

**CIVILIZATION AS IDENTITY: THE ROLE OF HISTORICAL MEMORY AND
RELIGIOUS NARRATIVE IN IRAN-ISRAEL HOSTILITY.**

Fasiku, Gbenga Cornelius

Department of Philosophy,
Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba,
cfasiku@gmail.com or gbenga.fc@ksu.edu.ng
ORCID:009-00903107-7661

Stephen, Emmanuel

Department of Philosophy,
Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba,
emmauelstephen864@gmail.com

and

Adewumi, Clement Ilesanmi

Department of Philosophy,
Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba,
wumiclem2004@yahoo.co.uk or wumiclems1010@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the persistent hostility between Iran and Israel from the perspective of civilization as identity, stressing the formative role of historical memory and religious narrative in shaping each nation's perception of the other. Rather than viewing their antagonism solely as a product of geopolitical rationality or recent ideological shift, this paper situates Iran-Israel tensions within broader civilizational paradigms, where sacred history, messianic expectations and the trauma of past empires converge into present-day enmity. The paper interrogates how ancient civilizational legacies and mythic-religious agendas continue to influence political rhetoric, collective identity and strategic choices till date. The paper critically observes speeches, state-sponsored media and symbolic references in national policy and exposes how both states construct existential narratives that sacralize conflict and delegitimize compromise. In the end, the paper argues that meaningful diplomatic resolution requires engaging not just with political grievances, but with the deeper historical and religious imaginaries that this sustain hostility.

Keywords: Civilization, Historical Memory, Religious Narrative, Iran-Israel Conflict, Identity Politics

Introduction:

The hostility between Iran and Israel is often interpreted through the lens of geopolitics, ideological extremism, or nuclear politics. However, beneath these superficial tensions lies a more profound and enduring source of conflict: the entrenchment of civilizational identity,

forged through historical memory and religious narratives. These civilizational hypotheses are not merely rhetorical embellishments; they shape national self-perception, define the "Other," and influence strategic behavior in ways that transcend conventional political logic. As Huntington argued, the post-Cold War world is increasingly characterized not by ideological blocs, but by civilizations grounded in religion, culture and memory, making the clash between Iran and Israel emblematic of this paradigm.¹

Iran's self-conception as the heir of Persian and Islamic civilization is deeply embedded in its historical consciousness and revolutionary ideology. Its leaders routinely invoke narratives of resistance against Western expansionism and Zionist aggression, casting Israel not merely as a political rival but as a metaphysical adversary in a sacred struggle.² Conversely, Israel's national identity is undergirded by the collective memory of the Holocaust, biblical history and the notion of divine promise and survival. The Iranian state's theological rejection of Israel's legitimacy is thus received not simply as a policy disagreement but as an existential threat that invokes the memory of past annihilations.³

This unpleasant chemistry of memory and myth elevates the conflict into the realm of what Assmann calls "cultural memory" a mode of collective remembrance that is institutionalized, ritualized, and transmitted across generations.⁴ Religious texts, martyrdom stories and eschatological visions serve not only as markers of identity but also as blueprints for political action. For instance, Iran's revolutionary ideology is steeped in *Shi'amestianism*, viewing confrontation with *Zionism* as a step toward the eventual return of the *Mahdi*.⁵ Israel, for its part, surrounds its security policy through a perspective shaped by biblical precedent and the trauma of exile, fostering a narrative of perpetual vulnerability and divine election.⁶

Thus, the hostility between Iran and Israel cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the deeper symbolic orders that sustain it. Historical grievances, religious cosmologies and civilizational self-images coalesce to form identities that are resistant to compromise. This paper argues that a critical engagement with these symbolic constructions is essential for both scholarly analysis and policy formulation. Only by understanding the civilizational logic that animates each side can there be hope for de-escalation and eventual reconciliation.

¹. Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Simon & Schuster., p. 21.

². Keddie, N. R. (2006). *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*(Updated ed.). Yale University Press. p. 187.

³. Segev, T. (2000). *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*. Henry Holt and Company., p. 302

⁴. Assmann, J. (2011). *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination*. Cambridge University Press. p. 48.

⁵. Takeyh, R. (2009). *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*. Oxford University Press., p. 95

⁶. Ben-Porat, G. (2008). *The Failure of the Middle East Peace Process: A Comparative Analysis of Peace Implementation in Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland and South Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan, p. 42.

Historical Memory and Civilizational Self-Identity in Iran-Israel Hostility

Historical memory plays a foundational role in shaping the civilizational self-identity of both Iran and Israel. It is not merely a passive recollection of the past but an active, selective construction of memory that serves to legitimize contemporary political stances and foreign policy objectives. In the context of the Iran-Israel conflict, both states have cultivated powerful narratives of historical continuity, victimhood, resistance and divine destiny, which serve as the foundation for their present-day civilizational postures.

For Iran, the legacy of Persian imperial civilization embodied in the *Achaemenid*, Parthian and Sassanid empires represents a deep cultural reservoir of pride, resilience and autonomy. This ancient grandeur has been integrated into the post-1979 Islamic Republic's ideological agenda as a symbol of resistance to Western cultural imperialism and Zionist influence. In spite of the Islamic regime's initial inconsistency toward pre-Islamic history, the dignity of ancient Persia has been selectively re-appropriated to project Iran as a continuous civilizational force. As Dabashi notes, "The Islamic Republic may wear the garments of *Shi'a* theology, but underneath lies the *silhouette* of an empire with a millennia-old memory of glory and sovereignty."⁷

These historical memories serve not only as reflections of the past but as forward-looking scripts that position each state within a cosmic or civilizational struggle.⁸ Iran's civilizational memory is deeply intertwined with its Islamic revolutionary identity, especially through the legacy of anti-imperialist resistance. The 1953 CIA-backed coup that overthrew Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh is remembered not only as a national humiliation but as a formative moment that justifies perpetual vigilance against Western and Israeli interference.⁹ This memory of betrayal becomes fused with a broader *Shi'a* narrative of martyrdom and resistance, particularly the story of Imam Husayn's defiance at Karbala, which symbolizes the eternal struggle against tyranny.¹⁰

Israel, in turn, constructs its civilizational identity around both biblical history and the trauma of modern exile and persecution. The narrative of return exemplified by the foundational Zionist motto, "a land without a people for a people without a land" invokes the memory of ancient Israelite kingdoms, the destruction of the Second Temple and centuries of diaspora as a civilizational arc culminating in the rebirth of the modern Jewish state. This identity is further galvanized by the Holocaust, which functions as a civilizational rupture and moral touchstone in Israeli national memory. Segev writes, "The memory of the *Shoah* has become an organizing principle of Israeli political culture, shaping both foreign policy and perceptions of existential

⁷. Dabashi, H. (2008). *Iran: A People Interrupted*. New Press. p. 214.

⁸. Assmann, J. (2011), p. 51.

⁹. Kinzer, S. (2008). *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (2nd ed.). Wiley., p. 163.

¹⁰. Takeyh (2009), p. 71

threat.”¹¹

Israel's memory, meanwhile, incorporates a deep civilizational consciousness rooted in biblical covenant and survival against annihilation. The Exodus story, the Babylonian captivity and the Holocaust are strung together as moments in a sacred history that continually validates the necessity of Jewish self-determination and militarized vigilance. This narrative is not merely historical but liturgical and ritualized, deeply embedded in the calendar, education and state ceremonies. As Zerubavel argues, “Israeli national memory is a liturgical memory, performed repeatedly to bind past suffering with future resolve.”¹²

The bitterness between Iran and Israel thus transcends contemporary policy disputes and enters the realm of symbolic competition between civilizational identities. Each state sees itself as heir to a divinely or historically sanctioned mission. Iran, particularly under theocratic leadership, sees itself as the vanguard of Islamic justice and a counterweight to perceived Western corruption, of which Israel is seen as an extension.¹³ Israel, in contrast, views itself as the outpost of Jewish civilization surrounded by hostile forces, its very existence a defiance of history's attempts to erase it. As a matter of facts, the symbolic narratives constructed by both nations create a structural hostility that resists diplomatic resolution. Because these identities are civilizational and sacred in tone, compromise is often perceived as betrayal. Civilizational memory, once politicized, becomes inflexible. This is particularly evident in the way both sides engage in identity-based delegitimization. Iranian rhetoric frequently refers to Israel as a "cancerous tumor",¹⁴ a semantic that evokes both religious impurity and historical intrusion. Israel, on the other hand, frames Iran as a genocidal state intent on completing Hitler's work, thereby invoking the Holocaust not only as memory but as prophecy.¹⁵

Assmann's concept of “cultural memory” is also very crucial here, distinguishing between communicative memory, which is informal and short-lived, and cultural memory, which is institutionalized, ritualized and laden with meaning.¹⁶ Both Iran and Israel have institutionalized their cultural memories through museums, education systems, state media and religious observances. These memories are not designed to heal but to preserve a sense of existential purpose and national coherence, even at the cost of perpetual conflict.

¹¹. Segev (2000), p. 289

¹². Zerubavel, Y. (1995). *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*. University of Chicago Press., p. 79

¹³. Keddie, N. R. (2006). *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*(Updated ed.). Yale University Press. p. 187.

¹⁴. Ayoob, M. (2009). *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World*. University of Michigan Press. p. 64.

¹⁵. Ben-Porat, G. (2008). *The failure of the Middle East Peace Process: A Comparative Analysis of Peace Implementation in Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland and South Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan., p. 45.

¹⁶. Assmann's (2011), p. 36.

In sum, historical memory and civilizational self-identity provide the symbolic infrastructure that sustains Iran-Israel hostility. This is not merely a geopolitical rivalry, but a clash of sacralized histories and civilizational destinies, each deeply embedded in the national *psyche*. Understanding these civilizational constructs is vital to any meaningful analysis of their conflict, for without engaging these deeper layers of memory and identity, diplomacy will remain at surface-level and ultimately ineffective.

Religious Narrative and Sacred Politics in Iran-Israel Hostility

The Iran/Israel tussle is not merely the result of conflicting national interests or territorial disputes; it is undergirded by powerful religious narratives that infuse political action with divine significance. These narratives do more than provide historical context, they sacralize political positions and elevate national ideologies to the level of theological imperatives. When politics becomes sacred, compromise is no longer just politically difficult, it becomes spiritually unacceptable. Both Iran and Israel exemplify this fusion of religion and politics, albeit from very different theological and historical trajectories.

In the case of Iran, the Islamic Republic was founded upon a *Shi'a* revolutionary ideology that draws heavily from religious mythology, particularly the martyrdom of Imam Husayn at Karbala. The event is not only a cornerstone of *Shi'a* identity but also a symbolic model for resistance against oppression and injustice. As Arjomand explains, “the political theology of the Islamic Republic sacralizes opposition to perceived tyranny, projecting its enemies as *Yazid*-like figures in a cosmic battle of good versus evil.”¹⁷ Israel, Zionism and Western imperialism are frequently cast into this narrative mold, giving Iranian foreign policy a distinctly messianic undertone. Thus, the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist), central to the Iranian theocratic system, institutionalizes this sacred politics by entrusting ultimate political authority to a religious leader deemed to be the protector of the Islamic community. This model grants divine legitimacy to political decisions, thereby rendering opposition to the state's stance on Israel not only a political disagreement but also a form of religious deviance. As Keddie notes, “Opposition to Israel is deeply embedded in the post-revolutionary ethos, framed as a moral duty and a continuation of *Shi'ite* defiance against corrupt powers.”¹⁸

Religious narrative in Iran is also eschatological. Belief in the eventual return of the *Mahdi*, the hidden twelfth Imam, forms a central part of *Shi'a* theology. Some Iranian leaders have interpreted regional conflicts, including opposition to Israel, as signs of the *Mahdi's* imminent return or as necessary steps to prepare for his arrival. *Ahmadinejad*, during his presidency, was

¹⁷. Arjomand, S. A. (1988). *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*. Oxford University Press. p. 109.

¹⁸. Keddie (2006), p. 204.

particularly known for such apocalyptic rhetoric. This eschatological view sees confrontation with Israel not as a political risk but as a sacred duty embedded in cosmic history.¹⁹

On the other side, Israel also blends religious narrative with political identity, though in a somewhat different fashion. While the modern Zionist movement originated as a largely secular nationalist project, religious themes quickly became indispensable to its legitimacy. The notion of *EretzYisrael* (the Land of Israel) as a divine inheritance, the idea of Jews as God's chosen people, and the invocation of biblical history are all central to Israeli state ideology and territorial claims. As Ben-Porat observes, “religious texts are frequently mobilized to justify state policies, from settlement expansion to military action, preserving them as fulfillment of divine prophecy rather than mere political strategy.”²⁰

The fusion of religion and politics in Israel has become even more pronounced over time, particularly with the rise of religious Zionism. This movement views the modern State of Israel not only as a political entity but as the beginning of the messianic redemption foretold in Jewish scripture. In this context, conceding land or political legitimacy to a perceived enemy like Iran or even discussing compromise is viewed by many as tantamount to violating God's covenant with the Jewish people. This belief system also renders Iran's theological challenge to Israel's legitimacy especially threatening, as it attacks not just a nation-state but a sacred narrative of divine promise and survival.²¹

Besides, the Holocaust operates as a *quasi*-religious memory in Israeli political life. While not theological in origin, it has been sacralized through ritual commemoration and national myth, shaping Israeli identity and security doctrine. The Iranian state's repeated denial or minimization of the Holocaust, such as during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's tenure, is thus received not merely as historical revisionism but as blasphemy against the sanctified memory of Jewish suffering.²² It reinforces the perception within Israel of Iran as a messianic enemy determined to complete the genocidal work of the Nazis. Thus, these sacred narratives create a profound asymmetry in discourse: each side views the other not merely as a political adversary but as an existential threat to a divinely ordained destiny. Religious symbolism turns realpolitik into cosmic struggle and historical grievances into eternal enmities. This structure, while politically potent, severely limits the space for diplomacy. As Ayoob warns, “when states sacralize their policies, they close off rational discourse and elevate zero-sum conflict to the level of divine will.”²³

^{19.} Takeyh (2009), p. 119.

^{20.} Ben-Porat, (2008), p. 53.

^{21.} Gorenberg, G. (2006). *The accidental empire: Israel and the birth of the settlements, 1967–1977*. Times Books. p. 137.

^{22.} Segev, (2000), p. 294.

^{23.} Ayoob (2009), p. 61.

Accordingly, the Iran-Israel hostility is deeply rooted in religious narrative and sacred politics. Both states construct theological frameworks that reinforce national identity while demonizing the other. These frameworks are not incidental but central to the logic of their foreign policies. Understanding the sacred dimension of this conflict is crucial for any attempt at de-escalation. Without addressing the underlying religious cosmologies that animate these hostilities, political solutions will remain superficial and ultimately unsustainable.

State Rhetoric as Symbolic Framing in Iran-Israel Hostility

State rhetoric and symbolic framing serve as potent tools in the construction and perpetuation of the Iran-Israel hostility. Far beyond mere propaganda, these rhetorical strategies function as ideological instruments for shaping public consciousness, legitimizing political action and sacralizing conflict. Both Iran and Israel have developed intricate symbolic vocabularies that inform their portrayal of each other not simply as adversaries, but as existential threats embedded in narratives of cultural identity, spiritual mission, and historical trauma.

In Iran, state rhetoric about Israel has long revolved around delegitimization, dehumanization, and metaphysical antagonism. Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Israel has consistently been referred to in official speeches, media, and textbooks as the "Zionist regime" a term deliberately chosen to deny the Jewish state legitimacy and sovereignty. The phrase strips Israel of its national character and recasts it as a colonial-imperialist outpost of Western power.²⁴ Iranian leaders, from Ayatollah Khomeini to Ayatollah Khamenei, have consistently referred to Israel as a "cancerous tumor" in the region imagery that both pathologizes and demonizes the state. As Ayoobnotes, such language elevates hostility into a moral imperative, casting Iran's opposition to Israel as a form of spiritual purification and regional liberation.²⁵

The symbolic language is not confined to political speeches but is embedded in Iran's institutional culture. State-sponsored commemorations such as *Al-Quds Day*, introduced by Khomeini in 1979, are explicitly designed to unify the Muslim world against Zionism and to frame the Palestinian cause as a divine responsibility. On these occasions, Israeli flags are burned, slogans such as "Death to Israel" are chanted, and posters often depict Israeli leaders as demonic figures. This ritualistic repetition of symbols and phrases constructs a semi-sacred vocabulary of resistance that becomes internalized through social and political life.²⁶ Iranian rhetoric also employs eschatological frames. Speeches by former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad often included references to the impending return of the Mahdi and suggested that global upheaval, particularly the elimination of Zionism, was a precondition for his arrival.²⁷ Such framing situates

²⁴. Keddie, (2006), p. 197.

²⁵. Ayoob (2009), p. 64.

²⁶. Arjomand, (1988), p. 131.

²⁷. Takeyh, (2009), p. 122.

present-day geopolitics within an apocalyptic narrative that justifies intransigence and valorizes confrontation.

Israel, for its part, employs a different but equally potent set of rhetorical and symbolic strategies. While Israeli leaders avoid explicitly religious language in many diplomatic contexts, internal discourse and national symbolism are heavily influenced by biblical imagery, Holocaust memory, and the theme of existential survival. Iran is frequently portrayed as the new *Amalek* the biblical archenemy of the Israelites or compared to Nazi Germany, especially in the context of Holocaust denial or threats against Israeli existence.²⁸ These comparisons are not accidental; they serve to symbolically equate modern threats with past traumas, mobilizing public support for hardline security policies and justifying military preparedness.

Israeli state rhetoric often emphasizes existential threat and moral clarity, framing its policies as defensive necessities in a hostile environment. The concept of “Never Again,” derived from Holocaust memory, is central to Israel's national ethos and underpins its nuclear ambiguity, preemptive defense doctrines, and regional intelligence operations. This symbolic posture is not merely strategic it is emotionally resonant and deeply ingrained in national consciousness. As Zerubavel observes, “The Israeli state has institutionalized a rhetoric of existential siege that fuses memory, identity, and policy into a single narrative of justified vigilance.”²⁹

In addition, Israeli educational materials and media consistently emphasize the radicalism of the Iranian regime, portraying it as a fanatical theocracy bent on Israel's destruction. This portrayal is reinforced by references to Iran's proxy activities in Lebanon and Gaza, especially its support for Hezbollah and Hamas. Through these associations, Iran is symbolically linked to chaos, terrorism, and anti-Semitism, reinforcing the binary of civilization versus barbarism.³⁰

Symbolic framing also extends to diplomacy and international advocacy. Iran, for example, frames its anti-Israel posture as part of a broader Third Worldist or anti-imperialist struggle. Its speeches at the United Nations often invoke colonial history and Western hypocrisy, casting Iran as the voice of the oppressed and Israel as the last vestige of settler colonialism in the Middle East.³¹ Israel counters by emphasizing liberal democracy, human rights, and technological innovation symbolically aligning itself with the West and portraying Iran as part of a global axis of authoritarianism and extremism.

^{28.} Segev, (2000), p. 306.

^{29.} Zerubavel (1995), p. 94.

^{30.} Ben-Porat, (2008), p. 49.

^{31.} Dabashi, (2008), p. 198.

The culminating effect of these rhetorical strategies is to harden public opinion on both sides and close off avenues for pragmatic diplomacy. Symbolic framing renders dialogue suspect, compromise a betrayal, and nuance a form of weakness. When political actors speak in absolutes casting the other as evil, diseased, or genocidal they leave little space for mutual recognition or negotiation. As Huntington argued, "Civilizations rally around symbols and myths, and in doing so, transform conflicts into identity wars."³²

Certainly, state rhetoric and symbolic framing are central to the perpetuation of Iran-Israel hostility. They function not only as tools of communication but as mechanisms of ideological reinforcement and identity construction. Understanding these rhetorical structures is essential for any serious attempt to deconstruct the conflict and imagine alternative futures.

Implications for Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution

The civilizational, religious and symbolic dimensions of the Iran-Israel conflict present profound challenges for conventional diplomacy and conflict resolution. Unlike disputes rooted in tangible territorial or resource issues, this conflict is embedded in narratives of sacred history, existential identity, and metaphysical enmity. These deep-rooted frameworks make compromise not only politically costly but spiritually suspect, often rendering negotiations ineffective or superficial. Therefore, any viable diplomatic engagement must move beyond transactional diplomacy to address the underlying narratives and ideological structures that perpetuate the hostility.

One of the central implications for diplomacy is the inflexibility of religious and civilizational claims. Traditional diplomacy operates on the assumption of rational actors capable of compromise based on interest calculations. However, when political positions are sacralized as they are in both Iran and Israel rational cost-benefit analysis becomes secondary to divine mandates or civilizational destiny. For example, Iran's opposition to Israel is framed not merely as political resistance but as a religious duty grounded in Shi'a theology and revolutionary ideology.³³ Similarly, Israeli security doctrine often invokes historical traumas like the Holocaust or religious claims to the land, which sacralize the need for defensive aggression and territorial retention.³⁴

This sacralization of political stances creates what Appleby describes as the "ambivalence of the sacred" the notion that religious conviction can both inspire peace and justify violence.³⁵ In this case, both Iran and Israel draw on sacred narratives that legitimize enmity. As a result, diplomatic

³² Huntington, (1996), p. 266.

³³ Takeyh, (2009), p. 117.

³⁴ Segev, (2000), p. 310.

³⁵ Appleby, R. S. (2000). *The ambivalence of the sacred: Religion, violence, and reconciliation*. Rowman & Littlefield. p. 13

language that does not engage these narratives is often perceived as hollow or irrelevant. For example, peace initiatives that focus solely on strategic deterrence or economic incentives fail to address the symbolic universes within which both states operate.³⁶

A second major implication is the problem of mutual delegitimization, which inhibits even the basic preconditions for diplomacy: recognition and dialogue. Iran consistently denies Israel's legitimacy as a state, referring to it as an artificial creation or a "Zionist entity," while Israel regards Iran as an irrational actor or genocidal regime. This mutual delegitimization is not simply rhetorical; it is institutionalized in education systems, media portrayals, and international posturing. As Gerges points out, "diplomacy is impossible without mutual recognition, and both Iran and Israel have constructed national identities that require denying the legitimacy of the other."³⁷

Even multilateral forums, such as the United Nations, often become battlegrounds for symbolic conflict rather than arenas for negotiation. Iranian representatives use the UN to promote an anti-imperialist discourse that frames Israel as a colonial occupier, while Israeli diplomats invoke democratic values and Holocaust memory to rally Western support against Iran's regional ambitions.³⁸ These forums become extensions of domestic propaganda rather than venues for substantive engagement. Yet, in spite of these obstacles, there are still possibilities for conflict de-escalation, particularly through track-two diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and narrative reframing. Track-two diplomacy informal dialogue among academics, religious leaders, and civil society actors can create the space to engage in more honest conversations about identity and memory, beyond the rigid constraints of official state discourse. As Lederach argues, sustainable peace often requires a transformation of relationships, which cannot occur through formal treaties alone but must involve processes of reconciliation and mutual storytelling.³⁹

Another potential avenue lies in narrative reframing the process by which conflicting parties reinterpret their histories in ways that allow for coexistence rather than antagonism. For example, Iranian and Israeli scholars might collaborate on re-examining shared regional histories, such as the Persian Empire's role in facilitating the return of Jews to Jerusalem under Cyrus the Great.⁴⁰ Such symbolic gestures could serve as seeds for mutual recognition and historical pluralism, challenging the zero-sum narratives currently in place.

³⁶. Ben-Porat, (2008), p. 58.

³⁷. Gerges, F. A. (2010). *The far enemy: Why Jihad went global*. Cambridge University Press. p. 221.

³⁸. Dabashi, H. (2008). *Iran: A people interrupted*. New Press. p. 209.

³⁹. Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. United States Institute of Peace Press. p. 38.

⁴⁰. Ezra 1:1–4

Furthermore, external actors, particularly global powers and regional stakeholders must be cautious not to exacerbate symbolic hostilities through one-sided alliances or careless rhetoric. U.S. policy that unequivocally supports Israeli positions without acknowledging Palestinian or regional grievances can reinforce Iranian narratives of Western bias and divine resistance.⁴¹ Similarly, Iranian alignment with groups openly calling for Israel's destruction further entrenches Israeli perceptions of existential siege. A more nuanced diplomacy that recognizes the symbolic weight of identity narratives is essential.

Finally, religious actors themselves often seen as obstacles to peace can also become agents of transformation. Religious leaders possess moral credibility and interpretive authority within their communities and can reframe theological doctrines in ways that promote coexistence. As Juergensmeyer notes, "religion is not inherently violent or peaceful; it depends on who interprets it and how it is mobilized."⁴² Interfaith dialogue initiatives that focus on shared values such as justice, compassion, and community may help create openings for empathy and reduce the dehumanization that underpins sacred enmity.

The Iran-Israel conflict undeniably presents distinctive diplomatic challenges due to its civilizational depth and religious symbolism. Traditional statecraft must be supplemented with cultural, religious and narrative-based approaches that address the core identities and memories involved. Without such multidimensional engagement, diplomatic efforts are likely to remain shallow, leaving the deeper logic of conflict untouched.

Conclusion

The enduring hostility between Iran and Israel cannot be adequately understood through the constricted angles of security politics, strategy, or regional rivalry alone. As this paper has established, the conflict is deeply rooted in the symbolic, historical as well as religious frameworks that shape each nation's identity and political posture. From the invocation of ancient empires and sacred scriptures to the sacralization of martyrdom, victimhood and divine promise, both states have constructed civilizational narratives that structure their enmity as both inevitable and righteous.

Iran's revolutionary ideology, steeped in *Shi'a* theology and anti-imperialist memory, positions Israel not merely as a geopolitical adversary but as a moral and spiritual affront. In turn, Israel, informed by its biblical heritage and the trauma of the Holocaust, views Iran's rhetoric and regional behavior through the lens of existential threat. These mutually reinforcing identity

⁴¹. Ayoob, (2009), p. 75.

⁴². Juergensmeyer, M. (2003). *Terror in the mind of God: The global rise of religious violence* (3rd ed.). University of California Press. p. 159.

constructions are perpetuated through state pomposity, sacred politics, and symbolic framing, leaving little room for compromise or coexistence.

Also, the interplay of religious narrative and political ideology creates a condition in which traditional diplomatic strategies predicated on pragmatism and mutual interest struggle to gain traction. Efforts at conflict resolution that fail to engage the deeper symbolic orders of memory, myth, and civilizational purpose are likely to falter. As this study suggests, sustainable peace will require more than treaties or negotiations; it will demand a reimagining of the narratives each side tells about itself and the other.

However, this is not a counsel of despair. The very tools used to entrench conflict religion, history, and identity can also be repurposed to build bridges. Religious leaders, cultural diplomats, educators, and civil society actors all have roles to play in reframing these sacred narratives toward coexistence. Recognition of shared historical moments, acknowledgment of mutual suffering and the cultivation of alternative symbolic frameworks could serve as the groundwork for de-escalation. In confronting the civilizational logic that underpins their hostility, Iran and Israel must also recognize the humanity that lies beneath it. Peace will not come from denying the power of memory and myth but from transforming them.

Bibliography

- Appleby, R. S. (2000). *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Arjomand, S. A. (1988). *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic revolution in Iran*. Oxford University Press.
- Ayoob, M. (2009). *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World*. University of Michigan Press.
- Ben-Porat, G. (2008). *The Failure of the Middle East Peace Process: A Comparative Analysis of Peace Implementation in Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland and South Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dabashi, H. (2008). *Iran: A People Interrupted*. New Press.
- Gerges, F. A. (2010). *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad went Global*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gorenberg, G. (2006). *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967–1977*. Times Books.
- Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Simon & Schuster.
- Juergensmeyer, M. (2003). *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (3rd ed.). University of California Press.
- Keddie, N. R. (2006). *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (Updated ed.). Yale University Press.
- Kinzer, S. (2008). *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (2nd ed.). Wiley.

- Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Masalha, N. (1997). *A land Without a People: Israel, Transfer and the Palestinians, 1949–96*. Faber and Faber.
- Segev, T. (2000). *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*. Henry Holt and Company.
- Takeyh, R. (2009). *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*. Oxford University Press.
- Zerubavel, Y. (1995). *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*. University of Chicago Press.