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ANALYSIS OF FOREIGN STUDIES ON THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Abstract. *This article analyzes foreign academic research devoted to the study of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In particular, it provides a comparative analysis of the scholarly perspectives of Western, Russian/CIS, and Iranian researchers, highlighting their methodological approaches, principal academic findings, and contributions to contemporary scholarship. The study examines the ideological, geopolitical, economic, and security dimensions of Iran's foreign policy through the perspectives of different schools of thought. It also evaluates the extent to which these approaches contribute to understanding the evolution, priorities, and strategic orientation of Iran's foreign policy in the contemporary international system.*

Keywords: *Axis of Resistance, Look East policy, pragmatic foreign policy, Western scholars, Russian Oriental studies, forward defense.*

INTRODUCTION

Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran became one of the most extensively studied subjects in international relations. This increased scholarly attention can be attributed to Iran's geostrategic location, vast energy resources, significant influence on political developments in the Middle East, and its long-standing confrontation with the United States and other Western countries. Consequently, Iran's foreign policy has been interpreted through diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives by scholars representing different academic traditions.

To date, numerous monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles, and doctoral dissertations on Iran's foreign policy have been published in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, China, and Iran itself. The majority of

these studies focus on the conceptual foundations of Iran's foreign policy, its regional strategy, nuclear program, soft power diplomacy, the Axis of Resistance, the Look East strategy, and regional cooperation. There is no single universally accepted scholarly approach to the study of Iran's foreign policy. Western scholars generally analyze Iran's foreign policy through the theoretical frameworks of realism, neorealism, and security studies. Russian researchers tend to emphasize geopolitical interests and the concept of a multipolar world order. In contrast, Iranian scholars interpret the country's foreign policy primarily through the principles and values of the Islamic Revolution, national interests, and the preservation of national independence and sovereignty.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a comparative analysis of foreign academic literature devoted to the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The research employs comparative analysis, the historical method, the systems approach, and content analysis as its principal methodological tools. Scholarly works produced by Western, Russian/CIS, and Iranian researchers are systematically compared to examine their methodological approaches, theoretical perspectives, and principal findings. In addition, the study draws upon the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, publications of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and official documents issued by international organizations.

Several distinct schools of thought have emerged in the academic study of Iran's foreign policy. Among Western scholars, Ray Takeyh, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Shireen T. Hunter, David Menashri, Trita Parsi, Suzanne Maloney, and Shahram Chubin have extensively examined the ideological, geopolitical, and security dimensions of Iran's foreign policy through the theoretical frameworks of international relations. Russian and CIS scholars, including L. M. Kulagina, V. Yurtayev, S. Druzhilovsky, and S. Agaev, have analyzed Iran's regional policy, its strategic partnership with Russia, and its interests in Central Asia from a geopolitical perspective. Meanwhile, Iranian scholars such as Rouhollah K. Ramazani, Kayhan Barzegar, Abbas Maleki, and Reza Dehshiri have interpreted Iran's foreign policy as being closely linked to the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, national interests, and the functioning of state institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Western Scholars' Research on the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Western academic tradition occupies one of the leading positions in the study of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In particular, studies conducted by scholars from the United States and the United Kingdom are distinguished by their comprehensive analyses of Iran's foreign policy strategy, national interests, ideological foundations, nuclear program, and regional policy. Most of these studies assess Iran's foreign policy from the perspective of the strategic interests of Western states, and therefore, a certain degree of political subjectivity can be observed in some cases (Fayzullayev, 2024).

Foreign scholarly literature on Iran's foreign policy has generally developed along three principal directions. The first focuses on Iran's regional geopolitical role and its influence in the Middle East. The second examines the country's nuclear program and issues of international security. The third explores the relationship between the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, religious factors, and foreign policy. This classification provides an important methodological framework for the systematic study of the academic literature on Iran's foreign policy (Xodjimuhamedova, 2022). Among Western scholars, Ray Takeyh is regarded as one of the foremost experts on Iran's foreign policy. In his works "Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic" and "Guardians of the Revolution", he analyzes not only the ideological foundations of Iran's foreign policy but also its pragmatic dimensions (Takeyh, 2009). According to Takeyh, it is insufficient to explain Iran's foreign policy solely through the lens of religious ideology. In most cases, the country's leadership prioritizes national interests and state security (Takeyh, 2009). Consequently, Iran's policies toward Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and the Persian Gulf states are driven more by geopolitical interests than by religious solidarity. This approach closely corresponds to the realist theory of international relations, which views national interests as the primary driving force of foreign policy. Nevertheless, Takeyh does not argue that Iranian foreign policy is entirely devoid of ideology. The principles of the Islamic Revolution continue to serve as a source of legitimacy for the country's foreign policy, although practical decisions are predominantly based on strategic interests. Shireen Hunter is among the scholars who interpret Iran's foreign policy through historical and cultural factors. She argues that Iran's regional policy is

deeply rooted in the traditions of Persian statehood, national identity, and geopolitical interests. According to Hunter, Iran perceives itself not only as an important actor in the Islamic world but also as a historical civilizational center linking the Middle East and Central Asia (Hunter, 2010).

David Menashri is one of the leading scholars who has examined the relationship between the post-Islamic Revolution political system and Iran's foreign policy. His research provides a detailed analysis of the role of religious institutions in shaping the country's foreign policy. According to Menashri, a comprehensive understanding of Iran's foreign policy requires an in-depth analysis of the roles and interactions of the Supreme Leader, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and the Supreme National Security Council (Menashri, 2001).

Among the leading scholars who have studied Iran's nuclear program are Shahram Chubin, Kenneth Pollack, Suzanne Maloney, and Trita Parsi. In particular, Shahram Chubin interprets Iran's nuclear program as an element of its regional security strategy and strategic deterrence policy. Suzanne Maloney provides an extensive analysis of the impact of the country's economy and international sanctions on its foreign policy (Maloney, 2015). Trita Parsi, in turn, views the strategic rivalry among Iran, the United States, and Israel as one of the principal driving forces of contemporary international relations (Parsi, 2007). Furthermore, many Western scholars seek to explain Iran's foreign policy through the theoretical perspectives of constructivism and neorealism. In their view, concepts such as the "Axis of Resistance," "Dialogue Among Civilizations," "Islamic Awakening," and "Look East" reflect the evolution of Iran's foreign policy.

The principal strength of the Western academic tradition lies in its analysis of Iran's foreign policy through extensive empirical evidence, official documents, and contemporary theories of international relations. Nevertheless, a comprehensive understanding of Iran's foreign policy requires not only engagement with the Western academic tradition but also a comparative examination of the scholarly perspectives advanced by Russian, CIS, and Iranian researchers. Such a comparative approach possesses significant academic value and contributes to a more balanced and nuanced interpretation of Iran's foreign policy.

Research by Russian and CIS Scholars on the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The academic schools of Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States

(CIS) occupy a distinctive place in the study of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is primarily due to Russia's historically close political, economic, and geostrategic ties with Iran, as well as their shared interests in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Caspian Sea region. Consequently, Russian Oriental studies tend to analyze Iran's foreign policy from the perspectives of geopolitical realism, a multipolar international order, and regional cooperation, in contrast to much of the Western scholarly literature.

Within the Russian school of Oriental studies, research devoted to the emergence of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the political consequences of the Islamic Revolution, and the evolution of the country's foreign policy has developed steadily since the early 1980s. In particular, the scholarly works of S. Agaev, L. Avdeeva, S. Aliyev, S. Druzhilovsky, A. Lukoyanov, E. Kalinin, A. Reznikov, and L. Sklyarov examine the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the development of its system of governance, and the formation of its foreign policy doctrine from a historical perspective. These scholars interpret the Islamic Revolution not merely as a domestic political event but also as a geopolitical turning point that fundamentally altered the balance of power in the Middle East.

Among the studies produced during the Soviet era, A. Arabadzhyan's monograph "The Iranian Revolution: Causes and Lessons" holds particular academic significance. In this work, he argues that the rise of the Shia clergy to political power following the 1979 Revolution fundamentally transformed the ideological orientation of Iran's foreign policy. During the initial years of the Islamic Republic, foreign policy was primarily directed toward promoting the ideology of the Islamic Revolution internationally and consolidating the newly established political system. Likewise, V. Ushakov, in his research, analyzes the evolution of the concept of the "export of the Islamic Revolution" during the 1980s and 1990s, demonstrating how it gradually became integrated with more pragmatic elements of foreign policy.

One of the leading representatives of the Russian academic school is L. M. Kulagina. Her research focuses on the stages of the development of Iran's foreign policy, political processes in the Persian Gulf region, and Iran–Russia relations. Kulagina argues that although the Islamic Republic's initial foreign policy was founded upon the principle of "Neither East nor West, but Islam," a more pragmatic approach gradually emerged after the Iran–Iraq War. She further notes that the geopolitical transformation of the Middle East following the Iraq War significantly influenced the emergence of new priorities in Iran's foreign policy.

Druzhilovsky and S. Kondratyev analyze Iran's foreign policy in the context of the transformation of the international system at the beginning of the twenty-first century. According to their studies, following the end of the Cold War, Iran's foreign policy shifted its emphasis from ideological confrontation toward regional cooperation and economic diplomacy. During this period, particularly under the presidencies of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami, economic modernization and the diversification of foreign policy became the country's principal strategic priorities.

Among Russian scholars, the research of V. Yurtaev holds particular academic significance. He systematically examined the formation of the foreign policy doctrine of the Islamic Republic of Iran during the period 1979–2010, introducing numerous official Persian-language documents and political sources into scholarly discourse. In his analysis of Iran's foreign policy, Yurtaev relied extensively on the speeches of the Supreme Leader, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, foreign policy doctrines, and official strategic documents (Yurtaev, 2012). At the same time, he argues that it is insufficient to explain Iran's foreign policy solely through official doctrines, emphasizing that the balance of domestic political forces, economic factors, and the international environment also play decisive roles in shaping the country's foreign policy.

Among scholars from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), N. Mamedova, E. Dunayeva, L. Aliyeva, V. Kurshakov, and other researchers have devoted considerable attention to Iran's policies toward Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea region. Their studies examine Iran's transport and logistics initiatives, energy diplomacy, regional security, and its activities within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

The principal strength of the Russian and CIS academic tradition lies in its comprehensive analysis of Iran's foreign policy, considering not only ideological perspectives but also geopolitical, historical, and economic factors. In particular, the emergence of a multipolar international order, the development of the Russia–Iran strategic partnership, the legal status of the Caspian Sea, the Afghan factor, and integration processes in Central Asia constitute some of the central themes of this body of research.

Nevertheless, certain limitations can also be identified within the Russian academic tradition. In some studies, Russia's own geopolitical interests are discernible, while insufficient attention is devoted to Iran's domestic political evolution, civil society, and the instruments of soft power. Furthermore, comprehensive research remains limited regarding the "Look East" strategy adopted after 2021, Iran's expanding role within the SCO and BRICS, and the impact of the 25-year Iran–China Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement on the country's foreign policy. Therefore, although the Russian and CIS academic schools have established an important theoretical and empirical foundation for the study of Iran's foreign policy, there remains a need to develop new analytical approaches that take into account the contemporary transformations of the geopolitical environment.

The Scholarly Perspectives of Iranian Researchers on the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The works of Iranian scholars occupy a distinct methodological and theoretical position in the study of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Unlike the Western and Russian academic traditions, Iranian researchers primarily analyze the country's foreign policy through the prism of the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, national interests, historical experience, and Iran's independent model of development. In their scholarship, foreign policy is interpreted not merely as an instrument of international relations but also as a fundamental means of safeguarding national sovereignty, protecting Islamic values, and strengthening regional stability.

Among the prominent Iranian scholars who have studied Iran's foreign policy are Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Rouhollah K. Ramazani, Kayhan Barzegar, Abbas Maleki, Reza Dehshiri, Elaheh Koolaei, Firouzabadi, Nader Entessar, and other distinguished researchers. Their academic works constitute an important theoretical foundation for understanding the conceptual principles of Iran's foreign policy, its regional strategy, and its position within the international system.

One of the scholars who has conducted a systematic academic analysis of Iran's foreign policy is Professor Rouhollah K. Ramazani. His books "Iran's Foreign Policy: Both North and South" and "The Foreign Policy of Iran" are widely recognized as classical references for the study of contemporary Iranian diplomacy. Ramazani argues that although the 1979 Islamic Revolution fundamentally transformed the ideological foundations of Iran's foreign policy, the country's principal strategic objective has

consistently remained the protection of its national interests (Ramazani, 1992). According to his theoretical framework, Iran's foreign policy rests upon three principal pillars:

- Islamic ideology;
- National security;
- Geopolitical interests.

Among contemporary Iranian political scientists, Kayhan Barzegar interprets Iran's foreign policy from the perspective of geopolitical realism. In his scholarly works, Iran's policy in the Middle East is presented not as an ideological confrontation with the United States or the West, but rather as a strategy aimed at preserving the regional balance of power (Barzegar, 2010). Barzegar explains Iran's policies toward Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Persian Gulf states through the concept of "forward defense." According to his interpretation, Iran seeks to ensure its national security by containing threats beyond its own borders. This analytical framework has been widely applied to explain the Syrian crisis after 2011, the activities of the Islamic State (ISIS) terrorist organization, and the broader geopolitical transformations that have reshaped the Middle East.

Professor Abbas Maleki is one of the leading specialists who has examined the economic dimensions of Iran's foreign policy. He argues that Iran's external relations should not be assessed solely through ideological or military instruments but also through the lenses of economic diplomacy, energy cooperation, and transport connectivity (Ditto, 2013). In particular, Maleki identifies the following areas as being of strategic importance:

- Long-term cooperation with China;
- Strategic partnership with Russia;
- Transport corridors linking Central Asia;
- The Chabahar Port;
- The International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

Professor Reza Dehshiri explains Iran's foreign policy through the functioning of the country's political institutions (Zaccara, 2020). According to his research, foreign policy is not determined solely by the President or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Rather, it is formulated through a balance among several key institutions, including the Supreme Leader, the Supreme National Security Council, the Presidential Administration, the

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majlis).

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the foreign scholarly literature demonstrates that the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been examined through diverse methodological approaches adopted by different academic schools. Western scholars primarily emphasize realism, security, and geopolitical interests, whereas Russian and CIS researchers focus on Iran's regional role and its position within a multipolar international system. Iranian scholars, by contrast, interpret the country's foreign policy as being intrinsically linked to the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, national interests, and state sovereignty.

Each of these academic approaches highlights particular dimensions of Iran's foreign policy; however, none alone provides a comprehensive understanding of its complexity. A thorough analysis therefore requires a comparative and multidisciplinary approach that integrates the insights of these different scholarly traditions.

Accordingly, research on Iran's foreign policy should combine the critical analysis of foreign academic literature with the examination of official documents, primary sources in the Persian language, and contemporary theories of international relations. Such a comprehensive methodological framework contributes to greater objectivity, analytical rigor, and reliability of scholarly conclusions regarding the evolution and dynamics of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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