

An Analysis of the Concept of Political Negotiation and Its Dimensions in the Sīrah of Imam Reza (A.S.)

Mohammad Qasemi Shub¹✉

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Thought and Cultural Studies, Imam Hossein Comprehensive University (A.S.), Tehran, Iran. Email: mohammadkonkooor@gmail.com

Article info

Abstract

Article type:
Research Article

Received:
10 August 2025

In Revised form:
14 October 2025

Accepted:
11 Desember 2025

Published:
28 February 2026

This article, through a conceptual analysis of political negotiation, undertakes a comparative examination of the dialogues of Imam Reza (A.S.) with Ma'mūn and the principles governing them. Adopting a descriptive-analytical approach and taking a definitive concept of "political negotiation" as its basis, the present study comparatively investigates the imposed dialogues of Imam Reza (A.S.) with Ma'mūn during the succession (wilāyat al-'ahd) process. The findings demonstrate that this negotiation can be classified within the type of "intra-religious/inter-party" negotiation and at the level of "an infallible personage with a usurping ruler," which, under conditions of duress, materialized through two stages: indirect (proxy-based) and direct. The analysis of the principles governing this negotiation across three domains -behavioral, expressive, and cognitive -delineates a model of Shi'i diplomacy: "prudential flexibility" and "adherence to covenants" in the behavioral dimension; "observance of wisdom in discourse" and "explicitness in stating conditions" in the expressive dimension; and "vigilance and the withholding of full trust" alongside "persuasion of public opinion" in the cognitive dimension. The strategic outcomes of this negotiation indicate that the Imam (A.S.), through astute foresight, despite the outward acceptance of the succession, effectively played no role in the power structure by inserting restrictive conditions, thereby thwarting Ma'mūn's attainment of his political objectives. This event is the manifestation of political rationality and commitment to ethical principles in the school of the Ahl al-Bayt (A.S.), and constitutes an inspiring model for religious statesmanship.

Keywords: Political Negotiation, Imam Reza (A.S.), Conceptual Analysis, Principles of Negotiation.



Reference: Qasemi-Shub, Mohammad. (2026). An Analysis of the Concept of Political Negotiation and Its Dimensions in the Conduct (Sīrah) of Imam Reza (A.S.). *Imam Reza (A.S.) and Contemporary Sciences*, 3(10),130-163.

Publisher: Imam Reza (A.S) International University
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22034/ijs.2025.500234.1323>



1. Introduction

This study critically examines a prevalent and caricatured perception of Islam that portrays it as a religion founded solely on war and violence. In contrast to this view, the article argues that in the *Sīrah* (biographical conduct) of the Infallibles (Ma'ṣūmīn, PBUH), “political negotiation” holds a prominent position as a wise and peaceful strategy for securing objectives and resolving disputes with minimal cost. By grounding the study in the core concept of “political negotiation” as understood in political science and international relations, the author turns to one of the most complex and critical junctures in Islamic history: the Imamate of Imam Reza (A.S.) and the imposition of the crown-princeship (*wilāyat al-‘ahd*) by the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mūn. The primary research gap this article seeks to fill is the lack of a comparative and operational analysis of the dialogues between Imam Reza (A.S.) and al-Ma'mūn precisely within the conceptual framework of “political negotiation.” Previous studies have either examined the political *Sīrah* of the Imams without this framework or have analyzed the negotiations of other Infallibles. Thus, the novelty of this research lies in its operationalization of a definition of political negotiation to the process of dialogues surrounding the imposed crown-princeship and the subsequent extraction of its strategic principles.

2. Research Objectives

Adopting a descriptive-analytical approach based on an integrated theoretical framework, this research seeks to answer the central question: “How did the political negotiation of Imam Reza (A.S.) with al-Ma'mūn lead to the peaceful resolution of the crown-princeship crisis, and what principles and outcomes did it entail?” To answer this, the article pursues several specific objectives: first, to elucidate the lexical and technical meaning of “political negotiation” and present a specific typology and leveling of political negotiations within the *Sīrah* of the Ahl al-Bayt (A.S.); second, to analyze the political conditions of Imam Reza's (A.S.) era as the context for this negotiation; third, to map the dialogue process between the Imam and al-Ma'mūn onto the defined indicators to determine its type and level; and finally, to extract the strategic principles governing this negotiation in its behavioral, expressive, and psychological dimensions and to explain its achievements as a model for religious statecraft.

3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach using a “descriptive-analytical” method. Its theoretical framework is constructed from the synthesis of three conceptual components: first, an operational definition of “political negotiation” as a peaceful method for resolving disputes through bilateral dialogue aimed at securing the interests of both parties; second, a model for typologizing negotiations based on the nature of the opponent (extra-religious, intra religious/inter-sectarian, intra-sectarian) and the level of negotiation (the Infallible personally or their representatives); and third, an analytical model for extracting negotiation principles across three spheres: “behavioral-practical,” “expressive-verbal,” and “psychological-cognitive.” In the data collection phase, the article draws on authoritative narrative and historical sources (such as al-Kāfī, ‘Uyūn Akhbār al-Reza, al-Irshād by al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, and Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyyīn) as well as relevant sources in political science and jurisprudence. In the analysis phase, historical accounts of the crown-princeship affair are first mapped onto the conceptual definition of negotiation to determine its type and level. Subsequently, through content analysis of the narrations, the strategic principles and objectives of Imam (A.S.) are deduced and expounded.

4. Findings

The research findings are presented in several sections:

Conceptualization and Typology: Based on a comparative analysis, the dialogues between Imam Reza (A.S.) and al-Ma’mūn fully conform to the definition of “political negotiation” as a bilateral action to resolve a dispute through dialogue and aimed at securing interests. This negotiation is classified as “intra-religious/inter-sectarian” and at the level of the “Infallible personally with a usurping ruler.” It occurred under conditions of “coercion and duress (ikrāh wa ijbār)” and transpired in two distinct phases: the first, conducted by proxy through al-Ma’mūn’s emissaries (al-Faḍl and al-Ḥasan b. Sahl), was met with the Imam’s refusal and threats; the second, a direct phase, led to the conditional acceptance of the crown-princeship following an explicit death threat from al-Ma’mūn himself. Furthermore, the subsequent scholarly debates (munazarāt) do not fall under the category of “political negotiation” based on the operational definition.

Strategic Principles: Content analysis of the narrations resulted in the extraction of a comprehensive model of Shi’i diplomacy across three spheres.

Behavioral-Practical Principles: Including “prudential flexibility” (modeled on the Sīrah of Prophet Joseph (A.S.) to preserve the foundation of Islam and the Shi‘a community through wise flexibility while safeguarding core principles) and “fidelity to the pact” (whereby the Imam, despite al-Ma‘mūn’s breach of promise, remained faithful to his own commitment and even thwarted al-Faḍl b. Sahl’s conspiracy against al-Ma‘mūn).

Expressive-Verbal Principles: Including “observing wisdom (ḥikmah) in dialogue” (the Imam’s logical argumentation in response to al-Ma‘mūn’s ostensible offer to cede the Caliphate, which exposed the latter’s contradiction and deceit) and “clarity in stating conditions” (whereby he explicitly declared his four conditions without wavering, thereby establishing his red lines).

Psychological-Cognitive Principles: Including “shaping public opinion” (enlightening the Shi‘a and the general Muslim populace about the coercive nature of the acceptance and addressing doubts by invoking shared beliefs, such as the story of Prophet Joseph) and “vigilance and absence of full trust” towards al-Ma‘mūn (whereby by rejecting al-Ma‘mūn’s subsequent proposals to involve him in executive affairs, the Imam thwarted the plot to tarnish the ascetic image of the Ahl al-Bayt (A.S.)).

Achievements: Despite the outward acceptance of the crown-princeship, the Imam’s (A.S.) astute strategy neutralized al-Ma‘mūn’s political objectives. By incorporating restrictive conditions, the Imam practically played no role in the power structure. Conversely, this action foiled al-Ma‘mūn’s conspiracy to portray the Ahl al-Bayt (A.S.) as power-hungry and worldly. Other strategic achievements included preserving the Imam’s life and ensuring the survival of the Shi‘a community, freeing it from socio-political isolation.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The article concludes that the event of the crown-princeship, far more than a mere historical occurrence, is a manifestation of “political rationality” and “adherence to ethical principles” within the school of the Ahl al-Bayt (A.S.). The Sīrah of Imam Reza (A.S.) in this negotiation offers an inspiring and operational model of “religious statecraft,” wherein the preservation of the greater interests (maṣāliḥ) of the faith and the Ummah is made simultaneously possible with dignity and wisdom, through the intelligent utilization of diplomatic tools while maintaining full adherence to ethical principles. By presenting a framework for analyzing the

political negotiations of the Infallibles, this research suggests that future studies could apply this model to analyze other historical junctures in the lives of the Imams (A.S.) and even for formulating strategic principles in contemporary Shi'i political jurisprudence (fiqh) and diplomacy.

Keywords: Political Negotiation, Imam Reza (A.S.), al-Ma'mūn al-'Abbāsī, Crown-Princeship (Wilāyat al-'Ahd), Negotiation Principles, Political Sīrah of the Infallibles.