In The Name of God

The Compassionate, The Merciful

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China's "Belt and Road" Initiative and Iran's Political Economy (2013-2025)

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The "Belt and Road" Initiative (BRI), launched by China in 2013 as one of the most ambitious global economic projects, aims to strengthen China's position as a leading power in the economic, trade, and political spheres. Due to its strategic geographical location at the crossroads of North-South and East-West transport corridors, as well as its abundant energy resources, the Islamic Republic of Iran constitutes one of the key nodes in this initiative.

The purpose of this study is to examine the opportunities and challenges presented by China's Belt and Road Initiative for Iran's political economy during the period 2013–2025. The findings indicate that the BRI offers significant strategic opportunities for Iran while simultaneously posing considerable structural challenges.

- **Keywords:**
  Belt and Road Initiative, China, Islamic Republic of Iran, political economy, opportunities, challenges

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The Identity Factor in China's Foreign Policy: A Comparative Assessment of the Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping Eras

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National identity is one of the fundamental factors shaping states' foreign policy, with China serving as a prominent example of its profound influence on foreign policy decision-making. The main objective of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the impact of components of national identity and identity-shaping discourses on China's foreign policy during the leadership periods of Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping.

The central research question explores how national identity and prevailing identity discourses have influenced the direction and orientation of China's foreign policy across these two eras. The research hypothesis posits that while the core principles of China's foreign policy have exhibited considerable continuity, shifts in identity discourses and perceptions of China's global position have resulted in notable changes in foreign policy priorities and approaches.

The findings demonstrate that the Hu Jintao era was marked by a cautious and pragmatic approach, emphasizing economic development, multilateralism, and international cooperation. In contrast, Xi Jinping's leadership has been characterized by a stronger emphasis on national identity, the integrated use of hard and soft power, and the pursuit of a more assertive and strategically proactive global role for China. Overall, evolving perceptions of China's position in the international order and the growing focus on national power have been the primary drivers behind the transformation of the country's foreign policy.

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Exploitation of Caspian Sea resources and Iran-Turkmenistan Relations

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The present study examines the geopolitical challenges surrounding the exploitation of oil and gas resources in the Caspian Sea between Iran and Turkmenistan. The primary research question is: What are the underlying factors behind the energy disputes between the two countries, and to what extent are these differences attributable solely to legal issues, as opposed to national interests and pressures exerted by trans-regional actors?

The research hypothesis posits that the existing geopolitical challenges result from a complex interplay among the legal framework, conflicting national interests, and competition between regional and trans-regional actors. The study adopts an analytical-qualitative approach, employing document content analysis along with a comprehensive review of specialized books, articles, agreements, and Caspian-related conventions. Data were analyzed using a three-level framework: structural, national/regional, and trans-regional.

The findings indicate that legal ambiguities regarding the Caspian Sea, the impact of international sanctions and Iran's domestic restrictions, Turkmenistan's export diversification strategies, and the strategic influence of Russia, China, and the United States have all contributed to the persistence and intensification of these disputes. These results confirm the research hypothesis and suggest that sustainable management of Caspian energy resources necessitates a multifaceted approach, including joint bilateral and multilateral agreements, proactive diplomacy, and the strengthening of domestic capabilities.

- **Keywords:**
  Caspian Sea, Energy Geopolitics, Iran, Turkmenistan, Border Disputes.

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The Russian Language in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Language, Power, and Regional Institutions

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In recent years, the status of the Russian language in the political, economic, and cultural spheres of Central Asia and the South Caucasus has encountered significant challenges. This study analyzes the role of Russian as an instrument of regional influence, with a focus on the post-Soviet language policies of selected states. Employing a documentary analysis method and drawing on academic literature, institutional reports, and official statistics, the research examines the interplay between language, power, and regional organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The findings reveal that while certain states (e.g., Georgia and Turkmenistan) have actively pursued policies of linguistic disengagement from Russian, others (e.g., Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia) continue to recognize Russian as a second official language. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, which investigates the emerging linguistic competition involving Turkish, Chinese, and English, while assessing Russia's continued role in fostering regional convergence through the lens of soft power.

- **Keywords:**
  Russian language, Central Asia, Caucasus, language policy, economic interactions.

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Afghanistan and Iran's Strategic and Cultural Environment

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This article objectively examines the developments in Afghanistan over recent years, with particular attention to Afghanistan's strategic importance for Iran, the depth of historical and civilizational connections between the two countries, the escalating threats emanating from Afghanistan to Iran's national security, and the measures required to strengthen bilateral ties while effectively mitigating these growing threats.

The central research question of this article is: What strategies should Iran adopt to control the threats originating from Afghanistan and contribute to the stabilization of cultural and economic conditions in that country?

The main argument of this article is that Iran bears a disproportionately heavy burden from the costs and consequences of Afghanistan's instability. As a result, Iran has no realistic alternative but to actively engage with the root causes of these problems. Given its unique position and capabilities, Iran is exceptionally well-placed to play a decisive role. By adopting appropriate policies, effective management, and mobilizing its national resources, Iran can help guide Afghanistan toward peace and stability.

The linkage between Iran and Afghanistan is unique in the context of Iran's foreign relations and is rarely observed to the same degree in relations between other countries. Nevertheless, the Afghanistan issue has long been neglected within Iranian policy-making circles, decision-making centers, think tanks, research institutions, and academic communities. Iran has no viable option other than to elevate the Afghanistan file to the highest national priority and take determined action to address the root causes of its challenges.

- **Keywords**: Afghanistan, Iran, neighborhood policy, strategic environment, solidarity.

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A Model for Analyzing Iran–Azerbaijan Interactions

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Foreign policy orientations are profoundly shaped by domestic political and social interactions. This study seeks to design and analyze a model of Iran's political and social interactions with the Republic of Azerbaijan and to examine their impact on Iran's foreign policy toward that country.

Employing a mixed-methods approach grounded in grounded theory and statistical modeling, the findings identify national interests, social participation, diplomatic weaknesses, balancing strategies, and media management as the primary determinants of Iran's foreign policy toward Azerbaijan. The quantitative results further confirm the statistical significance of the relationships among these variables and highlight the critical role of domestic interactions in shaping foreign policy formulation.

- **Keywords:**
  Political and social interactions، international relations، foreign policy، mixed-methods research..

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Border Rivers and the Hydropolitical Relations between Kazakhstan and China

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The transboundary Irtysh and Ili Rivers serve as vital sources of drinking water, agriculture, and energy for Kazakhstan. Originating in China, these rivers create a distinct hydropolitical dynamic between the two countries. This study examines Kazakhstan's heavy dependence on upstream water flows from China and the absence of a binding institutional framework, both of which pose serious threats to its water, economic, and environmental security. The findings demonstrate that China utilizes its geographical advantage, material capabilities, and economic leverage to reduce water flows to Kazakhstan, thereby reinforcing its hydropolitical hegemony. This situation has heightened Kazakhstan's vulnerability in water resource management, undermined its water security, and endangered its prospects for sustainable development. Moreover, Kazakhstan has often refrained from raising sensitive issues—such as limitations on water withdrawals—to avoid jeopardizing Chinese investments in the region.

The study proposes the establishment of robust institutional mechanisms, the development of transboundary water diplomacy, and the implementation of multidimensional water resource management strategies as essential steps to mitigate the risks of upstream hegemonic control. These measures can significantly strengthen Kazakhstan's water security and support its long-term sustainable development in the context of China's hydropolitical influence.

- **Keywords:**
  Irtysh and Ili Rivers, Water Security, Kazakhstan, China, Hydro politics, Transboundary Water Resources.

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Georgia's Entrepreneurship Ecosystem and Iranian Entrepreneurs

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The entrepreneurial ecosystem, as a dynamic platform shaped by the interplay of cultural, social, financial, and institutional factors, plays a pivotal role in the success or failure of entrepreneurial ventures. In recent years, Georgia has emerged as an attractive destination for Iranian entrepreneurs, driven by its economic reforms, favorable geopolitical position, and expanding trade relations with Iran. Nevertheless, operating within a foreign entrepreneurial ecosystem presents numerous challenges.

The present study seeks to identify the challenges faced by Iranian entrepreneurs in Georgia's entrepreneurial ecosystem, drawing upon Isenberg's entrepreneurial ecosystem model. This research is applied in purpose and adopts a descriptive-survey approach using qualitative methods. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with managers, internationally experienced entrepreneurs, traders, and members of the Iran–Georgia Joint Chamber of Commerce. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

The findings reveal seven major categories of challenges: financing, domestic and foreign policy issues, cultural differences, weak legal and institutional support, limitations in human capital, market barriers, and security risks. Although Georgia's entrepreneurial ecosystem offers significant potential opportunities, the results indicate that realizing these opportunities requires the implementation of joint supportive policies and medium- to long-term programs to facilitate the activities of Iranian entrepreneurs.

Accordingly, strengthening bilateral economic cooperation, leveraging cultural commonalities, improving supportive regulations, and addressing financial constraints can significantly enhance entrepreneurial relations between the two countries.

- **Keywords:**
  Ecosystem, Isenberg's model, International Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial challenges, Georgia..

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The Recognition of Unconventional States: A Case Study of Russia and the Taliban

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The return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan in 2021 has once again brought the issue of state recognition to the forefront of contentious debates in international law. While the majority of states and international organizations have refrained from officially recognizing the group, the Russian Federation has adopted a divergent approach, gradually engaging in various forms of interaction and implicit recognition. Conversely, Iran, by leveraging the Taliban's ambiguous legal status, has maintained limited engagement while deliberately avoiding formal recognition, to balance its ideological imperatives with regional strategic considerations. The article ultimately concludes that the process of state recognition in the emerging global order is increasingly influenced by political and security considerations, highlighting the urgent need for a reassessment of the legal foundations of this process.

- **Keywords:**
  Taliban; Recognition of Governments; Russia; Iran; Israel; Non-standard States; Regional Security.

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The Ups and Downs of Iran–Azerbaijan Relations: 2000–2024

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The South Caucasus region, as an integral part of Iran's civilizational sphere, holds profound geostrategic significance for the Islamic Republic of Iran that transcends conventional state-to-state relations and mere geographical boundaries. Among the countries of the South Caucasus, the Republic of Azerbaijan is of particular importance to Iran owing to its size, population, natural resources, extensive shared border, Shiite religious affiliation, Azerbaijani ethnic ties, and deep cultural and civilizational affinities.

Despite considerable potential for convergence and cooperation, instability has been the dominant characteristic of bilateral relations between the two countries throughout more than three decades of diplomatic engagement. As neighboring states with significant cultural commonalities, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan have experienced an unstable bilateral relationship shaped by numerous factors. The scope of their interactions is exceptionally broad and multifaceted, encompassing political, cultural, economic, military, environmental, and social dimensions. Consequently, managing these relations presents considerable challenges.

In addition to domestic conditions and internal dynamics, regional and occasionally trans-regional factors further intensify the complexity of bilateral ties. In this context, identifying the root causes of instability in Iran–Azerbaijan relations is of critical importance. The present study employs the theory of layered analysis of causes to examine the key factors influencing convergence and divergence between the two countries and proposes practical recommendations for strengthening bilateral relations.

This research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, employing qualitative methods and relying on library-based data collection.

- **Keywords:**
  Geopolitics, soft power, identity, Pan-Turkism, ethnicity.

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