Religion and Foreign Policy Making in the USA, India and Iran: towards a research agenda

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ABSTRACT This article is concerned with religious soft power in foreign policy making through a focus on the foreign policies of the USA, India and Iran. It suggests that, if religious actors ‘get the ear’ of key foreign policy makers because of their shared religious beliefs, the former may become able to influence foreign policy outcomes through the exercise of religious soft power. In relation to the above-mentioned countries, the article proposes that several named religious actors do significantly influence foreign policy through such a strategy. It also notes that such influence is apparent not only when key policy makers share religious values, norms and beliefs but also when policy makers accept that foreign policy should be informed by them.

This article argues that religious soft power in foreign policy making warrants further research by highlighting the existing treatment of religion’s soft power in the secondary literature to propose a new research agenda. Although many authors attest to the significance of religion in international relations—with some observers noting a recent widespread religious resurgence—there is less agreement on how religion affects foreign policy (Fox & Sandler, 2004; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Thomas 2005; Haynes 2007).1 This article is not concerned generally with religious soft power in international relations. If that were the focus then the emphasis would be on religious actors in one country seeking to use soft power to influence individuals or groups in another country. For example, various kinds of religious missions—notably, Christian and Muslim—have for centuries been a key expression of international religious soft power. Their aim is to seek to change people’s religious norms, values and beliefs from one set of views to another set; the result is that individuals and groups in a foreign country eventually behave religiously like the original proselytisers.

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The context of this examination of religious soft power is located in major recent changes in

the structure of world affairs and global interactions... Both in terms of actual operations and the ways that those operations are conceived and understood by analysts, the old systems of relationships are passing rapidly (Voll, 2006: 12).

Today some transnational religious networks are influential. For example, the numerous extant cross-border Islamic movements all have soft power that ‘enhances [their] strength’ (Voll, 2006: 15). In addition, as Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler note, religion can also affect international outcomes via ‘its significant influence on domestic politics. It is a motivating force that guides many policy makers’ (Fox & Sandler, 2004: 168).

This article examines the issue of religious soft power in the USA, India and Iran in the context of their respective foreign policies. In these countries various religious actors seek to influence outcomes by encouraging foreign policy makers to adopt policies informed by their religious tenets and beliefs. The article seeks to expand the use of the term ‘soft power’ beyond the common conception that considers it to be the influence a government exercises over another government to achieve its goals. The intended contribution of this article is to highlight the applied use of soft power in relation to how certain religious groups seek to effect changes in foreign policy. It underlines that the concept of soft power should include cultural (including religious) actors who seek to influence foreign policy by encouraging policy makers to incorporate religious beliefs, norms and values into foreign policy (Katzenstein, 1996).

But how might a religious group exercise such influence, and why would religious actors seek to influence foreign policy makers? A starting point is to think of the importance of norms and identity in international relations (Katzenstein, 1996). Rejecting both neo-realism and neoliberalism, because of their focus on the physical capabilities of states and institutions, Peter Katzenstein suggests that explaining apparently inconsistent or irrational foreign and national security policies depends on factoring in influential norms, collective identities and cultures of the relevant societies. Peter Haas’s (2001) concept of epistemic communities is also useful in this context. Epistemic communities—including those energised by religion—serve as significant conduits for policy makers compared with traditional political interest groups. Epistemic communities are more effective because their knowledge is ‘politically untainted, and thus more likely to work’ (Haas, 2001: 115–180).

Soft power domestically can easily become hard power internationally. For example, in the USA domestic evangelical groups convince the US government through a mix of soft and hard power to oppose funding for contraception and abortion internationally. When the US government agrees to curtail funding to various international organisations on these grounds, it is emphasising not the use of soft power but the force of hard economic power. Another example is the influence of various conservative entities in
US domestic politics, which used soft power to try to encourage the Bush administration to invade Iraq in 2003. The actual invasion was, of course, the epitome of hard power—despite the fact that soft power, focusing on the desirability of spreading democracy to Iraq and then to the Middle East region more generally, encouraged use of the policy. What these examples collectively illustrate is that soft power is one end of a spectrum with hard power at the other end. In other words, soft power will not necessarily be used in isolation but will often form an aspect of a continuum that includes, when deemed necessary, use of hard power.

**Soft power and international relations**

In recent years, ‘soft power’ is notable ‘across many political, economic, and military areas... taking precedence over traditional, material “hard power”’ (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999: ix). When Joseph Nye (1990) introduced the concept of soft power into international relations (IR) nearly two decades ago, it was a useful reminder to the IR community that use of hard power is not the only tool available to achieve goals. The basic concept of power is the ability to influence others to get them to do what you want. There are three major ways to do that: one is to threaten them with sticks; the second is to pay them with carrots; the third is to attract them or co-opt them, so that they want what you want. If you can get others to be attracted, to want what you want, it costs you much less in carrots and sticks (Nye, 2004b).

‘Soft power’ refers to the capability of an entity, usually but not necessarily a state, to influence what others do through persuasion, not force or threats. It co-opts people; it does not coerce them. Soft power influences people by appealing to them not by forcing them to comply (Nye, 1990). Soft power covers certain attributes—including, culture, values, ideas—collectively representing different, but not necessarily lesser, forms of influence compared with ‘hard’ power. The latter implies more direct, forceful measures typically involving the threat or use of armed force or economic coercion. In short, soft power is neither ‘sticks nor carrots’ but a ‘third way’ of achieving objectives. It goes beyond simple influence—that can rest on hard power threats both military or diplomatic as well as financial payments—to involve persuasion and encouragement rooted in shared norms, values and beliefs. To exercise soft power relies on 1) persuasion, or the ability to convince by argument, and 2) the ability to attract:

If I am persuaded to go along with your purposes without any explicit threat or exchange taking place—in short, if my behavior is determined by an observable but intangible attraction—soft power is at work. *Soft power uses a different type of currency—not force, not money—to engender cooperation. It uses an attraction to shared values, and the justness and duty of contributing to the achievement of those values.* (Nye, 2004c: emphasis added)

In sum, hard power represents the ability to *force* people to do things, irrespective of whether or not they agree with them. Soft power moulds preferences to encourage people to *want* to do things.
Joseph Nye virtually neglects religion, merely noting that ‘for centuries, organized religious movements have possessed soft power’ (2004a: 98). Since 9/11 competing conceptions of soft power have been operating within the debate over the ‘war on terror’, with religious values central to the discussion. US foreign policy makers, apparently informed by ‘Christian values’, cannot, however, convince all Muslims that their objectives in Afghanistan and Iraq are not self-serving (Shlapentokh et al., 2005). Moreover, both ‘extremist’ and ‘moderate’ Islamic ideas and movements are competing post-9/11 for the support of ordinary Muslims by offering differing soft power visions. In discussions of the impact of various Muslim transnational networks, analysts agree that radical movements—notably al-Qaida—more strongly affect the world stage and receive more foreign policy attention from the great powers than many ‘weak’ states in the international system (Casanova, 2005; Haynes, 2005; Voll, 2006; Appleby, 2006). Of course, the relevant literature does not begin and end with Islam. Other religious entities—including the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant evangelical churches (often conservative and US-based or rooted), and Judaism—are also significant transnational religions in international relations (Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Thomas, 2005; Casanova, 2006; Voll, 2006). Drawing on soft power norms, values and beliefs, they encourage followers to act in certain ways and not others.

Religious actors and foreign policy in the USA, India and Iran

This section examines the efforts of three sets of religious actors to try to influence state foreign policies through the application of soft power: the Religious Right in the USA, India’s Hindutva (‘Hindu-ness’) proponents, and ‘messianic fundamentalists’2 and other religious militants in Iran. The main argument is that the norms represented by certain political individuals and groups are to a variable, yet significant, extent a result of the exercise of religious soft power by religious groups. The case studies do not consistently contain explicit operational accounts of how religious groups exercise their soft power. This is because by its very nature soft power is often subtle and hard to trace. Soft power is typically wielded through informal—and difficult to trace—political mechanisms rather than via more formal methods that are often easier to track. On the other hand, domestic politics is the province of ‘political science’, a discipline that, many would agree, has had a more sophisticated debate on power than International Relations. Consequently material in the three case studies draws on relevant political science literature, including that concerned with agenda-setting power, in order to examine how, why and with what results religious individuals and groups seek to influence foreign policy makers in the USA, India and Iran.

The USA

During the second half of the 19th century conservative Christian evangelicalism emerged in the USA. From the 1970s it sought to target successive US governments in relation to abortion, family values and school
curricula. Conservative Protestant evangelicals ‘politicked to take back the Supreme Court, the Congress, the public schools, textbook publishing houses, foreign affairs, and the Executive branch...[T]heir crusade is as evident as anywhere in the words and deeds of the current Bush Administration’ (Wessner, 2003: 65).

This section highlights conservative Christian evangelical normative persuasion in the White House during the presidencies of both Bill Clinton (1993–2001) and George W Bush (2001–09). It shows that religious soft power is exercised in relation to foreign policy. Influence is wielded in several ways. First, various religions claim to speak for millions of ordinary Americans—an attribute that can give them the ear of decision makers through the medium of regular face-to-face meetings. Second, when such religious views are also held by decision makers—including the president—then religious soft power, often in combination with ‘secular’ hard power, is likely to be realised in relation to specific policy goals.

The US Constitution prohibits institutionalised links between the state and religion. The First Amendment of the US Constitution—‘Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof’—formally separates religion from the remit of the government. Nevertheless, ‘religion has always played an important part in American politics’ (Reichley, 1986: 23). The republic’s founders drew on religious values and rhetoric in forming the new nation. Churches controversially became involved in slavery and the civil war in the 1860s. In the 20th century religious groups participated in various campaigns, including the prohibition of the sale of alcohol, the enactment of women’s right to vote, the New Deal measures to increase social welfare, and the passage of civil rights laws (Wald, 2003). Table 1 indicates religion’s strong continuous influence on US foreign policy.

Unlike most Western countries the USA is regarded as a highly religious country (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). Since in the USA ‘religion plays an important role in politics’ it is likely that there exists ‘greater prominence of religious organizations in society and politics’ (Telhami, 2004: 71). In a democratic system such as that of the USA, religion’s ability to affect policy depends on whether it retains the ear of influential policy-making figures (Hudson, 2005: 295–297). Close personal relations with key players and good relations with influential print and electronic media help to alter policy makers’ behaviour. Although not a religious entity per se, as Stephen Walt & John Mearsheimer note, the ‘Israel lobby’ in the USA attempts to acquire and wield influence by lobbying ‘elected representatives and members of the executive branch, mak[ing] campaign contributions, vot[ing] in elections, [and] try[ing] to mould public opinion, etc’ (Walt & Mearsheimer, 2006: 6). Yet religions are not just run-of-the-mill lobby groups, nor are they necessarily monolithic in their views, beliefs and expectations. Religion can often wield indirect influence that can be instrumental in helping construct the mindset of policy makers, including in relation to foreign policy. It will depend on a number of factors, including: what questions are raised? What are the issues of concern? What terms are used when discussing policy? How...
they are thought about and applied by policy makers? This highlights the importance of religious norms, values and ideology. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink note:

the ways in which norms themselves change and the ways in which they change other features of the political landscape...[making] static approaches to International Relations...particularly unsatisfying during the current era of global transformation when questions about change motivate much of the empirical research we do. (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998: 888)

This highlights the need to focus analytically on the relationship between ideational and material issues in US foreign policy. Although now analysis focuses on the Religious Right (RR), during the presidency of Jimmy Carter (1977–81) a different religious expression became influential as it shared with Carter a focus on human rights and Christian values. For neo-conservatives, however, Carter's presidency was notable for a rising tide of pacifist sentiment that not only permeated American critical consciousness at the general level but also the upper levels of the Carter administration (Dorrien, 1993: 170).
During his presidency Ronald Reagan shared many of the RR’s ideals and goals, encouraging it to develop into a significant lobby group (Dorrien, 1993; Haynes, 1998: 28–33; Halper & Clarke, 2004: 182–200; Judis, 2005). During the Clinton era (1993–2001) ‘left-leaning [religious] activists’ had access ‘to top administration officials’. In contrast, after George W Bush’s election in 2001, conservative ‘evangelical Christian leaders were able to arrange sessions with senior White House aides’ (Page, 2005). Howard LaFranchi (2006) refers to a shift at this time from predominantly secular to primarily religious foreign policy goals, an ‘evangelisation’ of US foreign policy. This drew on ideological empathy between, on the one hand, key religious individuals and groups and, on the other, government policy makers, including the president. The RR’s influence featured prominently in two areas: 1) state building and democratisation in Afghanistan and Iraq; and 2) promotion of religious freedoms and human rights in North Korea, Sudan and elsewhere (Seiple & Hoover, 2004).

This is not to suggest that the RR was only concerned with foreign policy. Also important were a range of domestic concerns including what form of Christianity should take precedence in the USA, reshaping American society according to their Christian values, and promotion of ‘family values’, or a specific sense of morality and a preferred education system (Bumiller, 2003). During George W Bush’s first term (2001–05) evangelical Christian leaders were emboldened by their role in re-electing him and galvanised by their success in campaigning for constitutional amendments to ban same-sex marriage, eventually passed in 18 states. The aim was to organise to build on these successes, to solidify their agenda-setting role in relation to domestic and increasingly foreign policy, and to help elect sympathetic public officials. Congress and its committees are usually judged to have less influence in foreign policy compared with domestic policy. Instead, the president is the main focal point through which new foreign policy issues enter the US system (Wood & Peake, 1998: 173). Presidential power is significantly augmented by the ability to influence the political agenda. However, we know relatively little about the factors leading presidents to pursue particular issues over others, including sources of presidential foreign policy emphases. Andrade and Young (1996) aver that a number of different contextual factors, including approval, presidential influence in Congress and international events, affect presidential emphasis on foreign policy. In addition, we can note the recent influence of the RR in agenda setting in foreign policy. That is, the RR has been able to influence presidential thinking during the period of Bush’s leadership through its ability to set or encourage certain domestic and foreign policy agendas.

Agenda setting has been developed, expanded and employed in numerous studies as an analytical tool that affords an understanding not only of how our political reality is formulated but also of how ‘realities’ can be manufactured (Matsaganis & Payne, 2005) Some influential members of the RR have shown themselves capable of agenda setting in relation both to domestic and foreign policy by virtue of their access to the media, the president and his close advisors. Such figures include Gary Bauer, Republican presidential contender in 2000 and head of the advocacy group
American Values; the late Jerry Falwell (d 15 May 2007), prominent Southern Baptist and televangelist; Ralph Reed, former executive director of the Christian Coalition and candidate in 2006 for the Lieutenant Governorship of Georgia; Pat Robertson, former Republican presidential candidate and televangelist; Dick Armey, former Republican congressman and co-chair of Freedom Works; and Tom Delay, a prominent member of the Republican Party (Bumiller, 2003; Lobe, 2002; Robertson, 2002; Wessner, 2003). Many of these men have both a high media profile and close personal relationships either with President George Bush himself or with his key confidantes, including John Bolton, Robert Bartley, William Bennett, Jeane Kirkpatrick and George Will (Walt & Mearsheimer, 2006: 6; Mazarr, 2003; Bacevich & Prodromou, 2004). Some individuals maintained links to both groups, notably Michael Gerson, who resigned in June 2006 as a key Bush policy adviser and speechwriter (Gerson coined the phrase ‘axis of evil’). Gerson represented not only ‘a member of an evangelical Episcopal church in suburban Virginia’, but also a driving force behind Bush’s ‘emphasis on a global spread of what the president sees as God-given rights’ (LaFranchi, 2006). In short, Bush’s biographer, David Frum, declares that a ‘culture of modern Evangelicalism’ is the ‘predominant creed’ in White House policy making, its Executive branch Bible studies, and the president’s oft-noted time spent in prayer (Editorial Board, 2003: 8). In sum, the importance of conservative evangelical Christians in foreign policy agenda setting is reflected in a dual ability both to access and influence key foreign policy decision makers and to help set agendas via high-profile media positions.

The agenda the RR promoted within the White House was formed by what Anatol Lieven sees as five key developments. The first was the narrowing of Christian beliefs to those espoused in selected biblical texts, with little attention to the breadth of Christian teachings contained there. The second and third key developments were the expansion of the perception that globalisation threatened Christian values along with the desire to resist external influences. The fourth focused on returning to a golden age. The last came when the RR decided to use all available means to achieve successful policy outcomes in crucially important areas (Lieven, 2004).

September 11 thoroughly blurred the line between domestic and foreign policy issues, with many in the RR interpreting the attacks as ‘an apocalyptic contest between good and evil’, an interpretation shared by at least some secular neoconservatives in Bush’s circle (Halper & Clarke, 2004: 196). Their alliance found focus in a key foreign policy goal to spread religious freedom to the communist and Muslim worlds. More generally, both groups—religious and secular—shared common ground and beliefs, and the alliance between them deepened following 9/11 (Oldfield, 2004).

The ‘evangelised’ foreign policy focused squarely on human rights issues (LaFranchi, 2006), in relation to the following:

- The International Religious Freedom Act (1998): by establishing an office and an annual ‘international religious freedom’ report that grades countries on their religious rights, this law made freedom of religion and
conscience a ‘core objective’ of US foreign policy. It was lobbied for by ‘a coalition of conservative Christians, Jews, Catholics, mainline Protestants, Tibetan Buddhists and others’ (Page, 2005).

- The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000): the aim was to remove international crime syndicates that dispatch children and women from the developing world into prostitution and sweatshops.

- The Sudan Peace Act (2002): conservative evangelicals promoted this law, outraged by the government of Sudan’s attacks on Christians and animists. The law and its accompanying sanctions were influential in helping create the road map for Sudan’s 2003 ceasefire and the peace treaty in 2004.

- The North Korea Human Rights Act (2004): conservative Christians and Korean Americans lobbied for this bill. The aim was not only to focus US attempts to help North Korean defectors, but also to focus attention on the country’s egregious human rights violations and nuclear weapons programme.

- The Bush administration’s continuing focus both on AIDS in Africa and in attacks on international family planning activities also demonstrate the influence of conservative evangelical Christians (MacAskill, 2006)

It is important to note, however, that the secondary literature is not clear about the extent to which idealism or realism motivates conservative evangelicals. The extent to which the Bush administration adopted Wilsonian ideals in its foreign policy goals is also unclear. Not only in relation to foreign policy but also more generally, such religious actors’ influence is worthy of more attention and further scrutiny.

It is less controversial to note that, since the mid-1990s, conservative evangelicals have been the most important influence in a new, highly significant, human rights movement. This movement helped create ‘a new architecture for human rights in American foreign policy’, developed under the auspices of both Clinton and Bush. As Allen Hertzke notes:

> Without a determined constituency pressuring for engagement in international affairs, it would be likely that—given the difficulties in Iraq—you would have had the administration hunkering down a bit, and the American people with them… But instead, you have these substantial forces pushing on human rights causes and demanding intervention (Hertzke, cited in Page, 2005).

This suggests that religious soft power was instrumental in helping broaden the foreign policy agenda to include international human rights issues. To achieve influence it was necessary to develop broad alliances with both religious (the US Jewish community and mainline Christian organisations) and secular (student bodies on college campuses and traditional secular human rights organisations) entities (Green et al., 2003). This move by the RR reflects a change in its activism: the RR leveraged its increased lobbying power to mobilise support for an international agenda.
[In] just a few years, conservative Christian churches and organizations have broadened their political activism from a near-exclusive domestic focus to an emphasis on foreign issues... Even as many in Washington trumpet the return of realism to US foreign policy and the decline of the neo-conservative hawks, the staying power of the evangelicals is likely to blunt what might otherwise have been a steep decline in Wilsonian ideals. (LaFranchi, 2006)

In conclusion, human rights-focused foreign policy under Reagan, Clinton and Bush reflects religious soft power. The RR has long believed that the USA is involved in a continuing international struggle between ‘good’ and ‘evil’. While in the 1980s this struggle faced a ‘secular’ evil (the USSR), in the 1990s and early 2000s the struggle has faced human rights denials and Islamic terrorism. Successive US presidents needed to exhibit a high level of moral courage and character, both core ‘American values’ essential to speak out and act in defence of the claims of ‘good’ over ‘evil’ (Green et al, 2003).

As noted earlier, the strength of soft power lies in its ability to co-opt people, not in the ability to coerce others into doing what you want them to do. If you get others to do your bidding, then the resultant process achieves objectives more easily than relying on sticks or carrots. President Bush wears his religious credentials on his sleeve. When Bush waxes lyrically about how the USA ‘won’ the Cold War and how the ‘war on terror’ would be won in the future, he focuses upon what he regards as two of the USA’s key virtues: moral courage and character. For Bush the country’s commitment to Christian values explicitly generates these virtues. For example, on a visit to Warsaw in May 2001 Bush claimed that ‘the iron purpose and moral vision of a single man: Pope John Paul II’ brought communism to its knees (Remarks by the President in Address to Faculty and Students of Warsaw University, 2001). A year later, in Prague, Bush stated that ‘in Central and Eastern Europe the courage and moral vision of prisoners and exiles and priests and playwrights caused tyrants to fall’ (‘President Bush previews historic NATO summit in Prague’, 2002). Such claims provide a clear religious focus in current US foreign policy that seeks to establish ‘freedom and democracy’ in Afghanistan, Iraq, North Korea and Sudan. Bush does not necessarily privilege religious over secular values, but it is plausible to suggest that the soft power of the RR—sometimes in tandem with other religious entities—significantly influences current US foreign policy.

India

India is widely seen as both an emerging power and as a ‘natural ally’ of the USA. Empathy between governments of the two countries appears to have strong strategic underpinnings, with both believing they face common or similar security threats: a dynamic China and ‘Islamic terrorism’. There is also India’s growing attractiveness as an economic and technology partner, the Indian American lobby, and shared, longstanding democratic traditions. Yet this foreign policy focus is not the only one seeking prominence. There is also the agenda preferred by the country’s powerful Hindutva (‘Hindu-ness’).
movement, which sees the issues of the ‘war on terror’, Pakistan and Kashmir as central (Bidwai, 2003).

Following independence from British colonial rule in 1947, secular Congress Party governments ruled India until 1975. India’s foreign policy developed according to two core values: non-alignment and ‘third worldism’. After the decline of Congress Party (CP) rule, Indian politics experienced a period of flux as no one party dominated the political scene. Eventually, at the end of the 1980s, a new hegemon emerged: the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), motivated by Hindutva, an amalgam of nationalist and religious concerns. This was a time of growing religious tensions, the result of political, psychological, socioeconomic, cultural and modernisation issues (Copley, 1993; Juergensmeyer, 1993; Chiriyankandath, 1994).

India under BJP rule demonstrated both the possibilities and limitations of using religious soft power as an analytical variable in relation to governmental policies, including foreign policy. While many continuities characterised BJP foreign policy in contrast to external relations under CP rule, during BJP’s rule Hindutva concerns became more prominent both at home and in relation to foreign policy (Chiriyankandath, 2006). Over time Hindutva increased in significance in India, finding its chief political expression in the BJP. The BJP was and is closely linked with a variety of organisations and movements that promote Hindutva, collectively known as the Sangh Parivar (‘family of associations’). These organisations include the Rashtriya Swayamsevak (RSS), the Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). All these associations champion the values of Hindutva in three key policy areas: Pakistan, Kashmir and the post-9/11 ‘war on terror’.

Hindutva’s domestic and foreign policies embody the concept’s rise to prominence. At home, Hindu nationalists regarded Christianity and Islam as ‘foreign’ religions and serious social threats to the country’s Hindu culture. Under the BJP government (1996–2004) the party attempted to restrict minority religious groups’ international contacts and also to limit their right to build places of worship (Chiriyankandath, 2006). The BJP government also passed anti-conversion laws; changed laws governing marriages, adoptions and inheritance; and practised legal discrimination against Christian and Muslim Dalits (the so-called ‘Untouchables’), but not against those who classified themselves as Hindus. As Marshall comments, ‘With BJP support, laws were adopted in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat states restricting the ability of Hindus to change their religion, and proposals for national restrictions’ were made (Marshall, 2004).

During the time of the BJP ascendancy, inter-communal relations between Hindus and Muslims worsened. Specific incidents included the destruction of a historic mosque at Ayodhya in December 1992 by Hindu extremists. Widespread communal riots followed with huge loss of human life and destruction of property. A decade later, in February 2002, Muslims in Gujarat experienced serious violence when as many as 2000 were massacred after some Muslims reportedly set fire to a train carrying Hindu nationalists, killing several dozen people. Many Muslim victims were burned alive or dismembered while police and BJP state government authorities allegedly...
stood by or even joined in the violence (Marshall, 2004). According to Amnesty International, Hindu mobs had lists of homes and businesses owned by Muslims that could only have come from government sources, while after the events state BJP officials allegedly impeded the investigation of the violence (Amnesty International, 2003).

Following the violence Bal Thackeray, leader of the Shiv Sena, a Hindu extremist political party based in Mumbai and allied to the BJP, stated that, ‘Muslims are cancer to this country . . . Cancer is an incurable disease. Its only cure is operation. O Hindus, take weapons in your hands and remove this cancer from the roots’ (quoted in MacFarquhar, 2003: 51). Also referring to Muslims, Gujarat’s Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, a BJP member, called upon his supporters to ‘teach a lesson’ to those who ‘believe in multiplying the population’. Some Sangh Parivar officials explicitly threatened India’s Muslims. VHP International President Ashok Singhal described the Gujarat carnage as a ‘successful experiment’, and warned that it would be repeated all over India. Following a December 2002 BJP election victory in Gujarat, VHP General Secretary Pravin Togadia declared:

All Hindutva opponents will get the death sentence, and we will leave this to the people to carry out. The process of forming a Hindu rule in the country has begun with Gujarat, and VHP will take the Gujarat experiment to every nook and corner of the country. (Vyas 2002)

Hindu extremists also targeted Christians. They were responsible for violent attacks in the late 1990s on Christian minorities in various states, including Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. The BBC reported that:

India’s Home Ministry (internal security) and its National Commission for Minorities officially list over a hundred religiously motivated attacks against Christians per year, but the real number is certainly higher, as Indian journalists estimate that only some ten percent of incidents are ever reported. These attacks include murders of missionaries and priests, sexual assault on nuns, ransacking of churches, convents, and other Christian institutions, desecration of cemeteries, and Bible burnings. (BBC, 1998)

Such examples of Hindu extremism were often said to be supported by ‘allies in the Indian government, which until mid-2004 was led by the BJP’. As a result, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom proposed in 2004 that the State Department’s official shortlist of the worst religious persecutors include India for its ‘egregious, systematic, and ongoing’ violations of religious rights. In addition, the late Pope John Paul II described the persecution of Christians in India as ‘unjust’ and said they prohibited ‘free exercise of the natural right to religious freedom’ (Marshall, 2004).

The recent prominence of Hindu nationalism within India also affected foreign policy. Following independence in 1947 India’s foreign policy focused upon non-alignment while seeking to project itself as a champion of the world’s poor and of ‘third worldism’. Reflecting such concerns, during CP rule Indian foreign policy sought the following: dialogue with Pakistan;
expansion of trade and investment relations with China; strengthening of ties with Russia, Japan, Western Europe and the USA; and attempts to create the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (Katalya, 2004).

Over time institutional connections between public opinion and foreign policy were often tenuous. As in the USA and many other established democracies, international issues receive considerable attention in the media and in academic circles, although the extent to which such views affect government foreign policy making is not necessarily clear. In India interest groups concerned with international relations exist both within and without parliament, but they are said to be less organised and articulate than in many other democracies, including the USA. In India they include: the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce International; various religious groups, both Hindu and others; and various friendship or cultural societies promoting closer ties with specific countries (Panda, 2003).

During BJP rule, various Hindutva organisations, notably the RSS, were able to emphasise their foreign policy preferences, both through the media and by developing close links with key foreign policy makers (Chiriyankandath, 2004). This reflected the growing political stature of both Hindutva and the BJP, as well as the background circumstances provided by the end of the Cold War, the deepening of globalisation and, after 9/11, the ‘war on terror’. After this shift, BJP foreign policy sought to build closer relations with the USA and Israel on the basis of a shared ‘Islamophobia’ and anti-Arabism, to isolate Pakistan internationally and to develop a more aggressive and dynamic Indian nationalism (Bidwai, 2003).

It is not clear, however, whether BJP foreign policy goals focused on values or instead on specific ‘objective’ goals that favoured Indian national interests. This suggests a future opportunity to examine the rhetoric of BJP leaders in different settings. For example, future research could compare memoranda for internal and external consumption, and could explore the validity of generalisations about religious motivation based on oratory designed for particular audiences. However, the ability of Hindutva proponents to get the ear of decision makers was made possible because the latter during BJP rule broadly shared the former’s values, norms and beliefs. During the BJP’s period in office governmental evidence suggests that Hindutva views did indeed influence foreign policy makers in relation to Pakistan, Kashmir terrorism and nuclear weapons.

BJP foreign policy exhibited a more abrasive stance towards India’s Muslim minority as well as towards Muslim Pakistan. First, India’s government claimed that its Pakistan counterpart represented the main sponsor of ‘anti-Indian’, Muslim terror groups fighting to wrest Muslim-majority Kashmir from Indian control. Second, the BJP government openly ‘criticized non-alignment and advocated a more vigorous use of India’s power to defend national interests from erosion at the hands of Pakistan and China’. Third, it favoured nuclear weapons acquisition in the face of the Pakistan threat (Library of Congress, 1995). Fourth, the BJP government sought to build what it called an ‘Axis of virtue’ against ‘global terrorism’ that would link India, the USA and Israel (Bidwai, 2003).
India’s then National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra advanced the ‘Axis of virtue’ proposal on 8 May 2003 in Washington. Addressing the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and a number of US Congressmen and women, Mishra wanted an ‘alliance of free societies involved in combating’ the scourge of terrorism. Apart from the fact that the USA, Israel and India were all ‘advanced democracies’, each had also ‘been a significant target of terrorism. They have to jointly face the same ugly face of modern-day terrorism’. The aim of the ‘Axis of virtue’ would be to be to ‘take on international terrorism in a holistic and focused manner . . . to ensure that the global campaign . . . is pursued to its logical conclusion, and does not run out of steam because of other preoccupations’ (Mishra, cited in Embassy of India, 2003).

A month later in Washington Lal Krishna Advani, then India’s deputy prime minister, also spoke in glowing terms about the ‘Axis of virtue’ proposal. Emphasising democratic ‘similarities’ between India and the USA, although not making clear the composition of these similarities or the extent of soft power’s involvement, he praised the relationship developing between India and the USA. Obliquely referring to Pakistan, he stated that this relationship did not constitute ‘an alliance of convenience. It is a principled relationship’ (Advani, cited in Bidwai, 2003). Although the Indian ‘Axis of virtue’ statements do not necessarily imply that soft power featured as the key idea in foreign policy makers’ minds, arguably this represented an area where soft and hard power calculations merged. More research is needed to ascertain what the balance of influences was.

According to Praful Bidwai, India’s closer relationship with Israel reflected the BJP’s ideology [that] admires people like [Ariel] Sharon for their machismo and ferocious jingoism. It sees Hindus and Jews (plus Christians) as “strategic allies” against Islam and Confucianism . . . [T]his “clash-of-civilisations” idea has many takers on India’s Hindu Right’ (Bidwai, 2003). But the BJP government lost power before it successfully cemented its new triangular relationship with the USA and Israel.

In conclusion, India’s foreign policy under the BJP reflected both the influence of Hindutva as well as a move away from core Indian foreign policy principles. The extent to which this reflected the soft power of Hindutva is an important issue that requires further research.

Iran

The overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979 was both significant and unexpected for the same reason: the significant role of Islam in the Shah’s downfall and in Iran’s revolution. Unlike earlier revolutions in Muslim majority countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Libya, Iran’s revolution did not represent a secular leftist revolution from above, but rather a populist uprising from below that ultimately led to an Islamic theocracy. The Iranian revolution became the first modern revolution with an entirely religious component. This religiosity was expressed throughout its dominant ideology, forms of organisation, leading personnel and proclaimed goals. The Koran
and the *Sunnah* (the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, comprising what he said, did and of what he approved) influenced and shaped the revolution’s guiding principles. While economic and political problems played a major part in the growth of the anti-Shah movement, religious leaders’ overall goal focused on creating an Islamic state and publicly rejecting ‘Western’ liberal democracy.

Religious figures within the government lost ground following the June 1989 death of Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, the revolution’s leader. Their loss of influence seemed to persist when a 1997 landslide electoral victory elected Mohammad Khatami, a self-proclaimed reformer. Supporting an initiative known as the ‘dialogue of civilisations’ between Iran and the West, Khatami was caught between two forces: those in government who wanted increased social and political liberalisation, and those religious figures in the regime who did not. This quickly resulted in a stalemate between reformers and conservatives. 8

According to Afrasiabi and Maleki, ‘since the inception of the Islamic Republic in 1979, Iranian foreign policy has extend from of (sic) two concurrent sources, namely, a perpetually turbulent regional environment, and the exigencies of a faction-ridden republican, theocratic polity with its own unique system of checks and balances and complex decision-making’ (Afrasiabi & Maleki, 2003: 255).

Iran’s foreign policy is officially formulated by the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), headed in 2007 by Ali Larijani. Larijani is close to Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The SNSC is staffed by both secular and religious figures. On the secular side are senior officials from the ministries of foreign affairs, intelligence and the interior, as well as high-ranking military figures. On the religious side the Revolutionary Guards, Iran’s main security body formed following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, are notable. In 2007 the Revolutionary Guards were said to be training, funding and equipping Shiite militias in southern Iraq (Beehner, 2006; Tisdall, 2007). Other bodies with an influence on Iran’s foreign policy include the country’s parliament, the Majlis; the Guardian Council—an influential 12-member body of six clerics and six conservative jurists picked by the Supreme Leader; and the Expediency Council, which acts as interlocutor between the Majlis and the Guardian Council (Afrasiabi & Maleki 2003).

Following the presidential replacement of Khatami by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in July 2005 Iran’s foreign policy centred on three main issues: 1) Iran’s interests in Iraq; 2) relations with the Muslim world; and 3) interaction with the USA and Europe, especially in relation to Iran’s civil nuclear power programme (Barnes & Bigham, 2006: 33).

What was the role of religious soft power in relation to these issues? Ahmadinejad brought a new focus on religious concerns into decision making following his accession to the presidency. Influential constituencies who shared his views—including religious leaders and representatives of organisations such as the Revolutionary Guard—found it relatively easy to gain access to the president and his key advisors compared to when President Khatami was in power (Beehner, 2006; GlobalSecurity.Org, 2006). Note,
however, that, even though Iran may not be a ‘standard’ democracy of the kind routinely found in many Western countries, it is by no means a closed society with little or no ability for citizens to discuss matters of state. Foreign policy debates fill the Iranian press and there are frequent deliberations on this topic in the Majlis (Sarioghalam, 2001). According to Kaveh Afrasiabi and Abbas Maleki, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs figures as the main promoter of Iran’s secular state interests while ‘religious hardliners in Iran’ represent key advocates of Islamic causes and expressions of Muslim solidarity with co-religionists beyond Iran’s borders. Such hardliners frequently attack Foreign Ministry policies, especially in the pages of the daily newspaper Jomhuri-ye Islami (Afrasiabi & Maleki, 2003).

Following Ahmadinejad’s election, Khatami publicly criticised what he called ‘the “powerful organization” behind the “shallow-thinking traditionalists with their Stone-Age backwardness” currently running the country’ (Asian Times, 2005). Khatami here refers to three prominent sets of Ahmadinejad supporters: 1) the Hojjatieh, a radically anti-Baha’i and anti-Sunni semi-clandestine society, with a growing presence ‘in the corridors of power in Tehran’; 2) the Revolutionary Guard, including a two-million strong Islamic militia, the Basijis; and 3) ‘messianic fundamentalists inspired by the teachings’ of a Shi’ite cleric, Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi, a key Ahmadinejad supporter and the chief ideologue of Hojjatieh (Barnes & Bigham, 2006: 2; McFaul & Milani, 2006). Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, a deeply conservative cleric with close ties to the Haqqani theological school in Qom, allegedly issued a fatwa urging all members of the Basijis to vote for Ahmadinejad in the 2005 presidential elections (The Iranian, 2005). In the other camp were both Iran’s ‘embattled democratic movement’ and ‘an array of forces that had benefited from the status quo before Ahmadinejad came to power, including Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, head of the Expediency Council and former president’ (McFaul & Milani, 2006). This implies that Rafsanjani opposed Ahmadinejad’s policy direction and focus, although the secondary literature examined for this article does not make clear the extent to which he deliberately uses religion and in what respects religion shapes his views.

After the revolution Iran’s foreign policy was ‘shaped, not mainly by international forces, but by a series of intense postrevolutionary debates inside Iran regarding religion, ideology and the necessity of engagement with the West and specifically the United States’ (Sarioghalam, 2001: 1; see also Sohrabi, 2006). When Iran’s material interests conflicted with proclaimed commitments to ‘Islamic solidarity’ and ‘Islamic revolution’, under both Rafsanjani and Khatami preference would normally be given to security and economic considerations. In addition, when appropriate, Iran would employ religion as part of a strategy to contend with neighbouring regimes or try to force policy changes. For example, Iran’s government typically promotes Islamic radicals and anti-regime movements when official relations with a neighbouring Muslim country are poor—for example, in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan—although it normally does not work to undermine secular Muslim regimes when relations with Tehran are good, such as with Turkmenistan (Tisdall, 2006).
Second, Ahmadinejad’s accession to power led to a significant change in the power balance in Iran. Supportive organisations and individuals, including the Basijis, Hojjatieh and Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, constituted a source of religious soft power with influence on foreign policy thanks to their relations with Ahmadinejad and his key advisers (The Iranian, 2005). This requires analysis in terms of both the Iraq conflict and Iran’s nuclear programme.

In relation to Iraq it is noteworthy that Iran is 90% Shi’ite and Iraq is 60%–65% Sunni. One-third of Iraqis are Sunnis, including both Kurds and Arabs. Religious ties between Shi’ites in Iraq and Iran galvanised Iran’s bid for more influence in the former following the fall of Saddam Hussein in March 2003, encouraged by, among others, Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi (Kemp, 2005). Iran actively supported the US position advocating elections in Iraq. It hoped to see a Shi’ite-dominated government in power so that it could create strong relations with a new ruling coalition based on shared religious affiliation.

This strategy differed from that adopted by Iran immediately after the 1979 revolution. Then the government focused efforts on hard power strategies, for example by seeking to export the revolution via ‘funding of Shi’ite resistance groups’ (Kemp, 2005: 6). However, use of Iran’s soft power to appeal to co-religionists in Iraq collides with Saudi Arabia’s anxious bid to extend its influence. While Iran offers a better organised military capability in Iraq, Saudi Arabia seeks to use its influence among Sunnis. When competing with Iran, Saudi Arabia uses both hard and soft power to attain its goals. It tries both financial largesse and the exploitation of political and religious dissatisfaction among Iran’s Sunni population. This population remains disaffected by under-representation in the parliament, army and civil service. In addition, in 2005–06 Iran’s mainly Sunni Kurds rioted in the north, while the ethnic Arab south also experienced political unrest and a bombing campaign (Barnes & Bigham, 2006). In sum, competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia entails multiple foci, including Iraq: both sides want to influence outcomes via appeals to co-religionists through the use of religious soft power.

Iran currently fights in Iraq to win the hearts and minds of ordinary Iraqis, the majority of whom are Shi’ites. While Iran maintains a better intelligence presence in the country, Saudis account for the majority of suicide bombers active in Iraq. Former Central Intelligence Agency agent, Robert Baer (Baer, 2005), quoted an unnamed senior Syrian official who claimed that Saudis constituted over 80% of 1200 suspected suicide bombers arrested by the Syrian government in 2003–05. Baer also quoted an Iranian, Grand Ayatollah Saanei, who described the Saudi Wahhabi (Sunni) suicide bombers as ‘wolves without pity’. Iran would ‘sooner rather than later . . . have to put them down’.

Iran will probably continue to promote democratic structures and processes in Iraq as a strategy aiming both to help consolidate a strong Iranian and Shi’ite voice in Iraq’s government, and to help Iran to build influence. Kemp notes that ‘Iran’s capacity, capability, and will to influence events in Iraq are high in terms of both hard power and soft power’ (Kemp, 2005: 7). According to Hamidreza Taraghi, head of Iran’s conservative
Islamic Coalition Society, ‘What Ahmadinejad believes is that we have to create a model state based on... Islamic democracy—to be given to the world... [The] government accepts this role for themselves’ (Taraghi, cited in Peterson, 2005).

In sum, Iran pragmatically uses all available sources of power at its disposal in Iraq—both soft and hard power—in order to secure its crucial foreign policy objective: namely, a compliant and supportive Iraq. The development of religious networks involving Shias in both countries greatly improves the likelihood of achieving this objective.

Is Iran’s Iraq policy unusual? Or does this policy represent what any state, secular or religious, would do when a near neighbour and rival undergoes considerable political instability? It is possible that Iran’s efforts to encourage closer ties with Shi’ites in Iraq is not particularly ‘religious’, as it also makes sense from a secular and strategic point of view. However, if soft power options based on shared religious affinity exist, then the use of such options allows for maximum policy gains.

A second key foreign policy issue is Iran’s nuclear programme, which entails a clear religious component. The USA tried to isolate Iran by branding it a rogue state. US officials describe Iran’s president as a threat to world peace, asserting that he faces a domestic popular insurrection (MacAskill & Tisdall, 2006). At this time, mid-2006, Ahmadinejad actually enjoyed a 70% approval rating at home, as well as growing support abroad, both in Muslim countries (including Indonesia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Syria) and in non-Muslim countries, such as China (Tisdall, 2006). This is likely to be both a product of religious attraction and secular interests, depending on the context.

Many argue that a religious component underpins Iran’s nuclear programme, which allegedly grows out of an apocalyptic vision envisaging widespread devastation or ultimate doom. Some argue that Ahmadinejad and several religious figures believe that Shi’ite Islam’s long-hidden 12th Imam, or Mahdi, will soon emerge—perhaps at the mosque of Jamkaran—to inaugurate the end of the world. Ahmadinejad spoke of an aura that he believed wreathed him during his controversial UN speech in September 2005: ‘O mighty Lord, I pray to you to hasten the emergence of your last repository, the promised one, that perfect and pure human being, the one that will fill this world with justice and peace’ (Peterson, 2005).

State funds amounting to US$20 million were provided to prepare the shrine. Ahmadinejad is said to have told his cabinet that he expects the Mahdi to arrive within the next two years, that is, by mid-2008. According to Diehl, a cleric, Mehdi Karrubi, claimed that Ahmadinejad ‘ordered that his government’s platform be deposited in a well at Jamkaran where the faithful leave messages for the hidden imam’ (Diehl, 2006).

These peculiarities in Iran’s foreign policy invite the conclusion that religious soft power is one factor that encourages President Ahmadinejad to pursue a determined line on Iran’s nuclear programme, despite the pressure from the USA and others to desist. Scott Peterson (2005) notes that ‘from redressing the gulf’ between rich and poor in Iran, to challenging the
United States and Israel and enhancing Iran’s power with nuclear programmes, every issue is designed to lay the foundation for the Mahdi’s return’. In addition, there are also traditional hard power concerns served by current foreign policy strategy.

**Conclusion**

This article has examined whether Joseph Nye’s concept of soft power has explanatory power beyond certain secular outcomes that occur in international relations, and could also cover the power dynamics created by religious actors in relation to foreign policy agenda setting and decision making in the USA, India and Iran. It considers the notion that some religious actors influence state foreign policy by encouraging policy makers to take into account religious beliefs, norms and values. The article seeks to relate the case studies—USA, Iran and India—to the wider literature on foreign policy analysis through an analysis of who influences foreign policy in what manner and with what results. While the article has only made tentative first steps in this regard, future research might usefully focus on the insights of Katzenstein (1996) and Haas (2001). For Haas epistemic communities serve as effective conduits to policy makers because, he claims, their knowledge is ‘politically untainted, and thus more likely to work’ (2001: 11580). Further research could uncover whether selected religious actors act as effective epistemic communities in the realm of foreign policy, although Katzenstein’s discussion of culture’s influence already delivers new insights.

The article suggested that religious actors must ‘get the ear’ of key policy makers to have any influence; it helps if they share religious convictions and beliefs. Two further factors are also important: first, there must be a key foreign policy maker or small group of them to focus attention on; and, second, preferred foreign policy options of actors seeking to wield religious soft power must find influential media outlets. Together or separately these aspects can encourage the ability of religious soft power to help set foreign policy agendas and to influence foreign policy decision making. On the other hand, none of the case studies examined in this article offered unequivocal evidence of the power of religious soft power over other forms of influence. Instead, what they do show is that religious soft power is most likely to be influential when working with complementary forms of hard power. We saw this in relation to the USA in the context of Iraq, where religious soft power sought increased democracy and human rights while hard power advocates—the neoconservatives—were more concerned with the USA’s strategic position; yet both were complementary and subsequently influential in encouraging key foreign policy players—especially the president—to make certain foreign policy choices. Regarding India religious soft power, conceptualised here as Hindutva, dovetailed with secular nationalist hard power concerns in relation to various key foreign policy contexts: the post-9/11 ‘war on terror’, the regional rivalry with Pakistan and the still unresolved issue of the status of disputed Kashmir. Finally, in relation to Iran, concerns of both religious soft power actors and advocates of secular hard power...
coalesced over the issue of how to extend Iran’s influence in Iraq in the context of US and Saudi involvement. Advocates of both secular hard power and religious soft power in Iran concurred that the foreign policy interests of both parties would best be served by adopting a dynamic and proactive policy that would seek to advance Iran’s multifaceted interests in Iraq.

Notes
1 Defining religion is problematic. Listing 17 different definitions, Martin E Marty concludes that ‘scholars will never agree on the definition of religion’. He does, however, note five phenomena that ‘help describe what we’re talking about’. Religion focuses our ‘ultimate concern’, builds community, appeals to myth and symbol, is enforced through rites and ceremonies, and demands certain behaviour from its adherents (Marty, 2000: 11 – 14). This suggests approaching the concept of religion as 1) a body of ideas and outlooks, such as theology and ethical code; 2) a type of formal organisation, such as, an ecclesiastical ‘church’, and 3) a social group, such as faith-based organisations. Religion affects the world in two basic ways: by what it says and what it does. The former relates to doctrine or theology, while the latter relates to religion’s importance as a social phenomenon and mark of identity, which manifests in various modes of institutionalisation.

2 In Iran a ‘messianic fundamentalist’ is a person with messianic or apocalyptic dreams of political domination by their membership. Some contend that this religious messianism encourages Iran’s president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to proceed in his politics with a dangerous sense of divine mission (La Guardia, 2006).

3 Founded in 2004, Freedom Works represents a merger between Citizens for a Sound Economy and Empower America.

4 Note that these claims are drawn from the secondary literature. The influence of such religious actors is a subject that both draws attention and merits further scrutiny.

5 Pat Robertson claimed that Islam ‘is not a peaceful religion’ (in Halper & Clarke, 2004: 196).

6 Advani was President of the BJP until the end of 2005. At the time of writing he is leader of the opposition in the Indian parliament, the Lok Sabha.

7 The Congress Party and allies gained the largest number of seats in parliament (216, compared with the BJP’s 186), although it did not gain enough seats to rule with an overall majority, for which 273 seats would be required.

8 While the Iranian political situation is more complicated than a simple religious or clerical conservatives versus lay reformers dichotomy, this focus is a useful heuristic device as it examines comparative soft power attributes of both constituencies.

9 The Basijis is a paramilitary force founded by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979. It supplied volunteers for shock troop units during the Iran – Iraq war (1980 – 88). The Basijis is now a branch of the Revolutionary Guard, loyal to the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

10 The Expediency Council maintains the authority to mediate disputes between parliament and the Council of Guardians. The latter comprises 12 jurists, including six appointed by the Supreme Leader. The Council of Guardians serves as an advisory body to the latter, making it one of the most powerful governing bodies in the country.

11 Key supporters of both organisations are found among revolutionary guards and other pro-regime militants, where the attraction no doubt includes both soft and hard power factors.

12 Later, however, Ahmadinejad’s popularity declined, as a result of rising inflation, high unemployment and increasing petrol costs (Tait, 2007).

13 Shi’ite tradition holds that the Jamkaran mosque was ordered to be built by the Mahdi himself.

References


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