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Iranian Diplomacy (IRD): Foreign Policy through Conservative-Pragmatic Lenses

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Published in:
Asian Politics & Policy

DOI:
[10.1111/aspp.12049](https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12049)

2013

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Behraves, M. (2013). Iranian Diplomacy (IRD): Foreign Policy through Conservative-Pragmatic Lenses. *Asian Politics & Policy*, 5(3), 483-485. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12049>

Total number of authors:
1

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Electronic Media Reviews

Iranian Diplomacy (IRD): Foreign Policy Through Conservative-Pragmatic Lenses (<http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/> and <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/en>)

The only Shiite state in the Muslim world established by a popular revolution in 1979, Iran has occupied center stage in the global electronic and print media for various reasons. Its controversial nuclear program; strained relations with Western powers not least the United States; unprecedented UN and U.S.-EU sanctions against it; its heightened role in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly in the Syrian crisis; acrimonious enmity with Israel; and last but not least, Iran's hardly intelligible but interesting domestic political dynamics constitute the major issues that draw international attention. A cursory tour of outstanding news networks and outlets around the world—including the Associated Press (AP), Reuters, Agence France-Presse (AFP), Aljazeera, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Xinhua, RIA Novosti, Cable News Network (CNN), *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Financial Times* (FT)—would reveal the scope of Iran-related developments that have received the spotlight.

Iranian Diplomacy (IRD) is a news analysis and political commentary Web site dedicated to Iranian foreign policy and its domestic, regional, and international implications, while also covering most of the critical developments in the wider Middle East and beyond. Headed by [Seyyed Mohammad Sadegh Kharrazi](#), a former Iranian diplomat, ever since its installation in March–April 2007, it operates in both English and Persian languages and tilts more or less toward the center as defined in the political culture of the Islamic Republic. In simpler terms, it is politically affiliated with two major camps in Iran, that is, (a) conservative pragmatists and technocrats for whom the current Expediency Discernment Council Chair Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani is still believed to be a guiding figure, and (b) moderate or loyal reformists who have remained sympathetic to the former president Seyyed Mohammad Khatami. It is noteworthy that these groups were ideologically degraded and officially sidelined following the rise to power of Iranian neoconservatives, otherwise known as “principle-ists,” under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the 2005 presidential elections.

In its [About Us](#) statement presented in Persian, IRD is described as “a website about international affairs, which aims to spread information and offer analysis on national, regional and international events.” The statement further characterizes the Web site as “a sphere for the exchange of ideas and thoughts of those

who view international affairs and relations among states from an Iranian perspective.” This second part significantly indicates that the site would not transgress the political boundaries set by the Islamic Republic; it adopts a standard approach to scrutinizing those issues that lie at the core of its ideology and manifest themselves clearly in the way the Iranian establishment conducts diplomacy. Further, though IRD as a media platform has been trying, more or less successfully, to act in a nonpartisan manner, it has arguably demonstrated a subtly critical attitude toward the Ahmadinejad government’s foreign policy practices, as if his team alone is in charge of Iran’s diplomatic apparatus. This said, it is most prominently characterized by an effort to promote a type of regional and international order attuned to the entrenched interests of the Islamic Republic and a formulation of foreign policy espoused by Iranian conservative pragmatists. Hence, there is frequent publication of commentaries and pieces that either take issue with the diplomatic measures of Iran’s regional rivals and Western nemeses or highlight the adverse and destabilizing implications of such policies.

This does not mean, however, that *Iranian Diplomacy* is an official mouthpiece. It endeavors to create a coverage balance by reporting some of the more sensitive developments and unorthodox statements that are left out entirely or are substantially manipulated by well-known news agencies and outlets inside Iran, including the [Islamic Republic News Agency](#), [Fars News Agency](#), [Mehr News Agency](#), [Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting](#), [Press TV](#), and [Tehran Times](#). In contrast, IRD cleverly utilizes framing-phrasing in reporting such cases as if the platform itself is opposed to or has a critical view of them, whereas its political orientations in reality imply otherwise. IRD’s main feeding resources are Persian-, English-, and Arabic-language networks and newspapers from which it gathers news and analyses of relevance to foreign policy and presents them in a synoptic form. It also commissions opinion editorials and commentaries mostly from Iranian political affairs observers who work in policy institutes and think tanks or teach at universities at home and abroad. Yet, the most original part of the Web site consists of interviews held with former Iranian politicians, policy makers, ambassadors, and diplomats, where a broad range of subjects, from Iran’s relations with the outside world to the security situation in neighboring countries, to Latin American politics and global economic issues, are discussed at some length.

Iranian Diplomacy is one of the very few news and commentary outlets in Iran operating independently of the government and is thus popular with certain segments of Iranian society, but it has very little, if any, readership in the West or Asia, which appears to be primarily because its English version lags far behind its Persian one in terms of both content richness and information updates. Nonetheless, the Web site provides a good window into how Iranian conservative pragmatists view the world of diplomacy and international affairs.

Web Resources

Seyyed Mohammad Sadegh Kharrazi: <http://www.kharrazi.ir>

About Us: <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/staticContent/33/%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87+%D9%85%D8%A7.html>

Islamic Republic News Agency: <http://www.irna.com/en/>
Fars News Agency: <http://english.farsnews.com>
Mehr News Agency: <http://old.mehrnews.com/en/>
Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting: <http://english.irib.ir>
Press TV: <http://www.presstv.ir>
Tehran Times: <http://www.tehrantimes.com>

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Introduction to the “Real” Indonesia: A Review of *Inside Indonesia* (<http://www.insideindonesia.org/>)

Almost 15 years after the fall of the old dictator Suharto, Indonesia has emerged as the most vibrant and stable democracy in Southeast Asia, receiving constant praise for its achievement. U.S. President [Barack Obama \(2010\)](#), for example, remarked that “[Indonesia’s] democracy is sustained and fortified by its checks and balances: a dynamic civil society; political parties and unions; a vibrant media and engaged citizens who have ensured that—in Indonesia—there will be no turning back.” British Prime Minister [David Cameron \(2012\)](#) similarly praised the country for creating “one of the world’s most inspiring democracies.” Also, Freedom House (2012), in its latest report, [Freedom in the World 2012](#), rated Indonesia as the only country in Southeast Asia that is both free and an electoral democracy.

Such optimism, however, does not resonate among serious observers of Indonesia. Journalists and commentators alike slam the country’s leaders for their corruption, rent seeking, and self-imposed isolation from the electorate almost on a daily basis. This is also joined by a significant number of academic observers who similarly emphasize the increasingly vulgar behavior of the Indonesian elite unconstrained by the rule of law. For example, Richard Robison and Vedi Hadiz (2004), leading experts on Indonesia, argue that post-Suharto Indonesia is traveling to something other than liberal democracy, that is, “a form of democracy driven increasingly by the logic of money politics and political intimidation” (p. 256). In “democratic” Indonesia, the rule of law is conspicuously missing.

Those who are new to Indonesia might struggle to understand the absence of the rule of law in the context of democratization. This is partly because the media coverage is occupied with day-to-day events and rarely, if ever, provides us with systematic analyses as to the fundamental causes of Indonesia’s transition to illiberal democracy. Academic research, say, in the form of journal articles, on the other hand, offers detailed and systematic analyses on the subject but is often written in ways that the general public might have difficulties in comprehending and is hidden behind journal paywalls as well. Thus, there is a compelling need for concise analyses of Indonesia in accessible terms.

This is where *Inside Indonesia* comes in. Established 30 years ago, it publishes quality articles written mostly, but not exclusively, by academics. All articles are available free of charge, as are archives of back issues. The articles are based on in-depth empirical research and provide us with detailed information and