Extended English Abstracts

CENTRAL ASIA AND CAUCASUS STUDIES

No. 133, Spring 2026
ISSN: 2322-3766
SCIENTIFIC- RESEARCH QUARTERLY

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

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The Belt and Road Initiative, proposed by Xi Jinping in 2013, is one of the most ambitious geostrategic initiatives of the 21st century. By creating a vast network of land and sea routes, this initiative seeks to reshape the world's economic geography and strengthen China's position in the international order. In fact, beyond the development of transport and energy infrastructure, the Belt and Road Initiative is a tool for deepening countries' commercial, financial, and political dependencies on China and, therefore, has both an economic and geopolitical dimension. In the meantime, the Islamic Republic of Iran, due to its unique geopolitical and geoeconomic location connecting the East and the West and also having vast energy resources, has always been at the center of this initiative But the fundamental question is what opportunities and threats has the Belt and Road Initiative created for Iran's political economy in the period 2013-2025?
The importance of the above question lies in the fact that Iran has experienced three different phases in its interaction with the Belt and Road Initiative during this period: first, the period 2013-2016, when a cautious approach and skepticism towards China's real goals prevailed; second, the phase 2016-2019, when signs of economic-infrastructure rapprochement and cooperation became apparent; and third, from 2019 onwards, when Iran became more actively involved in cooperation related to this plan, although at the same time, the pressures resulting from sanctions and competition between great powers intensified. It seems that Iran-China relations within the framework of the Belt and Road have not been linear and simple, but rather dynamic and influenced by regional and international variables.This study attempts to present a balanced picture of the implications of this initiative by examining the opportunities and challenges of the aforementioned plan for Iran's political economy. Such an analysis can reveal the potential of utilizing this plan for national development, while also highlighting the limitations and risks arising from structural dependencies. The findings of this study can be useful for Iranian policymakers in formulating realistic and balanced strategies in their interactions with China and other global actors .

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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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1- Introduction

In recent decades, the People's Republic of China has emerged as a key actor within the international system, acquiring a strategic and influential position. Analyses of China's foreign policy indicate that Beijing's international actions are not solely shaped by rational calculations and material interests but are profoundly influenced by identity-related factors and its historical–civilizational heritage. China's national identity, situated at the intersection of its ancient imperial legacy, the experience of the "Century of Humiliation," and the aspiration to restore global prominence, functions as a dynamic factor guiding the country's behavior on the world stage. From this perspective, any comprehensive analysis of China's foreign policy must consider its normative and identity dimensions alongside geopolitical and economic considerations.The leadership periods of Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping represent two distinct phases in China's foreign policy, offering an opportunity for a comparative examination of the role of identity. During Hu Jintao's tenure, the strategy of "Peaceful Rise" dominated China's foreign policy, emphasizing domestic economic development, avoidance of overt ideological competition, and constructive engagement with international institutions. This cautious and inward-looking approach reflected an identity that prioritized strengthening the foundations of national power while minimizing confrontation. In contrast, Xi Jinping's era has been marked by the revival of civilizational discourse and identity-based confidence. Initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the promotion of the "Chinese Dream" not only signify geopolitical ambitions but also represent a redefinition of China's normative and leadership role in the international order.This strategic shift can be analyzed across three identity levels: domestically, identity serves as a source of legitimacy for the ruling system and reinforces social cohesion; regionally, it provides a framework for managing relations with neighboring states and pursuing soft power strategies; globally, it functions as a tool to consolidate China's status as an emerging great power. The transition from a strategy of "Peaceful Rise" to one of "Strategic Confidence" reflects a profound change in Chinese leaders' understanding of national identity and the country's international role.This study seeks to answer the question: How have national identity and identity discourse influenced China's foreign policy during the leadership periods of Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping? The research hypothesis posits that although the core principles of China's foreign policy have exhibited relative continuity across both periods,

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differences in identity discourses and perceptions of China's global position have led to changes in foreign policy priorities and orientations. Understanding these developments cannot be achieved solely through materialist frameworks; attention must also be paid to the normative and discursive foundations of China's foreign policy. China draws upon its civilizational narratives to promote an order based on peaceful coexistence and shared development, while simultaneously seeking to reshape the international order in ways that reflect its own power and values. These normative claims lend depth and legitimacy to China's actions, both in economic diplomacy and in security-related domains.The significance of this topic lies in the fact that understanding China's foreign policy cannot be reduced to material and security interests alone; it must also be analyzed through the lens of its identity and normative components. A comparative examination of the Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping eras illuminates how different leaders, through divergent interpretations of national identity, have pursued distinct pathways of international engagement. Such an analysis is essential not only for anticipating the future trajectory of China's foreign policy but also for understanding the broader dynamics of the international system.

2- Theoretical framework

The field of International Relations emerged in a context dominated by positivist paradigms and the behavioral revolution in the social sciences in the United States. Consequently, from its inception, the discipline largely adopted materialist, realist, and interest-centered assumptions and somewhat distanced itself from the broader theoretical debates that were concurrently taking place in other areas of the social sciences. One of the most significant movements of reflexivity in the social sciences was constructivism. The emergence of this perspective transformed the "constructivism–positivism" debate into a central axis of theoretical discussion within the social sciences. These developments reached the field of International Relations in the early 1980s, challenging the dominant assumptions of the discipline. As a result, the "Third Debate" in International Relations emerged—a debate between constructivism and rationalism—first prominently articulated by Yosef Lapid (Motaghi & Kazemi, 2007:212).Constructivists regard the world and the international arena as an ongoing project of normative construction, shaped by perceptions and contextually informed interpretations. This approach emphasizes the "social construction of reality," arguing that direct and unmediated access to the world is impossible because all human actions are embedded in social contexts and acquire meaning within them. It is this process of meaning-making that significantly shapes the reality of the world. Accordingly, constructivism posits that international reality is a social phenomenon constructed through cognitive structures that ascribe meaning to the material world. Consequently, international politics is also perceived as a social domain whose characteristics are ultimately determined and stabilized through interactions among actors (Aghaei & Rasouli Thani, 2009:3).Every theory has its unique ontology and epistemology. In the case of constructivism, its ontology is grounded in the assumption that social reality is constructed and dependent on human meaning-making, rather than being an objective, mind-independent reality. From a constructivist perspective, the international system is not merely a collection of material facts or power relations; it is the product of social interactions, norms, values, and shared beliefs among actors. Therefore, international entities and structures such as states, sovereignty, security, and even national interests do not possess intrinsic or immutable characteristics; rather, they are formed and reproduced within social and historical processes. In other words, the constructivist ontology emphasizes the dynamism, contextuality, and malleability of social reality in international relations (Jung, 2019:3).Similarly, the epistemology of constructivism is based on the principle that our understanding of international

reality is not an objective reflection but the outcome of interpretive and social processes. Knowledge about global politics is always produced and reproduced within the context of norms, language, discourses, and social interactions. Unlike positivist approaches, constructivism does not seek universal laws; instead, it stresses that the understanding of international phenomena is possible only through an appreciation of their social and historical contexts. Hence, its epistemology highlights the relativity of knowledge, the significance of discourse, and the role of collective meaning-making in shaping political and international understanding (Charskykh, 2022:62).Key constructivist theorists include Alexander Wendt, who emphasized that international structures are not only constraining but also the product of social actions and collective identities. Similarly, John Ruggie and others have shown that norms and shared beliefs can shape state behavior and the nature of international security. Martha Finnemore and colleagues have highlighted the importance of meaning-making, language, and discourse in the reproduction of international social realities. Collectively, these theorists provide a framework in which international politics is not merely a realm of competition and power, but the outcome of social and cultural processes.Constructivism also encompasses central discursive elements, which can be summarized as follows:First, the concept of social structure. From this perspective, international structures are not only constraining frameworks for actors but also the product of social interactions and collective identities. The identities of states and other international actors are shaped through social processes, and these identities determine political behavior and international relations. Constructivism thus emphasizes examining how identities are formed and how they contribute to the reproduction of structures (Adler, 1997:330).Second, norms and shared beliefs constitute another central element in constructivism. Norms are sets of social rules that guide and constrain actors' behavior and provide meaning to it. Accordingly, international actions cannot be fully explained by material interests alone; they are shaped by norms and social values. Collective meaning-making is the process through which these norms are produced, reproduced, and transformed, thereby giving form and significance to international reality (Björkdahl, 2002:15).Third, social action and interaction. Constructivists argue that international politics is a social arena whose characteristics are determined through interactions among actors. States, organizations, and other actors reproduce meanings and rules through communication, dialogue, and mutual interpretation, which collectively shape international reality. In this sense, international politics is not a fixed, objective reality but the product of social and cultural processes that are continually reproduced and reinterpreted (Charskykh, 2023:68).Constructivism thus provides the most suitable analytical framework for a comparative study of the role of identity in China's foreign policy during the leadership periods of Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. The theory emphasizes the significance of identity, norms, and meaning-making in shaping international behavior. During Hu Jintao's era, the emphasis on a "Peaceful Rise" and portraying China as a responsible power in the international system reflected the identity endorsed in that period. In contrast, during Xi Jinping's leadership, the redefinition of China's national identity based on the "Chinese Dream" and the revival of its historical status as a great power led to a more active and occasionally assertive foreign policy. Since constructivism views foreign policy as the result of interactions among identities and social structures, it provides a robust framework for explaining transformations in China's foreign policy through shifts in national identity and leaders' ideological interpretations.

3- Methodology

Qualitative research is a methodological approach primarily concerned with understanding the complex nature of social phenomena by exploring the meanings, experiences, perspectives, and contexts of individuals or groups. Instead of seeking statistical generalizability, its goal is to achieve deep, interpretive understanding (Verstehen). It employs non-numerical data—such as interviews, observations, focus groups, and textual or visual materials—and analyzes this data through inductive reasoning to identify patterns, themes, and narratives. Characterized by flexibility, an emergent design, and researcher reflexivity, this approach is particularly valuable for exploring nuanced processes, uncovering underlying motivations, and generating rich, contextual theories in fields like sociology, anthropology, education, and political science.

4-Discussion

During Hu Jintao's presidency (2002–2012), China's foreign policy underwent significant developments shaped simultaneously by economic growth and national identity discourse. This period was marked by a cautious and gradual approach to international engagement, with a particular emphasis on national security and domestic cohesion. The focus on enhancing China's global standing, alongside the "Peaceful Rise" strategy, reflected the government's effort to integrate economic power with the country's cultural and historical identity (Rozman, 2011:87).This approach also sought to establish China's image as a responsible and reliable actor within the international order. During this period, national identity functioned as a discursive tool to legitimize domestic governance and justify foreign policy. The Hu administration emphasized the restoration of national pride and the redefinition of China's role in the global order. This focus on national identity enabled domestic policymakers to pursue initiatives such as military modernization, international investment, and cultural diplomacy with public support and political legitimacy. Furthermore, China's identity discourse acted as a deterrent against external pressures and as a framework for articulating strategic interests (Guo, 2007:26).The period was increasingly influenced by historical and cultural concepts, particularly narratives emphasizing the "glory of China's past," which served to strengthen domestic national identity. This identity discourse provided a framework for countering external pressures; by leveraging history and culture as sources of soft power, China justified its positions within international organizations and regional negotiations while simultaneously reinforcing internal cohesion. This approach allowed China to present its foreign policy as a natural extension of its historical and cultural identity.On the international stage, Hu Jintao's China pursued a "harmonious diplomacy" approach, combining principles of multilateralism with a focus on national interests. National identity and China's cultural heritage were utilized as legitimizing factors in this approach (Glaser, 2007:300). This strategy allowed China to simultaneously develop economic and political relations with major powers while maintaining strategic autonomy and safeguarding national interests. Emphasizing respect for national identity in regional and international negotiations positioned China as a reliable and leading actor. Identity discourse also reinforced soft power strategies, with tools such as media, cultural diplomacy, and initiatives like the "Conferences on Chinese History and Civilization" serving to enhance China's standing in the international system.Moreover, by drawing on cultural and historical symbols, China projected a positive and influential image while communicating the implications of its political and economic actions in a non-confrontational manner (Wang, 2014:1120). This approach strengthened both domestic legitimacy and international influence. National identity also shaped China's stance on regional issues, particularly in interactions with Asian neighbors and matters concerning Taiwan and the South China Sea. Maintaining territorial integrity and national authority emerged as central pillars of foreign policy.This focus on security

and territorial integrity led China to adopt firm positions in regional negotiations and border disputes, while simultaneously expanding its influence in East Asia through diplomatic and economic instruments. This combined approach significantly contributed to consolidating China's position in regional affairs. During Hu Jintao's tenure, China sought to transform its image from an emerging power to a responsible global actor, while domestic identity discourse emphasized the protection of national interests and strategic autonomy. This duality influenced the orientation of foreign policy.The approach enabled China to engage in international issues such as climate change, global economic governance, and multilateral cooperation while remaining steadfast on identity-based red lines and national interests. Thus, China's foreign policy achieved a balance between global responsibility and the protection of national identity. In the economic domain, national identity influenced the "Secure and Strong China" strategy; foreign investments, energy strategies, and international infrastructure projects were designed to reinforce China's image as a powerful and independent actor. This economic strategy also enhanced strategic autonomy and reduced dependence on external powers, demonstrating that China's economic development aligned with the protection of national identity and strategic interests. Consequently, China's economic and identity-driven policies functioned in a complementary and coordinated manner during this period (Mochtak, 2021:750).Analysis of China's foreign policy during this era indicates that identity discourse was utilized not only for domestic legitimacy but also for managing external relations. This discourse enabled China to adopt firm stances against Western pressures and regional challenges. Additionally, leveraging national identity allowed China to implement policies in security, economic, and multilateral diplomacy with greater coherence while simultaneously projecting the image of a powerful nation committed to its cultural and historical values. Ultimately, national identity and identity discourse during Hu Jintao's presidency played a key role in guiding foreign policy, enabling China to strengthen domestic cohesion and consolidate its position as an emerging power in the international system. This emphasis on national identity and historical culture allowed China to shape its foreign policy not solely based on economic and security interests but also on identity-based and historical legitimacy, enhancing its image as an independent, responsible, and influential global actor (Cabestan, 2009:92).

5- Conclusion

A comparative analysis indicates that China's national and civilizational identity has had a direct influence on the orientation of its foreign policy. During Hu Jintao's era, China's identity was defined as that of a cautious rising power, primarily focused on domestic economic development and maintaining stability in international relations. This identity-driven approach led China to consolidate its presence on the global stage largely through multilateral cooperation and by avoiding direct confrontation with major powers. In contrast, Xi Jinping's period is characterized by an emphasis on great power identity and the restoration of China's historical status, which has resulted in a more proactive and, at times, assertive foreign policy.Another key finding of this analysis is the transformation in China's perception of its role in the global order. Hu Jintao viewed China as a member that should coexist within the existing order, whereas Xi Jinping, drawing on national and civilizational identity, frames China as having a historical mission to reform or create an alternative order. This shift in identity has prompted China's foreign policy to move from a cautious and cooperative stance toward a more active and hegemonically-oriented approach, particularly in sensitive geopolitical areas and in the establishment of parallel international institutions.A further important dimension of the findings is the prominence of ethnocivilizational identity and nationalism in Xi Jinping's foreign policy. This normative-historical identity,

reinforced through narratives of the “Century of Humiliation” and the revival of Chinese civilization, has made China’s foreign policy increasingly attentive to territorial sensitivities, status concerns, and domestic legitimacy. Consequently, issues such as Taiwan, the South China Sea, and China’s engagement in Africa and Southeast Asia are not merely economic or geopolitical matters but also serve as instruments for consolidating national identity and legitimizing leadership domestically.In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that China’s national and civilizational identity has played a decisive role in shaping the country’s objectives, strategies, and international behavior. The shift from a cautious rising power to an active great power has transformed China’s approach to the global order, regional interactions, and the definition of national interests. These results underscore the centrality of identity as a variable in analyzing foreign policy and highlight that an accurate understanding of China’s foreign policy is incomplete without considering its identity and historical dimensions. This trend also carries significant implications for International Relations studies, regional security, and forecasting China’s future behavior, emphasizing the necessity of considering identity as a strategic element in diplomacy and international policymaking.

Exploitation of Caspian Sea Resources and Iran-Turkmenistan Relations

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The Caspian Sea, as the world's largest enclosed body of water, occupies a unique position in the geopolitical, geoeconomics, and geostrategic relations of the Eurasian region. Over the past three decades, the five littoral states — namely, Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan — have faced numerous challenges in establishing a legal regime, exploiting energy resources, and protecting the environment. The importance of the Caspian Sea stems from two main aspects: first, its enormous oil and gas reserves, which place it among the key regions of global energy supply; and second, its geographical location, which serves as a passageway between Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Accordingly, any change in the legal status or in the patterns of cooperation and competition among littoral states has direct and indirect consequences for global energy security and regional dynamics.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of newly independent states, the issue of determining the boundaries of national sovereignty over the waters and subsurface resources of the Caspian Sea became a focal point of discussion. The 2018 Aktau Convention was a significant step towards establishing a common framework; however, numerous issues related to the delimitation of the seabed and joint exploitation between the countries remain unresolved. In the meantime, Iran and Turkmenistan have disputes over the oil and gas field known as "Dostlik" or "Alburz", which is a clear example of the legal and geopolitical complexities in the Caspian. This dispute not only affects bilateral relations but can also alter the regional balance, as any agreement or disagreement over the exploitation of joint fields draws the interests of trans-regional actors into the field and is linked to broader international competitions.

The research background shows that most domestic and foreign studies on the Caspian have focused either on the legal aspects of the maritime regime or on the importance of energy resources and export pipelines. Studies from Western and regional think tanks have focused on the role of the Caspian in European energy security and its place in transit corridors. At the same time, Persian literature has primarily focused on the legal dimensions and implications of the 2018 Convention. However, there is still little research that examines the Iran-Turkmenistan dispute over the common field at three levels of analysis—structural, national, and regional/transregional. This research gap underscores the need to address the issue even more. Moreover, many existing sources either lack accurate quantitative data or sporadically refer to the economic and security dimensions of the problem. As a result, combining a legal-political approach with exploitation data can provide a more comprehensive picture of the existing realities.

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The research method employed in this article is a combination of qualitative and documentary analysis. The data was collected through the study of official legal documents (including the 2018 Aktau Convention and the bilateral agreements between Iran and the former Soviet Union), reports from reputable international think tanks, scientific articles, and statistics from energy organizations. To increase credibility, the data triangulation method was employed, meaning that information from different sources was compared and overlapped to minimize potential bias. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that there are limitations, such as limited access to confidential contract provisions and insufficient field data, which make the results more cautious when generalizing. By adopting a descriptive-analytical approach, this research attempts to reconstruct the historical and legal contexts and explain the economic and political consequences of the conflict at different levels.

In the methodological dimension, special attention is also paid to comparing the Caspian Sea with other similar regions worldwide (such as the Gulf of Mexico and the North Sea) to better understand the issue. These comparisons illustrate how countries have employed various models of joint management or legal division when confronted with shared resources or fields situated in disputed areas. Such a comparative approach helps to make global experiences referable as policy options for Iran and Turkmenistan.

The research's theoretical framework is organized around the neorealist or structural realist approach. According to this framework, the international system is anarchic, and the leading actors (countries) are in a state of survival and seeking to increase their power. In such conditions, strategic resources such as oil and gas are viewed as a means of enhancing national power and rising regional influence. Legal disputes around the Caspian Sea can also be understood not only from the perspective of international law but also within the framework of competition among powers for access to and control over resources. Iran and Turkmenistan are each seeking to maximize their own interests. In this regard, trans-regional actors such as Russia, China, and the European Union are also attempting to capitalize on the situation to advance their own interests. From a neorealist perspective, even legal cooperation and agreements are more a product of balance of power and power calculations than of normative commitments or a mere will to cooperate.

The research findings reveal that the Iran-Turkmenistan conflict over the shared Caspian Sea cannot be analyzed in a purely legal or purely economic framework. This conflict, in fact, reflects the interplay between the anarchic structure of the international system, specific national needs, and regional and global competitions. From a neorealist perspective, countries' efforts to maximize power and security are the primary drivers of their behavior in this area.

Although Iran faces technical and financial constraints, it still enjoys a privileged geopolitical position and significant potential to play a role in the Caspian. By adopting a phased, realistic approach based on temporary and institutional cooperation, it can prevent the dispute from turning into a crisis and instead turn it into an opportunity to strengthen its regional position. On the other hand, continuing the current situation and postponing reaching an agreement could harm national interests and pave the way for greater influence by extra-regional actors.

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

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Abstract**:** In recent years, the position of the Russian language in the political, economic, and cultural spheres of Central Asia and the South Caucasus has faced emerging challenges. This study aims to analyze the role of Russian as an instrument of regional influence, focusing on post-Soviet language policies of selected states. Using a documentary analysis method and drawing on academic literature, institutional reports, and official data, the research explores the relationship between language, power, and regional organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The findings indicate that while some states (e.g., Georgia and Turkmenistan) have pursued policies of linguistic disengagement, others (e.g., Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia) maintain Russian as a second official language. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach to analyzing the new linguistic competition with Turkish, Chinese, and English, while assessing Russian's role in 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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Introduction

This article, while objectively describing what happened in the past few years, focuses on the issue of Afghanistan's importance for Iran, the level of connection and solidarity between the two countries, how the threats from Afghanistan are increasing for Iran and to stabilize What should be done about these links and curbing the increasing threats .During the last four decades, Iran has always been involved in Afghanistan issues and has paid heavy costs in this matter. These costs have been so heavy that, once in 1998 and following the catastrophe in the Iranian consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif and with the approval of the National Security Council, Iran was supposed to enter Afghanistan militarily and occupy parts of that country. Even the Iranian military forces were ready to enter Afghanistan at the border lines, and if it was not for the tact of the decision makers and preventing this action at the last moment, a terrible disaster would have occurred for the country. Also, in 2023, the issue of the threat of military action against Afghanistan was raised again.

Research Question

The main question of this article is what Iran should do to control the threats from Afghanistan and stabilize the cultural and economic conditions in the Afghanistan

Research Hypothesis

The claim of this article is that Iran is heavily involved in the costs and consequences of Afghanistan's problems, and it has no choice but to deal with the roots of Afghanistan's problems, and Iran is the only one that can. Iran should bring Afghanistan's issues to peace on the condition of adopting appropriate policies and management and mobilizing capabilities.

Methodology (and Theoretical Framework if there are)

In this article, relying on deep library research, using Afghanistan's written sources and especially field experience at the highest levels, while finding the roots and investigating the dimensions of Afghanistan's complexities, I try to go beyond description and analysis and find the solutions facing Iran in solving them. The interdependence and integration theories such as behaviorism, constructivism and cybernetic approaches have been used here.

Results and discussion

Iran and Afghanistan are strongly linked to each other (for historical, geographical, social, religious, cultural, linguistic, security, economic and strategic reasons). This issue is unique among

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Iran's relations with other countries and even less so in the relations between the other two countries**.** At the same time, the issue of Afghanistan has been neglected in Iran for a long time and the necessary attention is not given to it in decision-making centers, think thanks and even research and academic centers. We need a more comprehensive approach toward Afghanistan. Iran should help Afghanistan to create acceptable daily life for its citizens (as far as economic, social and political aspects are concerned). Fundamental issues should be addressed from the Taliban authorities as well as international community. Inclusive government and reforming social behavior, especially towards women, are Taliban duties, but international community has its own responsibilities.

We (regional countries, Islamic world and international community) are paying the cost and we should act responsibly. We should return the hope and minimum living conditions to the Afghanistan. This should be done through correct fundamental actions. It is a wrong policy that international organizations have limited themselves to distributing food only. This policy has turned people into beggars.Changes and progress cannot be made by foreigners and must be made by Afghans themselves. Afghanistan needs real projects. The country and people must get out of being an American hostage. The hard core of decision making in the Taliban (deep state) are very hard liner and interact with them is very tough and is very hard work but we have no any other choices. Their social policies especially regarding to the women are not acceptable and they are not form any kind of inclusive government but Sanctions and pressure only increase people's suffering and strengthen extremism.

Conclusion

Afghanistan is a profoundly complex issue. Despite its seemingly simplistic image, it is riddled with contradictions and paradoxes. It is precisely due to these intricacies that three major superpowers—the British, the Soviet Union, and the USA—occupied the country, only to meet abysmal failures in their endeavors. They left Afghanistan in disgrace, a nation that not only served as the graveyard and quagmire of superpowers but also as a failed laboratory for various ideologies, including communism, extremism, imposed democracy, jihadism, and more.

According to the before mentioned circumstances, the Taliban came to power and is now a reality in the main part of Afghanistan. After 4 decades, this is the first time that the whole Afghanistan is under the control of a central government. For the foreseeable future , there would be no alternative for the Taliban. The opposition is very weak. Not a single foreign country can or wants to interfere militarily or support the opposition seriously. Despite of all problems, the Taliban could keep its integrity, and despite of all sanctions and foreign pressures continue its rule although the poor people of Afghanistan are in a catastrophic situation. As far as the current situation in Afghanistan has been continued, Iran should pay the heavy costs. Iran has no other choices rather than takes Afghanistan issue as its top priority and in a win –win policy help to solve the roots the problem. In the section of what should be done, a comprehensive proposal has been prepared to solve the problems of Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Iran, neighborhood policy, solidarity, strategic environment

A Model for Analyzing Iran–Azerbaijan Interactions

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Identifying the Pattern of Political and Social Interactions between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan in Foreign Policy: An Exploratory Mixed-Methods Approach

This study explores the pattern of political and social interactions between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan and examines how these interactions influence Iran's foreign policy orientation. Based on the premise that foreign policy is not solely shaped by external factors but is deeply influenced by domestic political and social dynamics, the research focuses on the role of internal interactions in determining Iran's approach toward Azerbaijan. Given Azerbaijan's strategic position and its historical, cultural, and geopolitical ties with Iran, understanding these interactions is of particular importance.

The theoretical framework of the study draws on contemporary international relations literature, which emphasizes the interdependence between domestic politics and foreign policy behavior. Political interactions are influenced not only by tangible factors such as economic interests and political structures, but also by intangible elements including ideology, culture, identity, and social values. Recent scholarship highlights the need to analyze foreign policy as a broader pattern of actions and interactions rather than isolated decisions. Within this context, Iran–Azerbaijan relations present a complex and multi-layered case that requires a comprehensive analytical approach.

Methodologically, the study employs an **exploratory sequential mixed-methods design**, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches. In the qualitative phase, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to conduct in-depth interviews with experts, senior policymakers, and academics specializing in foreign policy and international relations. A total of twelve interviews were conducted, and theoretical saturation was achieved. Data were analyzed using grounded theory through open and axial coding with the support of ATLAS.ti software. This process led to the identification of key concepts and categories related to political and social interactions.

In the quantitative phase, the qualitative findings were transformed into a structured questionnaire to test and validate the proposed model. The statistical population consisted of employees of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran. Using Cochran's formula, a sample of 303 respondents was selected through simple random sampling. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and SmartPLS software, and structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was applied. Reliability and validity of the measurement model were confirmed through standard indicators such as Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and

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discriminant validity. The results demonstrated an acceptable model fit and robust measurement accuracy.

The findings reveal that **domestic political and social interactions play a decisive role in shaping Iran's foreign policy toward Azerbaijan**. The core phenomenon identified in the model is the interaction pattern between the two countries, which is influenced by several interrelated dimensions.

The **causal conditions** include national interests, political realism, domestic policy considerations, counter-sanctions strategies, and efforts to strengthen international relations. These factors highlight the importance of adopting flexible and interest-oriented approaches in foreign policy decision-making.

Intervening conditions, such as weaknesses in diplomacy, economic inefficiencies, and institutional shortcomings, were found to constrain effective foreign policy implementation. These limitations reduce Iran's ability to manage bilateral relations efficiently and respond to regional challenges.

Contextual conditions—including social participation, trust-building, support for elites, domestic economic initiatives, and cultural development—were identified as crucial foundations for sustainable foreign policy outcomes. In particular, serving and empowering national elites contributes to social legitimacy and policy stability.

The study also identifies key **strategic actions**, such as balancing strategies, tension reduction, media and public opinion management, strengthening diplomatic capacity, and enhancing both soft and hard power. Emphasis on national and religious identity and positive international image-building further supports Iran's foreign policy objectives.

The **outcomes** of effective political and social interactions include economic, political, and cultural development, stronger bilateral agreements, increased public satisfaction, and enhanced national power. Economic development, in particular, strengthens Iran's resilience and international bargaining capacity.

Quantitative results confirm the statistical significance of the relationships among these dimensions and support the explanatory power of the proposed model. The consistency between qualitative and quantitative findings reinforces the validity of the research framework.

In conclusion, this study provides a coherent and empirically validated model for understanding the political and social interactions shaping Iran's foreign policy toward Azerbaijan. By combining qualitative depth with quantitative rigor, the research offers valuable insights for policymakers and scholars. Despite minor limitations related to sample scope, the findings contribute meaningfully to the literature on foreign policy analysis and regional relations and offer a useful foundation for future research in this field.

Border Rivers and the Hydropolitical Relations between Kazakhstan and China

Javad khademzadeh[1]

Abstract

The transboundary Irtysh and Ili Rivers are vital sources of drinking water, agriculture, and energy for Kazakhstan, and their flow originating from China creates a unique hydropolitical dynamic. This study examines Kazakhstan's dependence on upstream water flows from China and the absence of a binding institutional framework, which threatens its water, economic, and environmental security. Findings indicate that China leverages its geographical power, material capabilities, and economic bargaining to reduce water flow to Kazakhstan, thereby consolidating its hydropolitical hegemony. This situation has led to Kazakhstan's vulnerability in water resource management, reduced water security, and threats to sustainable development. Furthermore, Kazakhstan refrains from raising sensitive issues such as water withdrawal limitations to avoid jeopardizing Chinese investments in the region. Consequently, establishing institutional mechanisms, developing transboundary water diplomacy, and implementing multidimensional water resource management are proposed as strategies to mitigate upstream hegemonic threats. These strategies can enhance Kazakhstan's security and sustainable development in the face of China's hydropolitical hegemony.

Keywords: Irtysh and Ili Rivers, Water Security, Kazakhstan, China, Hydropolitics, Transboundary Water Resources

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Georgia's Entrepreneurship Ecosystem and Iranian Entrepreneurs

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In recent years, Georgia has positioned itself as a reform-oriented and business-friendly economy in the South Caucasus, gaining international recognition for institutional reforms, deregulation, and administrative efficiency. These developments have attracted increasing numbers of foreign entrepreneurs, including Iranians seeking regional market access and more flexible regulatory conditions. However, despite Georgia's favorable macro-level indicators, limited research has examined how Iranian entrepreneurs actually experience this ecosystem in practice. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the lived experiences of Iranian entrepreneurs in Georgia through the lens of Isenberg's six-domain model of entrepreneurial ecosystems.

The research adopts a qualitative, exploratory design based on semi-structured interviews with twelve Iranian entrepreneurs. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and had at least three years of business experience in Georgia. Interview data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Initial coding generated a large set of concepts that were refined into core themes aligned with Isenberg's domains: policy, finance, culture, supports, human capital, and markets.

Findings reveal a complex and sometimes contradictory ecosystem experience. In the financial domain, access to capital was identified as the most significant challenge. Although Georgia's banking system is formally open and regulated, Iranian entrepreneurs reported substantial difficulties in opening accounts, transferring funds, and obtaining loans. Due to international sanctions and heightened compliance procedures, banks often apply strict scrutiny to Iranian nationals. In the policy domain, participants acknowledged the efficiency of company registration and the relative clarity of formal procedures. However, they emphasized inconsistencies in regulatory enforcement and varying interpretations of laws across institutions, particularly in taxation and licensing. Such inconsistencies create uncertainty and reduce institutional trust, despite the country's reformist image. Cultural and linguistic barriers also shape entrepreneurial experience. Limited proficiency in the Georgian language restricts access to informal business networks and complicates negotiations. While younger generations are more internationally oriented, broader societal reliance on Georgian and occasional negative perceptions toward Iran affect trust-building and integration.

In the area of supports, although Georgia has established innovation agencies and entrepreneurship programs, Iranian entrepreneurs reported limited or unequal access to these mechanisms. Strict

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production standards and regulatory requirements, combined with insufficient advisory guidance, increase operational burdens. Regarding human capital, participants described an adequate supply of general labor but a shortage of specialized and technically skilled workers. Skill gaps, combined with turnover and migration of qualified professionals, constrain growth, particularly in knowledge-intensive sectors.

Finally, security-related concerns including uncertainties about residency status, capital protection, and profit repatriation, add an additional layer of risk, especially under sanction-related constraints. Overall, the study demonstrates that Georgia's entrepreneurial ecosystem presents both opportunities and structural limitations for Iranian entrepreneurs. While administrative simplicity and regional connectivity are advantages, financial exclusion, institutional inconsistency, cultural barriers, limited market scale, and security concerns significantly shape lived experience. By bridging macro-level indicators and micro-level realities, this research contributes to the literature on entrepreneurial ecosystems and migrant entrepreneurship in sanction-affected contexts.

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

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Introduction

The re-emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and their seizure of power in 2021 has once again revived legal and political debates surrounding the recognition of governments in international law. While most states and international organizations have refrained from officially recognizing the Taliban, the Russian Federation, by adopting a pragmatic approach, has pursued a path of gradual engagement and even some forms of informal recognition.

Purpos

This article, using comparative and legal analysis methods, examines whether Russia's recognition of the Taliban aligns with or contradicts the principles and practices of international law. Within this framework, key concepts such as the distinction between "de facto" and "de jure" recognition, non-standard governments, and the transformations of the post-Western international order are explored.

Method

The article then analyzes the regional implications of this trend for the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Result

These include Iran's use of the Taliban's ambiguous legal status to maintain security and diplomatic advantages, secure a rear front amid tensions with the West and Israel, and preserve its value as a bargaining chip for Russia in its negotiations with the West over Ukraine. In conclusion, the article emphasizes the need to reconsider legal frameworks of recognition in light of emerging geopolitical developments.

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 Part Of The Iranian Civilizational Sphere, Is Of Geostrategic Importance For Iran Beyond The Equations Related To State-Nation Relations And Geographical Borders. The Formation Of The Soviet Union Cut The Political, Cultural And Civilizational Connection Between Iran And The South Caucasus For Seventy Years. With The Collapse Of The Soviet Union, The Caucasus Region, Like Other Separated Regions, Underwent Fundamental Changes And Developments In Its Social, Political, And Cultural Structure. After The Collapse Of The Soviet Union And The Formation Of New Governments, Iran Attempted To Develop Its Relations With The Countries Of The Region In Political, Economic, And Especially Cultural Dimensions. Among The Countries Of The Caucasus Region, Azerbaijan Has A Special Position Due To Its Larger Population, Size, And Resources Than The Other Two Countries. In Addition To This Position, The Ethnic And Religious Composition Of This Country, As Well As Its Common Land, Sea, And Air Borders And Rail, Sea, Road, And Air Communication Lines, has doubled the importance of this country for Iran. After The Early Years Of Independence, Which Were A Period Of Instability In The Country's Foreign Policy, With The Coming To Power Of Heydar Aliyev, The Foreign Policy Of The Republic Of Azerbaijan Gradually Became Stable. The Path Laid By Heydar Was Continued By Ilham Aliyev After That. Despite The Great Potential For Convergence And Cooperation Between Iran And Azerbaijan, The Instability Of Relations Has Been The Main Characteristic Of The Relations Between The Two Countries Throughout The History Of More Than 30 Years Of Relations. Two Categories Of Issues That Affect Relations Include Convergent And Divergent Issues. Regarding The First Category, Issues Such As The Religion Of Islam And The Shiite Religion, the historical and cultural background, The Common Azeri Language Of The Republic Of Azerbaijan And The Northwestern Provinces Of Iran, Family Ties And The Extent Of Travel Between Citizens And Neighbors Are Relevant. In Contrast, The Divergent Issues Include Issues Such As Differences In Government Models (Secular And Theocratic), Iranian Religious Activities In The Republic Of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani Ethnic Pressure On Iran, The Karabakh Crisis And Iran's Positions On This Issue, Differences In Opinion Regarding The Legal Regime Of The Caspian Sea, Differences In Perceptions Of Sharia Due To 70 Years Of Separation, Azerbaijan's Non-Regional Approach Versus Iran's Mere Regionalism,

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And The Role And Influence Of Third-Party Actors Such As Turkey, Russia, Israel, The United States, And NATO. The Above Factors Have Sometimes Had Short-Term Consequences And Sometimes Profound And Long-Term Effects On The Relations Between The Two Countries. Convergent Or Divergent Issues In The Relations Between The Two Countries Can Be Categorized Under The Material Or Semantic Structure Of The Relations. Accordingly, using the theory of layered causal analysis, we attempt to examine the factors that influence bilateral relations between Iran and Azerbaijan. In Addition, These Two Structures Also Affect Each Other And Strengthen Or Weaken Each Other. In Addition To These Considerations, The Evolving Geopolitical Landscape Of The South Caucasus In The Post-2020 Era Has Further Highlighted The Necessity Of Recalibrating Iran–Azerbaijan Relations. The Shifting Regional Power Dynamics Following The Second Karabakh War, The Emergence Of New Transportation Corridors, And The Growing Presence Of Extra-Regional Actors Have Created Both Opportunities And Constraints For Bilateral Interaction. These Transformations Underscore The Importance Of Pragmatic Engagement, Particularly In Sectors Such As Energy Transit, Trade Facilitation, And Infrastructure Development, Where Shared Interests Can Outweigh Ideological And Identity-Driven Differences. Accordingly, A Forward-Looking Strategy That Prioritizes Mutual Economic Benefits And Regional Stability May Serve As A Foundation For Reducing Tensions Rooted In Semantic Disagreements And For Building Sustainable Cooperation Between The Two Neighbors.