



# Crafting Enemy

## Ideographs in Iranian Political Discourse

Alireza Azeri Matin<sup>(✉)</sup>

Faculty of Science and Arts, International University of Malaya-Wales, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
azeri\_matin@yahoo.com

**Abstract.** Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the public discourses in Iran have been flooded with a series of ideographs which were characteristically vague, and at the same time persuasive or even provocative. One of the key ideographs, particularly within the realm of political communication that saturates the Iranian mediascape, is <enemy>. As a continuously changing concept, <enemy> has often been used by Iranian authorities as a rhetorical means and political manoeuvring strategy to both influence and unite the masses against the threats from a number of imagined, ill-defined and sometimes shifting adversarial forces. As an ideographic analysis, this study attempts to trace and reflect on the emergence, modifications and implications of <enemy> at several junctures throughout the clerics' reign in Iran. As such, it briefly surveys the use and development of this ideograph in the years that followed the Islamic revolution, and later the Iran-Iraq war. In so doing, it also provides examples of the incidents when the definition of <enemy> was strategically altered to (de-)emphasize a particular entity, group or nation as hostile, threatening and treacherous. Next, the study moves on to discussing the ways in which <enemy> has been associated with other ideographs, its usage in slogans and its implications in public policy. Ultimately it is concluded that although the extensive deployment of <enemy> in public discourse has effectively secured support for the elites since Islamic Revolution, the mounting nationwide dissidence in recent years have shown signs of a mass realization about the rhetorical/political nature of this ideograph.

**Keywords:** ideograph · enemy · political discourse · ideology

## 1 Introduction

Since Islamic Revolution in 1979 the Iranian authorities have come up with a number of abstract terms that have been extensively used in political discourses in order to develop support for their political positions. Far from having a clear definition, these terms have almost always given the impression of an obvious meaning. One of the central terms which has been of an immense help to the state in establishing and maintaining its power over the nation is the word 'enemy'. Whether imagined or actual, the idea of the presence of an enemy, by and large, has a great capacity to serve two main purposes: to distract the public's attention from their democratic goals, and to unite the masses

against the threats of an adversarial force. Being persistently incorporated into political discourse for more than four decades, 'enemy' has inevitably become a commonplace expression among the public. It has also been effortlessly functioning in society without raising much questions about who or what the 'enemy' is, as if the term is perfectly understood by both the interlocutor and the audiences. Indeed, this is the result of a long-standing trend within the political communication context and among the authorities' spokespersons who aspire to appeal to a wider range of Iranian audiences, with an ultimate goal of supporting the interests of the elites and ruling clerics of Iran. As such, these officials often rely on rhetorical ambiguity strategy for persuading the public "to interpret the text as being in accord with their own values, regardless of the rhetor's own values" [1, p. 455]. Such vagueness in meaning can appeal to heterogeneous audiences, since it allows polysemic interpretations of the term. This strategic ambiguity, therefore, enables a diverse member of the audience to make their own meanings according to their orientations and ideologies; each group interpret the term in line with their own specific beliefs and ideas, yet they all subscribe to it precisely because the ambiguity of the term simply accommodates divergent readings [2].

In consequence, then, people of Iran have come to understand the idea of 'enemy' in its abstract form without realizing the exact nature or source of such presumable threat. This, in turn, has given the authorities the opportunity to exploit the term (along with other terms) at their disposal and at different junctures, particularly when bringing the public attention to an immediate threat were perceived to be necessary. Such purposeful ambiguity, on the one hand, has long created the illusion of a constant and often imminent threat to the safety and security of the nation. On the other hand, it has enabled the Islamic regime to define or foreground one (or more) specific political entity as 'enemy', at will, depending on Iran's foreign policy and other political forces at work at each critical point in time. Whereas during wartime (1980–1988) enemy was commonly understood as Iraq and its allies at the time, the creation of an imagined enemy during peace time when the nation is no longer engaged in any apparent war raises serious questions about manipulative nature of this particular sort of propaganda.

In response to this, and as an ideological criticism, this study considers 'enemy' to be an ideograph, an abstract and cultural-specific term that gains meaning over time, and summarizes the orientation or viewpoint of an ideology. In early 1980s, McGee [3] pointed to the omnipresence of ideographs in political discourse and argued that they have the power to inspire and unite populations. He noted that ideographs are able to appeal to pathos without sending a specific message; audiences are not usually affected by the definition of an ideograph, but by how it makes them feel. That is to say, by having several connotations attached to them, the ideographs are able to impart complex ideas and increase the effectiveness of the rhetoricians' pathos.

According to McGee there are four characteristics for a term (in this case 'enemy') to be qualified as an ideograph: 1) <enemy> is an ordinary language that is widely used in political discourse with a popular history, appearing in Iranian films, stories, song, and so on. 2) <enemy> is a high-order abstract form that represents the determination of authorities in reaching a specific but ill-defined normative objective. 3) <enemy> permits the authorities the use of power and excuse their wrongdoings. 4) <enemy> is

culture bound, and each member of the culture who has lived after Islamic Revolution is familiar with the vocabulary associated with it.

### 1.1 Purpose of the Study

Following McGee's view, and by performing an ideographic analysis on <enemy>, the present study attempts to garner an understanding of the significance of the term, as well as the ideas and ideals associated with it which have been influencing the Iranian society throughout the post-revolution era. Here, the purpose is to trace and reflect on the emergence, modifications and implications of <enemy> at several junctures throughout the clerics' reign since 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran.

### 1.2 Ideograph and Social Reality

Since the late 1970s, rhetorical scholars have paid special attention to the concept of ideology and its various relations to public discourse. Although they recognized that public discourse contributes to the formation and perpetuation of ideology, they still wanted to understand the ways in which such effects are accomplished, and find a way to apply theory of rhetoric to address their concern with ideology [4]. This issue was addressed for the first time by McGee who wrote, "The political language which manifest ideology seems characterized by slogans, a vocabulary of 'ideographs' easily mistaken for the technical terminology of political philosophy" [3, p. 5]. As he explained, ideographs are ordinary words or phrases that are political in nature, therefore, they can capture, create and reinforce certain ideologies, that is to say they "exist in real discourse, functioning clearly and evidently as agents of political consciousness" [3, p.7]. He maintained that ideographs can reveal how apparently distinct and concrete cases in political discourse are linked to the more abstract forms of concepts in political ideology.

Ideographs, in this way, are type of labels that encapsulate ideology in political discourse; they sum up a particular ideology's nature and orientation. Condit and Lucaites elaborated more on McGee's idea and argued that "Ideographs represent in condensed form the normative, collective commitments of the members of a public, and they typically appear in public argumentation as the necessary motivations or justifications for action performed in the name of the public" [5, pp. xii-xiii]. Following this view, ideographs were used by many scholars as a tool to understand specific rhetorical situations and the wider historical context of the ideological formations. As value-laden linguistic units, ideographs are exceptionally meaningful to a particular group, yet, there seemed to be no easy way for defining them, whatsoever [6]. It is commonly agreed upon that only the ruling/majority class has the power to define and disseminate ideographs and subsequently reinforce a dominant ideology. In this way, ideographs function as a rhetorical device and serve as the embodiment of an ideology.

Besides having political dimension, ideographs are also culture-specific; members of the culture are accustomed to the vocabulary of ideographs, the familiarity with which is necessary for one to belong to a society. In this way, individuals are expected to recognize and understand the ideographs within a specific range of application that are thought to be ordinary and natural. This means that ideographs are "culturally biased, historically

situated collectivity” [5, p. xiii]. As a consequence of political and cultural dimensions, ideographs are indispensable discourses for social movements. As a rhetorical device, ideographs function as strategies for social control [3] or elements of persuasion [5]. In these instances, ideographs permit political struggle among competing elements and contentions between dominant and dominated groups.

In producing opposing groups, ideographs work as powerful signifiers of political ideologies, changing people into consumers of public discourses. In this regard, Charland observed that the ideographs sustain more than arguments or public claims [7]. Hence, he argued that the partialities specified by ideographs generally indicate persuasion; this is crucial for the creation of “persuasive discourse [that] requires a subject-as-audience who is already constituted with an identity and within an ideology” to withstand it [7, p. 134]. Ideographs, by their presence and implied innocence, signify an exertion of state power, thus, exertion of power and domination over the masses’ perception.

### 1.3 The Idea of Enemy and National Solidarity

National solidarity involves verbal and nonverbal symbols from sounds, objects and logos to expressions that generate sentiments of loyalty and devotion to the nation state. When these symbols represent holiness, their impacts soar to the extent that citizens volunteer to sacrifice their time, resources and even their lives. It is then reasonable to think of the symbols, key terms, mottos, or lyrics and tunes as powerful representational means in the hands of the elites to emotionally influence the masses [8].

Intertwined with these representational means, is the sense of belonging to a group that produce national solidarity. That is to say, consolidating the nation requires presenting the world outside the group as adverse and full of risks or harmful enemies, so that belonging to the group provides the members a feeling of safety, security and prosperity [9]. The sense of belonging is generated through promoting the emotions of camaraderie and friendship among people and protecting them from anxiety and meaninglessness which gives people a place in the world and a meaning to their lives. Since individuals seek collective recognition as a way to strengthen their own self-esteem, being accepted as a member provides the sense of, or gives the impression of legitimization, respect and appreciation [10]. Such belongingness in political terms and in regard to nationhood is carried out by the state through creating a single national identity, the one that brings together diverse groups across the nation. One of the chief approaches commonly adopted by the state in pursuit of a single national identity, is through the creation of common enemies. Historically, the examination of war has confirmed that external threat, be it imminent, potential or invented, is the most powerful way for generating a sense of community among the members of a group or a nation.

In brief, the creation of enemy should be sought in the idea of ‘othering’ and ‘otherness’. In discussions of identity and belonging, the ‘other’ is regarded “as a threat to one’s own cultural purity and portrayed as a ‘quasi-enemy’ against whom to construct one’s own identity” [8, p. 89]. In this regard, ‘rituals of exclusion’ is a way to identify and penalize defectors, to condemn disobedience within the group and to stigmatize the ‘others’ as enemies. Stigmatizing the ‘others’ as enemies involve associating them with negative qualities such as rebellious, unreasonable and undesired [11].

National identity has also a psychological aspect that arises from the awareness of a group formation based on the perceived closeness, uniting those who belong to the nation. This latent form of closeness can remain unnoticed or unfelt for long time, but it might suddenly appear whenever the nation faces an external or internal enemy, whether real, potential or imagined. The enemy, in this way, is seen as a risk to the lives, prosperity, tradition and culture of the people, or in some cases a threat to the nation's territory, its sovereignty or its international status. Facing a common enemy, therefore, signals high levels of unity among citizens and strengthens a sense of community; nations feel alive when there are enemies to unite against and to do battle with. Collective anxiety that comes from the presence of an enemy excites people, and the fear of being threatened generates national unity.

A difference between the actual and imagined enemy, however, is that whereas the presence of a common well-defined enemy, such as the one during wartime, brings about instant national solidarity, it takes more time and effort to create the illusion and convince people about the potential threats of an ill-defined enemy. Nevertheless, such ambiguity seems to have wider range of applications, as it provides more opportunities for the state's exploitative agendas without feeling the need to point its finger towards specific entity or group as the source of the threat.

## 2 Method

As an ideological criticism, the ultimate goal of this study is to make an understanding of the significance of the term 'enemy', as well as the ideas and ideals associated with it which have been influencing the Iranian society throughout the post-revolution era. In so doing, it performs ideographic analysis, and follows Dana L. Cloud's approach which begins by locating an ideograph, in this case <enemy>, and examining it in its historical (diachronic) context [12]. The diachronic investigation involves looking into how <enemy> has been historically developed within Iranian society as a persuasive rhetorical trope or social construct. The process will then move on to describing the contemporary tensions in using <enemy> in current (synchronic) political discourse. This phase of the analysis, as Cloud noted, involves identifying the ways in which various clusters of ideographs are discursively connected with, and shape the definition of the central ideograph [12]. Lastly, as she further put, the analysis should conclude by examining the rhetorical force of the tensions evoked in the ideograph's usage, such as its relationship with other terms and its employment in slogans and discuss the potential implications for public policy and people's material lives [12].

## 3 Analysis and Discussions

### 3.1 The Emergence and Reformulations of <enemy> in Iran

The entrance of <enemy> into public discourse in Iran can be traced back to the days after the overthrow of the Pahlavi's dynasty in late 1970s when the U.S. and its allies at the time began to suspend their relationships with Iran. The Islamic regime's seizure of power marked the beginning of a new era throughout which the nation experienced

several epoch-making historical events that largely altered the course of the country's development and destabilized its international relations. Parallel to each of these events, a series of ideographs, including <enemy> emerged and vastly popularized within authorities' speeches, publications and other popular political statements which were made merely in pursuit of persuading and convincing the masses, rather than informing them about the country's state of affairs. Perhaps the earliest use of <enemy> during the reign of the ruling clerics stems in the powerful speeches of Ayatollah Khomeini (the first Supreme Leader of Iran) after the revolution, famously calling the United States of America 'the Great Satan' [13]. One of the earliest effects of the use of this provoking ideograph was dramatically manifested in hostage crisis in Iran. In the wake of the revolution and mass uprising against the pro-American Shah of Iran, the United States became an object of compelling condemnation and the U.S. Embassy in Tehran was an accessible target [14]. Consequently, in 4th of November 1979, rebellious students seized the embassy and detained more than 50 Americans with different ranks and positions, ranging from the *Chargé d'Affaires* to the most junior personnel, holding them hostage for 444 days. Arising from such tumultuous situation, Khomeini's famous demonizing epithet 'the Great Satan' in describing the United States, became part of the Revolution's doctrine which directed Islamic regime's foreign policy up until today.

Likewise, the Islamic Revolution was a turning point in Iran's relation with Israel. During Pahlavi dynasty, and following Turkey, Iran was the second Muslim-majority nation that recognized Israel as a sovereign state. The Iran-Israel relations, however, continued to grow up until the overthrow of Shah of Iran in 1979 when Islamic regime changed its position in recognizing the legitimacy of Israel as a state and immediately started to sever all its diplomatic and commercial ties with this nation [15]. It was at this point that an open hostility began between the two nations, inscribing irreconcilability with Israel in Islamic Republic's Constitution, making it as an integral component of the theocratic regime's ideological foundation. In both political and popular discourses, Israel have commonly been referred to as Zionist regime, an antagonizing term to constantly remind people of the animosity of this nation towards Iran (Fig. 1). Such sensationalization has inevitably led to the association of Israel to the Jews which subsequently brought about a range of harming policies, views and actions against the Jewish minorities in Iran. Being one of the most discriminated religious minorities in Iran, Jews have been subjected to systematic repression over the past four decades or so, and a growing sense of anti-Semitism has resulted in the exodus of Iranian Jews [16].

With beginning of the Iran-Iraq war almost a year after revolution, <enemy> (singular form) suddenly became an unambiguous term within Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) as well as domestic press that directly referred to Iraq. During the wartime the public were kept continuously informed by daily news reports from battlefields, mostly announcing the casualties of the enemy, and the progression of the Iranian troops. At the same time, the political news which covered foreign policy and other countries' diplomatic relations concerning Iran, often employed the plural form of the term <enemy> to include those nations that backed Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war.

Among other non-Western countries which Islamic regime began to regard as hostile and therefore implicate them among the lineup of Iran's enemies, was Saudi Arabia.



**Fig. 1.** Placard cursing the USA, Israel, and England (Source: [https://cdnuploads.aa.com.tr/uploads/Contents/2019/09/13/thumbs\\_b\\_c\\_a39775492627872835c5f1d77bb22a2b.jpg](https://cdnuploads.aa.com.tr/uploads/Contents/2019/09/13/thumbs_b_c_a39775492627872835c5f1d77bb22a2b.jpg))

Perhaps one of the earliest and the most important events that sparked the Iran-Saudi tension was the ‘Mecca incident’ Saudi Arabia came to the forefront of the countries that Iran regarded as enemies. The incident took place on 31 July 1987, involving a clash between Saudi security forces and Iranian pilgrims who attended a political demonstration against the United States and Israel during Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca. Arising from escalating Shia-Sunni tensions, the event which resulted in death of more than 400 pilgrims was described as ‘riot’ by Saudis and ‘massacre’ by Iranians [17]. Although the gravity of the incident went on echoing in collective memories of Iranians for several years, the Saudi’s name was gradually consigned to oblivion, as other equally significant political events took place which added new names to the list of hostile countries, repetitively realigning the definition of <enemy>. A more recent example of a friendly Muslim nation turning into enemy, largely within political discourse, is the UAE. Right after the Abraham Accords Peace Agreement in 2020 (Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization Between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel), the UAE which for several decades had been regarded by the Iranian authorities as one of their reliable and influential allies in the region, became an untrustworthy quisling enemy overnight [18].

Although in the course of the war and its aftermaths the West was associated with imperialism, a number of specific countries appeared in or disappeared from the Islamic regime’s diplomatic lexicon as <enemy>, depending on the circumstances of the war and other cultural/political tensions. For example, when it was known that Iraqi armies used chemical weapons which were provided by German firms, Germany was foregrounded in the news, and consequently in the other public discourses in Iran as an immediate source of harm to Iran. Another incident that contributed to such discourses and further soured the Germany-Iran relations was the 1993 Mykonos Trial in Berlin. It began when the German court found a number of Iranians including an intelligence officer guilty for assassination that took place on 17 September 1992 at Mykonos Greek restaurant located on Prager Strasse in Berlin. Following the court’s rule, Iranian authorities who categorically denied their involvement in the case dismissed the ruling and regarded it as an untrue and unsubstantiated case that was politically organized to condemn Islamic regime [19]. In 1999, another incident which shook Iran-Germany diplomatic relation, involved Helmut Hofer a German businessman who had an affair with an Iranian woman



in Tehran. The incident became a major political issue when details of the account was overdramatized by religious figures and circulated in the Iranian Muslim society where the effects of such illegitimate affair was compounded by the public's general anti-West sentiments [20]. The post-war era, however, was followed by several major geopolitical shifts across the world such as the Gulf War (1990–1991), dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991), the agreements between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization known as Oslo Accords (1993) and many others, each of which had their impacts on Iran's statesmanship and foreign affairs. In this way, the changing overall political climate which followed Iran-Iraq war led to the establishment of new international relations, as new alliances were formed or some other partnerships fell apart [20]. It was in the course of these changes that, for instance, Iran called Iraq its 'Brother Nation' and very soon the relationship between these two countries began to grow to the extent Iran has become Iraq's largest trading partner, while both governments have a more or less political stance especially in respect to their policies towards the U.S. and Israel.

In tandem with Iran's Supreme Leader of the time whose decrees, based on the dynamics of international affairs, demarcate the (im-)permanent allies-enemies boundary [21], other religious and political figures also influence the degree of abstraction of <enemy>. Although these individuals' thoughts and opinions cannot deviate from those of the Supreme Leaders', in referring to 'enemy', they naturally tend to underline one entity, group or nation and de-emphasize the other. Such variations, however, are fairly expected considering they are either the result of these speakers' political orientation and social position, or even the nature of the specific speech itself. An example of this is the weekly performed Friday prayers when large crowds gather in each city and listen to their local Friday Imam's speech about current social and political affairs [22]. It is during these ceremonial events that people frequently hear the word <enemy> (or enemies) without really making out what or who it is referring to, even though some hints might be given by the Friday Imam during the speech. This is further complicated by another ritual: the intermittent interruptions of the speech by the crowd who loudly chant ideological slogans that are designed to curse U.S., Israel, and other countries or groups, depending on political climate of the day. There is even an unofficial but factual higher-up post called 'Minister of Slogans' (Fig. 2) whose job is to design and orchestrate aversive slogans depending on the country's political climate at the time, and to arouse enthusiasm among the crowd to chant loudly and tenaciously. In addition, the Friday prayers in Tehran are live broadcasted nationwide by IRIB (radio and television) whereas the outlines of the speech, especially those regarding politics, are repeated several times later in the day in news, as well as in the Saturday papers.

### 3.2 The Linkage between <enemy> and Other Revolutionary Ideographs

The ideographs (often captured in slogans) and their prevalent use throughout 1978 and 1979 were undeniably the catalyst for inciting and mobilizing the masses that eventually led to the victory of the dissident majority [23]. Likewise, in the wake of the revolution, these ideographs became significant means for reconciling minor political parties and unifying a diverse range of militant/revolutionist groups at the critical period of power takeover and government formation. One of the earliest, and perhaps





**Fig. 2.** The former Minister of Slogan, M. Mortezaifar (Source: [https://cdn.mashregnews.ir/old/files/fa/news/1394/2/21/1022938\\_376.jpg](https://cdn.mashregnews.ir/old/files/fa/news/1394/2/21/1022938_376.jpg))

the most important slogans which encapsulated three of these ideographs was “Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic” [24] (Fig. 3). Even in their abstraction forms, every one of these ideographs has been used to represent an essential aspect of the Islamic regime’s foundation. Furthermore, each ideograph functions and gains meaning through its interconnectedness with other ideographs, including <enemy>.

In this regard, “Independence” has been commonly used to emphasize Islamic Republic’s determination for ending its reliance on the global forces, especially the Western countries, a term synonymous to self-efficiency with largely economic implications. Alternatively, in political discourse “Independence” have deeper meaning, often used to refer to the imperialistic nature of both the West and the East (communism), and to suggest Iran’s cut out allegiances to these major powers, regarding them as <enemy>. This can be best captured in yet another key slogan of the revolution “Neither the East, Nor the West, [only] Islamic Republic” which reflects the Islamic regime’s conviction to be independent from both Western and Soviet domination [25].

In a similar vein, the concept of “Freedom” has been crucial constituent of the Islamic Revolution’s foundation [26]. As an ideograph <freedom> was extensively used by ayatollah Khomeini throughout his speeches recorded in cassettes in exile which was then transported to Iran to incite the masses [27]. In the aftermath of the revolution,



**Fig. 3.** “Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic” (Source: <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/FNpCPaiXMAczQYc.jpg>)

<freedom> continued to be used not only in public discourse, but also in symbolic forms. The centrality of this concept to the founders of the Islamic Republic becomes evident by looking at how quickly the authorities changed the names of some of the most iconic public places, building, stadiums, monuments and even consumer goods to “Freedom”. Indeed, the meaning of <freedom>, just like other forms of ideographs, dramatically changed since the earlier days of the revolution and throughout the course of the Islamic regime’s existence. For instance, at its earliest days, the concept was used by anti-Shah and religious leaders as a rhetorical trope for aspiring people to indicate the removal of the Pahlavi’s ideological shackles that supposedly limited the freedom of speech for decades in Iran; it was also used to explicitly mean the improvement of the economic conditions of Iranian families, especially the underprivileged majority, by providing free public services, free housing, free utilities, and so on [28]. During this phase, while the popular conception of <freedom> was the illusion of having all-out civil liberties, the deployment of the ideograph (similar to <Independence>) in political discourse was often meant the end of the major powers’ interference in Iran. Thus, it was in this latter sense that <freedom> appeared to link to <enemy>, precisely because the Islamic regime made its hostility quite obvious towards the Western nations by blaming them for influencing the Shah of Iran and meddling with the country’s affairs.

### 3.3 <enemy> in Contemporary Iran

In line with ayatollah Khomeini’s agenda to put an end to the pro-Western monarchism and establishing an Islamic state governed by Shi’i theocrats, Iran’s domestic and foreign policies from the outset has been strictly guided by Shi’ism, anti-West and revolutionary doctrines. As the building blocks of the Islamic Republic’s identity construct, such principles have been persistently utilized to create a unique form of Islamic state with its distinct values, aims and visions that in many ways differed from other Islamic countries’ [29]. This exclusive identity, in turn, became instrumental for the state to distinguish itself from other Muslim nations, both for exporting its ideologies to the world, and also for pursuing its precarious foreign policies and political ambitions in the region [30]. Such grandiose aspirations, first and foremost, required the state to overcome the internal problems in regard to governing the country and domestic affairs, and to deal with the continual struggle of legitimizing itself as a divine and lawful authority. This was only possible through utilizing the national identity, a high order concept for uniting diverse groups across the nation and bringing them under the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Perhaps the most effective way to achieve this was the state’s investment in creation of an imagined enemy. This seemed necessary, particularly after the Iran-Iraq war when there was not any imminent threat that could cause national anxiety and bring Iranians together against a common enemy. In this way, the absence of a real enemy during the peace time would mean the beginning of the public realization of the Ayatollahs’ failed governing system, followed by the social and political fragmentation, and consequently the spread of nationwide dissidence. This provided substantial motivation for the state to continually foster the idea of the presence of enemies, so that people are constantly distracted from their democratic goals, and their discontents are systematically stifled. The constant presence of such threats was also used by ecclesiastics to justify and reaffirm the permanent rule of the Supreme Leader who acts as the protector and has the

rights to overwrite the constitutional laws and policies [31]. Moreover, such untouchable leadership role that cedes the absolute power to a Supreme Leader for the custodianship over people (*Vilayat-e Faqih*) has enabled and promoted theocratic mode of governance in Iran [30], it has also clearly implied the incapacity and powerlessness of the people.

Nevertheless, as it was shown earlier, the ongoing transformation of definition and constituents of <enemy> throughout the past four decades or so, exemplifies an essential function of rhetoric in the construction of social reality. In particular, the major political parties in Iran and the exilic oppositional groups operating outside the country construct competing social realities around the idea of 'enemy'. As such, while the use of the term by both camps might not be explicit, the former employs it to signify a threat to the state and its ideologies, making no distinction between the people and the government. In contrast, the latter uses the term to denote a threat to the people, the human rights and the country's resources, differentiating the masses from the elites and drawing a line between their goals and interests. Furthermore, there have been serious inconsistencies and disagreements among both political and religious figures at individual levels about who should or should not be called enemy. For instance, in 2020 Iran's Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif notably denounced the popularized chanting 'Death to America' and instead invited the two nations for diplomatic talks, while at the same time many influential hardliners were infuriated by Zarif's new and friendly disposition towards the United States [32]. Even so, at present time, with the increasing tension between people and the government, there is a general sense of public knowingness in Iran about the true nature of the well-known and prevailing concept of enemy, as protesters famously chant in the streets "They are lying that our enemy is America, our enemy is right here!" [33]. As such, it seems that the beginning of the public inquiry into the true nature of the <enemy> which the mainstream political discourses in Iran is so depended on, has started to shake the foundation of the authoritarian regime. Perhaps, this continuous public pressure on clarifying the definition of <enemy> soon lead to the revelation that indeed, the people of Iran have no external enemy, and that the world's hostility towards Iranian people (not the government) is just an illusion constructed by the state.

## 4 Conclusion

Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the public discourse in Iran have been flooded with a series of ideographs which were characteristically vague, and at the same time persuasive or even provocative. These ideographs not only played a critical role in infuriating the masses which led to the overthrow of the Shah more than four decades ago, but ever since have been important rhetorical means of control in the hands of the politicians and religious leaders in Iran. Arguably, one of the most pervasive of these ideographs, particularly within the realm of the political communication, is <enemy>. As a continuously changing concept, <enemy> has often been used by Iranian authorities as a politically motivated rhetorical strategy to both influence and unite the masses against the threats from a number of imagined, ill-defined and sometimes shifting adversarial forces. This study, however, was an attempt to trace and reflect on the emergence, modifications and implications of <enemy> at several junctures throughout the clerics' reign since 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran.

In so doing, it was shown that since the inception of the Islamic Republic, the Iranian authorities have consistently made it known that the United States and Israel will remain Iran's eternal enemies, respectively referring to them as the Great Satan and the illegitimate Zionist regime. Yet, there have been numerous other countries that under certain political circumstances and for a period of time were labeled as enemy by Iranian government, before they were strategically replaced by some other nations. In this way, the list of Iran's enemies has continuously been in flux. The Communist nations like China and USSR were declared by the first Supreme Leader of Iran as irreconcilable enemies during the earliest decade of the Revolution, merely for their political (Marxist-Leninist) system. However, in the later years the Iranian government not only began to de-emphasize the danger of Communism and its contradictions with Islam, but also established strong ties with these totalitarian states mainly for their anti-West political views. Similarly, a number of European countries, or even Islamic nations like Saudi Arabia, Iraq and the UAE intermittently were brought into or taken out from Iran's list of enemies through the rhetorical means of the politicians and religious figures.

Hence, at this point it is concluded that the Islamic regime in Iran, to this day, continues to use friend-enemy scheme for creating imagined enemies as scapegoats for distracting public from the country's numerous distressing social problems which are precisely rooted in the totalitarian nature of the theocratic government. Nonetheless, as it was pointed out, despite the extensive deployment of <enemy> in public discourse which seems to have effectively secured support for the elites for more than four decades, the mounting nationwide dissidence in recent years indicates the mass realization of the public about the rhetorical/political nature of this ideograph.

## References

1. M. Duncan, Polemical ambiguity and the composite audience: Bush's 20 September 2001 speech to Congress and the Epistle of 1 John. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 41(5), 455–471, 2011.
2. L. Ceccarelli, Polysemy: Multiple meanings in rhetorical criticism. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 84(4), pp. 395–415, 1998.
3. M. C. McGee, The "ideograph": A link between rhetoric and ideology. *Quarterly journal of speech*, 66(1), pp. 1–16, 1980.
4. J. Jasinski, *Sourcebook on Rhetoric: Key Concepts in Contemporary Rhetorical Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001.
5. C. M. Condit, J. L. Lucaites, *Crafting equality: America's anglo-african word*. University of Chicago Press, 2012.
6. H. M. Stassen-Ferrara, Ideographs. In M. Allen (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of communication research methods*, pp. 681–684, SAGE publications, 2017.
7. M. Charland, Constitutive rhetoric: The case of the People Quebecois. *Quarterly journal of Speech*, 73(2), pp. 133–150, 1987.
8. M. Guibernau, *Belonging: Solidarity and division in modern societies*. Polity, 2013.
9. L. Højer, Günther Schlee. *Imagined Differences: Hatred and the construction of identity*. *Cambridge Anthropology*, 24(1), pp. 72–77, 2004.
10. T. H. Eriksen, We and us: Two modes of group identification. *Journal of peace research*, 32(4), pp. 427–436, 1995.

11. E. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1963.
12. D. L. Cloud, The rhetoric of: Scapegoating, utopia, the privatization of social responsibility. *Western Journal of Communication*, 62(4), pp. 387–419, 1998.
13. R. Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
14. L. Bolkvadze, Iranian Hostage Crisis. *Alte University Scientific Journal*, 11(1), pp. 135–157, 2020.
15. M. Furlan, Israeli-Iranian relations: past friendship, current hostility. *IsraelAffairs*, 28(2), pp.170–183, 2022.
16. A. Cecolin, Iranian Jewish Aliyah in 1951: An Historical Analysis of Iranian Jewish Emigration to Israel. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 18(3), pp. 221–236, 2018.
17. M. Soltaninejad, Iran and Saudi Arabia: emotionally constructed identities and the question of persistent tensions. *Asian Politics & Policy*, 11(1), pp. 104–121, 2019.
18. R. Ekhtiari Amiri, M. R. Mohammadi, H. Safavi Homami, “Iran’s Geopolitical Power and the Normalization of Relations Between the UAE and Israel.” *Geopolitics Quarterly*, 2022.
19. S. H. Mousavian, *Iran-Europe relations: challenges and opportunities*. Routledge, 2008.
20. E. P. Rakel, Iranian foreign policy since the Iranian Islamic revolution: 1979–2006. *Perspectives on global development and technology*, 6(1–3), pp. 159–187, 2007.
21. V. Golmohammadi, The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Prospects for change and continuity. *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 8(1), pp. 93–102, 2019.
22. M. S. Abdullah, M. A. Alsayyad, Friday Prayers in Iran Religionizing Politics and Politicizing Religion. The International Institute for Iranian Studies (Rasanah). <https://bit.ly/3br7AyO>, 2020
23. M. Asadi Firouzabadi, Z. Fatehi Nasrabadi, *Literary-Political Aspects of Slogans During Islamic Revolution of Iran*. *Islamic Revolution Studies*, 10(35), pp. 25–45, 2014.
24. M. Shafiei, Cultural-Political Development in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Analysis of Transformations of 1990–1998. *Journal of Islamic Political Studies*, 1(2), pp. 103–124, 2019.
25. S. T. Hunter, The Soviet Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran. In *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan* (pp. 244–266). Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1987.
26. A. A. Matin, The meanings of freedom for the young generation in Iran: A reception analysis of the reality show *Befarmaeed Sham*. *SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 14 (Special issue), pp. 57–71, 2022.
27. A. Sreberny, A. Mohammadi, *Small media, big revolution: Communication, culture, and the Iranian revolution*. U of Minnesota Press, 1994.
28. N. Alavi, N. Flashback: Khomeini’s speech in 1979. *Open Democracy*. Retrieved June, 2022, from <http://www.Flashback: Khomeini’s speech in 1979, Open Democracy>, June 26, 2005.
29. M. S. Nosratpanah, M. Bakhshi, Anti-Arrogance and Support of Oppressed across the World in Imam Khomeini’s Foreign Policy Thoughts Emphasizing on the Semantics of Suppression and Arrogance in Almizan Interpretation. *Islamic Political Thought*, 5(1), pp. 33–57, 2019.
30. H. Moftakhari, Iranian society in encounter with Muslim Arabs. *History of Islam*, 4(16), pp. 5–32, 2003.
31. N. Shevlin, *Velayat-e faqih in the constitution of Iran: The implementation of theocracy*. U. Pa. J. Const. L., 1, p. 358, 1998.
32. C. Entekhabi-Fard, “Iran’s reality is: Talk to America, not death to America,” *Alarabiya*, May 20, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.english.alarabiya.net/views/news/middle-east/2013/11/04/>
33. J. Lemon, “Iranians Chant ‘Our Enemy Is Right Here’ on Second Day of Anti-Government Protests After Ukraine Plane Shot Down,” *Newsweek*, June 25, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.newsweek.com/iranians-chant-our-enemy-right-here-second-day-anti-government-protests-after-ukraine-plane-1481727>

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

