
THE MODERN SOCIO-POLITICAL DISCOURSE OF IRAN IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGING WORLD ORDER

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An important feature of the changing world order is the weakening of the World-System's centre – the United States and Western Europe, while developing countries are becoming stronger and freeing themselves from various forms of dependence on the West. Iran stands out among these countries, so examining the process from Iran's perspective provides additional opportunities for a deeper understanding of this transformation of the world order. The present article analyses the perception of colonialism and anti-colonial struggle in modern Iran, as well as its struggle against Western hegemony, in the context of the changing world order at present time. The Iranian authorities attach particular importance to the anti-colonial struggle of the 19th and 20th centuries and the condemnation of Western colonial and neo-colonial practices, taking into account not only the formal colonisation, but also the actual subordination of formally independent states to the will of Western powers. In this context, a special role is given to the Islamic revolution as an anti-colonial revolution that aims to liberate the oppressed not only in Iran, but in the whole world. Materials from the Iranian news agency IRNA and speeches by Iranian political and spiritual leaders were analysed. It was found that the main focus of Iranian discourse is to condemn the crimes of the West, especially the United States and Israel, against Muslims, and to praise the Iranian people's resistance to colonialism, past and present, with an emphasis on the special role of Ayatollah Khomeini in the Iranian anti-colonial movement. In recent years, the Iranian press has paid much attention to the struggle of developing countries in Asia and Africa against Western hegemony, which is perceived as a struggle against modern neo-colonialism and for a more just and multipolar world order, as well as to the struggle of the Palestinians against Israeli aggression, which Iranians perceive as having a colonial essence.

Keywords: *Iran, colonialism, Khomeini, revolution, world order, USA, Israel.*

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Introduction

The existing world order, established in the 1990s after the collapse of the USSR, and which has gradually been weakening in recent years, is based on the dominance of Western countries led by the United States. Today, this order is significantly weakened and continues to weaken. Nevertheless, many developing countries still remain in a certain form of dependence on the West. In the past, the vast majority of them were direct colonies of Western European countries. However, after formal liberation in the second half of the 20th century, various forms of neo-colonial dependence often persisted, for example, in the economy of Africa (where the West maintains control over key resources through large corporations, such as the sale of uranium from Niger to France, and coltan mining in the DRC, *etc.* [see Zotin 2024]), as well as in the sphere of international justice through the activities of the International Criminal Court, which prosecutes objectionable African leaders (see Mezyayev 2024).

Currently, Western countries are experiencing a serious weakening in various aspects including foreign policy, economy, and demography. At the same time, major developing countries and large associations of states located outside the West, especially such as the SCO, BRICS, and the EAEU, are noticeably gaining strength. The political power of the countries of the Global South continues to lag far behind their economic potential, so they are still unable to prevent unilateral actions by the US, which seeks to impose its will on them and overthrow undesirable regimes. However, their political significance and economic role are growing (Goldstone and May 2023), which leads to increased competition for African countries and the Global South as a whole (see, *e.g.*, Grinin and Korotayev 2023). It will take some time for developing countries to increase their political influence. These processes of Western decline and the rise of developing countries are fraught with political instability in various regions of the world, but they will ultimately lead to a further weakening of Western dominance and the emergence of a new world order. This is the essence of current trends in the changing world order (see Grinin, Ilyin, and Andreev 2016; Grinin A. 2025). There is also a decline in the role of the most powerful and self-interested sovereign, the United States, accompanied by the emergence of new poles of power in the world.

In the USA, there is a struggle at the government level between ‘Americanists,’ who are primarily focused on American national interests, and ‘globalists,’ who pursue policies based on the interests of their narrow supranational group, often contradicting the interests of the American nation itself. Therefore, under the rule of ‘globalists’ like the Biden administration, the dominance of the US and the West in the world has been weakening much faster than under ‘Americanists,’ a typical representative of whom is Donald Trump. On the one hand, the profound crisis in the US under the ‘globalists,’ which will lead to their significant weakening, will inevitably affect all countries; on the other hand, it will open up a wide path to new foundations for the world order (Grinin L. and Grinin A. 2021). Trump's rise to power in January 2025 brought this contradiction between Americanists and globalists into the open discourse and elevated it to a global scale.

Here, it is necessary to point out the peculiarities of Trump's policy towards Iran during his first term (2016–2020). As is well known, during this period, the current US

president was distinguished by his confrontational rhetoric and coercive measures towards Iran. During Obama's presidency (2015), Iran was able to reach a nuclear agreement (JCPOA), lift international and Western sanctions, and began to develop economically rapidly. However, this only lasted two years. In May 2018, despite requests from European partners, Trump unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA and soon reinstated old sanctions and even introduced new ones. This happened even though Iran had not violated the agreement, but the Trump administration explained its move by saying that Iran supported the Assad regime in Syria and was developing a ballistic missile program, even though this had nothing to do with the nuclear program (Simon 2018: 13–17). The new sanctions (especially the oil export embargo) had a severe impact on the Iranian economy (in 2018–2019 economic growth turned negative and inflation rose sharply, *etc.*), and this led to the impoverishment of large segments of the population and, ultimately, to large-scale violent protests in November 2019. The Iranian authorities refused to make any concessions until the US sanctions were lifted. Most of the Trump's administration's demands were clearly political in nature (including stopping support for the Assad regime and Hamas and Hezbollah, and stopping support for Shiite militias in Iraq) and spoke of a desire to radically weaken Iran's geopolitical role in the region, which would result in the strengthening of the US and its allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia (Nuruzzaman 2020: 570–576). After the Biden administration came to power in 2021, pressure on Iran eased significantly but remained considerable.

The struggle for a new world order has accelerated particularly since the beginning of 2022, following the start of Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine, and has effectively taken on a direct military form. Most countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have refused to support the Western anti-Russian measures, and are trying to pursue more independent policies, although they do not want to abandon their long-standing trade and economic ties with Western countries. Among the countries seeking to change the world order, Iran and Türkiye stand out in the Middle East. The changes in the world against the backdrop of the Special Military Operation have confirmed the deep division in the modern world between the West, which seeks to maintain its hegemony through aggressive means and the rest of the world, which does not intend to actively support it, with many countries sympathizing with Russia (Grinin 2023).

Amid the intensified struggle between the West and Russia, some developing African countries are seeking to free themselves from neo-colonial dependence by relying on Russian assistance – primarily Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, which on July 6, 2024 created the Confederation of Sahel States and are actively developing all forms of relations with Russia in order to dismantle French influence entirely, which they view as negative (*e.g.*, 80 % of Niger's population still lacks electricity, despite France using uranium from this country to produce a third of its electricity), as well as to solve urgent internal problems of instability, terrorism, and separatism. The French military contingents in these three countries have been replaced by Russian ones (Denisova and Kostelyanets 2024).

Perceptions of Colonialism in the Middle East

One of the main poles in the recent struggle for a new world order has undoubtedly been the Middle East. And this is no coincidence. The interests of many superpowers and regional states intersect in this geopolitically important and resource-rich region. In recent years, an intense struggle has unfolded here between Israel and Iran for dominance in the region, periodically escalating into military action. At the same time, Israel is perceived as an aggressive colonial state by many residents of the Middle East, especially Palestinian Arabs, and Iran as a fighter against colonialism. Palestinian journalist Abdulla Moaswes, in particular, interprets the plans of some American organizations affiliated with Israel to assist separatist movements in Iran and Pakistan (such as the Baloch movement) as a reflection of Israel's colonial ambitions. At the same time, he condemns Western policy in the Middle East, pointing out that Western companies, such as Barrick Gold and BHP Billiton, have played a key role in colonial resource extraction and environmental destruction in the Baluchistan region (Moaswes 2025).

One of the main issues in foreign policy in contemporary Iran, against the backdrop of the global transformation of world political relations, is the issue of colonialism and the struggle for national liberation.

Although almost all the colonies in the world officially gained independent decades ago, Iran still considers the problem of Western colonialism as a current issue. First of all, this is due to the fact that colonialism caused serious damage to the socio-economic, demographic, and technological development of the countries conquered by the colonizers, which is still perceived today in the form of a serious lag behind developed countries for many of them.

Former Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (who died in a helicopter crash on May 19, 2024) was a radical conservative who took a very critical stance towards the modern West. He believed that despite the formal liberation of almost all colonies in the second half of the 20th century, in fact, Western colonialism continues to exist to this day. In a conversation with the president of Equatorial Guinea, he stated: 'For centuries, Western countries have simply plundered Africa's rich natural and human resources and preserved their colonial spirit, changing only their methods of colonization' (ParsToday 2022).

According to Iranian leaders, the West still supports rulers who oppress their people in many countries, which is also a distinct form of neo-colonialism. They emphasize that today, the West supports atrocities committed by Israel against the Palestinians, thereby supporting Israeli colonial conquests (Tehran Times 2023, 2024).

Secondly, the concept of colonialism in modern Iran is understood much more broadly than direct colonization in the form of the violent annexation of a state by a metropolis and replacement of local rulers by officials appointed by the metropolis. According to Iranian politicians and experts, even if a state is formally independent, it can still effectively become a colony. This is expressed primarily in the fact that the rulers of these countries care much more about the interests of foreign (usually Western) states than about their own country's interests, which is often accompanied by plundering of natural resources and other forms of dependency close to colonialism. As a typical example of such a formally independent, but de facto colonized state by Britain and later

by the US and Israel, the Iranians cite Iran their country during the reign of the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925–1979). The Islamic Revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini is perceived in modern Iran not only as a struggle for the triumph of Islamic principles over secularization and Westernization of society, but also as an anti-colonial struggle for national liberation. This view is shared, for example, by Iranian historian Mohammad Hassan Rajabi. He says that Ayatollah Khomeini emphasized the neocolonial policies of the United States as the main cause of the misfortunes and hardships faced by the Iranian people, since the United States inspired the anti-Islamic actions of the Pahlavi dynasty. Khomeini also pointed out the proximity of the last shah to Israel, who patronized the Iranian Baha'is, opponents of Muslims, which also led to new measures against the clergy, and the shah became a puppet of the US and Israel (Jahani 2021).

Unlike India, where colonialism had a certain positive impact, ensuring a long period of internal peace, British and French colonial rule in the Middle East did not lead to the formation of strong and stable states. As a result, former colonies suffer from internal ethnic and religious conflicts, which lead to civil wars in some countries (Grinin, Korotayev, and Tausch 2019).

Overall, it is not surprising that the perception of colonialism throughout the Middle East is very negative – the colonial period of history is perceived by the inhabitants of these countries as a national humiliation and subjugation to a foreign will. Although in general, liberation from colonial dependence took place relatively peacefully, in some cases the national liberation struggle was accompanied by bloody repressions. Thus, French troops in Algeria carried out numerous killings and deportations of Algerian civilians in villages that served as bases for the local guerrilla groups from the National Liberation Front (FLN) during the war of independence in 1954–1962. The number of victims among the Algerian population reached hundreds of thousands (both guerrillas and civilians), and 9,000 villages were completely destroyed by French air and artillery strikes (Vasiliev 1992: 195–209). Therefore, those people, parties, and groups that collaborated with the colonizers are considered traitors in modern national consciousness among the peoples of the Middle East, while those who resisted colonialism are revered as heroes and liberators. For example, the aforementioned FLN in Algeria and the Libyan hero of the resistance against Italian fascists, Omar al-Mukhtar (see Nassar and Boggero 2008). In Iran, Rais Ali Delvari, who fought during the First World War, is recognized as a hero and a symbol of the struggle against colonialism. He fought against British troops landing in Bushehr and died on September 2, 1915. This date has been declared National Day of Struggle against British Imperialism in Iran (ParsToday 2016).

Resentment towards Western European countries for the crimes of the colonial era often extends to modern Western states – it is believed that they continue to oppress the Middle East and other regions to a significant extent, but in a more cunning and covert way – by supporting tyrannical rulers who obey the will of the West. In addition, in the mass consciousness of the Middle East America is now perceived as a new colonial power in the region due to its occupation of Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003 and parts of Syrian territory, as well as its full support for Israel and its wars of conquest in the region.

The above view of the role of Western countries in the fate of the Middle East, using the example of Great Britain, can be clearly seen in the speech by Tunisian scholar Nouredine al-Farjani in the program 'The Opposite Direction' on the Qatari satellite channel Al Jazeera on August 25, 2008. He argued that it was Great Britain that illegally created the state of Israel on ancestral Palestinian Arab lands, specifically to weaken the Arab world by dividing it into two parts – western and eastern – and continues to patronize Israel in its oppression of the Palestinians. Moreover, according to al-Farjani, the colonial crimes by British troops continue in the modern era. In particular, in Iraq, where British and American troops killed many Iraqis and completely destroyed Iraq's infrastructure, recalling the darkest crimes of the colonial era. It is significant that 85 % of program listeners agreed with al-Farjani's position that Britain's colonial policy is the main cause of the current misfortunes and disasters in the Arab world (Al-Jazeera 2008).

Perceptions of Colonialism and Decolonization in Contemporary Iranian Socio-Political Discourse

The problem of the perception of colonialism and decolonization in modern Iran has been reflected in the works of Iranian analysts (Masudi 2008; Sohrabi and Musavikhu 2021).*

This work primarily analyzed materials from Iran's largest news agency, IRNA, as well as a collection of speeches by the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, the personal website with speeches by the current Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, and other sources. This helped to determine the views of modern Iranians on various forms and methods of colonialism.

Constructivism was chosen as the main theoretical framework for the study. This helped to conduct research on the Iranians' perceptions of colonialism in the context of social history and social construction.

In order to examine the peculiarities of the perception of colonialism, the leading Western colonial powers, and the anti-colonial struggle in contemporary Iranian discourse, it is necessary to analyze the views of two spiritual leaders of Iran (Ruhollah Khomeini and Ali Khamenei), the three most recent Iranian presidents, who frequently addressed these topics, as well as the views of some other senior Iranian officials and representatives of the clergy, and materials from the IRNA news agency. In general, the most frequent themes in contemporary Iranian anti-colonial discourse are the opposition to imperialist states, including Israel, the struggle against internal tyranny, which is usually supported by these colonial powers, and also the assistance to Iran's allies in their anti-colonial struggles.

In general, the Islamic Revolution can be called one of the most important manifestations of Islamism in recent decades (Filin *et al.* 2022). The rise of Islamism in the Middle East during that period was linked to the struggle between the US and the USSR, with the US being particularly active in subjugating the region to its power, as it was geographically close to the USSR, as well as to the struggle of Muslims in the Middle East against Israel (Grinin 2019). In other words, the Islamic Revolution was indeed largely anti-Western and, therefore, anti-colonial in nature. But Islamism in Iran

differs from Islamism in many Muslim countries and even more so from Islamism in African countries, since the level of its development and culture, as well as its focus on the development of Iran, allows it to be interpreted as Islamism of a higher level or post-Islamism (see Grinin, Korotayev, and Tausch 2019).

It is interesting to see how contemporary Iranian scholars perceive the influence of colonialism on the policies of the Pahlavi regime. When analyzing their works, one must, of course, take into account that they, consciously or unconsciously (under the influence of the dominant ideology), completely deny any achievements that took place in Iran during the Shah's reign. And these, of course, did take place. This is quite typical of the position of revolutionaries who are unwilling to acknowledge anything positive in the regime they overthrew. This must be kept in mind when interpreting the position of Iranian critics of colonialism, taking into account the one-sidedness and inevitable bias of this criticism.

For example, Hamid Masoudi argues in his article that Reza Shah (1925–1941) came to power with the British help and pursued domestic policies that were entirely beneficial to London: unlimited tyranny, combating the influence of Islam in society while glorifying Iran's pre-Islamic past, and aggressive Westernization, which in many ways contradicted traditional culture. All this continued under his son, Mohammad Reza (1941–1979), with the only difference being that America became the main colonizer, whose influence grew particularly after the 1953 coup, when the Shah gained unlimited power. From that time until the 1979 revolution, the US directly or indirectly controlled Iranian domestic and foreign policy, army, education, and cultural policy. American companies owned 40 % of the shares in the International Oil Consortium, which extracted Iranian oil. Iran was clearly in an unequal and subordinate position vis-à-vis the US, unconditionally accepting all American demands. The goal of the Pahlavi regime was to decline the religiosity of the population by repressing the clergy, banning the hijab for religious women, creating an atmosphere of worship of the West and Western culture, and encouraging moral laxity. Radio, television, and the press were put at the service of state propaganda. At the same time, Western films, Western entertainment programs, advertisements for Western goods, and other programs related to Western culture accounted for 78 % of television airtime in 1975, while programs produced in Iran itself accounted for only 22 %. Despite the development of the media, there were no political freedoms in the country, and anyone who disagreed was suppressed by the SAVAK political police force. In this situation, the Shiite clergy began to talk about the danger of propaganda promoting Western values and watching television programs for traditional culture, and many religious Iranians stopped watching television. Ultimately, the Iranian people could no longer tolerate colonialism, tyranny, and the imposition of alien cultural models, and they carried out a revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini, overthrowing the colonial regime and expelling the American colonizers from the country (Masudi 2008).

Ayatollah Khomeini paid great attention to criticizing colonialism after the start of the Islamic Revolution, which began with the brutal suppression of anti-Shah protests on January 9, 1978. In his speech on February 18, 1978, on the occasion of the fortieth day of the death of those who were shot in Qom on January 9, Khomeini lashed out at

the United States and Britain for their crimes against Muslims. According to him, although both the US and the UK had signed the Declaration of Human Rights, both countries were guilty of committing mass crimes. America appointed its agents – dictators – in various countries around the world, which led to mass deprivation and suffering among people. Great Britain committed atrocities in India and Pakistan, and also imposed the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran, which committed numerous heinous crimes in order to show their loyalty to the masters in London and Washington, and also tried to destroy Islam in Iran. Under the last Shah, Iran effectively became an American colony. Khomeini also claimed that the US and Britain created Israel, which oppresses Muslims, and imposed their agent, Anwar Sadat, in Egypt, who became a servant to the Israelis (Khomeini 2008a [1978]: 344–347). The latter seems particularly far-fetched, since Sadat was clearly not an American satellite, but was striving for the best possible balance for Egypt.

Khomeini devoted considerable attention to the issues of colonization and the struggle against colonialism in his religious and political testament. In it, he noted that the people of Iran, Muslim peoples, and oppressed throughout the world felt their moral superiority, since their enemies had abandoned all religious and moral principles and committed monstrous crimes against them. Most of these crimes were committed by the United States, which Khomeini called a ‘terrorist state’, as well as by international Zionism. They are also zealously served by Saddam Hussein's criminal regime, which killed not only Iranians, but also its own people. However, the US and its servants, despite all their crimes and anti-Iranian propaganda, proved powerless against the freedom-loving Iranian people (Khomeini 2008b [1983]: 403–404).

Khomeini also drew attention to the serious problem of the dependence of the oppressed Muslim peoples on the US and the USSR: many of their representatives decided that they were inferior to these superpowers and, fearing their power, began to renounce their culture and individuality, completely adopting Western or communist ideologies. As a result, people began to favor foreign words, foreign names and company names, and trips to Western or Communist countries, while pilgrimages to Muslim holy sites and the use of traditional names and titles came to be seen as a sign of backwardness. Under the influence of the West, debauchery, pursuit of luxury and entertainment, and desire to possess prestigious but actually unnecessary goods also spread in Iran. Khomeini considered these processes to be destructive to Islamic civilization and called on people to reject foreign colonial influence and return to their traditional roots. He wrote that Iranians and Arabs were in no way inferior to Europeans and could overcome their economic and technical backwardness compared to the West in a short period of time if they believed in their own strength (Khomeini 2008b [1983]: 418–421). Thus, in addition to Western neocolonialism, which was the main target of criticism by Iranian leaders, they also condemned the USSR's policy of spreading communism throughout the world, considering this process to be a neocolonial manifestation (thereby ignoring the USSR's great assistance to Arab countries, including in the fight against Israel).

The current Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, who took office after Khomeini's death in 1989, also has a very negative view of the political West and believes that the West has retained its barbaric colonial practices to this day. In one of his

speeches, Khamenei said that Western politicians look well-groomed and elegant and constantly say that their goal is to protect human rights, but this external attractiveness should not be misleading. In fact, during the colonial period, they treated the conquered peoples with barbaric cruelty. Moreover, Western states did not limit themselves to killing civilians, but also tried to keep colonized peoples in deep decline, preventing them from developing in any area (Khamenei 2011). Khamenei considers the United States to be the most cruel and ruthless state in the modern world. He stated that American rulers have surpassed even ISIS (banned in Russia) in their cruelty. According to him, it was America that created and financed ISIS, provided it with weapons, and most likely trained its fighters in their cruel methods of killing people. So now, American military companies linked to the US government, such as Blackwater, which committed brutal crimes in the region, have been replaced by Middle Eastern organizations that were actually created by the same Americans. At the same time, America hypocritically advocates for human rights, the rights of the oppressed and even animal rights. Khamenei cited the colonial oppression of the Palestinian people, which has been going on daily for more than 70 years by Israel with comprehensive American support, as proof of the extreme hypocrisy of the United States (Khamenei 2018b).

At the same time, Ayatollah Khamenei does not limit himself to merely stating the facts of mass crimes committed by Western political leaders and armies, but he attempts to identify their underlying causes. He sees the main reason for the profound moral decline of Western leaders in the separation of religion from the state and science from spirituality. Scientific and technological progress has allowed the West to far outstrip the rest of the world in the fields of science, technology, and weaponry. However, due to the rejection of religious and moral norms, the West has become focused solely on material values, and has taken a course of conquering and subjugating other nations in its foreign policy, taking advantage of its military and technological superiority. According to the Supreme Leader, such policies of the West have led to catastrophic consequences for all of humanity: two world wars, slavery, repressive communist regimes, savage capitalism aimed at unbridled profit-making, colonialism, which resulted in the deaths of millions of people and caused great damage to dozens of countries, the destruction of many families, and the spread of debauchery due to anti-family propaganda by Western elites, and, more recently, the crimes of the American army in Afghanistan and Iraq (*e.g.*, in Abu Ghraib prison and other Iraqi prisons) under the false pretext of spreading democracy. The Islamic regime in Iran opposes oppression throughout the world, and therefore the West and the Zionists are trying to overthrow it and discredit its founder, Ayatollah Khomeini, in order to be able to oppress the peoples of the world unhindered. In order to discredit Khomeini, the West and Zionism spend ‘thousands of hours’ broadcasting on hundreds of radio and television stations around the world, hoping that Iranians will renounce his teachings and surrender to imperialism. However, according to the Supreme Leader, all these efforts will fail, as the Iranian people deeply honour Khomeini and believe in his ideas based on morality, ethics, and spirituality, as well as respect for the will of the people. These ideas ensure Iran's freedom and independence. Khamenei also stated that the US has nothing to teach Iranians about democracy: Khomeini created a much better democracy than exists in America. After all, the

US claims to support democracy in the Middle East, but in fact supports the worst dictatorial regimes in the region, such as the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran and Ariel Sharon in Israel, and uses coups d'état and atomic bombings (as in Japan) to 'promote democracy,' while Iran spreads Khomeini's ideas throughout the world in an exclusively non-violent manner, and the Ayatollah's teachings find many sincere supporters among Muslims in different countries (Khamenei 2004). It can be said that the Supreme Leader is right in many ways in his conclusions about the negative impact of Western domination on global development: both Western colonialism in the past and the violent overthrow of regimes that are not favored by the West in the present have indeed brought and continue to bring suffering to many peoples of the world. However, one cannot help but note the exaggerations and literal adherence to the demands of revolutionary Islamist ideology in his speech.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005–2013), who belonged to the radical conservatives – the most anti-Western faction in the Iranian political system – always took a sharply anti-Western stance. His speeches at the UN General Assembly became widely known. During one such speech in September 2011, Ahmadinejad called the West the main culprit for all of humanity's misfortunes and accused it of unleashing world wars, slavery, colonialism, and inciting conflicts that continue to this day. He stated that Western countries should pay compensation to the descendants of those who suffered from slavery and the crimes of colonialism. The delegations of the US and some Western European countries left the meeting in protest against the Iranian president's speech (IRNA 2011). In April 2013, speaking to students and teachers at the Islamic University in Ghana, Ahmadinejad also harshly criticized the history of slavery and colonialism in Western countries, calling it one of the darkest moments in human history, and stated the need to compensate the affected countries. According to him, wherever there is poverty, social stratification, war, and hatred in the world, traces of Western imperialists can be found. Today, the West has the same goals of world domination as it did during the colonial period, only it is achieving them by other, less brutal methods. He added that Iran, through its struggle against corrupt, despotic, and criminal Western governments, is protecting all of humanity and wishes all peoples justice, peace, and prosperity (IRNA 2013). Thus, it can be seen that in Iran's relations with former colonies, the theme of colonialism is used to bring these countries closer together in international politics on the basis of a joint struggle against the West and for a more just world order.

President Hassan Rouhani (2013–2021), although belonging to a more moderate political movement than Ahmadinejad, also actively condemned colonialism and denounced American conspiracies against Iran. In particular, he claimed that Khomeini's expulsion from the country in 1964, after he protested against the 'colonial' law granting extraterritorial status to American advisers, was ordered by the US. According to him, America is still trying to overthrow the Islamic regime and return the Iranian people to poverty and protectorate, but thanks to the freedom-loving spirit of the Iranian people and the courageous leadership of the Supreme Leader, its plans will be crushed (Alef 2019).

Former President Ebrahim Raisi, like the Supreme Leader, supported Iran's rapprochement with Russia, which, like Iran, opposes Western domination and a unipolar world, considering the Western world order to be unjust, neocolonial, and based on imposing its own rules of conduct on other countries (AiF 2022).

The Iranians often accuse the largest and most influential Western country, the United States, of colonialism. For example, American policy is accused of destabilizing Venezuela, one of Iran's allies in Latin America. It is claimed that the United States wants to overthrow the independent patriotic government of Nicolas Maduro and colonize the country. After the 2018 presidential elections in Venezuela, the US, with the support of opposition leader Juan Guaido, tried to create divisions in this oil-rich country and interfere in its internal affairs (IRNA 2020a).

Official Iranian media also condemn France's neocolonial ambitions on the African continent and sympathize with the struggle of African countries to achieve genuine sovereignty. For example, the IRNA news agency reported that in September 2023, a demonstration involving thousands of people took place in Niamey, the capital of Niger, near a French military base, protesting against France's neocolonial policies. The protesters called for the overthrow of African rulers who are dependent on France. In August 2023, a military coup took place in Niger, and the new authorities announced the elimination of all forms of the country's dependence on France (including the expulsion of the ambassador and the withdrawal of French troops) in order to achieve a true independence for the country (IRNA 2023).

Iranian politicians and experts also actively accuse Israel of colonialism, blaming it for the occupation of the historic territory of Palestine and crimes against the Palestinians. In this regard, Iran widely celebrates Quds Day (a day of solidarity with the Palestinian people), established by Khomeini in 1982, when anti-Israeli demonstrations are organized throughout Iran. However, they believe (rather rashly and not objectively) that Israel itself has no real power and defeats Muslims only thanks to the comprehensive support and assistance of the United States, which is trying to weaken Iran as much as possible with sanctions in order to suppress its will to resist and prevent it from helping the Palestinians, and is also behind all major conflicts in the Middle East, supporting the killing of the peoples of the Middle East, while Iran consistently stands on the side of the oppressed peoples. In particular, according to Professor Alireza Marandi, the US supports the Saudi genocide in Yemen, while Iran, on the contrary, supports the oppressed people of Yemen. The United States also supports terrorists in Syria and Iraq, while Iran helps the Iraqi and Syrian peoples in their fight against terrorism. Washington supports Israel in killing Palestinians in Gaza, while Iran has taken up the cause of defending the Palestinians and has opposed Israel since the Islamic Revolution (IRNA 2021). The theme of the Arabs' struggle against Israel's neocolonial ambitions has an important place in the works of one of the leaders of the Islamic movement in Iran, Murtaza Mutahhari (Mutahhari 2008: 24).

However, it should be noted that such a significant underestimation of Israel's military power is mistaken: even if the US and the West did not help Israel, the country itself possesses considerable strength, as demonstrated by Israel's crushing victories during the Arab-Israeli wars of 1947–1949 and 1967, in which Western assistance did not

play a significant role. Underestimating a powerful enemy played a fatal role during the intensification of the Iranian-Israeli confrontation in 2024–2025.

The Iranian official press has paid particular attention to Israel's crimes against the Palestinians since the start of Israel's war in the Gaza Strip in October 2023. For example, one article, citing the Human Rights Department of the Islamic regime, lists Israel's most serious crimes since 1948 and emphasizes that the United States has always blocked UN resolutions condemning Israel's mass crimes. It is emphasized that in the first month of the war alone, Israel killed and wounded 40,000 Palestinians, destroyed 33,000 of their homes, and forced 1.4 million people to leave their homes (Shafii 2023). In Iran such large-scale crimes are linked to the desire of radical Israeli politicians and the military to expel the indigenous population – Palestinian Arabs – and expand their territory in a typically brutal colonial manner.

Iranian officials emphasize that Iran's equal and friendly approach to other countries is fundamentally different from the US harsh neo-colonial approach. For example, Iran's ambassador to Iraq, Iraj Masjedi, stated that Iran does not intend to interfere in Iraq's domestic affairs and takes the country's national interests into account better than anyone else in the world. According to him, Iran seeks to strengthen order and security in Iraq and accelerate its post-war recovery, while the American presence anywhere in the world only leads to greater insecurity, increased terrorism, and actual colonization. The ambassador condemned the killing of Qasem Soleimani by the Americans in January 2020, commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, who was fighting in Iraq at the official invitation of the Iraqi government, and said that the US was seeking to turn Iraq into a battlefield with Iran (IRNA 2020b).

Although considered more pro-Western than his predecessors in this post, Iran's new president, Masoud Pezeshkian, sent a letter to the now deceased secretary-general of the Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, just a few days after his election, in which he stated that he would continue to support the resistance front in the region and even increase the scale of assistance provided. In doing so, he demonstrated his commitment to the Supreme Leader's foreign policy doctrine, in which support for Hezbollah and the Palestinian resistance in their struggle against Israel and its crimes plays a central role. Iranian experts interpret this letter as support not only for Hezbollah, but also for all groups belonging to the Axis of Resistance, whose main task is to counter Western domination in the region under Iran's leadership (IRNA 2024).

In general, the struggle for world order in the Middle East has intensified since 2011 (with the beginning of the Arab Spring revolutions), and Iranian political discourse has begun to change in response to these events. The struggle for Syria has become particularly important for Iranians. This can be seen in Iranian academic works. For example, A. Moradi and A. Shahramnia argue that Iran helped Bashar al-Assad's government and loyal Syrians fight against the colonial and expansionist ambitions of the US and Israel in the region (with the support of conservative Arab regimes), helping those forces that defend their sovereignty. As evidence, they cite the Syrian National Council's request to foreign states to intervene in Syria along the lines of the Libyan scenario. The paper actively uses the concept of the 'Axis of Resistance,' which consists of Iran, pro-Iranian groups in the region, and the Assad regime, and asserts that the

US, in alliance with Israel and the Arab monarchies, has set itself the task of weakening this axis and eliminating Iran's influence in the Arab world (Moradi and Shahramnia 2015). In 2018, Ali Khamenei called the Syrian president a vivid example of fighting spirit and resistance to Western invaders and the armed groups they support (Khamenei 2018a). Even after the collapse of the Assad regime, Khamenei remained optimistic, stating that Syrian youth would take up arms and defeat the new regime, as well as begin fighting Israel to stop its crimes and colonial oppression in the region. He emphasized that Israel, despite killing 40,000 women and children in Gaza, had failed to defeat Palestine and achieve any of its goals, and had also failed to break Hezbollah, despite the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah (Rahman 2024). However, it is obvious that this conclusion is overly optimistic: Hezbollah's military organization has been virtually destroyed, and Syria's new government, hostile to Iran, continues to exist, controlling the country with authoritarian methods and brutally suppressing the uprising of Assad's supporters on the coast in March 2025.

If we look at the actual political steps taken by post-revolutionary Iran, we can see that despite the pan-Islamist slogans of Iranian leaders, Iranian policy after the 1980s has been pragmatic and has often put national interests ahead of pan-Islamic ones, as in the case of the US wars in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, when Iran remained neutral and did not help the leadership of these Islamic countries in their fight against the US. In the 1980s, Iran actively supported the Sunni Palestine Liberation Organization, but over time it began to primarily assist (diplomatically, financially, and with weapons) predominantly Shiite movements and regimes, such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, Iraqi Shiite parties and military groups, the Yemeni Houthis, and the Syrian Alawites. In Iran, all of them are considered to be national liberation movements resisting American and Israeli influence in the region. This approach, supported by many Iranian specialists within the country, has been criticized by pro-Western Iranian experts abroad. For example, Iranian scholar A. Nader, who lives in the US, argues that Iran's comprehensive support for Shiites and Alawites without taking into account the interests of local Sunni Arabs has led Arab Sunni regimes and Sunni groups to perceive Iran as a threat to stability in the region and to treat it with suspicion (Nader 2015: 14–15).

Interestingly, there have been cases in Iran's history when it has helped non-Muslims in their struggle for liberation. Before the Islamic Revolution, Iran maintained close relations with the Republic of South Africa, where apartheid existed. After coming to power, Khomeini called the South African regime racist and ordered all relations with it to be severed, including oil sales. Despite ideological differences, the Islamic Republic began to assist the opposition socialist African National Congress (ANC) and the Marxist national liberation movement SWAPO in Namibia, which was occupied by South Africa until 1990. Only after the ANC's victory and the rise to power of its leader, Nelson Mandela, were relations between Iran and South Africa restored (Tasnim 2020).

The 2025 Iran-Israel War and the Problem of Israeli Colonialism in the Iranian Media

In June 2025, a very intense, but brief war broke out between Iran and Israel. The parties had been moving towards this for a very long time, with tensions rapidly growing between them, which inevitably led to a fierce direct confrontation. The war was started by Israel, which, by infiltrating agents into the Iranian authorities, was able to kill 30 senior Iranian officers and 11 nuclear scientists in the first few days. Israel also destroyed hundreds of military facilities (including missile production plants), some of Iran's nuclear facilities, and even the central state television headquarters. In total, Israel attacked more than 900 Iranian targets. Iran responded with airstrikes on Israeli military and strategic sites (in particular, the oil refinery in Haifa) and was able to cause significant damage, although not as much as Israel itself caused Iran, due to the superiority of the Israeli air force and Israeli air defense system over the Iranian ones (Coller and Landay 2025). Overall, according to official data, 935 people were killed in Iran during this conflict, including both military personnel and civilians, among them 38 children and 132 women. In Israel, 28 people were killed in retaliatory Iranian strikes (AP News 2025).

It is also necessary to objectively point out Iran's mistakes, which led to such a high number of military casualties, especially among senior IRGC officers. Iran failed to learn from the experience of the Israeli attacks on its consulate in Damascus in April 2024, which killed several high-ranking IRGC officers, and failed to evacuate key senior officers to hidden and safe locations in advance. Ten IRGC generals were even allowed to gather in one place for a meeting, and as a result, all of them were easily killed by Israel in the first hours of the war. Iran also found itself flooded with Israeli agents who promptly transmitted information on the whereabouts of key Iranian figures to Tel Aviv. According to some former Iranian security officials, the main mistake was made back in the mid-2000s, after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to power: many experienced senior intelligence officers were dismissed and replaced by new, inexperienced ones. They focused primarily on combating women without headscarves and dissidents, not foreign spies. This was at a time when Israel was actively establishing its agents in the Middle East, including Iran. All this led to a catastrophic situation and heavy losses among the military leadership in the summer of 2025. Israel was also aided, sometimes unknowingly, by some illegal immigrants from Afghanistan, who collected drone parts (Zarbeli 2025).

It is worth noting Donald Trump's actions during the conflict. At first glance, they seem to fit in with his usual image as a hater of the Iranian regime and a loyal ally of Israel, which everyone saw during his first term. On June 22, Trump bombed several Iranian underground nuclear facilities with 30,000-pound bunker-busting bombs (fortunately, the Iranians were warned and removed radioactive material from them in advance). After that, he announced his victory, and the very next day he called Netanyahu and forced him to stop the bombing (US News 2025). Thus, Trump, although it may sound paradoxical, acted as a kind of savior of the Islamic regime in Iran by interrupting the intense Israeli bombing. If this is indeed the case, then we are dealing with a sharp change in Trump's policy – in which case it can no longer be called completely

pro-Israel and anti-Iranian. Although, of course, Trump continues to praise Israel and criticize the Iranian regime in order to maintain his image as the ‘defender of Israel against Iran,’ to which everyone has become accustomed. It can be assumed that behind these unexpected and cunning actions by Trump lies a desire to accommodate Russia, for which the preservation and stable functioning of the Islamic regime in Iran is very important.

Official Iranian media and religious leaders reported Iran's victory over Israel and the West behind it. The English edition of *Tehran Times* reported that this was a war waged by the West, which retained its colonial ambitions, against Iran through Israel, in which the country's ‘brightest minds’ were killed: officers and nuclear scientists. Millions of people took part in mourning ceremonies in Tehran. The publication also notes that now, unlike the situation in the two world wars and the 1953 coup, Iranian society is united and the Iranian authorities are patriotic, which helped Iran to withstand and repel the aggression of the US and Israel and punish Israel (Zarfam 2025). In his sermon immediately after the war, the Friday prayer leader in the city of Qom, Ayatollah Alireza Arafī, sharply criticized Israel, denouncing it as a ‘military outpost in the service of colonialism’ and accusing it of ‘a full-scale demonstration of violence, cruelty, and lawlessness in the world.’ Pointing to the 60,000 Palestinians killed in Gaza, he noted that ‘Israel has an inhuman spirit and inner nature and violates all international, humanitarian, and moral norms; this has become obvious today to world public opinion.’ Also, in his opinion, 12 days of aggressive war by Israel and its Western allies against Iran ‘exposed the whole truth to the world’ about the Israeli regime and its aggressive nature in its quest to create a ‘Greater Israel’ from the Nile to the Euphrates, seizing Gaza and other Islamic lands. Ayatollah Arafī used the words ‘holy defense’ to describe Iran's defense against Israeli aggression. This is reminiscent of the characterization of the Iran-Iraq War, which is also called the Holy Defense in Iran (Aghagoli 2025). Thus, the discourse of colonialism and condemnation of the West and Israel in Iran, which has always been present, has become particularly relevant and popular in recent months due to the Iran-Israel war, in which Iran was forced to defend itself against Israeli aggression.

In fact, the theme of colonialism and modern neocolonial manifestations is one of the most important elements of Iranian state ideology. The concept of colonialism is interpreted broadly in Iran, also including dependence in the areas of foreign policy and culture, as was the case in Iran during the Pahlavi dynasty. The legitimacy of the current Islamic regime is based not only on the struggle against Israel, but also on the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty as an ‘instrument of Western and Israeli colonialism’ in 1979. Given that the Iranian regime remains stable to this day and that there were no mass demonstrations during the period of Israeli aggression (although demonstrations against the regime have been ongoing in recent years), it can be said that the discourse on the struggle against colonialism does indeed help to unite the Iranian nation around the government: in critical periods for the country, the people, even those who do not support the government, unite to defend their country. Also, the Iranian discourse of the struggle against colonial and neocolonial manifestations of the modern West fits well

into the struggle of many countries of the Global South against neocolonial dependence. This is the strength of this approach.

Its weakness lies in an obvious overestimation of its own strength. The propaganda of the Islamic regime portrays Iran and its allied groups as very strong and invulnerable, which is not always confirmed in practice. This was clearly demonstrated in 2024, when Israel inflicted a serious defeat on Hezbollah, and the government of Bashar al-Assad which is aligned with Iran quickly fell under the pressure of armed Islamist groups. It can be said that Iran should modernize its anti-colonial discourse by making changes to it, in particular introducing the postulate that the victory of Iran and its allied movements in the region cannot happen by itself, and that it requires a realistic assessment of the enemy's combat potential and operational measures to strengthen its own military potential and effectively protect its population, especially its top civilian and military leadership, from possible aggressive actions by the enemy. In addition, the weakness of Iran's approach lies in its reliance primarily on Shiite (confessionally identical) groups and regimes, while there are very few Sunni groups among Iran's allies in the Middle East (in fact, only Hamas). This narrow confessional approach to choosing allies does not allow Iran to significantly expand its support base in the region. It is also worth noting that, for pragmatic reasons, Iran remained neutral during the US attacks on Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, which weakened Iran's image as the vanguard of the anti-colonial struggle in the region.

Conclusion

Today, the world is undergoing a process of accelerated destruction of the old world order, which was led by the US and the major countries of Western Europe and was largely neocolonial in nature. Direct colonialism is a thing of the distant past, but many forms of neocolonial exploitation of developing countries by developed countries have survived to this day. Developing countries, especially in Asia and Africa, are actively fighting against the old world order and for the establishment of a multipolar world, but the problems of neocolonialism and, in particular, the self-will of the United States, which criminally overthrows disagreeable governments around the world, remain relevant (Grinin L. and Grinin A. 2021, Filin, Khodunov, and Koklikov 2022). This has sparked great interest in this topic in modern Iran, which is itself trying to become one of the regional poles of the emerging world order and has joined organizations such as SCO (2022) and BRICS (2024) for this purpose. In August 2025, Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized the importance of organizations such as BRICS, SCO, and EAEU, with which Iran has a free trade agreement, as excellent platforms for cooperation with superpowers such as Russia and China to counter the unipolar world order (TASS 2025).

The topic of colonialism is covered in great detail in contemporary Iranian discourse. Colonialism is interpreted very broadly and also implies indirect forms of dependence. According to the officially accepted point of view in Iran, the Pahlavi regime served England and then America, allowing them to plunder Iran's natural resources, and, in order to ensure the dominance of these colonial powers in the country, did not stop from mass killings of those who disagree, especially the most educated and strong-willed Muslims, as it set itself the task of weakening Islam in Iran and introducing a

Western secular worldview in its place. The Islamic Revolution put an end to the national humiliation of Iranians and foreign domination. After the revolution, Iran's spiritual leaders, Ruhollah Khomeini and Ali Khamenei, followed by the presidents of Iran, emphasize in their speeches the crimes of Western countries and the Iranian people's struggle for independence and against Western intrigues and conspiracies, and they also advocate for Iran's genuine cultural independence and against blindly following Western cultural models. The Iranian press condemns Israel, Western countries, and their allied monarchies in the Persian Gulf for brutally suppressing the will of the peoples of the Middle East and presents Iran as the voice of the true aspirations of these peoples and their faithful friend and defender against oppression. In Iran, they believe that in the Middle East the most active struggle against the modern neocolonial world order and for the establishment of a just world order is the Axis of Resistance, consisting of the Islamic regime in Iran, the Assad regime in Syria (until his overthrow in December 2024), Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon, as well as Iraqi Shiite parties and groups, and the Yemeni Houthis. Currently, these governments and groups, led by Iran, are fighting against Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip. Israel's aggression against Iran in June 2025 was an indication that a fierce struggle for dominance in the region had indeed begun between Iran and Israel.

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NOTE

* See also the works of Russian researchers (Zhukov 1999; Levin 2018).

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