

## Iran-USA relationships: Idealism or Pragmatism

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Original Article</p> <p>Main Object: International relations Scope: Iran &amp; USA</p> <p>Received: 30 June 2025 Revised: 23 July 2025 Accepted: 28 July 2025 Published online: 03 August 2025</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> foreign policy, idealism, Iran USA relations, pragmatism, regional rivals.</p>	<p>Like other great revolutions, the Islamic revolution of Iran had a base of ideology and idealism, because of which the revolutionary ethos was universal and did not limit to the geographical borders. In particular, anti US sentiments were institutionalized. However, unlike Waltz prediction that revolutions in their foreign policy gradually incline from their initial idealism toward pragmatism, did not happen for the Islamic Republic of Iran. As a result, after nearly five decades, the Iran US relations continued to be shaped based on idealism. The question that this paper wants to answer is why idealism in Iranian foreign policy towards US has continued so long. Using historical review, and employing the Popperian situational analysis method, the rivals to Iran in this case, the role of effective institutions, and the conditions in which such relations have been taken shape are analyzed. Finally, it is concluded that the continuation and overcome of idealism in Iranian US relations are because of the access of Iran to the oil revenue and also because of the dual political structure of the Islamic Republic.</p>

**Cite this article:** Samiei M. (2026). "Iran-USA relationships: Idealism or Pragmatism". *Countries Studies*. 4(1): 1-5. doi: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jcountst.2025.397800.1310>.



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 Website: <https://jcountst.ut.ac.ir/> | Email: [jcountst@ut.ac.ir](mailto:jcountst@ut.ac.ir) |  
 EISSN: 2980-9193  
 Publisher: University of Tehran

**Extended Abstract****Introduction**

The Islamic Revolution of Iran was not limited to the geographical borders of Iran and, like great revolutions such as the French and Russian Revolutions, it had goals and aspirations for humanity and chanted slogans containing global messages. The enemies of the Iranian Revolution were also not limited to internal enemies such as the Shah and the court, but the revolution targeted enemies such as global arrogance and the superpowers of the East and the West, among which the USA has been distinguished. There was a strong anti-American sentiment among a wide range of revolutionaries, and although they had many differences with each other, they were unanimous in this anti-American stance. It was as if the revolutionaries saw a similarity between the Shah and America, and just as they had defeated the Shah in the domestic arena, they sought to defeat America in the international arena as well.

However, as Kenneth Waltz says, although revolutions usually initially have ideological and global claims, their behavior gradually becomes normalized in the process of socialization in the international community.

**Aim**

This article aims to investigate why such an event did not occur in the Islamic Republic and the relations between Iran and the United States were not normalized like in other revolutions. Considering the position of the United States in the world system, the Islamic Republic should have given up its initial idealism and should tend towards pragmatism, as Waltz predicted. But why did this not happen in the case of the Islamic Republic?

**Methodology**

This research employs Popperian situational analysis. Popper recommends that in order to analyze the situation, the phenomenon under analysis be simulated. For simulation, it is necessary to identify the main elements in question. In the present study, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is considered as the central actor. Other actors are other governments, including the governments of the United States, Israel, and Arab states, which are considered competitors of the central actor.

**Discussion**

By studying the history and political structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran, we realize that the situation of the Islamic Republic has been somewhat different from the situation in other revolutions for two reasons. The first reason is access to huge oil resources, which made the Islamic Republic of Iran not dependent on other countries and economic needs did not cause it to forget revolutionary ideals. The

second reason which is more important is the dual structure of the Islamic Republic that has established a kind of separation of duties between the republican and Islamic branches. The republican branch is mainly responsible for economic, executive and foreign policy issues, while the Islamic branch is responsible for military, legislative, judicial and general principles of foreign policy. This separation of duties has had important consequences for the Islamic Republic system. The approach of the revolutionary leaders (the Islamic branch) towards the relationship with America is consistently and continuously idealistic, and has not changed noticeably over the four decades, even after Imam Khomeini. While the presidents (republican branch) have sought and engaged in negotiations and exchanges with America and has turned to pragmatism.

### Conclusion

In response to the main question of this research, it should be said that Iran's foreign policy, like all other countries, falls on a spectrum where one side is idealism and the other side is pragmatism. Iran, like other revolutions, appeared as an idealist activist in its first appearances in the arena of international relations. But unlike other revolutions, and contrary to Waltz's general assertion about other revolutions, Iranian idealism persisted because of access to oil wealth and, more importantly, because of the dual structure of the Islamic Republic. While the republican wing was more inclined to prioritize economic interests and development and to be pragmatic, the Islamic wing insisted on idealism.

### Conflict of interest

The author declared no conflicts of interest.

### Ethical considerations

The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

### Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the author on reasonable request.

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