
PECULIARITIES OF IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST REGION

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses the peculiarities of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Middle East region, as well as the fact that the Islamic factor is the fundamental ideology of Iran's foreign policy, and the impact of the oil factor on global and regional issues.

KEYWORDS: "Neither West, nor East, only Islam", Gulf region, oil factor, Islamic factor, "Dialogue of Civilizations" (گفتگوی تمدن ها), "Shia Crescent", "Look East".

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Republic of Iran is also one of the important actors of the Middle East region. Its history, geographical location, natural energy resources, military power and other factors play an important role in determining the specific features of official Tehran's foreign policy. When talking about Iran's foreign policy, it is appropriate to follow a retrospective approach from a scientific and theoretical point of view. Since the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, Tehran's foreign policy has been free of serious changes. Although some new concepts and views have changed in foreign policy, the Islamic factor remains the fundamental ideology of Iran's foreign policy.

"Neither the West nor the East, only Islam". This slogan of foreign policy originally meant strengthening Iran's relations with Muslim countries and thereby exporting Iran's Islamic revolution. When analyzing the Iranian Islamic revolution, it is necessary to consider it in two groups, that is, through internal and external factors.

Internal factors include the aggravation of the political situation and worsening economic situation in many Muslim countries, as a result of dissatisfaction with the current development, the desire to return to one's historical, cultural and religious roots, increasing lack of confidence in the solution of various regional, religious and territorial problems that have not been solved for a long time in Muslim countries, also, as a result of the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Islamic world, especially the countries of the Middle East, went through the process of modernization, and as the political system changed, the representatives of religion began to be squeezed out of social life. This gave rise to religious extremism as a movement against changes in society, a mood arose in the Muslim world that evaluates the entry of European countries into the Middle East as an invasion against Islam and Muslims. In several Islamic countries and other countries where its influence is significant, both the government and the opposition increasingly turn to the Islamic factor in order to strengthen their authority and gain public support.

When talking about external factors, special attention should be paid to the following issues: the Middle East region is the world's most important transport corridor, the center of origin of the

world's three largest religions - Islam, Judaism and Christianity, and the world's huge reserves of mineral resources, including 61.7% of the world's oil reserves and 40.6% of natural gas are located in this region, which created the need to use the Islamic factor within the geopolitical interests of the leading countries. Iran's Islamic revolution inspired Islamic activists and militants, and served as a spiritual support for them. Most of the supporters of the "Islamic way of world development" emphasized that while talking about the Islamic revolution in Iran, "the event that took place in Iran, in a certain sense, even the return of the Holy Land to the bosom of Islam or the establishment of the Ottoman Empire was more remarkable, because in this case it was about the stages of civilization; "The Islamic revolution in Iran has a global-historical character and should have been a turning point in the history of the entire nation, as well as in its relations with the non-Islamic world". However, in 1979, the occurrence of another reality prevented Iran from quickly realizing the idea of an Islamic revolution in the Middle East. It was in this year that the invasion of the Soviet troops into the territory of Afghanistan caused radical groups in the Middle East to be directed to Afghanistan. This situation was especially useful for the leading Arab monarchies to preserve their political regime.

Gulf region. This region is the priority of Iran's foreign policy. The Gulf region (GR) is distinguished by its favorable geopolitical location and rich natural energy resources. Today, there is no doubt about the importance of the Gulf region in world politics. This region contains approximately 65 percent of the world's oil reserves and 30 percent of the gas reserves. Also, the geopolitical importance of the region is directly related to its location in the important countries of Asia, Africa and Europe. It should be noted separately that the countries located in the Gulf region are historically connected by a single ethnic, religious and cultural identity. For this reason, the leading countries of the world and the countries located in the region tried to exert their influence on the area where the Gulf region is located, and this process is still ongoing.

In fact, the vital interests of Iran's foreign policy are closely related to the Gulf region. The political interests of Iran in the Persian Gulf region are studied in detail in the doctoral dissertation of scientist Tahirkhani Ali, and these interests are divided into two important groups. The first group includes the energy (oil) factor, and the second group includes the Islamic factor. According to Tahirkhani Ali, the Persian Gulf will retain its position as the world's richest oil region until 2060. In the Islamic factor, the author focuses on the protection of Shia interests in the Persian Gulf by Iran. In this respect, both factors can be assessed as strategic interests in Iran's foreign policy in the Gulf region.

Dialogue of civilizations. The concept of foreign policy announced by the fifth President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mohammad Khatami, in 1997. This concept (گفتگوی تمدن‌ها) was developed in order to free Iran from international isolation and ease relations with Western countries. He said at his presidential swearing-in ceremony: "We are in favor of dialogue between civilizations and redevelopment of relations with the outside world". It should be noted that as a result of Khatami's foreign policy initiative, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to declare 2001 as the Year of Dialogue of Civilizations under the auspices of the UN. As a result, various conferences, summits and forums were held by the UN.

The idea of establishing communication between civilizations was first used in 1972 by the Austrian philosopher Hans Kechler. Hotami's doctrine of "Dialogue of Civilizations" is in itself a counter thesis to Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations". According to Mohammad Reza Hafizneya, a professor of political geography in Iran, the paradigm of "Dialogue of Civilizations" promoted the prevention of divisions between the first and third world, north, south, rich and poor, the phenomenal convergence of the world community in international relations, and the strengthening of Iran's foreign political position on the international stage .

Shia Crescent. Tehran's foreign policy concept is aimed at uniting countries with Shiite populations in the Middle East. The areas in the Middle East inhabited by Shiites are described by Tehran as a crescent. The term "Shia crescent" was first used in 2004 by King Abdullah II of Jordan. In fact, this theory has been used in Iranian politics since the 1960s . In his interview, Abdullah II warned of the danger of the "Shia crescent" spreading from Iran through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon after the overthrow of the Sunni regime of Saddam Hussein and mentioned about its characteristic that creates an unstable situation in the Persian Gulf countries and the entire region.

The tectonic changes that occurred in the region after 2003, including the victory of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, the defeat of the Sunni government in Iraq, and the dominance of the Shiite communities in Lebanon, made it easier for Iran to realize this geopolitical ambition.

In the "Shia crescent" Bahrain (65-75%), Lebanon (45-55%), Iraq (45-55%), Yemen (35-40%), Kuwait (20-25%), Syria (15-20 %), Saudi Arabia (10-15%), Qatar and the UAE (10%) and Oman (5-10%) provide for the unification of the relevant space where Shiites live. In addition to these countries, although the "Shia Crescent" concept map is not included, Tehran pays serious attention to other countries where the majority of the population is made up of Shia Muslims. In particular, about 85% of the population of Azerbaijan believe in the Shia sect. In Pakistan, the Shia community makes up 15% of the population, and in Afghanistan, the Hazaras, who believe in the Shia sect, make up about 10% of the population. Also, according to the data, about 10% of the population of Turkey are Shia Muslims.

The Tehran regime is trying to capture or distract the internal socio-political environment by two factors. The first is the invariable thesis that America is the number one enemy, and the second is the unification of all Shiites in the Islamic world based on the "Shia Crescent" formula. However, the first view lost its significance in Iran. The factor holding the Tehran regime is the latter, that is, the Shiite factor. If ties with Shia groups in the Middle East are completely severed, it could end disastrously for Tehran in the future.

Look East. In the 20th year of the 21st century, instead of softening, Iran's relations with the West continued to grow colder. The problems of Iran's nuclear program have not been resolved. For this reason, the priority of the Eastern space in Iran's foreign policy has been increasing more and more. In the dissertation written by Sarvar Fayzullayev, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Political Sciences, it is noted about this concept of Iran's foreign policy as follows: "Iran's "Look East" policy is aimed at expanding alliance ties and reducing Iran's susceptibility to the influence of Western powers in the Eastern Hemisphere, in particular, it was adopted as a strategy aimed at strengthening strong political, economic and strategic relations with countries in Asia. Mahmoud

Ahmadinejad, Hasan Rouhani and Ibrahim Raisi pursued the “Look East” policy, seeking to diversify Iran's international relations and realize its economic interests. However, their policy implementation varies, reflecting distinct conceptual frameworks, geographic priorities, institutional dimensions, and the interplay of external and internal forces .

A bright expression of Iran’s “Look East” foreign policy is its acceptance as a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The appearance of Iran in the SCO has an impact on the position of the organization in the order of international relations as a factor of opportunities. This can be analyzed as follows:

first, Iran’s membership increases the economic and energy potential of the SCO. Iran is the world’s fourth-largest oil producer and has large natural gas reserves, and its membership would also benefit other member states, particularly China and Russia, which are major energy consumers. Iran’s membership will also contribute to the further integration of the economies of the SCO member states, which in turn will serve to develop regional trade and commerce;

secondly, Iran’s membership will increase the security and stability of the SCO. Iran is an important player in the Middle East, and its membership will help stabilize the region, which is currently facing a number of challenges such as terrorism, extremism and conflict;

thirdly, Iran’s membership will strengthen the SCO’s global position. Iran is a major regional power and its membership increases the SCO’s influence in the Middle East and beyond. Iran's membership would also help balance the power dynamics in the region, which are currently dominated by the United States and its allies.

In short, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has an impact on the regional order of the Middle East. In this regard, three the most important factors can be highlighted. These are the Islamic factor, the energy factor, and the military factors that Iran aims to acquire nuclear weapons. Since 1979, Tehran’s foreign policy has tried to strengthen its influence and position in the Middle East with concepts such as “Neither West, nor East, only Islam”, “Dialogue of Civilizations”, “Shia Crescent” and “Look East”. In a certain sense, the leading countries and other actors of the region have realized that it is necessary to take into account and even count on Iran’s foreign political influence in the Middle East.

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