Center for Strategic Research

Research paper

National Interests and Ideology in Iran's Foreign Policy Toward the United States: A New Perspective from the Lens of Identity Realism

Mohammad Padin
Ph.D. student in Political Sciences, Political Sciences Department, Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran.
mohamadpadin1992@yahoo.com   0000-0003-0456-4906

Fariborz Arghavani Pirsalami
Associate Professor in International Relations, Political Sciences Department, Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran (Corresponding author).
farghavani@shirazu.ac.ir   0000-0002-6180-7751

Seyed Javad Salehi
Associate Professor in Political Sciences, International Relations Department, Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.
s.javad.salehi@ut.ac.ir   0000-0002-9492-6992

Abstract

Iran's foreign policy in the past two decades has been the subject of debate between those who prioritize interests and those who prioritize ideology when analyzing the factors influencing Iran's behavior on the international stage. Both perspectives have sought to understand Iran's foreign policy through the lenses of rationality and ideology, exploring the interplay between national and ideological interests. Given the significant role of the United States in shaping Iran's foreign policy post-Islamic Revolution, a key question arises regarding the balance between national interests and ideological motivations in the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign relations, particularly concerning the U.S. This article, drawing on the theoretical framework of identity realism, argues that following the end of the Iran-Iraq War and the collapse of the bipolar world order, Iran has realigned its principles, objectives, interests, and ideologies to prioritize national interests and safeguard its survival in the face of American policies and pressures. The study employs a descriptive-analytical research methodology, relying on library sources for data collection. The research findings challenge the assumption of a dichotomy between ideological motivations and national interests in Iran's foreign policy, demonstrating a consistent alignment between these two factors in practice. Iran recognizes that in today's evolving regional landscape, it must integrate national interests, ideological considerations, and the international system, viewing the convergence of these elements as essential for safeguarding its national interests and ensuring its survival.

Keywords: Iran, United States, Foreign policy, Cultural realism, National interests.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly toward the United States of America, has faced criticisms from researchers and experts. Whether this foreign policy is rooted in realistic or pragmatic doctrines or leans toward an ideological, transnational approach detached from the realities of the international system remains a topic of discussion within academic and societal circles. In numerous studies conducted in the last forty years, this notion has been heavily scrutinized. Some researchers argue that Iranian leaders have predominantly followed an ideological foreign policy, while others emphasize the importance of national interests over ideological considerations. Consequently, the balance between national interests and ideological pursuits in Iran's foreign policy, especially concerning the United States, is a key question. Are ideological stances always in conflict with national interests across all domains? Our hypothesis, based on the framework of identity (cultural) realism, suggests that following the Iran-Iraq War and the end of the bipolar world order, Iran has redefined its principles, goals, interests, and ideology to prioritize national interests and ensure its survival amidst American policies and pressures. The optimal approach, according to this perspective, involves aligning and harmonizing both ideological and national interests. Based on this study, it is argued that the distinction between ideological interests and national interests in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is inaccurate. In practice, it seems to be a harmonized approach between these two frameworks. Given the recent regional developments, it is imperative to view national interests, ideological matters, and the international system as interconnected rather than conflicting entities. Therefore, perceiving a division and clash between these aspects may lead to uncertainty and perplexity. In essence, the fusion of these two paradigms serves the national interests. According to this research, when national interests are no longer solely based on material priorities but also incorporate spiritual or non-material values, ideological interests and national interests become two sides of the same coin, complementing and enhancing each other.

This article is divided into three sections. Firstly, it considers the significant works and viewpoints of those who advocate for interest-based and ideology-based discourse in Iran's foreign policy. Next, we explore Johnston's identity realism theoretical framework along with its components and indicators. Lastly, the article concludes by

presenting the main argument through the lens of Johnston's theoretical framework.

1. Cultural Realism as a Theoretical Framework

Researches that have examined the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran have mainly used the theories of realism, structuralism, critical theory, and discourse analysis. Realists focus on the material aspect, constructivists on the mental aspect, critics on challenging the status quo, and discourse theory on the external dimension. While in this article, these theories are not disregarded in analyzing Iran's foreign policy, they are not viewed as all-encompassing or hindering. To effectively analyze and evaluate them, we believe in a framework that encompasses both material and political dimensions as essential. By incorporating mental and spiritual aspects into the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy, a conceptual framework of cultural realism (identity) can shed light on the hidden goals and interests of Iran. According to Johnston, governments base their actions on their environment and their choices, which limit them (Johnston, 1995: 48). National history and experiences significantly influence a government's culture and strategic behavior. Iran's experiences, such as the development and persecution of the Shia religion, foreign interventions, revolutions, and wartime casualties, shape its worldview and guide its actions to preserve its national narrative and ensure safety and prosperity (Snyder, 1990: 57). Strategic decisions and behaviors are deeply intertwined with culture, as culture provides meaning to these actions (Gray, 1999: 59). Culture always plays a crucial role in shaping strategic decisions. (Booth, 2005: 25).

Following the decline of the study of strategic culture after the Cold War, there was a resurgence with the publication of Cultural Realism: *Political Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History.* Alastair Johnston's introduction of cultural realism provided a new outlook on strategic culture by delving into ancient Chinese strategic thought. His research on the Ming Dynasty's grand strategy in the face of Mongol threats emphasized the impact of historical experiences, external pressures, and geographical factors on China's current policies. Johnston contended that despite differences in strategic culture, governments often exhibit similar body language and operational doctrines. (Johnston, 1995: 40). In the following, while introducing the most important propositions of cultural realism (which helps us to understand more and more precisely the foreign policy of Iran), we will give a brief explanation of them:

1-1. Integrating Mental and Material Principles

This theory causes the connection between various systemic variables, geography and geographic threats and the interaction between domestic elites, interpretations of the historical role and political culture and ideology of different countries, especially Islamic Republic of Iran (where both material and spiritual elements are important and need to be examined simultaneously).

- o *Awesomeness:* According to Johnston, no matter how much the Awesomeness and dignity of the government is reduced, the enemy will have more desire and courage to attack that country.
- o *The importance of military and defense affairs:* Johnston considers war as a relatively constant feature of the human condition; which should not be taken lightly.
- o *Having moderation and flexibility without creating weakness:* In his opinion, the ruler should have both the features of moderation and strictness at the same time and choose one of them according to the situation and time.
- o *The strategy of symbols:* This principle is to create and maintain a sense of solidarity within the group, which is consciously or unconsciously placed against possible enemies.
- o *Compromise:* According to Johnston, compromise measures should never be completely forgotten in foreign policy. In his opinion, sometimes we need to compromise with our powerful enemy to reduce pressure and buy time.

1-2. Strategic Alliances, Defense, and Economic Welfare in Cultural Realism

Among the other principles of cultural realism, we can mention the attack on powerful enemy allies, alliance with countries, and the importance of the economy and the welfare of the society (Johnston, 1998). It is crucial to emphasize that Iran's public diplomacy and military conduct are centered on issues that align with Johnston's propositions. To begin with, firstly the country's cultural and historical experiences of being targeted by enemies have instilled a deep sense of distrust and victimization among its elites and society. Secondly, Iran advocates for a pan-Islamic agenda, seeking to garner support from its kinship communities, irrespective of their Sunni/Shia or Salafi/Sufi affiliations. Conversely, over several decades in its foreign policy, Iran has employed a range of tactics, including bolstering its defense capabilities, as well as employing offensive, defensive, and flexible measures in dealing with its adversaries, particularly the United States of America. It appears

that the theoretical framework of cultural realism offers a more fitting analysis of these behaviors, which will be further explored in a subsequent section of the article.

2. Exploring the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Analyzing the Influence of National Interests and Ideology

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly the influence of national interests and ideology, has been the subject of limited research, although numerous books and articles have been published on this topic. In the following discussion, we will review these works and critically analyze two prevailing perspectives on Iran's foreign policy: one that is ideologically driven and the other that is primarily focused on national interests.

2-1. Scientific works that believe Iran's foreign policy is ideological

Sariolghalam (2005), in his book, *Iran and Globalization: Challenges and Solutions*, argues that the ideology of the Islamic Revolution is at odds with the United States, the Western countries, Arab monarchies, Israel, and other Western-leaning governments due to their capitalist nature. The author highlights a significant paradox faced by the Islamic Republic: the desire for economic and technological advancement while simultaneously striving to maintain political independence, uphold justice beyond its borders, and preserve its ideological principles. However, the West's perspective on I.R. Iran is that it is a cohesive system, making it impossible for Iran to engage with one part while engaging in political and religious conflicts with another. Shirin Hunter (2021) also acknowledges in her book, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era*, that unless Iran is willing to make substantial changes to its foreign policy direction in alignment with the international system, it will encounter heightened security and economic risks in the future. Armin Amini (2017), in the article "Explanation and Structural Analysis of the Political Relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America," believes that until Iran maintains its diplomatic relations with the United States (which it considers to be the most important indicator of the ideological nature of Iran's foreign policy), if it does not return to normal, it is difficult to even imagine how to resolve the sensitive issues that have caused the darkness between the two countries.

2-2. Those who believe in interests or pragmatism in Iran's foreign policy

Seyed Hossein Mousavian (2022) also confirms the pragmatism in

Iran's foreign policy in his book Iran and the United States: A Look from Inside a Broken Past and a Path to Reconciliation. Based on measures such as cooperation with the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, offering a big deal to the United States during the Khatami era to end the differences between the two countries, Ahmadinejad's offer to meet and debate with the American president, and not supporting the Shiites of Azerbaijan in the war with Armenian Christians, he believes that Iran Especially after the early years of the revolution, Iran has turned toward adopting a realistic or pragmatic approach in its foreign policy. Furthermore, in an article titled "Iran's Foreign Policy through the Lens of Offensive and Defensive Realism," Kayhan Barzegar (2008) argues that while ideology plays a significant role in Iran's worldview, there are practical aspects that demonstrate Iran's actions are shaped by pragmatic concerns, geopolitical necessities, and political-security demands. Within this context, ideology is merely a component of national power utilized to advance national objectives and interests. By examining the research conducted regarding the foreign policy of I.R. Iran, we are faced with two types of approaches. Some consider Iran's foreign policy to be ideological, and national interests have been sacrificed. Some others also believe that after the end of the war, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has tried to distance itself from ideological interests and move toward national interests, or that the requirements of time and necessity have made it move in this direction. However, this article believes in the third point of view, which can be said to be the boundary between the first two points of view. Based on this point of view, the assumption of separation and conflict between ideological interests and national interests in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is incorrect. In practice, there is always a kind of aligned and complementary approach between these two models, and the combination of the two models provides the national interests of the country, and neglecting each of them causes the collapse of the power and prestige of Iran.

3. Principles and Strategies of Iran's Foreign Policy Toward the United States

Today, after more than four decades of victory of the Islamic Revolution, the United States is still considered the number one enemy of this country, and it seems that the hostility and confrontation between the United States and Iran will continue in the coming decades. As a result of I.R. Iran (which, according to

this research, the main principles, strategies, and tactics of it have been redefined based on confronting and neutralizing the actions of the United States), strategies have been used based on which it can fight against the pressure of the United States of America. In this confrontation, Iran, which normally cannot confront and compete with the threats of the United States, as well as influence regional developments and protect its interests, has added to the objective material dimension the power of the mental dimension as well, which over time these two components or tools of power have become a part of the intrinsic identity and representative of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the provider of interests and the preservation of its power and survival. In the following, some of these principles and strategies will be discussed.

3-1. Flexibility

One of the key concepts of identity realism is the government's capacity in management to effectively respond to unforeseen threats by remaining flexible and adaptable, thus reducing potential risks and increasing the likelihood of success. This approach, as outlined by Johnston, suggests that governments may need to compromise on certain principles or short-term goals in order to secure long-term interests. A notable example of this strategy can be observed in recent years in the strategic policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, such as the negotiation of the JCPOA. Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's leader, endorsed the idea of "heroic moderation" in dealing with the United States, a departure from years of staunch opposition to direct talks with Americans, particularly after 2003 (Mousavian, 2014: 3). The application of the concept of "heroic moderation" by the Supreme Leader was interpreted as a license to negotiate with the United States while respecting the red lines. Using this concept, the leadership expressed their non-opposition in the negotiation with the United States and practically provided the space for the government to negotiate in a dignified and rational manner (Karimifard, 2019: 10).

3-2 Having military (defense) readiness

Johnston emphasized the strong and clear link between military vulnerability and the failure to deter potential threats. He firmly believed that the security of both the government and military should never be underestimated. Neglecting these aspects would only lead to a weak image of the ruler or government, inviting attacks and plundering by enemies. Iran also views military readiness as a non-negotiable priority, refusing to compromise on

this matter. Echoing this sentiment, the Supreme Leader stated that the American political system raises critical issues concerning the Islamic Republic of Iran, demanding concessions on defense capabilities, regional influence, and national power. Such demands are deemed unacceptable, as a patriotic individual dedicated to safeguarding the nation's interests would not yield to such pressures (Rostami, 2022: 2). Subsequently, we will delve into an examination of the defense components within the Iranian Armed Forces.

3-2-1. Self-reliance

Throughout the history of Iran's foreign relations, the country has faced betrayals by allies, invasions, and pressures from other nations and great powers. From the Golestan and Turkmenchai agreements to the coup d'état in 1953, Iran has sought to rely on itself to overcome its enemies and maintain a balance, only to experience failure and disappointment. This emphasis on self-reliance has become a key aspect of Iran's cultural realism, as noted. The concept of strategic loneliness has led Iran to tap into its internal resources to ensure its survival. For instance, Iran has focused on producing local military equipment through reverse engineering of weapons from the pre-revolution era, reducing its military dependence on global powers. Additionally, Iran has made significant advancements in its missile industry and the production of drones like "Karrar" and "Raad," which are cost-effective and do not require highly advanced technology.

3-2-2. Deterrence

Fareed Zakaria outlines the threats facing Iran, pointing out that the country is surrounded by nuclear-armed regimes such as China, Russia, Pakistan, and the Israeli regime. Additionally, there are thousands of American troops stationed near Iran, with the United States historically opposing the Iranian government. Zakaria suggests that Iran's options for countering these threats are limited to either giving in to Western demands or pursuing a strategy of deterrence. Some analysts argue that Iran may use its allies, particularly Israel, as a deterrent against potential attacks by the US. Furthermore, Iran's pursuit of nuclear energy can also be seen as a form of deterrence, even if it does not lead to actual nuclear production, as the capability itself acts as a deterrent against enemy aggression (Azadi, 2018: 73).

3-2-3. Enhancing strategic depth

Following the ordeal of the imposed war, Iran sought to broaden its strategic reach outside its territorial boundaries. Leveraging the capabilities of Islamic factions, governmental and non-governmental partners, as well as proxy organizations to apply pressure and deliver a counterattack against adversaries, stands as a key strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Essentially, Iran aims to establish a defensive perimeter beyond its borders to counter potential threats, particularly from the United States, and to pose a threat to its military installations in the region as a form of deterrence.

3-2-4. The role of martyrdom culture and its influence on military strategies

The defense culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran is profoundly rooted in the principles of martyrdom and jihad for the sake of God. As highlighted in the 27th sermon of *Nahj al-Balagha*, soldiers prioritize the Day of Resurrection over worldly possessions, perceiving martyrdom as a gateway to an eternal and genuine life. The Shiite political culture, a central element of Iran's defense ideology, plays a crucial role in cultivating this spirit of martyrdom. The Ashura incident and the uprising of Imam Hossein (AS) stand as powerful symbols that inspire a culture of sacrifice, resistance, and selflessness, thereby reinforcing the values of jihad and martyrdom (Hurd, 2004: 15). In the face of adversaries and competitors with superior conventional and modern weaponry, the culture of martyrdom can, to a certain extent, mitigate these disadvantages by promoting a broader culture of sacrifice, resistance, and selflessness.

3-2-5. Asymmetric warfare

Iran has heavily invested in asymmetric warfare strategies to counter the military superiority of the United States and the military support provided to Iran's regional rivals by Western powers. These strategies include the use of high-speed light vessels, unmanned light submarines, and suicide drones in the Persian Gulf and the Oman Sea. The uncertainty of American officials regarding Iran's capabilities in war, combined with Iran's utilization of various asymmetric tactics, could potentially escalate the consequences of Iran's actions against the US military in the Persian Gulf region. (Ghafari Cherati & et al., 2021: 15).

3-3. Awesomeness

Based on what was said in the previous lines, Johnston believes that having prestige and awesomeness causes the enemy to fear a possible attack, and based on the calculation of the profit and loss caused by the war, he avoids this because of the fear of the enemy's power. According to Johnston, awesomeness, or dignity, is necessary to achieve security, and when the awe of a government is lost, the security of that country will also be attacked by enemies. The history of several thousand years of Iranian civilization, along with Islam, has caused Iranians to place their pride and honor on par with today's great powers and resist any pressure and intimidation. For example, the presence and influence in the developments of the surrounding areas and access to nuclear energy are considered part of the pride, prestige and dignity of this country, which despite the pressures, obstacles and sanctions it has suffered, it is willing to give them up. It is not, and the elites of this country believe that any shortcoming and retreat in these matters will lead to requests and concessions from the enemies.

3-4. Targeting allies of powerful adversaries

Johnston suggests that a strategic approach to dealing with a powerful enemy involves targeting the allies of that country. Success hinges on a thorough understanding of the political, climatic, geographical, and organizational factors at play on both sides—a concept encapsulated in the phrase "Knowing the enemy and knowing oneself," along with intelligence on the enemy's plans and tactics (Johnston, 1998: 127). It is evident that Tel Aviv's regime serves as a safeguard for U.S. interests in the region, with its security being a top priority for successive American administrations (Sahabi, 2013: 8). As underscored by Biden's recent affirmation that Israel is indispensable for preserving American interests, the Israeli regime not only protects U.S. interests but also exposes the nation's vulnerability vis-à-vis Iran and its allies, both state and non-state actors.

3-5. Forming alliances with other countries

The Islamic Republic of Iran has strategically engaged in both unilateral and multilateral relationships with various countries, including allies such as the European Union, as well as Russia, China, and Latin American countries. These alliances have been crucial in countering American influence, alleviating pressure, and mitigating the impact of sanctions on Iran. Moving forward, we will

consider the significance of Iran's partnerships with these countries.

≠**Latin America:** Iran's presence in Latin America during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency was strategically evaluated based on several key factors.

1) For instance, Iran utilized economic resources to bypass sanctions and alleviate economic pressures. In the financial sector, Iran sought to leverage institutions such as the International Development Bank (IDB) in Venezuela, as well as the Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI) to transfer funds and evade international sanctions (Gordon, 2013: 9).

2) Using a platform to criticize the United States' hostile policy and pressures.

≠**Neighboring countries:** Following the end of the imposed war, Iran made efforts to mend relations with neighboring countries, particularly those in the Persian Gulf, to alleviate pressure from the United States. However, Shahram Chubin highlights that Iran, being a non-Arab Shiite nation, lacks a natural support base (Bahgat, 2007:3). Moreover, Iran and most of its Arab neighbors hold differing perspectives on regional security issues; Tehran blames the U.S. for instability, while Arab nations view Washington as a key element in their defense strategy. Iran has advocated for a regional security framework with active involvement from neighboring countries and devoid of foreign interference. Nevertheless, Arab countries, concerned about Iran's growing influence, have shown little enthusiasm for such initiatives. These contradictions were evident during the Pahlavi era, indicating that I.R. Iran's lack of unity extends beyond ideological differences.

≠**China:** China, a major global rival of the United States in both economic and political realms, stands out as one of the few countries that continued to purchase oil from Iran during the sanctions. Iran, recognizing the significance of its relationship with China, refrained from taking a firm stance on the issue of the Muslims in the Uyghur city of Xinjiang province, as delving into this sensitive issue could potentially be viewed as interference in China's internal affairs. This highlights Iran's approach of prioritizing strategic interests and maintaining relations with friendly governments over emotional or ideological considerations, even in the face of such sensitive matters.

≠**Russia:** I.R. Iran consistently prioritizes its relations with Russia, especially in a global landscape where only a few countries can resist American influence. Despite the

mistreatment of Muslim Chechens during separatist movements, Iran supported the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation during the First Chechen War from 1994 to 1996 and refrained from condemning Moscow's actions in Chechen (Watson, 2017: 6). According to Dina Esfandiari and Arian Tabatabai, the relationships between Tehran and Moscow, as well as Tehran and Beijing, are not traditional alliances but rather pragmatic partnerships based on mutual interests and needs. The relationship with Russia presents both advantages and disadvantages for Iran (Osiewicz, 2019: 9-10).

≠**Third-world countries:** Using the capacities of third-world countries is one of Iran's other tactics against American pressures, threats, and sanctions, especially in international organizations. Countries with moderate power like Iran are turning to "international institutions, economic tools, and diplomatic arrangements" with aligned countries to resist the policies of the United States in the unipolar world.

≠**Europe:** Throughout history, the relationship between Iran and Europe has experienced numerous fluctuations. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has sought to collaborate with European countries, leveraging their advancements against global powers like the Soviet Union and the United States. However, incidents such as the American embassy, the Mykonos trial, the Salman Rushdie fatwa, and the nuclear program have consistently strained relations, fostering mutual distrust. Despite these challenges, under the presidencies of Hashemi Rafsanjani, Khatami, and particularly Hassan Rouhani, Iran has made significant efforts to engage with Europe, particularly in resolving the nuclear issue and alleviating American pressures. Conversely, the European Union has consistently shown willingness to normalize relations with Iran, fostering trade and economic ties, exemplified by the JCPOA. Nevertheless, following the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and Iran's positions on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, relations between Iran and Europe have once again cooled.

Iran's attempts to foster intergovernmental cooperation and unity have been hindered by various factors such as sanctions, banking restrictions, and system limitations. Furthermore, Iran has also sought to build relationships with informal movements and groups, a topic that will be explored further in the following section.

3-6. Utilizing symbolism and ideology as strategic tools

Based on the theoretical framework section, Iran's post-revolution aimed to bolster non-governmental groups and Islamic movements in the region as strategic allies, utilizing symbols and ideology. This approach was crucial for Iran to enhance its influence, especially considering its strained relations with many regional countries. By fostering relationships with non-state actors, Iran sought to solidify its position within the movement's policy framework (Dehghani Firoozabadi & Asadi, 2013: 13). Iran's support for groups in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, known as the "axis of resistance," serves as the country's military and executive arm in the region. This country has strengthened the groups in the gray area (including the countries of Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon) as its military and executive arms in the region (Asiaban & Ghafarizadeh, 2022: 13). This alliance is rooted in the narrative of "resistance" against the United States and Israeli regime, providing Iran with strategic depth in the Arab world and limited retaliatory capabilities against Israel. (Milani, 2013: 5). Conversely, by backing the rights of Palestinians against the Israeli regime, Iran has managed to bridge the sectarian gap with its Sunni Arab neighbors, particularly within their communities, thus increasing its popularity. Unlike the early days of the revolution, when Iran supported various non-governmental movements regionally and internationally, in recent decades, it has aimed to synchronize ideological beliefs with national interests. Iran's stance of neutrality in the conflict between Armenian Christians and Shiites in Azerbaijan, as well as its decision not to intervene in the internal affairs of Russia and China amidst Muslim protests, demonstrates a strategic alignment with national interests. While ideology may sometimes clash with national goals, Iran has successfully integrated these elements to a large extent, especially in supporting Palestinians and opposing Israel, where both national and ideological interests converge. This approach not only fulfills religious and humanitarian duties but also serves strategic purposes by countering American influence and preventing Israel from becoming a dominant regional power through normalization with neighboring countries. The normalization of Israel's relations with regional states poses significant security challenges for Iran, including:

1- The decline in the strength and impact of Shia movements in the area due to the diminishing influence of Iran, resulting in the marginalization of these movements.

2- The weakening or removal of tools to counter American

policies and influence.

3- The establishment of a three-way alliance between Arab nations, the Israeli regime, and the United States to counter Iran, disrupting the power balance in the region. This alliance was delayed due to Arab communities' objections over the Palestinian massacre and strong opposition from within Iran.

3-7. Diplomatic engagement and attempts at compromise

During the presidencies of Hashemi Rafsanjani, Mohammad Khatami, and Hassan Rouhani, Iran made efforts to reach compromises with the United States to alleviate pressure and improve relations between the two countries. These administrations were of the opinion that the Islamic Republic required a proactive and renewed approach to foreign relations in order to ease tensions and foster amicable relationships on the global stage, advocating for the avoidance of any actions that could escalate tensions. Subsequently, we will explore an instance of Iran's compromise initiatives toward the United States.

3-7-1. Iran's reaction to the September 11 terrorist attack

Following the September 11 terrorist attack, Iran promptly extended its condolences and support to the victims and their families. In response to the tragic events, Iran swiftly convened an emergency session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, where a strong stance against terrorism was taken. Ayatollah Khamenei, the supreme leader of the revolution, issued a call to Muslims worldwide to join in a religious-jihadi effort against terrorism (Afrasiabi and Maleki, 2003: 5).

3-7-2. Cooperation with the United States in Afghanistan's war

Following the September 11 attacks, Iran and the United States found common ground for the first time after the revolution, focusing on the downfall of the Taliban government and the eradication of Al-Qaeda. The US held the Taliban responsible for supporting Al-Qaeda and sheltering them, while Iran blamed the Taliban for the killing of several Iranian diplomats and Ahmad Shah Massoud. Iran's security cooperation with the United States in Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban government was seen as aligning with the winning side. Tehran's rationale was that if the United States agreed, Iran could not only eliminate one of its enemies but also use this as a model to resolve other regional disputes with Washington and bring about a historic change in bilateral relations (Mousavian and Chitsazian, 2020: 8). The Iranian

government also agreed to assist any American who may be shot down or forced to land on Iranian soil. Additionally, there were other collaborations in the United Nations through Afghanistan's 2+6 talks (Zukerstein, 2014: 42). Despite these efforts, the Bush administration labeled Iran as the axis of evil due to the Karina ship incident and accused Iran of supplying weapons to the Palestinian Authority, despite Iran's denial and its relatively warm relationship with the organization at the time. This led to Iran being listed as one of the Axis of Evil countries.

3-8. Economy

Following the revolution's triumph and the subsequent seizure of the American embassy, the hostility between the United States and Iran commenced, primarily through economic sanctions. As Iran pursued nuclear energy, these sanctions intensified with the backing of the European Union. To counter these economic pressures, strategic planning was deemed essential. Many experts argue that these pressures were utilized to alter the behavior of the Islamic Republic and potentially even its system. In addition to the extensive international sanctions led by the United States, various factors affecting Iran's economy must be taken into consideration. In addition to the extensive international sanctions led by the United States, we can consider things such as the state of Iran's economy—a command economy—the uncertainty of the private sector to enter the production cycle and invest in non-productive sectors such as buying land, housing, gold, cars, etc., the change of economic policies at the same time as the change of governments, the rentier economy, the single-product economy, etc. Iran's integration into the global economy is crucial for its standing in the international system. In today's globalized world, a country's power and influence are closely tied to its economic connections worldwide. To achieve this, economic diplomacy, private sector development, and meeting international standards are essential. Establishing a consistent link with the global economy is key to improving Iran's economic situation and attracting technology and capital. The growth of the private sector is contingent upon its interaction with the global economy (Azadi, 2018: 46).

Conclusion

This article utilized Alastair Johnston's cultural realism framework to explore the role of national interests and ideological interests in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly in its

interactions with the United States of America. It was argued that Iran has redefined its principles, goals, interests, and ideology toward the imposed war and the collapse of the bipolar system, focusing on securing national interests and ensuring its survival amidst external pressures and the United States policies, has shifted its approach, and the most effective way to do so has been to align and complement ideological and national interests. According to the findings of research, the assumption of separation and conflict between ideological and national interests in Iran's foreign policy is incorrect. In practice, there has always been a coordinated approach between these two models. Iran recognizes that, given the regional developments, it can no longer view national interests, ideological issues, and the international system as separate and opposed to each other. The combination of these two patterns serves national interests. Iran's foreign policy is based on survival, particularly against the United States. However, we believe that survival, which is a key component of classical realism, cannot be achieved solely through the material dimension of power due to the limitations of the Islamic Republic. In addition to material tools such as the balance of powers and the development of the missile program, Iran also utilizes ideological expansion to enhance its power. Iran lacks the economic and military strength to directly challenge the United States. As a result, since 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has incorporated a religious aspect into its geopolitical strategy. The Islamic revolution has significantly influenced Iran's interests and relationships with neighboring countries. Following the revolution, Iran's geopolitical landscape has been shaped by Islamic principles. Iran's conventional military capabilities are limited, not only in comparison to the United States, a dominant military force in the region, but also when compared to countries like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the Persian Gulf countries. To address this power disparity, Iran has focused on enhancing its asymmetric capabilities. Moreover, Iran's opposition to the PLO-Israel agreement is driven by ideological, humanitarian, as well as security and defense concerns. There is a belief that the agreement aimed to isolate Iran further and expose it to external pressures. In a scenario where the United States holds significant influence in the region, viewing Iran as a primary security threat alongside Israel, and where powerful Arab states and US allies openly display hostility toward Iran, it is understandable for Iranians to feel anxious and vulnerable about the resolution of conflicts between Arabs and Israelis. The history of American foreign policy indicates a reluctance to normalize

relations with revolutionary governments until all concerns of the United States, such as supporting proxy groups, missile programs, and Islamic ideology, are addressed. As a result, the Islamic Republic of Iran feels justified in prioritizing its security and implementing preventive measures. Despite achieving some success in defense through military forces and proxy groups, economic pressures have led to challenges such as structural instability, a government-controlled economy, the psychological impact of sanctions, lack of trust from society and investors, mismanagement, and economic corruption, creating complex economic challenges for the country.

References

Afrasiabi, K. & Maleki, A. (2003). Iran's foreign policy after 11 September. *The Brown Journal of World Affairs,* 9(2), 255–265.

Amini, A. (2017). Explanation and structural analysis of the political relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America. *Political Studies Quarterly,* 10(37), 57–74. [In Persian]

Asiaban, O. & Ghafarizadeh, M. (2022). The gray area of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the deterrence challenges of the United States of America. *Scientific Journal of Defense Policy,* 13(121), 11–26. [In Persian]

Attar, S., & Mohammadi, A. A. (2015). Tension reduction strategy in Iran's foreign policy (1368–1384); Lessons for the future. *Foreign Policy Quarterly,* 30(3), 163–191.

Azadi, F. (2018). *Iran and the United States: The power components of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the process of confrontation with the United States of America (Looking at the statements of the Supreme Leader).* Tehran: Aria Danesh Publishing House. [In Persian]

Bahgat, G. (2007). Iran and the United States: The emerging security paradigm in the Middle East. *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters,* 37(2), 5–18.

Barzegar, K. (2008). Iran's foreign policy from the perspective of offensive and defensive realism. *International Quarterly of Foreign Relations,* 1(1), 113–153. [In Persian]

Booth, K. (2005). Strategic culture: Validity and validation. *Oxford Journal on Good Governance,* 2(1), 25–28.

Dehghani Firoozabadi, S. J. & Asadi, A. A. (2013). Revolution and foreign policy of Iran: The first decade revised. *Iranian Review*

of Foreign Affairs, 4(1), 157–184.

Fiedler, R. (2018). Internal factors and their impact on Iranian foreign policy. *Pzzegląd Strategicyyy,* 8(11), 211–220.

Ghafari Cherati, A. A. & et al. (2021). The role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in deterring the US military presence in the Persian Gulf after September 11. *Specialized Political Science Quarterly,* 17(56), 40–59. [In Persian]

Gordon, J. D. (2013). The decline of US influence in Latin America. *Defense Dossier*. Washington, DC: American Foreign Policy Council.

Gray, C. S. (1999). Strategic culture as context: The first generation of theory strikes back. *Review of International Studies,* 25(1), 49–69.

Hunter, S. (2021). *Iran's foreign policy in the era after the collapse of the Soviet Union* (2nd ed.). Tehran: Mizan. [In Persian]

Hurd, E. S. (2004). The international politics of secularism: US foreign policy and the Islamic Republic of Iran. *Alternatives,* 29(2), 115–138.

Johnston, A. I. (1995). Thinking about strategic culture. *International Security,* 19(4), 32–64.

Johnston, A. I. (1998). *Cultural realism: Strategic culture and grand strategy in Chinese history* (Vol. 75). Princeton University Press.

Karimifard, H. (2019). Rouhani's détente policy and the change in the executive elite in America. *Politics Quarterly,* 49(1), 205–224. [In Persian]

Lantis, J. S. (2014). *Strategic cultures and security policies in the Asia-Pacific*. London & New York: Routledge.

Milani, M. (2013). Why Tehran won't abandon Assad (ism). *The Washington Quarterly,* 36(4), 79–93.

Mousavian, S. H. & Bigdali, M. R. (2022). *Iran and the United States: An inside look at a broken past and a path towards reconciliation*. Tehran: Parseh. [In Persian]

Mousavian, S. H. & Chitsazian, M. R. (2020). Iran's foreign policy in the Middle East: A grand strategy. *Middle East Policy,* 27(3), 99–114.

Mousavian, S. H. (2014). US, Iran cannot afford another missed opportunity. *Al-Monitor: Iran Pulse*. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2014/05/iran-us-missed-opportunity.html

Osiewicz, P. (2019). Ideologizing and fundamentalism in Iranian foreign policy under the Hassan Rouhani presidency. *Eur Middle East Afr Aff,* (9), 109–121.

Rostami, M. (2022). Explaining the relationship between American threats and the socio-political dimensions of the national power of the Islamic Republic of Iran. *Scientific Quarterly of Defense Strategy,* 20(79), 103–174. [In Persian]

Safavi Hammami, S. H. (2008). *An autopsy book on the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. Tehran: Imam Sadegh University. [In Persian]

Sahabi, A. (2013). Iran-US diplomacy: US think tanks' approaches after UN General Assembly.

Sariolghalam, M. (2005). *Iran and globalization* (3rd ed.). Tehran: Strategic Research Center. [In Persian]

Snyder, J. L. (1990). The concept of strategic culture. In *Strategic culture(s) in Latin America* (pp. 19–28). Routledge.

Tajik, M. R. (2001). *An introduction to I.R. Iran national security strategies: Approaches and strategies*. Tehran: Farhang Dahdaman. [In Persian]

Watson, P. L. (2017). Iran's Latin America strategy: 2005 to present. *Democracy and Security,* 13(2), 127–143.

Zukerstein, J. (2014). *On the edge of dependency: Iran in the foreign policy of the United States, 1979–2009*. Institut politologických studií. https://dspace.cuni.cz/bitstream/handle/20.500.11956/64064/120157728.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y