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Indicators of "Heroic Flexibility" in the Foreign Policy Thought of Ayatollah Khamenei

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Abstract: "Heroic Flexibility" is a phrase that was first used by Ayatollah Khamenei in 1969; however, its most prominent application occurred in 2013 during the negotiations between Iran and the P5+1. Over recent years, this concept has provided an important direction for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The central question of the present study concerns the meaning of "Heroic Flexibility" and its indicators from the perspective of its originator, Ayatollah Khamenei. This concept is examined from both negative and positive dimensions. The findings of this study indicate that "Heroic Flexibility" refers to employing all possible methods to achieve a given objective and to the "timely and appropriate use of flexibility and authority in dealing with the enemy." From the perspective of the Leader, "Heroic Flexibility" constitutes a mechanism of struggle for confronting the enemy, with the ultimate aim of defeating the adversary. This concept falls within the broader theories and strategies of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy—such as dignity ('izzat), wisdom (hikmat), and expediency (maslahat)—while operating primarily at the level of tactics and methods. Maintaining a revolutionary spirit, responding firmly to the enemy's acts of aggression, and avoiding passive silence and a defensive posture are among its essential requirements.The present study is a basic-applied and explanatory research project that employs a text-centered hermeneutic approach.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Negotiation, Heroic Flexibility, Foreign Policy, Ayatollah Khamenei.

Introduction

"Heroic Flexibility" is a phrase that, according to the findings of this study, was first used in 1969 by Ayatollah Khamenei in the course of translating Soleḥ al-Ḥasan (The Peace of Imam Hasan), written by Shaykh Āl Yāsīn, from Arabic into Persian. At that time, he added the phrase to the title of the book and changed its title to The Peace of Imam Hasan: The Most Magnificent Heroic Flexibility in History (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2000). However, the most prominent instance of the application of this idea in the contemporary era occurred 44 years after that translation, in 2013, during the negotiations between Iran and the P5+1. The importance of examining the concept of Heroic Flexibility from Ayatollah Khamenei's perspective becomes particularly evident when his direct references to the concept are examined. Such an examination reveals his repeated emphasis on the erroneous interpretations of Heroic Flexibility and his continuous efforts to reject such interpretations.

The specific question addressed in this study is: What does the concept of Heroic Flexibility in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran mean from the perspective and within the thought of the first person to employ this concept, namely Ayatollah Khamenei? The initial hypothesis proposed in response to this question is that Heroic Flexibility constitutes an artful maneuver aimed at achieving a desired objective in such a manner that, while preserving dignity, independence, commitment to principles, and adherence to ideals, diverse approaches and methods are employed in pursuit of various and multifaceted Islamic aspirations.

At first glance, this hypothesis may appear to place less emphasis on the "heroic" dimension of the concept. However, the course of this study demonstrates in detail that Heroic Flexibility is not merely an additive combination of two separate concepts. Accordingly, "Heroic Flexibility" does not refer simply to a form of "flexibility" or "accommodation" occasionally demonstrated by a hero for reasons such as weakness or inability. Rather, a hero may, in certain circumstances, deliberately demonstrate flexibility in the course of achieving victory and overcoming an opponent so that, in subsequent circumstances, the authority and power he demonstrates can be more

effective and consequential. In this sense, flexibility is an inseparable component of victory and heroism itself.
Therefore, whenever the present study refers to flexibility or accommodation, it is this particular form of purposeful flexibility that is intended. In assessing the "heroic" character of such flexibility, attention is consequently devoted to the specific characteristics that this form of flexibility must possess. This approach should by no means be understood as disregarding the word "heroic" in the expression "Heroic Flexibility."

Given the prevailing context of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the operational application of the concept of Heroic Flexibility, and the conditions of the international system, as well as the possibility that foreign-policy decision-makers may continue to employ this tactic, a precise and practical understanding of the concept is of considerable importance. Furthermore, given the absence of a clear conceptualization of Heroic Flexibility in previous studies of Iranian foreign policy, the primary objective of this basic-applied research is to develop an accurate and precise understanding of the meaning intended by the originator of the concept of Heroic Flexibility. Significantly, the originator of this concept is also, by virtue of his current constitutional position, the most influential individual in the Islamic Republic of Iran with regard to foreign-policy decision-making.

The research employs a text-centered hermeneutic approach. To apply this method, the concept of Heroic Flexibility was first examined on the basis of Ayatollah Khamenei's own statements. Through a word-by-word examination and close analysis of the terminology used in his published statements concerning the concept, key statements, keywords, and prominent positive and negative concepts through which he explains Heroic Flexibility were identified, categorized, and subsequently consolidated into five analytical dimensions.

In the next stage, these concepts were analyzed within the intellectual framework of the originator of Heroic Flexibility in the field of foreign policy, which had been reconstructed at the outset of the study. This analysis was supplemented by other statements and

views expressed by Ayatollah Khamenei concerning the subject. The purpose was to identify the fundamental principles underlying his definition of Heroic Flexibility. By bringing together his dispersed explanations of the characteristics of Heroic Flexibility across different contexts, the study seeks to provide a more precise representation of the characteristics of the concept and of his overall understanding of Heroic Flexibility, and to reconstruct the corresponding intellectual model.

In the process, different—and in some cases contradictory—interpretations of the Leader's statements concerning the aforementioned concept are also implicitly presented and assessed against the reconstructed intellectual model. This validation process has contributed significantly to refining the intellectual model and developing a more precise definition of Heroic Flexibility, ultimately leading to a unified definition of the concept.

The present study is organized as follows. It first presents the intellectual framework of "Foreign Policy in the Thought of the Supreme Leader" and then examines the concept of Heroic Flexibility. It subsequently provides a detailed analysis of the concept on the basis of the statements of the Supreme Leader and, finally, draws conclusions regarding the nature and meaning of Heroic Flexibility within Ayatollah Khamenei's intellectual framework.

Literature Review

Despite the importance of the subject and the methodological considerations discussed above, the nature and meaning of the concept of "Heroic Flexibility" have not been adequately explained in previous studies of Iranian foreign policy. For example, Soleimani, Bashiri, and Alimohammadi, in their article entitled "Heroic Flexibility in Foreign Diplomacy from the Perspective of Political Jurisprudence," examine the prerequisites for Heroic Flexibility in foreign policy from the perspective of political jurisprudence. In the course of their study, they provide only a general description of the concept in a few paragraphs (Soleimani et al., 2013: 65–88).

Mo'tamed Koutiani and his colleagues, in another article entitled "The Principle of Dignity and Tolerance and Its Relationship with Heroic Flexibility in Political Negotiations from the Perspective

of Islam," explicitly state that their objective is to explain the principle of dignity and examine the concept of tolerance from an Islamic perspective. Accordingly, they exclude a detailed conceptualization of Heroic Flexibility from the scope of their study (Mo'tamed Koutiani et al., 2017: 109–130).

Rostami and Ganji, in their article "American Smart Power and Iran's Idea of Heroic Flexibility in Nuclear Negotiations," examine the influence of American soft power on the nuclear negotiations. However, conceptualizing and systematically defining Heroic Flexibility does not constitute an objective of their study (Rostami & Ganji, 2016: 53–76).

Nematollah Yousefiān and Fatemeh Moridi, in three separate articles focusing on the narrative and Qur'anic foundations of Heroic Flexibility, attempt to examine concepts related to "prudence," "rationality," and "dissimulation" (taqiyya) in the Qur'an and Islamic traditions. However, their extensive focus on the foundations of the concept has prevented them from fully developing a comprehensive and detailed definition of Heroic Flexibility and from adequately addressing the details of the statements of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, as the originator of the concept (Yousefiān, 2015: 85–120; Yousefiān, 2016: 35–62; Moridi, 2015: 109–125).

Shamsini-Ghiasvand and Nasiri, in an article entitled "The Supreme Leader's Approach to the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with Emphasis on the Method of Negotiation and the Concept of Heroic Flexibility," have perhaps conducted the study most closely related to the subject of the present research. By examining the intellectual foundations of the Supreme Leader and his perspective on foreign policy, they analyze his statements concerning Heroic Flexibility. Unfortunately, however, their strong emphasis on the foundations and approaches of the Islamic Republic and the Supreme Leader toward foreign policy has resulted in a considerable imbalance in their analysis. After devoting approximately half of the study to the foundations of foreign policy, the second half primarily consists of reiterating the Supreme Leader's statements and presenting illustrative examples from foreign thinkers. Consequently, the study does not succeed in deriving a comprehensive understanding of the

development of the Supreme Leader's statements or of the concept of Heroic Flexibility as a whole, including all of its characteristics (Ghiasvand & Nasiri, 2015: 3–22).

Finally, in another study, Farajollah Mirarab, in an article entitled "Explaining the Strategy of Heroic Flexibility in the Words of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution," makes use of numerous Qur'anic and traditional sources. Nevertheless, the study is somewhat limited in terms of analytical depth. In particular, his characterization of Heroic Flexibility as a "strategy" rather than a "tactic" constitutes one of the conceptual shortcomings in his explanation of Heroic Flexibility. This issue is examined in detail in the present study (Mirarab, 2015: 127–144).

1. Theoretical Approach: Foreign Policy in the Thought of the Supreme Leader

According to the Cambridge Online Dictionary, "foreign policy" refers to a government's policy concerning how it deals with other countries (Cambridge Online Dictionary). More precisely, foreign policy can be defined as a strategy or a set of pre-planned actions formulated by governmental decision-makers with the purpose of achieving specific objectives within the framework of national interests and the international environment. Such actions may constitute either a government's own initiative or a response to the actions of other states (Moqtader, 1980: 131–132). From another perspective, foreign policy represents one of the most important dimensions of the social and political life of nations and constitutes an intellectual and theoretical effort to examine the nature of states and analyze their behavior in the international arena (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2015: 1). In an Islamic political system, foreign policy and international relations are oriented toward coordination and peaceful coexistence among different nations of the world and are organized around two fundamental principles: justice and unity (Ayatollah Javadi Amoli, 2009: 15, 37).

Different approaches to the analysis of foreign policy have emphasized different explanatory factors. Some scholars consider it essential to examine foreign policy in relation to concepts such as "domestic politics" and "ideology." Kenneth Waltz, for instance, places greater emphasis on the influence of international politics on

foreign policy (Waltz, 1988: 619), and some scholars following this approach have analyzed states' foreign policies without taking their domestic politics into account (Elman, 1995: 172). Others, however, regard domestic politics and ideology as highly influential factors in explaining foreign policy behavior (Rosato & Schuessler, 2011: 813). This latter approach appears to correspond more closely to the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Stephen Walt can also be placed, to some extent, within this category, as he argues that analyzing foreign policy without taking into account an actor's theory is almost impossible (Walt, 2005, vol. 8: 23; Walt, 2012, vol. 7: 33). From this perspective, Heroic Flexibility may be understood as a policy influenced by the ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran and as reflecting what Neacsu, drawing on Morgenthau's writings and personal notes, describes as the "need for a more idealistic outlook" (Morgenthau, 1959: 15; Neacsu, 2010: 19).

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran identifies the determination of the general policies of the political system and supervision over their proper implementation as among the most important responsibilities of the Leader (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1989: Article 110). Ayatollah Khamenei, as the highest-ranking authority with substantial influence over foreign policy within the political structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, 2011: 510), consequently occupies a central position in shaping the country's foreign-policy orientation.

In the present article, "foreign policy in the thought of the Supreme Leader" is adopted as the conceptual framework because Ayatollah Khamenei's views constitute one of the most important sources influencing the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the processes of policy formulation and decision-making associated with it (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2015: 254; Izadi, 1992: 108). The concept of Heroic Flexibility derives its meaning within the sphere of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy and should therefore be understood as an element of this broader intellectual framework.

Various studies have examined the framework of Iran's external relations on the basis of Islamic theories (Norouzi Amiri & Darabi, 2014: 137). An examination of the Supreme Leader's ideas and

views concerning politics and international relations also demonstrates that these views are rooted in a monotheistic worldview, Islamic teachings, and Islam's understanding of human beings, human interactions, and the ultimate purpose of human life at the individual, collective, and global levels. In contrast to approaches that regard states as merely seeking power, this perspective does not reduce state behavior exclusively to the pursuit of power (Mearsheimer, 2001: 33–34). Many scholars who have examined Ayatollah Khamenei's views maintain that his positions are grounded in Islamic jurisprudential and religious principles (Va'ezi Dehnavi, 2012: 141; Sotoudeh, 2006: 130). Consistent with these principles, the broader body of his statements defines, both explicitly and implicitly, three fundamental principles—'izzat (dignity), hikmat (wisdom), and maslahat (expediency)—as the inviolable framework governing the international relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Hatami Rad, 2007: 181). Other principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy can consequently be categorized under these three overarching principles.

The concept of 'izzat (dignity) derives from the Islamic tradition expressed in the statement "Islam prevails and nothing prevails over it" (al-Islam ya'lu wa la yu'la 'alayhi) (Majlisi, vol. 39: 47), as well as from various Qur'anic verses, including "Allah will never grant the disbelievers a way over the believers" (Qur'an, 4:141) and "You shall neither wrong nor be wronged" (Qur'an, 2:279). The Leader's understanding of this concept is that the international interactions of an Islamic society and political system must never result in the humiliation or degradation of Islam and Muslims (Ayatollah Khamenei, 1991; 1989).

The concept of hikmat (wisdom) encompasses acting wisely, prudently, and thoughtfully in speech, social interactions, and conduct. Maslahat (expediency), meanwhile, does not refer to the interests of individuals but to the broader interests of the country and the Islamic Revolution(koohkan,2025). In this regard, Ayatollah Khamenei has emphasized the necessity for ambassadors and officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to observe piety, asceticism, and moral discipline in their personal, religious, economic, and family conduct (Ayatollah Khamenei, 1991).

Within the field of foreign policy in the thought of the Supreme Leader, various studies have attempted to classify the characteristics and principles that he considers important in foreign policy. Each of these studies has identified several major characteristics as overarching categories and placed other characteristics under those categories(Roshani&Koohkan,2025). For example, Seyyed Esmaeil Yasini interprets the principle of 'izzat as opposition to the hegemonic system and considers it, together with three other dimensions that can all be subsumed under hikmat and maslahat, as constituting a roadmap for the diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Yasini, 2018).

Other studies have likewise addressed such classifications. Their common feature is the identification of characteristics and principles for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran from the perspective of the Supreme Leader. These characteristics and principles can, in their entirety, be subsumed under the three fundamental principles of 'izzat, hikmat, and maslahat. In his study, Naser Asadi identifies 42 distinct characteristics and demonstrates that all of them fall within the discourse of "interactionism against the hegemonic system." Clearly, this formulation combines two previously identified principles: 'izzat (opposition to the hegemonic system) and hikmat (interactionism). It therefore reinforces the view that hikmat, 'izzat, and maslahat constitute the central and overarching principles of the foreign-policy framework (Asadi, 2014: 115). The same logic can be observed in the analytical study published by the Shafaf Analytical Base, which categorizes and explains 33 principles of Iranian foreign policy (Shafaf Analytical Base, 2013).

A common set of principles emphasized by the Supreme Leader, selected from the aforementioned studies and from some of his statements, is presented in the following table. All of these principles can be incorporated under the three overarching concepts of 'izzat, hikmat, and maslahat. They are therefore used in the present study as indicators of the foreign policy envisioned by the Supreme Leader and as the conceptual framework for the analysis that follows(koohkan,2026).

Key Concepts and Indicators of Foreign Policy as Envisioned by the Supreme Leader under the Three Principles of Dignity, Wisdom, and Expediency				
Discussions on Interactionism (Wisdom and Expediency)		**Discussions on Opposition to the System of Domination (Dignity)**		
Smart Interaction with the World	Scientism	The New Discourse of the Islamic Republic	Soft War and the War of Wills	Confronting Neo-Colonialism and Post-Colonialism
Mutual Respect	Look-to-the-East Policy	You shall neither wrong others nor be wronged	Religious Democracy	National Dignity
Peace-Seeking	Globalization	The Palestine Issue	Preservation of Territorial Integrity	The Principle of Denial of Domination
Interactive Foreign Policy	Avoidance of Isolation	Dignity of the Islamic Ummah	Resistance Economy	Non-Alignment (“Neither East nor West”)
Commitment to International Obligations	Non-Interference in the Internal Affairs of Countries	Export of the Revolution	Distrust of the Enemy and, Conversely, National Self-Confidence	Political Islam
Coalition-Building in Foreign Policy	The Need for Promptness in Decision-Making	Islamic Awakening	National Interests	Non-Surrender in the Face of the Enemy
The Necessity of Active Diplomacy Based on Endogenous Capacities	Building Friendships for Iran (Strategic Partners)	Support for the Oppressed	The Dignity of Nations	Opposition to Arrogance and the Hegemonic System
The Necessity of Distinguishing	The Primacy of Reason and Logic in	The Islamic Ummah as a Unified	Othering of the West, Particularly	Non-Dependence (Independence

between the United States and Europe and Turning toward the East	Decision-Making	Community (Islamic Anti-Nationalism)	the United States and Israel	and Self-Sufficiency)
Healthy Relations with Other Countries, Free from Formalism and Imposition, with a Few Exceptions	Public Diplomacy and Attention to Nations as the Strategic Depth of the System	Support for Islamic and Liberation Movements	Criticism of the International Institutional System and Its Structures	Confronting Soft War and Media Warfare
Adherence to Principles (No Deviation from the System's Positions)		Changing the Global Geopolitical Geometry	Clarity and Candor in Positions	Rejection of Subordination to Hegemony
Prioritizing Quality over Quantity in Various Diplomatic Activities, Such as Visits, Meetings, and Talks		Non-Recognition of Israel and Refusal to Engage in Dealings with It	Political, Economic, and Military Power	Courage in the Face of Threats from Adversaries
Prioritizing Muslim, Neighboring, and Like-Minded Countries in Expanding and Strengthening Relations		No Relations with the United States Until It Corrects Its Wrong Policies and Approaches	Taking Threats Seriously and Turning Them into Opportunities	Maintaining the Strategic Objectives of Foreign Policy Since the Beginning of the Revolution
		Adopting Assertive Positions and Policies on Issues Such as Human Rights, Women's Issues, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and Nuclear Energy		

	Refusing to Show Flexibility or Make Concessions on Issues Such as Relations with the United States, Middle East Negotiations, Support for Palestinian and Lebanese Muslims, and Relations with Europe

The preservation of ideology, shaped by Iran's domestic political context, and the Islamic Republic's continued commitment to an idealistic outlook, alongside due attention to the realities of the international environment, are articulated more clearly under the framework of the policy of "Heroic Flexibility."

2. Heroic Flexibility: A General Conceptualization

Heroic Flexibility is a policy employed after the strategic level, at the level of a tactic or technique (an argument that will be substantiated later in the article through reference to the Supreme Leader's statements). The Supreme Leader has characterized it as a diplomatic skill involving the timely use of authority and flexibility and has described the use of Heroic Flexibility as an artful maneuver for achieving a desired objective (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013a). The "management of enmity" constitutes a highly important dimension of the country's diplomacy and encompasses a range of measures, one of which is negotiation and diplomatic engagement. In this sense, it is possible to attain, without resorting to coercive power or military capabilities, the same victories and gains achieved by a hero in a military confrontation—or even greater ones. Negotiation, as the Leader of the Islamic Revolution has noted, begins with a smile, and no one begins negotiations with a confrontation, except, perhaps, the Westerners, who tend to approach matters in this way. "We are not inclined toward such practices; however, we engage firmly, clearly, and rationally, without ambiguity" (Larijani, 2013). The ability to "manage how enmity is exercised" is precisely the capacity that a hero and victor in a dispute undoubtedly requires. The concept of Heroic Flexibility therefore refers to the timely and appropriate deployment of hard power and soft engagement by a hero or victor in a dispute.

Since the Islamic Republic is expected to uphold the banner of opposition to injustice and adherence to truth, and since opposition to injustice constitutes a derivative of its commitment to truth, truth itself does not require confrontation; rather, it requires clear and forthright articulation. At the same time, we have no hesitation in adopting a stern posture when necessary. Where circumstances require it, we confront others forcefully in defense of truth, and where necessary, we demonstrate flexibility. Our diplomacy must become more sophisticated in response to complex circumstances and, according to clearly defined objectives and interests, must employ more advanced techniques. Accordingly, characterizing "flexibility" as "weakness" is a major mistake (Larijani, 2013).

In response to the central question of the present study—namely, what the concept of "Heroic Flexibility" means from the perspective of its originator—it may be argued that the most important shortcoming of the limited number of studies that have addressed this concept in recent years is that, after referring to the Supreme Leader's statements, they have largely presented their own interpretations of Heroic Flexibility. They have not, however, examined in sufficient depth the specific wording, conceptual nuances, and intellectual trajectory underlying the Supreme Leader's statements on this issue. Several factors have contributed to this limitation. For example, the Supreme Leader has referred explicitly to the phrase "Heroic Flexibility" in only five of his public speeches, and approximately half of these statements concern misconceptions about Heroic Flexibility and incorrect applications of the concept. Moreover, the full transcripts of two of these five speeches have not been published. Nevertheless, the present study attempts to address this gap by undertaking a detailed examination of each term and expression used in these five references and situating them alongside the broader conceptual foundations and statements of the Supreme Leader. In doing so, the study seeks to identify and present distinctive and previously underexplored characteristics of the Supreme Leader's conception of Heroic Flexibility.

3. Analysis of Texts on the Concept of Heroic Flexibility in the Leader's Statements and Writings

Since the purpose of the present study is to examine the Supreme Leader's views through a text-centered analysis of his statements concerning the concept of Heroic Flexibility, this section examines the five occasions on which he sought to explain and clarify the meaning of this concept. In each subsection, in addition to identifying the principal points emphasized by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, an attempt is made, based on other statements made during the same speech or other writings by him, to establish the practical conceptual relationship between Heroic Flexibility and other concepts of foreign policy.

3.1. Heroic Flexibility: A Strong, Assertive, and Non-Defensive Posture

According to statements published on the website of the Office for the Preservation and Publication of the Works of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the first direct reference by the Supreme Leader to the phrase "Heroic Flexibility" during his leadership of the Islamic Republic (following his earlier reference to the concept in 1969) was made during a meeting with the Minister and officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as Iranian ambassadors and chargé d'affaires serving in various countries, on August 8, 1996 (Ayatollah Khamenei, 1996).

The complete text of the Supreme Leader's remarks at this meeting has not been published; only selected portions have been made available in the form of indexed excerpts and a news report. According to the published excerpt, in explaining the necessity of preserving a revolutionary spirit among officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Supreme Leader characterized the revolutionary spirit as "a source of the system's dignity and the origin of its power" and emphasized the necessity of "avoiding a defensive posture and adopting strong and assertive positions," which, logically, amounts to not being intimidated by challenges. From the overall substance of his remarks, it is clear that he contrasted a "revolutionary spirit" with a "spirit of compromise" and believed that a spirit of compromise would not only

fail to strengthen the political system but would also deprive it of dignity and respect. He explicitly stated that it was the revolutionary spirit that "opens the way for the system." It can therefore be inferred that, from his perspective, the notion that "abandoning the revolutionary spirit would open the way and resolve problems" is unfounded.

Having established this position, the Supreme Leader then turned to the concept of Heroic Flexibility and emphasized that Iranian diplomats and diplomacy should remain revolutionary even in their speech and interviews. When one is subjected to aggression, he argued, remaining silent and adopting a defensive posture will accomplish nothing; rather, progress requires responding firmly to such aggression. His reference to "striking with the fist," however, does not mean using insults or unjustified harshness. Rather, he intended that one should be "sharper than a sword, softer than silk, and harder than stone and steel." Being "sharper than a sword and softer than silk" means demonstrating clarity, firmness, and steadfastness toward the adversary: if the adversary makes an affront or commits an act of aggression, one should respond firmly, but neither impolitely nor with unjustified harshness. Harshness should be employed only when it is justified and appropriate, in which case it constitutes a "firm response" (Ayatollah Khamenei, 1996).

It should be noted that "avoiding a defensive posture" refers specifically to conceding under pressure, since no other interpretation unrelated to the issue of concessions can reasonably be inferred in this context. Accordingly, based on this statement, Heroic Flexibility means that, in the face of pressure and aggression by the adversary, one should not adopt a defensive posture, make concessions, or submit. The Supreme Leader states that "diplomacy is the arena of Heroic Flexibilities." In explaining this concept, he continues: "Be flexible; but let your flexibility be sharp." He further states that he does not recommend that Iranian diplomats confront others by saying, for example, "the criminal America," but insists that they "must stand firm and be strong" and that "our diplomats must stand firmly by their principled positions and take the steadfastness and perseverance of Imam Khomeini as their model." He further describes Imam

Khomeini's spirit of non-submission as having contributed to the survival of the country, the nation, and the Islamic Revolution, and identifies resistance to the demands and excessive expectations of global powers in foreign policy as a prerequisite for the survival and dignity of the Iranian nation. Conversely, he regards abandoning the revolutionary spirit as the greatest mistake that the Iranian nation and Islamic government could make.

Although the remainder of the Supreme Leader's explanation is not reflected in the published excerpt or news report, even the available portion of the text makes it possible to conclude that he regards diplomacy and dialogue as important domains for the exercise of Heroic Flexibility. He introduces the concept only after an extended discussion and repeated emphasis on the necessity of maintaining firmness and steadfastness toward the adversary, refusing to make concessions, avoiding a defensive posture, and responding firmly to aggression. This manner of presenting the concept leads to a clear conclusion: Heroic Flexibility means being flexible in conduct while preserving and insisting upon principled positions, while also avoiding unjustified and counterproductive harshness. From the Supreme Leader's perspective, concessions to the adversary, a defensive posture, silence in the face of the adversary's aggression, yielding to the adversary, and abandoning the revolutionary spirit do not constitute instances of Heroic Flexibility (Ayatollah Khamenei, 1996).

3.2. Heroic Flexibility Does Not Mean Abandoning Principles, Ideals, or Objectives

The second direct reference by the Supreme Leader to the phrase "Heroic Flexibility" was made during a meeting with the Chairman and members of the Assembly of Experts on September 5, 2013 (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013a).

In this meeting, rather than focusing primarily on the essence of Heroic Flexibility, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution sought to clarify erroneous interpretations of the concept. He stated: "Of course, flexibility and an artful and heroic maneuver in all political arenas are desirable and acceptable; however, this artful maneuver must not mean crossing red lines, retreating from fundamental strategies, or

disregarding ideals." He rejected interpretations that equated Heroic Flexibility with crossing red lines, retreating from fundamental strategies, or neglecting ideals. In his view, all "red lines," "fundamental strategies," and "ideals" must be respected. Heroic Flexibility does not entail abandoning any of these three categories. Rather, the path forward can be pursued without deviating from them and without yielding to pressure; even in the absence of concessions, alternative means of overcoming obstacles can be identified. Thus, Heroic Flexibility does not encompass these three domains and can bring about changes only in the "method, type of maneuver, and tactics of movement" (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013a).

In advising the country's officials, the Supreme Leader emphasized that all decisions and actions must simultaneously take into account the ideals and objectives of the political system, its general and overarching strategies, and a proper understanding of the positive and negative realities of the surrounding environment. He presented Imam Khomeini as an example of maintaining strategic commitments while recognizing and taking into account existing realities. He also emphasized that without a proper understanding of realities, decision-makers may deviate from or abandon the path they have chosen. Nevertheless, neither Imam Khomeini's nor the Supreme Leader's approach to realities is based on accepting and submitting to them. Rather, the intended approach is "idealism with an eye to realities," according to which "realities must also be properly understood, and those aspects of reality that contribute to power must also be identified" (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013a).

Reliance on popular opinion, reliance on Islam as the basis of the system, collective work, effort and innovation, national unity, and ensuring that the Islamic Republic neither commits injustice nor becomes the victim of injustice in different circumstances—based on the principles of lā taẓlimūna wa-lā tuẓlamūn ("you shall neither wrong nor be wronged") and kūnā li'l-ẓālimi khaṣman wa li'l-maẓlūmi ʿawnan ("be an adversary to the oppressor and a helper of the oppressed")—constitute some of the general and overarching strategies of the Islamic system from the Supreme Leader's perspective. In his view, these are non-negotiable and cannot be

subject to Heroic Flexibility (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013a; al-Sharif al-Radi, 1414 AH: 421; Majlisi, 1403 AH, vol. 42: 256).

Attention to the term "strategy" used by the Supreme Leader also reveals an important conceptual point. "Strategy" is the English equivalent of the Persian term rahbord (Academy of Persian Language and Literature, 2006). A theory or theoretical framework may employ different strategies in order to realize its objectives, while a strategy consists of a set of policies—including tactics, techniques, and operations—that are arranged together to achieve an objective defined by the underlying theory. In addition to emphasizing the necessity of maintaining ideals and objectives (the theoretical foundation), the Supreme Leader argues that even the strategy for achieving those objectives should not be altered in response to the demands of the adversary (i.e., no retreat from fundamental strategies, core principles, or red lines).

Accordingly, the originator of the concept of Heroic Flexibility maintains that only certain methods and subsidiary policies operating under the strategy for achieving the objective are subject to reconsideration within Heroic Flexibility. He explicitly states: "... every personality has methods and initiatives, and they will pursue these initiatives." The terms "method" and "initiative" directly refer to the third component in the commonly used tripartite classification of theory, strategy, and tactics and further confirm that Heroic Flexibility operates exclusively at the level of tactics and methods. Issues such as the abandonment of hostility toward global arrogance, particularly the United States, which would contradict the fundamental principles of the Islamic system, therefore cannot be subsumed under the policy of Heroic Flexibility. The Supreme Leader's use of the term "method" in describing this policy is repeated and reinforced in his fourth direct reference to Heroic Flexibility in the context of its Qur'anic explanation (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013a).

An even more important indication supporting the argument that Heroic Flexibility belongs to the domain of methods can be found in the continuation of the Supreme Leader's remarks. After discussing objectives, ideals, and overarching strategies, when his discussion turns to tactics, methods, and initiatives, he refers to the newly formed Eleventh Government, its capable and energetic members, and the

President himself as actors possessing new ideas and innovative approaches. These were individuals who had promised to change the methods of Iran's diplomacy and foreign policy. This approach by the Supreme Leader further confirms that the new ideas introduced by the new government are to be defined within the framework of the country's fundamental strategies, rather than at the level of changing its ideals or overarching strategies (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013a).

3.3. Heroic Flexibility: One of the Methods of Confronting the Adversary

The third direct reference by the Supreme Leader to the phrase "Heroic Flexibility" was made during a meeting with commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on September 17, 2013 (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013b).

In this statement, the Supreme Leader described the principle of lā taẓlimūna wa-lā tuẓlamūn as a fundamental value and a core element of the identity of the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic system. He presented refraining from committing injustice, confronting injustice, and assisting the oppressed as irreversible principles alongside the method of Heroic Flexibility. These principles thus serve as an indicator for understanding the boundaries of flexibility. He argued that the principal difficulties created for the Islamic system by its adversaries fall within the framework of this principle.

His particular emphasis on this fundamental principle in the context of Heroic Flexibility makes clear that the principle of lā taẓlimūna wa-lā tuẓlamūn cannot be abandoned in the exercise of Heroic Flexibility. Consistent with the testament of Imam Ali, which emphasizes that one must "be an adversary to the oppressor and a helper of the oppressed," indifference toward the oppression committed by oppressors has no place within Heroic Flexibility (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013b).

Beyond defining the boundaries of Heroic Flexibility, other important points can be identified in this statement. The Supreme Leader regards Heroic Flexibility as a longstanding policy rather than one adopted as a result of pressure from the adversary. In principle, he

does not conceptualize this flexibility as a response to enemy pressure, nor does he associate it with any particular historical period. Instead, he places it broadly within the category of "correct and rational diplomatic actions," stating: "I believe in the very thing that was named Heroic Flexibility years ago."

The Supreme Leader's enduring commitment to Heroic Flexibility, alongside his repeated emphasis on confronting global arrogance, makes clear that "flexibility" does not mean "yielding." He regards this form of flexibility as necessary and legitimate when employed in its appropriate place. At the same time, his understanding of flexibility differs in certain respects from that of some other political actors. He does not interpret flexibility as yielding to the adversary; rather, he explicitly presents it as a method and framework for confronting the adversary (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013b).

The principal condition articulated for Heroic Flexibility, together with the preceding and subsequent discussions, makes it possible to identify the following points:

1. Flexibility must be employed when necessary and in its appropriate context.
2. The intended recipient or counterpart of Heroic Flexibility is the "adversary," who cannot be regarded as a friend.
3. In implementing Heroic Flexibility, it must not be forgotten that flexibility constitutes a form of confrontation. The actor employing Heroic Flexibility is engaged in a struggle with a hostile adversary, rather than attempting to eliminate the underlying hostility.
4. The objective and outcome of Heroic Flexibility cannot be friendship or the elimination of hostility with the adversary. The confrontation between truth and falsehood is regarded as unavoidable because the fundamental cause of the adversary's challenge and struggle against Iran is not a particular policy or individual. Rather, it is the identity and message of the Revolution—namely, opposition to domination and submission to hegemonic powers—which is grounded in religious principles. Accordingly, the adversary's various actions, including sanctions, should be analyzed as extensions of this fundamental confrontation, with each action understood as another wave in the broader challenge directed against the message of the Revolution.

3.4. Heroic Flexibility: An Artful Maneuver for Achieving an Objective While Preserving Principles

The fourth direct reference by the Supreme Leader to the phrase "Heroic Flexibility" was made during a meeting with approximately fifty thousand Basij commanders from across the country on November 20, 2013 (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013c).

In this speech, he again rejected erroneous interpretations of Heroic Flexibility, identifying "abandoning the ideals and objectives of the Islamic system" and "the system's retreat from its principles" as incorrect interpretations of the concept. He then defined Heroic Flexibility as an "artful maneuver for achieving an objective" and described its true meaning as "using diverse methods to achieve an objective while moving toward ideals and goals" (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013c). In further explaining the concept of Heroic Flexibility, he recited verse 16 of Surah al-Anfal: "And whoever turns his back to them on such a day—unless he is maneuvering for battle or joining a company—has certainly incurred the wrath of Allah, and his refuge is Hell; and what an evil destination." (Qur'an, al-Anfal 8:16).

The Supreme Leader did not provide his own translation of the verse. Therefore, examining several authoritative Qur'anic translations and commentaries and synthesizing their interpretations makes it possible to clarify his precise understanding of Heroic Flexibility:
"Whoever turns his back to them [and flees] at that moment [during battle] shall incur the wrath of God, and his abode shall be Hell—and what an evil destination—except in two circumstances:

(a) when the withdrawal is intended to move to another position from which to continue fighting and launch another attack against the enemy (for example, moving from one flank to another), or to continue the battle in another area for tactical or military purposes; or

(b) when the withdrawal is intended to join another group [of fresh troops or fellow combatants] in order to continue fighting the enemy collectively and to assist a group that requires reinforcement."

(Adapted from the Qur'anic translations of Ayatollahs and scholars Ansarian (2004), Makarem Shirazi (1994), Qomshaei (2001), Fooladvand (1996), Safavi (2009), and Ayati (1995)).

In explaining the second exceptional group, both Tafsir Nemuneh and Tafsir al-Mizan explicitly state that joining another group does not mean abandoning those on the front line. Rather, the verse concerns combatants who are alone on the battlefield and whose withdrawal in order to join another group of troops and continue the battle collectively is permissible (Makarem Shirazi, 1992, vol. 7: 112–113; Tabataba'i, 1995, vol. 9: 46–47). The concept of collective warfare is similarly discussed in Tafsir Nemuneh (Qara'ati, 2009, vol. 3: 284–285). According to this verse, fleeing from confrontation with the enemy is prohibited. As is clear from the various translations and commentaries, the two exceptional cases do not involve abandoning or escaping the war; rather, their purpose is to continue the struggle.

The Supreme Leader invokes this verse to explain Heroic Flexibility and argues that, in the battlefield, regardless of the direction in which one moves, one must continue moving toward the objective rather than seeking to escape confrontation with the adversary. Accordingly, from his perspective, Heroic Flexibility cannot be understood as a means of preventing war, and retreat for the purpose of avoiding war does not constitute Heroic Flexibility (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013c). His other statements that negotiations and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) did not remove the threat or "shadow" of war from the country further support this interpretation (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2017).

3.5. Heroic Flexibility: The Ability to Employ Flexibility and Authority at the Right Time and in the Right Place

The fifth direct reference by the Supreme Leader to the phrase "Heroic Flexibility" was made during a meeting with officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as Iranian ambassadors, heads of missions, and representatives abroad, on August 13, 2014 (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2014).

The complete text of the Supreme Leader's remarks at this meeting has likewise not been published. According to the published report, in explaining the qualifications and characteristics required of

diplomats of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khamenei referred to "diplomatic skill" and identified it as another meaning of Heroic Flexibility. He explained this skill as "the timely and appropriate use of flexibility and authority." From this approach, it can be inferred that Heroic Flexibility does not mean "yielding or compromising with the adversary." Indeed, even "showing flexibility toward the adversary" does not constitute a precise definition of Heroic Flexibility. Rather, the Supreme Leader defines Heroic Flexibility, or diplomatic skill, as the ability to identify the appropriate circumstances in which to employ either flexibility or authority. Thus, in a particular situation, the policy of Heroic Flexibility may require the exercise of authority and the deliberate avoidance of flexibility.

Apparently, from the Supreme Leader's perspective, "Heroic Flexibility" is not merely an additive combination of two independent concepts. He adopts a similar approach when explaining combinations such as "religious democracy" or even "Islamic Republic." For example, regarding "religious democracy," he argues that "religious democracy" should not be understood as an additive combination of democracy as one concept and religion as another. Rather, "our democracy derives from religion; Islam has shown us this path, and it is through the guidance of Islam that we have arrived at the Islamic Republic" (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013d).

Accordingly, Heroic Flexibility is not simply "flexibility" or "adaptation" displayed by a hero because of weakness or other circumstances. Rather, a hero, in the process of achieving victory and overcoming an opponent, may demonstrate flexibility at certain moments so that the authority exercised at subsequent stages becomes more effective and consequential. This constitutes a skill and bears no necessary relationship to either the weakness of the hero or the strength of the opponent. Indeed, victory in a confrontation belongs to the actor who can better determine when to employ flexibility and when to exercise authority. The Supreme Leader's subsequent statement that "an example of this can be seen in wrestling" further supports this interpretation.

Accordingly, the assumption that "greater use of Heroic Flexibility means greater compromise with the adversary" is

fundamentally erroneous. The Supreme Leader identifies the objective of Heroic Flexibility through the example of the wrestler as "defeating the opponent," rather than establishing peace or eliminating hostility. His statement that "if someone has power..." indicates his belief that possessing power, if not accompanied by its appropriate use in conjunction with flexibility, may ultimately lead to defeat. This statement makes clear that Heroic Flexibility is not a policy designed exclusively for circumstances involving weakness or serious danger. Rather, it is a fundamental method of achieving victory and a skill involving the simultaneous and timely employment of flexibility and power (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2014).

From the Supreme Leader's perspective, flexibility and engagement are distinct from compromise. Within the Islamic conception of confronting an adversary, confrontation does not necessarily require the constant exercise of authority against the adversary. Authority is one method, while flexibility and engagement constitute other methods within the continuing process of confrontation and challenge. In practice, there are numerous examples of engagement operating within a broader context of confrontation. The exchange of prisoners during a war, or a temporary ceasefire before a war for the purpose of evacuating civilians from a conflict zone, can be understood in this context. Neither necessarily signifies compromise, submission, or the elimination of the underlying challenge and confrontation. Clearly, however, such examples apply only where the adversary does not habitually violate agreements, is willing to honor conditions and commitments, and where there are practical guarantees for the fulfillment of its promises. Thus, from the Supreme Leader's perspective, submission, compromise, or the elimination of the underlying challenge and confrontation cannot be defined as either components or objectives of Heroic Flexibility (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2014).

Perhaps it is precisely this conceptual distinction and analytical precision that led the Supreme Leader to state explicitly: "I am not opposed to political dialogue either; of course, not with everyone—there are exceptions. At the level of global issues, I agree with political dialogue. I have spoken about and pursued this matter since my presidency. They should not create the impression that we are

fundamentally opposed to dialogue and similar approaches. No; we are not only more supportive of such approaches than this, but in some areas we know better how to pursue them and understand how they should be conducted" (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2016).

In continuation of this discussion, the Supreme Leader identifies the peace of Imam Hasan as the "most magnificent historical example of Heroic Flexibility" and added this attribute to the title of his Persian translation of Shaykh Razi Al Yasin's book Sulh al-Hasan (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2000). A comprehensive examination of the characteristics of Imam Hasan's peace with Muawiya from historical, theological, and other perspectives would require a separate and extensive discussion. Nevertheless, referring to some of the characteristics emphasized by the Supreme Leader helps clarify his intended meaning.

While regarding the peace of Imam Hasan with Muawiya as the most magnificent example of the skill of employing flexibility and authority at the right time and in the right place, the Supreme Leader, like Imam Khomeini, also regards this peace as an imposed peace (Ghazanfari, 2013: 36; Ayatollah Khamenei, 2011: 122). He attributes it to circumstances such as the weakness of public understanding and the entanglement of people's religious faith with material motivations, which were themselves influenced by the adversary's propaganda, financial resources, and particular methods. From the Supreme Leader's perspective, this peace was "one hundred percent consistent with irrefutable logical reasoning" and represented the only rational course of action remaining after the path of jihad and martyrdom had been closed. It nevertheless produced a major benefit: the survival of the authentic line of the Islamic movement. The Supreme Leader maintains that values must be preserved at any cost and that the only limit to steadfast resistance is the survival of the religious school and its foundational system of values. As long as resistance does not inflict damage upon the foundations of the religious school, resistance must continue (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2011: 117–137).

The example of Imam Hasan's peace demonstrates that Heroic Flexibility is not always the optimal course of action. Circumstances may arise in which the exercise of authority becomes ineffective or

yields limited benefits, leaving no rational option other than flexibility. Such circumstances, and consequently the Heroic Flexibility exercised in response to them, may even be imposed. This "imposition," however, does not mean that the choice of flexibility itself is forcibly imposed; rather, it means that circumstances may be imposed in such a way that flexibility becomes the most rational option available under those conditions.

Another implication is that major, consequential, and historically significant instances of Heroic Flexibility—such as Imam Hasan's peace—which temporarily replace resistance and steadfastness through conventional military confrontation with the adversary, can be considered legitimate only when the very existence of the religious school and its foundational system of values is seriously threatened and when authentic Islamic thought itself faces the danger of extinction.

Conclusion

Although the phrase "Heroic Flexibility," first used by Ayatollah Khamenei in 1969 (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2000), has only recently become widely used in the foreign policy discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran, its underlying practice has long been present in the country's foreign policy, even though it was not previously identified by its current designation. Just as a professional athlete, in pursuing victory and overcoming an opponent, may deliberately and strategically demonstrate flexibility in certain carefully calculated situations so that his authority and steadfastness can become more effective and consequential at later stages, the general meaning of Heroic Flexibility is likewise an artful maneuver for achieving an objective and the timely and appropriate use of flexibility and authority in dealing with the adversary.

The skill of Heroic Flexibility is defined within, rather than alongside or in competition with, the three principles of 'izzat (dignity), hikmat (wisdom), and maslahat (expediency), as well as the other principles and foundations of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Therefore, employing Heroic Flexibility does not mean replacing other policies, such as resistance, with this approach. Clarity, firmness, and steadfastness toward the adversary, maintaining

a revolutionary spirit, responding firmly to the adversary's acts of aggression, and avoiding passive silence and a defensive posture are among the prerequisites of Heroic Flexibility. Accordingly, any degree of flexibility, firmness, or confrontation toward the adversary must be deliberate, purposeful, and directed toward defeating that adversary. In further clarifying the nature of Heroic Flexibility, it can be described through formulations such as "a set of correct and rational actions while preserving the principles of the Revolution," "active and innovative diplomatic efforts," and "being flexible in conduct while maintaining and insisting upon principled positions." From the Supreme Leader's perspective, and in accordance with his Qur'anic conceptualization, Heroic Flexibility constitutes a mechanism of struggle and confrontation with the adversary. More broadly, it is a method of struggle whose objective is to defeat the adversary (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013b). It is not adopted as a result of pressure from the adversary, and even when Iran possesses power several times greater than that of the adversary, the exercise of Heroic Flexibility in its appropriate context remains necessary and legitimate. The Supreme Leader identifies the peace of Imam Hasan as the "most magnificent historical example of Heroic Flexibility." Although he regards this peace as imposed and attributes it to factors such as the weakness of public understanding, the intermingling of people's faith with material motivations, and the adversary's propaganda, financial resources, and particular methods, he nevertheless considers it "one hundred percent consistent with irrefutable logical reasoning" and identifies its principal consequence as the survival of the authentic line of the Islamic movement. From the Supreme Leader's perspective, values must be preserved at any cost, and the sole boundary of such steadfastness is the survival of the religious school and its foundational system of values (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2014).

A substantial portion of the Supreme Leader's statements concerning Heroic Flexibility is devoted to rejecting erroneous interpretations of the concept. In general, if we are to identify what Heroic Flexibility is not and what characteristics it does not possess, its objective and outcome cannot be compromise, friendship, the elimination of hostility with the adversary, or yielding to the

adversary. This is because the confrontation between truth and falsehood is regarded as unavoidable due to the adversary's fundamental opposition to Islam and its essential identity. Accordingly, from the Supreme Leader's perspective, Heroic Flexibility cannot be understood as a means of preventing war, and retreating in the face of the adversary in order to prevent war does not constitute Heroic Flexibility. Nor does adopting a defensive posture toward the adversary or seeking to win the approval of hegemonic powers conform to Heroic Flexibility. Furthermore, Heroic Flexibility does not operate within the three domains of "red lines," "fundamental strategies," and "the ideals and objectives of the Islamic system." Rather, changes under Heroic Flexibility are confined to the domain of "methods, types of maneuver, and tactics of movement." Issues such as "reliance on the people's votes," "reliance on the Islamic character of the system," "collective work, effort, and innovation," "national unity," and ensuring that the system neither commits injustice nor becomes the victim of injustice in various circumstances constitute, from the Supreme Leader's perspective, some of the general, overarching, and non-negotiable strategies of the Islamic system. In his view, Heroic Flexibility cannot be exercised in relation to these matters (Ayatollah Khamenei, 2013a). Likewise, issues such as the abandonment of hostility toward global arrogance, particularly the United States, which would contradict the fundamental principles of the Islamic system, cannot in any way be subsumed under the policy of Heroic Flexibility.

The reason for employing Heroic Flexibility in foreign policy is not weakness vis-à-vis the adversary. Therefore, interpreting Heroic Flexibility as yielding to the adversary—even on a specific and temporary issue—because of the weakness of the Islamic system or the existence of a serious threat, except where the very survival of the Islamic movement is at stake, constitutes a misconception of the concept.

The application of the policy of Heroic Flexibility entails a number of requirements, including the following:

Dos and Don'ts of the Policy of Heroic Flexibility		
Dos	**Don'ts**	
Observing All "Red Lines" and Acting in Accordance with the "Fundamental Strategies" and the "Ideals and Objectives of the Islamic System"	Showing Humility toward International Powers, Particularly the United States	
Maintaining a Strong, Assertive, and Offensive Position	Neglecting Close Relations with the Elites and Ambassadors of Islamic Countries	
Not Forgetting the Nature of the Other Party and Its Status as an Adversary	Crossing the Red Lines (Usually under the Pretext of "Breaking Taboos")	
Not Forgetting the Nature of Heroic Flexibility as a Form of Struggle Rather Than Compromise with the Adversary	Abandoning the Fundamental Strategies, Neglecting the Ideals, or Adopting a Defensive or Passive Position toward the Adversary	
Identifying the Target of the Adversary's Attack and Recognizing That It Is the Islamic Nature of the Front of Truth, Rather Than Specific and Particular Policies Such as Nuclear Energy, etc.	Unjustified Harshness	Distancing Oneself from Islamic Groups

Beyond the issue of the dos and don'ts, several considerations play a significant role in the more effective application of Heroic Flexibility:

1. The path forward can be pursued without crossing red lines or deviating from fundamental ideals, objectives, and strategies.
2. In general, Heroic Flexibility involves reconsidering only certain methods and specific policies within the broader strategy for achieving an objective. In exceptional cases involving significant, consequential, and major forms of flexibility—where resistance and military confrontation with the adversary are temporarily set aside—the Supreme Leader considers such measures acceptable only when the very existence of the religious school is seriously threatened and authentic Islamic thought is at risk of extinction, as exemplified by the peace treaty of Imam Hasan. If the fundamental existence of the religious school is not under threat, resistance should, in his view, continue so long as maintaining a stance of resistance does not itself inflict damage upon the religious school; under such circumstances, there is no place for flexibility.

3. The principal target of the adversary's attacks is the genuine identity and existence of the Islamic Revolution and its message, namely, lā taẓlimūna wa-lā tuẓlamūn ("you shall neither wrong nor be wronged") and the confrontation with both those who exercise domination and those who submit to domination. Accordingly, yielding to the adversary on secondary or peripheral issues will not prevent the continuation of its attacks.
4. The Supreme Leader does not regard flexibility and engagement with the adversary as substitutes for confrontation and authority. Rather, he maintains that "the arena of diplomacy is a battlefield and an arena of grappling," and that "flexibility and engagement" and "authority" are different methods that operate within the broader framework of the inevitable challenge and confrontation with the adversaries of Islam, rather than alongside or in place of it. What is presented as an alternative to this confrontation is "compromise" with the adversary, which the Supreme Leader has repeatedly rejected. In various statements, he has also warned against conflating "compromise" with the methods of "flexibility and engagement" with the adversary.
5. The example of the peace of Imam Hasan demonstrates that Heroic Flexibility is not always the best possible course of action. At times, circumstances and conditions may render the exercise of authority ineffective or of limited utility, leaving no viable option other than flexibility. Such circumstances—and consequently the Heroic Flexibility adopted in response to them—may even be imposed, as in the case of Imam Hasan's peace. This, however, does not mean that the choice of flexibility itself was imposed upon him; rather, it means that the circumstances were imposed in such a way that flexibility constituted the most rational option under the prevailing conditions.

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