

Epistemic Systems and Protective Belt of Iranian Foreign Policy: A Combined Theoretical Analysis

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Abstract

The cognitive logic of foreign policy of different countries is constructed based on different epistemological and ontological systems. Outcome - process validity of making foreign policy shows its cognitive method and ontological logic. Therefore, the perception of foreign policy is formed through complex epistemological systems. Each different foreign policy as an ontological process has epistemic systems; so, any foreign relations actions refer to epistemic logic, structure, and package that are not particularly obvious. The dynamics of Iran's foreign policy in the regional and international system is formed based on multilateral factors that are influenced by international and regional components. The paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of different approaches to Iran's foreign policy by

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theoretical framework derived from a combination of the theories using Cohen's paradigm, the epistemic belts of Lakatos and Althusser Apparatus, and the epistemic theory of Foucault. The main question of the paper is what kind of epistemic systems does the foreign policy of Iran have and what systems did other systems intend to form around Iran? We examine and identify five epistemological systems including, Shi'ite, Islamic, revolutionary, national, modern, and postmodern, and each will be used to analyze the foundations, institutions, consequences, and applied pathology of Iranian foreign policy.

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Keywords: Knowledge, System, Protective Belt, Iran, Foreign Policy

I. Introduction

If we accept that the foreign policy of Iran has a certain logic, or better yet, if we accept that the foreign policy has a certain mental structure and epistemic system, the question arises as to what layers of mentality and epistemic system exist in governing Iranian foreign policy. Is there, indeed, any epistemic system? The answer to this question is important because every mental construct, and the epistemic layers embedded in it, have strategic properties and the power to influence external realities. Therefore, each of these layers of knowledge can provide the capacity to fulfill the national interests of the country. In fact, foreign policy is not abstractly formed in a vacuum, but rather in a space where every part of that space represents a part of Iranian society and tradition. Therefore, first, epistemic layers of a foreign policy cannot be understood, without first understanding the comprehensive foreign policy, and second, various layers of the foreign policy cannot be ignored, preventing those layers from applying their national capacities to realize their national interests.

Since the early 1970s, Iran has been regarded as an important regional player. Prior to that, it had managed to accumulate considerable strategic value as a weighty pawn in the cold war chessboard that straddled much of Asia and Europe. Before the Islamic Revolution and during the Pahlavi II era, Iran was a reliable partner for America in the Middle East in the middle of

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the Cold War. After the Islamic revolution and the success of the Islamists in Iran and the formation of the Islamic Republic, the anti-Western face of Iran spread in the world. The anti-Western-anti-American nature of the Iranian revolution caused the anti-American orientation of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran since the 1980s. This issue led to the spread of ideological and Western analysis of Iran's foreign policy. The nature of Iran in Western countries and their partners is ideological and usually completely stereotyped. In recent years, with the expansion of Iran's activities and regional competitions in the Middle East region and the increasing tension between Iran and the West over the nuclear issue and Iran's hostility with Israel, various analyzes of Iran's foreign policy have been presented. These factors have caused the emergence of different perspectives on Iran's foreign policy, especially one-dimensional analyses outside the main context of strategic culture that governs the policy-making system of Iran's foreign policy in the Islamic republic.

The one-dimensional views that emphasize only one of the layers of the epistemic apparatus governing Iranian foreign policy are also ideological. In this view, the ideological dimensions of Iran's foreign policy, which is anti-Western and based on the Shia Islamic Umma perspective, become more emphasized. Many European and American writers analyze Iran's foreign policy in

the post-Islamic Revolution era with this perspective.¹

Accordingly, explaining Iran's foreign policy based on a complex logic related to combined factors such as elites' strategic culture and internal political currents that affect the formation of Iran's dynamic foreign policy can help to understand the actions and logic of Iran's foreign policy.

The paper, however, seeks to prove that the mental structure governing Iranian foreign policy is not one-dimensional and consists of several different epistemic layers; however, with respect to other domestic and international factors in every period in the history of foreign policy, it has gained prominence.

Whether those with an empathetic approach to the national, Shi'ite, Islamic, or revolutionary character of Iranian foreign policy, or those who critically regard one of these features of foreign policy as a distinctive feature of foreign policy, they all have an intrinsic attribute value when reviewing their case.

¹ This view can be seen for example in the following authors' analysis. Kenneth Katzman. *Iran's foreign policy*. Washington: Congressional Research Service, (2015); Rouhollah Ramazani. "Ideology and pragmatism in Iran's foreign policy." *The Middle East Journal*, 58, no. 4 (2004): 1-11; Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri. *Iran's foreign policy: from Khatami to Ahmadinejad*. Reading: Ithaca Press, (2012); Shireen Hunter. *Iran's foreign policy in the post-Soviet era: resisting the new international order*. California: ABC-CLIO, (2010); Shahram Akbarzadeh and James Barry. "State identity in Iranian foreign policy." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 43, no. 4 (2016): 613-629; Przemyslaw Osiewicz. *Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Between Ideology and Pragmatism*. London: Routledge, (2020).

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However, it is assumed that none of these features or, as this article suggests epistemic layers, have intrinsic value. In fact, all of these epistemic layers are valuable only in that they can contribute to the realization and advancement of national interests and must be moderated when excessive emphasis is placed on one of them to advance national interests. In other words, this article seeks to show that a lack of value in these epistemic layers makes it possible for foreign policymakers to serve, better, the national interests of the country by emphasizing these layers. Therefore, questions in this article are: what kind of epistemic systems does Iranian foreign policy have? What are the foundations, schools, thinkers, and influences of these systems? Who is at the helm now? What can be done to exploit all their potential to safeguard national interests and create a belt of security for the nation?

II. Classification of research literature in the study of Iran's foreign policy

Although the literature on Iran's foreign policy has expanded a lot in the last few years and many researchers have addressed Iran's foreign policy problems and issues, still there is a lack of epistemological and analytical views that can evaluate the different approaches to Iran's foreign policy without ideological orientation and out of stereotypes. The expansion of Iran's nuclear program and the increase of hostility towards Israel and the United States and the widespread presence in sectarian conflicts

in the region, especially in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, have increased attention to Iran's foreign policy. The research literature on the evolution of Iran's foreign policy is divided into three categories. The first category is the classic written products that considered Iran as an unusual, hostile, and ideological country against the international order.² This view is very popular in the mainstream and academia and media-journalistic trends follow the view. Western academia and media-journalistic literature about Iran's foreign policy portrays this country as an unusual and revolutionary country in the international system.³

The second category is the literature that considers the combined characteristics of Iran's foreign policy and examines rational and strategic trends in Iran's foreign policy with a non-western perspective. In this way, most of the sources, with a scientific basis, seek to analyze the identity-oriented structures of Iran's foreign policy, especially the country's support for regional

² To know more about this point of view, you can refer to the following works: Elizabeth Shakman Hurd. "The international politics of secularism: US foreign policy and the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Alternatives*, 29, no. 2 (2004): 115-138; Akbarzadeh and Barry. "State identity in Iranian foreign policy."; Volker Perthes. "Ambition and fear: Iran's foreign policy and nuclear programme." *Survival*, 52, no. 3 (2010): 95-114; Daniel Byman. "Iran, terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 31, no. 3 (2008): 169-181; Shaul Shay. *The Axis of Evil: Iran, Hizballah, and the Palestinian Terror*. London: Routledge, (2017). Ray Takeyh. "Iran, Israel and the politics of terrorism." *Survival*, 48, no. 4 (2006): 83-96.

³ Arash Beidollahkhani and Yaser Kahrazeh. "Anti-systemic revolutionary countries in the international system: Islamic Republic of Iran and religious branding." *Codrul Cosminului*, 27, no. 1 (2021): 230.

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proxies, enmity with Israel, and tension with the United States.⁴

Although some of these analyzed eventually suffer from the distortion of classical analyzes and ultimately view Iran's foreign policy as non-material, ideological, and abnormal.

The third category of research literature regarding Iran's foreign policy has a more logical and neutral view of Iran's foreign policy. In these sources, Iran, like any other country, pursues its material and non-material interests in the international system, and Iran's hostility and tensions with regional and western powers are a manifestation of the usual geopolitical and geoeconomic tensions in the international system.⁵ Accordingly,

⁴ You can refer to the following works: Gawdat Bahgat. "Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran." *Iranian Studies*, 39, no. 3 (2006): 307-327; Rouhollah Ramazani. "Iran's foreign policy: Both North and South." *Middle East Journal*, 46, no. 3 (1992): 393-412; Ramazani, "Ideology and pragmatism."; Ehteshami and Zweiri, *Iran's foreign policy*; Maaiké Warnaar. *Iranian foreign policy during Ahmadinejad: Ideology and actions*. New York: Springer, 2013; Thomas Juneau. *Squandered opportunity: Neoclassical realism and Iranian foreign policy*. California: Stanford University Press, (2015).

⁵ For example, to know about this point of view, you can refer to the following works: Vali Golmohammadi. "The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Prospects for change and continuity." *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 8, no. 1 (2019): 93-102; Kayhan Barzegar. "Iran's foreign policy strategy after Saddam." *The Washington Quarterly*, 33, no. 1 (2010): 173-189; Kayhan Barzegar and Abdolrasool Divsallar. "Political rationality in Iranian foreign policy." *The Washington Quarterly*, 40, no.1 (2017): 39-53; Hassan Ahmadian. "Iran and the new geopolitics of the Middle East: in search of equilibrium." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 23, no.3 (2021): 458-472; Hassan Ahmadian and Payam Mohseni. "Iran's Syria strategy: the evolution of deterrence." *International Affairs*, 95, iss. 2, (2019): 341-364; Zeynab Malakoutikhah. "Iran: Sponsoring or combating terrorism?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 43, no. 10 (2020): 913-939.

Iran's foreign policy is rational and based on national interests. Although the third category also suffers from the futility of analyzing and spreading exaggerated views on Iran's power in the international system. In the third category, Iran is more powerful than its capacities, and on this basis, it can be a fundamental challenge to the Western hegemony in the international system. The spread of such pieces of literature in recent years has led to the convergence of these views with leftist analyzes of Iran's foreign policy. The leftist view On Iran's foreign policy shows the country as a powerful and strategic partner of China, Russia, Venezuela, and Cuba. Some of these writings analyzed Iran from a flattering perspective through Iran's formal ideological government lens. According to this view, Iran, along with countries like Syria and Palestine, is the axis of resistance against the domination of the West and the evil and criminal Israeli hegemony in the Middle East.

All three categories of literature suffer from reductionist or extremist tendencies. The paper tries to analyze Iran's foreign policy from different angles and identify epistemic systems of Iran's foreign policy from a combined theoretical perspective without any stereotypes. In addition, the combined and epistemological view of the paper is derived from the political trends inside Iran, and this issue can contribute to the depth of the analysis.

III. Theoretical framework

In this study, we used a paradigm meaning we have taken the consensus of scholars from Thomas Kuhn.⁶ The paradigm concept for shaping consciousness is the hard core of power that is consensus-legitimized in foreign policy. Paradigms are controlled by protective layers and no competing paradigm can penetrate the hard core. The term “protection rings and layers” is taken from Imre Lakatos⁷ and is represented in foreign policy as epistemic layers that retain the hard core of power. Epistemic systems mean using power packages from Michel Foucault to show that mythology is not only formal in the formal mechanism of state institutions, but are also intelligent systems that form bi-directional power networks.⁸ We have also borrowed from Louis Althusser the “Apparatus”⁹ or the ideological mechanisms of power¹⁰ to show that the superstructure and ideology of foreign policy is transmitted to and from the country through various mechanisms.

⁶ Thomas Kuhn. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, (2012): 34.

⁷ James Ladyman. *Understanding philosophy of science*. London: Psychology Press, (2002): 12.

⁸ Michel Foucault. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. A.M. Sheridan Smith, trans. London: Routledge, (2002).

⁹ Giorgio Agamben. *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*. David Kishik, Stefan Pedatella, trans. California: Stanford University Press, (2009): 21.

¹⁰ Louis Althusser. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. G.M. Goshgarian, trans. London: Verso (2014): 68.

Table 1: Theoretical Framework Concept

Fundamentals of the Intellectual Framework	Philosophical Foundations	Crystallization in foreign policy
The Thomas Cohen Paradigm	The hard core of power and consensus around it	Every foreign policy has its own paradigm maintained by the hard core of power
Imre Lakatos Protective Belt	The different institutional and epistemic layer	Institutional and epistemic guardians who maintained the hard core
The Epistemology of Michel Foucault	Epistemic superstructure and knowledge system	The epistemic apparatus of foreign policy justification
Apparatus of Louis Althusser	Formal ideologies and intellectual utopias	The ideological diffusers of foreign policy at home and abroad

Source: Designed by the authors.

Foreign policy is not without thought staying always with intellectual foundations. Most foreign policy ideas have practical and operational implications. In foreign policy, we must be realistic and think of ideas as epistemologies that are tools for preserving national interests. A conservative and practical approach enables

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the use of epistemic systems and empowers Iran against various actors in the political arena. Epistemic systems are recognized as sources of power if they are applied, and they become alternative ideologies if the government abandons them. Thus, the text dominates in terms of the content according to the thoughts of Nicolas Machiavelli and Leo Strauss.

IV. Research Background

This essay seeks to explain the view that mental structure and epistemic apparatus governing Iranian foreign policy are composed of various epistemic layers, each of which has its own strategic character and power of influence and can contribute to the realization of national interests and be efficient. However, this unorthodox view of foreign policy sources is missing, overlooked or misunderstood, in most analyses written on Iranian foreign policy. Accordingly, there are three general approaches to examining the implications and perspectives of Iranian foreign policy. In other words, and from new lens we categorized Iranian foreign policy into three general approaches: namely empathy, betrayal and critical approaches. We will attempt to illustrate the vacuum that this article seeks to fill by explaining each of these approaches and the effects that follow.

A. Empathetic Approach

The analyses and perspectives underlying this approach fully

support and accompany the forty years of foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. These views, which are mostly held by clerics and intergovernmental forces, regard the ideological factor as the main framework of Iranian foreign policy, recognize the status quo, are conservative, and emphasize the idealistic dimension of foreign policy of the Islamic Republic. Most of these analyses argue that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and unipolarity of the world, the only country that has ideas and ideologies that can withstand the increasing Western capitalist domination is Iran. Therefore, since Iran ranks first place in the region and has withstood a defeat by America in the region, it must maintain the same revolutionary process and ideology of resistance in all fields and cannot confine itself to only national and regional goals. These sources point to Iran as the Islamic World and emphasize the principles of the constitution that address the position of protecting the oppressed peoples against the arrogant interlopers and exporting the revolution, in general supporting the liberation movement and transnational goals. Much of the personality and institutions of government in the Islamic Republic of Iran such as the Supreme Leader, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, the Friday prayer leader, the Islamic Propaganda Organization, and the Revolutionary Guards, have taken such an approach. This essay could mention persons who have followed this approach such as Manouchehr Mohammadi and his works including the book “The Principles of Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic”, Abbas Ali Amid Zanjani in the book

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regarding the Islamic Revolution and its roots, and Mohammad Rahim Eivazi in the book written about the Islamic Revolution and its historical roots.¹¹ In particular, Mohammadi discusses his idea of dualism of Islam or Iran as the ultimate goal of foreign policy in the book “Principles of Foreign Policy” and considers the former as the ultimate goal of the Islamic Republic.¹² In his book, Amid Zanjani considers the 1979 Revolution as the most important event in the history of Iran, even the world, and emphasizes the necessity of maintaining a revolutionary spirit in foreign policy and prioritizing the ideals of the revolution in formulating the foreign policy goals of the Islamic Republic.¹³ When analyzing these works, from all the epistemic layers of Iranian foreign policy, it seems that they focus on the layers regarding Islam and revolutionist and do not pay attention to other sources and layers in the mental structure governing foreign policies.

B. Betrayal approach

The betrayal approach contrasts with the empathetic approach. Here, Iran is portrayed as an ideological and terrorist country seeking nuclear weapons and moving in a dangerous fashion.

¹¹ Mohammad Rahim Eivazi. *Islamic revolution and its roots*. Tehran: Payamnoor university press, (2019):13.

¹² Manocher Mohammadi and Hamid Molana. *The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran under Ahmadinejad*. Tehran: Dadgostar press, (2010): 104-106.

¹³ Abbasali Amidzanjani. *Enghelabe Eslami va Risheyahe An* [Islamic revolution and its roots]. Tehran: Tobi publisher, (2005): 46.

Based on the approach that is mostly addressed in English language sources, strategic reports of foreign institutes, research journals, and journalistic articles, Iran has been influenced by extrajudicial military institutions such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)¹⁴ in all its political and economic layers, and by some, financial and military support. They see and label regional militant groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas as being the main cause of insecurity and disruption in the Middle East and the world.¹⁵ These reductive sources view Iran as the center of evil and seek to eliminate or isolate Iran from the international arena and prevent it from becoming powerful. Followers of the ‘sinister approach to their cause’ propose solutions such as establishing a global consensus against Iran, imposing crippling economic sanctions, creating political instability, instigating and equipping dissatisfied ethnic groups, and planning internal revolts. The United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and their affiliated institutes and individuals such as Nikki Keddie follow this approach.¹⁶ Fareed Rafiq, Bobby Said, and Olivier Roy are thinkers who view the experience of political Islam in Iran as

¹⁴ IRGC, Persian Sepāh-e Pāsdārān-e Enqelāb-e Eslāmi, also called Pasdaran, branch of the Iranian armed forces, independent of Iran’s regular army (the latter is sometimes called Artesh). Iran’s leader Ayatollah Khomeini established the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in April 1979 by decree and tasked it with safeguarding the Islamic republic.

¹⁵ Frederic M. Wehrey, Jerrold D. Green, and Brian Nichiporuk. *The rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the domestic roles of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, Vol. 821. California: Rand Corporation, (2009): 145.

¹⁶ Nikki Keddie. *Iran and the Muslim world: resistance and revolution*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, (1995).

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destroying regional and international order. In the minds of these thinkers, especially Olivier Roy, Iran began a reactionary movement in the late twentieth century that disrupted the balance of the region and the failed experience led to the spread of terrorism.¹⁷

C. Critical Approach

Those who follow this approach believe that Iranian foreign policy, despite its achievements, still needs reform and revision to achieve sufficient realism to achieve the national interests. This approach, which is common among academics, State Department experts, and moderate and reformist political forces, emphasizes the need to avoid tensions and compromise with neighbors, use diplomacy and negotiation, focus on regional and international engagement, and emphasizes on capacity building. Iranian cultural and historical quarters insist on international recognition of country image. The group views the preservation and survival of the Islamic Republic of Iran as moderating excessive emphasis on certain epistemic belts, such as idealism, revolution, and Shi'ism, in contrast to highlighting some of the forgotten layers in the mental structure of Iranian foreign policy such as the modern-postmodern belt. Many academic works on foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran follows this critical approach. For example, Alireza Azgandi in his book "Foreign Policy of the

¹⁷ Olivier Roy. *The failure of political Islam*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, (1994).

Islamic Republic of Iran” takes a critical approach with reference to the dominant discourses on foreign policy of Iran from the beginning of the revolution to the time of writing the book (2003). He views the value-oriented or idealistic discourse of the sixties as a negative aspect of Iranian foreign policy that, in the seventies with the emergence of a pro-interest and pragmatic economic reformist discourse, would lead to a geopolitical understanding rather than ideological understanding, and to a political discourse of diplomacy. The region, and the world regional and international cooperation will replace hostility and isolation, but he argues that along with all the benefits gained, there is some contradiction in Iranian foreign policy.

This contradiction is due to the sources and centers of influence in Iranian foreign policy that has more power than the President and senior State Department staff. In fact, these powerful, extra-legal institutions, that need to be reformed and legitimized, seek to place too much emphasis on the revolutionary and Islamic layers of the mental structure that governs Iranian foreign policy, and their existence is inconsistent with the use of modern layers. In an article entitled “The Concept of Power and the Functioning of Foreign Policy: A Comparison of China and Iran”, Mahmoud Sari al-Qalam writes that the concept of power in Iranian foreign policy is more theoretical than statistical. Noting that Iranian foreign policy over the past few decades has protected the borders of the country and the Iranian political system through confrontation,

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distance, refusal of regional coalition and convergence, and lack of interest in international politics and economics. He discusses that it is necessary to achieve a successful foreign policy, which is a quantitative and statistics-driven way of interacting with the world. He believes that generation of power, which means boosting GDP and contributing to the world economy, is a protection of borders.¹⁸ Ruhollah Ramazani, in his book, talks about the growth of rationality in Iranian foreign policy during the first two decades after the 1979 revolution. Referring to the emergence of “realistic compromise” versus “idealistic confrontation” in Iranian foreign policy, he believes that Iran has moved away from confrontational, revolutionary, and idealistic policies in the region and the world, moving towards engaging the world and moving out of isolation. He also argues that contrary to the image that Westerners and Israelis derive from Iranian foreign policy traditions and describe it as “irrational,” Iran has a prudent traditional civilization that has its roots in the pre-Islamic age. Along with referring to perceived provocative and revolutionary foreign policy of Iran after the 1979 revolution and the harsh comments made by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Israel and the Holocaust, he recalled periods in which Iranian foreign policy was moderate and productive.¹⁹

¹⁸ Mahmood Sariolghalam. “Concept of Power and Foreign policy behaviour: A comparative analysis of China and Iran.” *Foreign Relations*, 3, no. 1 (2011): 62.

¹⁹ Rouhollah Ramazani. *Independence without Freedom: Iran's Foreign Policy*. Virginia: University of Virginia Press, (2011): 121-122.

As we see in these analyses, unlike the other two approaches (empathetic and betrayal) it is less ideological in nature. Criticism of Iranian revolutionary foreign policy in the 1960s and some radicals in the 1980s brought these analyses to advocate realistic and rationalist approaches toward Iranian foreign policy, and to emphasize the need for reinforcement of the rationality and modern governance mechanisms based on the replacement of institutions. Persons and groups are under pressure, they insist, are still consumed by the dualism of realism and idealism, disregarding the capacities of some traditional epistemic belts such as Shi'ism and its role in forming alliances with regional countries against US regional allies.

According to what has been said, the two sympathetic and disproportionate approaches fall under two sides of the spectrum of analyses of Iranian foreign policy, and the non-sympathetic approach lies between them. This approach does not consider the Iranian political system to be completely radical and revolutionary and recognizes it on the international stage but seeks to strengthen its realism and reform by criticizing its idealistic and revolutionary aspects. However, this critical approach also entails some simplification between the two poles of idealism and realism. In contrast, this article uses the concept of "epistemic belts" and "theoretical frameworks" based on Cohen's paradigm, Lakatos' protective rings, Foucault's epistemological system, and Althusser's ideological apparatuses, which seeks a more

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unorthodox view of Jain's action. Indeed, one may ponder that it is possible to use the influence of all ideas to realize public and national interests. Our writing is based more on pragmatic conservatism that has been extracted from Machiavelli's ideas, especially the book on oratory. According to Machiavelli, in the book about the prince, the basic principle of power of the state and preservation of national interests is the idea of government, but asked what true power is. That is, the state should not be subject to ethics, thoughts, ideologies, or any other mentalities, but rather the different mentalities and narratives of those employed by government in order to empower citizens and develop the country. You can see Iran's foreign policy belts in Figure 1.

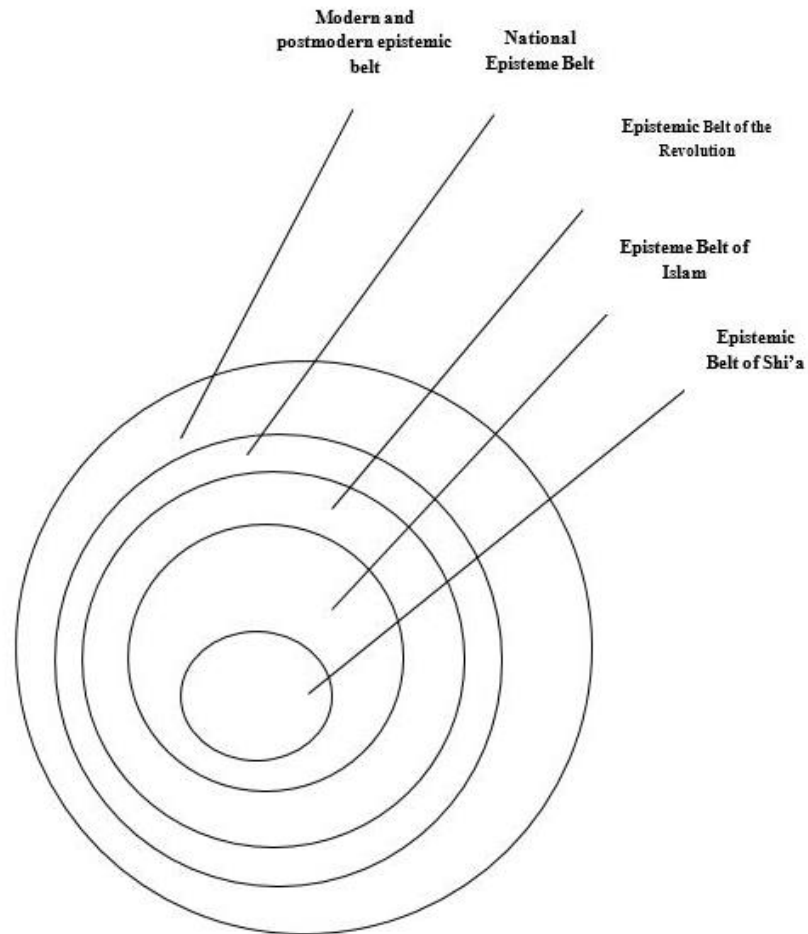


Figure 1: Iran's foreign policy belts. Source: Designed by the authors

V. Iranian foreign policy safeguards

A. Epistemic Belt of Shi'a

The Islamic Republic of Iran as a religious system is born of a unanimous vote revolution. This system is based on Velayat-e Faqih and first appeared in Shi'ite thought with the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. The leader of the Islamic Revolution is seen as a religious authority and the ultimate arbiter of Iranian politics. The elements and institutions considered in the political theory (Velayat-e Faqih) of Imam (i.e., leader) Ayatollah Khomeini are to some extent the same as those established by the Islamic Republic of Iran in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Therefore, the viewpoint of political guardianship by this jurist is of great importance as well as in Shi'ite theories of the Islamic Republic.²⁰ The philosophy of the jurisprudential abilities, rights, and duties of the jurist is a debate that is mainly within the domain of the philosophy maintained for the Islamic government. Thus, in foreign policy, the debate begins where the jurist, as one of the most important sources of foreign policy, is seen extracted from the government in Islam.²¹ In the Islamic jurisprudence of Khomeini, the jurist has the authority of the

²⁰ Davood Firahi. *Nezame Siasi va Dolat dar Islam* [Political System and Government in Islam]. Tehran: Samt pub., (2015): 11-13.

²¹ Christopher Ferrero. "The Iran narrative: The ideational context of US foreign policy decision-making toward the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Iran and the Caucasus*, 17, no. 1 (2013): 56-58.

Prophet and the infallible Imam (Mahdi, progeny of Prophet Mohammad). According to Khomeini in the absence of all the affairs in which the infallible Imam (PBUH ‘peace be upon him’) is entitled to a guardianship of the jurisprudence, this is because the jurispudent should have the highest degree of virtue and merit in addition to pertinent knowledge.

The jurispudent determines and monitors general policies. According to Article 110 of the Constitution of Iran, it is the responsibility of the leadership to determine the overall policies of the system, including the area of foreign policy and to monitor their proper implementation. Therefore, the overall policy, framework, priorities, orientation, strategy, and general policies of the Islamic Republic in the field of foreign policy are defined by the leader of the revolution after consulting with the Expediency Council. The leadership also oversees the proper implementation of these general policies.²² The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is organized around the Shi’ite axis with the aim of changing the status quo. The goals of foreign policy are pursued to form an appropriate external environment and to create favorable conditions. In this regard, Khomeini had said, “The Islamic government wants to be found in the world, that is, it wants to be a different Muslim soldier than it is a divine soldier. The Prime Minister must be different from the Prime Minister of other

²² Farid Mirbaghari. “Shi’ism and Iran’s Foreign Policy.” *The Muslim World*, 94, no. 4 (2004): 555.

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regimes; this is a divine being. Wherever there is a country, wherever we go, there is the voice of Allah. Islam wants it.”²³

Acting on this reasoning, the Islamic Republic of Iran has identified support for Islamic groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, the Yemeni Houthis, and the Syrian government as one of the major goals of its foreign policy approach. The Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards is directly responsible for overseas military operations, in other words, the front line of persecution. Almost all the overseas activities of Iran over the past decade relate to the Quds Force, which works by establishing links with Shi’ite Islamic militants and radical groups and providing financial support to these Islamic groups or personalities that fulfill the foreign policy principles and goals of the Iranian government. After Ahmad Vahidi, the first commander of the Revolutionary Guards and the first commander of the Quds Force, succeeded Ahmadinejad in his first term as deputy defense minister, Qasim Suleimani was appointed Quds Force Commander. Qasim Suleimani, in the Kerman rally and prayer gathering on Quds Day, refers to the 33-day battle of Hezbollah with the Israeli army that not only brought about a new Middle East, but also a new belief in the Islamic World. It cited the Shi’ite clan as having succeeded in exporting from Lebanon numerous religious beliefs and patterns of struggle for Palestine and played a central role in transforming the

²³ Ruhollah Khomeini. *Imam Khomeini’s Sahifah* [A Collection of Imam Khomeini’s Works: Sayings, Messages, Interviews, Sentences, Laws and Letters], Volume 2. Tehran: Institute of Imam Khomeini’s Works, (1999).

throwing of the Palestinian rock into a rocket.²⁴

With the onset of the Syrian crisis and the role played by regional and extra-regional countries, Iran has also expressed its readiness to resolve the crisis. The IRGC went to the country as the executive arm of the regime for military guidance and intelligence activities.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is tasked with preserving the Islamic Republic of Iran and the ideals of the 1979 revolution. The IRGC combines traditional military roles with a relentless focus on supposed domestic enemies. The IRGC is Iran's primary instrument for exporting the ideology of the Islamic Revolution worldwide. It is rigidly loyal to Iran's clerical elite.

With the presence of the IRGC in the area and the use of military consultations by Iranian forces, the Syrian army recovered defensively and practically stopped the terrorist attacks in many areas as the rules changed. The classical Syrian Army has since been able to increase its defenses against terrorists and, with the help of the IRGC training, has learned the techniques of urban warfare and found the opportunity to defend itself in advance of terrorists with the least possible casualties. The creation of Hezbollah in Iraq was also a major step taken by the Islamic

²⁴ Rouhollah Ramazani. "Iran's Export of the Revolution: Its Politics, Ends and Means." *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 13, no. 1 (1989): 32.

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Republic of Iran to increase the military power of the Islamic State against ISIS, and to a large extent, blinded the perplexed Iraqi crisis. The successful operation of the IRGC in Iraq severely diminished the role of the US-led anti-ISIS coalition in the country and elevated Iranian position as the guiding and leadership center of resistance.²⁵ In addition, the commander-in-chief of the corps, Commander Ja'fari in relation to assistance to Yemen by Iran, said, "Our assistance to the Resistance Front has been made at the request of the people and their governments, and Yemen is an example of it. It is Ansarollah, and the Iranian aid is in the amount of moral and spiritual help that Yemen needs most, and the Islamic Republic does not hesitate to do so which continues." The Islamic Revolution has a principle that naturally conflicts with the interests of some including the US and Israel and their constituents. The main word of the Islamic Revolution is the sovereignty of the people over their fate and their own destiny.²⁶

Following these policies has led many countries at the regional level to regard Iran as a potential threat to national security. In general, it is true that these policies have created soft power for the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region, and Iran has had influence in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, but in

²⁵ "West Asian Army and Regional Security." Pars Today News, accessed October 9, 2020. <https://parstoday.com/fa/iran-i101247>.

²⁶ "Corps Commander: Iran Assists Yemen in Intelligence." Tasnim News Agency, accessed November 23, 2017. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1396/09/02/1581804/>.

some cases has also faced major challenges. For example, various interpretations of Islam and Shi'ism have generated intellectual tendencies among politicians who sometimes carry out theoretical actions causing too much emphasis on Shi'ite indices having led to the negative stance of Islamic countries, most of them Sunni, against Iran. Ultimately, too much emphasis on the unity and interests of the Muslim World has undermined the national identity and interests of Iran.

B. The Episteme Belt of Islam

One of the most important aspects of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the establishment of a global Islamic order and the call for unity of Muslims for this purpose. For Ayatollah Khomeini, the alternative to liberating them from Western dependency and overcoming backwardness due to Western hegemonic domination could be Muslim unity. "With the unity of the Muslims and the revival of their own identity, they will be able to free themselves from the Western hegemony and at the same time enjoy all the positive aspects of human civilization in the field of thought and experience." It could be understood that creating a global Islamic order through the invitation and unity of the Muslim World requires contact with other countries. This revolutionary leader, therefore, called for "the unity and understanding between governments to serve the interests of Islam and Muslims, as well as to overcome the various problems and competitions faced by the Islamic Ummah [community]." In this

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regard, as a foreign policy, the Islamic Republic of Iran with its pivotal role in the Islamic world has a dignified claim to the empowerment of the Muslim Ummah and the emergence of Muslims.²⁷ The criterion of unity in Umm al-Qura's philosophy is unity in the Islamic duty, because in this reign, the responsible nation, together with the responsible leadership in the land of Umm al-Qura, forms the central core of the government that has the global board. Thus, the jurisprudence of the jurispudent is the basis for the formation of Islamic rule in Umm al-Qura. The idea of the leadership of Velayat-e Faqih is the cause of unity in the Islamic Ummah; contractual and international boundaries have no effect on this leadership. The jurisprudence of the jurispudent and its scope of responsibility cannot be divided into countries. The responsibility of the leadership of the Islamic Ummah knows no bounds; it becomes a nation of the Muslim World that has a leadership that is, in fact, capable of leading the Islamic World.²⁸

The Islamic Republic of Iran has made every effort to create unity among Muslims and has a particular mission and role in this regard. Article 11 of the Constitution states, "All of us are united, and all of us are Muslims, all are one Ummah and the government of the Islamic Republic is obliged to base its overall policy on the Coalition and the United Nations and to pursue it." To bring about

²⁷ Ali Reza Azgandi. *Siasate Khareji Iran: Charchobha va Jahatgiriha* [Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Frameworks and Orientations]. Tehran: Qomes, (2012): 109-110.

²⁸ Katzman, *Iran's foreign and defense policies*, 19-21.

the political, economic and cultural unity of the Muslim world,²⁹ it is not possible for some Muslims to be pro-Western and others to follow the East, and some to comment on their own desires and unity. Khomeini has repeatedly emphasized the necessity of unity in his remarks, and the key to victory is unity and all failures are caused by divisions. In one of his remarks, he had said, “Unity is with the Beneficent and the difference, with the devil.”³⁰ Therefore, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic, as an Islamic state, “is committed to defending the rights of all Muslims in the world” based on brotherly commitment to Muslims. Protecting and defending the rights of Muslims is practiced as foreign policy at three levels; first, at the level of the Ummah and the Islamic World it is manifested in support of Islamic liberation movements and movements, such as support of the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq. Second, to support and defend the Muslims rights who are fighting the “infidels.” A striking example of this policy is the support by the Islamic Republic for Palestinian Muslims, and third, to defend the rights of Muslim minorities in non-Islamic countries such as Chechen Muslims in Russia.³¹

Iran has always sought to persuade regional countries to end

²⁹ Mohammad Sotoudeh. *Tahavolat Nezam Beinolmelal va Siasate Khareji Jomhuri islami Iran* [Developments in the International System and Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran]. Qom: Bostane Ketab, (2006).

³⁰ Javad Mansouri. *Nazari bar Siasate Khareji Jomhuri Islami Iran* [A comment on the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran]. Tehran: Amirkabir Publications Institute, (1986): 23

³¹ Seyed Jalal Dehghani Firouzabadi. *Siasate Khareji Jomhuri Islami Iran* [Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran]. Tehran: Samt, (2012): 31.

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the presence of foreign troops in their territory in line with Islamic regionalism and the creation of an Islamic Ummah, instead of relying on foreigners to conclude a regional defense treaty with regional Muslim governments. For this purpose, Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani was the first senior Iranian official to travel to Saudi Arabia after the revolution in 1998. In May 1999, President Muhammad Khatami traveled to Saudi Arabia and Qatar. During the trip, bilateral agreements on cooperation in various fields of investment, trade, sports and tourism were signed. Since the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Qatar has called for closer ties with Iran in all fields, including defense and security, and the parties finally agreed in 1999 to establish relations between their military commanders. In the spring of 2007, Ahmadinejad continued the process of improving relations with the southern neighbors of Iran by traveling to the United Arab Emirates and Oman to discuss the Iraq crisis and the nuclear program of Iran as well as other regional security issues.³²

Since its establishment, the Islamic Republic has considered the support of the Palestinian people to be part of the ideals and policies of the Islamic Revolution and has continued to provide material and moral support to the Palestinian people throughout its life, with any peace that it may consider in the interests of the Palestinian people. Khomeini denouncing the Camp David peace

³² Simon Mabon. *Saudi Arabia and Iran Power and Rivalry in the Middle East*. London and New York: I. B. Tauris, (2016): 80-84.

accord had said that he supported Israel's plan for independence and identified it with a catastrophe for Muslims and opposing it is a major Islamic obligation. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei describes the Middle East peace process, thus: What we call the Middle East peace process is in our view not a peace, but a betrayal and a reconciliation process, and it is up to Muslims who are in any way possible with the Zionist enemy of the land. Palestine to oppose: "Our opposition to what they call the Middle East peace dialogue is due to its unfairness, arrogance, humiliation, and ultimate irrationality."³³

Although Iran has shown its desire for unity among Muslims, including Muslims in the Middle East, the Arab countries in the region have not only declared their opposition to the Islamic leadership in the Arab World, but also formed strained and fragile relations with Iran. In fact, the announcement of the existence of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) in February 1981 was not the result of efforts by the six countries of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, and Oman to maintain collective security, but was due to a revisionist Iranian revolution. They also challenged the unity of the Islamic World by drawing closer to the United States and concluding defense and military alliances with it and secretly communicating with Israel. In addition, the support for the unity in Islam and the liberation of Palestine has had enormous

³³ Constance Duncombe. "Representation, recognition and foreign policy in the Iran-US relationship." *European Journal of International Relations*, 22, no. 3 (2016): 641-642.

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costs for Iran. Israeli leaders called for a global confrontation with the Islamic Republic of Iran and its policy of encouraging the annihilation of Israel. Israeli officials have repeatedly considered the Islamic Republic of Iran their biggest security threat since the Iranian Revolution. In addition, one of the reasons for the distrust and the ongoing tension in the US-Iran interactions has been the Israeli issue. The main problems of relations between Iran and the United States are in various ways related to Israeli goals and interests in the region and because of US-Middle East policy, such as identity ties with Israel and the powerful Jewish lobby in the U.S. Congress, Israelis are heavily influenced and controlled.

C. Epistemic Belt of the Revolution

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been organized with the aim of changing the status quo. This implies the conditions that the power equation in international politics considers unfair.³⁴ Ayatollah Khomeini refers to the responsibility of government leaders in spreading Islam to other countries. According to his instructions, everyone should try to introduce this kind of government so that all non-Islamic governments are abolished. You must strive to inform the world about the Islamic rule and the behavior of Islamic rulers in order to provide the

³⁴ Clément Therme. "Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era, Resisting the New International Order; Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic; Iran and the International System." *Iranian Studies*, 49, no. 3, (2016): 515-517.

ground for a just and fair government. Fairness should be established in place of these colonialist governments based on cruelty. Unless the young people of every class understand the nature of Islamic rule, which unfortunately existed for only a few years during the time of the Prophet and in the very short period of Amir al-Mu'minin (nephew of Prophet Mohammad), the basis of their cruel governments would be abolished.³⁵

According to the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Islam does not allow an infidel government to exercise its dominance over the Muslim state. Muslims should not be dominated by infidels, "God for blessings and exaltation has not been given to any Muslim by the infidels and Muslims must not accept this infidelity." In explaining the dominant nature of the West, the revolutionary leader had said Westerners in former England, and after this the US, thought they ought to consume the entire world because of their superpowers and sought to propagate it by weak propaganda that forced the poor countries to believe that they can do nothing without great powers. "We live in an age when the oppression of the imprisoned nations is at the hands of a fierce criminal whose dominance is brutal. We are in an age when criminals are admired rather than reprimanded. We live in an age where so-called human rights organizations are guarding the cruel interests of super-criminals and defending their transgressors and their relatives." According to the leader of the revolution, the most

³⁵ Khomeini, Imam Khomeini's Sahifah, 99

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important issue facing the nations of the world is the American issue. The US government, as the most powerful country in the world, makes no effort to devour other reserves of other countries. For this reason, until the “American interests of this vicious enemy of the oppressed of the world” cease to be reconciled with it, it is necessary for all Muslim nations and nations, together with the Islamic Republic, to resign “to hit this [American] government in the mouth.”³⁶

Thus, the second and third articles of the constitution have explicitly emphasized the rejection of all oppression, the suppression of justice, the rejection of the system of total domination and the rejection of colonialism and arrogance. To this end, the Islamic Republic of Iran has put forward the principle of support for the oppressed and the liberation movements. In fact, this principle is necessary and complementary to decolonization and cruelty, so that there is a logical and functional link between combating the arrogant and protecting the weak. In other words, two species can be decolonized; first, the fight against the arrogant and hegemonic class, who are the most important cause of the dissension in a nation, and second, support for the oppressed nations being the result of a system of domination and structural violence of the dictatorial order. Therefore, the Islamic Republic, in parallel to the struggle against authoritarianism and colonialism, is obliged to support the oppressed of the world and liberation

³⁶ Azgandi, Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 119-120.

movements that fight against the arrogant colonialists.³⁷

In line with this, at the beginning of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, an ideological divide was raised that the United States and the Soviet Union were misrepresented in the general and global view of neither eastern nor western Iran. The frontier foreign policy of Iran, however, has become more pragmatic. Iran eventually decided to improve its relations with a less evil country by signing a wide-ranging protocol with Moscow. The Islamic Republic of Iran, which had established its foreign policy with the slogan of “neither East nor West,” was able to expand its relations with the Soviet Union within the framework of the modern thinking of Gorbachev. During the first two decades of the revolution, however, foreign policy of Iran was focused on Europe because virtually no relations with the United States were possible, and Asia had just found the potential poles of power and wealth. Thus, during this period, the expansion of relations with Europe formed the center of gravity for the foreign policy of the country regarding the centers of power and wealth production. Critical and constructive dialogue has shown to our political leaders that an alliance with Europe and the exploitation of its economic and technological capacities can only be achieved through concessions

³⁷ Dehghani Firouzabadi, *Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 34-36.

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and political retreats.³⁸ For this reason, when Ahmadinejad came to the presidency, the policy of looking to the East became a priority in the foreign policy of Iran.³⁹

As part of the Eastern policy, the development of relations with China and Russia was pursued very seriously. Iran and China are considered two important partners in a strategic dimension. Increasing the power of these two governments can be a challenge for the great powers, especially the United States.⁴⁰ One of the concerns of China and Iran, in the region, is the presence of the U.S. in Afghanistan, Asia, and the Middle East in a way that has made the two countries almost agree on curbing the influence of Washington in areas close to their borders. In this context, Iran views the Persian Gulf as part of its natural influence, while China interprets American domination of the Persian Gulf as a medium-to-long-term confrontation with Chinese interests.⁴¹ In general, in relation to Russia, it is possible to expand relations between Iran and Russia on condition of its competition with the

³⁸ Ali Adami. "The Orientation Strategy in the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Perspectives, Backgrounds and Opportunities." *Quarterly Journal of Political Studies*, 7, (2010): 97-126.

³⁹ John Garver. "China and Iran: Expanding Cooperation under Conditions of US Domination," in *Toward Well-Oiled Relations? The Nottingham China Policy Institute Series*, Niv Horesh, ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan, (2016): 201.

⁴⁰ Arash Beidollahkhani. "Discourse Formation of Political Dissents via Twitter: Political Sociology of the Subversion Discourse in the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Sociological Research Online*, 27, no. 4 (2022): 1024.

⁴¹ John Garver. "China–Iran relations: cautious friendship with America's nemesis." *China Report*, 49, no. 1 (2013): 81.

West. Several factors influence the promotion and encouragement of bilateral cooperation: Geographical proximity, understanding of regional common interests, relative political challenge of the two countries with the West, and mutual understanding of the need to oppose the presence and influence of major powers in the peripheral areas.⁴² For Iran, relations with Russia can balance the position of Iran on international issues, especially the West, and deter other regional powers and thwart their efforts to eliminate the role that Iran plays in the region.⁴³

The Islamic Republic of Iran has also looked to the south in its foreign policy, which is in line with the strategy of looking to the east. The goal of Iran is to connect with the revolutionary countries of South America, especially with Latin American countries (Venezuela, Bolivia and Nicaragua). Due to their imperialist policies and anti-economic ideas, these countries sought to counter the American plan of free trade in order to counter the spread of neoliberalism in the region.⁴⁴

Iran-Europe relations at the time of former president Khatami showed that relying on Europe could not serve the strategic interests and security of Iran. There is an inextricable link between

⁴² Eric Moore. *The Crisis of Cooperation: A Critical Analysis of Russian-Iranian Relations in the Post-Soviet Era*. M.A. Thesis, Portland State University, (2012):32.

⁴³ Nansi Paulraj. "The JCPOA and Changing Dimensions of the Russia-Iran Relations." *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 3, no. 1 (2016): 101.

⁴⁴ Akbarzadeh and Barry. "State identity in Iranian foreign policy," 621-622.

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the two sides of the Atlantic, and Europe does not have the capacity to take the opposite course to that of the United States, therefore, the cost to Iran against the United States is great. However, Iran has opted to diversify its relations with East-West politics and relations with South America without paying attention to the fact that most Asian and Latin American countries look to the West. In addition, it provided conditions for China and Russia to leverage their relations with Iran from the West, including the United States, in effect making Iran a means of achieving its goals vis-à-vis the West.

D. National Episteme Belt

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the present leader of the Islamic Revolution, has said that the unity of countries in common was the secret of their authority.⁴⁵ The Islamic Republic of Iran has prioritized its relations with Central Asian countries, including Tajikistan and Afghanistan because of its emphasis on the abundance of commonalities. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, meeting with schoolchildren, rejecting the widespread role America plays in Central Asia and expanding the influence of American culture in the region, noted that the United States is only thinking of securing its own interests by mobilizing all scientific, political, financial, and technological resources, even though other nations - including

⁴⁵ "Khamenei's meeting with the President of Kazakhstan." Khamenei news website, accessed June 23, 2007.
<http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=1558>.

Central Asian nations - sit on black soil.⁴⁶ He cited that one of the ways to combat the influence of superpowers is through cultural relations and by giving attention to the shared history between Iran and the Central Asian countries. It was also emphasized that the nations of the region could form a valuable cultural asset, and that the Islamic Republic of Iran can become strengthened while welcoming the cooperation of the countries of the region that share a common culture and regards the progress and enhancement of each of the neighboring countries as its own benefit and its pride.⁴⁷

Since the text of the constitution has implicitly emphasized the political strategies of the country in some cases, it is essential to specify the behavior and position of countries, such as the Central Asian region, in the first and second parts of the constitution. The principle emphasizing the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has emphasized peaceful relations with non-combatant governments. "The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on the rejection of all hegemony and domination, the preservation of sovereign nations and their independence and territorial integrity, the defense of the rights of all Muslims, non-compliance with domineering powers, and peaceful interactions with non-hostile states." The rejection of any unequal relationship and the emphasis on peaceful relations in foreign

⁴⁶ "Leadership statements at a meeting with a group of students." Khamenei news website, accessed December 21, 2003, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech?nt=2&year=1382>.

⁴⁷ "Khamenei's meeting with the President of Kazakhstan."

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policy is an issue that has not been left open to the legislators of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The common ties between Iran and the Central Asian countries were rooted in two historical periods, the pre-Islamic era and the Islamic era. Thus, Iranian cultural and civilization domains, especially the ancient Persian Empire and the spring holiday Eid al-Norouz, are considered as two most important influential factors and, in other words, the relative advantage of Iran in the Central Asian region.⁴⁸ Accordingly, since the independence of the countries of the region, Iran has sought to maximize this relative advantage by increasing its coefficient of influence in Central Asia.⁴⁹ Publishing and distributing Farsi-language books, especially in poetry and literature, as well as book fairs and collaborations between academics, Iranian universities and various centers of Iranian studies, various artistic collaborations in the fields of theater, music and cinema, cultural exhibitions, and radio and television networks. Finally, the establishment of numerous cultural and religious centers and agencies has been one of the most important efforts of Iran to revive its cultural and civilization

⁴⁸ Jahangir Karami and Wali Cozegar Collegi. "Counter-Hegemonic Models of Iran, Russia and China in Central Asia." *Central Asia and The Caucasus Journal*, 20, no.85 (2014): 157.

⁴⁹ Noemi Maria Rocca. "Regional Stability for National Survival: Iran's Foreign Policy Towards the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia in the Post-Soviet Era." *International Relations and Diplomacy*, 5, no. 9 (2017): 545.

status in Central Asia.⁵⁰ The Islamic Republic of Iran has made extensive efforts to establish political and cultural agencies, friendship associations, Iranian studies, and Farsi language training centers as well as cultural weekends in Central Asian republics.⁵¹

With cultural sharing as outlined in the Strategic Science and Technology Transformation Document, a special cultural look at Central Asia can enable active engagement with the global environment and the processes of developing science and technology around the world and realize the scientific and cultural capacities of these countries. The region has assisted various sciences in enriching Iran.⁵² The Eco-Cultural Institute is also one of the organizations involved in the development of cultural activities between the countries of Iran and some countries of the Central Asian region. The statute emphasizes the need to strengthen cultural ties through spiritual and brotherly ties that bind people together in social and cultural life through the avenues of scientific, academic, artistic, literary institutions, libraries and

⁵⁰ David Menashri. "Iran and Central Asia: Radical Regime, Pragmatic Politics," in *Central Asia Meets the Middle East*, David Menashri, ed. London: Routledge, (2013): 77.

⁵¹ Somayeh Azadi, Mojtaba Maghsoodi, and Azadeh Mehrpouyan. "Performance Analysis of Cultural Diplomacy of Iran in Central Asia." *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 2, no. 2 (2015): 663-690.

⁵² "Iran's strategic evolution of science and technology document." Planning and monitoring center, Isfahan university of Technology, accessed June 24, 2014. https://strategic.iut.ac.ir/sites/strategic/files/ufiles/t_Sanade%20Tahavo%20%28%2088-6-28%20%29.pdf, 2009.

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museums.⁵³ The prospectus of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, as the mother University of the country, also emphasizes the importance of this region in view of the linguistic sharing with some Central Asian countries. Among the core values stated in this text are “constructive and effective engagement in international scientific and cultural cooperation” and the promotion of the Iranian Farsi language as one of the international scientific languages, which can be expanded through cooperation in various fields of science with Central Asian countries.⁵⁴

The Central Asian region is one of the suitable areas for the presence and role of Iran in historical-cultural, political, economic, and security arenas. Following the independence of the Central Asian republics and the end of the Soviet domination of the region, Iran, with a variety of geographical, historical, and cultural links, found many capacities to serve its national interests. The varied developments in these countries, on the one hand, and the neglect of policymakers in the region, on the other hand, led to the failure of the foreign policy of Iran to pursue failed national interests. Iran is unaware that these countries have become independent since their independence from the Soviet Union, so they are less inclined

⁵³ “Charter of Eco Cultural Institute.” Iran’s parliament Research Center, accessed March 14, 2023. <https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/92661>, accessed on 1994

⁵⁴ “Strategic Document of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad.” Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, accessed on June 25, 2011. https://vpb.um.ac.ir/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3987:vision&catid=101&Itemid=796&lang=fa.

to associate with Iran to seek to rekindle the flames of past Iranian culture and civilization and seek identity. Therefore, emphasis made by Iran on Iranian-Islamic civilization as a factor of regional unity and cooperation has had little appeal. These countries are suspicious of perceived goals of Iran as a revolutionary and Islamic state as well as a regional power. In addition, the neglect of this newly considered important region has made it very difficult for Iran to compete with Russia, as well as unequal levels of competition with regional and extra-regional powers such as Russia, China, the United States, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.

E. Modern and postmodern⁵⁵ epistemic belt

The adoption of Resolution 598 and the end of the Iraq war against Iran, the revision of the constitution, and the election of Mr. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to the presidency were among the

⁵⁵ In this article, modern and postmoderns mean Western-nationalist trends in Iran's foreign policy, which are converging and coordinated with global currents, especially capitalist currents, and seek to improve the relations of the West in general and the United States in particular. They are elites and social forces that influenced by worldwide currents and seeking to improve Iran's image, adapt it to the conditions of the international system and rebuild Iran's relations with the West and the United States. These tendencies are under the influence of western modernity and against the traditionalist-Islamist currents that promote opposition to the West, especially America and Israel, as well as links with the Islamic world and Eastern countries, including Russia and China. Modern currents seek to present a normal image of Iran in the international system and join the world economic system and remove sanctions through stable and long-term cooperation with America. According to them, Iran's national interests lie in geopolitical convergence with the West and the expansion of secular trends in Iran's governance system.

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factors that greatly influenced the policy-making process and how the elites thought and decided on the major issues of the country.⁵⁶ The devastation of the war and the resulting financial and moral problems, the problem of immigrants and prisoners of war, the destruction of production centers, the decline of financial capital, the economic blockade, and generally the economic turmoil and domestic policy bottlenecks, threatened the very existence of the Islamic Republic. While pursuing the extreme policy of disregarding international arrangements during the eight years of war, it had not met any international appeals made by Iran. Under the influence of these factors, the government gradually, reluctantly accepted the realities of the international system and the domestic and critical conditions. In fact, the practical behavioral policy of Iran on the foreign policy scene of the second decade of the revolution can be categorized in the context of normalizing relations regarding national interests and regional arrangements and the avoidance of provoking others.⁵⁷

With the advent of the presidency of Khatami, the process continued more rapidly. Peacemaking, tensions, confidence building, dialogue, and multilateralism were considered foreign policy objectives during this period. Dialogue among civilizations

⁵⁶ Amir Mohammad Haji-yousefi. "Iran's Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad: From Confrontation to Accommodation." *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 9, (2010): 20.

⁵⁷ Ali Reza Azgandi. *Siasate Khareji Iran* [Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran]. Tehran: Qomes Publication, (2002): 19.

emphasizes the logic of concept rather than conflict, which has these characteristics and behavioral principles. Conceptual logic recognizes another existence and considers it to have an independent legal value; rejects cultural-civilizational absolutism and believes in cultural pluralism - while recognizing the right of others to self-righteousness; changing the way individual and national identities are acquired and does not define it in opposition to others.⁵⁸ Khatami proposed a dialogue of civilizations, a policy of de-escalation, which meant cooperation, interdependence, diplomacy, treaties, negotiations, bargaining, reconciliation, and economic cooperation. In fact, this signaled his awareness and aristocracy of two main problems in the foreign relations of Iran. First, that the relationship Iran has with the outside world are suffering from a seizure that will continue to the detriment of Iran; second, at least part of this seizure is the responsibility of Iranian diplomacy that must be resolved.⁵⁹ De-escalation means that in its foreign policy, Iran seeks to eliminate the misunderstandings accumulated in the past in an effort to put an end to any kind of international strife and concern with the existing international realities.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Dehghani Firouzabadi, *Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 123

⁵⁹ Bijan Asadi. *Siasate Khareji Dolate Eslahat: Mofaghitha va Shekastha* [foreign policy of the reformist: Successes and failures]. Tehran: Baz Press. (2008): 74.

⁶⁰ Peter Mandaville. "Islam and International Relations in the Middle East: From Umma to Nation State," in *International Relations of the Middle East*, 5th ed, Louise Fawcett, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2019).

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The State Department has always played a decisive role in the constructive interaction with the world. Principles and ideas of constructive engagement with the world include avoidance of tension, rationality and rigor in foreign policy, confidence building, global image and prestige, active and dynamic diplomacy, and efforts to balance and improve relations with world countries.⁶¹ One of the most important developments in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran was the transfer of responsibility for nuclear negotiations to the State Department. Prior to that, the Supreme National Security Council oversaw the negotiations, which provided the nuclear issue with a security profile and made it difficult to move diplomatically.⁶² In fact, because the present government of President Hassan Ruhani sought to move the Iranian nuclear file from a critical and security situation, to a normal one, was the first issue in selecting the right people with a successful diplomatic background. For this reason, Mohammad Javad Zarif was appointed Foreign Minister and Head of the Nuclear Negotiation Team, who had a long history of international negotiations.⁶³ Zarif also argued that sanctions had hurt the ordinary people more than anything else, and these ordinary people

⁶¹ Shahram Akbarzadeh and Dara Conduit. "Rouhani's First Two Years in Office: Opportunities and Risks in Contemporary Iran," in *Iran in the World*, Shahram Akbarzadeh and Dara. Conduit, eds. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, (2016): 12.

⁶² Duncombe, "Representation, Recognition and Foreign Policy," 639.

⁶³ Christopher A. Ford. "Thinking About Iran's Nuclear Future," in *Iran's Nuclear Programme: Strategic Implications*, Joachim Krause, ed. London: Routledge, (2011): 178-179.

were not willing to give up their rights to the government. The other side had not yet realized that in the world of today this could not be done at the expense of others. Progress had been made and that there was a need to make others realize that only through a win-win play could collective gain be achieved.⁶⁴ For the State Department, constructive and effective engagement based on engagement and dialogue of equal standing, respect and mutual benefit, reduction of hostility and mutual tension, and mutual trust should be at the top of the foreign policy goals of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the age of globalization and era in the international system, the period of voluntary isolation in international relations had passed, and the absence of role-playing or absence in the regional and international arenas was not a privilege, but a weakness.⁶⁵ Finally, the characteristic of an interactive approach was that it is neither passive nor active (aggressive), but acts as mutually beneficial with constructive cooperation because it had a common interest for all those involved, and a preventive approach in the face of overreaching and bullying. In balanced conditions, it tries to utilize the win-win in the game

⁶⁴ Ramin Ghayour and Haniye Jafari. "Soft Power and Iran's Nuclear Diplomacy and world powers (Case Study: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action)." *Iranian Research Letter of International Politics*, 4, no. 2, (2017): 96-97.

⁶⁵ Osiewicz. *Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 12-15.

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and maximizes the interests of both parties.⁶⁶

Many people also think that foreign policy decision-making and policy-making is only carried out and implemented by the State Department, while the State Department is only one of the relevant institutions involved in the decision-making process and structure. The Third Development Plan emphasizes that the State Department is the only organization that will oversee all foreign relations, and that other agencies and units that have somehow been operating overseas or whose activities and actions have affected foreign relations. The policies are communicated by the State Department, but in practice, a multitude of decision-making centers and organizations, and different and inconsistent policies by foreign policy bodies as well as the direct action of various governmental and non-governmental institutions to negotiate with foreign political figures and centers are among the factors which Questions the State Department's rational role in foreign affairs. Failure to co-ordinate cultural, commercial, military, and security organizations with the State Department, causes disparities and interference in foreign policy by unusual personalities and devices, parallel actions, and sometimes opposition to foreign policy, and are not only endangering national security, but also Ministry spending. This has grown unprecedentedly in the foreign affairs sector and has been pursuing a lack of independence from the State

⁶⁶ Lejla Jafari, Ali Alihosseini, and Seyyedjavad Emanjomehzadeh. "Discourse analysis of the moderate government's foreign policy in Iran." *Teorija in Praksa* 55, no. 1, (2018): 143.

Department for some time.

VI. Conclusion

In this study, the authors examined the epistemic systems and the protection of Iranian foreign policy. The Shi'ite epistemic belt is based on the jurisprudence of the jurist. The leader of the Islamic Revolution is seen as a religious authority and the ultimate arbiter of Iranian politics. Although it has led to the creation of soft power in the region for the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iran has had influence in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine producing various interpretations of Islam and the Shi'ite intellectual tendencies among politicians. At times, they carry out theoretical measures as well as over-emphasis on Shi'ite indicators leading to other Islamic State forming a negative stance against Iran and undermining the national identity and interests of Iran. The epistemic belt of Islam is one of the important aspects of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran that aims to create a global Islamic order to invite and unite all Muslims. For Khomeini, the alternative to liberating Muslims from Western dependency and overcoming backwardness due to Western hegemonic domination could be the uniting of Muslims. Although Iran has shown its desire for unity among Muslims, including Muslims across the Middle East, the Arab countries in the region have not only declared their opposition to the Iranian leadership in the Arab world, but even more since the very beginning of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the relations between the Persian Gulf

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countries and the Islamic Republic became strained. In addition, support for the unity of Islam by Iran and the liberation of Palestine has had entailed enormous costs for Iran. Israeli leaders vehemently called for a global confrontation with the policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran concerning the annihilation of Israel.

The epistemic belt of the revolution is organized to change the status quo. This reflects the conditions that make the equation of power in international politics unfair. While antagonism to the United States is costly for Iran, Iran has opted to diversify its relations with East-West politics and relations with South America without paying attention to the fact that most Asian and Latin American countries look to the West. The Islamic Republic of Iran has prioritized its foreign policy in the National Knowledge Belt regarding relations with the Central Asian countries, including Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Following the independence of the Central Asian republics and the end of Soviet domination over the region, Iran, with a variety of geographical, historical, and cultural ties, discovered many capacities to serve its national interests. The varied developments in these countries, on the one hand, and the neglect of policymakers in the region, on the other hand, led to the failure of Iranian foreign policy to pursue failed national interests. Iran is unaware that these countries have become independent since their independence from the Soviet Union, so these countries are less inclined to associate with Iran to seek or rekindle the flames of the past Iranian culture and civilization and seek identity.

Therefore, the emphasis of Iran on Iranian-Islamic civilization as a factor of regional unity and cooperation has had little appeal. The modern and postmodern epistemic belt accepted the realities of the international system and the domestic and critical conditions, given that the pursuit of excessive policy of disregard for international arrangements during the eight years of war did not satisfy Iranian international revisionist demands. Indeed, the practical behavioral policy of Iran in the foreign policy scene of the second decade of the revolution can be framed as a policy of normalizing relations, national interests and regional arrangements and the avoidance of provoking others. The State Department has always played a decisive role in the constructive interaction with the world. However, in practice, the multiplicity of conflicting and contradictory decision-making centers and organizations by different bodies in foreign policy, as well as the direct action of various governmental and non-governmental institutions to negotiate with foreign political figures and centers, are among the factors that undermine State Department rational function. It casts doubt on foreign relations, and its continuation will naturally not only slow down the implementation of the policies adopted, but may also play a role in thwarting the efforts of the State Department, the Secretary of State, and senior staff. The layers of the epistemic apparatus governing the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran include the layers of Shi'ite, Islamic, revolutionary, national, and modern factors. These epistemic layers bring with them power and create institutions. These layers of

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knowledge should not be one-sided and fanatical. All of these protective belts should be used to safeguard the national interests of the Iranian nation.

Table 2: Iran foreign policy protective belts

Epistemic belts	Basics of the situation	Functions and Results	Obstacles
Shi'a Episteme	Shi'ite, Jurisprudential Province, Shi'a Clerical Institutions, Shi'a Jurisprudence, The Main Basis and Determinant of General Policies on War, Peace, Negotiation	Shi'ite expansion, defending Shi'ites, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Hezbollah	Sectarian warfare and activation of Sunni and Shi'a Divisions, activation of Sunni political Islam and various patterns of caliphate revival
Islam episteme	Political Islam, Unity of the Islamic World, Standing Against the West and Secularism, Islamic Laws, Attempting to Affiliate and Influence Muslim Countries in the Region, Islamic Culture and Communications Organization	Working with Sunni Muslim countries, rejecting Israel, defending Palestine, shaping Islamic regionalism and creating an Islamic Ummah	Sunni Arabism, secretive relationship of some Islamic countries with Israel, Israeli opposition to all Iranian policies, cost-effectiveness
Revolutionary episteme	The collectivist approach, the strategy of protest against capitalism, the axis of resistance	East-oriented approaches to China and Russia, fostering relations with revolutionary Latin American	China and Russia abuse of Iran, relations with dictatorships that fall one by

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	and persistence, being different, dealing with the disadvantaged and the oppressed, the military institutions and the parties and the masses support this practice.	countries, good relations with Iraq, Syria and North Korea, critical dialogue with Europe, anti-Americanism	one, opposition to the US has cost Iran a lot, Europe and the US are not separated
National episteme	Wisdom of Mazda'i, Cyrus, Achaemenid, Nowruz, Iranian Celebrations, Farsi Language, Ferdowsi's poems in Shahnameh, Hafez, Antiquity, Ancient Inscriptions	Attention to Farsi-speaking countries, especially the emphasis on public diplomacy and the great cultural Iran in relations with Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, Dialogue among Civilizations	Ethnic and sectarian identities oppose Iranian national influence; Caliphate-based Islamic approaches seek to destroy Iranian Farsi language and destroy Iranian culture
Modern and postmodern episteme	National government, secularism, humanities, information age, globalization, positivism, support from university elite, connecting to international currents, scientific development,	National interests, realistic approach, balance-sheet strategy, lack of real friends and foes, international trade and economy	The reaction of the government in Iran, literature critical of the government

	department state	of		
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Source: Designed by the authors.

In general, the foreign policy system in Iran is complex and is formed under the influence of various factors. The dynamics of Iran's foreign policy in the regional and international system is formed based on multilateral factors that are influenced by international and regional components. Considering the non-democratic and elitist environment of Iran's foreign policy, public opinion plays a lesser role in the design and construction of Iran's foreign policy making. Various regional and international changes, especially any changes in the relations between Iran and the United States and issues related to Iran's nuclear program, can affect Iran's foreign policy in the Middle East and Asia. These effects have a great impact on the regional security system, especially on the countries of the region, including Saudi Arabia, Israel, Russia, and China. Iran's internal developments, including the expansion of secular social movements in Iran, especially from democracy and secularism perspective, can change Iran's foreign policy. The formation of the women, life, freedom movement and the awakening of secularism in Iran in the form of the women's movement has caused a crisis in Iran's foreign policy in the world and has increased the attention of Western and Asian countries to human rights issues in Iran. Also, the crisis in Iran's relations with international organizations can have profound

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effects on Iran's foreign policy in the future. Not to mention that the most important issue in Iran's foreign policy is relations with the US which can transform Iran's foreign policy and its relations with the regional and international system. Any expansion of Iran-US relations and the change in Iran's situation in the international system and the reducing of Iran's international sanctions could accelerate Iran's accession to the international economy and expand the power of modern and postmodern political currents in Iran. These currents can expand Iran's cultural links with the international system and Western countries, and subsequently, the expansion of these links will lead to the expansion of democracy and secularism in Iran's political environment and the reduction of the power of Islamists and anti-Western -US tendencies in the decision-making environment of Iran's foreign policy.

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