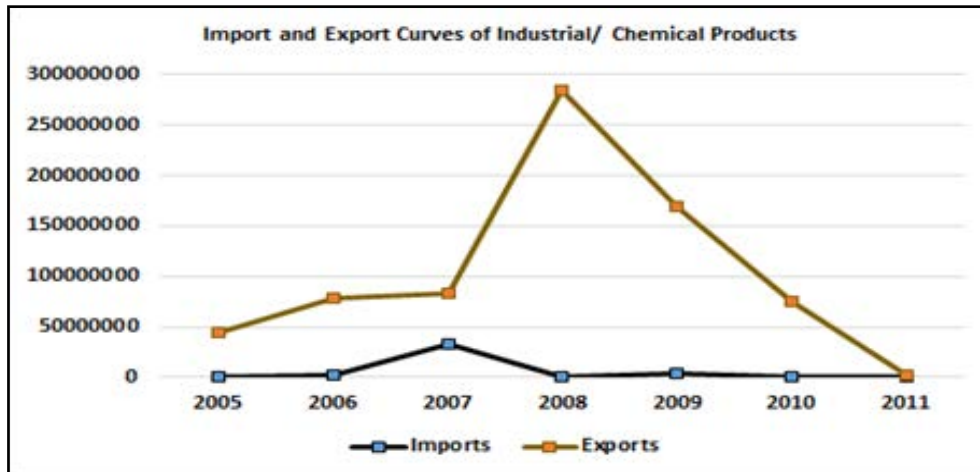
Figure 6- Tunisia’s Imports and Exports of Automotive – Iran (in DT) – category 1



**Figure 7 - Tunisia's Imports and Exports of Food – Iran (in DT) – category**



**Figure 8 - Tunisia's Imports and Exports of Industrial/ Chemical Products – Iran (in DT) – category**



Furthermore, Iran is a strategic supplier in the Tunisian food market.<sup>21</sup> Figure 7 displays the activity of the Tunisian food market vis-à-vis Iran in terms of imports and exports. Tunisia's net exports are negative except in 2008. In 2005, Tunisia imported 81,309 DT worth of commodities from Iran but had zero exports. In 2007, imports remained relatively high (1,509,035 DT) and exports dramatically rose to 357,807 DT. This trend reversed in 2008. Tunisia's exports to Iran (1,790,326 DT) exceed its imports (955,849 DT). Between 2009 and 2011, the ratio stagnates, but the imports remain great-

er than the exports (IMP Food > EXP Food).

In the industrial sector, Tunisia has been an important player in the Iranian market. Figure 8 displays the Tunisian imports and exports with respect to Iran. The import curve EXP Ind/ Chem is constantly higher than the export curve EXP Ind/ Chem. In 2008, Tunisia's exports' value mounted to 283,022,684 DT and imports' value reached 1,392,034 DT. From that point, EXP Ind/ Chem decreased to 0 in 2011. It is important to note that Tunisia's exports to Iran increased at a time when the repercussions of international pressure had become real.

<sup>21</sup> The food category includes commodities like meats, cereals, vegetables, and fruits.

**Figure 9 - Tunisia's Imports and Exports of Consumer Products – Iran (in DT) – category 1**

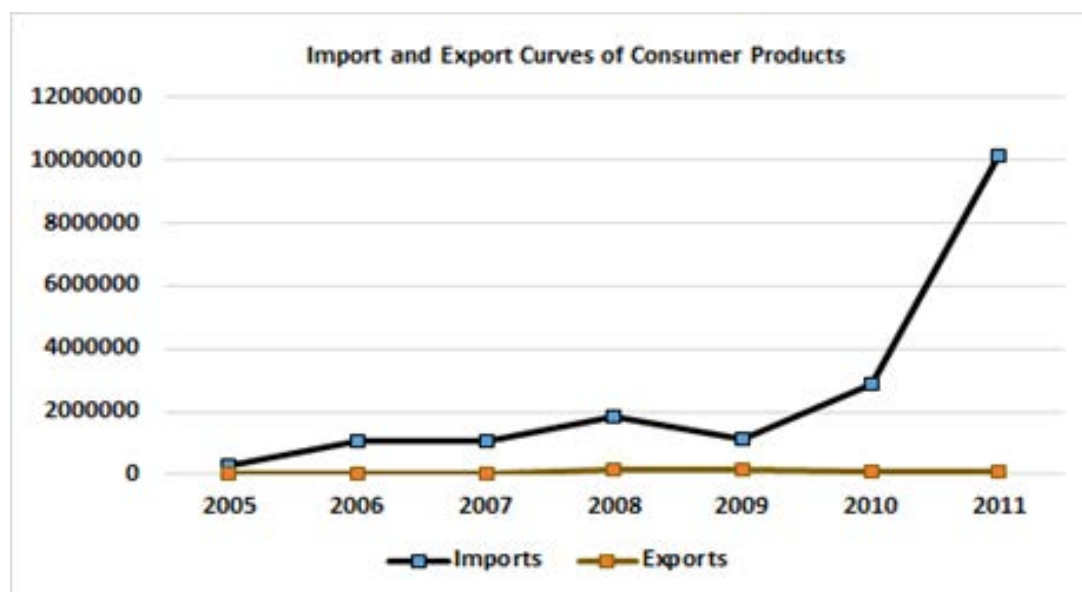


Figure 9 sheds light on the role of Iran in the Tunisian economy. Between 2005 and 2011, Tunisia's imports of consumer goods from Iran increased. The import curve IMP Cons reaches its peak in 2011 (10,112,420 DT). In 2006 and 2007, Tunisia did not have exports to Iran, thus, the export curve EXP Cons hit 0 DT. In the remaining years, the value of Iranian imports from Tunisia remains relatively negligible; the highest point is 162,613 DT (2009).

The statistical analysis of Iran-Tunisia relations between 2005 and 2011 renders some conclusions. First, ideology had not impeded developing relations with the Ben Ali regime, whose signature was so-called Tunisian secularism. Second, Iran's development of bilateral ties with Tunisia illustrates Ahmadinejad's accommodating stance towards Arab countries. Third, Tunisian foreign policy towards Iran has proved to be highly pragmatic. The Tunisian President endorsed the right of Iran to possess peaceful nuclear energy at a time when the Iranian nuclear file had reached the UNSC. More-

over, the imposition of international and American sanctions on Tehran and the controversial election of Ahmadinejad in 2009 did not alter the trade behavior of Tunis.

## II. Iran-Tunisia Cultural Relations Under Ahmadinejad

The Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance pursues "the promotion of general and cultural awareness based on Iranian-Islamic culture and civilization and paying close attention to the safeguarding of Persian language" (Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance). Indeed, Iran-Tunisia cultural relations illustrate this clause.

In January 2000, the Tunisian and Iranian ministers of culture established a cultural program to encourage greater cultural ties between Tunisia and the IRI. Specifically, the program comprises various aspects of culture such as tourism, education, and religion. During Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran and Tunisia assembled an Islamic art exhibition at a cultural

center in Kairouan. Officials in Tehran and Tunis affirmed that this move sought to strengthen cultural ties. Accordingly, the cultural relations between these two countries from 2005-2011 took three conventional components: religion, tourism, and language.

### A. Shiism in Tunisia

Shiism in Tunisia dates back to the era of the Fatimid Caliphate. The Fatimids (909-969) were Shia Ismaili Muslims who had reigned in the axis Kabyle-Cairo after they had broken from the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate (Barrouhi, 2007). Contrary to Iran and Iraq, the principal references of Shiism, modern Tunisia has proven to be a religiously homogeneous country, i.e., the majority of the population is Maliki Sunni. Accordingly, the Shiite population has undergone what Abdulhafid al-Bannani labels a “crisis of identity loss” (Al-Bannani, 2012:226). For him, Shiites in Africa failed to assimilate into their societies and to formulate a unifying vision (Al-Bannani, 2012:226). At the broader level, he refers to the limited availability of Shiite scientific/ religious centers and resources (Al-Bannani, 2012:226). The astute remarks of al-Bannani do not contradict the fact that Tunisian Shiism has thrived. Undoubtedly, the corresponding factors go beyond the national scale. First, the Iranian Revolution empowered the Shiite population in Tunisia. Al-Bannani, a Shiite, admits that Ayatollah Khomeini had proven that religion and politics can be mixed (Al-Bannani, 2011). Second, Shiite media, books, and online resources have served as propaganda to accustom the people to Shiism. Al-Manar, a Lebanese channel affiliated with Hezbollah, is among the main television platforms that introduce Shiism. Al-Bannani admits that Al-Manar

has been the principal force behind his adoption of Shiism (Al-Bannani, 2011). He specifically refers to the shows that Shiite and Sunni scholars are invited to and emphasizes the influence of Hassan Nasrallah, Mohammad Mahdi Shamseddine, and Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah (Al-Bannani, 2011). Abdullatif al-Hannachi adds the influence of students who had studied in the Middle East, the impact of Hezbollah after 2006, the publication of Shiite resources in Lebanon, and the role of the Iranian Cultural Association (Al-Hannachi, 2013:1792).

Article 6 of the Tunisian constitution specifies that the state “guarantees freedom of conscience and belief, the free exercise of religious practices” (Tunisian Constitution, art. VI). This constitutional clause allowed President Ben Ali to place Islam under national identity, furthermore, to generate an equilibrium between religion and foreign policy interests. In fact, the President launched a repressive wave against the Islamists but remained neutral towards the spread of Shiism in Tunisia. Abdullatif al-Hannachi argues that Ben Ali had indeed given the Shiites room to manoeuvre and this was a tactic intended to counterbalance the influence of Islamism and obstruct the potential resurrection of Islamism in the political scene (Al-Hannachi, 2013:1792). Another motive, the author adds, was the need to preserve strong Tunisia-Iran relations regardless of ideological divergences (Al-Hannachi, 2013:1792).

### 1. Shiite Associations and Alliances in Tunisia

The Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO - رابطة الثقافة والعلاقات الإسلامية) is directly linked to the IRI. Founded in 1995, it seeks to “undertake the cultural activities

outside Iran” by organizing conferences about Iranian civilization and free Persian courses, broadcasting Iranian movies weekly, and holding traditional Iranian art exhibitions (ICRO website). The Organization comprises a library (The Great Prophet Library) that contains various resources, including music disks and films (ICRO website). Furthermore, the Organization arranges film festivals, Quran exhibitions, and trips to Iran (ICRO website). On the Organization’s official website, Iran and Tunisia are considered “brother countries” (البلدين الشقيقين) because they share a historical heritage of amity (ICRO website). Special emphasis is put on the role of the cultural department of the Iranian embassy in Tunisia. Ultimately, it unites the Tunisian and Iranian people (ICRO website).

In theory, the Islamic Culture Relations Organization warns against the eruption of sectarian debates, specifying that its purpose is solely to cultivate greater cooperation and collaboration between Tunisia and Iran in the fields of Islamic art and culture (ICRO website). Nevertheless, culture has a high propensity of dispersal, i.e., to spread from one group to another. In human geography, contagious diffusion refers to the spread of a feature, idea, or notion regardless of details such as economic status. In Tunisia, the presence of Iranian/ Shiite organizations and associations whose aphorism is independence cannot obstruct the diffusion of Shiism.

The Ahl al-Bayt Cultural Society (جمعية أهل البيت الثقافية) was created in October 2003, as an offshoot of The World Council of Shia Centers in Tunisia. This Council seeks to integrate Shia practices worldwide through the issuance

es of news, the publication of articles, and the provision of Shia resources (World Council of Shia Centers website). The Cultural Society organizes religious practices and spreads awareness among individuals (World Council of Shia Centers Website). However, its broader goal has been the revival of the Ahl al-Bayt Charitable Association (جمعية آل البيت الخيرية) (Al-Hannachi, 2013:1792), a Lebanese association that comes under the guidance of Ayatollah Sayed Ali al-Sistani and provides social services to the disfavored (Ahl al-Bayt Charity Association website). It is important to note that President Ben Ali never granted the Cultural Society legal recognition, and this refusal illustrates the place of religion. Ultimately, he only gave Shia representatives the illusion of freedom, when the reality was otherwise.

During the presidencies of Ben Ali and Ahmadinejad, Tunis and Tehran developed strong ties. The Tunisian President’s normalization of relations with the Shiites reveals the complexity of domestic and international balance. Ben Ali, a fierce opponent of the Islamists, attempted to adjust his stance towards religion by not confronting the Tunisian Shiites. Additionally, this delicate domestic equipoise set the stage for the smooth evolution of Tunisia-Iran relations. With the eruption of the Arab uprisings, Tunisia has transformed its geographical weakness into a major strength. Indeed, it has become what Safwan Masri labeled “an Arab anomaly” and Iranian officials discerned an opportunity when regional uncertainty prevailed (Masri, 2017, cover).

## **PART 4**

### **THE DEPARTURE OF BEN ALI AND THE RESURRECTION OF ENNAHDA: A MILESTONE IN IRAN-TUNISIA RELATIONS**

*The Islamists and at the top of which Ennahda, have been the principal beneficiaries. The Revolution created a historical opportunity for the movement, and made it an important actor; not only among the opposition but also in the transition towards democracy. This is how Ennahda moved from marginalization and repression to a political party that acts according to the terms of democracy.*

Salah Eddine al-Jourchi

Decades of repression concluded with Ben Ali's departure to Saudi Arabia on January 14, 2011. Mohamed Ghannouchi, who had been Prime Minister under the ousted president, rushed to form a new government and Fouad Mebazaa, a member of the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD), ascended to the presidency. Those slight changes did not meet the socio-economic demands of the Tunisian people. Thus, the Jasmine Revolution terminated with the resignation of Ghannouchi

on February 27. Essebsi, a prominent figure of the old regime, was nominated for the interim position. The new Prime Minister started a fresh chapter in Tunisian politics by dissolving Ben Ali's RCD, calling for the organization of elections to enact a new constitution, and legalizing numerous parties, including Ennahda (Loi sur l'organisation provisoire des pouvoirs publics). The countrywide protests were a tipping point for Ennahda. First, Ennahda members showed limited involvement in the protests and that was

ultimately part of its cautious activity. Wolf addresses this strategy, arguing that the party was not willing “to alarm the international community with what might look like an Iranian-style Islamic revolution” (Wolf, 2017:130). However, as the death toll rose and the regime’s chances for survival shrunk, Ennahda vigilantly entered the street to demonstrate goodwill in front of the protesters, although they refrained from using pro-Ennahda slogans (Wolf, 2017:131). Furthermore, on January 30, Rashid Ghannouchi and other senior members of Ennahda returned from exile and were welcomed by around 10,000 supporters in Tunis (“Tunisian Islamist leader Ghannouchi returns home,” 2011). They understood that softening their stance on Islam and politics would bring non-Islamists closer. Mourou stated that the party sought to resolve the push factors of the Revolution without focusing on the political game (“Tunisie: Rashed Ghannouchi de retour d’exil,” 2011). Thus, Ennahda neither mentioned the intention to establish an Islamic state nor emphasized drafting the constitution based on Islamic law. Instead, it defended gender equality and freedom and called for mosques to be separate from political debates.

On October 27, 2011, Ennahda achieved a landslide victory in the elections of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), obtaining 89 of 217 seats. The Islamist party formed a coalition with the Congrès pour la République (CPR) and Ettakatol, under the support of President Moncef Marzouki and Mustapha Ben Jaafar. This coalition government, known as the Troïka, ruled Tunisia from 2011 to 2014. However, if it symbolized the transcendence of differences, it did not guarantee the absence of internal power politics. Accordingly, Ennahda monopolized

the political landscape, which alienated the members of RCD and Ettakatol and by 2014, around half the deputies resigned from those two parties (Wolf, 2017:134).

Where does Iran fit? How did Tehran’s officials react to the Ennahda’s resurrection? After all, they are an Islamist party that led Tunisia between 2011 and 2014. Moreover, they operated in a legal framework. Ennahda’s predecessors, Jema’ah al-Islamiyah and the MTI, had gained momentum from the Iranian Revolution, and thus, had emerged as the main opponents of Bourguiba and Ben Ali. The following section elucidates the foreign policy of Tunisia under President Marzouki and studies the diplomatic behavior of Iran.

### I. MARZOUKI’S TUNISIA: THE OVERLAPPING LINES OF HUMANITARIANISM AND PRAGMATISM

#### A. A Doctor who did not Plan to Enter the Palace of Carthage

After occupying key positions in the French medical sector, Marzouki, a medical doctor and a human rights activist, went to Tunisia where he devoted his accumulated expertise to the Tunisian people. In 1991, he began teaching public health at the University of Sousse. However, after issuing criticism for the regime of Ben Ali in 2000, he faced expulsion. Accordingly, he restored his position in France at the University Hospital of Bobigny. Between 2004 and 2011, he taught health education to foreigners and immigrants in France.

Marzouki did not limit his career to medicine. Indeed, he has also proven to be an active defender of human rights. Between 1989

and 2000, he headed several bodies that defend human rights, such as the Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights (TLDH) and the Arab Commission for Human Rights. In 2001, he founded the CPR, however, the party was not allowed to operate until the departure of Ben Ali. Repercussions for his criticism of the regime included job loss and being barred from entering Tunisia. Though he attempted to return three consecutive times (2004, 2005, 2006), Marzouki's image temporarily faded from the national scene. Nevertheless, it was resurrected during the Jasmine Revolution, more apparent than ever. In 2011, the CPR resumed its activities and Marzouki was elected deputy at the NCA in October. In December, he assumed the presidency after winning two-thirds of the votes in the NCA. The profile of President Marzouki would place Tunisia's foreign policy between 2011 and 2014 in the territory of humanitarianism, with a dose of pragmatism.

## B. The Foreign Policy of Tunisia During the Presidency of Marzouki

With Marzouki in the palace of Carthage, Tunisia embarked on a friendly foreign policy endeavoring to spotlight Tunisia's state of anomaly in a region ruled by resilient autocrats who countered the people's will. Tunisia circumvented the outbreak of a civil war and regional and foreign powers intervention, unlike Syria and Yemen. Instead, Tunisia reached democratic consolidation and saw the creation of a consensual government between moderate Islamists and secularists. The language of President Marzouki at the UNGA meetings portrays Tunisia as a host country for refugees and a fierce opponent of autocratic regimes (Marzouki,

2012, 2013, 2014). Nevertheless, the Marzouki administration did not hesitate to challenge the status quo through resorting to pragmatism when national interests were at stake.

With the onset of the conflict in Libya, Tunisia sought to lift its regional position by absorbing the influx of Libyan refugees who had fled violence and political instability. Solving the Libyan crisis has always figured among the priorities of the Marzouki administration. At the UNGA annual meetings, the president repeatedly sympathized with the people of Libya (among other countries). In 2012, he likened Tunisia's opposition to dictatorship and its repercussions (Marzouki, 2012). For him, the fight against dictatorship is equivocal to the defense of individual and collective rights (Marzouki, 2012). Similarly, in 2014, he was distraught about the security climate in neighboring Libya (Marzouki, 2014). However, what remains certain is that a weak security apparatus in Libya jeopardizes Tunisia's security. At the concrete level, Tunisia hosted more than 660,000 Libyans in 2012 ("Observatoire des Migrations Libyennes en Tunisie," 2019). In the realm of this humanitarian foreign policy, the political scene in Tunisia observed a major crisis in 2012.

In June, the Tunisian government extradited Al-Baghdadi Mahmoudi, the former Prime Minister of Libya, without Marzouki's support. In response, the president condemned this move in what he qualified as "a violation of human rights" ("Le Président juge 'illégal' l'extradition de l'ex-premier ministre de Kadhafi," 2012). Indeed, the subsequent crisis did not appear from thin air because Jebali violated the constitutional clause on the consultation between the president and the prime minister. Article 77 exposes consultation in a one-sided

frame, i.e., the president needs to consult the chief of the government when taking a sensitive action that puts the vital concerns of Tunisia at stake (Tunisian Constitution, art. LXXVII). Nevertheless, the opposite scenario is also true because the president is at the head of the decision-making hierarchy.

The development of the war in Syria was met with massive support from the palace of Carthage. As soon as the Syrian regime proved unwilling to relinquish power, Marzouki expressed his support for the Syrian people, calling for the departure of the Assad regime and the enactment of a peace plan to secure a political transition in Syria (Marzouki, 2012). Prime Minister Jebali even urged countries to follow the example of Tunisia and isolate the Assad regime (*"Vague d'indignation après le double veto à l'ONU sur la Syrie,"* 2012). In 2013, the President warned against the negative effects of militarization, external interventions, and sectarianism in Syria (Marzouki, 2013). In a palpable advocacy of human rights, he confessed that life precedes the quest for justice (Marzouki, 2013). The bombardment of Homs pushed Tunisia to recall its ambassador from Syrian, and to later expel the Syrian ambassador (*"Tunisia to expel Syrian ambassador,"* 2012). Those gestures of solidarity were accompanied by the banishment of Syria from the Arab League due to the brutality of the regime towards protesters (Batty & Shenker, 2011).

Tunis's approach towards the Libyan and Syrian conflicts corroborates Marzouki's humanitarian profile. Eventually, the President displayed less commitment to the values of humanism. By 2013, Tunisia began facing a mix of internal and external challenges that ren-

dered the humanitarian conduct of foreign policy idealistic, if not naïve. Accordingly, Tunis officials began softening their stance towards the Assad regime, and this attitude fits in the realm of pragmatism.

In August 2013, Tunisian officials cracked down Ansar al-Sharia, a terrorist group affiliated with Al-Qaeda, after it was held responsible for Tunisia's deteriorating security climate (Zelin & Walles, 2018). In June 2014, ISIS proclaimed the establishment of a so-called Caliphate in Syria and Iraq, which paved the way for the departure of 27,000 to Syria and Iraq, and the participation of 2,900 in the conflict (Zelin & Walles, 2018). Starting in 2015, ISIS began losing territory. This gradual weakening resulted in a massive flow of fighters returning to Tunisia and Libya. In this context, Tunisia moved beyond the limits of humanitarianism to deter the risks associated with returnees. Moreover, Karasik and Cafiero (2019) explain that Tunis officials became aware that foreign actors' interventions and the Syrian Arab Army gains obscured the prospects of a successful revolution in Syria. In their words, Tunisia "shifted from an idealistic to a more realistic approach" (Karasik & Cafiero, 2019).

This overview of Tunisia's behavior regarding Libya and Syria highlights a major specificity of foreign policy, i.e., "zero-enemy policy." Whereas Youssef Cherif (2015) ascribes this expression to the Tunisia of Bourguiba, Ben Ali, and Essebsi, the study of Iran-Tunisia relations under the Marzouki administration cannot be carried out in isolation from this paradigm. Indeed, Tunis and Tehran maintained strong levels of engagement, and several dynamics come into play.

### C. Iran and Tunisia Under Marzouki: An Asymmetrical Relation

During the presidency of Marzouki, Iran displayed unprecedented levels of interest in Tunisia, which engendered the relations between the two countries disproportionately cordial. In the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, Iranian news agencies like the Iran Project, Iran Front Page, and IRNA have extensively covered Iran-Tunisia bilateral relations. Whereas the status of Tunisia as the pioneer of Arab uprisings is certainly a push factor, other junctures such as the resurrection of moderate Islamism, the shift of Tunisia's approach on Syria, and its zero-sum foreign policy are decent variables that intervene, the totality of which substantiates the complexity of Iran's foreign policy.

#### 1. Iran-Tunisia Economic Relations During Marzouki

During the presidency of Marzouki, trade was a central axis in Iran-Tunisia relations. In April 2012, Ali Akbar Salehi met with Mohamed Lamine Shakhari and Jebali to discuss the possibility of joint investments between Iran and Tunisia ("Iran, Tunisia to expand cultural relations," 2012).<sup>22</sup> In another occasion, Abdesalem called for the enlargement of the trade volume with Iran because that would facilitate a successful democratic transition ("Iran, Tunisia to expand cultural relations," 2012). In August 2012, Ahmadinejad and Marzouki met during the summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Mecca. The Iranian President recalled some commonalities between Iran

and Tunisia, especially those bound to the revolution, and thus, emphasized the relevance of commerce (Aymen, 2012). In September 2013, the Tunisian Minister of Interior met with the Iranian ambassador in Tunis to strengthen bilateral ties in "different areas, especially local councils, management of natural disasters and relief operations" ("Tunisia calls for enhancement of ties with Iran," 2013).<sup>23</sup> In October 2013, the Tunisian Minister of Tourism Jamel Gamra, like other officials, sketched the common grounds between Iran and Tunisia, to argue in favor of expanding tourism ties ("Iranian, Tunisian Officials Stress Expansion of Tourist Ties," 2013). Furthermore, Iranian and Tunisian officials met at Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) to expand trade in the sectors of oil and petroleum, automobiles, agriculture, phosphate, pharmaceuticals, food, and financial services. The distribution of goods and services reveals symmetry in terms of benefits. For example, phosphates and oil/ automobiles are pivotal components of the respective Tunisia-Iran trade balance ("Tunisia looks to increase economic ties with Iran," 2013). In reference to the automobile sector, officials from both countries considered manufacturing an Iranian line of car production in Tunisia, an initiative that coincided with the fact that Tunisia produces automobile spares ("Tunisia seeks 'to enhance economic ties with Iran'," 2013). The purpose of this section is to exemplify Iran-Tunisia economic relations between 2011 and 2014. Accordingly, data on Tunisia's balance of net exports with Iran from the INS was retrieved following four axes: automotive, foods, industrial/ chemical

<sup>22</sup> Iranian Minister of Culture Mohammad Hosseini; Tunisian Foreign Minister Rafik Abdessalem.  
Tunisian Minister of Industries and Trade Mohamed Lamine Shakhari.

<sup>23</sup> Tunisian Minister of Interior Lotfi ben Jeddou.

goods, and consumer goods. Figure 10 displays IMP Auto and EXP Auto, Tunisia's import and export curves of automotive. The fluctuations of IMP Auto do not change its relative position in respect to EXP Auto. It rises from 1,306,819 DT to 1,831,325 DT between 2011 and 2012,

and falls to 17,083 DT in 2014. EXP Auto, on the other hand, limitedly evolves in the range [7,180 – 56,294 DT], and reached 0 DT in 2013. However, the sharp contrast between the two curves is not surprising since the Iranian automotive sector is thriving.

**Figure 10 – Tunisia's Imports and Exports of Automotive – Iran (DT) – category 2**

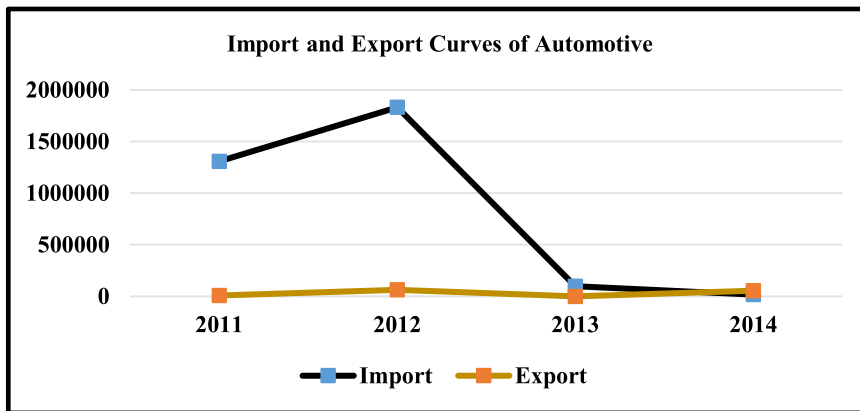


Figure 11 displays a continuation of Iran's senior role in the Tunisian food market. Figure 7 illustrated that Tunisia's balance of net food exports to Iran (2005-2011) was negative because it heavily relied on the latter. The same trend continued between 2011-2014, and IMP Food and EXP Food swing, respectively, in the ranges [1,397,520 – 1,678,276 DT] and [100,445 –

39,338 DT]. In 2011, Iran exported 1,397,520 DT worth of food to Tunisia and imported 100,445 DT. In 2012 and 2013, Tunisia did not export any food commodities to Iran. Nonetheless, Figure 11 differs from Figure 7 because the curves of the latter display more linearity, which is consistent with the official declarations of Tehran and Tunis.

**Figure 11 – Tunisia's Imports and Exports of Food – Iran (DT) – category 2**

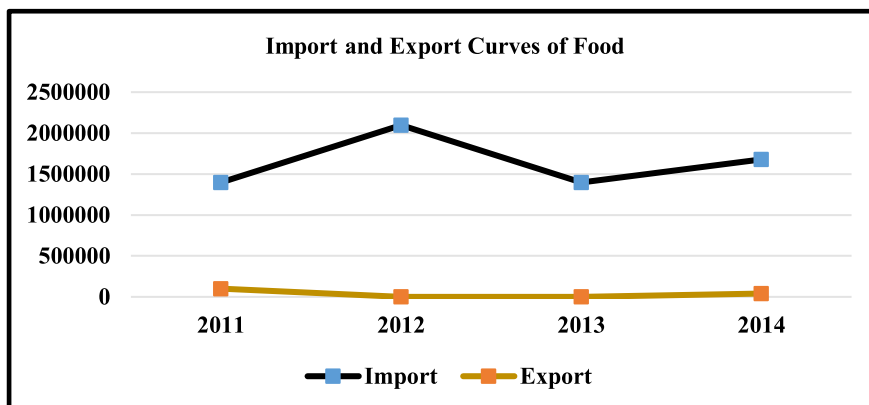


Figure 12 displays a new trend in Iran-Tunisia economic relations. Between 2005 and 2011, Tunisia was an important client in the Iranian market of industrial and chemical products. This status changed in 2011, i.e., IMP Ind/ Chem and EXP Ind/ Chem got unprecedentedly closer, because Tunisia is a major exporter of chemical products and fertilizers. In 2011, Iran exported

331,219 DT worth of industrial/ chemical products to Tunisia and imported 2,029,940 DT. This gap, worth 1,698,721, reaches 16,283,642 in 2014, thereby growing by 89.57%. This instance shows that the Marzouki administration was able to build a relatively symmetrical relation with Iran through utilizing Tunisia's natural wealth.

**Figure 12 – Tunisia's Imports and Exports of Industrial/ Chemical Products – Iran (DT) – category 2**

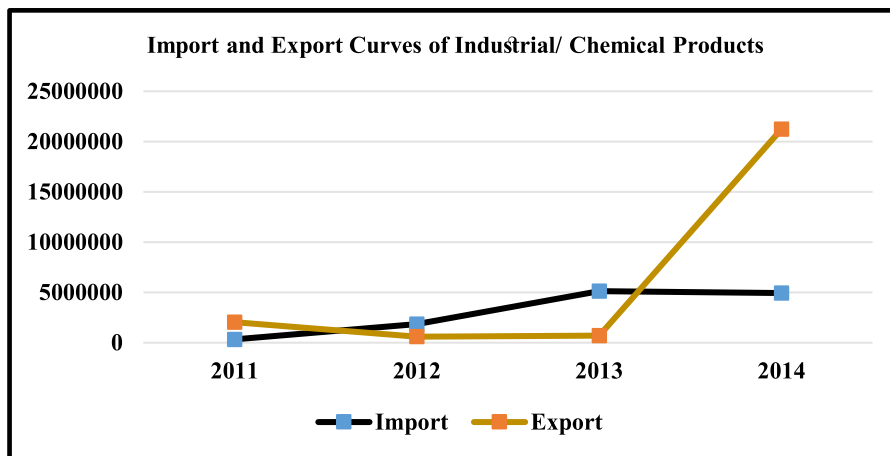
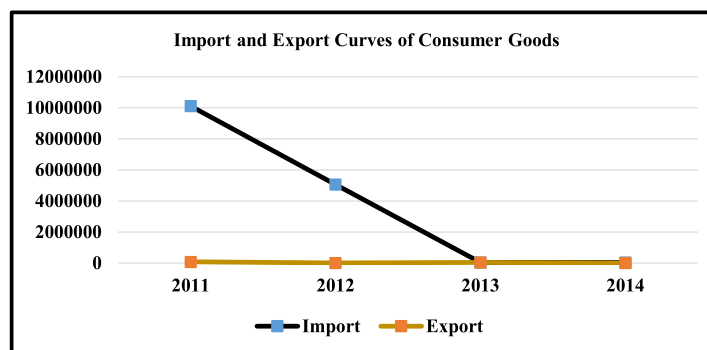


Figure 9 displayed gradual and then, exponential growth of IMP Cons and stagnation of EXP Cons. Figure 13 presents IMP Cons with a negative slope and EXP Cons, which experienced a slight change. In 2011, Tunisia imported 10,112,420 DT worth of consumer goods from

Iran and exported 79,161 DT worth. In the following years, imports declined to 5,061,245 DT in 2012, to reach 32,965 DT by the end of Marzouki's mandate. EXP Cons maintained minimal fluctuation in the range [79,161 – 0 DT].

**Figure 13 – Tunisia's Imports and Exports of Consumer Products – Iran (DT) – category 2**



Clearly, the rhetoric of Iranian and Tunisian officials has materialized. Between 2011 and 2014,

the trade volume between Iran and Tunisia expanded. The four graphs display import and export curves for various markets in a way that differs from the era of Ben Ali. In other words, Tehran's economic engagement growth with Tunis during Marzouki's presidency was incomparable to the 2005-2011 period. However, when culture is considered, equality fades and Iran emerges as the stronger party in the nexus. The cultural projection of Iran in Tunisia created a rift between government officials and the people who questioned the Islamic Republic's intentions.

### 2. Iran-Tunisia Cultural Relations During Ahmadinejad, Rouhani, and Marzouki

When the Jasmine Revolution ensued, Khomeini issued numerous statements to equate the protests to the Iranian Revolution. The Tunisian Revolution and its aftermath occupied headlines because it was the starting point of what would be a ripple effect. In this context, Iranian officials and their Tunisian counterparts carried out copious diplomatic moves to proselytize greater cultural relations. In April 2012, Iranian and Tunisian Foreign Ministers highlighted the importance of bilateral cultural relations ("Iran, Tunisia to expand cultural relations," 2012). This coincided with the opening of Iranian film week in Tunis, an event "intended to serve as an opportunity for cultural exchange, and to transcend linguistic barriers and cultural misconceptions" ("Iran, Tunisia to expand cultural relations," 2012). Abdesslem underlined the role of Islamic culture in creating a common ground for Iran and Tunisia ("Iran, Tunisia to expand

cultural relations," 2012). In November 2012, Tunisia and Iran's Ministries of Culture and the ICRO organized Tunisia's cultural week, a new initiative to spread Tunisian art such as cinema, music, and poetry. At this event, the Tunisian Minister of Culture expressed his willingness to establish Persian language centers in Tunisia ("Tunisia Cultural Week to kick off in Tehran," 2011). Similarly, Hosseini recalled the joint historical heritage between Iran and Tunisia, noting that strong cultural relations are a guardian for political relations ("Minister of Culture," 2012). In 2014, another edition of Iranian Cultural Week transpired in Tunisia to promote aspects of Persian culture like paintings, customs, calligraphy, and music.

It is important to note that governmental bodies in Iran and Tunisia organized cultural events. In the case of the Iranian film week, the organizers were the Tunisian Ministry of Culture and the Iranian cultural bureau. This 'governmental activism' places Iran-Tunisia cultural relations in a formal context. Yet, the introduction of the Shia factor increases the influence of local associations like the ICRO and adds to the complexity of Iran's relation with the Tunisian Shiites.

#### a. Shiites in Marzouki's Tunisia

The departure of Ben Ali, Ennahda's victory, and the subsequent consensus between moderate Islamism and secularism designated Tunisia a neutral ground for Shiism. In the course of the transitional phase, Shiism was not the main concern of the political elite in Tunisia. Allegedly, Shiites exploited the Jasmine Rev-

olution to spread their doctrines and practices, and this explosively reinitiated the debate on Shiism. Based on his investigation, Abdulhakim al-A'ardawi asserts the presence of Shiites who aim to attract the youth. He explains that those Shiites operate through associations that receive patronage from Iran and accordingly support its revolutionary principles (Al-Zair, 2012).<sup>24</sup> Al-A'ardawi refers to the case of the Tunisian League for Tolerance, claiming that its members are narrow-minded individuals who refuse dialogue principles (Al-Zair, 2012). In response, al-A'ardawi revealed his plan to create a front to counterbalance the League's influence principles (Al-Zair, 2012). Salah al-Masri, the president of the League, negated the charge and vowed that if the allegation became fact-based, he would be the first to resign from the presidency principles (Al-Zair, 2012).

After the Revolution, the Ahl al-Bayt Cultural Society acquired legal status. In addition, the ICRO continued organizing art exhibitions, film weeks, and trips to Iran. However, as much as the Marzouki administration responded to the benevolent signs of Iran, some Tunisians expressed discontent with the spread of Shiism. This attitude gave birth to the Tunisian Association Against Shiism in 2012, "to preserve the Sunni-Maliki-Arab identity" ("The creation of a Tunisian association against Shiism," 2012). According to its founder, Ahmad Ben Hassana, it is crucial to defend the identity of the Tunisian nation against foreign interference, particularly those that emanate from Iran ("The creation of a Tunisian association

against Shiism," 2012). For Ben Hassana, Iran supports Shiite associations in Tunisia to enlarge the circle of proponents ("The creation of a Tunisian association against Shiism," 2012). In August 2012, the Association accused the ICRO of spreading Iranian Shiism, and the president issued a statement asking the government to end cultural relations with Iran ("A Tunisian association accuses the Iranian cultural center to spread Shiism in Tunisia," 2019). The fact that this association is non-governmental outlines a discord between the Marzouki administration's policies and social opinion.

Between 2011 and 2014, Iran made several signs of magnanimity towards Tunisia to nurture greater cultural relations. Officials from both countries paid visits that lead to the organization of various cultural events such as the Iranian/ Tunisian cultural weeks and the Iranian film festival. Moreover, associations like the ICRO have played a prominent role in the formalization of the Iran-Tunisia cultural nexus. Nonetheless, some Tunisians disapproved of the Marzouki administration's policies, and this attitude was formalized through the conception of the Tunisian Association Against Shiism. In December 2014, Essebsi won the presidential elections in a landslide victory, becoming the first democratically elected Tunisian President. Once Essebsi entered the palace of Carthage, Tunisia revived Bourguiba's pragmatic political legacy. Between 2014 and July 2019, the President would anchor Tunisia's foreign policy to nuanced pragmatism, and Tunisia-Iran relations unmistakably fit in that exemplar.

<sup>24</sup> Al-A'ardawi is a Tunisian activist.

## II. INSIDE ESSEBSI'S MINDSET: THE MUTUAL EXCLUSIVENESS OF AFFINITY AND PRAGMATISM

### A. Essebsi: The President who Knew the Palace of Carthage Before 2014

President Essebsi was a member of the old regime. After studying Law in the Sorbonne, he returned to Tunisia, where he worked in a law bureau. This is when he started defending the nationalists of the colonial era. With the departure of the French in 1956, Essebsi started working with President Bourguiba, as Interior Minister (1965-1969), Defense Minister (1969-1970), ambassador to France (1970-1971), and Foreign Minister (1981-1986). During the reign of Ben Ali, Essebsi occupied the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies (1990-1991) but left the political scene for a while to rejoin in 2011 as Prime Minister. In 2012, he founded Nidaa Tounès (call for Tunisia), a secular party with a mission to revive the legacy of Bourguiba and to ensure the success of Tunisia's democratic transition (Mohsen-Finan, 2015).

Indeed, Essebsi was the president who knew the palace of Carthage before 2014. He had accumulated abundant expertise from the old regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, so, essentially, his rise to power is a resurrection of pre-Marzouki politics. In the final months of Marzouki's presidential term, Tunisia underwent an economic recession that uncovered the state's incapacity to create jobs (unemployment rate in 2013: 15.93%) (World Bank, unemployment), although, Ennahda provided jobs for its sympathizers, and security threats intensified, particularly those bound to terrorism. This multifaceted crisis boosted Essebsi's status, and the latter amassed support from large coastal cities. However, he was obliged to engage in a policy of rapprochement with Ennahda to curtail the backlashes of the predicament, resulting in what

Mohsen-Finan (2015) labels "the bipolarization of the political scene."

As time wore on, the permanency of the Nidaa Tounès-Ennahda coalition proved uncertain as competition between Essebsi's son Hamed and Prime Minister Youssef Chahed grew fiercer than ever. Specifically, Hamed had inculpated Chahed for the country's deplorable economic performance, but Ghannouchi refused to carry out a replacement ("En Tunisie, Youssef Chahed accusé Hamed Caid Essebsi d'avoir 'détruit' le parti présidentiel," 2018). Ergo, the President ended the consensus that had linked Nidaa Tounès and Ennahda since 2014 because Ennahda "chose to form another relationship with Youssef Chahed" (Ajroudi & Allahoum, 2018).

On July 25, 2019, President Essebsi passed away in Tunis. In reference to Article 84 of the Tunisian constitution, 85-year old Mohamed Ennaceur, the Speaker of the Tunisian Parliament, became interim president (Tunisian Constitution, art. LXXXV). On July 27, Tunisia paid a last tribute to a politician who believed in the mutual exclusiveness of affinity and pragmatism in conducting foreign policy.

### B. The Foreign Policy of Tunisia During the Presidency of Essebsi

On December 31, 2014, Marzouki officially transferred his powers to Essebsi. The ceremony, which commenced in the Parliament and concluded in the Palace of Carthage, marked the end of a three-year rule of the Troïka government, the departure from a predominantly humanitarian foreign policy, and the resurgence of Tunisian secularism. In short, the handover of presidential power marked the beginning of a new stage in the political history of modern Tunisia, a chapter of nuanced pragmatism represented by Essebsi's motto: "Enough with set-

tling accounts, we need to face the future” (Auf-  
fray, 2014). During the presidency of Essebsi,  
Tunisia resumed diplomatic relations with Syr-  
ia, carried out a rapprochement with Egypt and  
Saudi Arabia, expressed sympathy for the Pal-  
estinian cause, and maintained amicable rela-  
tions with Qatar despite the blockade.

Tunisia’s engagement with Saudi Arabia  
dates back to the time of Bourguiba, and it is  
predominantly tied to pecuniary benefits. In  
early 2011, Ben Ali and his family were wel-  
comed in what Riyadh officials described to  
be “exceptional circumstances” (“Ben Ali gets  
refuge in Saudi Arabia,” 2011). Parenthetically,  
Riyadh has always granted safe political havens  
to leaders with whom its interests are bound.  
The case of Tunisia differs slightly because the  
Kingdom “was determined to preserve the re-  
gional status quo” (Al-Tamamy, 2014). Follow-  
ing the death of King Abdallah Ibn Abdelaziz  
al-Saud in January 2015, President Essebsi paid  
an official visit to Saudi Arabia to console the  
royal family, describing the late king as a man  
“with superior qualities” (“Tunisie: Béji Caïd  
Essebsi en Arabie Saoudite après la mort de Roi  
Abdallah,” 2015). On March 26, Saudi Arabia  
launched Operation Decisive Storm in neigh-  
boring Yemen to retrench what was perceived  
as Iranian expansionism. Several countries, the  
UAE, Bahrain, and Kuwait, joined the Opera-  
tion, forming an Arab coalition that culminat-  
ed on April 21. Subsequently, on April 22, the  
Kingdom launched Operation Restoring Hope,  
throwing Yemen into “the worst humanitarian  
crisis since World War 2.” Tunisia did not join  
any of the operations. In the early stages of the  
crisis, Tunisia expressed its preference for the  
formulation of an Arab solution, i.e., for Ri-  
yadh’s involvement instead of foreign actors.  
Moreover, it did not join the Saudi-led interven-  
tions. Prime Minister Habib Essid expediently  
expressed his concern about the repercussions

of a potential civil war and the spillover on re-  
gional stability (“Tunisia stresses importance of  
‘Arab solution’ to Yemen crisis,” 2015).

With the arrival of Mohammed Bin Salman  
to the royal rank in June 2017, Tunisia-Saudi  
Arabia engagement acquired a financial dimen-  
sion. In 2017, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia’s GDPs  
were \$40 billion and \$684 billion, respective-  
ly. For the Kingdom, Tunisia’s adrift economy  
can be easily rehabilitated. Accordingly, Crown  
Prince Bin Salman visited President Essebsi to  
advance greater cooperation on “the economy  
and finance, investment promotion and security  
and military cooperation to counter extremism  
and terrorism.” The Kingdom poured \$830 mil-  
lion into the Tunisian economy (“Saudi Arabia  
pledges Tunisia \$830m of financial aid,” 2018).  
It is important to note that bin Salman’s visit  
took place a few weeks after the assassination  
of Khashoggi, despite countrywide protests  
against the Crown Prince.

Tunisia’s relation with Qatar has grown to  
prominence since the Arab Spring, mainly be-  
cause Al-Jazeera Channel supported the protests  
and criticized Ben Ali. Under the Troïka, rela-  
tions expanded to numerous sectors such as po-  
litical development and security, which resulted  
in the signing of ten agreements between Tunis  
and Doha (Cherif, 2017). In 2014, the relations  
experienced a brief standstill, but resumed be-  
cause of the State’s backing for Tunisia proved  
generous. In parallel to its strong nexus with  
Saudi Arabia, Tunisia maintained harmonious  
relations with Qatar after 2017. This attitude,  
part of the country’s affinity for neutrality, paid  
off in 2017 during Tunisia’s Investment Forum.  
In fact, the Qatari Emir covered the costs of the  
Forum and offered a financial package worth  
\$1.25 billion (Cherif, 2017). In March 2019,  
Emir al-Thani attended the Arab Summit in Tu-  
nis after an absence from the 2018 summit, as it  
had taken place in Riyadh.

Essebsi's Tunisia began a policy of openness towards Sissi's Egypt. In October 2015, the Tunisian leader paid an official visit to Cairo and declared that Tunisia endeavors to "strengthen bonds of brotherhood with Egypt and reinforce bilateral cooperation in all domains" on the premise that common views on the Arab world exist ("Caïd Essebsi optimiste de sa visite en Egypte," 2015). A year later, Chahed reiterated Tunisia's willingness to solidify cooperation with Egypt during a meeting with President Sissi ("Tunisie-Égypte: 10 accords de coopération dans différents domaines signés," 2017). The meeting closed with the signature of 10 agreements in the maritime sector, tariffs, renewable energy, sports, veterinary, and investments ("Tunisie-Égypte," 2017).

On Syria, Essebsi's Tunisia embarked on explicit support of the Assad regime. In 2015, Tunis officially restored diplomatic ties with Damascus by reopening its consulate. This move came in response to the intensification of deadly terrorist attacks on Tunisian soil.<sup>25</sup> By the end of 2018, Prime Minister Khemaies Jhinaoui declared (Karasik & Cafiero, 2019):

"The Syrian government has started to recover and to restore its security after eliminating several terrorist groups. When the dust settles, we will make the necessary decisions to restore the deep-seated Syrian-Tunisian ties."

In March 2019, he addressed Tunisia's unremitting prioritization of dialogue over rupture, explaining that the resumption of Tunisia-Syria ties is expected since the two countries are part of a common arena, the Arab world (Jhinaoui, 2019). Likewise, Nidaa Tounès' spokesperson

advocated the readmission of Syria into the Arab League (Al-Hilali, 2019), and, during an unofficial meeting, a parliamentarian from the same party reassured President Assad that Tunisia values a rapprochement with Syria. Remarkably, Ennahda advocated for reconciliation with the Syrian regime. In August 2019, Mourou, Ennahda's candidate for the presidential elections, noted that the Syrian crisis is an Arab concern whose complexity outpaces the power of Tunisia (Saanouni, 2019).

Concurrently, Tunis officials showed compassion towards the Syrian crisis and called for the implementation of measures to alleviate the suffering of the people, especially in their deliveries at the UNGA. Prime Minister Essid coined the expression "Syrian suffering" and condemned foreign intervention and its fallouts (Essid, 2015). His successor, Jhinaoui, urged for the comprehensive settling of the crisis (Essid, 2017). Moreover, this dose of humanitarianism applies to the Palestinian file. In an interview with *Jeune Afrique*, Prime Minister Jhinaoui bluntly declared that he does not envisage a potential rapprochement with Israel (Jhinaoui, 2019). In Tunisia's 71st address at the UNGA, President Essebsi called for the resolution of the Palestinian issue based on equality and comprehensiveness (Essebsi, 2016).

The foreign behavior of Tunisia between 2014 and 2019 underlines Essebsi's foreign policy of nuanced pragmatism. Tunis officials have a propensity to overlook the divergences that they deem would impede the smooth achievement of national interests. Accordingly, the President adopted a flexible foreign policy behavior to improve Tunisia's geopolitical sta-

<sup>25</sup> On March 2015, Tunis suffered one of the deadliest attacks. Militants attacked the Bardo National Museum, killing 21 and wounding several.

tus. In reference to Iran-Tunisia relations, Nizar Messari articulates (2019):

“Essebsi is from the old regime, and he is more pragmatic and flexible (in comparison to Marzouki). He does not want Tunisia to be aligned automatically neither with Saudi Arabia nor with Iran.”

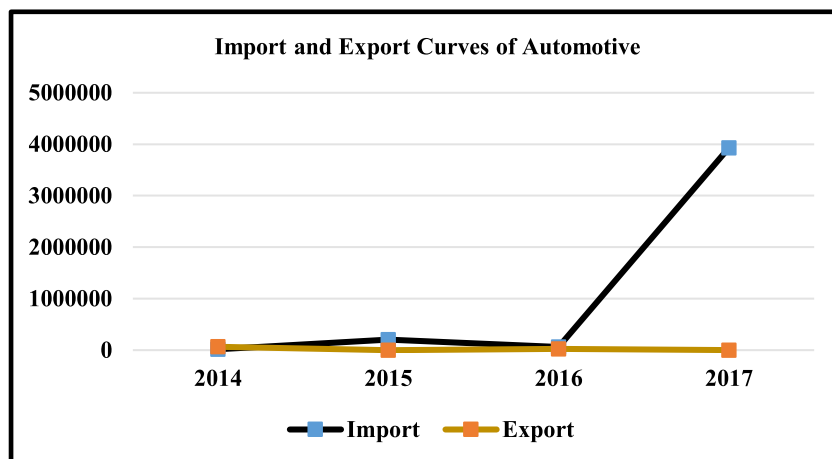
### C. Iran-Tunisia Economic and Cultural Relations During Essebsi

In 2016, the Tunisian Foreign Minister expressed his country’s willingness to further bilateral relations with Iran, referring to historical convergences, and denying the allegations of Iran meddling in Tunisia’s internal affairs (“Tunisia: We want to expand relations with Iran,” 2016). In June 2017, Prime Minister Zarif paid an official visit to the Tunisian President and Foreign Minister to suggest mechanisms to boost relations and congratulate Rouhani on his reelection (“Zarif: There is no ceiling for bilateral relations between Iran and Tunisia,” 2017). In this context, Zarif affirmed, “there is no break in the two countries’ relations in any field,” and emphasized the importance of political dialogue in bringing nations closer (“Zarif: There is no

ceiling for bilateral relations between Iran and Tunisia,” 2017). In February 2019, President Rouhani met with the Tunisian ambassador in Tehran to discuss Iran’s willingness to develop bilateral ties with Tunisia at all levels, including economy and culture, pointing to the absence of obstacles that would impede this plan. Moreover, the Iranian Executive asserted that Iran seeks to develop multifaceted relations with African nations and this part of its foreign policy agenda (“Iran sees no obstacles in boosting ties with Tunisia: Rouhani,” 2019).

Referring to the INS, data on Iran-Tunisia trade relations between 2014 and 2017 was retrieved. As it has been the case in the previous sections, trade categories have been classified according to four axes: automotive, foods, industrial/ chemical goods, and consumer goods. Figure 14 displays Tunisia’s import and export curves of IMP Auto and EXP Auto. Between 2014 and 2016, Tunisia’s automotive imports and exports were significant, but not exceptional. In 2015, Iran exported 204,977 DT worth of autos, cycles, and tractors, and imported 1,960 DT of the same commodities.

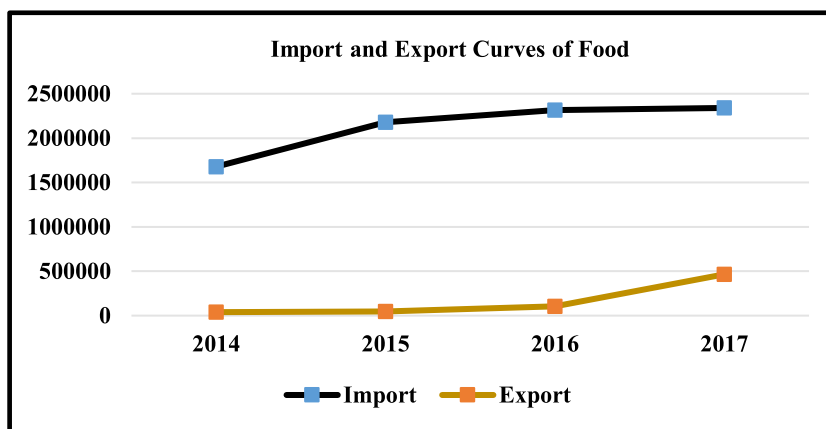
**Figure 14 – Tunisia’s Imports and Exports of Automotive – Iran (DT) – category 3**



After 2015, IMP Auto increases to reach its peak in 2016 (3,932,499 DT). This rise is foreseeable considering the cooperation of car production between Iran and Tunisia. Over the past decade, Iran Khodro Company (IKCO), the Iranian automotive leader, has expressed a growing interest in the Tunisian market; this interest materialized at the end of 2014, when the Iranian Minister of industry, mine, and trade suggested a new domain of cooperation, i.e., the joint production of cars (“Iran, Tunisia can cooperation in car manufacturing,” 2014).

Figure 15 presents Tunisia’s trade with Iran in the food sector and a clear change of trend. Between 2011 and 2013, EXP Food was relatively linear and IMP Food underwent a gradual decrease. During Essebsi’s presidency, Tunisia expanded its trade volume with Iran. In 2016, it exported 103,103 DT worth of food commodities and imported 2,316,287 DT. This pattern continued in 2017 as the value of imports remained relatively stagnant and that of exports reached 465,228 DT.

**Figure 15 – Tunisia’s Imports and Exports of Food – Iran (DT) – category 3**



**Figure 16 – Tunisia’s Imports and Exports of Industrial/ Chemical Products – Iran (DT) – category 3**

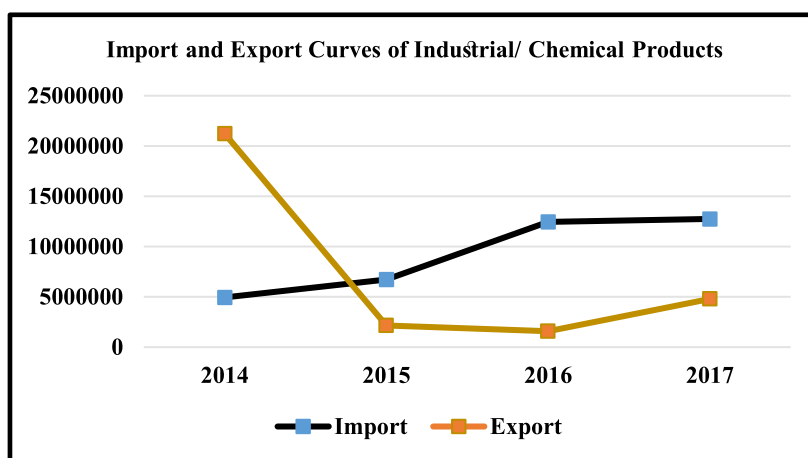


Figure 16 represents import and export curves of industrial/ chemical products. Between 2011 and 2013, IMP Ind/ Chem and EXP Ind/ Chem intersect at various points and show that Tunisia’s exports of chemical/ industrial products to

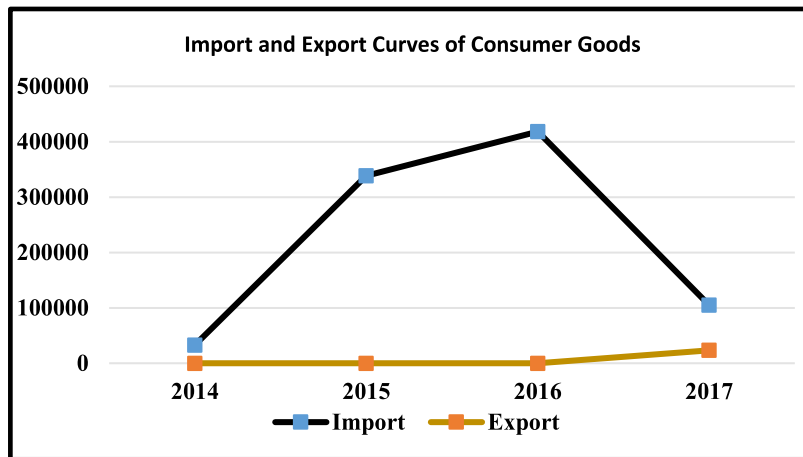
Iran outpace its imports. Starting from 2014, this pattern is reversed as the value of Tunisia’s net exports moves from 4,944,211 DT in 2014 to 12,450,766 DT in 2016. EXP Ind/ Chem, on the other hand, decreases from 21,227,853 DT

in 2014 to 1,584,274 DT in 2016. In 2016, the two curves begin to converge, and by 2017, they become parallel.

Finally, Figure 17 shows IMP Cons and EXP Cons between 2014 and 2017. The first curve is an imperfect inverted-U that starts at 32,865 DT in 2014 and ends at 104,871 DT in 2017, and reaching a maximum value of 418,169 DT in

2016. The second curve, EXP Cons, follows the same trend as in the 2011-2013 period, except in 2014 and 2017 (32,865 DT and 23,299 DT). The shapes of the two curves reveal the presence of asymmetrical trade between Iran and Tunisia. Remarkably, Iran is a vital player in the Tunisian market of consumer goods, likewise in the three other markets.

**Figure 17 – Tunisia’s Imports and Exports of Consumer Products – Iran (DT)- category 3**



When President Essebsi entered the Palace of Carthage, Tunisia’s economy was emerging, people were unemployed, and some of them joined terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. Facing this unusual interdependency of internal and external obligations, Essebsi sustained a balance between the two. Accordingly, Tunis officials conducted practical foreign policy that left no space for affinity. Tunisia needed the financial packages from Saudi Arabia and Qatar and continued engagement with both, despite the 2017 blockade. Similarly, it supported the Palestinian cause without replicating the Saudi-Israeli relation and defended the rights of the Syrian people without marginalizing the Assad regime. In the context of nuanced pragmatism, Essebsi preserved Iran-Tunisia historical relations to

create a political, economic, and cultural nexus.

Contrarily to the behavior of its traditional Saudi ally, Essebsi’s Tunisia did not securitize relations with Iran and Shiism, and the constitutional clause on the freedom of religious exercise allowed Iran-Tunisia cultural relations to evolve smoothly. In 2017, the Iranian Culture Minister and the Tunisian Religious Affairs Minister met in Tunis to extend cooperation to culture while affording special importance to religion (“Iran, Tunisia Stress Broadening of Cultural Relations,” 2017). Later that year, the Iranian official highlighted the significance of cultural dialogue in nurturing understanding between the two nations (“Iran calls for cooperation with Tunisia in fighting against terrorism,” 2017).

### CONCLUSION

Since the inception of the Arab uprisings, the MENA region has been an open battlefield for regional and foreign actors. Several conflicts have driven the patterns of war and peace, senior among with is the traditional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The immolation of Bouazizi and subsequent departure of Ben Ali, Saudi Arabia has become increasingly aware of the ineluctability of fate. Ultimately, the House of al-Saud does not want a shift in the regional balance of power in favor of the people or Iran. Accordingly, the Kingdom has been using its ideological apparatus to securitize Shiism and has conducted politics in the realm of the Sunni-Shia divide.

In this Regional Security Complex (RSC), Tunisia is an exception. Geographically remote from the epicenters of instability, it has undergone a successful democratic transition, becoming the exception in a dichotomous spectrum with extremes of war and authoritarian continuity. In this context, Supreme Leader Khamenei praised countries whose people fought for a better future.

Moreover, Realpolitik rather than Khomeinism and Bourguibism drive Iran-Tunisia relations. In Iran, Ali Khamenei is the political figure that sustains the revolutionary principles of Ayatollah Khomeini. Whereas Iranian leadership justifies foreign decisions using Khomeinism, Tunisian leadership guides foreign decisions using Bourguibism. Under President Ben Ali, Iran developed fruitful relations with secular Tunisia. The Shiite factor was vital since

the President maintained a religious balance between Islamism and Shiism. In this context, several Shiite associations started operating, albeit in the absence of a legal frame. Under President Marzouki, Iran's engagement reached unprecedented levels. This coincided with Tunisia's traditional pursuit of a zero-sum foreign policy, the emergence of Ennahda as a party, and the departure of some Tunisians to Syria and the subsequent shifts of Tunisia's stance on the Assad regime. In 2014, secular candidate Essebsi won the presidential elections. During the Essebsi's presidency, Tunisia developed outstanding relations on the premise of nuanced pragmatism, a Bourguibist hallmark.

Essebsi, a political figure of the old regime, died on July 25, 2019. The precise nature of the Tunisian political system ensured a seamless transfer of presidential powers to Mohamed Ennaceur. Furthermore, the presidential elections will be held, prematurely, on September 15. The number of presidential candidates and their profiles demonstrate that the elections will be competitive, the voter turnout will be high, and the Secularism-Islamism schism will prevail, especially because Ennahda nominated Mourou to the candidacy. In the short-term, the relations between Iran and Tunisia will remain cordial. Moreover, Iran continues to display interest in post-Essebsi Tunisia. At the end of July, Tunisian Foreign Minister Jhinaoui held talks with Hamid Reza Dehghani to expand bilateral cooperation. Nonetheless, Tunisia will certainly not sacrifice the benefits it gets from the pursuit of a zero-enemy foreign policy at the expense of a solid rapprochement with Iran.

## Addendum

### Speeches of Khamenei (2005-2019)

- Leader's Speech at the Inauguration of President Ahmadinejad (August 3, 2005)
- Leader's Speech to Government Officials (October 30, 2005)
- Leader's Speech to Government Officials (June 10, 2006)
- Leader's Speech in Meeting with Government Officials (October 19, 2006)
- Leader's Speech to Executive Officials (June 30, 2007)
- Leader's Speech to Judiciary Officials of Islamic Countries (December 5, 2007)
- Leader's Speech to Thousands of People from East Azerbaijan (February 17, 2008)
- Leader's Speech to Officials of the Executive Branch (August 23, 2008)
- Leader's Speech to Elites (October 28, 2009)
- Leader's Address to Members of Basij (November 25, 2009)
- Leader's Speech in Meeting with Entrepreneurs (September 7, 2010)
- Leader's Speech to Executive Officials in Qom (October 27, 2010)
- Leader's Speech to Government Officials (August 7, 2011)
- Leader's Remarks at International Conference on Islamic Awakening (September 17, 2011)
- Leader's Inaugural Speech at the 16th Non-Aligned Summit (August 30, 2012)
- Leader's Speech to Participants of International Conference on Islamic Awakening (December 11, 2012)
- Leader's Speech at Ceremony Approving Rouhani Presidency (August 3, 2013)
- Leader's Speech in Meeting with Officials and Ambassadors of Islamic Countries (July 29, 2014)
- 'Death to America' Means Death to American Policies and Arrogance (November 3, 2015)
- Ayatollah Khamenei: We Will Not Allow the JCPOA to Become a Tool for American Pressure (November 23, 2016)
- It is the Islamic Republic which Gives Us an Environment of Freedom: Ayatollah Khamenei (May 17, 2017)
- The Revolution Has Made Progress in All its Goals and Ideals (May 28, 2018)
- Negotiating with the Enemy is a Deception (June 26, 2019)

### Speeches of Ahmadinejad (2005-2012)

- Ahmadinejad's Address at the 60th Session of the UNGA (September 17, 2005)
- Ahmadinejad's Address at the 64th Session of the UNGA (September 23, 2009)
- Ahmadinejad's Address at the 66th Session of the UNGA (September 23, 2011)
- Ahmadinejad's Address at the 67th Session of the UNGA (September 26, 2012)

### Speeches of Rouhani (2013-2018)

- Rouhani's Address at the 68th Session of the UNGA (September 24, 2013)
- Rouhani's Address at the 70th Session of the UNGA (September 28, 2015)
- Rouhani's Address at the 72nd Session of the UNGA (September 20, 2017)
- Rouhani's Address at the 73rd Session of the UNGA (October 1, 2018)

**Table 6 – Leadership Trait Analysis Output**

Variables	DIS	TASK	BACE	IGB	SC	CC	PWR
<i>Khamenei</i>							
08/03/2005	0.2095	0.4505	0.3667	0.1463	0.2667	0.5983	0.2414
10/30/2005	0.2014	0.5333	0.303	0.1696	0.2727	0.5859	0.3061
06/19/2006	0.1685	0.5355	0.3063	0.1783	0.2561	0.6028	0.2277
10/10/2006	0.2214	0.625	0.3782	0.0588	0.381	0.5788	0.3613
06/30/2007	0.2542	0.7569	0.3704	0.2	0.4444	0.6557	0.3396
12/05/2007	0.1091	0.2833	0.3111	0.2037	0.6	0.7333	0.4468
02/17/2008	0.2871	0.5504	0.463	0.061	0.4286	0.6435	0.3929
08/23/2008	0.3129	0.5935	0.3778	0.0725	0.4742	0.5847	0.2889
10/28/2009	0.2667	0.623	0.3168	0.0893	0.35	0.6221	0.2604
11/25/2009	0.2222	0.6286	0.2	0.1333	0.2	0.529	0.2609
09/07/2010	0.1846	0.7329	0.3077	0.0759	0.525	0.5635	0.186
10/27/2010	0.25	0.5283	0.3889	0.1765	0.303	0.645	0.3143
08/07/2011	0.1862	0.5642	0.3067	0.0795	0.3409	0.6169	0.2303
09/17/2011	0.5083	0.44	0.2105	0.1429	0.2667	0.5253	0.4211
08/30/2012	0.3509	0.463	0.3871	0.2045	0.1429	0.4479	0.3636
12/11/2012	0.3043	0.5366	0.4194	0.1	0.375	0.6301	0.2951
08/03/2013	0.1071	0.5	0.4286	0	0.1111	0.375	0.5714
07/29/2014	0.4154	0.4082	0.3846	0.0714	0.3333	0.4861	0.2308
11/03/2015	0.3185	0.5263	0.3077	0.0725	0.3889	0.6157	0.1837
11/23/2016	0.1641	0.4857	0.4444	0.0886	0.3286	0.5562	0.144
05/10/2017	0.3694	0.6209	0.3735	0.051	0.3	0.5928	0.2439
05/28/2018	0.4054	0.6083	0.2971	0.0682	0.4409	0.6496	0.1742
06/26/2019	0.2435	0.565	0.3898	0.1143	0.1818	0.5777	0.339
<i>Ahmadinejad</i>							
2005 UN GA	0.1495	0.4551	0.25	0.2143	0.1667	0.503	0.3929
2009 UN GA	0.2029	0.4231	0.4706	0.3571	0.0714	0.4571	0.25
2011 UN GA	0.1895	0.3896	0.2778	0.1429	0.2667	0.4386	0.1667
2012 UN GA	0.1875	0.3922	0.2778	0.1429	0.2667	0.4386	0.1667
<i>Rouhani</i>							
2013 UN GA	0.5663	0.4409	0.24	0.2381	0.3077	0.4522	0.2083
2015 UN GA	0.25	0.6016	0.4423	0.25	0.125	0.4727	0.5294
2017 UN GA	0.3913	0.5568	0.2692	0.0694	0.0909	0.4537	0.2642
2018 UN GA	0.3085	0.6341	0.3143	0.2	0	0.5364	0.3714

**Table 7 – Tunisia's Trade with Iran (Imports, Exports)**

Trade Categories	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Automotive</b>													
Autos cycles tractors (imports)	73500	18121	16043722	18359667	9368884	5239256	1306819	1831325	98163	17083	204977	62267	3932499
total	73500	18121	16043722	18359667	9368884	5239256	1306819	1831325	98163	17083	204977	62267	3932499
Autos cycles tractors (exports)	81309	208947	82050	-	48737	892834	7180	63296	-	56294	1960	23425	1350
Total	81309	208947	82050	0	48737	892834	7180	63296	0	56294	1960	23425	1350
<b>Tunisia's net exports</b>	<b>7809</b>	<b>190826</b>	<b>-15961672</b>	<b>-18359667</b>	<b>-9320147</b>	<b>-4346422</b>	<b>-1299639</b>	<b>-1768029</b>	<b>-98163</b>	<b>39211</b>	<b>-203017</b>	<b>-38842</b>	<b>-3931149</b>
<b>Foods (imports)</b>													
Fish	-	65879	-	-	223	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Animal origin-products	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20005	-	35929	-
vegetables	9669	-	430	346	105	-	-	-	-	-	-	24000	-
Fruits	884168	655706	1483292	917084	1103965	2007130	1342663	2094557	1370074	1648340	2155990	2252796	2263418
Coffee, spices	8566	11200	2376	4163	81	4889	-	-	8456	4785	4059	2780	1609
Seeds	17683	7244	3793	9481	725	7807	5772	26	4582	2658	6135	782	2029
Vegetables products	2464	-	929	-	-	-	-	2399	15066	2488	6031	-	12657
Prepared meat and fish	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	60001
Sugar, sweets	-	5127	9707	3216	64617	4571	12390	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cacao, cacao products	-	2890	4045	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cereal preparations	-	25974	4463	21004	8007	7149	36695	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vegetables and fruits preparations	-	-	-	555	-	6640	-	-	5	-	-	-	-
Various food preparations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4889	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>922560</b>	<b>774020</b>	<b>1509035</b>	<b>955849</b>	<b>1177723</b>	<b>2038196</b>	<b>1397520</b>	<b>2096982</b>	<b>1398183</b>	<b>1678276</b>	<b>2177104</b>	<b>2316287</b>	<b>2339714</b>
<b>Foods (exports)</b>													
Meat, variety meat	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	24881
Plants and flowers	-	-	-	344	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fruits	-	-	-	-	-	49133	-	-	-	-	2135	-	20982
Vegetables	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	103103	-
Fats	-	-	357807	1789982	205094	213522	100445	-	-	-	-	-	251485
Cereal preparations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vegetables and fruits preparations	-	-	-	-	-	17885	-	-	-	39338	44443	-	-
Various food preparations	-	639	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	0	639	357807	1790326	205094	280540	100445	0	0	39338	46578	103103	465228
<b>Tunisia's net exports</b>	<b>-922560</b>	<b>-773381</b>	<b>-1151228</b>	<b>834477</b>	<b>-972629</b>	<b>-1757656</b>	<b>-1297075</b>	<b>-2096982</b>	<b>-1398183</b>	<b>-1638938</b>	<b>-2130526</b>	<b>-2213184</b>	<b>-1874486</b>

**Table 8 – Tunisia's Trade with Iran (Imports, Exports)**

Trade Categories	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Petroleum</b>													
Oil and derivatives (imports)	-	-	49583	-	63630	-	-	-	-	-	16180	-	-
total	0	0	49583	0	63630	0	0	0	0	0	16180	0	0
Oil and derivatives (exports)	-	-	-	22954	-	-	-	750337	-	-	-	-	-
Total	773291	773291	773291	773291	750337	750337	750337	750337	0	0	0	0	0
Tunisia's net exports	773291	773291	723708	773291	686707	750337	750337	750337	0	0	-16180	0	0
<b>Industrial/ Chemical Goods (imports)</b>													
Inorganic chemical products	-	39016	31056734	25719	2818	-	-	-	1162	-	-	-	-
Organic chemical products	44493	1054203	383630	453627	-	-	107386	280	-	50172	102	-	452327
Tanning paint	-	-	2378	128751	21851	-	-	-	26730	-	-	440	-
Tanning paint - vegetable origin	161571	51643	61087	68995	119350	72896	102543	114260	76929	472248	273359	699892	460203
Salt, sulfur, lime, cement	37385	-	2370	-	3746654	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Aluminoid substances and glues	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	174	-	-	811
Boilers, reactors, industrial engines	291891	475873	784093	557088	529161	494823	107121	1474115	3101746	26438	364094	1230312	1148926
Carious chemical products	-	1827	-	-	2438	-	-	139924	4186	-	-	-	-
Rubber, rubber products	53672	-	-	76	47752	81495	1958	65	150	-	2755	8398	303
Cotton	-	16561	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1274	-	-
Synthetic or artificial filaments	-	-	-	1030	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Synthetic Fibers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	29358	-	-
Cement products	-	-	32101	14524	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glass products	11000	8403	38923	132224	241800	-	528	63931	121896	123206	114029	4514	4010
Copper products	-	-	665	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cast, iron, steel	-	-	-	-	-	-	197	52200	5058	-	35068	7740	341805
Iron, steel products	285	-	4911	-	-	260	10328	580	1787809	4271977	5897263	10499470	10340847
Aluminum products	-	-	-	-	-	-	1158	176	-	-	-	-	-
Lead products	985716	-	-	-	-	123923	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	1526013	1647526	32387892	1392034	4711824	773397	331219	1845531	5125666	4944211	6717302	12450766	12749232
<b>Industrial/ Chemical Goods (exports)</b>													
Inorganic chemical products	23284280	26656721	20235150	38451020	4536070	762601	165702	115750	71515	209285	765134	387582	4392561
Fertilizers	21436343	52280181	63563816	245952196	164287437	73376817	-	-	-	20740659	-	-	-
Plastic	-	-	-	-	-	129197	257336	238494	179801	176933	244155	299203	391587
Rubber, rubber products	-	-	144569	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Copper products	-	-	18715	8216	14411	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Boilers, reactors, mechanical engines	-	264352	60405	3286	151538	156360	1365160	243535	460799	96519	-	178532	-
Wadding, rope	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2130
Cast, iron, steel	-	-	-	-	-	385017	188738	-	-	-	-	-	-
Iron, steel products	-	-	-	-	-	53013	-	-	-	4457	1143939	718957	739
Aluminum products	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Various metal products	-	-	48258	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	44720623	79201254	84070913	284414718	168989456	74811740	2029949	597779	712115	21227853	2153228	1584274	4787017
Tunisia's net exports	43194610	77553728	51683021	283022684	164277632	74038343	1698730	-1247752	-4413551	16283642	-4564074	-10866492	-7962215

**Table 9 – Tunisia's Trade with Iran (Imports, Exports)**

Trade Categories	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Consumer Goods (Imports)</b>													
Plants, flowers	-	973	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Essential oils, perfumes	-	-	-	732	-	-	-	664	-	-	-	10730	-
Soap, cleaning products	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	32930	31727	-	-	-
plastic	165039	1014453	1014986	1800425	1079792	2790971	10028092	5019854	154	32	336284	340493	85252
Wood, wood products	5214	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Paper, paperboard and books	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1028	-	-	-	84
Books and bookstore articles	-	-	698	-	-	-	10191	-	-	-	-	2136	-
Carpets, floor coverings	-	-	-	-	-	146	141	1388	-	-	-	-	-
Clothes and accessories	-	2703	-	2168	1235	1374	2653	-	-	-	-	-	-
Clothes and accessories	-	-	-	-	-	114	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Thrift products	-	-	27537	29599	-	42394	54488	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	236	79	-	86	-	156	-
Various tools - metal	1499	-	1563	-	-	913	4673	2217	-	-	-	-	-
Electrical devices	54	10	1715	628	19872	2899	11893	34511	1461	3	-	30870	1487
Scientific devices	88064	53534	30414	-	794	23813	53	2532	-	1117	2025	33784	18048
Horology	152	-	-	41	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Toys, games, sport items	-	-	-	-	-	412	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Furniture	6506	836	5691	532	1577	2160	-	-	222	-	-	-	-
Total	266528	1072509	1082604	1834125	1103270	2865196	10112420	5061245	35795	32965	338309	418169	104871
<b>Consumer Goods (Exports)</b>													
Essential oils, perfumes	-	-	-	128796	139854	109136	75631	-	43076	-	-	-	-
Paper, paperboard and books	2185	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11140
Books and bookstore articles	712	-	-	-	22759	-	-	4113	1000	-	-	-	10029
Wadding, rope	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2130
Clothes and accessories	-	-	-	-	-	-	1982	-	-	-	-	-	-
Clothes and accessories	-	-	-	-	-	5228	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Shoes	-	-	-	-	-	-	813	-	-	-	-	-	-
hairdressing	-	-	-	-	-	-	735	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	2897	0	0	128796	162613	114364	79161	4113	44076	0	0	0	23299
Tunisia's net exports	-263631	-1072509	-1082604	-1705329	-940657	-2750832	-10033259	-5057132	8281	-32965	-338309	-418169	-81572

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