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IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY PRINCIPLES AND THE RULES OF INTERNATIONAL LAW: A LEGAL STUDY ON POINTS OF CONFLICT AND PATHWAYS FOR ADAPTATION

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Abstract

This study analyzes the interplay between the guiding principles of Iranian foreign policy, as stipulated in the Iranian Constitution and the peremptory norms of public international law that form the foundation for regulating international relations. Iranian foreign policy is grounded in a set of ideologically and religiously driven principles, including support for the oppressed (*mustazafin*), exporting the revolution, the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist (*Wilayat al-Faqih*) and opposition to global oppressors (*mustakbirin*). These principles reflect the philosophy and objectives of the revolution in shaping Iran's foreign relations. However, they raise legal challenges when compared to binding international norms, such as non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, sovereignty, sovereign equality and the prohibition of the use or threat of force in international relations. Thus, the study examines the constitutional foundations that define the intellectual and political framework of Iranian foreign policy and evaluates the extent to which these principles align with the norms of international law — as enshrined in the UN Charter and related international agreements.

Keywords: Iranian foreign policy, international law, sovereignty, non-intervention, exporting the revolution, support for the oppressed (*mustazafin*), Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist (*Wilayat al-Faqih*), prohibition of the use of force.

Introduction

The 1979 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran serves as a key legal and normative foundation for the country's foreign policy orientation. It asserts a series of principles that guide Iran's external posture: a categorical rejection of all forms of oppression and domination, advocacy for the oppressed globally, avoidance of submission to major powers, defense of causes tied to the Islamic nation and a stated policy of non-interference in other states' domestic affairs except where support for the oppressed is claimed. These are specifically articulated in the preamble and in Articles 3, 11, 152, and 154 of the Constitution.

This constitutional architecture interweaves the ideological legacies of the Iranian revolution with pragmatic foreign policy aims. Legal scholars have pointed out that this blending of ideologically charged commitments with more orthodox international obligations creates ongoing tension between Iranian foreign policy actions and established norms of international law. The preamble characterizes the revolution as a global movement on behalf of the oppressed and asserts that the Constitution institutionalizes the revolution both within Iran and abroad, particularly by promoting Islamic solidarity and expanding the notion of a unified Muslim nation.

Consequently, Iran's international legitimacy, as articulated in official doctrine, is derived less from conventional legal principles and more from a foundational commitment to exporting the revolution and confronting what it deems global arrogance. Scholarship observes that this conflation of revolutionary religious authority with constitutional norms endows Iranian foreign policy with a transnational dimension. Such a paradigm may place Iran in recurring tension with principles of sovereignty and non-intervention that are essential to the international legal order.

Accordingly, the following central question emerges: to what extent do the ideological principles underpinning Iranian foreign policy align with the established rules of international law? This study approaches the issue through a comparative legal lens, systematically analyzing whether and how the foundational tenets of Iran's foreign policy run contrary to, or harmonize with, the core principles of international legal order. The investigation is designed to critically examine areas of convergence as well as potential conflict, thereby offering a nuanced assessment of coherence or tension between Iran's constitutionally mandated foreign policy ideals and universally recognized norms of international law.

The Principles of Supporting the Oppressed (Mustazafin) and Non-interference

The principle of supporting the oppressed has been a foundational ideological and political pillar of Iranian foreign policy since the 1979 revolution. Rooted deeply in religious, intellectual and constitutional contexts, this principle emphasizes aiding populations suffering under occupation or tyranny. It derives from the Shiite concept of supporting the oppressed, and is enshrined in Article 154 of the Iranian Constitution, which states, "The Islamic Republic of Iran considers human happiness throughout human society as its ideal. It considers independence, freedom, and the governance of justice and truth as the right of all the people of the world. Consequently, while it completely abstains from any

kind of intervention in the internal affairs of other nations, it supports the struggles of the oppressed for their rights against the oppressors anywhere in the world”⁽¹⁾ This principle continues to guide Iran's international engagement and foreign policy decisions.

Ayatollah Khomeini, the first supreme leader of Iran, strongly endorsed the principle of supporting the oppressed, asserting that Iran must stand with all oppressed people against their oppressors.⁽²⁾ His successor, Ali Khamenei, has maintained this stance, emphasizing that supporting the oppressed forms a core and unchanging part of Iran's political and foreign policy doctrine. Khamenei articulated that the revolution is committed to aiding the downtrodden and confronting global arrogance. He firmly stated that Iran's foreign policy is rooted in backing the oppressed against the arrogant,⁽³⁾ which remains a fundamental and enduring constitutional principle guiding the Iranian republic's international conduct.⁽⁴⁾

Political factions in Iran diverge significantly on the interpretation of the principle of supporting the oppressed. “Reformists” view this support as aligning with human rights and development, adhering to established international norms and law, and explicitly reject backing armed movements that could breach these laws. Contrarily, Iran's activist foreign policy, with its interventionist tendencies rooted in revolutionary ideology, often clashes with the core international law principle of non-intervention in states' internal affairs.⁽⁵⁾ This principle, firmly embedded in customary international law and enshrined in Article 2(7) of the UN Charter and UN General Assembly Resolution 2131 (1965), prohibits interference in domestic jurisdiction, emphasizing the sovereignty and independence of states.⁽⁶⁾

The 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-Operation among States in Accordance With the Charter of the United Nations (General Assembly Resolution 2625) explicitly affirms that “No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. Consequently, armed intervention and all other forms of interference or attempted threats against the personality of the State or against its political, economic and cultural elements, are in violation of international law.”⁽⁷⁾

Article 154 of the Iranian Constitution seeks to balance Iran's unwavering commitment to supporting oppressed peoples worldwide with a formal principle of non-interference in other nations' internal affairs. Despite this constitutional wording, Iran's foreign policy, notably its backing of non-state armed actors such as Hezbollah⁽⁸⁾ in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen, is frequently cited in UN Security Council reports as violating the sovereignty of other states and interfering directly or indirectly in their internal matters. Iran has acknowledged providing technological military assistance to the Houthis, which conflicts with Security Council resolutions.⁽⁹⁾ Furthermore, a UN Panel of Experts has reported mounting evidence that Iranian individuals or entities supply weapons and components to the Houthis, breaching Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015).⁽¹⁰⁾

The definition of non-intervention is firmly established in customary international law, as articulated by the International Court of Justice in *Nicaragua v. United States* (1986), which found that financing, training or arming irregular forces operating within another state breaches the principle of non-intervention.⁽¹¹⁾

In this light, the principle of supporting the oppressed can be construed as compatible with international law when limited to non-coercive forms of engagement — such as political advocacy or humanitarian assistance — that do not exert pressure on another state’s sovereign choices. By contrast, any coercive backing, including material or military assistance to insurgent or paramilitary actors, crosses the legal threshold into prohibited intervention in a state’s internal affairs.

Table 1: Comparison Between the Principle of Protecting the Oppressed and the Principle of Non-Interference

The Iranian Constitution: Protecting the Oppressed	UN Charter: Non-intervention in the Internal Affairs of States
<p>Preamble to the Constitution: “With respect to the Islamic content of the Iranian Revolution, which was a movement for the victory of all the oppressed people over their oppressors, the constitution prepares the ground for continuing this revolution at home and abroad.”</p>	<p>Article 2(7) of the Charter of the United Nations: “Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.”</p>
<p>Article 152: “The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based [...] the defense of the rights of all Muslims.”</p>	<p>General Assembly Resolution 2131 (XX), 21 December 1965: “No State has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any State. Consequently, armed intervention and all other forms of interference or attempted threats against the personality of the State or against its political, economic and cultural elements, are condemned.”</p>
<p>Article 154: “The Islamic Republic of Iran considers human happiness throughout human society as its ideal. It considers independence, freedom, and the governance of justice and truth as the right of all the people of the world. Consequently, while it completely abstains from any kind of intervention in the internal affairs of other nations, it supports the struggles of the oppressed for their rights against the oppressors anywhere in the world.”</p>	<p>Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015), April 14, 2015: Reaffirms the unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen, and decides in paragraph 14 that all states shall immediately take necessary measures to prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer — to or for the benefit of the Houthis and the entities and individuals identified in the resolution — of arms and related materiel of all types, as well as technical assistance, training or financial assistance.</p>

The Principles of Exporting the Revolution and State Sovereignty

The Iranian Constitution — through its preamble and Articles 3(16), 11, and 154⁽¹²⁾ — articulates a constitutional commitment often described as “exporting the revolution,” framed as a duty toward the broader Islamic nation. In the sphere of organizing and equipping the national armed forces, the text places faith and doctrine as the foundational basis for their construction and purpose. Correspondingly, the armed forces are assigned a dual duty: not only the conventional responsibilities of safeguarding and defending national frontiers, but also the fulfillment of a declared divine mission — engaging in jihad in the path of God — and pursuing the establishment of the rule of divine law at the global level.⁽¹³⁾

According to the Iranian Constitution's preamble,⁽¹⁴⁾ the revolution is not confined to a particular territory but extends beyond national borders to a global horizon, implying an active pursuit of ideological and political influence abroad. Khomeini articulated this principle as the “export of the revolution,” envisaging its transmission to Islamic countries to topple governments aligned with the West and replace them with authorities committed to Islamic law.⁽¹⁵⁾ In 1989, Khamenei stated that exporting the revolution “is not a crime.”⁽¹⁶⁾ This outlook has been echoed by establishment-aligned clerics, who advocate the rhetoric of export and maintain that the Islamic nation should adopt the Iranian revolutionary model as an exemplary paradigm.⁽¹⁷⁾

Two contrasting approaches emerged over the “export of the revolution.” One advocated peaceful export through persuasion, culture and example. The other endorsed active efforts to project the revolution's influence into the Gulf states — an approach which the Gulf governments denounced as fomenting unrest between Shiite communities and their Sunni-led governments.⁽¹⁸⁾ “Reformist” currents propose a re-framing: rather than coercive export, the revolution should be conveyed as a cultural and civilizational project grounded in dialogue and soft diplomacy.

The doctrine of exporting the revolution conflicts with international law and contradicts state sovereignty.⁽¹⁹⁾ Article 2(1) of the UN Charter affirms that all states are sovereign and retain exclusive authority over their internal affairs.⁽²⁰⁾ The UN General Assembly's 1970 Declaration on Friendly Relations further confirms that “Every State has an inalienable right to choose its political, economic, social and cultural systems, without interference in any form by another State.”⁽²¹⁾

Although Iran contends that exporting the revolution excludes military intervention and consists of supporting oppressed peoples alongside a commitment to non-intervention, international law treats any conduct exceeding non-coercive intellectual or media advocacy — such as arming, training or financing groups within another state — as a violation of sovereignty and potentially an unlawful use of force under Article 2(4) of the Charter.⁽²²⁾ Consequently, the two principles can coexist only if exporting the revolution is construed as limited to disseminating values, providing humanitarian assistance or undertaking security and political cooperation at the explicit invitation of the state's lawful government. Any form of armed support or involvement in internal conflicts plainly contravenes the principle of sovereignty and the rules of international law.

Table 2: Comparison Between the Principle of Exporting the Revolution and the Principle of Sovereignty in International Law

The Iranian Constitution: The Principle of Exporting the Revolution	UN Charter: The Principle of Sovereignty
<p>Preamble to the Constitution: “With respect to the Islamic content of the Iranian Revolution, which was a movement for the victory of all the oppressed people over their oppressors, the constitution prepares the ground for continuing this revolution at home and abroad. Specifically, it strives to expand international relations with other Islamic movements and people in order to pave the way for the formation of a single.”</p> <p>Preamble: Ideological Army: “In establishing and equipping the defense forces of the country, the focus shall be on maintaining ideology and faith as the foundation and the measure. Consequently, the Army of the Islamic Republic and the Islamic Pasdaran Revolutionary Corps are formed in accordance with the aforementioned objective. They will undertake the responsibility of not only guarding and protecting the borders, but also the weight of ideological mission, i.e. striving (jehād) on the path of God and struggle on the path of expanding the sovereignty of the law of God in the world; in accordance with the Qur’anic verse: “Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, of Allah and your enemies.”</p>	<p>Article 2(1) of the Charter of the United Nations: “The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members.”</p>
<p>Article 3, paragraph 16: “The organization of the nation’s foreign policy based on Islamic criteria, fraternal commitment to all Muslims, and unrestrained support for the impoverished people of the world.”</p>	<p>General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV), 24 October 1970: “All States enjoy sovereign equality. They have equal rights and duties and are equal members of the international community, notwithstanding differences of an economic, social, political or other nature.”</p> <p>“Each State enjoys the rights inherent in full sovereignty.”</p> <p>“Each State has the duty to respect the personality of other States.”</p> <p>“The territorial integrity and political independence of the State are inviolable.”</p>

The Iranian Constitution: The Principle of Exporting the Revolution	UN Charter: The Principle of Sovereignty
Article 11: "...all Muslims form a single nation and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is required to base its overall politics on the merging and unity of the Muslim nations. It must continuously strive to achieve the political, economic, and cultural unity of the Muslim world."	Article 2(4) of the Charter of the United Nations: "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."

The Principles of Guardianship and Equal Sovereignty Among All Nations

Belief in the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist (Wilayat al-Faqih) constitutes a foundational pillar of the Iranian republic's state architecture. Under Article 107 of the Constitution, the supreme leader occupies the paramount office established by the revolution,⁽²³⁾ while the president functions primarily as the implementer of the leader's directives.⁽²⁴⁾ Constitutional provisions vest the supreme leader with expansive authority — encompassing the direction of foreign policy and other consequential state decisions — most notably in Articles 110 and 111. This distinctive institutional design elevates religious authority as the principal lodestar of external relations, at times prompting the application of religious or sectarian criteria in the conduct of international affairs.

Supreme Leader Khamenei has indicated, in remarks to the Assembly of Experts, that the supreme leader's absolute authority is a flexible concept amenable to adjustment when circumstances require, though not in a manner that abandons its core substance.⁽²⁵⁾ "Reformist" factions, while accepting the doctrinal legitimacy of Wilayat al-Faqih within the constitutional order, critique the extension of its powers into the foreign policy realm insofar as this produces frictions with international law. One proposed corrective contends that enhancing the roles of the Supreme National Security Council and the Parliament in foreign policy decision-making could mitigate inconsistencies with international norms.

International law rests on the principle of the sovereign equality of states,⁽²⁶⁾ a foundation that stands above any religious or ideological claims. Accordingly, elevating religious criteria as the primary driver of foreign policy risks friction with international norms premised on neutrality and the legal equality of states. Within what may be termed a "universal guardianship"⁽²⁷⁾ conception of the revolution, the Iranian Constitution contains no clause requiring the supreme leader or the government to observe international laws and conventions, nor does it explicitly reference the UN or a duty to uphold its charter and treaties. As a result, the text does not bind the state to principles — such as good neighborli-

ness, non-intervention in domestic affairs and the safeguarding of national sovereignty — that many other constitutions expressly affirm.

If Wilayat al-Faqih is treated as an internal constitutional arrangement limited to Iran’s domestic order, it does not conflict with sovereign equality. If, however, Wilayat al-Faqih is construed as a leadership claim over the broader Muslim world, it can be read as an extraterritorial assertion that exceeds national sovereignty and runs counter to the principles of international law and accepted practices in international relations.

Table 3: A Comparison Between the Principle of the Guardianship of the Jurist and the Principle of Equal Sovereignty

The Iranian Constitution: The Principle of the Guardianship of the Jurist	UN Charter: The Principle Of Equal Sovereignty
Preamble to the Constitution: “Based on the sovereignty of the command [of God] (velāyat-e amr) and continuous religious leadership (imāmat), the constitution prepares the background for the actualization of leadership by a qualified jurisprudent who is recognized as leader by the people (“Administration of affairs should be by those scholars who are learned in regard to God and that which He has permitted and that which He has forbidden”) this leadership protects various institutions against deviations in fulfilling their authentic Islamic responsibilities.”	UN General Assembly Resolution 2625 (1970): “Each State has the right freely to choose and develop its political, social, economic and cultural systems.”
Article 57: “The governing powers in the Islamic Republic of Iran consist of the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary powers. They operate under the supervision of the absolute authority of the command (velayat-i amr) and religious leadership (imatat) of the community of believers and according to the forthcoming articles of this law. These powers are independent of one another.”	Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States (1970): “No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. Consequently, armed intervention and all other forms of interference or attempted threats against the personality of the State or against its political, economic and cultural elements, are in violation of international law.”

The Iranian Constitution: The Principle of the Guardianship of the Jurist	UN Charter: The Principle Of Equal Sovereignty
Article 5: “During the absence (ghayba) of his holiness, the Lord of the Age, May God all mighty hasten his appearance, the sovereignty of the command [of God] and religious leadership of the community [of believers] in the Islamic Republic of Iran is the responsibility of the faqih who is just, pious, knowledgeable about his era, courageous, and a capable and efficient administrator, as indicated in Article 107.”	Article 2(4) of the UN Charter: “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”

Confronting Global Arrogance and the Principle of Using Force

Chapter X of the Iranian Constitution articulates the core principles of its foreign policy, vigorously rejecting any form of hegemonic dominance. Article 152 explicitly affirms a policy of non-alignment with dominant superpowers, while Article 154 endorses the support of oppressed peoples in their struggles against oppressors.⁽²⁸⁾

The principle of confronting global arrogance has been central to Iranian political doctrine since the 1979 revolution. This principle transcends mere rhetoric to function as a strategic framework guiding Iran's defense and international relations policies. It underpins the pursuit of advanced military capabilities, including ballistic missile development and legitimizes backing armed groups in conflict zones.⁽²⁹⁾

Within Khomeini's ideological framework, supporting the oppressed and liberation movements serves as a strategy to counter global arrogance. He contended that this struggle involves direct confrontation with arrogant powers, identified as the primary source of the weakening of nations, and protection of oppressed peoples, seen as victims of a global hegemonic system.⁽³⁰⁾ Khamenei has reiterated this worldview, asserting that arrogant powers seek to obstruct Iran's scientific progress and labeling global arrogance as inimical to humanity.⁽³¹⁾ In a speech on the National Day of Fighting Global Arrogance, Khamenei declared Iran's commitment to comprehensive readiness — militarily, politically and in armament — to confront global arrogance and the criminal regimes that dominate the world order.⁽³²⁾

“Reformists” differ from “conservatives” in their approach to confronting global arrogance. “Reformists” argue that this confrontation should not involve military conflict or support for armed movements but should instead rely on negotiation, confidence-building and preventive diplomacy. Their approach is epitomized by the nuclear agreement reached under Rouhani's government,

which sought to reconcile Iran’s nuclear rights with its obligations under international law.

However, this approach stands in tension with the principle prohibiting the use of force, as enshrined in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter. This article restricts the use or threat of force to cases of legitimate self-defense⁽³³⁾ or actions authorized by the Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Moreover, persistent threats of force against UN member states can themselves constitute violations of this provision. The UN General Assembly, through Resolution 3314 of 1974, defines aggression as “...the use of armed force by a State against the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of another State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations.”⁽³⁴⁾

The principle of confronting global arrogance may be framed domestically as a political and moral duty; however, in practice, it has often translated into support for armed movements beyond Iran’s borders. International law views such support — when it involves arming, training or financing armed groups⁽³⁵⁾ — as tantamount to indirect use of force or unlawful intervention. Iran’s expansive interpretation of confronting global arrogance effectively permits the use or threat of force outside international legal frameworks, particularly through backing non-state armed groups against recognized states. This practice constitutes a clear breach of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, which prohibits the use of force, and Article 3(g) of UN General Assembly Resolution 3314 (1974), which defines acts of aggression.⁽³⁶⁾ Though Iran asserts that its support for resistance movements aligns with peoples’ right to self-determination, this justification does not exempt it from the UN Charter’s prohibitions on the use of force.

Table 4: Comparison Between the Principle of Confronting Arrogance and the Prohibition of the Use of Force

The Iranian Constitution: The Principle of Confronting Forces of Arrogance	UN Charter: The Principle of Banning the Use Of Force
Preamble to the Constitution: “The Council of Experts, consisting of the representatives of the people, completed the task of writing the constitution. [It] is written with the hope that this will be the century of the universal rule of the oppressed and the defeat of all the oppressors.”	Article 2(4) of the Charter of the United Nations: “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.” Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations: “Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.”

The Iranian Constitution: The Principle of Confronting Forces of Arrogance	UN Charter: The Principle of Banning the Use Of Force
<p>Article 3, paragraph 16: "The organization of the nation's foreign policy based on Islamic criteria, fraternal commitment to all Muslims, and unrestrained support for the impoverished people of the world."</p>	<p>General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV), 24 October 1970: "Every State has the duty to refrain from organizing or encouraging the organization of irregular forces or armed bands including mercenaries, for incursion into the territory of another State." "Every State has the duty to refrain from organizing, instigating, assisting or participating in acts of civil strife or terrorist acts in another State or acquiescing in organized activities within its territory directed towards the commission of such acts, when the acts referred to in the present paragraph involve a threat or use of force."</p>
<p>Article 152: "The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on the rejection of any kind of domination, both its exercise and submission to it; the preservation of the all-inclusive independence of the country and its territorial integrity; the defense of the rights of all Muslims; non-alignment in relation to the dominating powers; mutual peaceful relations with nonaggressive states."</p>	<p>General Assembly Resolution 3314 (XXIX), 14 December 1974: "Aggression is the use of armed force by a State against the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of another State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations, as set out in this Definition."</p>
	<p>Article 3(g) of General Assembly Resolution 3314 (1974): "Any of the following acts, regardless of a declaration of war, shall, subject to and in accordance with the provisions of article 2, qualify as an act of aggression: The sending by or on behalf of a State of armed bands, groups, irregulars or mercenaries, which carry out acts of armed force against another State of such gravity as to amount to the acts listed above, or its substantial involvement therein."</p>

Outcomes and Necessities of Adaptation

This study found that the Iranian Constitution emphasizes that the principle of protecting the oppressed should be aligned with national and international standards. However, in practice, there is a gap, as this principle is often overshadowed by violations of the prohibition against intervention and the use of force.

While the principle of exporting the revolution in its cultural or ideological sense does not inherently violate sovereignty, executing it through direct or indirect intervention — especially by supporting non-state armed groups — constitutes a violation of the sovereignty of other states, as affirmed by UN resolutions and the International Court of Justice.

Regarding the doctrine of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist (Wilayat al-Faqih), it remains compliant with international law when understood as an internal system defining Iran's governance. However, if promoted as a transnational authority or as a justification for intervention in other countries' domestic affairs, it conflicts with the principle of sovereign equality explicitly set forth in Article 2(1) of the UN Charter.

The principle of confronting global arrogance, while foundational in Iran's political rhetoric, can encompass political, economic and intellectual resistance. Yet, if it shifts toward armed support or proxy military operations, it directly conflicts with the prohibition of force, except in cases of legitimate self-defense or UN Security Council mandates.

For Iran to align its policies with international law, it must establish clear standards limiting support for humanitarian aid or human rights advocacy, reinterpret revolutionary principles peacefully and ensure its actions are consistent with its legal obligations under the UN Charter and international treaties. Furthermore, it needs to adopt a balanced diplomacy that combines its revolutionary-Islamic identity with its commitments under international law. Such a recalibration could help Iran reconcile its revolutionary message with its international duties, stabilizing regional and global relations and reducing internal and external conflicts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the fundamental principles of foreign policy enshrined in the Iranian Constitution and articulated by its leaders are deeply value-driven and ideological. However, their practical implementation often conflicts with key tenets of international law, particularly the principles of sovereignty, non-intervention and the prohibition on the use of force. While international law permits Iran to freely determine its internal political system and promote a discourse of resistance or moral leadership, it strictly forbids actions such as arming, funding or training armed groups outside its territorial jurisdiction or asserting transnational control.

The challenge for Iran lies in reinterpreting these principles to ensure full compliance with its international obligations, emphasizing peaceful, diplomatic and humanitarian approaches. Doing so would bolster the political system's legitimacy at home and prevent violations of peremptory norms of international law. Such a strategic recalibration could help Iran sustain its regional influence while maintaining its legal standing in the international community, thereby mitigating ongoing internal and external tensions.

Endnotes

- (1) The first Constitution of the Republic of Iran was issued in 1906, and was subsequently amended four times: in 1907, 1925, 1949 and 1956. During the 1979 revolution, a new Constitution was enacted; it was adopted on October 24, 1979 and entered into force on December 3, 1979. This Constitution has been amended only once, on July 28, 1989. Edward Wastnidge, *Iran's Shia Diplomacy: Religious Identity and Foreign Policy in the Islamic Republic* (Washington: Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, 2020), 3.
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- (3) "Support for the oppressed" in the Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Policy," *Khamenei.ir*, February 3, 2021, accessed November 11, 2025, <https://bit.ly/4hRXNmF>.
- (4) "Islam's Stance: No Production of Nuclear or Chemical Weapons of Mass Destruction," *Leader.ir*, February 11, 2021, accessed November 10, 2025, <https://bit.ly/3JEM2Ue>.
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- (10) "The Situation in the Middle East (or descriptive title if needed: On Threats to International Peace and Security Caused by Terrorist Acts in Yemen)," *United Nations Security Council*, Resolution 2216 (2015), S/RES/2216(2015), April 14, 2015, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2216\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2216(2015)).
- (11) "Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v. United States of America)," *International Court of Justice*, Merits, Judgment, 1986 ICJ Reports 14, para. 205 (June 27), <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/103143>
- (12) "Iran (Islamic Republic of), Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran," 1979, rev. 1989, Preamble, and Articles 3(16) and 11, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.
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- (19) UN Charter, art. 2(1).
- (20) Ibid
- (21) Friendly Relations Declaration (October 24, 1970).
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