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Contents

- **The Political Economy of Energy in Central Asia: The Role of Regional and International Actors**
Sajjad Abbasalipour / Mehdi Fakheri
- **Iran and the BRICS Countries: A Study of Trade Synergies**
Moslem Ansarinassab / Najmeh Bydmal
- **China and Russia's Strategy in the Middle East**
Hossein Fattahi Ardakani
- **Cultural Development's Indicators in Central Asia**
Mohammad Farhadi
- **Phenomenology of Strategies for Resolving Water Disputes between Iran and Afghanistan in the Harirud Basin**
Ali Akbarpour Almelh Joghi
- **Geopolitical Changes in the South Caucasus and Iran's Economic and Security Interests**
Ali Akbar Jowkar / Akbar Valizadeh
- **Joint Strategy of Iran and India in South Caucasus With Emphasis on South-North Corridor's Development**
Amirroham Shojaie / Seyed Mehdi Velayati
- **Karabakh in Transition from Conflict: International Law and Sustainable Order**
Shamim Mahpouri / Maryam Afshari
- **China's Strategic Interests in Recognizing the Taliban (2021-2025)**
Safiullah Mawlawi zada / Arsalan Ghorbani sheikhnashin
- **Macro-Determinants of Educational Inequality in Afghanistan**
Hamid Masoudi / Mohammad Nasir Saberi

The Political Economy of Energy in Central Asia: The Role of Regional and International Actors

*Sajjad Abbasalipour¹
Mehdi Fakheri²*

The presence of energy resources in Central Asia represents one of the most significant opportunities for the region's countries to navigate the economic and political crises of the post-independence era. From the outset, the three Central Asian nations with fossil fuel resources have sought to make the energy sector the main pillar of their economic growth by attracting international capital. Some scholars argue that the existence of these energy resources and their resulting revenues is the cause for the formation of limited and authoritarian political systems. In contrast, others maintain that the domestic conditions of these countries are rooted in their political history and culture, and that in the absence of these resources, they would have faced greater economic and political instabilities. On the other hand, the prevalence of realist logic and intra-regional rivalries has been a primary obstacle to economic and energy cooperation in the region. This challenge has typically been overcome only when a regional or international power has acted as a facilitator and guarantor. International organizations and programs, such as the SCO Energy Club and CAREC, have been unable to effectively alter this realist logic on a broad scale, serving instead mostly as platforms for bilateral and trilateral cooperation. China's bilateral cooperation with Turkmenistan on gas and with Kazakhstan on oil are successful examples of such collaborations. The strategic rationale behind China's actions in Central Asia's energy sector has been to mitigate its energy security challenges and to create a counterbalance against major powers, particularly Russia.

▪ **Keywords:**

Political Economy of Energy, Political Economy of Central Asia, Regional Cooperation in Central Asia, China and Central Asian Energy, Resource Curse.

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Iran and the BRICS Countries: A Study of Trade Synergies

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Najmeh.Bydmal²

Given the prominent position of the BRICS group, this study aims to develop a roadmap for Iran's trade by analyzing the degree of trade similarity and co-movement between Iran and BRICS member countries over the period 2003–2022. The results indicate that Iran's trade similarity with China and India has been the highest. Moreover, bilateral exports between Iran and India have shown the greatest stability, while the bilateral import trade stability index between Iran–Brazil and Iran–Russia has been the highest. Therefore, first, it is strongly recommended to emphasize the role of the BRICS group in formulating Iran's trade roadmap; and second, the strengths and weaknesses of Iran's trade relations with each of the five BRICS countries, as derived from the statistical analyses of this study, can serve as a roadmap for Iran's future trade with other BRICS members.

▪ **Keywords:**

Roadmap for Trade, BRICS Group, Trade Similarity, Trade of Iran, Trade Synergy.

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China and Russia's Strategy in the Middle East

Hossein Fattahi Ardakani¹

The Middle East has been of considerable importance in the strategy of international powers and has played an important role in the past. China and Russia, as two major international powers, are attempting to establish a multipolar order, and the Middle East is recognized as one of their key strategic arenas of confrontation and cooperation. Their common goal is to expand their influence by actively shaping regional political and security dynamics to challenge the hegemony of the West and the United States. The present study, by applying a game theoretical framework and employing an explanatory method, seeks to answer the question of what is the strategy of China and Russia in the Middle East? The findings show that since strategies are a function of the tools and mental perceptions of the actors and the existing realities, the two countries are seeking a balanced presence based on defined interests in a division of labor. China's economic strategy is long-term, pragmatic, opportunistic, and flexible, which results in maintaining good relations with all state actors and avoiding challenging the interests of the United States as the main guarantor of stability and security in the region. Russia's military and defense strategy is aimed at pursuing interests, providing political and military support for certain countries, controlling arms sales, maintaining regional stability, and countering terrorist groups. On the other hand, some of their interests overlap, and both maintain frequent diplomatic and political contacts throughout the region.

▪ **Keywords:**

Middle East, China, Russia, economic interests, military and defense interests.

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Cultural Development`s Indicators in Central Asia

Mohammad Farhadi¹

Research Objective: To develop and validate a comprehensive model for identifying, classifying, and explaining the key constraints that undermine cultural development in Central Asia, as reflected in its indicators.

Method: Qualitative thematic analysis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 regional studies experts selected via theoretical sampling and analyzed using a thematic network approach, yielding a coherent conceptual framework and a measurement-oriented thematic network.

Research Question: Which factors most undermine cultural development in Central Asia? **Findings:** Four overarching themes emerged: (1) weak civil society and independent media (media weakness and censorship; state-related implementation deficits and insufficient civic culture-building); (2) weak democratic culture (patron–client orientation; weak public culture); (3) weak educational performance (structural and managerial deficits in educational institutions; legal-administrative overlap and multi-agency fragmentation); and (4) regional and extra-regional pressures (competition among regional and extra-regional powers; cultural impacts of globalization).

Validation & Reliability: Credibility was supported through member checking and an audit trail; reliability through assessments of repeatability and transferability.

▪ **Keywords:**

pathology, development, cultural development, Central Asia.

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Phenomenology of Strategies for Resolving Water Disputes between Iran and Afghanistan in the Harirud Basin

Ali Akbarpour Almehr Joghi¹

The present study aims to phenomenologically explain the strategies for resolving water disputes between Iran and Afghanistan in the Harirud basin. This study, with a qualitative approach and interpretive phenomenology method, was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 20 experts in the fields of water, international relations, and the environment in 1403 to 1404. Through three-stage coding, 116 open codes were obtained in the form of 11 categories of mutual interests, formal and informal diplomacy, international institutions, education, economic interactions, environmental issues, scientific synergy, executive will, cultural interactions, transparency, and strategic document. According to these findings, the above strategies can provide a basis for reducing water tensions and promoting bilateral cooperation.

▪ **Keywords:**

Phenomenology; Water disputes; Iran; Afghanistan; Harirud.

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Geopolitical Changes in the South Caucasus and Iran's Economic and Security Interests

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Akbar Valizadeh²*

The November 2020 ceasefire agreement between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh region marked the beginning of new geopolitical developments in the South Caucasus. This agreement has created both challenges and opportunities for neighboring countries, particularly the Islamic Republic of Iran. Strategically, the consequences of these developments are twofold: on one hand, the potential for peace, regional integration, and enhanced cooperation in various sectors—especially transportation and transit—strengthening Iran's regional role; and on the other hand, shifts in security balances and increased military and political presence of extra-regional actors, posing potential threats to Iran's national security. The findings of this study, based on a qualitative analytical method, highlight the importance of adopting intelligent, balanced, and multilateral policies in dealing with regional actors to safeguard and advance Iran's national interests.

▪ **Keywords:**

National Security, Iran, 2020 Agreement, Geopolitics, South Caucasus, Economic Interests

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Joint Strategy of Iran and India in South Caucasus With Emphasis on South-North Corridor`s Development

*Amirroham Shojaie¹
Seyed Mehdi Velayati²*

led global order and Iran -where India generally aligns with the Western both sides have identified certain shared interests ,it stands in opposition to in the geoeconomic sphere. Accordingly, this study examines the causes and factors behind the formation of joint strategic approaches between Iran and ing the development of the India in the South Caucasus, particularly concern South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The main –International North hypothesis of this article is that Iran’s geopolitical and geoeconomic characteristics, along with the mutual economic benefits of the project, have foundation for strategic cooperation between Tehran and New created the Delhi. The findings indicate that although this cooperation has achieved some progress, its continuation depends on developments in the –yticalinternational system and regional dynamics. Adopting an anal explanatory method within the framework of geoeconomic theory, this research analyzes the feasibility and dynamics of this cooperation through the examination of academic sources and specialized reports.

▪ **Keywords:**

India, foreign policy, Iran, South Caucasus, North-South Corridor, Geoeconomy, Bilateral relations.

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Karabakh in Transition from Conflict: International Law and Sustainable Order

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Maryam Afshari²

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict raises the legal question of how to reconcile the principles of territorial integrity and self-determination within the framework of international law. Using a documentary method based on binding international instruments and UN reports, and a comparative approach drawing on the Aland, Dayton, and Northern Ireland agreements, this study proposes a legal framework for transitional justice, reparations, and minority protection. The findings suggest that balancing Azerbaijan's sovereignty with the security of affected communities through international supervision and regional cooperation is essential for sustainable peace. Ultimately, achieving a stable legal order requires the political commitment of the parties and the firm support of the international community.

▪ **Keywords:**

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, Territorial Integrity, Right to Self-Determination, Transitional Justice, Minority Rights, Sustainable Peace.

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China's Strategic Interests in Recognizing the Taliban (2021-2025)

Safiullah Mawlawi zada¹
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This research examines China's approach toward the Taliban government in Afghanistan, aiming to analyze the challenges, opportunities, and strategic interests of Beijing regarding the recognition of the Taliban. Utilizing Allison's rational choice theory, it addresses the question of how China's strategic interests have influenced its approach to recognizing the Taliban. The research hypothesis posits that China's strategic interests—namely, border security, countering extremism, access to resources, and the development of the Belt and Road Initiative—have influenced its decision-making process regarding the recognition of the Taliban, leading to de facto recognition. The study adopts an analytical-descriptive approach and relies on library and documentary sources.

▪ **Keywords:**

China, Taliban, Afghanistan, Recognition, Regional Security.

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Macro-Determinants of Educational Inequality in Afghanistan

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Mohammad Nasir Saberi²

Education, a critical driver of social and economic progress, faces significant inequalities in Afghanistan. Economic, social, cultural, and geographical factors; such as poverty, inadequate educational infrastructure, negative attitudes toward girls' education, political instability, and educational deprivation, are primary barriers to equitable education. Using documentary methods and secondary data analysis from sources including the Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Higher Education, this study identifies poverty, cultural barriers, and geographical disparities as key determinants of educational inequality. Addressing these requires comprehensive educational policies, improved infrastructure, cultural attitude shifts, and economic support for low-income families.

▪ **Keywords:**

Educational inequality, Indicators of inequality, Afghanistan, Inequality.

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