



Duplicate of domestic behavior in Iran's foreign policy arena during Khatami presidency

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic conflict is a worldwide issue that has challenged many countries since the second half of the twentieth century in particular. As multi-ethnic country Iran, which is positioned at the center of an ethnic conflict area namely the Middle East, has experienced many ethnic conflicts since the formation of the modern nation state in 1906, and especially after Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979. The main ethnic groups involved in these conflicts are Kurds, Turkmen, Arabs, Baluchs and Azeris. Since the Revolution, Iran had attempted to quarrel the ethnic conflict severely. When Khatami took power, however, he behaved peacefully towards minorities and ethnic tensions eased. Based on the theory that states duplicate their domestic patterns of behavior in their inter-state relations, the paper intends to examine this theory in the case of Iran during Khatami's administration. The article concludes that when Khatami came to office, he attempted to deal with the ethnic groups on the basis of democratic values. He extended these values to Iran's foreign policy arena which led to an improvement in relations between Iran and other countries. In other words, he could replicate internal peaceful policy in Iran's inter-state relations and he made a direct connection between these two spheres.

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Introduction

The "conflict breeds conflict" (1981, p. 3) view is based on the notion that sees democracies as being more peaceful than non-democratic countries. This idea is rooted in the democratic peace theory of Kant's Perpetual Peace (Caprioli & Boyer, 2001). He suggests democracies are more peaceful because the separation of power prepares them to face foreign threats in a proper way, tame the aggressive wishes of non-democratic governments and learn to respect for the rights of the citizen.

The democratic norms have more chance of becoming dominant by interactions among states because more countries are going to accept democratic principles for governing their people. These norms were respected by states because of their promise for a more peaceful world based on democratic values. In other words, democratic peace theory suggests democracies do not easily begin war against each other (Chan, 1997).

The opinions on the notion derived from a wide array of contemporary international relations literature asserts domestic behaviors are mirrored in a state's international interaction (Caprioli & Boyer, 2001).

For example, there is an argument that emphasizes the relationship between women's conditions in society and the level of a states' violent behavior internationally. According to this argument, the way political power is distributed at societal level influences the tendency of the ruling government towards militarized inter-state challenges and war.

In other words, the more access women have to political power the less violent a state behaves in the international arena. Therefore, there exists a relation between equality of genders within a state, especially in achieving political positions in the decision-making process and conflicting behavior of states in the international sphere.

Caprioli & Boyer (2001) argue the severity of conflicting behaviors and crises among states decreases with improvements in domestic gender equality within states. By focusing on studying crises, they suggest the states with "higher levels of gender equality use lower levels of violence during crises than those with lower levels of gender equality" (p. 515). It may also be that societies with higher birth rates are more likely to engage in inter-state conflicts because mothers in multi-children families are more accepting of their sons going to war (Regan & Paskeviciute, 2003). Other arguments, by examining the impacts on women and blacks in the United States, bring race and gender together and argue that they influence external behavior of the states (Nincic & Nincic, 2002).

The idea was the outset of an approach which is emphasized the harmony of internal and external behavior of the states. And so the government which respects the liberty of its citizens and other individuals in its territory also follows peaceful intentions in foreign policy (Doyle, Dec 1986). Respect for the rights of citizens will be generalized at the level of inter-state relations of democratic countries. Among the scholars, Rummel (1997) argues that where power is dominated by non-democratic government including a monarch or an ideological group, the possibility of violent behavior in inter-state relations is high.

In the same way Capriole (2000), by studying the behaviors of states in domestic and external relations, argues that inequalities between women and men in domestic affairs will lead to more warlike foreign policy. In supporting the above idea, Gurr (2000) believes domestic discrimination arises because of a resource deficiency and lack of proper decision making in non-functional governments which will lead to violent behavior by states at the international level. In general, as Caprioli & Trumbore (2003) explain, states duplicate their

domestic patterns of behavior in their inter-state relations.

Accordingly, states that permit discrimination and inequality on the basis of ethnicity and gender or act against their minorities or repress their own citizens, follow a similar approach in inter-state relations (Caprioli & Trumbore, 2006). This article intends to examine the above theory in the case of Iran during Khatami's administration to establish whether or not domestic policy of the government was reflected in its external relations.

The paper is in two sections, with the first section looking at internal matters (policy), and mainly relies on primary data, while the second section considers Iran's foreign policy and depends on secondary data. Informant selection in first section is based on the number of conflicts between ethnic groups and central government over the last one hundred years.

Accordingly, four ethnic groups' elites were selected as informants. As the Kurds have a long history of conflicts compared with other ethnic groups, so six of the ethnic elites are Kurds, two are Azeris, two are Baluchs while two are Arabs.

Seven of the informants are from administrative elites while three are from academic elites. The administrative elites are, moreover, selected from among ministers and governors of ethnic provinces during Khatami's administration. All of the informants belonging to these two groups are experts on ethnicity, ethnic management and policy making. The age of all informants selected by purposive sampling is between 40 and 60. With regard to the nature of ethnicity and ethnic studies in Iran and the over-representation of men in governmental positions, the informants were selected among men. Six ethnic elites have Ph.D degrees while six others have masters degrees. Informants belonging to the ethnic elites are coded as "A", the administrative elites as "B" and the academic experts as "C".

Conceptualizing Ethnic Conflicts

Conflict is correlated with control of scarce resources and occurs when "two related parties—individuals, groups, communities, or nation-states—find themselves divided by perceived incompatible interests or goals or in competition for control of scarce resources" (Avruch, 1998, pp. 24-25). In this case, one controversial issue in many nation-states is ethnic conflict.

According to Brown (1993) ethnic conflict is a quarrel over important political, economic, social, cultural or territorial matters between two or more ethnic communities, or between them and a sovereign state. Brown argues the ethnic conflicts can be out of violence or the degree of violence may be low. He points to conflict over Quebec's autonomy with low degrees of violence, while Bosnia, Angola and the Caucasus are examples of full scale violence. In general, ethnic conflicts occur in three main forms: inter-group, intra-group conflict and conflicts targeting the political system (Goudarzi, 2007).

Despite the first two forms of ethnic conflicts which occur within one or more ethnic groups, looking forward conflicts within the political system will take place between one or more ethnic groups on the one hand and the state on the other. The aims of the latter conflicts, as Goudarzi (2007) stated, are to secure political, economic, social and cultural rights or autonomy and even to secede from the home land territory.

Ethnic conflicts since the beginning of the second half of the last century have caused concerns in international debates (Cornell, 2002). However, the fall of the Berlin Wall inspired efforts to end conflict around the world and was a sign of integration of a disintegrated people, though this sweet dream did not last. Recent years have recorded a great number of ethnic conflicts throughout the world, from Europe and America to

Asia and Africa. In this respect, the Middle East has witnessed a considerable number of conflicts. Iran as a Middle Eastern and multi-ethnic country, especially after the formation of a central modern state as a result of the Constitutional Revolution, has experienced numerous ethnic conflicts. In this respect, the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution (1979) intensified ethnic conflict.

Accordingly, a couple of weeks after the Revolution, political and violent ethnic tensions occurred across all ethnic regions. The major ethnic groups involved in the tensions were Kurds, Turkmen, Arabs, Baluchs and Azeris. The new government, however, did repress some of them over a short period, and then pursued others such as the Kurdish parties over a number of years of armed conflict. It also forced the remaining militants to leave the country, but the roots of conflict remained and violence occasionally erupted.

Iran's Domestic Behavior towards Minorities and Ethnic Conflict

The election of Seyyed Mohammad Khatami on May 23, 1997 was a turning point in the history of the Iranian political scene. Khatami came to office following a landslide election victory resulting from the "changing of people demands" in Iran. There were two main reasons for Iranian's support of Khatami: first, his domestic reforms based on civil society, rule of law, freedom of speech and political freedom, and secondly, pursuing peace abroad in the framework of cooperation with international system.

In other words, as Ramazani (2004, p.111) described, those who voted Khatami "were looking for more freedom inside of the country and more cooperation with other countries in the world." So, democracy inside and peace outside the country was the main characteristic of Khatami's policy. He viewed "democracy at home and peace abroad" as two sides of the same coin.

With regard to minorities and internal ethnic conflicts, Khatami's administration could control and reduce the trend of conflict. One of the policies of Khatami's administration in ethnic areas was normalization of the atmosphere and removing these areas from security concerns which were rooted in suppression. In other words, reduction of suppression was considered one of the most important demands of ethnic groups which were met during the Khatami presidency. That is why the conflicts, whether armed or political, went into decline.

For instance, social transformation and development in the Kurdish areas during this period, contributed to diminishing violent conflict and to some extent political conflicts between people and the government (Interview with informant A11). Meanwhile, the number of those who opposed the armed struggle and violence increased, and armed conflict between the government and opposition parties dropped in Kurdistan area (Interview with informant A10).

The lessening of conflict also occurred in other ethnic areas. Before Khatami's presidency, Baluchistan had witnessed a considerable number of conflicts but in light of his administration's policies such as facilitating ethnic participation and respecting their values, the conflicts' trend notably decreased. According to informant A12, during Khatami's term all armed ethnic groups stopped their violence and the people enjoyed peace and stability in the ethnic areas. He categorized sources of violent conflicts in Baluchistan in three groups; tribal leaders, religious leaders and drug smugglers, who had been active against central government since the outset of the revolution. Each group possesses its own potential source of power. The first has fighting men; the second has no noticeable

source of money and men but is able to mobilize the people by their religious appeal to fight, and the third group, which apart from having money, seek to use the manpower of the first group and the religious means of the second group. Although they had all fought against the regime, and despite some differences in the aims and interests, they were nevertheless weakened during the Khatami period in light of his appropriate policies.

In this regard, Baluch informant A6 said that Khatami's policies led to a significant decrease in ethnic tensions and increased political participation among ethnic groups. He pointed out the contrast between levels of civil participation and the degree of ethnic tension in that period and during Ahmadinejad's period of office (2005-present) to prove such a claim.

This situation was also experienced in Arab society. According to informant A8, despite enhancement of the demands, however, conflicts dropped to zero level. Azeri elite had the same experiences as well. He asserted that during this period there was no serious ethnic tension because the ethnic groups felt they could pursue their demands legally. Such evolution led to a remarkable reduction in security costs (Interview with informant A4).

With regard to a decrease in conflict, informant B3 believed the tension which had existed since the fall of the *Qajar* dynasty, and intensified between the two World Wars and after the Islamic Revolution, reached a zero level during the Khatami presidency. For this claim, he pointed to provincial governors' trips with their families to the farthest points of the ethnic provinces without bodyguards. Further examples showed a return to their residences of the border's population, after they had been enforced to leave their place due to the Iran-Iraq war and ethnic conflicts. Informant B4 stated the statistics on the recruitment of ethnic peoples by opposition militant parties is clear proof of the reduction in conflict.

As a former security officer, he explained how the statistics revealed the number of people employed by these militant groups had fallen significantly. In this regard, informant B6, as a former provincial governor, focused on some matters such as surrendering control of ethnic areas to law enforcement systems instead of the military organizations, as well as the remarkable reduction in security checkpoints in ethnic provinces as an endorsement of weakening ethnic tensions.

Some of the ethnic elites, moreover, emphasized the relationship between ethnic participation and reduction of conflicts. In this case, Maghsoodi (2006) suggests if there is a suitable ground for participation, ethnic groups will participate through legal channels such as election; if not they may choose other ways of participation which may include violence. According to informant A2, who belongs to Arab society, the open policies of Khatami's administration encouraged the creation of positive feelings for cooperation and participation in government. This led to a weakening of conflict as many of the ethnic groups supposed they could pursue their ethnic demands within the legal framework.

In other words, as informant A8 stated, "People believed that by a serious participation, they could reach their demands." The achievement of the demands, therefore, stopped them to pursuing conflict. In this respect, Kurdish informant, A10, asserted that Kurdish areas experienced a high level of participation in different elections during this period. Besides this form of participation, political and social activity increased in the national parties and NGOs at the local and national level. In addition, people learnt to express their protests through peaceful and legal ways instead of resorting to violence. These

factors reduced existing conflicts. It was at this time when other ethnic areas, just like the Azeri and Baluch provinces, experienced the similar circumstances.

In sum, Khatami's policies such as downplaying the security atmosphere in ethnic areas, paving the ground for ethnic participation, and also a decrease in suppression lead to a fall in ethnic conflict, since they felt they could achieve their goals legally. In addition to Khatami's appropriate internal policies towards ethnic groups, he also adopted a suitable foreign policy which changed Iran's image globally and improved its relations with the world community.

Emergence of new Atmosphere in Iran's Inter-State Relations

Khatami is characterized as the "Iranian Gorbachev" due to his reforms in domestic and foreign policy (Takeyh & Gvosdev, 2004). As Spiegel, Kibbe, & Matthews (2002) indicated, Khatami "revolutionized Iran's foreign policy." The main characteristic of the new foreign policy was its "non-ideological" and "non-confrontational" aspects. This development in foreign policy can be named as 'the drive for moderation' due to Khatami's positive approaches on internal and external issues (Ehteshami, 2007, Gheissari 2009). Inside the country, Khatami pursued some democratic values such as civil society, rule of law, freedom of expression, expanding personal liberty and economic reforms which, as Sick (2002) argued, could extend to Iranian foreign policy. In this case, Zweiri (2007) states that one of Khatami's goals was creating a strong link between domestic issues and foreign policy. Khatami, indeed, tried to add a democratic dimension to Iran's foreign policy (Ramezani, 2004).

Alnahas (2007) argues that Khatami's foreign policy was very different from the old slogan of 'Neither East Nor West'. According to him, "in Khatami's world, there is East and West, North and South, Islam and other faiths rather than confrontation, they are all brought together through dialogue in which no one group holds the monopoly on morality" (p.199). This policy changed Iran's image in the world and caused many countries to engage with Iran. In fact, Khatami intended to ease the country out of years of isolation and external tensions. In this case, Khatami declared that "foreign policy should be based on avoiding violence, and on establishing friendly relations with all countries which recognize Iran's independence and also not follow aggressive policy toward Iran" (Ramazani, 2001, p. 116).

Khatami placed detente at the top of his administration's foreign policy in order to improve Iran's relations with the world (Zweiri, 2007). It was a policy based on 'common grounds', 'mutual respect' and ensuring growth and development of regional states without intervention of foreign forces (Payvand, 1999). In August 1997, Khatami announced that "the Islamic Republic needed an 'active and fresh presence' in its foreign relations to lessen tensions and to seek friendship in the international arena. "Government will refrain from any behavior or activity that could create tension" (Marschall, 2003, p. 22). Furthermore, in criticizing Iran's old confrontational policy and in attempting to build a cooperative policy, Khatami declared that "Making enemies is not a skill; real skill lies in the ability to neutralize enemies, convert animosities to human interaction and scale down hostilities ... And, this is not incompatible with our principles. And he adds being mighty does not mean fighting the world at any cost, and debate does not mean abandoning the principles and values of society and revolution" (Alnahas, 2007, p. 200). Following Khatami's new approach in the foreign policy arena, Iran's relations with world countries changed markedly.

Iran and Persian Gulf States

Khatami defined good relations with Persian Gulf neighbors as a top priority of foreign policy, since the security and stability of the Persian Gulf region has been vital for Iran's national interest as well as its domestic well-being (Marschall, 2003). By having friendship relations with the littoral states, moreover, Iran intended to persuade the United States to leave the region since there was no threat to its interests. For this, Iran's foreign policy did not face internal opposition since conservatives and the armed forces wanted to have good relations with its southern neighbors in order to decrease the US armed forces in the region (Alnahas, 2007).

Accordingly, and with the aim of improving relations with Persian Gulf states, Kharrazi, Iran's foreign minister, on several occasions reiterated that he would be happy to negotiate with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) regarding disputes over the three islands, Abu Mosa, Greater and lesser Tunbs, in the framework of 'mutual confidence and understanding' (Rubin, 2002). In this regard, Mohammad Sadr, Iranian assistant foreign minister for Arab and African affairs, moreover, reiterated "Iran was determined to normalize fully its relations with its brothers in the Arab homeland to open up fully and widely toward its neighbors among the member-states of the [Gulf Countries Council] (GCC)" (Menashri, 2001, p. 244).

Meanwhile, in order to assure the Arab neighbors about Iran's intentions in the region, Ali Shamkhani, Iranian Defense Minister, announced that "These were only the means to enhance his country's defense capabilities, assuring all our brothers in the region that Iranian forces will never be used against them. Iran, he said, was even ready to defend the interests of the Gulf States if exposed to any danger. After all, its military power is part of the Islamic World's power, and aimed at repelling aggression and confronting challenge" (Menashri, 2001, p. 244).

The speeches were indeed intended to build confidence and to assure the Persian Gulf countries of Iran's good intentions. In this way they would not have to rely on foreign forces for security and stability in the region, but could act themselves by improving relations and mutual cooperation.

In general, Khatami, by his "openness to the outside world" intended to show "trust in Iran's intentions" among Persian Gulf states (Bakhash, 2001). In this regard, Marschall (2003) stated that "His call to establish trust was "more than welcomed" by Iran's neighbors in the Persian Gulf. For instance, Jamil al-Hujailan, who headed the GCC, said that Gulf countries were encouraged by new signs of a possible thaw in relations with Iran. He mentioned how the Gulf States welcomed the new signals coming from Iran, which was initiating of new trend in relations. He continued that "We hope these signs are in harmony with our belief that our relations with Iran should be the strongest relations. Iran is a big and strong neighbor ... Agreeing with Iran and deepening its conviction on the need to cooperate with the GCC is important to stability in the region" (Marschall, 2003, p. 143).

Meanwhile, the 8th summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Tehran in September of 1997 and Iran's announcement for solving regional problems and supporting the unification of the Muslim world, further helped the improvement in Iranian and the Gulf States relations. In this case, Iran's Foreign Minister, Kharrazi, said that the Islamic summit conference in Tehran paved the way as an engine of détente.

The attendance of Islamic countries at the summit changed the mind set of these countries and provided an opportunity to build and strengthen connections. Since then we have seen

progress in our relations with them" (Ettelaat, 1999b). Indeed, one of the principle aims of Iran in the 8th Islamic conference was "creation of trust and confidence atmosphere in relations with all neighbors in Persian Gulf" (Ramazani (2001, p. 121). During the Khatami presidency, in general, Iran attempted to reduce tensions with the Arab neighbors in two main spheres: "bilateral relations" and "multilateral relations". As Alnahas (2007, p.139) indicates, Khatami said that "Economic development must be accompanied by political development." So, Iran strived to solve the existing problem and decrease the tension in order to integrate all regional countries.

Khatami's endeavors to improve Iran's relations were welcomed by littoral states because they also needed Iran's economic as well as political capabilities for stability and peace in the Persian Gulf region. In other words, their mutual interest provoked both sides to close one another. Therefore, it can be seen that Iran's relationship with Persian Gulf states improved in this period. According to Hooglund (2002), if one evaluates Khatami's achievements in Iran's foreign policy, one "can see that Iran had strengthened ties with Arab neighbors in the Persian Gulf". Following the rapprochement between Iran and the Gulf States, Khatami later visited Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria. It was the first time an Iranian head of state had visited Qatar, Saudi Arabia since the Islamic revolution in 1979.

Relationship of Iran and the West

Khatami's electoral slogans as well as his new approach in foreign policy were welcomed by the West as well. After the victory, Khatami declared "the third millennium should be begin by understanding among nations, cultures and civilizations and we will not have any antagonistic behavior with any country" (Ettelaat, 1999c). Furthermore, in an interview with a Spanish newspaper, Kharrazi said the "principle of Iran's policy is based on reduction of tension, creating of understanding and confidence building" (Ettelaat, 1999a). These statements were considered positive marks from the Iranian side for an improvement in the devastated relations between Iran and the West.

Iran and European Union

Iran's relations improved with the European Union (EU) due to important changes in Iranian foreign policy during Khatami's presidency (Rakel, 2007; Ramazani, 2004; Rasmussen, 2009). In this respect, Rakel (2007) states the most important success of the first four years of Khatami's presidency was that he was able to improve Iran's position on the international scene, particularly with the EU. As a result, Khatami was the first Iranian president to be received by the EU since the 1979 revolution.

However, Mousavian (2008) argues that although Iran announced that its relations with the EU had entered a new phase, any improvement in relations was conditional on the assessment of president Khatami's performance by Western countries. There were still two stumbling blocks in Iran-European relations: first there was Khomeini's life-threatening fatwa against Salman Rushdie and secondly there was the Mykonos case. Ramazani (2004) explains how in this period Iran attempted to distance itself publicly from that ideological decree. In a news conference on September 22, 1998, in New York, President Khatami suggested "the fatwa was the expression of Khomeini's own view as an Islamic jurist, reportedly adding, we should consider the Salman Rushdie issue as completely finished." According to the writer, two days later Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi reportedly told British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook:

"The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has no intention, nor is it going to take any action whatsoever to threaten the life of the author of *The Satanic Verses* or anybody associated with his work, nor will it encourage or assist anybody to do so." According to Alnahas (2007, p. 216), Khatami's step of disassociating from Khomeini's fatwa found a very positive response from the European Union, such that at its presidential level it stated that, "It removes an obstacle for a better relationship between the European Union and Iran and increases the possibility that closer cooperation can be discussed in renewed dialogue." Indeed, Iran wanted to assure the EU about its intentions by taking positive steps which even included ignoring Khomeini's decree, as founder of the existing Islamic regime.

Anyway, Khatami's moderate foreign policy could eliminate political isolation imposed by European countries on Iran for almost two decades. He could also mend Iran's image in the world by visiting different European countries for the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic.

Iran and United States

In addition to an Iran-EU reconciliation, there were also growing hopes for an improvement in relations between Iran and the United States (US) during this period. Khatami's foreign policy approach that stood on the dialogue among civilizations, was mostly aimed at the United States. In this regard, Khatami said "Nothing should prevent dialogue and understanding between two nations, especially between their scholars and thinkers (Alnahas, 2007, p. 201)." Indeed Khatami was the first figure after the revolution who considered developing a formal US-Iranian relationship provided that US respect Iran's dignity and national interests (Alexander & Hoenig, 2007). In addition to a welcome for Khatami's democratic reforms by US leaders, the CNN interview with Khatami in January of 1988 was regarded as an initial positive step in the relationship between Iran and the US. In the interview Khatami declared "Iran and the United States should create a 'crack in the wall of mistrust' by exchanging writers, scholars, artists and thinkers. ...I believe all doors should now be open for such dialogue and understanding and the possibility for contact between Iranian and American citizens" (CNN, January 7, 1998). Khatami's first major foreign policy statement which was addressed to the American people surprised many observers (Ramazani, 2004).

Despite this fact, Alexander & Hoenig (2007) argue that Khatami practically improved Iran's relations with the United States by inviting the American national wrestling team to compete in Tehran in 1998 for the first time, which was followed by raising of the American flag in honor of the athletes during this event. Improvements in Iran-US relations became more serious later in speeches by President Clinton, then US president. In April 1999, President Clinton said Iran has been "the subject of quite a lot of abuse from various Western nations, and that sometimes it's quite important to tell people 'look, others have a right to be angry at something my country or my culture or others that are generally allied with us today did to you 50 or 60 or 100 or 150 years ago'" (Ramazani, 2004, p. 556). According to Ramazani (2004), moreover, on March 17 2000, Secretary of State, Madeleine K. Albright, publicly admitted "US involvement in the 1953 Mussadegh coup [which led to overthrowing of his administration] and expressed regrets for the United States' having sided with Iraq in its war against Iran." However, as the writer argues, "heavy baggage of mutual antagonism" as well as missing significant opportunities for rapprochement caused US-Iran relations to remain stuck in the mud after the cutting off of diplomatic relations by President

Jimmy Carter, the former US president. Later, after the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, the atmosphere not only in Congress but also in the White House became passionately anti-Iranian (Arjomand, 2009). The reason was that "9/11 opened American eyes to the dangers of Islamic fundamentalism -by default viewing the Shia-Muslim state of Iran as a natural partner in crime for Sunni-extremist (though Shia-denouncing) Al-Qaeda and Taliban" (Rasmussen, 2009, p. 3). Therefore, Bush, the new American president, (2000-2008) called Iran a member of the "axis of evil", [along with Iraq and North Korea], and also threatened indirectly to strike Iran as a 'rogue' state, which might be providing terrorist groups with weapons of mass destruction (Ramazani, 2004). According to Rasmussen (2009,p.3), when the Bush administration named Iran as part of the 'axis of evil', the positive development in Iran's relations with the West almost immediately came to a halt, and in Iran a feeling of insecurity was created overnight. It was at the time when Iranian hardliners were also opposed to Iran-US relations.

Despite Khatami's announcement to radical groups that "we cannot close the doors completely" and no country can afford to form its cultural, political, economic and social policies without taking world events into account especially in today's world (Alnahas, 2007), however, prominent right-wing conservatives condemned the United States and its allies in the national and international media, which only worsened the situation (Rasmussen, 2009). Above all, the role of the Iranian leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, was remarkable in Iran-US relations.

For instance, "Ayatollah Khamenei did not give his permission to Kharrazi in September 1998 to meet Albright, nor to Khatami to make any grand gesture" (Arjomand, 2009, p.147). In general, as Takeyh & Gvosdev (2004, p.39) illustrate, "The reformers never had the institutional power and the confidence of the supreme leader necessary to overcome the hard-liners' objections to dealing with the United States. Iranian hard-liners were profoundly suspicious the reformers' policies would ultimately undermine the Islamic Republic itself and leave the country vulnerable to US dictation. Despite this fact, Iran under Khatami attempted to improve its relations with all countries, even the US since he believed in democratic values and interaction with the wider world.

Conclusion:

During the presidency of Khatami, Iran changed its behavior toward minorities and endeavored to reduce the ethnic conflict using policies such as a reduction in a security atmosphere in ethnic areas, access of ethnic groups to legal ways of achieving their demands, paving the ground for ethnic group participation and also decreasing suppression, which had dominated ethnic regions for decades. In addition to following democratic values inside the country, which had led to an improvement of ethnic groups conditions, Iran under Khatami also adopted a policy of détente in the foreign policy arena, based on coexistence and interaction with the world which eventually led to an improvement of Iran's inter-states relations. In other words, Iran's domestic and foreign policies during the Khatami presidency were in alignment. For this, Iran's relations with other countries in particular the Persian Gulf states and the EU, reached the highest level of diplomatic relationships since the Islamic revolution in 1979.

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