

# Third Worldism and Ahmadinejad's Foreign Policy

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## Abstract

This article aims at examining the reasons for the focus of the Iran's foreign policy under the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on third world countries, especially Africa and Latin America. With the coming to power of the Ahmadinejad government, Iranian foreign policy orientation underwent a great shift from détente and cooperation with the West to expanding relations with third world countries. In examining the reason for this change, this article argues that a certain kind of perception of constructive doctrine and a reaction to Khatami's foreign policy, failure in converging and a coalition – building with the peripheral environment, and some common views between Iran and Africa and Latin American countries regarding the nature of international order provided grounds for Iranian foreign policy to focus on the third world in this period. For this study the article explores national, regional and international issues. Relying upon a theoretical view based on the level of analysis in foreign policy, the author while studying the main reasons for paying attention to the third world in Iranian foreign policy, explores the grounds and reasons for the realization of this approach in Ahmadinejad's era.

Keywords: Iran, Foreign Policy, Third World, Ahmadinejad, Africa, Latin America

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## **Introduction**

With the advent of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, Iranian foreign policy's priorities underwent a spectacular change. In the Pahlavi era, Iranian foreign policy was influenced by the former regime's cooperation with the West. Also during that period the Cold War's security atmosphere dictated the priority of foreign relations with great powers (Azghandi, 1997: introduction), but during the time following the emergence of the Islamic Revolution, Iranian foreign policy shifted radically under the influence of religious ideals, as a result, improving relations with the third world countries aiming at challenging the established order and confronting the status quo. In addition, the issues such as export of the revolution, religious approach to political affairs, and reaction of the revolutionary system to whatever the Pahlavi regime stood for, destroyed Iran's attractiveness for the West and led them to contain Tehran rather than interact with it. These developments created a situation that led to the emphasis on relations with the third world both in the rhetoric of leaders and in the constitution.

With the change in policies in Iran, the third world, also, offered good conditions for diplomatic activities. The prolonged rivalry between two superpowers during the Cold War era dominated by the concept of containment, establishment of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), relative success of decolonization process, and the necessity of prioritizing growth and development led third world countries, especially those situated in Latin America, Africa, and partly Asia, to seek for new solutions to their problems. For this reason, some



countries like Iran, China or India placed good relations with third world countries on top of their foreign policy agenda. Although, New Delhi and Beijing first interacted with the third world based on an ideological vision, they gradually adopted a pragmatist approach and these policies were put in the service of their national interests. On the other hand, in Iran the ideological and security aspects of these kinds of interactions remain intact and they have been pursued until now with some ups and downs.

Although, in Khatami's era, Iran emphasized interaction and détente, eventually foreign policy elites shifted their attitude towards the cultural and civilizational aspects aiming at presenting a positive image of Iran to the West and great powers. However, when Ahmadinejad came to power in 2005, underlying tensions surfaced in new forms and amid a diplomatic row with the West, the priorities of Iranian foreign policy shifted towards deepening relations with the third world, especially Africa and Latin America.

This article aims to explaining the reasons for this shift in Iranian foreign policy towards looking to the third world, looking at that this transformation in the national, regional and international level. While at the national level, constructive interaction doctrine (with particular reading of it by the justice – oriented government) and reaction to Khatami's government motivated this change, failure in interaction with peripheral countries at the regional level and having common vies with some African and Latin American countries regarding the nature of international order contributed to this shift. To test this hypothesis, this article addresses in the first section, the theoretical approach based on foreign policy level analysis, then studies the status of the third world in the I.R.I's foreign policy and finally explores the reasons for focusing on the third world during the presidency of Ahmadinejad drawing upon the above theoretical framework at the three national or internal, regional and international levels.



## I- Conceptual Framework

Existing orientations in the foreign policy of countries are not constant, because the realm of foreign policy is the product of interaction between the changing domestic and foreign events. In both domestic and foreign spheres continues changes through different periods of time dictate certain priorities to foreign policy agendas. However, despite the fact that change is inevitable, some accepted principles in internal interactions within the country and some unchanging rules in international realm preserve the principle of continuity along with that of change.

At the national or domestic level, foreign policy realm is influenced by certain variables such as psychological setting or decision making and bureaucratic environment. Researchers who choose this level of analysis believe that changes in the foreign policy of countries are the product of interaction between decision- makers, their mental preferences and bureaucratic processes that these policies are exposed to (Seifzadeh, 2006: 41-45). For this reason, James Rosenau in describing his model for analyzing foreign policy argues for a "linkage theory" between levels. He believes that paying attention to the role and status of executive and bureaucratic officials, dominating attitudes, as well as structural conditions can exclude a reductionist view from foreign policy analysis (Rosenau, 1969: 52). Along these lines, when Iranian foreign policy undergoes change with coming to power of a new president, we can understand the new situation by relying upon domestic grounds and analyzing the mental and ideological disposition of the new decision – makers and managers. The example of this could be seen in the framework of constructive interaction policy as a general strategy of Iranian policy. While, the "vision document" introduced this approach with a special view under the presidency of Mohammad Khatami as a main strategy, with the coming to power of a new president, a new reading or interpretation of this policy is presented which is to some extent



different from its original goal and content.

Along with determining domestic variables, foreign environment or operational environment is of importance. If we consider domestic environment as the realm of decision making, the foreign environment is the realm of implementation, influential in making policies. The type of approach to the existing order, the kind of power distribution in the international sphere, alliances and coalitions, the types of interaction with great powers in the international system and developments in regional or geopolitical environment are among variables which could be influential in adopting foreign policy orientation (Ramezani, 2001: 30 -36; Sajadpour, 2007: 71- 78).

At the regional level, peripheral and contiguous regions have a determining role in interactions and foreign policies adopted by countries. Geographical contiguity, thematic commonalities and relative consistency in geopolitical priorities are among factors which increase the role of regions for countries (Ghasemi, 2011: 85 – 86). For this reason, it is predominant that countries try to formulate their interaction with the international system by taking the priority of contiguous regions into account and expanding their interests in these parts. Today, with the intensification of the globalization process, it seems impossible to talk about national security as an important factor in foreign policy goals without considering regional security, and paying attention to economic development without considering regional economic needs. However, if geopolitical challenges, ideological priorities and regional conflicts over different subjects prevent regional cooperation, it would not be unlikely that countries resort to non-contiguous regions to ensure their interests in security and economic realms.

Eventually, at the international level, the type of attitude towards the existing order and the kind of perception of the organizing principle of relations between countries are important. The analysts, who study foreign policy at this level, believe that the structure of the



international system is the main factor in shaping the models of foreign policy behavior. As a result, we cannot consider seriously the role of domestic variables and policymaking process in the analysis (Waltz, 1979: 81 – 82). Considering these levels, mere reliance on each of them in analyzing foreign policy and change in its priorities could lead to reductionism. Inspired by Rosnau in combining these levels, it can be said that shift in Iranian foreign policy from interaction with the West and great powers in the "reforms government" to an increase in interactions with the third world countries, in the "principlist justice-oriented government" has been influenced by all three national or domestic, regional and international levels.

## II- Basic Periodical Trends

The introduction of the term "Third World" in the literature of international relations discipline is linked to two scientific and policy-making currents. In policy making area, Mao-Tse-Tung, for the first time, after escalating tensions between China and Western countries and then the Soviet Union, observed that the governing method and behavior of Western countries (First World) towards the other countries is the continuation of traditional era and reflect imperialism. This kind of imperialism considers other countries under its domination relying upon capitalist methods in distributing resources. From Mao's point of view, the Soviets' behavior towards other countries is not so much different from the capitalists. While the West exploit others by its production mode, the Soviet Union, relying upon the appearances of red imperialism, is the symbol of the second world, aiming at exploiting by different ways and means. In his opinion, other countries along with china are among third world countries, located outside Europe and the U.S. and should try to cut these colonialist chains (Elahi, 2004: 88).

Contrary to this interpretation, the term "Third World" became prevalent since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century simultaneously



with the beginning of decolonization, in the literature of international relations discipline, especially in the field of political economy and leftist works. In this concept, the third world in its different interpretations was considered an area where colonial powers disputed with each other for centuries. These areas while exploited, subsumed to the inevitable rule of "underdevelopment" and "backwardness". Therefore, the shortage of resources, the lack of investment, poverty and disease are the main characteristics of these societies and their development or in other words, improving their conditions depends on severing their links with the West (Röhrich, 2005: 128 – 130).

This approach to the third world, in policymaking realm or at the theoretical level, is linked with revolutionary attitude and used by different ideologies protesting the status quo. During the Cold War era, the Soviet Union and China were leading these protests, but since the 1970s along with nationalist currents, revolutionary countries such as Iran with Islamist tendency put developing ties with third world countries in their agenda. Therefore, while the revolutionary nature of these countries emphasized this link, their ideology had the capacity of theorizing this phenomenon. For this reason, the I.R.I's foreign policy has paid special attention to the third world since its inception. The priority of paying attention to the third world in the I.R.I foreign policy is inspired by three intertwined factors:

**Revolutionary Nature of the System of Islamic Republic:**

The I.R.I since its establishment inspired by the struggles and ideas of its leaders, laid some principles and goals for itself transforming it from a government which accepts the status quo into the revolutionary and progressive one. When a revolution takes place, its first explicit reaction is opposing the manifestations of the previous system. In the Pahlavi era, the political system governing Iran put all of its foreign policy preferences at the regional and international levels, in the framework of alliances and coalition with the U.S. and just when the first revolutionary currents grew in the country, reaction



to this axis formed the main theme of anti-regime slogans and propagandas. The Pahlavi regime sought to provide itself with some legitimation through cooperation with the West and thereby it had been introduced as a "puppet" regime (Azghandi, 1997: introduction). Evidently, the new system, at least in the initial period of its establishment could not bear the vestige of the former regime.

**Ideology:** The factor influential in including attention to the third world in existing mechanisms as the main potential for implementing the revolutionary and revisionist approach of the I.R.I was its ideology and its manifestation in the framework of third world orientation in the constitution. The Islamic ideology of the Iranian political system contributed foreign policy approach to the third world in many ways; the first aspect of ideological impact relates to its role in the definition of Iranian national identity. Ideology as a set of concepts and presuppositions regarding social behavior and systems or a series of ideas and beliefs regarding order and social – political rules (Dehghani, 2009: 90) reflects the values. These values shape the national role of a country considering that national role is a basis for national identity. For example, supporting the oppressed countries based on an ideology is considered a value for the Iranian political system, the national role is defined as an anti-imperialist agent and the identity of the country is manifested in opposing the agent of oppression and supporting the oppressed represented by the third world. In addition, ideology defines national goals and interests providing a perspective of the future (Dehghani, 2009: 90-92; Hunter, 2010: 22). For example, when we speak about the formation of a single Umma<sup>9)</sup>, supporting the oppressed, defending Muslims rights and non-alignment towards dominating powers are advanced as Iran's revolutionary considerations (Safari, 2008: 108-114), a basis is laid in foreign policy for paying attention to the third world.

**Constitution:** What seems leading to the more or less continuation of the approach of paying attention to the third world in Iranian foreign policy is its institutionalized or constitutive dimension.



Along these lines, the constitution by stating that the mission of this text is to realize the ideological aspects of the movement ... and tries to pave the way for establishing a single world Umma and continuing the struggle for the emancipation of oppressed nations all over the world (preamble of the constitution, quoted from Safari, 2008: 109), has, in fact, opened the way for paying attention to the third world. This issue is emphasized in article 154 of the constitution which states that "the Islamic republic of Iran...while scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the internal affairs of other nations, supports the just struggles of the freedom fighters against the oppressors in every corner of the globe". Since the constitution is considered the main document of policy-making in the country, other minor documents and strategies in the realm of foreign policy should obey its guidelines. Therefore, all of the above factors in addition to what Hunter (2010) calls it "Iran's historical experience" have made paying attention to the third world an important approach in foreign policy and the issues such as describing established order unfair and the necessity of strengthening South-South cooperation could be understood along these lines; an approach pursued in all periods of Iranian foreign policy with some ups and downs.

Despite the fact that as a result of imperatives of the revolutionary nature of the political system and dominant world view, and finally, emphasis made on third world orientation in the constitution as a dominant approach in Iranian foreign policy, there is not a consistent approach in the I.R.I's foreign policy agenda in different administrations in regards to this issue. The reason for this could be found in the broad variation governing different administrations or governments. In other words, although there is a general emphasis on focusing on the third world, each cabinet has had a different look to this strategy considering external and internal conditions and the character of governing elites or has been forced to look differently to it based on priorities given to national goals and interests.



During the period of Bazargan's premiership, called transitory government, we cannot precisely speak about distinct approaches and orientations on foreign policy. The most important task of the transitory government was to create favorable conditions for transferring power and to establish necessary institutions along these lines. Therefore, it had no other option than addressing the issues required by the revolutionaries paving the way for stability in the future. Thus, ending alliance with the U.S. was placed at the top of the agenda (Ramezani, 2001: 59-60). This government sought to realize the goals such as the recognition of the I.R.I, obtaining international prestige, maintaining independence and territorial integrity and reconstruction considering principles such as look to the West policy, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, and pacifism (Dehghani, 2009: 304-313). These principles and goals expressed national interests and although independence from great powers was emphasized, this did not mean not to interact with them. For this reason, focusing on the third world as a practical strategy or valued –ideological bias was not only envisaged, but also it was not prioritized under those specific circumstances. But, the second period of Iranian foreign policy covering the years of war heralded the first extra national efforts in the realm of foreign policy. During this period, with the domination of idealists, Islamic values became the most important identity source of foreign policymaking and by overlooking the element of "being Iranian", a part of identity and subsequently principles such as struggling against the oppressors, establishing relations with nations and supporting movements (Dehghani, 2009: 350-355) were considered referring to the third world orientations stipulated in the constitution.

Despite, this spectacular development in responsibilities and focusing on peripheral points in foreign policy, the third world orientation had not still an extensive dimension at that time. During that period, Iran influenced by Islamic idealist elites, the specific condition of the region and war with Iraq, defined the significance of



the third world in the framework of the Islamic world and not beyond it. Although, at this time, we witnessed some interactions with African and Latin American countries, the theory of Um-ol-Qora<sup>29</sup> by its special look to Iran's status contributed to the limited scope of looking to the third world in Iranian foreign policy in the framework of the Islamic world (Dehghani, 2005:106-108).

The approach to the third world underwent some developments under the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani. Although during the war period, the third world in the realm of foreign policy was substantiated in the Islamic world, the specific conditions of the country following the end of the war imposed certain imperatives on the I.R.I's foreign policy. During this period, the necessity of reconstruction and revival of vital infrastructures, as well as improvement of economic situation required that foreign policy priorities were defined along these lines; so that governing elites realized the importance of revival and maintaining diplomatic relations with other countries, especially great powers as a precondition for economic development considering the necessity of reconstruction (Sadri, 2002: 446). In addition, the definition of principles and behavioral patterns in foreign policy such as the priority of national goals, economic development, necessity of normalization of ties, and prioritizing regionalism with an emphasis on the Persian Gulf sub-system and the (Economic Cooperation Organization) ECO organization (Dehghani, 2009: 388-395) brought about a kind of pragmatism in Iranian foreign policy resulting in less attention to third world countries compared to the previous period and giving priority to dialogue and détente, however in a critical manner, with the West. Providing grounds for reducing tension with the west under Khatami's presidency influenced I.R.I's foreign policy orientations regarding the third world. In the framework of reformist discourse, the main principle in foreign policy was the continuation of detente with the West and emphasis on dialogue among civilizations. Therefore the main focus was on relations with the West and any



action which could increase tension was avoided; so that expanding international cooperation and the enhancement of Iran's status as an important goal was pursued by Khatami's government (Darvishi and Tazehkand, 2009: 4), limiting Iran's direct presence in third world countries. On the other hand, the emphasis of Khatami's government on dialogue among civilizations – advanced in response to Huntington's clash of civilization theory – had a cultural – political nature. Based on the theory of the clash of civilization, Islam and the West will eventually confront each other, therefore, the mission of the I.R.I's foreign policy was to reject this issue and for this reason, it was emphasized on a dialogue with the participation of the West. Therefore, the third world orientations could not be at the top of the Iranian foreign policy agenda. The necessity of filling the gap resulted from disregarding third world orientation along with some domestic and international conditions under Ahmadinejad's presidency, transformed a focus on the third world into the dominant aspect of the I.R.I's foreign policy.

### **III- Ahmadinejad's Appeal**

Since the beginning of the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the I.R.I's foreign policy like domestic affairs experienced new conditions. If previous governments, especially the administrations of Hashemi and Khatami focused on reducing tensions and critical and constructive dialogue with the West, the new government was characterized by justice-oriented principlism (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2007: 67). Speaking about detente was out of question. For this reason, foreign policy in this period witnessed an unexpected and deep transformation from the attitude of interaction with the world to focus on different countries, broadly called the "third world," given the removal of grounds for cooperation with the west. Relation with such countries manifested in the foreign approach of the ninth and tenth cabinets to Africa and Latin America, revived once again the "third world" identity in the I.R.I's foreign policy. Despite the fact



that the third world covers a great part of the developing or underdeveloped countries in different regions from Latin America to Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and some parts of South Asia (Elahi, 2004: 87-91), in the foreign approach of the ninth and tenth administrations, the main focus shifted to Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

In expanding relations with Africa and Latin America, although apparently we witnessed more trade exchange and diplomatic travels, the share of these regions in terms of economic exchange is still very low, compared to other regions. In 2008, the fourth year of Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran's imports, according to official reports made by the customs administration, amounted to 55,849 billion dollars and non-oil exports reached 18,146 billion dollars. The amount of imports from Africa was 495 million dollars which compared to the previous year showed an increase of 101% indicating the government's more attention to imports from this continent. Although this figure compared to imports from Asia standing at 31,830 billion dollars and from Europe making 19,814 billion dollars seems insignificant, considering the scale of changes compared to 2007. Africa had a spectacular increase in its exports to Iran (Movahedin, undated: 55). Contrary to imports, Iran's export to Africa in this year is not remarkable; the same goes for 2008. No African country is seen among the top ten importers from Iran.<sup>69</sup> Also, the value of Iran's non-oil exports to Africa in 2008 was 261 million dollars with a negative growth, which is the lowest figure for Iranian exports after Oceania (Movahedin, undated: 56). However, it is worth considering that despite the low level of Iran's economic relations with Africa, especially compared to countries like Turkey, China and India (Tailor & Xiao, 2009; Desai, 2009: 413-429; Bakhshi, 2009), this size of relations show growth in economic exchange in comparison to the previous year.

Relations between Iran and Latin America follow a similar pattern. According to the statistics published by the Trade



Development Organization regarding Iran's imports and exports between March 2008 and March 2009, among Iran's top ten trade partners accounting for 61% of Iran's non-oil exports, no Latin American country is seen on the list. This applies also to the top ten countries accounting for 70% of Iran's imports (Lotfian, 2010:49). Like Africa, although Iran's imports from Latin America had a rising trend, trade balance was negative for Iran (Hunter, 2010: 237). Interestingly, Iran's relations with both regions especially Latin America focused on political ties rather than economic ones. Despite published statistics by the EU commission indicating that Iran is the sixth major partner of Venezuela in Latin America (Karmon, 2010: 277), the level of political ties was more remarkable. The explicit support made by Caracas of Iran's nuclear program in the international form, nuclear cooperation agreement, establishing Tehran-Damascus-Caracas airline (Karmon, 2010:278), signing non-visa agreement by Venezuela for Iranian citizens (Lotfian, 2010) are examples of developing relations between Iran and Venezuela in Latin America. Like relations with Venezuela, Iran's relations with other leftist countries such as Nicaragua, Cuba, Bolivia and Ecuador followed the same pattern. Despite the quantitative expansion of ties between Iran and Africa and Latin America since 2005, as well as the lack of depth in comprehensive and bilateral relations, there is some evidence that at least in terms of declarative positions and diplomatic customs, Iran has paid more attention to these regions suggesting the Iranian foreign policy. In studying the reasons for deepening relations, we can study it at three levels, national, regional and international.

**National Level:** If foreign policy is defined as a sphere demonstrating dynamic interaction between domestic and foreign areas, the study of changes in existing strategies and orientations depends on understanding foreign policy and its nature is of great importance. The increasing importance of look to the third world in Ahmadinejad's government like other sphere of policy-making has



been of reactive nature rather than resulting from some initiative. In other words, the first factor at the national level in paying attention to the third world in the realm of foreign policy is providing grounds for reaction to approaches dominating Iranian foreign policy during Khatami's era. Although approaches taken by Khatami and Ahmadinejad to foreign policy could be studied in a more general framework based on reformist and principlist views to foreign affairs and the international system, this approach specifically took several major characteristics which distinguished it from the previous period: 1) In Ahmadinejad's government, nation-state is defined in the framework of Islamic-Shia ideology and worldview; this government has not a secular nature and is completely religious; 2) Iran's national identity has an essential element that is the priority of the Islamic revolution and ideals and values resulted from it; this identity is the product of "Islamic identity", "Islamic revolution" and "Iran" in which Islam and the Islamic revolution have priority over Iran; 3) In the realm of foreign policy, the Islamic revolution is not considered a national and limited revolution rather it is extra-national and extraterritorial, based on the belief that its ideology is religious and universal; 4) The goal of foreign policy is to expand the values related to the sovereignty of Islam in order to establish an Islamic international community; as a result, the existing international system is not desirable because it is not compatible with Islamic international order; and, 5) Following the above principles, the existing international order is hegemonic, thereby all its manifestations including the role of international organizations is criticized (Eivazi, 2008: 209-219).

Regardless of the success or failure of this government in realizing the above principles, with a comparative glance to Khatami's era, we can find that in this period, the goals and principles of the I.R.I's foreign policy are reactive. During Khatami's presidency, Iranian national identity was distinguished by the heavy weight of republicanism; national interests were pursued according to defensive



and economic interests and the framework of the world order; contrary to an extremist interpretation, the export of revolution was conceptualized with creating a role model within the country and presenting abroad. The international system was not totally rejected rather there was a critical and rational view towards it and although the established order was not considered desirable, the sound way for correcting it lied in détente, dialogue and peaceful coexistence (Eivazi, 2008: 228).

Difference between these two attitudes towards foreign policy and its sphere of action that is the international system, on the one hand, and existing expectations made different existing means to realize goals in the diplomatic scene. While, in Khatami's era, emphasis on détente and necessity of working with the established order shifted foreign policy to interact with the West and to address bilateral challenges, in Ahmadinejad's era, challenging the existing unfair system and developing relations with like-minded countries were envisaged. Therefore, weak and poor African countries, on the one hand, and leftist regimes in Latin America, on the other hand, were brought to the fore of Iranian diplomacy. Both groups of countries have made their territory a base for confronting the U.S. influence. In addition, the argument made by some collaborators of Ahmadinejad government that Khatami's foreign policy was passive, defensive and based on compromise influenced the new attitude in Ahmadinejad's era. They believed that while Khatami's government cooperated with the West over different issues such as crises in Iraq and Afghanistan, and compromised in Iran's nuclear issue, eventually it was placed in the "axis of evil" and was condemned by the West furthermore, the (reformists) never achieved any advantage from the West in exchange for suspending uranium enrichment as they expected; as a result it was revealed that their attitude towards the West was simplistic and mistaken. Therefore, it was necessary that the I.R.I adopted an honorable stance at the beginning of the work of the new cabinet towards the West and took an offensive and resistant



approach. It necessitated alliance with the oppressed world to confront the oppressors (Mohammadi, 2008: 81-89; Molana and Mohammadi, 2009).

The interpretation of Khatami's foreign policy and the necessity of considering new imperatives formed the second factor leading to the adoption of third world orientation in foreign policy. This factor at the strategic level represented itself as the doctrine of constructive interaction. The doctrine of constructive interaction was first published based on a different interpretation of foreign policy imperatives in the nation's 20-year vision document<sup>49</sup> as an article titled "Constructive Interaction in Foreign Policy" in 2005 in *Rahbord Yas* quarterly (Mohammadi and Mottaghi, 2005). According to the 20-year vision document, the strategy of Iranian foreign policy for interaction with the international system to achieve defined goals is useful and constructive relations while maintaining interaction. Along these lines, in a certain interpretation of the vision document, the doctrine of constructive interaction is defined as an active, dynamic, influential and biased policy adopted with a precise understanding of the political equations of the international community, occupying the seat of claimant instead of that of the accused, and entering the international scene as a powerful player passing the détente stage (Mohammadi, 2008: 81). In this definition, the two operational levels (international level and developing world) are distinguished from each other in which the first level represents domination and second one denotes being oppressed. Therefore, the implementation of the doctrine of constructive interaction depends on emancipation of colonialism and supporting developing countries or the third world. Thus, in addition to the constitution that directly supports the deprived and oppressed nations, the doctrine of constructive interaction pays attention to this goal as well as a result, Africa and Latin America gain importance.

**Regional Level:** Iran's geopolitical status has long exposed this country to several regions or sub-systems. Regardless of challenges



resulted from this trans-regional role, this opportunity has been provided for Iran to play an increasing role in several sub-systems. Proximity to the Persian Gulf, Iraq and the Levant, South and Central Asia subsystems has caused that foreign policy is always exposed to the imperative of action. If under Khatami's presidency, relentless efforts were made for creating tranquility in relations with neighbors (Ramezani, 2001: 117), as a result of some major factors and the occurrence of some events under Ahmadinejad's era, relations with peripheral environment were not so much favorable; for this reason, the possibility for petition with other regional actors to influence in peripheral regions became out of question as well as Iranian foreign policy shifted its attention towards non-contiguous regions.

Regarding Central Asia and the Caucasus, despite some affinities such as cultural, historical and linguistic commonalities and the presence of Iranians (Ebrahimi Torkaman, 2001: 55), Iranian foreign policy could not play an active role for various reasons. Some authors believe that this environment and other peripheral sub-systems lack independent and necessary potentials for playing an effective role in enhancing Iran's status in the international system (Sariolghalam, 2005), but peripheral subsystem cannot be ignored by the foreign policy apparatus. The most important cases causing divergence with this sub-system are as follows: 1) Difference in the nature of political systems; 2) Different political ideologies; 3) The strong and effective presence of other regional and extra-regional actors; 4) A major difference in interpreting security; concepts such as terrorism and religious fundamentalism; and, 5) Not paying enough attention to regional economic problems by Iran despite the existence of economic cooperation potentials and also the structural economic weaknesses of regional countries (Hunter, 2010: 169-173; HajiYousefi, 2005: 110).

Like central Asia, the Middle East, also, could not play a useful and effective role in attracting the attention of Iranian foreign policy towards itself. This resulted from several important factors: 1) The



lack of legitimacy and thus the internal weakness of the southern countries of the Persian Gulf undermining grounds for cooperation and interaction with neighbors as well as providing conditions for extra-regional interventions; 2) Identity problems and the lack of common cultural grounds; 3) Geopolitical and nationalist challenges; 4) Ideological differences and hostile coalition models; and, 5) Israeli–Palestinian issue and different attitudes towards this issue (Hunter, 2010: 185-192; Sariolghalam, 2005: 316).

In addition to above mentioned general factors, Hunter (2010) believes that several important factors in Iranian foreign policy paved the way for the failure in relations with Middle Eastern countries, especially Arab countries, these factors are as follows; First, it seems that the I.R.I has not yet realized the fact that regional Arab countries will never sacrifice their relations with the U.S. to keep their relations with Iran; Second, Iran has faced a kind of strategic contradiction in its relations with regional countries by pursuing revolutionary goals and insisting on the implementation of principles and values, and on the other hand, it has emphasized improving state to state relations.

Regarding the two abovementioned regions, in addition to these factors making doubtful the establishment of normal ties between Iran and its contiguous subsystems, actions and statements of Ahmadinejad's government aggravated the situation. Emphasis made on the complete realization of revolutionary slogans, the revival of religious identity and insistence on it, more tense relations with the West and its impact on the extent of independent function of the regime, deterioration of relations with important regional countries, especially Saudi Arabia and some provocative actions derailed relations with these two sub-systems from their normal course leading to not using available potentials for cooperation. The result of this was Tehran's tendency to develop relations with those countries that their performance was in line with the Ahmadinejad government's confrontational strategies, the most important of which were those situated in Africa and Latin America.



***International Level:*** In addition to the main motivations for the I.R.I's foreign policy at the national and regional levels to shift its attention to the third world, some strategic imperatives at the international level, given the situation of regions such as Africa and Latin America led Iranian foreign policy to pay more attention to these geopolitical zones. If the doctrine of constructive interaction at the national level with special reliance on the third world or developing countries pursues amending existing international order or at the regional level, there is no favorable conditions for building coalition with neighbors, the priority of Iranian foreign policy should be directed to the zones that contribute to meeting the strategic needs of constructive interaction and to realize the goals of foreign policy. Several factors at the international and bilateral levels paved the way for the convergence of Iran, Africa and Latin America: 1) The first factor is related to the nature of these regimes with which Iran cooperated with. The U.S. disregard to Latin America during the presidency of George W. Bush (Lowenthal, 2009: 122), on the one hand, caused that since the beginning of the new millennium leftist radical regimes came to power in many countries of this region. The nature of these regimes distinguished by their anti-colonialist and anti-Imperialist policies had a great affinity with the attitude of the Ahmadinejad's government to the international system, both in theory and practice. On the other hand, Iran's confrontation with the U.S. in many areas created a special image of Iran in the eyes of these regimes. The regimes of Cuba, Ecuador, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Bolivia are among them (Lotfizadeh, 2010:34; Hunter, 2010: 234). Also, in Africa, the regimes that established good relations with Iran are economic inefficient or their elite's aspirations belong to the era of decolonization. 2) Another factor driving Iran at the international scene to forge close relations with these countries is the potential of these regions for creating a supportive atmosphere among public opinion. While the I.R.I is confronting the West over its nuclear program, it would be necessary for it to use the number and



potentials of the countries situated in these regions in the international organizations to prove its righteousness and to neutralize pressures and intimidating actions aiming at preventing it from obtaining nuclear technology. Africa with 55 countries and Latin America with more than 20 countries which all of them are members of major international organizations like the United Nations (UN) provide a potential source for attracting the world public opinion. Their votes are accounted for about a half of the total votes in the UN General Assembly; they have a great share in the economic and social Council, and always constitute a number of the UN Security Council (Bakhshi, 2010: 24-29; Hunter, 2010: 234). 3) The third factor contributing to the interaction and cooperation between Iran and these regions related to common views on problems affecting the South. In addition to common views on the need for amending the international economic system, the necessity of increasing economic self-sufficiency, individually or collectively, for third world countries along with that of economic cooperation and coordination in other fields among South countries in the framework of South-South cooperation provided grounds for paying attention to other goals and interests (Hunter, 2010: 225). 4) In economic field (although more weakly), Iran has had a special look to these regions. Imposing pressures on Iran in recent years by the West has enhanced to a great extent Africa and Latin America's status for Iran. Extensive export markets, rich natural resources, <sup>(6)</sup> and mutual opportunities for investments can help ensure mutual needs and also provide a potential source for attracting the support of these societies through bilateral relations (Molana and Mohammadi, 2009).

#### IV- Assessment

Adopting the third world orientation by Iran under the presidency of Ahmadinejad once again showed that foreign policy in case of imbalance in priorities and orientations not only cannot ensure interests and increase national power, but also it can incur heavy



costs. However, what is seen in theory is that third world orientation in Iran is underpinned by a strong historical background intertwined with valued and revolutionary principles, and for these reasons it would not be ignored with change in officials and governments. Some Iranians author consider the adoption of this policy in line with Iran's defensive policy based on deterrence and believe that it can be subsumed under the broad goal of attracting the support of African and Latin American countries for Iran's stances to consolidate efforts carried out for breaking Western monopoly in using the fuel cycle and uranium enrichment. Therefore, focus on the third world as the reflection of cooperation with countries that struggle against oppressors motivated Iranian foreign policy under Ahmadinejad suggesting a shift from defensive deterrence in the past to active deterrence (HajiYousefi, 2012:401-409).

Against this security-oriented approach which somehow approves Ahmadinejad's Third world orientation, there is a development-oriented view which cannot accept this policy in its current form. The proponents of this attitude believe that Iranian foreign policy is acting in a global environment which by reliance on the triangle of economy, politics and culture imposes an imperative on nations that are exploiting assets (Sariolghalam, 2011: 25). Therefore, under conditions that asset – for strengthening national power and accumulation of power and wealth- lie in powerful countries, the priority of Iranian foreign policy cannot be based on merely focusing on peripheral countries (Sariolghalam, 2005). Along these lines, Seifzade (2005), while emphasizing Iran's unique situation and the necessity of mobilizing national power to achieve the goals of foreign policy, believes that by cooperating with North countries we can achieve material power and in collaboration with south countries, we can assist each other to protect societies in the international distribution of power. In his opinion, the feasibility of these goals lies in the fact that first, Iran enjoys a strategic status and can exploit it in its own interests, and secondly, increase in power of the South



country is not the function or the threat of other actors or confrontation with great powers, because globalization provides the ground for authority and not power play. Therefore, the ultimate goal of this interaction with North or South is not changing the structure of the international system; rather it is the changing status in the existing international system. Iran should actively pursue a globalist approach through relying upon a positive balance strategy; an approach that encourages simultaneously cooperation with the North, for coordinating social justice with the structure of power distribution. For this reason, formulating and expanding relations only with the South or the third world countries will reduce national power, because Iran will be forced to deprive itself of strategic status for realizing the goal of justice (Seifzadeh, 2006: 9-22).

Considering these two views, it is made clear that first, the third world orientation is an inevitable part of Iranian foreign policy; secondly, its effective function as a defensive policy or strategy depends on maintaining balance with powerful countries and playing a role within the international system. In Ahmadinejad's era, indices such as disregarding the diversification of diplomatic sources, adopting a comprehensive view on African and Latin American countries, boosting the rhetoric aspects of developing relations and an inappropriate understanding of South-South interactions practically marginalized Iran's status as a buffer state between North and South and deterrence against the West.

### **Conclusion**

The I.R.I foreign policy since the emergence of the Islamic revolution has pursued a fluctuating course in its approach to the third world. While during the initial phase of the revolution given the dominating atmosphere of idealism resulting from the mentality of instrumentalist elites, it seemed that the third world or developing world became the axis of Iran's diplomatic activities, various problems, especially within the country, on the one hand, and regional and international



pressures, on the other hand, prevented it to become true. Although, the I.R.I Constitution with its revolutionary nature and official ideology, provided theoretical grounds for this attitude in foreign policy, the unpredictability of political events in Iran both in domestic and international realms until 2005 did not allow focusing completely on the third world orientation and deepening relations with these regions (especially Africa and Latin America) as a priority in foreign policy.

The year 2005 is considered a turning point in terms of shifting the approach to the third world. At the domestic level, with the coming to power of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president, reaction to the foreign policy of the previous government (Mohammad Khatami) and the introduction of constructive interaction (resulted from a certain interpretation of the vision document) as a basis for the foreign policy of Ahmadinejad government prioritizing the developing world and emphasizing the amendment of existing international order paved the way for expanding relations with the third world. In addition, at the regional level, the lack of necessary potentials for coalition-building facilitated the new approach. In other words, despite the existence of a fertile ground for expanding cooperation between Iran and peripheral regions, unfavorable conditions in neighboring countries and change in some priorities of Iranian foreign policy practically prevented a comprehensive cooperation; as a result, Iran tried to develop its foreign relations with extra-regional countries. Finally, at the international level, common views and needs of the two sides (Iran and third world countries) to some issues such as existing unfair international order, especially in its economic dimension, Iran's attention to quantitative potentials of these regions for attracting the support of the world public opinion and tense relations between Iran and the U.S, led to the shift from interaction with the West to establishing close ties with third world countries.

Despite the fact that the third world orientation in Iranian



foreign policy suffered from some insufficiencies, during this period, adopting this approach in Iran's foreign affairs showed that the I.R.I, could not confine itself to a specified region, due to its special geopolitical and geo-economics and identity situation. Therefore, ensuring the country's national interests depends on promoting the view in the foreign policy realm that Iran is an international country and is forced to interact internationally in a balanced manner.

## Notes

1. Nation or community, Arabic.
2. Mother of cities, Arabic.
3. These ten countries were Iraq, Emirates, China, India, South Korea, Japan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Belgium, Saudi Arabia (Movahedin, undated:56).
4. Iran is a developed country with the first economic, scientific and technological status in the region, with revolutionary and Islamic identity, inspiring the Islamic world, as well as effective and constructive interaction in international relations (the I.R.I's Vision Document by the year 2025).
5. Regarding economic advantages, for example, we can mention conditions governing Africa. This continent, despite its structural weaknesses, has experienced the highest volume of capital return in the world; the amount of which is four fold of G-8 countries, two fold of Asia and two-third more than Latin America countries. Africa accounts for 48% of diamond and platinum, 46% of chrome, 35% of manganese, and 10% of oil in the world (Bakhshi, 2010: 26).

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