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Volume2, Issue1, Spring and Summer 2026



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of Mashhad





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CONTENTS

International Relations Theories & COVID19- Pandemic (A Comparative Study) Hakem Ghasemi, Aram Hassanzad	6
Paradigms for Philosophy of Food Politics Rohollah Eslami	21
The Evolution of Organisational Leadership (OL) in Iran: A Historical and Theoretical Analysis Babak Moradi	42
The Impact of Sanctions on Iran-China Trade Interactions: Political Risks and Financial Flexibility Fatemeh Mahrough, Aboalghasem Shahriari, Fatemeh Sanisel	82
Agents 'all the way down': An Iranian critique of structure-war linkage Seyed Ahmad Fatemi Nejad	99
The Iranian Spirit: Existential Logic and Existential Threat Behzad Attarzadeh	118
Iran in UAE Foreign Policy (2018-1992):The UAE's Search for Identity Sam Mohammadpour	137
The Philosophical Foundations of the Idea of Iran in Medieval Islamic Governmentality Mohammad Osmani, Seyyad Hossein Athari, Morteza Manshadi	146
Women and the Environment; New Actors in the Transformation of the Global Order Fatemeh Zolfagharian	163
Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and Order in International Relations Mahdi Ansari	178
Militarized Masculinity and the Legitimacy of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (2005-1988) Farideh Mohammad Alipour, Mohadeseh Shabani	193

International Relations Theories & COVID19- Pandemic (A Comparative Study)

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Abstract

COVID-19 has brought about a more nuanced view in which natural phenomena, such as disease, influence international relations. International relations theories tend to analyze current events worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic, as one of these events that has affected the political dimension of countries, is analyzed within four main international relations theories (realism, liberalism, constructivism, and world system theory). In these theories we argue that international relations theories are offer informed predictions as to how states (what realists focus on it), organizations (what liberalism focus on it), structure and agent (what constructivism focus on it) and world system (what world system theory focus on it) would respond to the pandemic and what is their solution to this problem in these problem-solving theories.

Keywords

COVID-19, International Relations theory, Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, World system theory.

Introduction

The world population is facing an unprecedented challenge brought about by the outbreak of the virus known as 'Coronavirus' (COVID-19). It is believed to have first emerged in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, on January 12, 2020, before spreading worldwide (Idris, 2021, p. 23). The COVID-19 pandemic is the largest in the globalized world. As the coronavirus spreads globally and disrupts the world's political, economic, and social fabric, several forces that have gained momentum and strength during

the last decade are now converging as a formidable force during the pandemic. Focusing on resolving international conflicts and problems and on achieving cooperation and lasting peace in International Relations through interdependence is essential. In the discipline of international relations, there are contending general theories or theoretical perspectives.

COVID-19 has brought about a more nuanced view in which natural phenomena, such as disease, influence international relations. Unlike conventional warfare, coronavirus is a unique, faceless, non-discriminatory war; its movement is not governed by conventions or protocol, except maybe WHO regulations, nor does it seek to take over government or to consolidate any mineral wealth. In fact, it is ruthless, fleet-footed, and metaphorically a ruthlessly effective army.

IR theory cannot help solve any of the current problems related to the global spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). What IR theory can do, however, is offer informed predictions about how states will react to crises, and it can help us understand why states react the way they do – principally, in this case, via realism. As realists would expect, when crises hit, it is not international organizations, not even the World Health Organization (WHO) or NGOs, that citizens turn to first. It is their own respective governments that citizens ask to take the necessary actions to protect them from the threat and to provide for relief efforts. In the absence of a global authority governing international relations, the nation-state is proving once more to be the leading actor in global politics (Kliem, 2020, p. 1).

While Liberals in international relations theory follow an optimistic ‘glass-half-full’ perspective on the world stage, humanity is believed to believe in cooperation. Moreover, states when the fates of states are bound together, liberals claim, they must cooperate or pay a very high price. Moreover, constructivist theory sees the world, and what we can know about the world, as socially constructed. This view concerns the nature of reality and knowledge, also called ontology and epistemology in research language. World-systems theory has influenced many areas of contemporary social science. The times when epidemic diseases disrupt or interrupt the social order are also when the search for new political beginnings intensifies (Aydemir, 2021, p. 109). It was elaborated by Immanuel Wallerstein, based on a wide study of contemporary history and a detailed critique of global capitalism. The research method in this paper is qualitative, and the approach is descriptive-analytical, with a comparative study of the COVID-19 pandemic across international relations theories (realism, liberalism, constructivism, world-system theory).

1. IR theories

Studies in International Relations (IR) are organized into two or three schools. For example, it can be divided into three categories: “traditional theories, global society theories, and neo-Marxist theories”. Barry Buzan identified the theories of international relations as “conservatism, liberalism, and radicalism”. Indeed, realism, liberalism, and Marxism are the fundamental divisions common across different studies. On the other hand, Shimko used the basic division of realism and liberalism and further elaborated it into Machiavellianism, Grotianism, and Kantianism. As understood from the classifications and conceptualizations, they all set forth the different aspects of similar approaches. For example, the concepts of traditional classic theories, realism, and conservatism are used to explain the realist approach’s basic arguments. Similarly, the theories of global society, pluralism, and liberalism can be named under pluralism or liberalism. They can also be named under Kantianism, Grotianism, communitarianism, cosmopolitanism, and functionalism. The third group, which is clas-

sified as neo-Marxist, globalist, and radical, can be grouped with the concepts of Third World theories, Neo-Marxist theories, structuralist theories, and dependency theories (Ari, 2018, p. 3).

IR scholars are often criticized for engaging in what seems a purely academic exercise, centered on an obsession with theory and abstract debates. Furthermore, true enough, IR theory is ill-suited to providing pre-packaged solutions to current problems, but many scholars will argue that that is not their business. IR theory can provide insights into international behavior. It may provide informed predictions about how international affairs may evolve and how states may react to shocks, but it cannot prescribe a course of action. Moreover, IR theory is not, in fact, a homogeneous, coherent 'theory', but a diverse set of theories and approaches that examine different problems and phenomena in world affairs from different ontological and epistemological positions. No one theory can provide a comprehensive interpretation or predictions of world politics. However, taken together, these theories can help decision makers and the public fill the gaps in the puzzle we call 'International Relations' (Ghincea, 2020)

2. COVID-19 and Its International Impacts

The emergence of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, marked one of the most consequential events of the early twenty-first century. It profoundly reshaped modern life, affecting global trade, economic systems, and international relations. COVID-19 rapidly escalated into a global public health crisis, resulting in approximately 400 million confirmed infections and more than five million deaths worldwide. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially designated the outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). In an effort to contain the spread, governments around the world adopted non-pharmaceutical interventions such as lockdowns and travel restrictions, which, in turn, led to massive unemployment and economic downturns. From China's initial reluctance to cooperate with WHO experts to the former U.S. administration's decision to suspend WHO funding, the overall global response was often fragmented and insufficiently coordinated (Pattanshetty, 2022, p. 21). The emergence of COVID-19 had a profound impact on international relations, exposing both the strengths and weaknesses of global cooperation. The early stages of the pandemic revealed tensions among major powers, as China initially hesitated to share critical information and collaborate with World Health Organization (WHO) experts. This lack of transparency contributed to growing mistrust between nations. Additionally, the former U.S. administration's decision to suspend funding to the WHO further deepened divisions within the international community, highlighting the politicization of global health governance. The fragmented and poorly coordinated global response to the pandemic demonstrated how fragile international solidarity could be when confronted with a crisis of this magnitude. COVID-19 ultimately reshaped diplomatic priorities, underscoring the urgent need for stronger global health diplomacy and more resilient international cooperation mechanisms (Mngomezulu, 2020, p. 124). COVID-19 has significantly affected human life and global systems, leading to severe economic disruptions, mass displacement, and a rise in poverty levels worldwide. The pandemic also caused labor and essential raw material shortages, limiting vaccine production and distribution. COVID-19 can enter the human body through various pathways, such as the respiratory system, eyes, and even through droplets that can travel considerable distances. Despite clear preventive measures, many individuals neglected safety protocols or refused vaccination, decisions that cost millions of lives. Preventive actions such as regular handwashing for at least 20 seconds, wearing masks, and maintaining hygiene

remain crucial. Although vaccines are not entirely effective against every variant, they have proven to be highly safe and substantially reduce severe illness and death. The virus continues to mutate, with specific variants, such as Delta, being far more infectious and dangerous. Ensuring strict safety standards during vaccine development and maintaining personal protective practices are essential for global health protection (Valmiki, 2022, p. 803).

2-1. Realism & COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is a substantive crisis for world politics and an epistemological crisis for international relations theory, particularly the dominant tradition of international realism. Realism – stripped to its minimalist, modernist, structural essentials in the form of what Max Weber called an ideal type – implies that states are exclusively important in world politics. Other actors may exist, but they represent little beyond noise or an error in the equation. States guide their behavior by national interest defined in terms of power, particularly military power. These are the structural requirements for survival in an anarchic, hostile world and the epistemological foundations of the national security state. Realism claims that states can either follow the rules, become failed states, or cease to exist (Hariman, 2020, p. 1).

2-1-1. Realism Principles

Among mainstream theories of international relations, Realism, or political realism, is a view of international politics that emphasizes its competitive and conflictual aspects. It is usually contrasted with idealism or liberalism, which tends to emphasize cooperation. Realists consider the principal actors in the international arena to be states, which are concerned with their own security, pursue their own national interests, and struggle for power. The downside of the realists' emphasis on power and self-interest is often their skepticism about the relevance of ethical norms to relations among states. National politics is the realm of authority and law, whereas international politics, they sometimes claim, is a sphere without justice, characterized by active or potential conflict among states (Korab-Karpowicz, 2017, p. 1).

Several core realist assumptions inform the forecast's assessment. The most significant of these are that 'great powers', in particular the U.S. and China, but also Russia, shape the international order and that the interactions between them determine the prospects for global peace and stability. The world of the forecast is one in which the balance of power—understood as the Waltzian conception of a system-determined distribution of power among dominant states (Ruth, 2020, p. 1)—is central.

This current crisis reinforces several key aspects of realist theory. Firstly, that nation-states are by far the largest actors when it comes to responding to global emergencies. The opposite viewpoint is often expressed by experts and commentators on globalization who say that non-governmental organizations, multinational corporations, international terrorists, global markets, and others are undermining the sovereignty of states and pushing the state toward decreasing relevance (Nicholson, 2020)

2-1-2. Realism and International Issues

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global challenge calling for a global response. However, the actual responses of states, while exhibiting considerable international cooperation, are predominantly competitive and self-centered. Realism is generally pessimistic about the prospects for cooperation and

mutual support among states. It would immediately predict the national self-help and “us first” mentality that characterizes the global management of COVID-19 and its consequences. Travel and entry bans, international scapegoating, great power competition, and pharmaceutical protectionism are ubiquitous (Basrur, 2020, 1, 3).

The realist approach to international politics and foreign policy devotes little, if any, systematic attention to the problem of potential pandemics such as the COVID-19 outbreak. Like all theoretical frameworks, realism is inherently limited in scope: it focuses primarily on the constraining effects of international anarchy, the reasons great powers compete for advantage, and the enduring obstacles to effective cooperation among states. As a result, it has relatively little to say about interspecies viral transmission, epidemiology, or public health best practices, and it does not provide guidance on practical questions such as whether individuals should begin working from home. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, realism can still offer valuable insights into some of the political and strategic issues raised by the COVID-19 pandemic (Walt, 2020).

Stephan Walt, as a realist scholar of international relations, states that: “The pandemic will strengthen the state and reinforce nationalism. Governments of all types will adopt emergency measures to manage the crisis, and many will be loath to relinquish these new powers when the crisis is over. What will not change is the fundamentally conflictive nature of world politics. Previous plagues—including the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919—did not end great-power rivalry nor usher in a new era of global cooperation. Neither will COVID-19. We will see a further retreat from hyper-globalization, as citizens look to national governments to protect them and as states and firms seek to reduce future vulnerabilities. In short, COVID-19 will create a world that is less open, less prosperous, and less free. It did not have to be this way, but the combination of a deadly virus, inadequate planning, and incompetent leadership has placed humanity on a new and worrisome path. Stephen M Walt, ‘A World Less Open, Prosperous, and Free’ in ‘How the World Will Look after the Coronavirus Pandemic’ (Allen: 2020).

2-1-3. States and The COVID-19 Pandemic

Across the world, states have shifted their international activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in different ways. For instance, many governments have offered international aid, closed their borders, and given assistance to key export industries. For sub-state regions, the crisis has also affected their international relations (Ulises, 2020, p. 1). The coronavirus crisis is rattling 19 highly indebted European nations and exposing a potentially fatal lack of communitarian spirit within the EU. European countries have applied a “me-first” response, imposed export bans on vital medical equipment, and put up border controls that have left European citizens stranded. EU members failed to give desperately needed medical assistance and supplies to Italy during the outbreak. The UN, meanwhile, has performed no genuinely helpful service whatsoever during the global crisis (Musmar, 2020, p. 31).

Realists also point out that international institutions do not enable states to concentrate on greater long-term gains for everyone. Instead, international anarchy forces states to treat international organizations and institutions essentially like the international system itself: as an arena for zero-sum competition. Indeed, as realism predicts, the World Health Organization (WHO) has become highly politicized. (Basrur, 2020, 4). For instance, rather than cooperate on a joint plan to share expertise and increase the global availability of medical equipment, states have imposed export bans, engaged in equipment poaching, and engaged in beggar-thy-neighbor bidding wars. Rather than cooperate to develop a vac-

cine together, 'vaccine nationalism' has taken place, with countries unilaterally pursuing independent research programs, even attempting to capture research teams from other countries (Owen, 2020). The impact of COVID-19 is expected to be very severe and drastic, as the world still awaits an Anti-Virus. There was a worldwide lockdown when this virus began spreading at an alarming rate. Many governments have initiated nationwide lockdowns in order to prevent its spread; however, it is still spreading rapidly, even though China, where it initially emerged, has been far more successful in preventing its further spread and has contained it very well. More than 100 countries had closed their borders. The world economy had surely taken a big hit, and some of the most affected sectors were the service sector, food and hospitality sectors, import and export, and the aviation industry. (Muzaffer, 2020, p. 793).

3. Liberalism & COVID-19 Pandemic

Liberals state that, as the COVID-19 pandemic deepens, the need for international cooperation to address the twin health and economic crises has been highlighted. While much is made of the World Health Organization's failings, other international bodies have fared no better. In particular, the G20 – which styles itself as the "premier forum for international economic cooperation" – has been largely absent. Comprising the world's 20 largest economies, the G20 should be the natural forum for devising and steering the global response to the twin crises (Chodor, 2020).

3-1. Liberalism Principles

Liberalism, as it emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, was driven by the belief that wars and commerce were incompatible. The devastation of World War I and its aftermath set the stage for liberal idealism to become the forefront paradigm in rethinking how the world ought to be rearranged. The current liberal international order rests upon at least three crucial foundations: (1) the liberal ideology that emphasizes democratic values and norms; (2) the principle of multilateralism, which emphasizes international cooperation and management of international affairs through multilateral institutions; and (3) a group of defenders with common goals and shared commitment to preserve liberal values, norms, principles, and institutions (Huang, 2020, p. 2). The global interconnectivity among states is the key feature of the liberal viewpoint. Liberal theorists opposed Realism's 'zero-sum' perspective with a rigid assertion of a 'non-zero-sum' view of global politics and the international sphere. These have effectively recognized operating standards and endorse a consistent approach to the rule of law amongst contributing states (Aybet, 2020, p. 500).

Liberalism is characterized by the progressive growth of international institutions, regimes, and rules designed to collectively manage, regulate, and govern multiple aspects of world affairs, from security to economics to cultural heritage to the environment. Second, the liberal order is marked by the spread of capitalist modes of production and accelerating processes of economic globalization. These are mostly organized around neo-liberal logics, which require a scaling back of the state and thrive on the (relatively) free movement of resources, goods, finance, and people worldwide (Bettiza, 2020).

3-1-1. Liberalism and International Issues

A pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease (WHO, 2010). Because of poor natural immunity, a newly emerging disease may cause rapid spread across communities and countries (Azmi, 2020, p. 91). Undoubtedly, COVID-19, as an international issue first and foremost, constitutes a ferocious pandem-

ic and a human tragedy that swept across the globe, resulting in a massive health crisis, disproportionate social order, and colossal economic loss. It has created a substantial negative impact on the global economy, prompting governments, firms, and individuals to scramble for adjustments. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has distorted the world's operating assumptions, revealing the absolute lack of resilience of the dominant economic model to respond to unplanned shocks and crises. It has exposed the weakness of the over-centralization of complex global supply and production chains and the fragility of global economies, whilst highlighting weak links across industry (Mohammad, 2020, p. 3). States are strategically interdependent; as a result, the actions of any one actor can affect the strategic calculations of another (Noori, 2020, p. 160).

COVID-19 is often seen as yet another nail in the coffin of the liberal international order. The current Covid-19 crisis presents a clear test case to take stock of the current state of the liberal international order (Debre, 2020, p. 15). The United States has sought to corner scarce medical supplies, European states have failed to coordinate policy, and China and the United States are squabbling over responsibility (Jiangtao, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic is a wake-up call for multilateralism. Trying to cope with the immediate, devastating effects of the virus, nations have turned to imposing unprecedented executive measures, including border closures. However, a virus knows no borders. All countries are affected. We must remain united in our shared humanity. The fight against this global pandemic, which is taking so many lives and challenging our societies, requires greater international cooperation and worldwide solidarity (Drian, 2020).

3-1-2. Cooperation In the Pandemic Era

The global economy, for instance, is a complex network of trade, finance, and manufacturing that places a premium on cooperation. From this perspective, states must cooperate to stem pandemics that flow seamlessly across the world and impose high costs on all societies. They must share knowledge and material resources to counter a scourge that harms them all. They certainly do so, for example, in US-led efforts to ensure the reliable availability of equipment to combat pandemics. However, they do not cooperate consistently. There has been insufficient cooperation in providing support to countries with weaker states that are unable to control the spread of the disease on their own effectively. The \$8 billion raised by the EU-led global health pledging conference on May 4, 2020, has—credit some countries prepared to act cooperatively—gone some way to rectifying this, as has the replenishment of GAVI (the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization). However, while the principle of supporting each other was accepted, the financing raised is only a fraction of what is needed.² And rather than strengthen the World Health Organization (WHO), the international institution responsible for coordinating the global response to the virus, there have been systematic attempts to undermine and delegitimize it (Brown, 2020, p. 67).

The countries pledged to coordinate research efforts, increase the availability of medical equipment; mobilize “the full range” of policy instruments, including monetary and fiscal measures as well as targeted actions, to support workers, companies, and sectors most affected by the spread of COVID-19; task the finance ministers to coordinate weekly, and direct the IMF and the World Bank Group, as well as other international organizations, to support countries worldwide as part of a coordinated global response. G-7 coordination has not been unproblematic; however, there have been disagreements among G-7

foreign affairs ministers about how to refer to the virus (coronavirus or the “Wuhan virus”) and concerns about collaboration on vaccine research (Congressional Research Service, 2020, pp. 85-86).

The scale of the threat is such that it requires medical, social, and economic responses that both exceed the boundaries of individual state action and require consent at the individual level to be effective. It is thus a threat that needs to be addressed at individual, transnational, and trans governmental levels, utilizing state resources and requiring cooperation between states, of the kind achieved by the EU in July 2020 with the agreement on a Coronavirus recovery fund. It does not state that acting as self-interested actors in realist theory can be successfully addressed (Deyermund, 2020, p. 4).

At the end, cooperation would also have to be strengthened, because it is not enough to produce a vaccine: it has to be mass-manufactured and, if the disease is to be eradicated in every country, distributed equitably. This relates to a second reason that countries must cooperate—to address the substantial international inequalities in ability to respond to the pandemic, countries must cooperate to help the ‘poor and developing countries in the global community that are unable to control the virus on their own.

3.1.3. International Organizations and Pandemic

International organizations reflect the tendency of self-interested states to cooperate in order to minimize costs and maximize benefits. Organizations such as the World Health Organisation facilitate coordination among national health authorities, serve as channels for knowledge exchange, and provide forums for deliberation (Ghincea, 2020).

What sort of long-term institutional response can we expect? At the G20 meeting in April 2020, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for strengthening the WHO. However, we know the organization has had its problems and will likely continue to do so. From past and recent experience with responses to global crises or potential crises, there is little room for optimism about governments’ willingness to devote attention and resources beyond a limited point in time to longer-term preparedness. It may be time for a global push for a bigger public-private approach of the kind already in existence in a small way (Basrur, 2020).

While the recent meeting of G20 finance ministers produced more concrete outcomes – namely a suspension of bilateral debt repayments for low-income countries – there were no new actions on the health crisis, and no response to International Monetary Fund pleas to bolster its resources. As former U.S. Treasury Secretary Larry Summers put it afterwards: “I had modest expectations, which were significantly disappointed.” The roots of this failure to rise to the challenge of COVID-19 stem from both the nature of the G20 itself and the broader international context in which it operates (Chodor, 2020).

Among most developed and major developing economies, economic growth at the beginning of 2020 was tepid but still estimated to be positive. Countries highly dependent on trade—Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, and South Korea—and commodity exporters are now projected to be the most negatively affected by the pandemic-driven slowdown in economic activity. In addition, travel bans and quarantines continue to take a heavy economic toll on a broad range of countries. The OECD notes that production declines in China have spillover effects worldwide, given China’s role in producing computers, electronics, pharmaceuticals, and transport equipment, and as a primary source of demand for many commodities. Across Asia, some forecasters argue that recent data indicate Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam could experience an economic recession in 2020 (Weiss, 2020, p. 86).

Initial efforts at coordinating the economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic across countries have been uneven. Governments are divided over the appropriate response and, in some cases, have acted unilaterally, particularly when closing borders and imposing export restrictions on medical equipment and medicine. An emergency meeting of G-7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States) finance ministers on March 3, 2020, fell short of the aggressive and concrete coordinated action that investors and economists had been hoping for, and U.S. and European stock markets fell sharply after the meeting. However, on March 16, 2020, the leaders of the G-7 countries held an emergency teleconference to coordinate policy responses to the economic fallout from the global spread of COVID-19. In the joint statement released by the G-7 leaders after the emergency teleconference summit, the leaders stressed they are committed to doing “whatever is necessary to ensure a strong global response through closer cooperation and enhanced cooperation of efforts.” (Congressional Research Service, 2020, 85, 86).

4. Constructivism & COVID-19 Pandemic

In constructivism, there is an interaction between the agents and structures, constructivists say. There is a pandemic that affects not only one country but the whole world, and poses a global risk. The important thing here is the presence of actors who can control the risk and what kind of discourse and language they use. While trust is one of the most important and effective factors in inter-state relations, trust has been replaced by risks due to its safety risks, and risks have become global (Nazli, 2020).

The structure of the international system and the interests of states are not objective facts but – to use Alexander Wendt’s famous words – “what states make of it.” They lie in the eye of the beholder who constructs them (hence the name of the theory) in the light of his understandings and beliefs. As a result, a state’s identity and political culture play an important role in making sense of a given international situation (Rausch, 2020).

Constructivism focuses on the power of norms and on how norms are challenged and replaced with new ones. Constructivists contributed to the process of norm diffusion. Policy, practice, and theory were once again walking hand in hand. Social norms are also central to constructivism. These are generally defined as ‘a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity. Constructivism is often regarded as stating the obvious, namely that actions, interactions, and perceptions shape social reality. Indeed, this core assumption is the source of the theory family’s name. According to constructivist scholars, international relations are not pre-given or fixed; instead, they are continuously constructed and reconstructed through the ideas, practices, and interactions of actors (Theys, 2018).

4-1. Constructivism Basis

Constructivists are interested in understanding the actor’s preferences. Usually, mothers fall into this category, as they apply a cognitive approach to studying the entire room’s culture, including individuals’ preferences and health records. The topic of history is frequently addressed, as well as the moral norms of the family or even of the partner. In a constructivist setting, the actors and systems co-develop. In this respect, constructivists do not fear long periods of lockdown, as they can adapt to changes in accordance with the factors at stake. In specific contexts, skepticism is tolerated. However, too much of it might be unhealthy under such ambiguous conditions. Skeptics might encourage individuals or the whole group to break the rules of social distancing due to their distrust in knowledge

and scientific judgments (Asmar, 2020)

However, the ideational side of debate, like norms, regional identities, and shared values, has been paid little attention, which should also be taken into account while shaping the decisions of the country. This concept has given rise to another theoretical perspective called 'constructivism'. Constructivism holds that human consciousness plays a key role in the international political system, as ideational factors determine states' interactions. Constructivists present an ideational view parallel to the materialist view of the world. Their primary focus is human consciousness and its role in world affairs. Constructivists hold that ideas rather than material forces create the global system. In other words, they believe that people make society and society makes people (Farooq, 2020, p. 241).

Constructivism holds that human consciousness plays a key role in the international political system, as states' interactions are determined by ideational factors. Constructivists are not the opposite of realists and liberals; they supplement the ongoing debate by adding a social dimension that realists and liberals ignore. It does not entirely rule out the presence of material factors in global affairs. However, they introduce a mind-over-matter perspective. They present an ideational view parallel to the materialist view of the world. Their primary focus is human consciousness and its role in world affairs. Constructivists hold that ideas rather than material forces create the global system. In other words, they believe that people make society and society makes people (Farooq, 2020, p. 242).

4-1-1. Constructivism In the Pandemic Era

One of the most important reasons for the importance of a constructive approach in international relations is its relevance to the question of states' identity (Haghi, 2020, p. 241). Constructivists argue that agency and structure are mutually constituted, meaning that structures influence agency and agency influences structures. Agency can be understood as the ability of someone to act, whereas structure refers to the international system that consists of material and ideational elements. Therefore, from a constructivist perspective, the COVID-19 crisis and its responses depend on our views and beliefs about it. The central dictum of the constructivist—"anarchy is what states make of it" (Theys, 2018, p. 1).

Therefore, a constructivist would ask: how does the pandemic change shared beliefs and identities, and what effect would these changes have on world affairs? If the pandemic produces new ideas and identities that promote competition and conflict, then international relations will be defined by conflict. Conversely, if the pandemic produces solidaristic and cooperative ideas and identities, then world affairs will be characterised by increased cooperation and harmony. The world is what we make of it; it is constructed by us according to our beliefs about what is appropriate (Ghincea, 2020)

Thus, it sees the lack of collective action in the face of the pandemic not as an inevitable product of the material reality of the world as it actually is, but as arising from a realist thought structure. To wit, states fail to cooperate despite the urgency of the Covid-19 crisis because they are weighed down by the unquestioned notion that, even amid a pandemic, self-help must come first and that the exercise of power must shape action. This worldview, for the constructivist, is an ideational construct that needs to be overridden if cooperation is to be achieved.

However, while the concept of ideational structure is helpful in challenging established modes of thinking (and consequent habits of action) over time, it is not particularly helpful in offering insights into the short-to-medium-term responses of states to crises like the pandemic or to anticipating what, in fashioning states' responses, might actually be doable and what probably will not. In short,

constructivism is not a predictive theory and tends to be non-falsifiable and, more pragmatically, lacking in much utility other than urging new thinking. How to get from the present ideational structure to a more desirable one when a crisis breaks out remains a knotty problem (Basrur, 2020, pp. 5-6).

5. World-systems theory and COVID-19

Developed by Immanuel Wallerstein, the theory of World-Systems maintains that the world economy has been divided into three categories: the “core,” the “semi-periphery,” and the “periphery,” in which the economically powerful states are in the core and the labor in the other two groups. The core countries, on which the semi-periphery and the periphery nations depend, are industrially active and economically and politically developed, as a result of which surplus-value “flows from the weaker countries (the periphery) to the core” (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 12).

The coronavirus crisis has led to widespread criticism of capitalism from various sources, with most calling for reform and more radical voices arguing for a new world system. To understand the connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and capitalism, we should explore the mechanisms of the capitalist world-system.

5-1. World-Systems Theory Principles

World-systems theory, first formulated by Immanuel Wallerstein, offers a new perspective on social and economic reality. The basic framework of world-systems theory is that the world can be divided into three stages of domestic economic development within the current world system and the global political economy. The different stages are: the core (highly developed economies), the semi-periphery (economies between the core and the periphery), and the periphery (developing economies). Countries are placed into one of the categories by determining the state's or geographic area's political and economic roles within the overall world system and world economy (van der Meer, 2017, p. 9). Wallerstein elaborates on the intricacies of those zones' relations: “The semiperipheral states which have a relatively even mix of production processes find themselves in the most challenging situation. Under pressure from core states and from peripheral states, their primary concern is to avoid slipping into the periphery and to do what they can to advance toward the core. Neither is easy, and both require considerable state interference with the world market. These semiperipheral states are the ones that put forward the most aggressive, publicly stated, so-called protectionist policies (Izovekov, 2020, p. 277).

Wallerstein was one of those refreshing types in an increasingly restrictive academy, the big picture sort rich with colour, engaged in splashing out portraits of historical development. Dreary minutiae and specialism were not for him, even if he could play the game when needed, and his quest in sociology and history was a bold commitment to seek “a more egalitarian world and a more libertarian one.” (Kampmark, 2019)

5-1-2. Core, peripheral, and semi-peripheral relations in the pandemic era

According to world-systems theory, the COVID-19 pandemic and the threat of increasing and more deadly pandemics are a product of this same late-imperialist development. Chains of global exploitation and expropriation have destabilized not only ecologies but the relations between species, creating a toxic brew of pathogens (Suwand, 2020).

The coronavirus pandemic is also a by-product of capitalism. The COVID-19 virus is generally traced

back to Wuhan, China, where large luxury markets sell animals for human consumption that, in Western cultures, we label as wild animals. It is believed that the virus infected a human through the consumption of a bat that had been infected by a pangolin, possibly the original carrier of the virus. While China is not traditionally the perfect example of capitalism, its authoritarian state does function with a capitalist economy, and so it aspires to constantly expand its territory and find new products to capitalize on, in this case, wild animals. Furthermore, because these markets are popular among more exclusive circles, the coronavirus spreads among the upper classes with the capital to travel abroad, and, thanks to our interconnected world, it quickly became a global pandemic.

Wallerstein states that: "a world-system is a social system, one that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence. Its life is made up of the conflicting forces that hold it together by tension and tear it apart as each group seeks eternally to remold it to its advantage. It has the characteristics of an organism, in that it has a lifespan over which its characteristics change in some respects and remain stable in others...Life within it is largely self-contained, and the dynamics of its development are largely internal" (Coccia, 2018, p. 460).

It is not only about China, however. Apart from the fact that diseases are common among Western pig herds, the core countries have played a significant role in expanding the capitalist system into (semi-) periphery regions. The burning down of the Amazon rainforest to make place for livestock consumed primarily by Western countries, or Small Island Developing States (SIDS), being on the verge of disappearance because historically Western countries have contributed to climate change in such a significant amount that the rise of sea level threatens SIDS' existence, are both caused by the principles of capitalism. Thus, the COVID-19 crisis clearly indicates the limits of capitalism. While it has brought an average growth in the wealth of the world population and we have a higher standard of living than the previous generations, capitalism has also increased inequalities between both individuals and regions, and it has eroded our ecological and climate systems by the endless extraction of finite resources to an extent that cannot be reversed anymore and we can only hope to halt it by exceeding a system that tells us that always having more is the key to happiness (simon, 2020)

6. Comparison of COVID-19 in international relations theories

Realism emphasizes the state's role in responding to the coronavirus pandemic. At the same time, as we illustrated, liberals focused on government cooperation and organizational support in developing the coronavirus vaccine. In contrast, constructivist thinking views both cooperation and conflict in terms of thought structures, which explains very little about responses to the current crisis. The interaction between states changes their interests and identities. World System Theory by Wallerstein suggests that the traditional division of the world into two parts, a center and a periphery, made place for a new sort of tripolar division, with the addition of a middle category, which Wallerstein calls the "semiperiphery". The rise of the so-called semi-periphery is driving a growing hierarchization of the global South, one of the most significant phenomena of the modern world economy.

Theory	Leading actor in problem-solving	Respond to Covid-19
Realism	states	States that rely on self-help have been seeking a vaccine against the pandemic.
Liberalism	Organizations/non-governmental organizations(NGO)	Organizations such as the G20 and other non-governmental organizations have developed vaccines against the coronavirus pandemic.
Constructivism	usually powerful ones, like leaders and influential citizens... agent-structure	agent-structure formula, and leaders would be placed in a problem-solving situation
World system	structure (core, semi-periphery, and periphery), core countries are characteristic of the world system	Doing Reform in the world economic capital system, a system that produced the coronavirus (capitalism)

Conclusion

International relations theory will not give us a vaccine against COVID-19. Neither generates the sources for reconstruction during and after the pandemic. International relations theory provides the conceptual tools and categories to understand where and why we have underperformed, and where and how we can do better. IR theory cannot help solve any of the current problems regarding the global spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). What IR theory can do, however, is offer informed predictions about how states will react to crises, and it can help us understand why states react the way they do – principally, in this case, via realism. As realists would expect, when crises hit, it is not international organizations, not even the World Health Organization (WHO) or NGOs that citizens and states turn to first. However, we know the organization has had its problems and will likely continue to do so. At the end, cooperation would also need to be strengthened, as producing a vaccine is not enough. As liberals identified that: countries must cooperate to help the 'poor and developing countries in the global community that are unable to control the virus on their own and Constructivists argue that agency and structure are mutually constituted, which implies that structures influence agency and that agency influences structures and World system theory maintains that the world economy has been divided into three categories: the "core," the "semi-periphery," and the "periphery," where the economically powerful states are in the core, and the labor in the other two groups. As we imply, IR theories can offer a theoretical perspective on problem-solving and can guide and shed light on world crises, such as COVID-19.

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Paradigms for Philosophy of Food Politics

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Abstract

Politics is the planning and orientation that draws the intelligence of human communities to achieve different goals. Politics is a platform where players have the power to try to direct the game according to their own interests. Actors such as governments, organizations, parties, classes, movements, and companies make meaningful issues based on the terminal points they have outlined for themselves. Food is one of the most crucial aspects of human life. What is a healthy and standard food? What are the health regimes and the epistemic systems governing food diversity or plurality? What should be the bases for water, soil, seeds, and food management, and also for the food distribution systems? It all stems from the political philosophy often underlying food policies. What kind of epistemic devices and networks of thought do food policymakers in the world refer to? In this paper, drawing on the theoretical paradigm framework developed by Thomas Kuhn and the normative approach, we analyze eight main philosophical paradigms in relation to food policy. In a sense, there are eight philosophical paradigms in the existing world food policy; depending on the epistemology or ideological apparatus (political apparatus), each political actor has a different type of thought and action.

Keywords

Food policy, political philosophy, paradigm, epistemology

Introduction

One of the sources of power for political actors is access to food production and distribution cycles. All human beings need food, and from this point of view, a government, organization, or company which have a good food policy will have a better place in the structure of international relations. All hegemonic powers plan for food and try to direct strategic foodstuffs and international food policy orientations to their advantage. One of the leading indicators of the evolution of history, for example, was the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern era of natural and human technologies that changed human diets. In this process, the traditional production methods were replaced by mechanical and modern

technologies, which led European countries to dominate India, Egypt, North America, and Latin America. In fact, the introduction of modernity began with mass-produced food policies and the use of diets structured in England and later in the USA. Food policy has evolved since the 1990s, driven by the development of information technologies. There is a kind of self-awareness and return to nature, with non-governmental actors placing a great deal of emphasis on the environment, care for soil and water, and on keeping up with nature, challenging the uniform policies of globalization in the food sector.

The question for this paper is what kind of political philosophy do food policies embody? The mass production policy, which supports organic cultivation, preserves food diversity, and prioritizes only a few strategic food commodities, promotes self-sufficiency in agricultural products, emphasizes environmental protection, encourages vegetarianism, and reduces meat consumption. It also involves separating halal¹ food products from Haram² products, reflecting a specific political philosophy. We believe that basic awareness and epistemological apparatus have a fundamental role in food policy. This article will analyze eight main philosophical paradigms in the field of food policy. Political actors, such as governments, international organizations, parties, corporations, guilds, and even classes, can be categorized into eight distinct paradigms. Sometimes they themselves produce hegemonic policies, and sometimes they resist the legitimacy of diets. There is considerable conflict among the eight philosophies, and each tries to promote and support a specific food policy. This article will analyze the eight paradigms of liberalism, Marxism, phenomenology, Islamism, feminism, nationalism, postmodernism, and technologists. These paradigms are behind the minds of political actors and consciously and unconsciously shape the food policy orientation.

Theoretical framework

This writing is based on the normative approach, which is embedded in political philosophy (Rimer, 2014: 73). In this sense, the paper is situated within the context of interdisciplinary studies between agricultural (food policy) and political sciences. To qualitatively analyze the phenomena of political philosophy in the field of food policy, we have employed three interpretive theories: paradigm, epistemology, and apparatus, each of which can help clarify the issue. Within each of these interpretive packages, there are semantic mechanisms that allow the interpretation of political philosophy paradigms and their implications for food policy.

What is the paradigm? Cohen's book, *The Structure of the World's Scientific Revolutions*, demonstrated that a theory was developed in the natural sciences and could revolutionize existing theories by gaining consensus among scientists. He argued that scientific theories are not continuous and cumulative, but rather revolutionary, and political dynasties have a history of revolution and rupture. So we face the paradigm, and especially in the humanities, there are always different paradigms in every subject. The consensus among scholars and think tanks is that the paradigm is acceptable (Kuhn, 2012). In the first phase, the purpose of the article is to illustrate the eight philosophical paradigms on food policy, all of which currently exist and compete with one another.

Epistemology? French post-structuralist thinker Foucault demonstrated, through the Use of Archae-

1. Halal foods are those produced and prepared according to the Islamic rules and regulations.

2. Haram is the opposite of Halal.

ological and genealogical methods, that human knowledge is produced within a network of power. That is, every knowledge is formed directly in relation to power, and there is always intense competition between epistemic devices or epistemologies. Knowledge is not impartial, scientific, positive, and humanistic, but always power-oriented, as Nietzsche analyzes, in epistemic systems (Foucault, 2002). We employ this theory to elucidate the relationship between power regimes and knowledge regimes in the text, demonstrating that all philosophical paradigms possess power-oriented wills and should not be regarded as impartial or scientific knowledge (Foucault, 1977).

Ideological Apparatus? Agamben, the postmodern Italian thinker, also highlights the ideological underpinnings of Foucault's theories. In his view, there are always political, trade, and class roots within the epistemic apparatus of knowledge, so that, as weapons, military and economic power are the sources of power, knowledge is the same as the apparatus. Knowledge is the dominant mechanism, and dominance without power and knowledge is not established without a network of relationships among political actors (Agamben, 2009). We utilize Agamben's theory to analyze each of the eight philosophical paradigms studied, examining a network of parties, institutions, pressure groups, governments, and international organizations that serve as mechanisms of power. In fact, human beings are always seeking to strengthen their position and utilize ideological knowledge and mechanisms to foster relationships based on their own interests. Every paradigm is like the dominant ideology of soft power. Table 1 presents the framework for the philosophy of food policy.

Table 1: Theoretical Framework of Food Policy Philosophy

framework theory	Thinker	Definition
Paradigm	Thomas Kuhn	Theoretical consensus of scientists, intellectual sharing, and the intellectual elite approved by the scientific elite.
Epistemology	Michel Foucault	Epistemology that has a two-way relationship with power regimes.
Ideological Apparatus	Giorgio Agamben	Intellectual apparatus and brain packs are ready to maintain and expand power.

1. Liberalism

Since 1990, liberalism has become the hegemonic idea. The central point of liberalism is the belief in freedom and individualism, in the sense that if one is to be abandoned and the ban is reduced, spontaneous order will produce the best (Wall, 2015: 14). The difference between humans and other beings lies in the degree of freedom and ability to use reason. Throughout history, humanity has been plagued by mythical, religious, philosophical, and ideological idols; only in the modern age has it been possible to achieve a rational civilization with the help of science. On the basis, liberalism draws on the theses of thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Charles de Montesquieu, John Stuart Mill, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Hayek, and John Rawls. This narrative now dominates all advanced countries in a way that has shaped the most fundamental paradigm of life since the Renaissance (Rawls, 1993). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, liberalism has been regarded as the only victorious school of power currents, and even

Francis Fukuyama has called the liberal paradigm the latest version of human reason (Fukuyama, 2006). According to the Liberals' paradigm, what is rational and practical is only possible in the realm of science. According to Karl Mannheim, the new science is democratic, and the construction and establishment of democracy is compatible with the liberalism of the middle class (Mannheim, 1950). Liberalism takes the power of knowledge from the aristocracy and provides equal opportunities for education by establishing universities for citizens. In this version of optimism, there is an evolutionary and continuous view of human reason, and human history is seen as a continuous progression that culminates in the end of liberalism. Rationality, freedom, humanism, individualism, secularism, science, market, competition, and spontaneous order are the constituent elements of the liberal apparatus.

Liberalism in politics has concepts that have been developed in modern times. Belief in the national government, which is now a major player in international relations, as well as the constitution of power mechanics based on the constitutionality of the state, is the foundation of the political philosophy of liberalism (Wall, 2015: 165-167). Liberals believe that free and wise men themselves know what truth and happiness are and that governments should, as far as possible, respect the market system for goods such as power, wealth, and pleasure. It is the market that elects, dismisses, and shapes the elite. Parties are political companies that also shape national interests in pursuit of their own interests. Parliament and the cabinet are like designers and executives of the stock market. If they find a villain who wants to disrupt the fair game, the government will act as a powerful but small and innovative civil police force. Democracy, citizenship, and human rights, therefore, are the political foundations of liberalism in order to defend human freedom. In the international arena, too, liberals believe in free competition and the regulation of international law based on a social contract. Liberalists believe that, as in countries within the international environment, they differ in terms of actors' ability, effort, technology, and policy-making, and inequality is quite natural. Every actor must demonstrate their ability to compete without resorting to dumping. Competition is also regulated by international law and organizations, based on the principles of ignorance and fairness, to reduce inefficiencies such as instability, war, poverty, and drought. Now, all developed and many developing countries, except for some socialist and Islamic countries, have adopted the principles of liberalism and formulated their behavior according to the rules of the United Nations, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and other capitalist institutions.

The paradigm of food liberalism, as well as its foundations and politics, is rooted in scientific and competitive epistemology. Scientific in the sense that they believe science can manage the world. Science is an inductive and empirical knowledge that has universal rules of thumb. Humans in the age of dying have been able to identify the rules governing the cultivation and production of food through science and eliminate many famines, waste, and malnutrition processes. Science has enabled the creation of abundant food through technology, providing a wide variety of high-energy foods and vitamins that nourish billions of the world's population. With each passing decade, humans have been utilizing soil and water more effectively, thanks to the advancements in science and technology, resulting in increased productivity. Flood irrigation and traditional farming have evolved into mechanized farming, while costly livestock and hunting have become outdated and are now largely replaced by scientific methods. Wherever science has advanced, suffering, sickness, famine, and malnutrition have disappeared. All fruits are now produced throughout the year, and water, heat, and other severe crises, as well as thousands of types of pests, have been eliminated through experimentation and environmental control. Science has been the miracle of salvation of the human being who receives capital and

political support every day in the light of a free society and rational research, and now more countries take refuge in its safe haven.

There are no obstacles to human reason, and science has discovered all the previously unknown territories. If human beings once prayed for God to send rain for them, and the angels of the Earth would be fertile and goblins away, now with the construction of dams, deep wells, production of chemical fertilizers, application of drip irrigation, greenhouse cultivation, livestock and poultry, and fish farming. All barriers have been removed. The production of all types of food is possible, and food has become cheaper and more affordable. The competition and profits from the market economy have increased class mobility and financial incentives for peasants and producers. Technology has come to their service, and animal, marine, and agricultural products have global customers.

Technology has made it possible for frozen warehouses and durable packaging. Food production and distribution processes have gained a comparative advantage due to the principle of competition. In short, the optimistic approach of human food liberalism is closely linked with the market and science. Science, combined with mass production technology, provides the market with conditions for sales and profit. Citizens turn out from being enslaved to being useful, healthy, hopeful, and effective individuals who can overcome the constraints of time and place, as well as any powers that have deprived them of food.

2. Marxism

Karl Marx founded the Marxist paradigm. Before Marx, in ancient times, Plato and Mazdak, and in the modern period, Simon and Rousseau exhibited socialist tendencies, but Marx laid out all the lines that led to him (Rimer, 2014: 176). According to Marx, human beings make sense in society, and to understand human collective behavior and the interpretation of history, one must refer to material indices, especially the devices and means of production. In Marx's view, all philosophers were dependent agents of the elite class who interpreted events conservatively; for the first time, he sought to produce true consciousness with a revolutionary drive that would lead to change. This paradigm was formed by Marx's propositions on class conflict and garnered many supporters (Marx, 2008). Human beings are instinctively inclined to Marxism because it is simple and packed with thoughts, and seeks to achieve a paradise for the equality of religions in the name of communism on the Earth. Marxists believe that the whole history of class struggle is, but fortunately, in every revolution, the level of consciousness and action of the lower classes increases, and the upper classes are curtailed and overthrown (Harvey, 2010). It is a deterministic movement, and economic infrastructures largely determine all aspects of human life, including law, religion, culture, politics, and the family. In short, Marxism's intellectual foundations are a form of deterministic materialism that traces its roots to the underlying indicators of economics, making human beings meaningful only in the collective form of classes (Fine, 2010).

Politically, the Marxist paradigm employs a critical approach, positing that history is the comprehensive narrative of the struggle between the lower classes and those who have seized control of the means of production. Humans are inherently equal, yet they are often repressed in the name of rationality, freedom, individualism, and competition. When we are all equal, why are a small portion of human beings capable and able to afford them all, but most citizens do not enjoy the right to a healthy and natural life? Marxists believe that the ideologues of the state and the apparatuses of the capitalist system have enslaved and subjugated all citizens (Althusser, 2014). Humans are often unaware of their circumstances, and the ideology of all citizens is so deeply entrenched in the illusions of happiness

that they have been denied the possibility of critical action. The revolutions have gone into oblivion, and the last fortress of liberation, the Soviet Union, has also fallen apart. Welfare-left governments have disappeared under the pressure of the capitalist system, and any resistance to the market is doomed. According to the Marxist paradigm, not all versions of liberalism are a mirage, and what is happening in reality is the cruel and ruthless system of capitalism that has made human beings cheap laborers in the global form and colonized all world citizens with instrumental reason. Humans have no authority, and as creatures of alien and one-dimensional beings, are caught up in the aristocratic hierarchy of capitalists. According to Marx, states are parasites that are the tools of the capitalists to draw the blood of the lower classes. The entire judicial system, the church, the law, the political system, the schools, and the universities are capitalist ideological devices that have bound the world together in the name of the market and in coalition internationally. Marxists reject inequality and strive to anger and criticize workers and peasants for a self-conscious revolution.

This paradigm on food extends its political philosophy, namely that the birth and distribution of food in the world is unfair and inefficient. This is mainly due to the capitalist system. The capitalist system is limited by the logic of profit and gain, driven by individuals who have monopolized the food market through force, propaganda, and government support. Capitalism has destroyed all natural based for healthy food processes. From the beginning, it has destroyed various products to benefit others and promote the principle of comparative advantage. The logic of money has assigned every region of the world to a particular crop, thereby destroying the genetic diversity of crops. The capitalists' insatiable greed has distorted the natural color and taste of products, rendering all food artificial and potentially harmful. The use of different fertilizers and pesticides has exacerbated various cancers and diseases. Unhealthy agricultural products are mass-produced in experimental and greenhouse environments, resulting in a loss of their originality and natural status. These unhealthy products are delivered to the customer with beautiful packaging and a deceptively expensive advertising system. The logic of rush and benefit raises various livestock and poultry by injecting ampoules and forcing pills, and what does not matter is human health. Capitalism shows no mercy even to the land and water. It has destroyed the soil due to excessive cultivation and has ruined the water due to overuse. The plains have subsided, the forests have been destroyed, the Arctic ice has melted, and everything in existence has been exploited by capital.

Marxists believe that not only production but also food distribution is unjust. Every year, many products are lost to maintain the market. The expropriation and destruction of commodities is an obvious thing in the capitalist system (Albritton, 2009: 170-175). Banks and companies based in developed countries often exploit all workers and peasants in underdeveloped countries. Irregular and unreliable contracts and very low wages for workers, and the use of cheap labor for women and children in poor countries are commonplace in the capitalist system. The brutal system of capitalism and the unjust logic of capitalism benefit by creating war and instability, destroying various biological and agricultural patterns. It destroys the environment, and banks and multinationals serve the trees, forests, water, and soil. In corporations, the labor is done by people from poor countries, but the profits are taken by the capitalists.

The Marxist paradigm of present-day food policy views the world as capitalist and seeks to critique and raise awareness about the creation of a world led by the American-led liberal empire (Albritton, 2009: 186). Marxists believe that the mechanisms of food production and distribution must be based on justice and equality for human beings, as they are all equal. The first person to create a circle around themselves and claim ownership made a significant mistake. People must revolutionize the

creation of a food justice system, reversing the decline in dietary diversity, reducing the power of brokers and global stock exchange systems, and preventing oppression. Liberalism has formed a media, legal, and security system under the slogan and in the realm of capitalism that has a global network of diet regimes and will remain in power until food is taken from this paradigm.

3. Phenomenology

Phenomenology is rooted in the ideas of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, originating in Germany. Husserl believed that Descartes began the philosophical basis of modernity with the dualism of mind and object and the quantification of all phenomena. Descartes believed that the human mind is capable of discovering the universe and that humans are a distinct entity that can control all other beings. According to Husserl, modern science, influenced by Descartes and Bacon's humanistic ideas, has attributed the status of a human being to God and has created environmental crises through its attacks on existence, leading to the inexorable conquest of the world (Moran, 2012). The mathematics of the universe was not only confined to the natural environment but also occupied the human world. All subjects, from nature and man to emotions and morals, became numbers, and the inexhaustible human desire occupied all the breathing spaces of existence (Smith, 2007). In Heidegger's view, man has overcome his self-centeredness by focusing his intellect; however, we are becoming increasingly caught up in the good we think. According to Heidegger, in *Being and Time* and the works leading up to it, the focus is on the conditions in which human beings find themselves. Humans have been placed in history, language, and existence, and have been thrown into existence more correctly. How can a weak, flawed, mortal, and resilient creature overcome and seek to subdue it? Heidegger suggests that one should doubt modern knowledge and reexamine the foundations of Western rationality. From Plato to the present, the world has been interpreted in terms of the human subject, and such selfishness needs to be rethought (Wrathall, 2011).

Husserl's phenomenology was a scientific endeavor that sought to identify and address the crisis of modernity and the West in the twentieth century, drawing on the philosophy of critical thought. However, Heidegger was a philosophical and existential phenomenologist and suspended all Western subject-oriented consciousness. Heidegger believes that human beings come first, and we are thrown into the world; therefore, it is our duty to listen to and respect that being (Heidegger, 2001). According to Heidegger's thought, even the world's mystical religions and traditions were better understood. When they looked at the Rhine, they saw the power of God, the sound of water, and the beauty of nature, but the modern world has led us to constantly rely on the power of turbines, horsepower, and kilowatts of electricity. We have destroyed the beauty of the world through the myth of deconstruction in the name of reason, entrapping ourselves in a cage for profit. We have conceived the world as a source of energy for humanity, even though the world possesses more power than we do. Humans have always been the guardians of existence and shepherds of the environment, but now we are boundless looters working to destroy the environment. We could only listen to nature's care, care for it, and nature would continue to do so. However, with the destruction of forests, the elimination of animal species, the diversion of rivers and streams, and the conversion of gardens and grasslands into residential and economic zones, nature's care is compromised. We have transformed the Earth into a dustbin. Phenomenologists are devoid of science, modernity, and Western reason, and humanity's main enemy is technology. Phenomenologists believe that technology is not a tool, but a biological

world that destroys human behavior and ethics. Technology was created for power generation, and modern technologies have deterministically made man the enemy of nature. No marshes, wetlands, forests, rivers, or plains were immune to the power of human technology, and everywhere they were conquered by the force of scientific tools. This conquest broke billions of years of environmental laws, and the world went into turmoil. Arctic ice is now melting, the planet is warming, forests are burning, streams are drying up, and drought and dehydration are sweeping the Earth. Sudden changes in weather, earthquakes, and unpredictable storms are signs of environmental destruction. Existence has rules and reason, and now it has invaded our lives because humans have invaded it.

According to political philosophy, diet phenomenologists have not been beyond the reach of modernity and Western science. In the past, although humans lived in mythological, religious, or philosophical phenomena, environmentally friendly foods were diverse. Technology has now unified all foods. The phenomenological paradigm holds that human foods are not produced with respect to existence. They rule the logic of numbers and mathematics. In the past, plants, animals, and humans formed a natural cycle of harmonious living that had internal order, spontaneous defense mechanisms, and proliferative capabilities. Technology has now destroyed the original taste of food, and its use—through the creation of tractors, combines, and various mechanical and digital tools—has primarily been aimed at accelerating growth and increasing profits. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides have ruined the taste of fruits, and the hormones used in the production of chemicals and medicines have contaminated meat and animal products. All foods are spoiled and have fallen into the cycle of producing unknown diseases. The logic of profit and mathematics has led humans to create dietary technology without relying on time or place, which has increased the incidence of cancer and unknown pain. In the age of technology and machines, people no longer understand the taste of apples and cherries, and everything they eat, from milk to meat, has become artificial. Most vegetables and other plants are toxic, and poultry and eggs are all crafted according to the logic of speed and utility. Even organic-labeled foods are manipulated in laboratories and greenhouses. Nature is in danger, and humanity has become rebellious.

According to the phenomenological paradigm, one must respect the existence, hear the sound of water, and not disrupt the logic and order of the environment. Every plant and product, wherever it has been produced for centuries, is the same, and human beings have no right to disrupt the natural flow of water and the paths of soil and forest trees. History and geography have power, and humans are very powerless because they are a part of the natural world. Environmentalist political movements, especially green parties and movements, have phenomenological ideas. Even mystical philosophies, orientalist, and ancient religions have much sympathy with phenomenologists. The result is that if one listens to the environment and nature, and does not interfere with its logic, it will have access to authentic, natural, and varied foods. If the modern and technological way goes, the human race will be destroyed because it is destroying its home, that is, existence.

4. Feminism

Humanity had forgotten for centuries a significant issue in the name of women, who make up half of the human population, and it was feminists who commemorated this significant loss. Feminism is a pivotal critical paradigm that posits the history of thought in the world was written by men, and that philosophy, myth, religion, and science were predominantly male narratives. In a sense, feminists are advocates of

women's rights who are trying to bring half of the eliminated population into the public sphere by deconstructing male reason. Looking at it from a woman's perspective, women have historically been excluded from education, economic, and social fields, as well as political participation, due to their epistemic systems and practices. Historically, women have been considered primarily responsible for the home, children, and husband, and are often depicted as non-citizens (Dobson, 2006: 53). Even in the 21st century, women continue to face limited representation in politics and policymaking, and their role in leadership remains underrepresented. What seems natural and obvious is to move women to the private sphere and the underworld and to turn them into unequal beings who, with a great deal of effort, get only a slight right, is the great silence of history, which feminists have challenged.

The feminist paradigm has three well-known narratives. The first version is of liberal feminists who believe that women should have equal rights with men (Mill, 2012). This narrative emerged in the wake of the French Revolution, particularly among elite and middle-class women, whose primary demand was political participation, especially the right to vote. Later, of course, it was promoted to a candidate for political office and a major policy maker. The second version of Marxist feminists, formed from the middle and lower classes, was influenced by Marx's ideas and believed that women should be able to participate in social and especially economic activities like men (De Beauvoir, 1949). There should be no discrimination in the choice of job, employment, and wage, and women have the same rights as men. Under the influence of leftist socialist ideas, this wave demanded equal economic participation by women in society and achieved significant gains, often in opposition to and criticism of capitalism. The third version was formed in the late twentieth century and is influenced by postmodern thought. Postmodern feminists believe that two previous versions of masculine discourse have been thought and acted upon so far, and femininity must be recognized. This wave believes that advocating for women's rights is only possible from a woman's perspective. Women are different from men, and this difference must be recognized. This difference does not mean that women are discriminated against and excluded from the public sphere and politics, but rather that they are empowered and have abilities that have made women superior to men and can complement male intellectual deficiency. Women possess characteristics such as affection, love, maternity, caring, nursing, and empathy, which are precisely the opposite of the dry and aggressive traits of men. Men have written the history of science and philosophy, and philosophers and politicians have often been men. Men are left with nothing but destruction and a souvenir of the attack, and wherever a few men gather, they must devise a plan to invade (Genevieve, 2004). Man means death, imperfection, and destruction, because men are not capable of giving birth and perpetuating a generation. In contrast, women are associated with birth, life, and the continuity of a generation, implying that they are closer to nature and the environment. The elements of nature and the environment are more closely aligned with the mental and physical structure of women. Women tend to understand flowers and trees more, possess a gentler and more natural sense of Being, and are more mindful of nature. The third generation is considered radical because it rebels against many traditional masculine structures, ranging from the family to the legal and political systems, and features revolutionary literature (Dobson, 2006: 62).

As for food, feminists in the first and second narratives criticize the capitalist structure and inadequate distribution of food, believing that drought, food policy, and men's lifestyles have led to malnutrition and starvation. Women require high amounts of vitamins and nutrients due to childbearing, but are often deprived of them. Even women have little access to sunlight and exercise. Women in

poor underdeveloped countries are weak and hungry, and in developed countries, they have to be austere and lean because of the prevailing fashion trends. The feminist paradigm holds that religion, myth, and science are equally involved in women's deprivation, and men have always received the highest and best share of food. Even now, it promotes the propaganda of skinny women and fashions that shape the popular determinism of women's lifestyles.

Women have historically been food producers, and while men were hunting and fighting, women cooked together with care. Cooking is an art, and if this feminine art were taken seriously—and celebrated through festivals and exhibitions rather than scientific or militaristic displays—the world would experience greater peace. Women listen more closely to the call of Being and show more profound respect for the Earth and its flowers and trees. Feminists argue that women perceive color and taste more intuitively, as if nature speaks to them in a new way. If men also engage in cooking and child-rearing and collaborate with women in private spheres, they cultivate greater affection. When men cook, they tend to value food more, and feminists argue that men should embrace a measure of femininity. History has witnessed little constructive masculinity, and perhaps the twenty-first century may mark a turn toward femininity. Women now form parties, movements, groups, and manifestos supported by developed countries, the European Union, and the United Nations. This movement advocates for the equitable distribution of food, the education of men in cooking, the organization of food festivals, and the use of food as a diplomatic tool. It maintains that wherever women are present, war is absent, the environment is more peaceful, and communities have something to eat.

5. Nationalism

Nationalists believe we are not one of the existing political philosophies; we are the only real and applicable paradigm. This paradigm was founded on Machiavelli's ideas and was developed by Hegel and Weber. Machiavelli wrote that his ideal paradise is Italy, his motherland, where happiness is to be realized. According to Machiavelli in *The Prince*, he works in every way possible and by any means to further the national interest of his country. The public interest, the national interest, and the good of the country are the ultimate goals of all political actors, and in this respect, individual morality, goodness, and reliance on moral virtues are of no use. However, instead of an efficient blend of the lion's courage and the fox's virtues (Machiavelli, 2008: 65). Ethnicity, tribe, and clan, as well as globalization and the concept of the global village, are abstract and groundless concepts created by idealists in the world of politics. The primary political unit and main actor in state policy are nations, which are modern countries characterized by sovereignty, a government, citizens, and geographical boundaries that shape political transactions. In Spinoza's view, there is no sin or evil outside the state, and if one country does not prosper in this world, there will be no rest in the world. There is a link between patriotism, defending the national government, and development in nationalist literature.

This literature was developed by the German philosopher Hegel, who demonstrated in the course of his thought that every time human beings can create a national state beyond the family and civil society, it has reached the height of rationality. In Hegel's view, the ultimate human mind was the Napoleonic cannon and the creation of a national government that was established in Europe and was drawn to all parts of the world. The empire, the city government, the clan of tribes, the king, the caliphate, and others were scattered, disordered, and irrational forms of political entities, and it was only in the new era that the nation-state was formed, based on a balance of security and freedom in the sense of

law. Although technology has advanced enormously in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and numerous political scholars and schools of thought have emerged, Hegel still defines nationalism and the defense of nation-states as the unfolding of rationality. The United Nations, international law, the European Union, regionalism, human rights, the Internet, and networked societies, among others, have failed to undermine the credibility of the nation-state. Governance and the global village are no more than slogans; what remains genuine is the national interest and the preservation of the national state in every way possible (Dobson, 2006: 82).

The paradigm of nationalism is pragmatic and conservative, meaning that it views all grand propositions offered to societies as utopian and illusory, and holds that any step forward must be taken only when the ground is firmly secured beneath one's feet. This paradigm holds that the environment and ecology of the world's regions are not our concern, but what is important for the conservation of soil and water is the territory beyond national borders. It is the government's responsibility to produce healthy and sufficient food, and governments must meet the needs of citizens in every way possible, whether through peace, diplomacy, or force and war. There are strategic commodities, such as wheat and maize, in which the country must be self-sufficient in any way possible or, if it is dependent on another country, that country depends on our particular product. This is the formula that only power can be restrained by power, and countries in the anarchic field of international relations know nothing but encouragement and punishment; any ethics, norms, and values should be nothing but ideal slogans and failures.

The country must be self-sufficient in the production of food, fruit, energy, and in protecting its soil and climate, and utilize its maximum potential. It does not matter what the situation is in the neighborhood, the region, or the world; what matters is the needs of the nationals. Each country only guarantees the food of its citizens and must do its best to preserve the natural resources that, if followed by international actors, will achieve an appropriate balance in the international arena. The slogans of human rights, environmentalism, greenhouse gases, and the fight against poverty, and so forth, issued by the so-called cosmopolitan idealists will not harm the national interests of the countries that these gangs have cheated. Every politician is responsible for their own country, and every political actor must think about their own government, because multinational, sectarian, and cosmopolitan ideals will destroy the leviathan giant. The government must maintain a monopoly on power, and if national interest in food and food policy is neglected, relying on companies and other countries, national interest will disappear.

The government should possess the production and distribution of barley, wheat, rice, soybeans, and food-sensitive commodities, provide financial support to the private sector within the country, and offer opportunities for competition and production. Resist the entry of food products and never make the country dependent on other organizations and governments. Even legal and environmental regulations and regimes should not hinder the country's self-sufficiency and preservation of its food diversity. Food production and distribution are politics, and if any government is weak in this regard, it endangers all other features. The policy of Nizam al-Mulk, the national thinker of Iran, states that Moses did not destroy what God did to Pharaoh because he was the bread provider of his people, and thousands upon thousands of people lined up at Pharaoh's table (Yavari, 2018). The paradigm of nationalism is realistic; it does not rely on slogans of globalization or environmental protection. It is conservative; it does not make any concessions that the national interest is marginalized, and it produces

strategic food commodities independently. Alternatively, with the policy of buyer and customer diversification and domestic birth protection, it tries not to give the country a thorn in the face (Dobson, 2006: 88). Therefore, this paradigm in the production, distribution, and consumption of goods has the complete monopoly of policy making in the national interest.

6. Postmodernism

The postmodernism paradigm is a break with modernism and the age of mechanics, marking the entry into the quantum period. It was first formulated in the philosophy of postmodernism through critiques of Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx by thinkers from capitalist civilization, and later continued in the twentieth century by their exponents, such as Derrida, Lyotard, Lacan, Boudiar, and Deleuze (Bauman, 1992). Postmodernism is a deconstructing and rejecting foundation, with no fear of achieving freedom, and ridicules all taboos and red lines. According to this paradigm, humans are creatures that constantly deceive themselves, and the different narratives are the imagination and mental patterns that organize the world through willpower (Lyotard, 1989). There is no fundamental difference between myth and science, and the same forms of satisfaction and hardship once experienced by Native Americans are now shared by citizens of the Information Age. What deceives us is the media, images, universities, and science centers. In the past, people would go to a priest and confess their private secrets in order to be absolved by their spiritual father and to feel liberated. Now they go to the psychologist and confess to all their personal issues that they might be liberated from. The old knowledge of religion is often referred to as superstition, and the new knowledge of science is often referred to as science. At the same time, both have the same level of institutional power. Postmodernism holds that the world is not as we perceive it, and that scientific knowledge is merely one form of human knowledge that has established relations of subjection.

Postmodernists believe that human beings constantly create stories and narratives to deceive themselves and others, and that history is nothing more than a collection of random and meaningless events written by the victors. Whether conquered by the king or the minister, or by the fortunate inventor and author of the billions of works that have been coincidentally coincidental. History, like all science and thought, is nothing but rupture, emptiness, and fragmentation. The postmodernist stream, therefore, intends to scandalize all self-evident concepts and propositions.

Power is ubiquitous—within government institutions, organizations, public spaces, and everyday life—such that individuals are, in Foucault's terms, immersed in networks of power (Foucault, 2002). Therefore, neutrality, scientificity, public interest, and national interest are words produced by policymakers and academic associates for subordination. All colleges and institutions, like parties and corporations, have a will to power. Science is power, and if it is not power, no science will survive. There is also fierce competition between the various sciences to reach the center of power. Psychologists blame all people with mental health problems; criminalize citizens' law and ignorance of citizenship rights, physicians make people sick, and food science experts consider all production unhealthy and corrupt, so they can manipulate budget and policy centers by manipulating public opinion. Postmodernists believe that the dominant narrative of food and what humans use is influenced by power. Power decides which products are widespread and which ones to marginalize. Self-sufficiency policies or comparative advantage are both justified. Mechanical or organic production policies are pretty similar. Postmodernists argue that food companies and related organizations, including lobbying

groups, seek to promote their products by shaping and manipulating public opinion while pushing competitors out of the market. The media plays a decisive role in shaping diets (Baudrillard, 1988), determining the style and content of food that will be prevalent in a region. Those who criticize and promote healthy and natural foods should be questioned whenever they use repetitive sentences and advertising mechanisms, because healthy, standard, scientific, hygienic, and natural diets are no longer the norm. Attractive in the hospital, psychiatrists at the hospital, food scientists at the university, and lab produce science for their own benefit, and in reality have no choice but to rise above the hierarchy of institutions and government. There is the conquest of organizations, public opinion, and government funding, as well as the intimidation to deliver products and services in the food science arena.

In the Middle Ages, for example, humans struggled to prosper and enjoy the afterlife, practicing austerity and fasting, and the same relationships are now prevalent in new diets. Vegetarianism, refusal to eat, and rigid diets have made fashion lean. Companies and entities that produce and distribute food products operate in highly professional and specialized ways, shaping distinct culinary styles and consumption patterns. Postmodernists believe that food, even taste, is shaped by power regimes. Human thinking is shaped by the media, over which the epistemology of medical science has a predominant influence (Kellner, 1995). Warning, panic, and then the release of products in the name of health are the secret advertising that organizes the food market. So food is also an industry dominated by both technological tools and thought technologies. In the name of the narrative of the food industry's progress, it moves forward with a show that has occupied all public areas. Imagination in a crowded, messy world has been stifled, and critical thinking has been overshadowed by experts and professors who have come to power. This power extends not only to the state but also to public and private institutions and organizations. The development and endurance of reason in modern civilization is not an illusion; however, many of the so-called food standards are merely propagandistic stereotypes based not on principles of induction but on rules of analogy. An analogy with the intentions of domination and the networks of power that govern humanity by fixing symbolic capital.

7. Islamism

Religions possess a philosophical framework and have been shaped by a set of concepts that have structured their worldview throughout history. In modern times, religions have often become mythological and have shifted from the public and political to the religious and private. Islam has not undergone such a development, and unlike other religions, it has a strong presence in society, politics, economics, movements, and policy-making of the twentieth century. In addition to the fact that Islam has shaped the private worship, ethics, and beliefs of Muslims, it clearly has economic, social, and political binding and identifiable rules that are fully implemented even in the 21st century. Islam means submission to God. In this religion, God is one, and the world is temporary, and what is true is the Hereafter. God created humans and sent the prophets to guide them. The last and most complete Prophet and religion is believed to be Prophet Muhammad and the religion of Islam. Monotheism, Resurrection, and Prophecy are core tenets of the Islamic faith, shaped by additional doctrinal elements, such as justice, the Imamate, and other theological distinctions between Shi'a and Sunni traditions. The religion of Islam declares that God sends a message to the Muslims through revelation and that what is stated in the Qur'an is accepted as the chapter of punishment. After the Qur'an, the Prophet's traditions are recognized as sources, and then the actions and speeches of the companions, Rashid Caliphs,

Imams, and jurists are the source of thought and judgment. Islam encompasses a range of intellectual, theological, philosophical, instructional, and mystical aspects. Jurisprudential and theological tendencies tend to relegate and defend religion, and philosophical and mystical tendencies move toward interpretation and rationalism. In each of these tendencies, there is the idea of cosmism and religious hierarchy, and the world of divine metaphysics dominates everyday life. Islam is a secular religion that promotes a prosperous life. Muslims believe that one should always work and think about subsistence. In a sense, Islam is not austere, isolationist, or fatalistic. Human beings must constantly make jihad and use all their efforts to learn and acquire science. In Islam, science is more important than worship, and it is recommended to think and lead a good life.

Islam built a formidable medieval civilization with significant scientific achievements. However, it eventually lost its central place as Mongol invasions, militant dominance, and the expansion of Sufi thought pushed it to the margins. Cynicism, austerity, political despotism, and worldwide anti-philosophical principles were prevalent among Muslims. While western countries have been undergoing religious reforms, scientific and political revolutions since the 16th century, medieval times continued in the Islamic world until one hundred years ago. In the new era, reformist, constitutional, and revolutionary movements sought to rethink Islam, while economic and political relations were still in flux. In the paradigm of Islamic political thought, the goal of the formation of the Islamic Ummah is to carry out Islamic rulings by the Islamic State and to maintain the tradition of the past. This interpretation is promoted in radical and fundamentalist readings. These readings are often incapable of understanding new environmental and food issues because they are unable to rethink and adapt to current conditions. In traditional fundamentalist thought, the principle is with the believer, and existence is created for him. Humans are regarded as superior beings who claim the right to use water, soil, land, and animals as they wish. Everything is presumed to exist for their benefit, and nature is viewed as lacking any inherent understanding. Humanity is seen as divine and as God's representative on the Earth, with "being" conceived as a divine gift bestowed upon it. Under such an intensely anthropocentric and carnivorous mindset, hunting, environmental destruction, and the rejection of any form of moderation toward nature naturally follow. However, in the mystical and intellectual currents that emerged at the end of the twentieth century, there are signs of environmentalism and a growing consonance with nature. That man is also a part of nature and must respect existence. For example, by referring to Hafiz³ and Rumi⁴, it is acknowledged that all intelligent beings with a right to life are respected. One should respect animals, as stated in the Qur'an and the Prophet's tradition. It is not right to constantly shed blood, kill creatures, and destroy forests and natural life. These thought tendencies have embraced the idea of balancing and not disrupting the ecosystem.

In the Islamic paradigm, diet also has a special tradition. Muslims categorize food into Halal and Haram (Ayatollahi, 1992: 118). Halal refers to foods that are permitted for consumption by God; most halal foods include mutton, poultry, beef, as well as vegetables and fruits. Forbidden diets include pork, blood, and animal carcasses. In Islam, alcohol is also forbidden. To make it easier for Muslims to distinguish between lawful and forbidden things, halal signs have been introduced in restaurants, fast-food

3. *Persian poet (1315-1390)*

4. *Persian poet (1207-1273)*

establishments, companies, and on various other products in the 21st century. Islamic countries have their own dietary regimes and drinks with a legal symbol. Muslims also believe in fasting and set aside one month from dawn to dusk to abstain from eating and drinking. According to Muslims, fasting is about balancing, healing, and allowing the body to rest.

Muslims are encouraged to stop eating before they are full and to eat before they become hungry. They are advised to chew their food thoroughly and to reflect on what they eat, in accordance with the Quran. Islamic dietary practices involve ritualized behaviors: at the dining table, people often sit together politely and respectfully, observing social hierarchies. Meals begin with the name of God and end with a prayer. The Muslim diet is diverse, encompassing both traditional and spicy foods, often prepared according to principles of hot and cold elements. Muslims believe in maintaining a balance between these qualities, and they consider food a blessing from God. Consequently, when they see pieces of bread on the ground, they treat them with respect and collect them.

8. Technologists

Technique is a tool that can overcome the limitations of location, time, and power (Nye, 2004). The difference between man and other beings is in technical reason. The technique shortens the paths that disrupt geography and history in a way that often fulfills one's wishes. Technique is the deceptive and instrumental reason of human beings who, with the inventions and discoveries of engineering, medicine, humanities, and social sciences, try to disrupt and provide the firm natural axioms and principles. Technologists believe that through evolutionary wisdom, human evolution will continue to advance and reflect the history of ascending and transcending reason. Technique is identity for humans, and all analyses of science and technology that trace the history of decay and destruction have mental problems and pessimism. Humans have reduced sickness; medical advances have increased lifespan; health has reached all continents; and biomarkers have been established. Engineering technologies have enabled the creation of dams, bridges, roads, and advanced transportation infrastructure. Even if there is skepticism that science has been handed over to evil forces, it is primarily due to the advances in media and the invention of the Internet and social networks, from which bad news spreads faster and more widely.

Most of the bad news and pessimistic analysis is wrong. Human beings have been able to harness dictatorship and despotism through techniques such as parliament, constitutionalism, separation of powers, a constitution, civil society, and democracy. With the invention of the atomic bomb and other powerful weapons, wars have been constrained by the balance of power and the looming threat of destruction. Genocide and religious and tribal wars are on the decline, and the waves of democracy in the 21st century have accelerated with new social movements (Mossberger, 2008). Technology has profoundly impacted all aspects of human life, and information technology has revolutionized them in particular. A revolution that has provided hope for the survival and fulfillment of mechanically suppressed aspirations. In the modern age, with mechanical technologies, human beings have tried hard to reduce death, illness, despotism, war, floods, and earthquakes, but they have failed. In the information age, due to databases and information aristocracy facilitated through the Internet and software, there is a growing human capacity. Technologists believe that it is easier for women, children, workers, and all other social groups to assert their rights in the information age.

In the information age, technology has enhanced humans' ability to tackle previously unsolvable and

exciting problems. For example, the human genome map has been completed, weather forecasts have been made, child mortality rates have been reduced, and new inventions in homes and public places have helped temper the heat. Humans have been able to fertilize the clouds. The power of national governments has diminished, and borders have lost their traditional significance, both in the Westphalian and modern contexts. Communities have become interconnected, with enhanced power monitoring and transparency. Humans can now form identity-based communities worldwide through modern information technology and advanced software systems. The world has become a global village through shared global processes. People vote by mobile, polling, forming a virtual civil society, and the concept of a citizen journalist makes sense. The ability of humans in a networked society has given them tremendous power to create multidimensional global planning and to establish international standards for food, the environment, and all other international issues. In the era of human intelligence, it transcends national governments and the borders of the modern era, entering the age of globalization. In this era of global governance, cities are becoming international. The most important issues require international action, and technology has made this cooperation possible.

In such circumstances, diets and optimistic logic will also govern the evolution of food political philosophy. Technologists believe that with less land, better soil, water production, and technology-based crops, the world can be saved from starvation and vitamin deficiency. As always, science helps humanity. In most underdeveloped countries that lack the knowledge and experience to utilize technology effectively, they are harming their ecosystems. In the Middle East and Africa, water is often wasted and polluted, and low-energy production has become a common practice. Wherever technology is introduced, humans are moving towards renewable energy. Technology is responsible for expanding forests, producing fresh water, and halting desertification. Stopping desertification and balancing the environment cannot be done with technology alone. Technologists believe that the sun is the primary source of energy, and it makes no sense for humans to rely solely on oil and gas in a world abundant in energy. Wind, sun, uranium, and water are natural and renewable resources that can be effectively harnessed if invested in responsibly. Water is abundant across the globe, and if humans adopt technologies such as cloud fertilization, artificial clouds, and water transport, many issues related to microbes and desertification could be mitigated. Soil and water have the potential to sustain all of humanity with appropriate knowledge and technology. The real challenge lies in the pessimistic perspectives of the intelligentsia and the projections they make about humanity's future, often influenced by apocalyptic metaphysics and the ideals of imagined Marxist cities.

Humans have been able to produce synthetic meat technology and will soon produce compact, inexpensive, and high-vitamin diets. Technology-equipped warehouses have reduced the possibility of crop spoilage and made food accessible throughout all seasons. Greenhouses and farms equipped with the latest technologies, which minimize soil and water usage and incorporate environmental control, have been able to increase productivity. In the past, farmers worked hard to produce regional crops, destroying water and soil, and frequently did not make a profit, leading to a difficult life. Products were also often destroyed, and the speculators benefited. Technology has now reduced all barriers, genetics has produced new products, and wild products have been tamed. Sprouts and herbal pills have become available, and food is now canned. Multinational and global companies have been established with networking processes to make products cheaper and bring the real buyer and seller closer together. In a sense, the wishes once thought of in heaven were fulfilled in the 21st century on

the Earth. Technologists tend to be optimistic and linear in their thinking, believing that technology has eliminated mass hunger and facilitated the production, supply, and sale of goods in cyberspace, free from the constraints of space, time, and government regulation.

Table 2: All paradigms for philosophy of food policy

Paradigm	Intellectual Foundations	Aspect analysis	politics	Food	Result
Liberalism (Stuart Mill, John Rawls)	Science, Mono-linguals, Secularism, Humanism, Individualism, Freedom	Global	Democracy, National Government, Parliament, Globalization, International Organizations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund	Mass production, machinery, mechanics, instrumentalism, utilitarianism, competition, multinationals, regulated global production and distribution, global food planning	Comparative Advantage, Specialization, Global Competition, Profit, Capital, Inequality Advantage, Elitism
Marxism (Karl Marx, Wallerstein)	Equality, collectivism, materialism, justice, humanism, dialectics	Global	Revolution, Protest, Criticism, Rebellion, Workers, the Lower classes, Criticism of Modernism and Liberalism and Their Deconstruction, Crisis of Capitalism	Criticism of the Capitalist System in Diets, Defending the Rights of Producers and Peasants, Criticism of Consumerism and Luxury, Distributive Negation, Food Justice	Justice to food distribution
Phenomenology (Husserl, Heidegger)	The power of being and existence, the critique of humanism, the concept of being, the respect for being	Mental	Criticism of Modernity, Opposition to Modernity and Technology, Consistency with Nature, Determinism and Satisfaction, Criticism of Subjectivity	Earth is human's home, man is in existence, harmony with nature, disrupting nature's order, natural diet, natural food, non-manipulation	Environmentalism, Respect for Soil and Water, Environmental NGOs, Greens, Organic Products

Femi- nist (De Beauvoir, Fires- tone)	Women's Knowledge, Critique of Male Wisdom, Looking at the Vision of Women, Peace-lov- ing Women, Kind and Producers	Gen- der	Patriarchal criti- cism, dual public and private criti- cism, equality between men and women, critique of the domination of patriarchal sys- tems, critique of male warfare, defense of peace and mother- hood, and the birth of women	Women's diets, the role of women in food production, equal pay for wom- en in food produc- tion, the elimina- tion of women's malnutrition, food and cooking, that is, peace, men cook, women as- sociate with food and have always been a source of celebration.	Food diploma- cy, cooking fes- tivals, women's rights asso- ciations, and branches of the food system, where there is food and there will be no war
Nation- alism (Mach- iavelli, Hobbes)	National govern- ment, land, territory, sovereign- ty, political reason, realism	Nation State	Leviathan, Independent Government, National Policy, Public Interest, National Inter- est, Balance of Power	Food self-suffi- ciency, staples, strategic agri- cultural produc- tion, food policy, preserving the country's power and independ- ence, controlling production and distribution, and consumption of goods and food.	Self-sufficien- cy and food independ- ence, strategic commodity production, control, and management of resources i.e., power
Islamism (Seyed Qutb, Rashid al-Ghan- nushi)	God, Rev- elation, Prophets, Quran, Quotation, Sunnah, Sire, Res- urrection Wisdom	Islam- ic Um- mah	Islamic Ummah, Islamic World, Opposition to the West, Grief ontology, Tentative and Cosmic Politics, Austerity	Unity of the Islamic World, Healthy Deals, Laws on Killing Animals, Creep- ing Humans, Encouraging Agriculture, Encouraging Pro- duction, Fasting and Ramadan Diet	Halal system, Islamic slaugh- ter, carnivore, environmental balance, rejec- tion of instru- mental and commodity perspectives

Post-modernism (Michel Foucault, Lyotard)	Anti-subject, critique of modernity, anti-humanism, epistemological rupture, anarchy, relativism	Relativism	The deconstruction of connected constructs has a two-way attention to everyday power, truth regimes, knowledge and relational power, resistance to subjectivity	Confessions and Obedience System in Diets, Medical Knowledge and Food Regulation, Narrative of Progress in Food Making, Food Media Institutions and Virtual Simulation, Food Display Industry	Food industry subjugation, medical knowledge system for food and its subjugation, symbolic industry and virtual advertising simulations of unhealthy foods
Technological (Joseph Nye, Rosena, Castells)	Information Age, Quantum, Internet, Cyberspace, Information Technology, Simulation, Network Communities	Universal	Globalization, Fading Borders, Flow Space, Declining National Government Power, Decreasing Time and Space, Networking, Cyber Policy	Simulation, Radical Science, Cyberspace and Food Chain Information Technology, Artificial Meat Production, Genetics, Food Manipulation, Distribution Networking, Scientific Diets, Diet Technology Evolution	Creating Earthly Paradise with Technological Food Production, Cyber Food Marketing, Planning, Food Preparation, Global Mass Production, Statistics, Mathematics, Scientific Optimism

Conclusion

What stories lie behind a meal? Eight important paradigms of food policy were interpreted qualitatively and phenomenally using the normative approach in political philosophy. Food policy appears to be a straightforward planning process that different actors undertake to reduce poverty and deliver healthy food to human beings. However, one can see the differences in philosophies by examining the variations in policies. Governments, on the one hand, need to demonstrate that food production and distribution statistics are optimal in order to show their effectiveness and legitimacy in staying in power. Private companies and institutions are looking to increase profits in food policy. People and civil society lack food policies to address the mass production and destruction of water, soil, and ecosystems. International institutions are also working to eradicate food poverty, increase food diversity, and reduce inequality in access to food from the perspective of food justice and equality. It is essential to note that policies promoting self-sufficiency, halting mass production, ensuring food justice, fostering dietary diversity, protecting the environment, safeguarding health, and maintaining food security must not overlook the role of comparative advantage, competition, and profit for all stakeholders. Food policies are embedded within the power structure, and without a political-philosophical ap-

proach, it is impossible to accurately assess the situation, understand the damages, or propose effective solutions. Indeed, the philosophy of food policy seeks to rejuvenate and refine the very concept of food planning while revealing and enhancing well-established, self-evident policies.

The paradigms of political philosophy function like glasses, in that each food policy has a different perspective. While there is only one perspective from the positivist perspective, different paradigms can be identified from a normative perspective. In the natural and empirical sciences, a paradigm emerges and remains in place until a revolution is made against it; however, in the human sciences, there can be several parallel paradigms, each covering parts of reality and its remedies. Give. From Plato, Zoroastrianism, and Confucius to Foucault, Baudrillard, and Castells, all have offered theories within the humanities that persist as enduring frameworks, underscoring the need to study various paradigms to interpret the philosophy of food policy. In the humanities, self-interpretation serves as both explanation and practical engagement; without proper understanding, corrective action is impossible. To comprehend the nature of food policies and the reasons why humans are currently harming the environment, reducing food diversity, and prioritizing the logic of capital and profit, it is necessary to identify critical paradigms and marginal flows. Examining the regressive and outdated paradigms among these eight frameworks reveals the often-silent yet significant principles of food policy, enabling policymakers to grasp the broader context and implement informed corrective measures.

So a subject that seems impartial, scientific, and self-evident is in a web of power-driven wills. As leftists chant for self-sufficiency and food justice, they have designed the most unjust food systems, and their citizens have fallen into the pit of authoritarianism in the name of equality. While rightists are preaching the mass production and eradication of poverty with science and technology, they are actually planning to increase the profits of multinational corporations. The slogans are always beautiful, but the execution has not been successful. Out of the eight paradigms, liberalists rule the world, and their narrative of market, comparative advantage, and mass production is now practiced in complex countries. Even technology-centric ones who are optimistic about the future are practically given the liberal paradigm. A world full of the blessings of heaven on the Earth has been the cause of liberalism. A world without borders where all humans are in leisure with the help of technology and the abundance of food is found. Other paradigms have heavily criticized this paradise with reference to reality. The feminist paradigm has focused on gender inequality in the production and distribution of food, aiming to change food policies for women. Environmentalists have targeted meat-based and animal-friendly policies, and they argue that Earth's technology has destroyed the human home. Phenomenologists have also allied with the green parties, and Heidegger is a manifesto of environmental currents that oppose the growth of mechanical technologies and food policies of mass production, as well as the destruction of food pluralism, namely McDonaldization. Marxists also envision an ideal city where capital has no ownership and all human beings have access to food, particularly workers, the lower classes, children, and those in underdeveloped countries. All criticisms of liberalism are marginal, and only liberalism is at the center of food policy. Although some governments and international organizations have attempted to employ some of the critical principles and improvements of the other seven paradigms, they are overwhelmingly liberal and ideological. The liberal paradigm has a full scope and learns from other paradigms, employing their criticisms. It is natural, of course, that the media, parties and guilds, international organizations, capitalist governments, and finally corporations and private institutions use criticisms of other paradigms to promote liberalism.

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The Evolution of Organisational Leadership (OL) in Iran: A Historical and Theoretical Analysis

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Abstract

This article traces the evolution of organisational leadership (OL) in Iran from ancient Persia to the contemporary Islamic Republic. It develops a contextualised theoretical framework that explains how historical legacies, religious legitimacy, and managerial logics combine to form sector-specific hybrid leadership models. Using an interdisciplinary, historical-theoretical approach that synthesises primary chronicles, secondary historiography, leadership theory (Weber; Burns & Bass), and cross-cultural studies (Hofstede; GLOBE), the study maps continuities and ruptures across Achaemenid, Sassanid, Safavid, Qajar, Pahlavi, and post-1979 regimes. Findings show persistent high-power distance and centralisation alongside episodes of secular technocracy and post-revolutionary religious-technocratic hybridity. Strategic sectors (military, nuclear/technology, and state bureaucracy) display transactional-authoritarian cores augmented by technocratic and religious legitimisation, while private-sector actors increasingly exhibit transformational and participative leadership. The paper contributes (1) a layered contextual framework linking history, religion, culture, and organisational form; (2) the conceptualisation of sectoral hybrid leadership models; and (3) a research agenda for empirical validation (archival case studies, elite interviews, and content analysis). Implications concern the adaptation of Western leadership theory to non-Western contexts, policy for leadership development in high-stakes sectors, and directions for cross-cultural comparative research.

Keywords

Organisational Leadership, Iran, Leadership Evolution, Historical Analysis, Theoretical Framework, Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Servant Leadership, Hofstede, Hybrid Leadership Models, Cultural Dimensions, Authoritarian Leadership, Islamic Leadership, Bureaucracy, Modernisation, Globalisation, Gender and Leadership, Political Authority, Revolutionary Change, Continuity and Rupture.

Introduction

Organisational leadership (OL) is a critical construct in both management and political science, encompassing the processes by which individuals and groups influence, direct, and coordinate an organisation's activities to achieve its objectives. It extends beyond mere management, involving strategic decision-making, vision formulation, motivation, and the alignment of organisational resources with broader socio-political and cultural contexts. While the study of leadership has produced a rich body of theoretical frameworks in Western contexts—including transformational, transactional, and servant leadership—these models often inadequately capture the complexity of leadership in non-Western settings. In particular, the evolution of organisational leadership in Iran offers a unique case study where historical legacies, cultural norms, religious ideologies, and geopolitical realities intersect to produce distinctive hybrid leadership structures.

Studying Iran's organisational leadership is essential for several reasons. Historically, Iran has experienced continuous political and cultural transformations, from the centralised monarchies of the Achaemenid and Sassanid dynasties to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Each era has contributed to the shaping of organisational leadership practices, illustrating both continuity and rupture in leadership styles. Politically, Iran occupies a strategic position in the Middle East, with one of the region's most powerful armed forces and advanced nuclear capabilities. These institutions exemplify organisational leadership in high-stakes, high-complexity environments, demonstrating the practical implications of leadership practices at the national and global levels. Culturally, Iranian society reflects a blend of collectivist and hierarchical values, shaped by centuries of religious, philosophical, and socio-political thought. These dimensions influence leadership norms, authority structures, and organisational behaviour across both public and private sectors.

This study is guided by two primary research questions: first, how has organisational leadership evolved in Iran from ancient to contemporary times? Second, what roles have historical, cultural, religious, and institutional factors played in shaping organisational leadership practices? To address these questions, the study pursues several objectives: to map the historical trajectory of Iranian leadership, to analyse the influence of religion and culture on leadership practices, to evaluate the integration of Western leadership theories within the Iranian context, and to identify emerging leadership paradigms in contemporary organisations, particularly within strategic sectors such as the military and nuclear industries. The methodology of this study is interdisciplinary, combining historical analysis with theoretical and comparative approaches.

Historical analysis examines primary and secondary sources documenting leadership practices in different Iranian political regimes, tracing shifts in authority, organisational structure, and managerial norms. The theoretical lens situates these developments within major leadership frameworks, including transformational, transactional, and servant leadership, while integrating cultural dimensions such as power distance, collectivism, and institutional logics. Comparative analysis allows for the evaluation of Iranian leadership patterns against Western models, highlighting areas of convergence, divergence, and hybridisation. The historical trajectory of leadership in Iran reveals evolving relationships between authority, religion, and organisational practice. During the Achaemenid (550–330 BCE) and Sassanid (224–651 CE) dynasties, leadership was characterised by centralised, charismatic authority, legitimised primarily through political power and royal lineage rather than formal religious doctrine, despite the prominence of Zoroastrianism.

While religion played a cultural and ethical role, it did not define organisational or administrative leadership structures. In contrast, the Islamic era, particularly under the Safavid dynasty (1501–1736 CE), marked the emergence of a significant interrelation between leadership and religion. The establishment of Shi'a Islam as the state religion not only provided moral and spiritual legitimacy to rulers but also institutionalised religious oversight within administrative and organisational structures. Leadership during this period integrated political authority with religious guidance, influencing organisational norms and practices across bureaucratic, military, and social institutions.

During the Qajar dynasty (1789–1925) and later the Pahlavi era (1925–1979), the relationship between religion and leadership shifted toward secularisation. Modernisation efforts, particularly under the Pahlavi monarchy, emphasised technocratic governance, centralised authority, and Western-inspired organisational models, with reduced formal influence of religious institutions on state and organisational leadership. However, cultural and ethical values rooted in religion continued to shape norms of authority, loyalty, and hierarchical relationships. Following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, this relationship became far more complex, producing hybrid leadership structures that combine religious legitimacy, political authority, and managerial expertise. Modern organisational leadership in Iran—particularly in strategic sectors such as the military and nuclear industries—demonstrates this synthesis, in which religious, political, and technical competencies intersect to produce highly centralised, effective leadership outcomes. Iran's organisational leadership structures have tangible manifestations in global geopolitics and national capabilities. The Iranian military, recognised as one of the most powerful forces in the Middle East, reflects an integration of hierarchical command, strategic planning, and adaptive leadership within a culturally and politically unique context.

Similarly, Iran's nuclear development capabilities illustrate the application of hybrid leadership models in technologically complex, high-stakes environments. These sectors highlight the effectiveness of centralised authority, combined with technical expertise and organisational resilience, in producing outcomes with both national and international significance. Contribution. This study advances leadership scholarship by (1) mapping leadership evolution across six major political regimes in Iran to show how historical continuity and ruptures shape organisational practice; (2) proposing a layered contextual framework that integrates historical foundations, religious legitimacy, cultural dimensions, and organisational structures to explain leadership outcomes; and (3) conceptualising sectoral hybrid leadership – a form in which religious/political legitimation, technocratic expertise, and transactional/transformational practices co-exist. The framework aims to expand Western-centric leadership theory by detailing mechanisms of adaptation and hybridisation in a historically rich, geopolitically significant non-Western context. Iran represents a distinctive case in organisational leadership studies, where historical legacies, religious influences, secular modernisation, and contemporary global pressures intersect. By tracing the evolution of leadership from the Achaemenid and Sassanid dynasties through the Islamic Revolution to contemporary organisational practice, this study illuminates the complex interplay of culture, religion, and institutional development in shaping effective leadership. Understanding Iran's leadership trajectory not only enriches our knowledge of organisational dynamics in the Middle East but also contributes to broader theoretical debates on the contextualisation of leadership theory in non-Western societies.

The Research Aim and Objectives:

The overarching aim of this study is to analyse the evolution of organisational leadership in Iran by integrating historical, cultural, religious, and institutional perspectives with contemporary leadership theory. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Trace leadership evolution from the Achaemenid and Sassanid dynasties to the post-1979 Islamic Republic.
2. Examine the impact of national identity, religion, and cultural norms on organisational leadership structures and practices.
3. Identify hybrid leadership models emerging from the intersection of traditional, religious, and Western managerial approaches.
4. Evaluate the applicability of Western leadership theories (e.g., Weber, Burns, Bass, Hofstede, House's GLOBE study) in the Iranian context.

Research questions

1. How has organisational leadership evolved in Iran across historical periods and political regimes?
2. What roles do national identity, religious ideology, and cultural norms play in shaping leadership in Iranian organisations?
3. How are Western leadership frameworks applicable, adaptable, or insufficient for explaining Iranian organisational leadership?
4. How do contemporary hybrid leadership models manifest in strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear industry, bureaucracy, and private enterprises?

3. Literature Review

3.1. Introduction

Organisational leadership (OL) is widely recognised as a determinant of organisational performance, resilience, and innovation. Leadership theory has evolved substantially over the past century, with seminal contributions from both sociological and management perspectives. However, much of the established literature reflects Western-centric assumptions about authority, decision-making, and organisational culture. For instance, Max Weber's (1947) conceptualisation of authority—dividing it into traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal forms—remains a foundational lens through which organisational leadership is analysed. While Weber emphasised rational-legal bureaucratic structures as the pinnacle of modern authority, non-Western contexts such as Iran present hybrid forms in which charisma, religious legitimacy, and technocratic expertise intersect.

Similarly, Burns (1978) introduced the distinction between transactional and transformational leadership, emphasising motivation and the alignment of organisational goals with follower values. Bass (1990) expanded on this framework, operationalising transformational leadership into measurable behaviours, including idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1980, 2010) and House et al.'s GLOBE study (2004) further contextualise leadership practices within societal values, highlighting differences in power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, and gender egalitarianism. Together, these Western theories provide an essential foundation for evaluating organisational leadership; however, they inadequately address the role of religion, historical continuity, and cultural specificity that shape leadership in Iran.

3.2. Western Leadership Theories

3.2.1. Weberian Authority

Weber's tripartite model of authority—traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal—offers a valuable lens for examining the evolution of Iranian leadership (Weber, 1947). Historical evidence suggests that the Achaemenid and Sassanid dynasties primarily exercised charismatic and traditional authority, while rational-legal forms emerged later under the Qajar and Pahlavi monarchies.

Table 1 summarises Weberian authority types in the Iranian historical context:

Table 1: Weberian Authority in Iran

Period	Authority Type	Characteristics	Key Figures	Notes
Achaemenid (550–330 BCE)	Charismatic/ Traditional	Centralised, hereditary, religiously legitimised	Cyrus the Great, Darius I	Authority reinforced through imperial ideology
Sassanid (224–651 CE)	Charismatic/ Traditional	Bureaucratic elements, Zoroastrian influence	Ardashir I, Khosrow I	A combination of centralised control + religion
Safavid (1501–1736 CE)	Charismatic/ Religious	Shi'a Islam legitimises rule	Shah Abbas I	Integration of religious and political authority
Qajar (1789–1925)	Traditional/ Bureaucratic	Limited modernisation, hereditary power	Naser al-Din Shah	Introduction of administrative reforms
Pahlavi (1925–1979)	Rational-Legal	Western-inspired technocracy	Reza Shah, Mohammad Reza Shah	Secular, bureaucratic, and centralised authority
Post-Revolution (1979–)	Hybrid	Religious + rational-legal + technocratic	Khomeini, Khamenei	Intersection of religious authority & managerial expertise

3.2.2. Transformational and Transactional Leadership

Transformational leadership theory emphasises leaders who inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate followers (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990). Transactional leadership, by contrast, relies on rewards and penalties to achieve compliance. In Iran, elements of transformational leadership can be observed in revolutionary and reformist leaders who articulate ideological visions that align followers with broader social goals. Transactional elements remain prevalent in bureaucratic organisations, military institutions, and state-owned enterprises, where compliance and hierarchical obedience are emphasised. Figure 1 compares transformational and transactional leadership behaviours in Iran.

Figure 1: Leadership Styles in Iranian Organisations

Bar graph showing the prevalence of transactional vs transformational leadership across sectors

Sector	Transactional (%)	Transformational (%)
Military	70	30
Nuclear / Strategic Industries	60	40
Public Sector Bureaucracy	80	20
Private Sector & Start-ups	40	60

The figure demonstrates that high-stakes and hierarchical sectors, such as the military and nuclear industries, retain strong transactional characteristics, while private and innovative sectors exhibit higher transformational tendencies.

3.2.3. Cultural Dimensions and GLOBE Framework

Hofstede's cultural dimensions and House et al.'s GLOBE study provide insights into the sociocultural foundations of leadership. Iran demonstrates high power distance, indicating hierarchical authority is widely accepted and reinforced through both organisational structures and social norms. Collectivism is prominent, emphasising group loyalty, family ties, and organisational cohesion. Masculinity scores are moderate, reflecting an emphasis on achievement, competitiveness, and performance, particularly in strategic sectors such as the military and nuclear industries. Table 2 summarises Iran's GLOBE cultural profile.

Table 2: GLOBE Cultural Dimensions for Iran

Hofstede (1980, 2010) and House et al. (2004) highlight the influence of national culture on leadership. Iran exhibits: High power distance – hierarchical authority is widely accepted; Collectivism – loyalty to groups and institutions; Low gender egalitarianism – male-dominated leadership; Moderate uncertainty avoidance – balance between planning and adaptability.

Dimension	Score (High / Medium / Low)	Implications for Leadership
Power Distance	High	Centralised authority, hierarchical decision-making
Uncertainty Avoidance	Medium	Moderate tolerance for risk, strong planning culture
Collectivism	High	Loyalty to group, emphasis on social harmony
Gender Egalitarianism	Low	Traditional male-dominated structures, slowly evolving
Future Orientation	Medium	Strategic planning mixed with traditionalism
Performance Orientation	High	Emphasis on achievement, especially in technical sectors

The literature on leadership in Iran, while still emerging, highlights the enduring interplay of religion, politics, and organisational structures in shaping authority. Historical analyses underscore the significance of dynastic power and religious influence, particularly the Safavid integration of Shi'a ideology into governance and administration, which left a lasting imprint on political and organisational behaviour (Keddie, 2003; Amanat, 2017). In the post-revolutionary era, scholarship points to the consolidation of hybrid leadership models that combine religious legitimacy, technocratic expertise, and centralised authority, reflecting the Islamic Republic's institutional complexity (Alvandi, 2020; Gheissari & Nasr, 2006). Cultural studies further demonstrate the persistence of collectivist and hierarchical norms in Iranian organisational life, shaping leadership practice across government, military, and industrial domains (Hofstede Insights, 2020; House et al., 2004).

However, despite these contributions, a critical gap remains: existing research tends to examine political history, organisational behaviour, and Western-derived theoretical frameworks in isolation, without fully integrating them. What is lacking is a contextualised framework that links Iran's historical leadership trajectories with contemporary organisational theory, situating religion, culture, and political authority within a unified analytical lens capable of explaining the hybrid leadership forms that characterise Iran today.

3.4. Contextual Leadership Framework for Iran

The framework is a layered model in which historical foundations (dynastic, religious, revolutionary legacies) create persistent institutional logics that interact with national cultural norms (power distance, collectivism, gendered norms) and contemporary organisational structures (state bureaucracy, military, strategic industries, private firms). These interactions produce sectoral leadership logics that combine authority sources (religious, political, technocratic) and behavioural repertoires (transactional, transformational, paternalistic). The framework maps causal pathways from deep historical norms to observable leadership outcomes (resilience, innovation, capability building). Based on the literature review, a contextual framework for organisational leadership in Iran can be proposed, integrating historical, religious, cultural, and organisational dimensions.

Figure 3.4.1: Title – Layered Contextual Framework for Iranian Organisational Leadership.



Figure 3.4.2 Layered Contextual Framework for Iranian Organisational Leadership

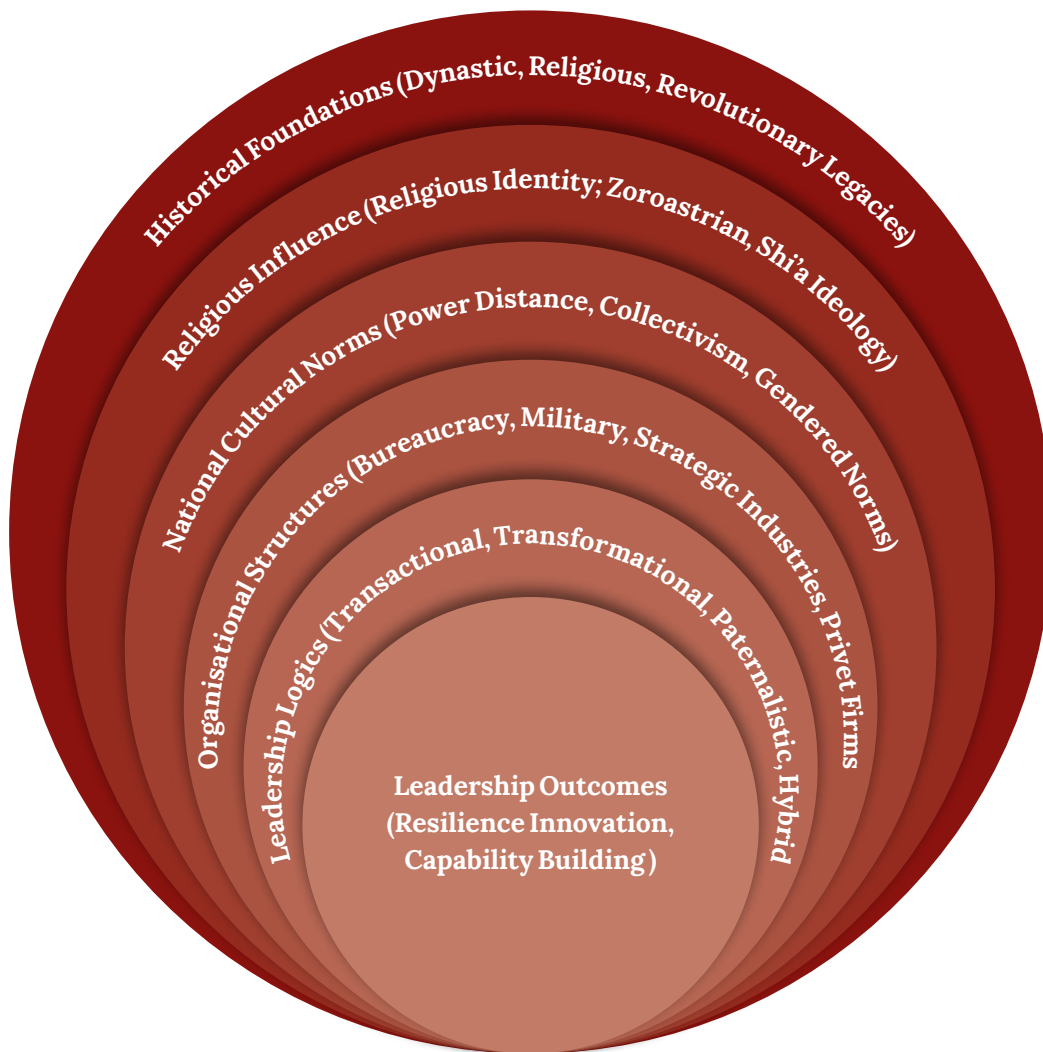


Figure 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. These figures represent both concentric layers: Historical Foundations → Cultural Norms → Organisational Structures → Leadership Logics → Outcomes. The figure should be drawn as concentric layers (history outermost → outcomes at the centre), and a flow diagram with arrows showing feedback loops (e.g., outcomes feed back to cultural norms and state policy).

Historical Foundations (Dynastic, Religious, Revolutionary Legacies): National identity has profoundly shaped the evolution of leadership in Iran, where authority has consistently been intertwined with the continuity of the state, dynastic power, monarchy, and revolutionary transformation (Amanat, 2017; Keddie, 2003). From the Achaemenid Empire, where leadership was legitimised through dynastic charisma and the consolidation of territorial cohesion (Briant, 2002), to the Sassanid era, which reinforced centralised governance through bureaucratic organisation and Zoroastrian ethical principles (Pourshariati, 2008), leadership was inseparable from the construction of identity and legitimacy. The Qajar dynasty sustained monarchical authority while initiating limited bureau-

cratic reforms and hesitant steps toward modernisation (Ansari, 2012), before the Pahlavi period secularised and redefined national identity through Western-inspired reforms, technocratic management, and state-driven modernisation projects (Katouzian, 2009).

The post-1979 Islamic Republic marked a rupture that simultaneously reasserted continuity, embedding religious legitimacy and revolutionary ideology into bureaucratic structures, thereby producing complex hybrid leadership models that fuse theological authority with institutional governance (Alvandi, 2020; Gheissari & Nasr, 2006). Across these historical transformations, Iranian leadership has remained anchored in the negotiation between tradition and reform, religion and secularisation, centralised control and adaptive hybridity, making national identity a defining axis in the trajectory of organisational and political authority.

Religious Influence (Religious Identity; Zoroastrian, Shi'a Ideology): Religious ideology has been a central force in shaping leadership legitimacy, authority, and organisational ethics in Iran, with successive traditions leaving enduring imprints on political and institutional life. In ancient Persia, Zoroastrian ethics infused leadership with hierarchical and moral principles that emphasised justice, truth, and loyalty, providing an ethical framework that underpinned both governance and organisational order (Boyce, 2001). The Safavid era marked a decisive transformation, as Shi'a ideology was institutionalised to legitimise political authority and embed orthodoxy within the state, centralising power under the Shah while aligning governance with religious doctrine (Newman, 2006; Matthee, 2015). The post-1979 Islamic Republic introduced yet another synthesis, integrating Islamic principles with bureaucratic and technocratic functions, producing hybrid leadership models that are particularly evident in high-stakes sectors such as the military and nuclear industries (Alvandi, 2020; Gheissari & Nasr, 2006). Across these epochs, religious thought has not only legitimised leadership but also shaped organisational norms and practices, embedding spiritual authority into the fabric of Iranian political and administrative structures.

National Cultural Norms: Iranian leadership practices are deeply embedded in cultural values that shape hierarchy, loyalty, and decision-making, producing distinctive organisational dynamics across both state and private sectors. High power distance remains a defining feature, with centralised authority widely accepted and institutionalised, particularly within bureaucratic and military structures where obedience to hierarchy is viewed as a cultural and organisational norm (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004). Collectivism further reinforces this orientation, prioritising loyalty to groups, organisations, and leaders over individual autonomy, creating strong communal bonds that underpin organisational cohesion and resilience. Leadership remains predominantly male-dominated, reflecting gendered cultural expectations that restrict women's access to senior positions, although gradual shifts in specific professional and academic sectors indicate the potential for expanding female leadership roles (Shakib, 2015).

Loyalty and adherence to institutional authority, historically reinforced through dynastic traditions and religious legitimacy, continue to shape the moral and organisational fabric of leadership in Iran, embedding trust, duty, and allegiance as central features of effective governance.

3.5. Organisational Structures and Leadership Outcomes

Iranian organisational structures embody the layered influence of history, religion, and culture, producing leadership patterns that diverge from purely Western models while incorporating elements

of them in hybridised forms (Alvandi, 2020; Gheissari & Nasr, 2006; Ehteshami, 2017). In the military, leadership is deeply hierarchical and centralised, structurally resilient, and rooted in Weberian notions of transactional authority, reinforced by national loyalty and ideological commitment (Cordesman, 2009). Strategic industries, particularly the nuclear sector, reflect hybrid leadership models that combine technocratic expertise with religious and political legitimacy, allowing high-stakes organisations to balance innovation with ideological conformity (Kassiri, 2016). Bureaucratic and public sector institutions retain a paternalistic and hierarchical orientation, largely transactional in their operations, reflecting long-standing traditions of centralised governance and administrative control (Katouzian, 2009). By contrast, the private sector and emerging start-ups demonstrate greater openness to participative and transformational leadership practices, increasingly integrating global management logics with indigenous cultural values (Ramin, 2011). Across these sectors, distinctive leadership outcomes emerge in hybrid models that integrate secular, religious, and technocratic elements; organisational resilience under conditions of sanctions and geopolitical pressure; strategic innovation in high-tech and military domains; and the cultivation of national capabilities, particularly in defence and nuclear development. These outcomes illustrate how the interaction between external contextual forces—historical legacies, religious ideologies, cultural norms—and internal organisational dynamics produces unique leadership forms that are simultaneously localised and globally relevant, highlighting Iran as a paradigmatic case of sectoral hybridity in organisational leadership.

Table 3.5: Iranian Organisational Sectors and Leadership Patterns

Sector	Dominant Leadership Style	Western Theory Alignment	Indigenous Influence
Military	Authoritarian / Transactional	Transactional / Weberian	High centralisation, loyalty, resilience
Nuclear / Strategic Industries	Hybrid / Transformational	Transformational	Technocratic + religiously legitimated
Public Sector Bureaucracy	Transactional / Rational-Legal	Weberian / Bureaucratic	Paternalism, hierarchical ethics
Private Sector & Start-ups	Transformational / Participative	Bass, Burns	Collectivism, family ties, local innovation

3.6. Gaps and Contributions

Although scholarship on Iranian leadership has provided valuable insights into its political, religious, and cultural dimensions, significant gaps remain in the literature. Few studies systematically integrate the long historical trajectory of leadership across multiple dynasties with contemporary theoretical frameworks such as transformational and transactional leadership theory or Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Much of the existing work remains either historically descriptive or theoretically abstract, without fully bridging the two. Empirical validation is also limited: there is a lack of robust quantitative and qualitative evidence linking leadership behaviours to organisational outcomes, par-

ticularly in strategic domains such as the military, nuclear industries, and state bureaucracies. Furthermore, the dynamics of hybrid leadership—where secular, religious, and technocratic elements co-exist—are underexplored, with most studies applying Western theories without examining how they adapt to or evolve within Iranian contexts. Finally, there is no comprehensive framework that integrates history, religion, culture, and organisational structure into a unified analytical model. This gap restricts a deeper understanding of leadership outcomes in Iran. This study addresses these shortcomings by proposing a contextualised framework that situates organisational leadership within its historical, religious, cultural, and structural dimensions, thereby advancing theoretical debates and offering practical insights for leadership development in high-stakes environments. Despite these insights, significant gaps remain. Existing studies often isolate political history, organisational theory, or cultural analysis rather than integrating them. Empirical research connecting leadership behaviours to outcomes in high-stakes sectors remains sparse. Hybrid leadership models—combining religious, political, and technical authority—are underexplored, particularly regarding their adaptive mechanisms in the face of sanctions and geopolitical pressures. This study addresses these gaps by proposing a contextualised, layered framework that synthesises historical, religious, cultural, and organisational dimensions, offering a comprehensive lens for understanding sectoral leadership logics and outcomes in Iran.

3.7. Summary

The literature establishes that Iranian organisational leadership cannot be fully understood through Western theories alone. Historical legacies, religious ideology, and cultural norms are deeply embedded in leadership practices. Hybrid leadership models emerge as pragmatic adaptations that blend transformational and transactional approaches with religious and technocratic authority. This review synthesises existing scholarship, identifies empirical and theoretical gaps, and lays the foundation for a contextually grounded framework that links historical trajectories to contemporary organisational outcomes across sectors.

4. Methodology

4.0. Introduction

This study uses an interdisciplinary historical-theoretical design that synthesises (a) primary/secondary historical sources (chronicles, governmental archives where available, and established historiography), (b) leadership theory and cross-cultural scholarship, and (c) sector-specific reports (military analyses, industry studies, and institutional documents). To strengthen validity and address limitations of secondary-only research, the manuscript triangulates findings across three streams: (1) cross-checking historical claims against multiple historiographical sources; (2) corroborating contemporary claims with sectoral reports and publicly available institutional documents (e.g., ministry white papers, agency reports); and (3) conducting purposive elite interviews and targeted document analysis as follow-up empirical validation (recommended $N = 15\text{--}25$ experts across military, industry, and academia). For qualitative analysis, the study uses thematic coding, process tracing for historical sequences, and comparative sectoral matrices. Inter-coder reliability (Cohen's κ) will be reported for coded material when primary interviews are undertaken. The paper is transparent about archival limits and proposes a clear plan for empirical follow-up in the conclusion.

The Research Aim and Objectives

The overarching aim of this study is to analyse the evolution of organisational leadership in Iran by integrating historical, cultural, religious, and institutional perspectives with contemporary leadership theory. Specifically, the study seeks to:

5. Trace leadership evolution from the Achaemenid and Sassanid dynasties to the post-1979 Islamic Republic.
6. Examine the impact of national identity, religion, and cultural norms on organisational leadership structures and practices.
7. Identify hybrid leadership models emerging from the intersection of traditional, religious, and Western managerial approaches.
8. Evaluate the applicability of Western leadership theories (e.g., Weber, Burns, Bass, Hofstede, House's GLOBE study) in the Iranian context.

The Research Questions

1. How has organisational leadership evolved in Iran across historical periods and political regimes?
2. What roles do national identity, religious ideology, and cultural norms play in shaping leadership in Iranian organisations?
3. How are Western leadership frameworks applicable, adaptable, or insufficient for explaining Iranian organisational leadership?
4. How do contemporary hybrid leadership models manifest in strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear industry, bureaucracy, and private enterprises?

The Research Hypotheses

Research Hypotheses

H1: The evolution of organisational leadership in Iran demonstrates enduring patterns of high-power distance and centralisation, with leadership legitimacy historically rooted in dynastic, religious, and ideological authority.

H2: Religious ideology (Zoroastrian ethics, Safavid Shi'a doctrine, and post-1979 Islamic principles) has functioned as a recurring source of organisational legitimacy, shaping leadership authority and ethical frameworks across different historical periods.

H3: Cultural dimensions, particularly collectivism, loyalty, and male-dominated leadership norms, significantly influence organisational leadership practices in Iran, reinforcing hierarchical and paternalistic models across sectors.

H4: Contemporary Iranian leadership exhibits hybrid models that integrate religious-political legitimacy, technocratic expertise, and transactional/transformational practices, especially in strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear industries, and bureaucracy.

H5: Western leadership theories (Weber's authority types; Burns & Bass's transformational and transactional leadership; Hofstede and GLOBE cultural frameworks) only partially explain Iranian organisational leadership, requiring contextual adaptation to account for indigenous historical, cultural, and religious factors.

H6: The private sector and emerging entrepreneurial organisations in Iran increasingly diverge from state-centric, authoritarian traditions by adopting more participative and transformational leadership styles, while still reflecting underlying cultural and historical influences.

4.1. Methodology Framework: The Research Onion

The research design of this study is best understood through the "research onion" model proposed by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019), which illustrates the sequential layers of methodological decision-making.

The layers of the onion—ranging from research philosophy to data collection techniques—help to situate the study's methodological choices within a structured framework.

Research Philosophy

This study adopts an interpretivist and critical realist stance. Interpretivism is necessary to understand the socially constructed and historically contingent nature of Iranian organisational leadership. At the same time, critical realism allows the analysis to identify enduring structures (e.g., power distance, religious authority) that persist across historical regimes despite contextual change.

Research Approach

The study follows an abductive approach, moving iteratively between theory and historical evidence. While existing leadership theories (e.g., Weber, Burns & Bass, Hofstede, GLOBE) inform the initial analytical lens, the data from Iranian history and organisational practice shape theoretical refinement, generating new concepts such as sectoral hybrid leadership models.

Methodological Choice

The design is qualitative and multi-method, combining historical process tracing, theoretical mapping, and comparative sectoral analysis. This combination allows for both depth (historical interpretation) and breadth (cross-sectoral comparison).

Research Strategy

The strategy integrates historical analysis, case-based organisational analysis, and theoretical mapping. Historical analysis reconstructs leadership trajectories from the Achaemenid period to the post-1979 Islamic Republic. Case-based organisational analysis focuses on sectors such as the military, nuclear/strategic industries, bureaucracy, and private enterprises. Theoretical mapping situates these findings within established Western frameworks to test their explanatory limits.

Time Horizon

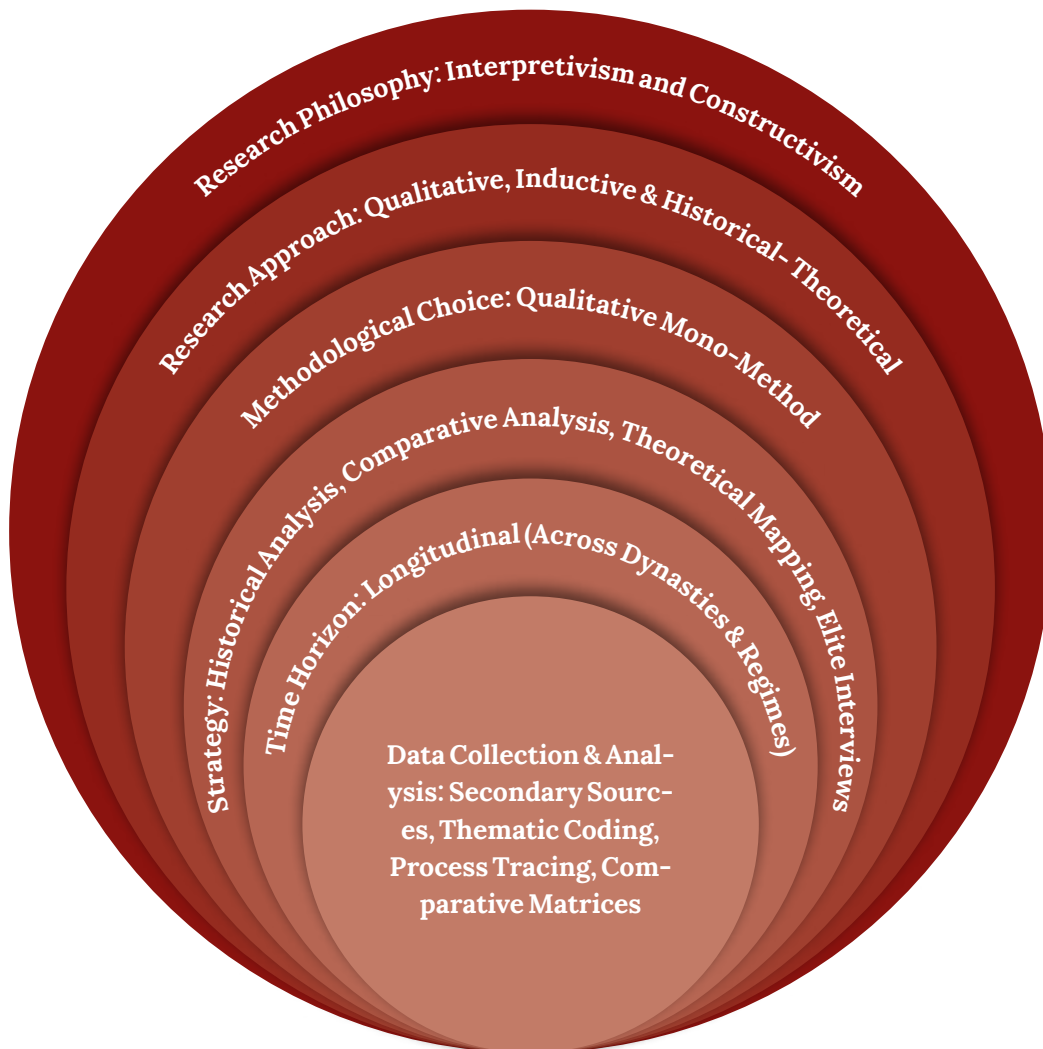
The study employs a longitudinal historical design, examining leadership across more than two millennia to trace continuity and rupture in leadership practices.

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

The study primarily relies on secondary sources (historical chronicles, archives, leadership scholarship, sectoral reports) supplemented by elite interviews ($N = 15-25$) to validate contemporary findings. Thematic coding, process tracing, and comparative matrices are used to analyse leadership patterns, while intercoder reliability (Cohen's κ) ensures robustness when primary interviews are included.

This onion-based framework highlights how the philosophical and methodological decisions reinforce one another: interpretivism guides the abductive approach; qualitative methods enable theoretical mapping; and historical-comparative analysis ensures that leadership evolution is understood in its socio-political, religious, and cultural context.

Figure 4.1: Research Onion Methodology Framework (Adapted from Saunders, 2019)



4.2. Research Design

This study adopts an interdisciplinary historical-theoretical research design, combining insights from history, management studies, political science, and cultural analysis to examine the evolution of organisational leadership in Iran. The design integrates multiple sources, including primary and secondary historical records such as chronicles, governmental archives (where available), established historiography, contemporary leadership theory, and cross-cultural scholarship, as well as sector-specific reports encompassing military, industrial, bureaucratic, and institutional analyses. By synthesising these diverse streams, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how leadership structures, practices, and norms have developed across dynastic, monarchical, and revolutionary periods, while also situating contemporary organisational leadership within a broader historical and sociocultural context.

To strengthen validity and address the limitations inherent in relying solely on secondary sources, the study employs triangulation across three complementary dimensions. Historical claims are

cross-verified against multiple historiographical sources to ensure chronological accuracy and interpretive consistency. Contemporary findings are corroborated by sectoral reports and publicly available institutional documents, including ministry white papers and agency reports, which provide additional empirical grounding. Furthermore, the study incorporates purposive elite interviews and targeted document analysis, involving 15–25 experts from military, industry, and academic sectors, to validate findings and capture nuanced perspectives on contemporary hybrid leadership models.

The analytical approach combines historical process tracing with thematic coding and comparative sectoral analysis, allowing the research to identify patterns of continuity and change, while mapping Western leadership theories onto the Iranian context to assess their explanatory power. Historical analysis traces leadership evolution from the Achaemenid Empire through the Sassanid, Safavid, Qajar, and Pahlavi periods to the post-1979 Islamic Republic, capturing shifts in authority, governance structures, and organisational norms over time. Theoretical analysis evaluates the applicability of Western frameworks, including Weber's authority typology, Burns and Bass's transactional and transformational leadership models, and Hofstede and GLOBE's cultural dimensions, to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and adaptation within the Iranian context. By situating leadership practices within their historical, cultural, and institutional milieu, the design highlights the complex interplay between national identity, religion, and socio-political structures in shaping organisational behaviour.

It also enables the identification of contemporary hybrid leadership models that integrate religious-political legitimacy, technocratic expertise, and elements of transactional and transformational leadership, particularly within strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear industry, bureaucracy, and private enterprises. Overall, this research design offers a robust and integrative framework capable of capturing the temporal evolution, contextual dynamics, and sectoral variations of leadership in Iran, while providing a structured platform for empirical validation and theoretical synthesis. The study adopts a qualitative, historical-theoretical research design, combining the following approaches:

1. Historical Analysis:

The purpose of this study is to trace the evolution of leadership practices, structures, and norms across Iran's dynastic, monarchical, and revolutionary periods, spanning from the Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE) through the Sassanid Empire, Safavid era, Qajar and Pahlavi dynasties, and culminating in the post-1979 Islamic Republic, as leadership in Iran is deeply historical and a thorough understanding of contemporary hybrid models requires a chronological perspective on the development and transformation of organisational leadership (Amanat, 2017; Briant, 2002).

2. Theoretical Analysis:

The purpose of this study is to map Western leadership theories onto the Iranian context and evaluate their explanatory power, drawing on frameworks such as Weber's authority typology, which distinguishes traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal forms of authority, Burns and Bass's distinction between transactional and transformational leadership, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions alongside the GLOBE study, providing a comparative lens to identify hybrid leadership models that integrate both indigenous and Western elements.

3. Comparative Lens:

The study compares historical and contemporary leadership practices against established theoretical frameworks, highlighting the divergences, adaptations, and innovations that are specific to Iranian leadership culture.

4. Interdisciplinary Approach:

The study integrates insights from management studies, political science, history, and cultural studies, which is necessary to capture the complex socio-political, religious, and organisational factors that shape leadership in Iran.

Conceptual Framework for Research Design: Evolution of Organisational Leadership in Iran

1. Historical Context Layer

The objective of this study is to trace leadership practices, structures, and norms over time, spanning the Achaemenid, Sassanid, Safavid, Qajar, and Pahlavi dynasties through to the post-1979 Islamic Republic, to produce a chronological mapping of leadership evolution that highlights patterns of continuity and rupture as well as key structural features such as centralisation and power distance.

2. Theoretical Mapping Layer

The objective of this study is to evaluate the applicability of Western leadership theories in the Iranian context, drawing on frameworks such as Weber's authority typology, which distinguishes traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal forms of authority, Burns and Bass's transactional and transformational leadership models, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions alongside the GLOBE study, intending to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and theoretical gaps within Iran's unique sociocultural and organisational environment.

3. Comparative and Interdisciplinary Layer

The objective of this study is to compare historical and contemporary leadership practices while integrating insights from multiple disciplines, including management studies, political science, history, and cultural studies, in order to develop a contextualised understanding of leadership that reflects the influence of national identity, religion, cultural norms, and organisational structures in Iran.

4. Contemporary Hybrid Leadership Layer

The objective of this study is to identify modern hybrid leadership models within key sectors, including the military, nuclear and strategic industries, bureaucracy, and private enterprises, using methods such as sectoral reports, elite interviews, and document analysis, to produce a typology of hybrid leadership models that integrate religious-political legitimacy, technocratic expertise, and elements of transactional and transformational practices.

5. Analytical Tools Layer

The study employs analytical techniques, including thematic coding, historical process tracing, and comparative sectoral matrices, and measures inter-coder reliability using Cohen's κ for interview data to ensure rigor, consistency, and validity in the analysis of leadership patterns across historical and contemporary contexts.

6. Triangulation and Validation

To ensure the validity and robustness of findings, the study employs triangulation through historical cross-verification, corroboration with institutional and sectoral reports, and empirical validation via elite interviews with experts across relevant fields.

7. Synthesis and Application

The study synthesises historical, theoretical, and empirical insights to map contemporary hybrid leadership models against Western frameworks, highlighting the contextual adaptations and unique features of leadership practices within Iranian organisational culture.

4.3. Data Sources

Given the historical-theoretical nature of this study, the research relies predominantly on secondary data, which provides a rich foundation for reconstructing leadership evolution and contextualising organisational practices across Iran's long and complex history. Historical records and chronicles form a primary source of evidence, encompassing ancient Persian texts, administrative documents from the Achaemenid and Sassanid periods, governance records from the Safavid era, reforms enacted during the Pahlavi dynasty, and organisational archives from the post-1979 Islamic Republic. These materials offer crucial insights into leadership structures, decision-making norms, and institutional hierarchies, enabling a detailed chronological mapping of authority and organisational dynamics. Academic literature constitutes a complementary data source, drawing on comprehensive studies in Iranian history, politics, organisational leadership, and culture. Seminal works by scholars such as Amanat (2017), Keddie (2003), and Gheissari and Nasr (2006) provide authoritative interpretations of socio-political contexts, cultural norms, and historical developments that underpin leadership practices, offering essential theoretical and contextual scaffolding for the study.

Leadership theory texts, including foundational contributions from Weber, Burns, Bass, Hofstede, and House et al. (2004), are used to situate Iranian leadership within established Western frameworks. These texts enable rigorous comparative analysis, helping identify points of convergence and divergence between indigenous leadership models and global theoretical constructs. Sector-specific reports further enrich the dataset by providing contemporary empirical evidence from critical domains, including the military, nuclear and strategic industries, bureaucracy, and private enterprises. These reports, which include analyses of organisational structures, leadership practices, and institutional performance, are essential for identifying contemporary hybrid leadership models and validating theoretical mappings against real-world organisational contexts.

The reliance on secondary data is particularly justified given the historical scope of the study and the challenges associated with accessing primary archival materials across multiple centuries. Secondary sources allow for the reconstruction of historical evolution, the interpretation of cultural and institutional contexts, and the systematic analysis of leadership frameworks in situations where primary empirical data may be limited or inaccessible. Collectively, these sources form a robust and multi-layered evidentiary base that supports the study's historical-theoretical approach and facilitates the triangulation of insights across time periods and organisational sectors. Given the historical-theoretical nature of the study, the research relies primarily on secondary data:

4.4. Data Analysis

The study employs a rigorous qualitative approach, combining content analysis with comparative-historical methods to systematically examine leadership practices and organisational structures across Iran's extensive historical timeline. Leadership patterns are first categorised chronologically, tracing developments from the Achaemenid Empire through the Sassanid, Safavid, Qajar, and Pahlavi dynasties to the post-1979 Islamic Republic. This chronological mapping enables the identification of continuity and rupture in leadership practices, organisational hierarchies, and decision-making norms, highlighting enduring features such as centralisation, power distance, and authority legitimacy. Concurrently, Western leadership theories are applied to each historical period to assess their explanatory power within the Iranian context. Frameworks such as Weber's authority typology, Burns

and Bass's transactional and transformational leadership models, and Hofstede and GLOBE's cultural dimensions are used to evaluate areas of convergence and divergence, revealing where indigenous leadership practices align with or depart from established theoretical constructs.

Contextual analysis further situates leadership within broader sociocultural and institutional environments. This involves examining the influence of national identity, religious ideology, cultural norms, and organisational structures on leadership outcomes, providing a nuanced understanding of how historical, political, and religious factors shape authority and managerial practices. Finally, a comparative synthesis integrates historical and theoretical insights to identify contemporary hybrid leadership models in Iran. This synthesis evaluates the extent to which Western frameworks are transferable, adaptable, or insufficient for explaining leadership in non-Western contexts, thereby illuminating the unique configurations of hybrid authority that combine religious-political legitimacy, technocratic expertise, and elements of transactional and transformational leadership. The analytical framework guiding this process draws on multiple complementary methods.

Historical leadership is examined through chronological mapping of chronicles, historical texts, and archival sources. National identity is analysed via content analysis of historical, political, and cultural literature. Religious influence is interpreted through textual and thematic analysis of Zoroastrian, Shi'a, and broader Islamic texts. Cultural norms are assessed using Hofstede and GLOBE cultural mapping, as well as comparative studies and sector-specific reports. Organisational structures are explored through sectoral case analysis, encompassing the military, nuclear and strategic industries, bureaucracy, and private enterprises. Leadership outcomes are synthesised comparatively, allowing for the identification of hybrid models and the evaluation of theoretical applicability. Collectively, this integrated approach ensures a robust, multi-dimensional analysis that captures temporal evolution, contextual influences, and sectoral variations, providing a comprehensive understanding of organisational leadership in Iran. The study employs qualitative content analysis and comparative-historical methods (See Table 4.5):

Table 4.5: Analytical Framework

Dimension	Analytical Method	Data Source / Evidence
Historical Leadership	Chronological mapping	Chronicles, historical texts, archives
National Identity	Content analysis	Historical, political, and cultural literature
Religious Influence	Textual interpretation, thematic analysis	Zoroastrian, Shi'a, Islamic texts
Cultural Norms	Cultural mapping using Hofstede/GLOBE	Literature, comparative studies, sector reports
Organisational Structures	Sectoral case analysis	Military, nuclear, bureaucracy, private sector
Leadership Outcomes	Comparative synthesis, hybrid model identification	Literature synthesis, theoretical mapping

4.5. Research Design: Justification

The study adopts a historical-theoretical approach that captures the temporal evolution of leadership in Iran, enabling a nuanced understanding of organisational practices within the country's distinct socio-political and cultural environment.

By tracing leadership patterns across dynastic, monarchical, and revolutionary periods, the approach illuminates how historical legacies, institutional frameworks, and cultural norms have shaped authority, decision-making, and organisational structures over time. An interdisciplinary lens underpins the research, integrating insights from management studies, political science, history, and cultural analysis. This integration is essential for capturing the complex interactions between socio-political dynamics, religious ideologies, cultural values, and organisational behaviour that collectively shape leadership practices in Iran. Comparative analysis serves as a critical dimension of the study, bridging Western leadership theories with indigenous Iranian practices. By systematically mapping frameworks such as Weber's authority typology, Burns and Bass's leadership models, and Hofstede and GLOBE's cultural dimensions onto historical and contemporary Iranian contexts, the study identifies hybrid leadership models that blend traditional, religious, and Western managerial elements. This approach not only highlights areas of convergence and divergence but also provides a structured means of assessing the applicability and adaptation of global leadership theories in a non-Western setting.

Finally, the reliance on secondary data ensures rigorous analysis in contexts where access to primary historical and contemporary records may be limited or restricted. Secondary sources, including chronicles, archival records, academic literature, leadership theory texts, and sector-specific reports, collectively provide a robust evidentiary base that supports triangulation, empirical validation, and the generation of theoretically grounded insights. Together, these design choices provide a comprehensive and methodologically sound framework that balances historical depth, theoretical rigour, and interdisciplinary breadth, enabling a detailed and contextualised understanding of organisational leadership in Iran.

4.6. Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to rigorous ethical standards by relying primarily on publicly available historical and academic sources, ensuring transparency, reproducibility, and accountability in the research process. All sources are meticulously cited and referenced, maintaining academic integrity and properly attributing to the original authors. Furthermore, the study exercises cultural sensitivity and respect in interpreting religious, historical, and political contexts, carefully considering the sociocultural nuances that influence leadership practices in Iran and avoiding misrepresentation or bias. This ethical approach safeguards both the credibility of the research and the integrity of the cultural and historical subjects under investigation.

4.7. Limitations

While the study employs a rigorous historical-theoretical and interdisciplinary approach, several limitations must be acknowledged. Reliance on secondary sources may result in the omission of unpublished, classified, or otherwise inaccessible organisational data, potentially limiting the completeness of the historical and contemporary record. Interpretive bias is an inherent risk when analysing historical and religious texts; however, this is mitigated through systematic cross-referencing across

multiple sources, triangulation of evidence, and careful contextual interpretation. Additionally, the findings of this study are context-specific to Iran, reflecting the country's unique socio-political, religious, and cultural environment. Consequently, caution should be exercised when generalising results to other national contexts. However, the framework and methodological approach can provide valuable comparative insights for examining organisational leadership in non-Western settings.

4.8. Sample Selection

For empirical validation, the study employs purposive expert sampling, targeting individuals with demonstrated expertise in leadership and organisational structures across strategic sectors, including the military, nuclear/strategic industries, bureaucracy, and private enterprises. A sample of 15–25 experts is recommended, selected based on seniority, sectoral experience, academic contributions, and familiarity with historical and contemporary leadership practices. Ethical protocols, including informed consent, confidentiality, and participant validation of responses, are strictly followed to ensure the credibility and reliability of qualitative data.

4.9. Appendices: Qualitative Questionnaires

The study employs semi-structured interview questionnaires, the full versions of which are provided in the appendices. These instruments are organised around four thematic domains: historical leadership perspectives, contemporary organisational practices, hybrid leadership models, and theoretical reflections on Western frameworks. Each questionnaire incorporates structured prompts alongside open-ended questions to elicit rich, context-specific narratives, and is supported by coding guidelines for thematic analysis. This approach enhances transparency, ensures replicability, and strengthens the study's methodological rigour.

4.10. Summary

This methodology establishes a robust, comprehensive, and interdisciplinary framework for examining organisational leadership in Iran, integrating historical, theoretical, and empirical perspectives. By combining detailed historical analysis, rigorous theoretical mapping, and comparative synthesis, the study captures the evolution of leadership across dynastic, monarchical, and revolutionary periods, revealing patterns of continuity and rupture, as well as structural characteristics such as centralisation and authority legitimacy.

It highlights the influence of national identity, religious ideology, and cultural norms on organisational practices, while systematically mapping Western leadership theories onto the Iranian context to assess their applicability and limitations. Furthermore, the methodology enables the identification and analysis of contemporary hybrid leadership models across strategic sectors—including the military, nuclear and strategic industries, bureaucracy, and private enterprises—shedding light on how indigenous, religious, and Western managerial elements converge in practice. Collectively, this approach provides a rigorous and nuanced foundation for understanding both historical and contemporary organisational leadership in Iran, while offering transferable insights for comparative studies in non-Western contexts.

Chapter 5: Historical Evolution of Organisational Leadership in Iran

5.1. Introduction

This chapter traces the evolution of organisational leadership (OL) in Iran from the Achaemenid Empire to the post-1979 Islamic Republic, situating leadership practices within the broader intersections of history, religion, culture, and institutional development. Organisational leadership in Iran cannot be understood merely as a managerial or administrative phenomenon; instead, it is embedded in centuries of shifting political authority, dynastic transformation, and the continuous negotiation between tradition and reform. Each political era—Achaemenid, Sassanid, Safavid, Qajar, Pahlavi, and Islamic Republic—contributed distinct institutional logics, authority structures, and legitimising ideologies that continue to shape organisational behaviour in contemporary Iran.

The significance of this historical approach lies in its capacity to illuminate both continuity and rupture in Iranian leadership models. Continuities can be observed in the persistence of high-power distance, centralised authority, and hierarchical obedience across different regimes. At the same time, ruptures are evident in recurring attempts at secular modernisation, religious revival, and the hybridisation of organisational practices. These dynamics resonate strongly with Weber's typology of authority (traditional, charismatic, rational-legal) as well as with Burns' and Bass' models of transactional and transformational leadership. However, the Iranian case demonstrates a unique blending of these authority types and leadership behaviours, mediated by cultural dimensions such as collectivism, patriarchy, and religious legitimacy. By examining organisational leadership across successive historical periods, this chapter contributes to a contextualised understanding of how deeply rooted cultural and institutional patterns interact with global theories of leadership. For instance, the dynastic charisma of Cyrus the Great, the bureaucratic rationality of the Sassanids, the religious-ideological centralisation of the Safavids, and the technocratic governance of the Pahlavi each represent historically specific configurations of leadership that both align with and diverge from Western frameworks. The Islamic Republic, with its fusion of religious legitimacy, revolutionary ideology, and technocratic expertise, embodies the culmination of this evolutionary trajectory, producing hybrid leadership models that are particularly evident in strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear industries, and state bureaucracy.

The analytical task of this chapter is therefore threefold. First, to map the historical trajectory of organisational leadership in Iran across six major political eras, highlighting how different forms of authority and organisational practice emerged. Second, to examine the role of religion, culture, and identity in legitimising and institutionalising leadership norms within each historical context.

Third, to interpret these developments through the lens of leadership theory, thereby identifying continuities, ruptures, and hybridisations that define Iran's leadership evolution. In doing so, this chapter not only situates Iranian organisational leadership within its historical and cultural milieu but also provides the empirical foundation for the contextual leadership framework proposed in Chapter 3. By bridging historiography with organisational theory, the chapter lays the groundwork for understanding how Iran's leadership models, while distinctively localised, also offer valuable insights for comparative and global leadership studies.

5.2. Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE)

During the Achaemenid Empire, leadership was characterised by a combination of charismatic and traditional authority. The early Persian state actively promoted loyalty across its diverse territories, consolidating national identity while embedding Zoroastrian ethical principles into administrative practices. This hierarchical and centralised bureaucratic system ensured cohesion, resilience, and loyalty, laying the groundwork for future governance structures.

5.2.1. Leadership Characteristics

During the Achaemenid Empire, leadership was characterised by a blend of charismatic and traditional authority, where rulers derived legitimacy from both personal magnetism and dynastic heritage (Weber, 1947). The formation of a unified Persian state actively fostered a sense of national identity, promoting loyalty and cohesion across a vast and culturally diverse territory (Briant, 2002). Zoroastrian ethical principles underpinned both moral and administrative decision-making, guiding rulers and officials in promoting justice, truth, and communal responsibility (Boyce, 2001). Culturally, the society exhibited high power distance, with strict hierarchical structures reinforcing centralised control and the authority of the monarchy. Organisationally, the empire relied on a robust bureaucratic apparatus, including a network of satraps (regional governors) who were directly accountable to the king, ensuring effective governance across provinces. These combined factors produced leadership outcomes characterised by administrative cohesion, enduring loyalty, and organisational resilience, establishing a stable foundation for centralised authority that would influence successive Persian dynasties (See Table 5.2.1)

Table 5.2.1: Achaemenid Leadership Features

Dimension	Characteristics
Authority Type	Charismatic / Traditional
National Identity	Early Persian state consolidation
Religious Influence	Zoroastrian ethics
Cultural Norms	High power distance, loyalty to the central authority
Organisational Structures	Bureaucracy with the satrap system
Outcomes	Administrative cohesion, resilience, loyalty

5.3. Sassanid Empire (224–651 CE)

The Achaemenid Empire represents the earliest and one of the most formative stages in the evolution of organisational leadership in Iran. Emerging under Cyrus the Great and consolidated by successors such as Darius I, the empire established a model of governance that combined charismatic and traditional authority with an unprecedented degree of administrative sophistication. Leadership during this period was legitimised through dynastic power and imperial ideology, reflecting Weber's concept

of charismatic and traditional authority, while simultaneously embedding moral and organisational principles derived from Zoroastrian thought. The consolidation of a unified Persian identity across vast and culturally diverse territories reinforced loyalty to the central state, demonstrating the early interplay between national identity and leadership legitimacy. The Achaemenids pioneered a highly centralised yet resilient bureaucratic system, most notably through the satrapy model in which regional governors (satraps) remained accountable to the King. This structure not only reflected the cultural norm of high-power distance but also institutionalised mechanisms of control and accountability that sustained cohesion across the empire's vast geography. Zoroastrian ethical values—emphasising truth, justice, and loyalty—further reinforced the moral basis of authority, shaping both political legitimacy and organisational practices. The outcomes of this leadership system were significant. The Achaemenids achieved administrative cohesion and remarkable resilience, enabling the empire to govern an unprecedentedly large and multicultural domain while maintaining stability and loyalty among diverse populations.

By embedding authority within dynastic charisma, centralised hierarchy, and religiously informed ethics, the Achaemenid leadership model laid the foundations for subsequent Persian governance traditions, establishing centralised authority as a defining feature of Iranian leadership culture that endured long after the empire's fall.

5.3.1. Leadership Characteristics

The Sassanid Empire, which succeeded the Parthians and ruled from the third to the seventh century CE, represents a crucial stage in the consolidation of Iranian organisational leadership traditions. Leadership during this period combined charismatic-traditional authority with a more systematic form of bureaucratic rationality, creating a dual foundation of legitimacy that reinforced dynastic continuity while ensuring administrative efficiency. The Sassanid monarchs drew heavily on the legacy of earlier Persian empires, presenting themselves as heirs to the Achaemenid tradition and thereby strengthening a sense of enduring national identity.

This continuity was reinforced through the institutionalisation of Zoroastrianism as the state religion, which not only provided a divine sanction for royal authority but also offered a comprehensive ethical framework that shaped governance and administrative practices. Cultural norms under the Sassanids emphasised centralisation and loyalty to hierarchical authority, with leadership structures reflecting the expectation of obedience to the monarch as both a political and spiritual figure. A sophisticated bureaucratic apparatus was established to support taxation, military organisation, and infrastructure maintenance, enabling more systematic governance across a territorially expansive and diverse empire. This bureaucratic rationality was complemented by the moral authority of Zoroastrian principles, which codified ideas of just leadership, duty, and responsibility, embedding them into the structures of statecraft.

The outcomes of this leadership system were marked by strong centralised governance, resilience in the face of both internal and external pressures, and the codification of ethical leadership norms that linked political authority to moral responsibility. The Sassanid leadership model thus represents both a continuation and an evolution of earlier Persian traditions, reinforcing the enduring patterns of centralisation, hierarchical loyalty, and religiously informed legitimacy that have characterised Iranian leadership across centuries.

5.4. Safavid Dynasty (1501–1736 CE)

The Safavid Dynasty marks a pivotal transformation in the historical evolution of leadership in Iran, distinguished by the institutionalisation of Shi'a Islam as the state religion and the creation of a unified Iranian identity under a centralised monarchy.

Emerging at the turn of the sixteenth century, the Safavid rulers consolidated political authority through a fusion of charismatic leadership, dynastic legitimacy, and religious ideology, positioning themselves as both temporal sovereigns and spiritual leaders. This period represents a decisive departure from earlier empires by embedding Shi'a doctrine into the very fabric of governance, thereby reshaping organisational structures, authority, and cultural norms in enduring ways. Safavid leadership practices were characterised by strong centralisation and a hierarchical system in which loyalty to the Shah was both a political and religious obligation. The integration of clerical authority into the governance framework legitimised royal power, while simultaneously establishing a new institutional balance between monarchy and the Shi'a religious establishment. Culturally, the Safavid period reinforced collectivist and hierarchical norms, while organisationally it expanded bureaucratic and military institutions to administer a growing, multi-ethnic empire. The outcomes of this leadership model were profound: the Safavids forged a distinct Iranian national identity anchored in Shi'a Islam, strengthened state centralisation, and institutionalised a model of religious-political legitimacy that has continued to influence leadership traditions in Iran well into the modern era. As such, the Safavid Dynasty stands as a defining moment in the interplay of religion, politics, and culture in shaping organisational leadership.

5.4.1. Leadership Characteristics

Leadership under the Safavid Dynasty was defined by a distinctive fusion of charismatic monarchy and religious legitimacy, creating a model of authority that transformed both the political and cultural landscape of Iran. The Safavid Shahs drew their legitimacy not only from dynastic and charismatic claims but also from their role as champions of Shi'a Islam, which they institutionalised as the official state religion. This decisive move embedded Shi'a ideology into the foundation of governance, reinforcing the Shah's authority as both a temporal ruler and a spiritual leader. In doing so, the Safavids forged a unique national identity that permanently linked Persian statehood with Shi'a doctrine, shaping the political and cultural trajectory of Iran for centuries to come.

Cultural norms under the Safavids reflected high power distance and strong hierarchical loyalty, with allegiance to the Shah framed as both a political duty and a religious obligation. Organisationally, the dynasty expanded and centralised both the military and the bureaucracy, ensuring administrative cohesion and reinforcing the Shah's dominance over a diverse empire. At the same time, the incorporation of clerical oversight into governance enhanced the regime's legitimacy, creating a dual system in which political authority was continuously validated by religious sanction. The outcomes of this leadership model were significant and enduring.

By grounding political authority in Shi'a Islam, the Safavids not only secured legitimacy and stability through hierarchical centralisation but also institutionalised a religious-political model of leadership that has continued to influence Iranian governance to the present day. This legacy established enduring patterns of authority in which religion, politics, and culture remained inseparably intertwined (See Table 5.4.1).

Table 5.4.1: Safavid Leadership Features

Dimension	Characteristics
Authority Type	Charismatic / Religious
National Identity	Persian Shi'a identity consolidation
Religious Influence	Shi'a ideology integrated with political power
Cultural Norms	High loyalty, hierarchical obedience
Organisational Structures	Centralised bureaucracy, clerical oversight
Outcomes	Religious-political legitimacy, governance stability

5.5. Qajar Dynasty (1789–1925)

The Qajar Dynasty represents a transitional yet deeply contested phase in the evolution of organisational leadership in Iran, situated between the Safavid model of religious-political centralisation and the modernising ambitions of the Pahlavi state. Rising to power in the aftermath of the chaotic post-Safavid period, the Qajars sought to consolidate authority through dynastic legitimacy, tribal alliances, and continuity of hierarchical governance. However, their leadership was continually challenged by internal fragmentation, foreign intervention, and economic dependency, all of which exposed the structural weaknesses of their centralised but fragile system.

Leadership during the Qajar era was marked by a reliance on traditional and charismatic authority rather than rational-bureaucratic institutionalisation, with rulers emphasising dynastic lineage and patrimonial loyalty to sustain their power. While Shi'a Islam remained an important source of legitimacy, the Qajar Shahs were often less successful than their Safavid predecessors in integrating religious authority into governance, leading to periodic tensions between the monarchy and the ulama (religious scholars). Cultural norms of high-power distance and hierarchical loyalty persisted but were increasingly undermined by corruption, nepotism, and inefficiencies within administrative structures. Organisationally, the dynasty maintained a centralised bureaucracy and military, but these institutions lacked the professionalisation and resilience required to withstand both domestic reformist pressures and external imperial encroachments. The outcomes of this leadership model were thus characterised by instability and vulnerability: while the Qajars preserved continuity in dynastic authority and hierarchical governance, they also oversaw a period of political decline, culminating in the Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911), which challenged autocratic leadership and introduced early debates on modern forms of political legitimacy and institutional reform. In this respect, the Qajar period stands as a critical juncture in Iranian leadership history, representing both the persistence of traditional authority and the emergence of reformist discourses that paved the way for modernisation under the Pahlavi.

5.5.1. Leadership Characteristics

Leadership under the Qajar Dynasty was primarily anchored in traditional authority, sustained by dynastic lineage and patrimonial loyalty, yet increasingly supplemented by fragile bureaucratic structures that lacked the institutional strength of earlier Persian empires. The Qajar monarchs projected

continuity of Persian identity through dynastic rule. However, this national identity was continually undermined by internal weakness, corruption, and heavy foreign interference, particularly from British and Russian imperial powers (Ansari, 2012). Unlike the Safavid model, where religious authority was deeply integrated into governance, the Qajars maintained a more limited clerical influence, as the monarchy sought to centralise control while simultaneously accommodating the growing influence of secular and reformist discourses.

Culturally, leadership practices remained marked by high power distance and expectations of loyalty to the Shah. However, the legitimacy of this model eroded over time as socio-economic crises, foreign concessions, and inefficiencies weakened public confidence in dynastic rule. Organisationally, the Qajar state was characterised by weak bureaucratic institutions and patrimonial governance, in which personal loyalty and familial networks often outweighed meritocratic or institutionalised systems of authority. This hindered the dynasty's ability to modernise effectively or resist external pressures.

The outcomes of this leadership model were thus mixed. While the Qajars preserved hierarchical governance and the traditional Persian monarchical structure, they achieved only limited modernisation, and their reliance on patrimonial authority exposed the dynasty to both internal reformist challenges and external domination. Ultimately, the leadership characteristics of the Qajar period illustrate the tensions between continuity and decline, reflecting the persistence of hierarchical structures without the institutional strength to adapt to modernising pressures (See Table 5.5.1)

Table 5.5.1: Qajar Leadership Features

Dimension	Characteristics
Authority Type	Traditional and weakly bureaucratic
National Identity	Continued dynastic legitimacy; weakened by corruption and foreign intervention (Ansari, 2012)
Religious Influence	Reduced clerical integration compared to the Safavids; rising secular and reformist influence
Cultural Norms	High power distance; loyalty central but increasingly contested
Organisational Structures	Weak bureaucracy; patrimonial governance dominated by familial and tribal networks
Outcomes	Limited modernisation; preservation of hierarchy without institutional resilience

5.6. Pahlavi Dynasty (1925–1979)

The Pahlavi Dynasty marked a transformative period in Iranian leadership, characterised by a decisive shift from traditional patrimonial authority toward a more centralized, secular, and technocratic model. Reza Shah and later Mohammad Reza Shah pursued ambitious modernisation and state-building projects, embedding Western-inspired rational-legal principles into governance while maintaining strong hierarchical control. National identity was reconstructed around secular nationalism, with

a focus on industrialisation, centralised administration, and state-driven economic development. Religious influence was deliberately curtailed compared to the Safavid era, as the monarchy sought to establish the primacy of secular authority and technocratic expertise. Cultural norms continued to reflect high power distance and strong hierarchical obedience, but were now reinforced through formalised education, military institutions, and state bureaucracy. Organisational structures became more institutionalised, with ministries, civil services, and modernised military forces implementing centralised decision-making and operational efficiency. Leadership outcomes during this period included strengthened state capacity, administrative consolidation, and significant strides toward socio-economic modernisation. However, the top-down approach, combined with limited political inclusivity, fostered tensions that would later contribute to the 1979 revolutionary upheaval. This period exemplifies the integration of rational-legal authority with centralised leadership, illustrating both the potential and limitations of adopting Western-inspired governance frameworks within the Iranian sociocultural context.

5.6.1. Leadership Characteristics

During the Pahlavi Dynasty, leadership was primarily defined by rational-legal authority, reinforced with authoritarian traits to maintain centralised control over the rapidly modernising state. National identity was actively reconstructed around secular nationalism, emphasising industrialisation, economic development, and the consolidation of centralised governance (Katouzian, 2009). Religious influence was deliberately diminished as secularisation policies curtailed the political role of the clergy, replacing traditional legitimising mechanisms with technocratic and bureaucratic rationality. Cultural norms continued to reflect high power distance but were now complemented by a meritocratic orientation within the civil service and state institutions. Organisational structures underwent significant reform, with Western-inspired bureaucracies, professionalised military forces, and technocratic management systems implementing standardised administrative procedures and centralised decision-making. Leadership outcomes included accelerated modernisation, improved bureaucratic efficiency, and the introduction of Westernised leadership practices; however, limited grassroots participation and authoritarian centralisation created a top-down governance style that alienated segments of society (See Table 5.6.1)

Table 5.6.1: Pahlavi Leadership Features

Dimension	Characteristics
Authority Type	Rational-Legal / Authoritarian
National Identity	Secular nationalism
Religious Influence	Limited
Cultural Norms	Hierarchical, meritocratic bureaucracy
Organisational Structures	Modernised military, technocratic bureaucracy
Outcomes	Modernisation, bureaucratic efficiency, centralised control

5.7. Post-1979 Islamic Republic

The post-1979 Islamic Republic of Iran represents a profound transformation in organisational leadership, blending religious legitimacy with state authority and technocratic governance. Leadership in this period is characterised by a hybrid model that integrates clerical oversight, revolutionary ideology, and managerial expertise, reflecting the complex socio-political landscape of the Islamic Republic. National identity is closely intertwined with Shi'a Islamic principles, which provide both ideological guidance and political legitimacy, while cultural norms continue to emphasise hierarchical authority, loyalty, and collectivism. Organisational structures combine centralized bureaucracy with sector-specific technocratic management, particularly in strategic domains such as the military, nuclear industries, and state enterprises. Leadership outcomes are shaped by this synthesis, producing resilient institutions capable of navigating internal and external pressures, maintaining ideological cohesion, and fostering sectoral innovation within a framework of religious-political legitimacy.

5.7.1. Leadership Characteristics

The leadership characteristics of the post-1979 Islamic Republic reflect a uniquely hybrid model that combines religious, political, and managerial authority to govern a complex socio-political landscape. Authority is legitimised through Shi'a Islamic principles, deeply embedded in both state institutions and organisational hierarchies, while revolutionary ideology reinforces cohesion and national identity. Cultural norms such as high-power distance, collectivism, and loyalty to both the state and religion shape leadership behaviours and decision-making processes.

Organisational structures include the military—particularly the Revolutionary Guard—nuclear and strategic industries, the state bureaucracy, and an evolving private sector, each operating under varying blends of hierarchical control and technocratic expertise. The outcomes of this hybrid system are multifaceted, producing leadership models that integrate transactional and transformational traits, promote institutional resilience, foster strategic innovation, and develop national capabilities across critical sectors, illustrating the synthesis of historical Persian traditions with contemporary Islamic-revolutionary governance (See Figure 5.7.1).

Table 5.7.1: Post-Revolution Leadership Features

Sector	Leadership Style	Authority Basis	Outcomes
Military (IRGC)	Authoritarian / Transactional	Religious + National Loyalty	Strategic resilience, centralised control
Nuclear / Strategic Industries	Hybrid / Transformational	Technocratic + Religious	Innovation, national capability
Bureaucracy / Public Sector	Transactional / Paternalistic	Rational-Legal + Religious	Centralised efficiency, loyalty
Private Sector / Start-ups	Transformational / Participative	Meritocratic + Cultural Values	Innovation, partial modernisation

5.8. Summary of Historical Evolution

Across Iran's historical trajectory, certain continuities in organisational leadership are striking. Centralised authority, high power distance, loyalty to leadership, and hierarchical structures remained enduring features from the Achaemenid Empire through to the post-1979 Islamic Republic, reflecting deeply embedded cultural and institutional norms. However, distinct ruptures also emerged, most notably the secularisation and Western-inspired modernisation initiatives of the Pahlavi dynasty, and the post-1979 integration of religious legitimacy with technocratic and managerial practices, producing a uniquely hybrid leadership system. Contemporary Iranian leadership exemplifies this hybridity, combining religious authority, political power, technocratic expertise, and selective adoption of Western management principles, especially within strategic sectors such as the military and nuclear industries. These patterns carry significant implications for organisational leadership theory, highlighting the limitations of purely Western frameworks and underscoring the necessity of contextual adaptation. Practical analysis and application of leadership models in Iran—and comparable non-Western settings—requires an appreciation of how historical legacies, religious ideologies, and cultural norms dynamically interact to shape hybrid and sector-specific leadership practices.

Chapter 6: Theoretical Analysis and Integration

6.1. Introduction

This chapter situates the historical evolution of Iranian organisational leadership (Chapter 5) within Western leadership theories and develops an integrated contextual framework. The analysis aims to explain how leadership practices in Iran reflect a hybrid of traditional, religious, and modern managerial logics, highlighting convergence and divergence from classical leadership models.

6.2. Western Leadership Theories in the Iranian Context

6.2.1. Weberian Authority

Weber (1947) distinguished traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal authority. Applying this framework to Iran: Achaemenid and Sassanid periods: Leadership primarily traditional and charismatic, legitimised through dynastic authority and Zoroastrian ethics (Briant, 2002; Boyce, 2001). Safavid era: Charismatic authority combined with religious legitimacy, reflecting Shi'a ideology (Newman, 2006). Pahlavi period: Rational-legal authority dominated with bureaucratic modernisation and technocratic governance (Katouzian, 2009). Post-1979 Islamic Republic: Authority is hybrid, combining rational-legal, religious, and charismatic elements (Alvandi, 2020).

Table 6.1: Weberian Authority Across Iranian History

Period	Authority Type	Characteristics
Achaemenid (550–330 BCE)	Charismatic / Traditional	Dynastic legitimacy, centralised bureaucracy
Sassanid (224–651 CE)	Charismatic / Traditional	Zoroastrian ethics, hierarchical loyalty
Safavid (1501–1736 CE)	Charismatic / Religious	Shi'a religious legitimacy, political control
Pahlavi (1925–1979)	Rational-Legal / Authoritarian	Western-inspired bureaucracy, technocracy
Post-1979 Islamic Republic	Hybrid	Religious, political, and managerial integration

6.2.2. Transactional and Transformational Leadership

Transactional leadership: Evident in military, bureaucratic, and state-owned sectors, emphasising hierarchy, rules, and rewards/punishments (Bass, 1990). Transformational leadership: Found in revolutionary leadership, private sectors, and strategic industries, emphasising vision, motivation, and adaptability (Burns, 1978).

Figure 6.2.2: Sectoral Leadership Styles in Iran

Sector	Transactional (%)	Transformational (%)
Military	70	30
Nuclear / Strategic Industries	60	40
Bureaucracy	80	20
Private Sector / Start-ups	40	60

Analysis: The Iranian context blends transactional and transformational leadership, forming hybrid models that adapt to sectoral and cultural requirements.

6.2.3. Cultural Dimensions: Hofstede and GLOBE

Iranian leadership is shaped by national culture, impacting decision-making, hierarchy, and organisational behaviour (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004). High power distance: Centralised decision-making and hierarchical authority. Collectivism: Loyalty to institutions and leaders; group cohesion over individualism. Low gender egalitarianism: Male-dominated leadership structures; gradual expansion of female participation. Moderate uncertainty avoidance: Balances risk management with innovation, especially in nuclear and military sectors.

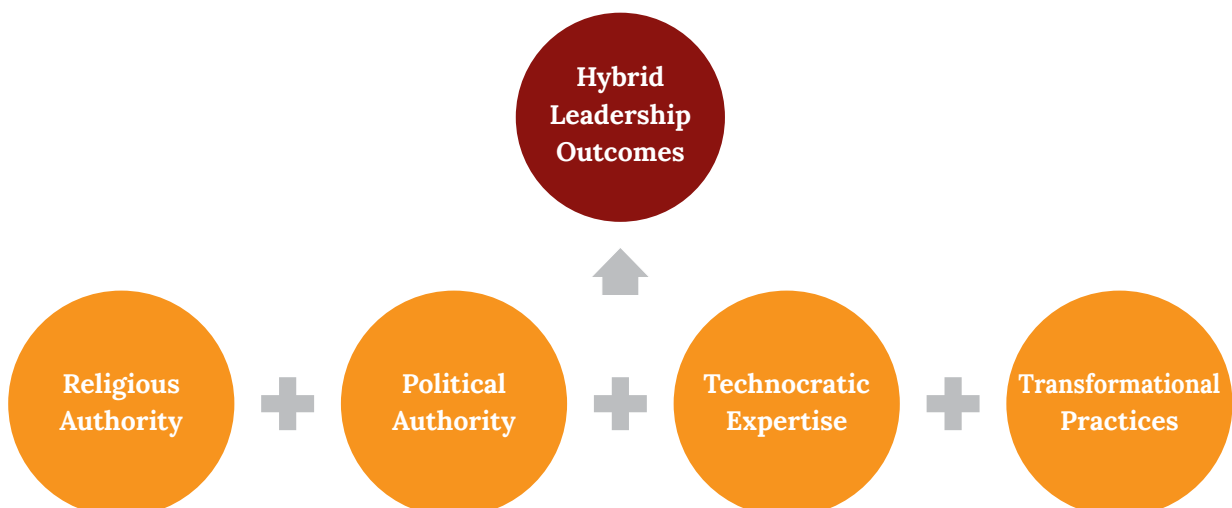
Table 6.2: Cultural Dimensions and Leadership Implications

Dimension	Level	Implications for Leadership
Power Distance	High	Centralised authority; strong hierarchy
Collectivism	High	Loyalty, cohesion, group-oriented decisions
Gender Egalitarianism	Low	Male-dominated leadership
Uncertainty Avoidance	Medium	Balance between planning and adaptability
Performance Orientation	High	Achievement-driven, especially in technical sectors

6.3. Hybrid Leadership Models in Iran

In the post-1979 Islamic Republic, Iranian organisational leadership exemplifies a hybrid model that integrates multiple sources of authority and expertise. Religious authority, particularly the oversight of Shi'a clerics, remains deeply embedded in strategic sectors and high-level decision-making, providing moral legitimacy and ethical guidance for organisational conduct (Alvandi, 2020). Political authority is reinforced through revolutionary legitimacy, ensuring that national security imperatives and state priorities are closely aligned with leadership practices. At the same time, technocratic and managerial expertise plays a critical role, especially in the military, nuclear, and industrial sectors, where technical knowledge and strategic planning are essential for organisational effectiveness. Complementing these elements, transformational leadership practices are increasingly observed in the private sector and innovative industries, fostering creativity, participatory engagement, and strategic change. Together, these dimensions form a complex, context-specific leadership paradigm that blends religious, political, and managerial authority while balancing hierarchical control with adaptive, innovation-driven practices.

Figure 6.2: Hybrid Leadership Model Framework



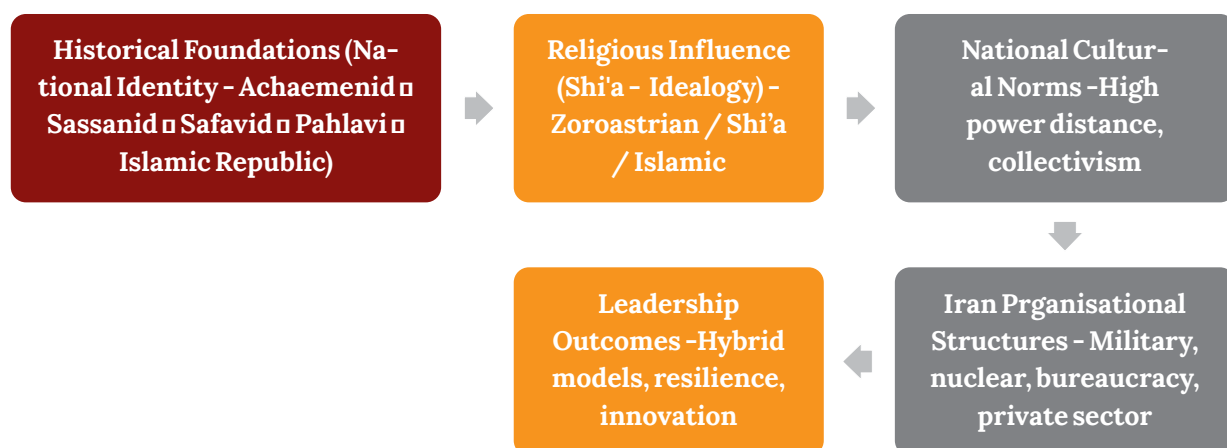
Leadership Outcomes:

Iranian organisational leadership has consistently demonstrated resilience, particularly under the pressures of international sanctions and complex geopolitical challenges. This resilience is coupled with strategic innovation, especially within high-tech and military sectors, where leaders integrate advanced technologies and adaptive strategies to maintain competitive and defensive capabilities. Leadership practices also prioritise national capability development, exemplified by Iran's nuclear and defence programs, which reflect a long-term commitment to self-reliance and strategic autonomy. Simultaneously, there is a selective integration of global leadership norms, such as meritocratic management, participatory decision-making, and transformational approaches, which are adapted to align with local institutional logics, cultural expectations, and the broader political-religious framework. Together, these outcomes illustrate the uniquely hybrid and context-sensitive nature of Iranian leadership, combining historical legacies, cultural norms, and contemporary strategic imperatives.

6.4. Contextual Framework Integration

The contextual framework links historical evolution, cultural norms, and organisational structures to leadership outcomes (Sections 3–5):

Figure 6.3: Contextual Framework for Iranian Leadership



Analysis:

The study of Iranian organisational leadership reveals that Western-centric theories alone are insufficient to capture its complexity.

Leadership practices are deeply embedded in historical, religious, and cultural contexts, producing hybrid models that blend authoritarian authority, religious legitimacy, and modern managerial logic. These hybrid forms are particularly evident in strategic sectors, where considerations of national security, technological innovation, and organisational resilience converge. By combining these diverse influences, Iranian leaders navigate both domestic institutional expectations and external pressures, creating a context-specific leadership paradigm that challenges conventional Western frameworks while demonstrating adaptive effectiveness in high-stakes environments.

6.5. Emerging Leadership Paradigms

In Iran, resilience-oriented leadership has been a defining feature in critical sectors such as the military and nuclear industries, enabling organisations to withstand external pressures, sanctions, and geopolitical challenges. Leadership in STEM and scientific domains combines advanced technical expertise with managerial authority, ensuring both innovation and operational control in highly specialised environments. Experimental approaches, such as principles applied in quantum and plasma research, demonstrate a unique integration of decentralisation, collaborative problem-solving, and innovation, reflecting adaptive leadership practices tailored to high-tech sectors. These developments underscore the broader implication that non-Western contexts like Iran challenge the assumed universality of Western leadership models. Instead, they generate context-specific, hybrid paradigms that blend indigenous cultural norms, historical legacies, religious authority, and sectoral expertise, offering valuable insights for comparative and global leadership studies.

6.6. Summary

Iranian organisational leadership is historically rooted, culturally embedded, and religiously influenced. Leadership evolution demonstrates a trajectory from traditional and religious authority to hybrid models integrating technocratic, transformational, and transactional practices. Western leadership theories provide useful analytical tools but must be adapted to account for the interplay of history, religion, culture, and organisational structures. The developed contextual framework links historical evolution to contemporary hybrid leadership outcomes, offering insights for theory, practice, and policy in Iran and comparable non-Western contexts.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Implications

7.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the key findings from the historical-theoretical analysis of Iranian organisational leadership and interprets their significance. It highlights how national identity, religion, cultural norms, and organisational structures have produced hybrid leadership models and explores their implications for leadership theory, organisational practice, and national strategic development.

7.2 Continuities and Ruptures in Iranian Leadership

7.2.1. Continuities

Across Iran's historical and contemporary leadership landscape, several enduring patterns emerge. Centralised authority has persisted throughout dynasties and regimes, reflecting deeply ingrained hierarchical structures, high power distance, and cultural norms of loyalty (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004). Religious legitimacy has consistently influenced leadership, even during secular periods such as the Pahlavi era, where religious identity continued to shape societal expectations and cultural perceptions of authority (Katouzian, 2009). Resilience and strategic innovation have been hallmarks of Iranian leadership from the Achaemenid administrative system to the post-1979 military and nuclear sectors, demonstrating an enduring capacity to develop adaptive strategies for organisational survival, national security, and capability enhancement (Cordesman, 2009).

7.2.2. Ruptures

During the Pahlavi era, secularisation reshaped Iranian leadership by diminishing clerical influence and introducing modern bureaucratic and technocratic practices inspired by Western models. In contrast, the post-1979 period witnessed a hybridisation of leadership, integrating religious authority, revolutionary legitimacy, and technocratic expertise into complex organisational models that diverge from purely Western frameworks. These patterns illustrate that Iranian leadership is highly contextually adaptive, blending historical traditions, cultural norms, and religious legacies with contemporary organisational imperatives.

7.3. Hybrid Leadership Models

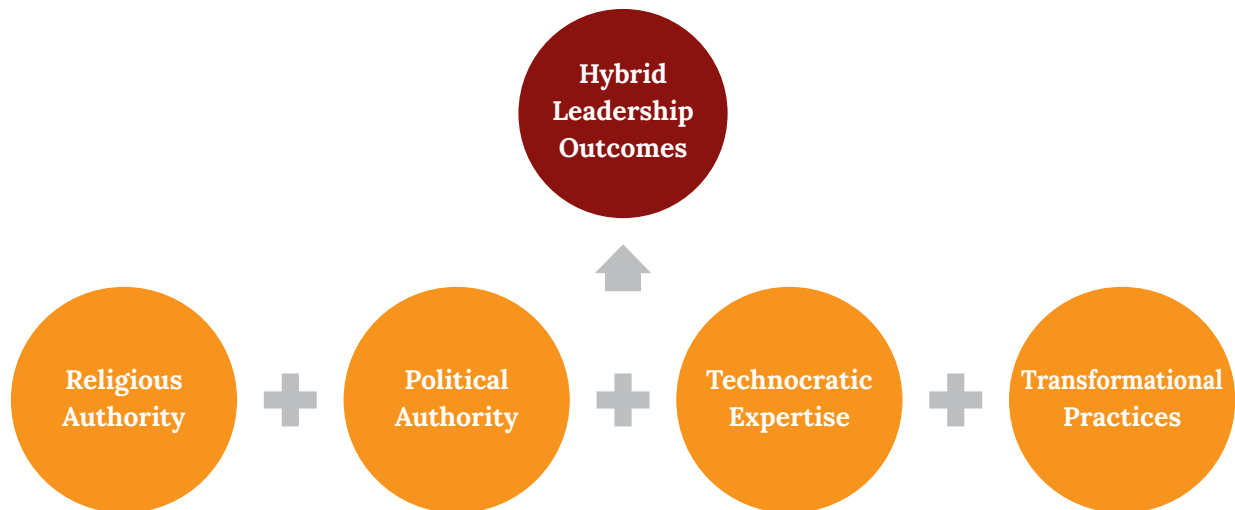
Hybrid leadership models in Iran represent the synthesis of multiple sources of authority and managerial approaches, reflecting the country's unique historical, cultural, and socio-political context. These models integrate religious legitimacy, political authority, and technocratic expertise, while incorporating elements of both transactional and transformational leadership.

In strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear and high-tech industries, and state bureaucracy, leaders balance hierarchical control and loyalty with innovation, expertise, and adaptive decision-making. Hybrid leadership manifests in several distinctive ways. Religious authority, rooted in Shi'a ideology, provides moral legitimacy and social cohesion, particularly in post-1979 institutions. Political authority, derived from revolutionary and state structures, ensures centralised decision-making and coordination across organisations. Technocratic expertise allows leaders to navigate complex technical environments, especially in scientific and strategic domains, blending managerial rationality with sector-specific knowledge. This hybridisation challenges conventional Western leadership frameworks, demonstrating that effective organisational leadership in non-Western contexts requires flexibility, contextual awareness, and the ability to integrate seemingly divergent leadership logics. Consequently, Iranian hybrid models exemplify how history, religion, culture, and organisational demands converge to produce leadership practices that are simultaneously locally grounded and globally relevant.

7.3.1. Defining the Hybrid Model

The Iranian hybrid leadership model represents a multi-layered integration of authority and managerial approaches. It combines religious authority, with Shi'a clerical influence providing ethical guidance and legitimising organisational decisions; political authority, rooted in revolutionary legitimacy and centralised state control, ensuring hierarchical coherence and policy alignment; and technocratic expertise, where leaders employ managerial and technical skills to navigate complex strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear, and high-tech industries. Additionally, transformational practices—particularly in the private sector and entrepreneurial environments—encourage participation, innovation, and adaptive problem-solving. Together, these elements create a context-specific leadership paradigm that blends traditional, religious, and Western-inspired managerial logics, producing resilience, strategic capability, and organisational adaptability unique to Iran.

Figure 7.1: Iranian Hybrid Leadership Model



7.3.2. Sectoral Applications

In Iran, hybrid leadership manifests differently across organisational sectors, reflecting the interaction of authority, culture, and functional requirements. In the military and Revolutionary Guard (IRGC), leadership is primarily authoritarian and transactional, emphasising hierarchical control while integrating resilience-focused innovation to adapt to sanctions and external pressures (Cordesman, 2009). Nuclear and strategic industries exhibit a hybrid and transformational style, combining technical and managerial expertise with national security imperatives to ensure both operational effectiveness and strategic alignment (Kassiri, 2016). Bureaucratic institutions operate under paternalistic, hierarchical, and rule-driven leadership, blending rational-legal authority with religious and ethical oversight to maintain institutional cohesion (Katouzian, 2009). The private sector demonstrates a growing adoption of participative and transformational leadership, integrating global management practices while remaining sensitive to local cultural norms and collectivist expectations, fostering innovation and adaptability in emerging entrepreneurial contexts (Ramin, 2011).

7.4. Implications for Leadership Theory

1. Challenging Western-Centric Models:

These observations indicate that traditional Western leadership frameworks—Weberian authority, transactional, and transformational models—require contextual adaptation to capture the dynamics of Iranian leadership fully. Indigenous hybrid models, which integrate religious legitimacy, political authority, technocratic expertise, and culturally embedded norms, exemplify non-Western pathways to achieving both leadership legitimacy and organisational effectiveness, highlighting the importance of socio-historical and cultural specificity in leadership theory.

2. Integration of Culture and Religion:

Cultural norms and religious ideologies are central to leadership practice, suggesting that leadership theories must incorporate sociocultural and historical dimensions.

3. Emergence of Sector-Specific Leadership Paradigms:

Strategic sectors such as the military and nuclear industry require resilience, innovation, and hybrid authority models. Lessons from these sectors can inform leadership development in other non-Western, high-stakes contexts.

7.5. Implications for Organisational Practice in Iran

1. Leadership Development:

Hybrid models highlight the need for training programs that integrate technical, ethical, and political competencies.

2. Strategic Sectors:

Military and nuclear organisations demonstrate adaptive leadership in high-uncertainty environments, which can inform public policy and crisis management.

3. Private Sector Innovation:

Firms must balance transformational leadership and cultural loyalty norms to enhance productivity and innovation.

4. Gender and Leadership:

The gradual inclusion of women in managerial roles requires cultural sensitivity alongside organisational reform (Shakib, 2015).

7.6. Policy and National Development Implications

1. National Capability Building:

Hybrid leadership models facilitate resilience and innovation in defence, nuclear, and technological sectors, reinforcing national strategic autonomy.

2. Global Integration:

Leadership practices that combine Western management principles with indigenous norms allow Iran to participate in global innovation systems without abandoning local identity.

3. Institutional Reform:

Policymakers can leverage insights from historical and contemporary leadership patterns to strengthen bureaucracy, innovation capacity, and organisational culture.

7.7. Contributions to Knowledge

This study advances the understanding of Iranian organisational leadership by developing a comprehensive contextual framework that links national identity, religious ideology, cultural norms, organisational structures, and leadership outcomes. It demonstrates that Iranian leadership models are inherently hybrid, adaptive, and sector-specific, challenging the universality of Western-centric theories. The analysis highlights the importance of historical continuity and rupture, showing how past dynastic, religious, and revolutionary legacies shape contemporary leadership practices in non-Western contexts. Finally, the study offers practical insights and policy recommendations, particularly relevant to strategic sectors, innovation-driven industries, and broader leadership development initiatives. It illustrates how contextualised leadership frameworks can guide effective organisational practice.

7.8. Summary

Iranian organisational leadership reflects a dynamic, multi-layered interplay of historical legacies, religious authority, cultural norms, and organisational structures that together shape distinctive patterns of governance and managerial practice. Across dynasties and political regimes, leadership has been simultaneously adaptive and resilient, balancing centralised authority with sector-specific innovation, and blending traditional, religious, and Western-inspired elements into hybrid forms. These hybrid leadership models exemplify the contextual adaptation of Western theories—such as Weberian authority, transactional, and transformational frameworks—while also exposing the limitations of applying purely Western models to non-Western contexts.

They demonstrate how leadership effectiveness in Iran is contingent upon the integration of local cultural expectations, religious legitimacy, historical continuity, and contemporary organisational needs. Insights from the Iranian experience provide valuable lessons for leadership theory by highlighting the importance of context, for organisational practice by illustrating ways to reconcile hierarchical structures with innovation, and for policy by informing approaches to governance, strategic industries, and national capability development. This chapter, therefore, serves as a bridge between the historical-theoretical analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6 and the practical implications for modern organisations, sectors, and national development, offering a nuanced understanding of how leadership in complex, high-stakes environments can be both culturally embedded and strategically adaptive.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1. Introduction

This chapter summarises the study's key findings, highlights its theoretical and practical contributions, discusses its limitations, and proposes recommendations for organisational leadership practice and future research. Building on the historical-theoretical analysis (Chapters 5–6) and the discussion of hybrid leadership models (Chapter 7), this chapter emphasises the significance of contextualised leadership frameworks in Iran.

8.2. Summary of Key Findings

1. Historical Evolution of Leadership

Leadership in Iran evolved from dynastic and religious authority in the Achaemenid and Sassanid periods to religiously legitimised political authority under the Safavids, followed by secular-modern bureaucratic structures under the Pahlavi. Post-1979, organisational leadership became hybrid, integrating religious, political, and technocratic authority with selective transformational practices.

2. Role of National Identity and Religion

National identity consistently reinforced leadership legitimacy, whether through dynastic continuity, revolutionary ideology, or Islamic principles. Religious influence evolved from Zoroastrian ethics to Shi'a ideology and post-1979 Islamic governance, directly shaping organisational structures and sectoral leadership outcomes.

3. Cultural Norms and Organisational Structures

High power distance, collectivism, and loyalty have persisted across historical periods. Organisational structures vary by sector: hierarchical in the military and bureaucracy, hybrid in the nuclear and

strategic industries, and increasingly transformational in the private sector.

4. Hybrid Leadership Models

Contemporary Iranian leadership reflects a blend of transactional, transformational, religious, political, and technocratic authority, particularly in strategic sectors. Sector-specific hybridisation enables resilience, innovation, and national capability development, especially in high-stakes industries.

5. Applicability of Western Leadership Theories

Western frameworks (Weber, Burns, Bass, Hofstede, GLOBE) are partially applicable but must be contextually adapted. The Iranian case highlights the limitations of purely Western-centric models in non-Western, culturally and historically complex environments.

8.3. Theoretical Contributions

1. Contextual Framework Development

This study developed a comprehensive contextual framework linking historical foundations, national identity, religious influence, cultural norms, organisational structures, and leadership outcomes. Provides a roadmap for analysing leadership in non-Western contexts.

2. Hybrid Leadership Model Conceptualisation

Identified sector-specific hybrid leadership models combining religious, political, and managerial logics. Expands leadership theory by integrating historical, cultural, and religious dimensions, offering a non-Western perspective.

3. Bridging Historical and Contemporary Analysis

Demonstrates the continuity and rupture of leadership practices across dynasties and regimes. Offers empirical grounding for comparative leadership studies in historical and contemporary contexts.

8.4. Practical Implications

1. Organisational Leadership Development

Training programmes should integrate technical expertise, ethical/religious awareness, and political and cultural competence. Leadership curricula in universities and institutions can benefit from the hybrid framework.

2. Strategic Sector Management

Military, nuclear, and strategic industries should emphasise resilience, adaptability, and innovation, informed by hybrid leadership principles.

3. Private Sector and Innovation

Encourage transformational leadership practices while respecting cultural and loyalty norms. Gradual inclusion of women and youth in leadership can enhance organisational dynamism.

4. Policy Development

Policymakers can leverage historical insights to strengthen bureaucratic efficiency, innovation capacity, and national capability development.

8.5. Limitations

1. Secondary Data Reliance:

Some organisational and strategic sector information is inaccessible, limiting the depth of empirical evidence.

2. Interpretive Bias:

Historical and religious texts may be subject to interpretive variation, which is mitigated by triangulating multiple sources.

3. Context-Specific Findings:

Hybrid leadership models are highly context-dependent; generalisation to other non-Western countries should be cautious.

8.6. Recommendations for Future Research

1. Empirical Validation of Hybrid Models

Conduct primary field studies in Iranian organisations to validate the proposed hybrid leadership framework.

2. Cross-Cultural Comparative Studies

Compare Iran with other Middle Eastern or Asian countries to explore both convergence and divergence in non-Western leadership.

3. Sector-Specific Analysis

In-depth studies of military, nuclear, or technology sectors to understand the application of hybrid leadership in high-stakes environments.

4. Gender and Leadership Research

Examine female leadership pathways in Iran's evolving organisational landscape.

5. Integration of Emerging Leadership Paradigms

Explore the applicability of resilience, quantum, and STEM leadership models in Iranian organisations.

8.7. Conclusion

Iranian organisational leadership is a dynamic, historically grounded, and culturally embedded phenomenon that has evolved over millennia, shaped by successive dynasties, revolutionary transformations, and socio-political shifts. Across periods—from the Achaemenid and Sassanid empires to the Safavid, Qajar, and Pahlavi dynasties, and into the post-1979 Islamic Republic—leadership has reflected an intricate balance of centralised authority, cultural norms, religious legitimacy, and organisational structures. Contemporary hybrid models, which integrate religious, political, and managerial authority, have emerged as adaptive strategies enabling resilience, innovation, and the development of national capabilities, particularly in strategic sectors such as the military, nuclear industries, and high-tech enterprises. While Western leadership theories—such as Weber's authority typologies, Burns and Bass's transactional and transformational frameworks, and Hofstede and GLOBE's cultural dimensions—provide valuable analytical tools, their applicability is limited without contextual adaptation to Iran's unique historical, cultural, and religious environment. This study contributes to leadership theory by highlighting the importance of hybridisation and contextual sensitivity; to Iranian organisational studies by mapping historical trajectories onto contemporary practices; and to policy development by offering insights for governance, strategic management, and sectoral leadership in high-stakes, culturally complex environments. By synthesising historical, theoretical, and empirical perspectives, it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding leadership in non-Western contexts, illustrating how indigenous approaches can coexist with, adapt to, and even challenge conventional Western paradigms.

Final Statement:

Iran exemplifies how historical, cultural, and religious contexts shape organisational leadership, offering lessons for leadership theory, organisational practice, and strategic national development in the 21st century.

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The Impact of Sanctions on Iran-China Trade Interactions: Political Risks and Financial Flexibility

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Abstract

Imposing sanctions is a tool to increase pressure on countries' political risk, an issue the United States has been implementing especially since 2018, with its unilateral sanctions against Iran. The main purpose of this study is to examine the impact of sanctions on trade with China and identify ways to improve them. A review of the time series of Iran-China trade from 2000 to 2021 shows that although trade transactions were continuous during the period of sanctions before 2018, they fluctuated in response to sanctions, and trade fell to its lowest level in 2018. The study of existing strategies for maintaining the level of Iran-China exchanges indicates that the development of Iran's export portfolio, especially in the field of petrochemical products, along with Iran's membership in BRICS and the use of existing processes in this organization for de-dollarization, are the facilities available to develop Iran's exchanges under sanctions.

Keywords: Iran, China, Sanctions, De-dollarization, BRICS.

Introduction

The relations and interactions among countries depend on their approaches to the intertwined domestic and international conditions. The foreign policy approach plays a decisive role in shaping governments' behavioral orientation in bilateral or multilateral relations. The behavioral orientation of governments is often different, leading to a mix of cooperation, friendship, competition, and hostility, which in turn shapes the alignment or discord of governments' foreign policies and their sensitivity in their business relations with others. China-Iran relations are no exception. Despite long-standing historical ties, bilateral relations between the two countries have remained volatile, especially in re-

cent years, due to factors such as the United States' unilateral and multilateral sanctions. Although the Islamic Revolution of Iran has been the target of U.S. sanctions since the beginning of its victory, the multi-layered and multiple nature of U.S. sanctions in recent decades has had the greatest impact on the level of relations between the two countries. The sanctions have targeted the economies of both countries and sought to impose restrictions on them. On the other hand, Iran and China are revisionist countries, which have created common chapters in their foreign policies and, accordingly, have shaped their closeness and, ultimately, their extensive cooperation.

In terms of relations between the two countries, energy exchanges are of great importance. Today, the role of energy in the global economy has grown to the point that it is possible to establish a direct and harmonious relationship with issues such as economic growth, recessions, and countries' trade balances. The efforts of industrialized countries to achieve reliable, affordable energy sources can be evaluated in this regard. In other words, natural energy reserves are considered the backbone of the global economy, and industrialized countries must impose more effective control over the relationship between energy and other economic commodities worldwide. This has made Iran, which ranks third in oil reserves at 18 percent, an important energy source for China. China has been an importer since 1993, despite being the world's fifth-largest oil producer. For this reason, ensuring energy stability and security is one of the most important diplomatic priorities for China's leaders. It has become one of the country's strategic goals on the international stage.

In contrast, Iran, with abundant energy resources, geopolitical centrality in regional and international transit, its position on the new Silk Road, and great political and security influence and importance in the Islamic world and the Middle East, can meet China's strategic needs. However, sanctions imposed on Iran have made it necessary for trading partners to mitigate their impact. Accordingly, this research seeks to investigate how the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States of America's sanctions against Iran have impacted Iran-China energy relations. If the sanctions are effective, in which direction will improvement occur? To answer the question, the time-series analysis of Iran-China exchanges from 2000 to 2021 has been used. The present research seeks to assess the impact of these sanctions in pre-sanctions periods, during sanctions, during the maximum pressure period that was accompanied by the expansion of the scope and severity of comprehensive sanctions, and during the JCPOA and reimposition of sanctions after the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA on Iran-China energy relations. Then the two countries have taken steps to reduce the impact of sanctions or can focus on them.

Literature Research

This section provides a general overview of sanctions theory and its mechanisms. The use of sanctions, particularly economic sanctions, refers to the actions or threats of a country or international organization to punish, restrict, or more generally influence the actions of the sanctioned state, private entities, or powerful elites. Sanctions are clever, targeted, or threatened withdrawal from trade or financial relations (Draca et al., 2023; Gaur et al., 2023; Jeong, 2019). Functionally, the sanctions regime is implemented by blocking assets and imposing trade restrictions to advance foreign policy and national security goals (Blackwill & Harris, 2016). Compared to other foreign policy mechanisms, sanctions are often a medium-level tool that falls short of armed conflict. Sanctions impose a variety of costs on sanctioned countries: currency crises caused by declining exchange rates and dollar

scarcity, banking crises due to disconnects between domestic and foreign banks, and, more generally, economic shocks from a decline in international trade. In addition to sanctioned countries, their trading partners face challenges due to secondary U.S. and UN sanctions.

Sanctions mechanisms against Iran are divided into economic and non-economic thematic areas. Economic mechanisms include financial and banking sectors, energy (oil and gas), petrochemicals, shipping, automobiles, and precious metals. Although non-economic areas cover human rights, terrorism, arms sales, and nuclear issues, their mechanisms are largely economic. In the meantime, trade sanctions are measures to limit economic engagement with the target country by limiting international trade (Maloney, 2015). In this regard, the scope and depth of trade sanctions vary from import to export and are applied unilaterally or multilaterally across sectors. Financial sanctions, on the other hand, include the exchange of financial assets and the blocking of investments. These types of sanctions have increased significantly over time due to the expansion of global economic activity and the integration of financial markets. The main factor influencing sanctions is the dependence of the international trade system on the SWIFT system and the dollar, known as dollarization. In other words, sanctions are imposed through the dollar instrument and by excluding target countries from doing business with it (Heuleppa, 2023).

Since Iran-China trade is mainly based on energy exchanges and the focus of this study is on the effects of sanctions on this part of the two countries' relations, it is generally possible to divide the sanctions mechanisms of Iran's oil and gas industries into four general areas:

1. Sanctions on the purchase and sale of crude oil, gas condensate, and petroleum products.
2. Sanctions on investment in Iran's oil and gas industries and financing them;
3. Sanctions on the export of equipment and technology to Iran;
4. Sanctions on the export of refining products and gasoline to Iran.

The U.S. sanctions on Iran in oil sales date back to the 1979 seizure of the U.S. Embassy, and since 2012 with Obama's Executive Orders 13622 and 13628, the National Defense Authorization Act for 2012 (NDAA, 2012) by Congress on December 31, 2011, the Iran Threat Reduction and Syrian Human Rights Act (TRA) in August 2012, the scope and severity of sanctions increased and various bank, financial, petrochemical, and shipping layers. Moreover, the insurance was covered. Iran's petrochemical industry has also been seriously included in the sanctions regime against Iran since 2011 through various laws and on several occasions. Under Executive Order 13590 (November 2011), under the pretext of the International Atomic Energy Agency's report on Iran's nuclear program, the United States expanded the scope of the D'Amato Act (ISA) to the petrochemical industry. The sanctions mechanisms of this industry also include five main sections: sanctions on petrochemical exports; financial and banking transactions related to exports; shipping and transportation insurance; technical knowledge, equipment, and financing for the establishment of petrochemical units. The following table presents the executive mechanisms for sanctions in the petrochemical industry.

Table 1: sanction Mechanisms against Iran's Petrochemical Industry

Title	Date	Executive mechanism
Executive Order 13590 of the President of the United States	November 21, 2011	Prohibiting the provision of Iranian-backed goods, technology services that would cause the petrochemical industry to be exported if the transaction is worth more than \$250,000 or the total annual transaction value exceeds \$1 million.
EU Council Regulation 2012/267	23 March, 2012	Ban on selling equipment and technology to Iran Investment in petrochemical industry imports and purchasing petrochemical products, providing financial services such as transportation insurance and reinsurance to Iran by the countries of the Europe Union
Executive Order 13622 of the President of the United States	30 July, 2012	Sanctions on any financial entity or individual involved in financial transactions and transactions related to the purchase of Iranian petrochemical products.
The Iran Threat Reduction Act and Syrian Human Rights Act approved by the U.S. Congress	August 3, 2012	Sanctions on any individual in providing goods technology services or support in the development and purchase of petrochemical products from Iran Prohibition of any financial transaction related to the production of logistics or the sale of goods, services and technology related to the Iranian petrochemical industry ...
EU Council Regulation 2012/1263	21 December, 2012	Ban on providing ships to any Iranian individual or company for the transportation and storage of petrochemical products, extending sanctioned items of equipment and technologies related to the petrochemical industry
Executive Order 13645 of the President of the United States	June 3, 2013	Sanctions on any individual or entity involved in financial transactions related to the purchase, sale, transportation and marketing of Iranian petrochemical products.

Sources: US Congress Act (2016); Presidential Documents (2014); The Council of The European Union (2012); Presidential Documents (2012); Presidential Documents (2011); US Congress Act (2010).

In addition to the sanctions literature, political risk theory also explains how creating barriers to a country's trade transactions and reducing access to, or disrupting, the target country's foreign trade system by monitoring the SWIFT system and disconnecting it from dollar payments can destabilize currency systems. The trading partners of the target countries will reconsider their trade, be forced to comply with sanctions due to increased political and financial risks, or be deprived of or punished for trade. According to this theory, international sanctions send strong signals of rising risk, as the target country's access to SWIFT is limited and it cannot pay in dollars (Heuleppa, 2023).

Moreover, political risk theory explains how instability in external systems affects investment op-

portunities. In this theory, investors are portrayed as ethical, risk-averse, and cautious. International sanctions send strong signals of rising levels of risk. Import bans and banking restrictions reduce the host market's capacity and return on investment. While the host country's economy struggles to survive, prospects for future development and market growth are questionable. Sanctions against governments may pose risks of political instability, armed conflict, or internal conflict, as well as potential credit damage to investors. Mirkina (2018), for example, argues that U.S. companies often anticipate sanctions and act on concessions before they take effect. Several studies support this view by providing evidence of foreign investors withdrawing from sanctioned countries and the significant economic consequences of these exits.

The proof of political risk theory is that when a sanctioning country intensifies its sanctions and declares its opposition to the target country, multinational companies become more cautious about investing there and may refuse to do so.

Methodology and data

In this study, a time-series analysis was used to examine the longitudinal quality of governance in Iran and the impact of sanctions on it. Time series analysis is an appropriate statistical method for longitudinal study designs. Such designs typically involve single subjects or units of study, measured repeatedly at regular intervals across multiple observations. Analysis of time series helps us understand natural processes and patterns of change over time and evaluate the impact of planned or unplanned interventions.

A time series process is a set of random variables in which the set of times at which the process has been, will be, or can be observed, and changes over time are examined. Time series are created as records of processes that change over time. A record can be a continuous tracking or a series of discrete observations. Typically, observations can be at full-time intervals, random sampling in a timeframe, or at fixed time points. Time series analysis is used to construct a model that describes the conditions of one or more variables over time. In social science studies, there are two modes in the time series set:

Trend: The evolution of the studied situation over a long period with a steady upward or downward trajectory.

Cyclical changes: Repeating the upward or descending movements of the studied situation around trend levels (Dettling 2020).

The analysis of time series has been more developed and used in areas such as engineering and economics compared to social science research. A primary method used in the social sciences is the autoregressive integrated moving-average (ARIMA) model. ARIMA models have been particularly useful for analyzing time series because they provide a basic framework for modeling temporal dependence and enable proper statistical testing.

Research data are exchange rates registered in the SWIFT system and published by the World Bank and the IMF.

Findings

To investigate the impact of international sanctions on Iran-China trade, the exchange process of these two countries has been selected between 2000 and 2021, and trend analysis has been carried out using time-series analysis. To collect data, international trade information has been sourced from the

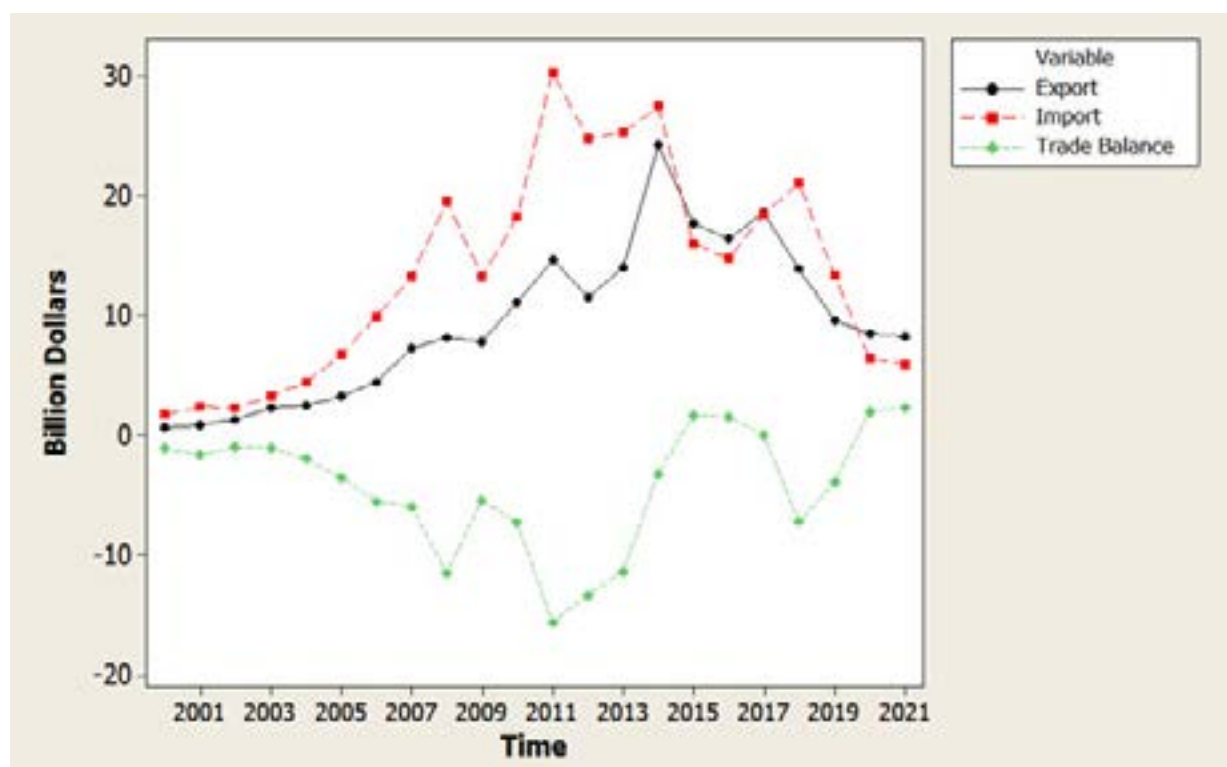
World Bank and the Economic Complexity Observatory. The figures are based on billions of dollars. To closely examine the impact of sanctions, the period under consideration is divided into five periods:

Table 2: International Trade Courses of Iran

Course Name	Timeframe
Pre-sanctions	2000-2006
Sanctions	2007-2011
Maximum pressure	2012-2015
JCPOA	2016-2017
Re-sanction	2018-2021

In Figure 1, the time series of China's exports and imports to Iran between 2000 and 2021 is outlined:

Figure 1: China-Iran Trade Time Series



Source: Authors' calculation based on data from World Bank and IMF resources

As the chart shows, until the maximum pressure phase of the United Nations sanctions on Iran, China's imports from Iran have always exceeded its exports, and for this reason, until 2014, the trade bal-

ance was always in Iran's favor. This means that at the time the secondary sanctions against Iran were implemented in 2007, the upward trend in Iran-China trade had not stopped, and it was not until 2015, during the peak of maximum pressure to comply with the sanctions, that trade between the two was disrupted. China, which in 2011 was Iran's largest buyer of Iranian oil, under new conditions and U.S. pressure, pursued a policy of drastically reducing oil transactions with Iran rather than cutting off imports from Iran and replacing them with imports from Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia. The average Iranian oil exports remained steady for 1.5 years until the conclusion of the JCPOA, at 1.1 to 1.2 million barrels per day (according to the World Energy Analysis Center), and only in July 2012 did exports fall below 1 million barrels per day (Ianchovichina et al., 2016). To continue exporting and selling oil under sanctions, Iran stores oil at times, including in 2014 at the Chinese port of Dalian, and then sells it to customers in South Korea and India.

According to Figure 1, the short period of the JCPOA has been accompanied by a very low uptrend. However, the unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States in 2018 and the imposition of secondary sanctions on countries that trade with Iran have led to a decline in trade between Iran and China since 2018. After the JCPOA, because sanctions on oil sales are intertwined with banking sanctions, SWIFT, and shipping, and according to the National Defense Authorization Act 2012 and the European Sanctions Act, central bank sanctions, along with sanctions on the energy sector as a law, minimized the possibility of energy cooperation between the two countries, and the upward trend was very small. After Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal in May 2018 and reimposed sanctions, China again pursued a pre-JCPOA policy of reducing, rather than cutting oil purchases from Iran, and, despite a commitment not to increase future oil imports, it rejected U.S. pressure to stop buying Iranian oil. According to official Chinese data, China's purchases of Iranian oil began to decline significantly in 2019 due to compliance with sanctions to avoid Washington's fines, including restrictions on access to the U.S. financial system (Chaziza, 2020). China's official imports of Iranian oil were \$118 million per month in 2020, down from \$589 million per month in 2019, an 82 percent year-on-year decrease (Green & Roth, 2021). China's pendulum policy between intermittent compliance and noncompliance with U.S. sanctions against Iran, in addition to supplying Iran's energy needs, is related to intense economic competition with the United States. On the one hand, China has refused to fully cooperate with U.S. sanctions against Iran in economic competition with the United States. On the other hand, it has refused to use this oil to maintain its complex relations with Washington amid the trade war.

In addition to oil cooperation, China has been a regular customer of Iran's petrochemical products, alongside crude oil, and is one of Iran's most important partners in the polymer and chemical products market. The following table shows the most important Chinese imported products from Iran, including petrochemical products in the studied period:

Table 3: Chinese Imported Products from Iran

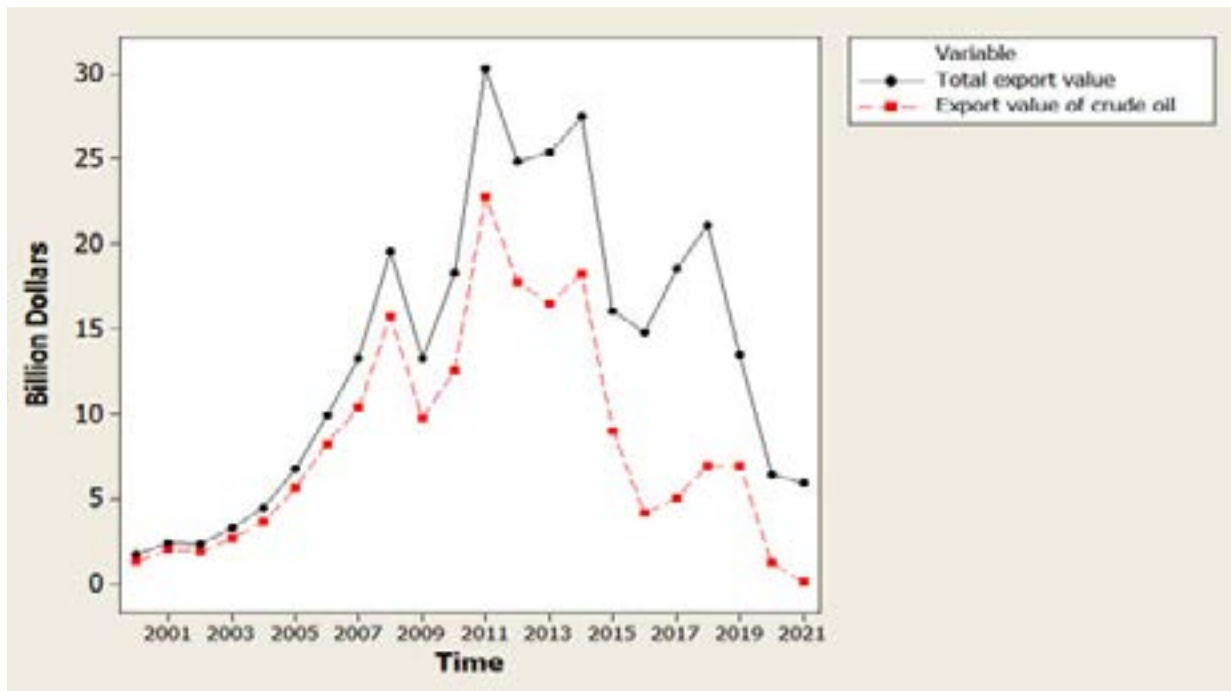
Course Name	Average value of each year in the period (Billions of dollars)	The most important imported products	average of each year in the period	
			Percent	Value
Pre-sanctions	4.44	Crude Oil	82.1	3.64
		Oil Gas	2.23	0.099
		Oil refined	1.72	0.076
Sanctions	18.96	Crude Oil	75.24	14.27
		Iron ore	5.1	0.966
		Oil refined	1.87	0.355
Maximum pressure	23.46	Crude Oil	64.73	15.19
		Ethylene Polymers	7.35	1.72
		Oil Gas	4.49	1.05
JCPOA	16.69	Crude Oil	27.75	4.63
		Ethylene Polymers	21.6	3.61
		Oil Gas	12.15	2.03
Re-sanction	11.73	Ethylene Polymers	28.5	3.34
		Crude Oil	26.2	3.07
		Non-edible alcohol	5.5	0.65

Source: Authors' calculation based on data from World Bank and IMF resources

According to the information provided, crude oil is the most important Iranian export to China, with its share fluctuating over different periods. The petrochemical industry during the period of maximum pressure and re-sanctions was most affected by financial and banking sanctions and transport restrictions. However, it was able to overcome these problems to some extent through measures. For example, international insurance companies (P&I and H&M) generated substantial foreign-exchange income and circumvented sanctions by insuring their ships and oil tankers. Iran and China also opened credit lines using Iran's overseas assets, as China could provide foreign sources of petrochemical financing alongside domestic resources. The two countries agreed to allocate part of the assets to joint projects in Iran for financing, with Iran's deposits with Chinese banks serving as the guarantee. China also invests in petrochemicals, cement, steel, urban trains, water, and sewage (Green & Roth, 2021). During the JCPOA, the remaining sanctions on the National Oil and Tanker Company and

Tidewater, the port service provider, prevented the export of this industry's products, as they had before the JCPOA (Green & Roth, 2021). After the reimposition of the sanctions in November 2018, China imported more of these products, including ethylene polymers, than other importing countries. China thus remained Iran's biggest customer, although the resumption of sanctions adds to the complexity and difficulty of continuing cooperation. Based on the authors' estimates, the total value of Iran's exports to China and the share of crude oil exports in it are shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Total export value and value of Iranian crude oil exports to China



Source: Authors' calculation based on data from the World Bank and IMF resources

As the chart shows, there is a direct relationship between the value of Iranian oil exports to China and Iran's total exports, confirming the importance of Iranian crude oil exports to China in Iran's international trade basket. Time series have been used to investigate the relationship between crude oil exports and Iran's total exports to China.

Table 4: Time Series Effect of Crude Oil Export Value on Total Value of Iranian Exports to China

Predicted	Predictor	Model Fitting	Ljung-Box		
		Factor R	Coefficient	df	significant
The total value of Iran's exports	Export value of crude oil	0.939	9.052	17	0.939

The study's results show that Iranian crude oil exports to China alone account for more than 94 percent of Iran's total exports. In other words, 94% of Iran's total exports to China depend on crude oil. The point to bear in mind is that the value of crude oil, in addition to the volume of trade, has been heavily influenced by global prices, which is why the following table examines the volume and value of trade in Iran-China crude oil.

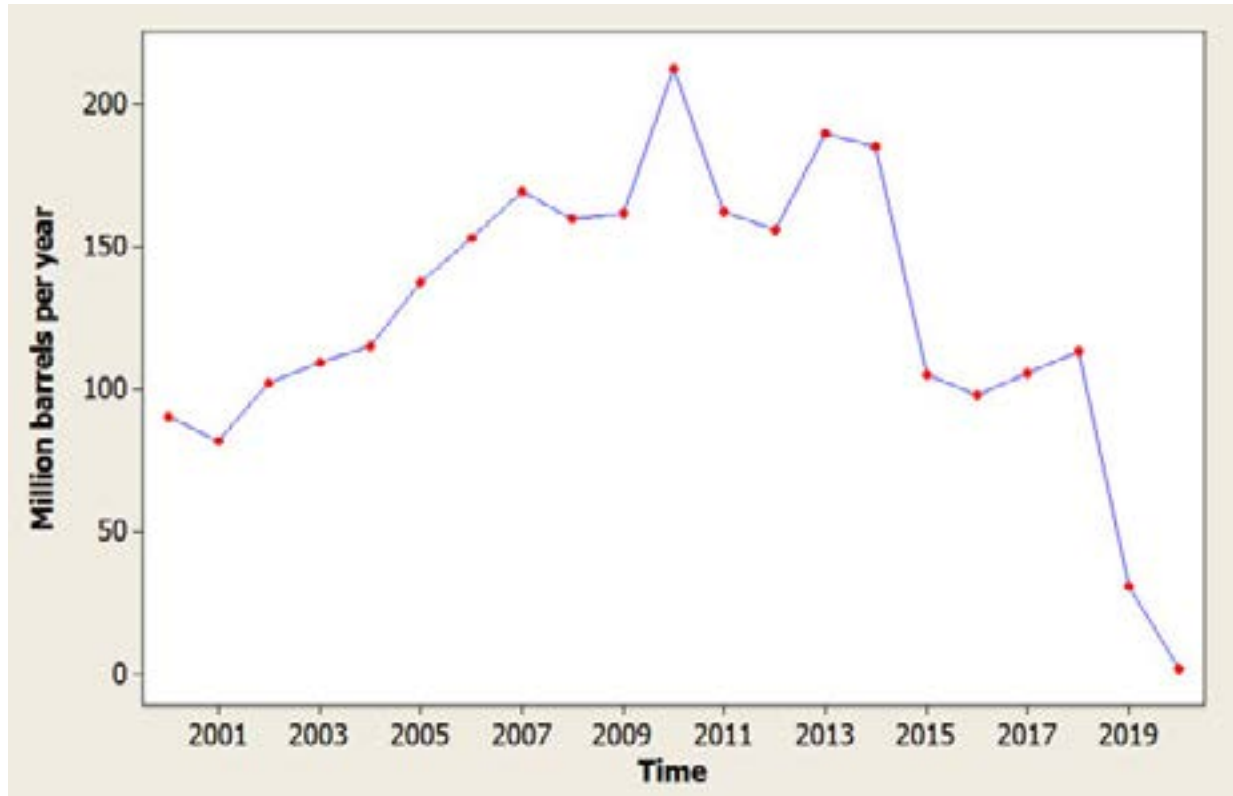
Table 5: The volume and value of Iran's crude oil exports to China

Course name	Ratio of crude oil to total trade	Crude oil value (billion dollars)	Average price of crude oil (barrels in dollars)	Crude oil sales (million barrels per year)
Pre-sanctions	82.1	3.46	34.56	98.47
Sanctions	75.24	14.27	81.37	171.39
Maximum pressure	64.73	15.19	90.03	173.21
JCPOA	27.75	4.63	45.76	101.5
Re-sanction	26.2	3.07	55.25	62.96

Source: Authors' calculation based on data from World Bank and IMF resources

Taking into account the average annual oil sales in the period under consideration until the United States reimposed sanctions on Iran in 2018, the imposition of UN sanctions did not disrupt Iran-China trade. Of course, it is worth noting that during the period of maximum pressure, part of the Iran-China crude oil trade was disrupted, as seen over the two years of the JCPOA. To better illustrate the impact of sanctions on Iran's crude oil exports to China, the annual export situation from 2000 to 2021 is delineated:

Figure 3: Volumes of Iranian Crude Oil Exports to China



Source: Authors' calculation based on data from the World Bank and IMF resources

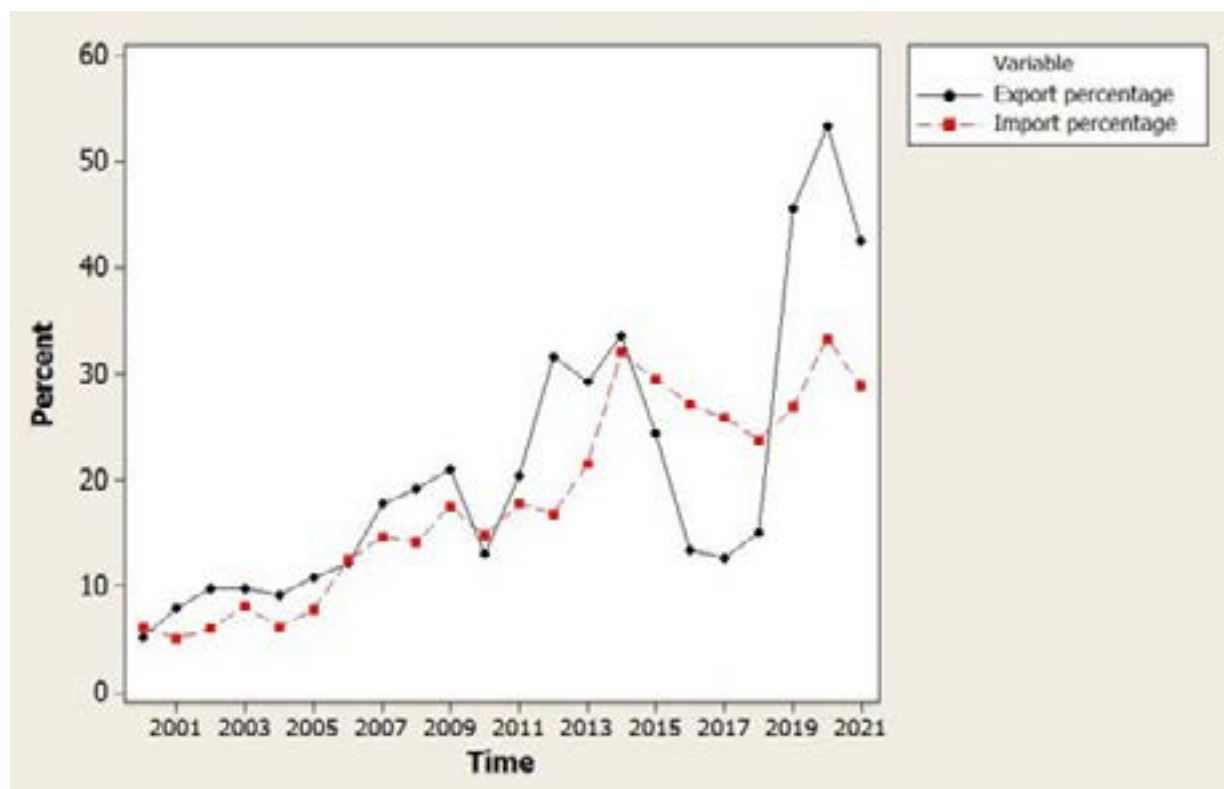
The chart shows the main impact of sanctions on Iran-China trade: Iran's crude oil exports to China began in 2000 at about 100 million barrels per year and rose to more than 210 million barrels per year by 2010. However, with the onset of maximum pressure on Iran in the form of UN sanctions and secondary U.S. sanctions, this level fell to about 100 million barrels per year in 2014 and 2015, marking the end of maximum pressure on Iran. The start of the increase in crude oil exports during the JCPOA did not last long, and with the reimposition of U.S. sanctions on Iran was sharply reduced, reaching about 31 million barrels per year in 2020 and about 2 million barrels per year in 2021, the lowest in the time series and about 50 times lower than in 2000, when the base year of the time series. In other words, in two periods, Iran's crude oil exports to China have been on a downward trend:

- Between 2013 and 2015, which is the period of maximum pressure, exports reached about 100 million barrels per year, which is equivalent to the start year of the time series.
- Between 2018 and 2021, which equates to unilateral U.S. sanctions against Iran and the use of a secondary sanctions mechanism to sanction countries with trade with Iran, Iran's crude oil exports to China have fallen sharply to about 2 million barrels per year. This has led to crude oil, which was by far the top of Iran's exports to China by a wide margin in 2020, with a sharp decline in 2021, accounting for only about 2.2% of Iran's exports to China and ranking 10th among Iran's export products.

Another measure is the percentage of trade partnerships when examining the impact of sanctions on

Iran-China trade relations. This criterion is based on exceeding the value of exchanges and converting it to an annual volume of exchanges; it is an appropriate criterion for studying the amount of exchanges between two countries, regardless of exchange rates, which are affected by prices.

Figure 4: Iran's Trade Partnership with China (%)



Source: Authors' calculation based on data from World Bank and IMF resources

Table 6: Iran-China Trade Partnership

Course name	Average export percentage	Average percentage of imports	China rank	
			Export	Import
Pre-sanctions	9.22	7.40	Third	Fourth
Sanctions	18.25	15.76	First	Second
Maximum pressure	29.73	24.96	First	First
JCPOA	13.03	26.46	Second	First
Re-sanction	39.11	28.20	First	First

Source: Authors' calculation based on data from World Bank and IMF resources

The important point in the chart and table of "Iran-China Trade Percentage" is that during the two periods of maximum pressure and re-sanctions, China has become Iran's main trading partner in both exports and imports, underscoring China's importance to Iran during the sanction's era. Although the value of Iran-China trade has been affected by U.S. sanctions, especially after 2018, the lack of trade between other countries and Iran due to increased political risk has led China to become Iran's strategic trading partner.

Promoting Iran-China Trade Cooperation

A review of Iran's trade situation, especially after 2018, shows that sanctions have increased the political risk of doing business with Iran and disrupted its business processes. In this process, the removal of Iran from the SWIFT system and the utilization of the U.S. dollar against Iran has played an important role, in addition to increasing the political risk of trade with Iran, by imposing sanctions on Iran's trading partners, has caused a lot of political risk of trade with Iran; but at the same time, the volume of exchanges with China also leads to the fact that during the sanctions, mechanisms have been used to reduce the effects of the sanctions. Iran can use some of them as tools. Given the current sanctions, countries' de-dollarization from international trade could increase Iran's trade power. Importantly, many countries that began de-dollarizing trade were trading partners with Iran before the sanctions, and all of them have extensive trade with China.

The imposition of sanctions on Iran since 2018, along with targeted disruptions to its trade relations, are significant obstacles to Iran's exploitation of its commercial potential. This is an important overlap with the de-dollarization theory, and, as stated in the theoretical section, sanctions are implemented using a dollar tool; for this reason, a significant part of countries' worldwide efforts is to develop solutions to ease these sanctions (Desai & Hudson, 2021). Some of China's actions to improve its currency position in the field of international trade and counter the use of the dollar have provided appropriate strategies for Iran: international payment system, as well as alternative SWIFT systems, have a suitable platform to increase Iran's trade exchanges, which if using these facilities, it will be possible to de-dollarize part of the trade exchange. The most important measures taken by China that have also led to Iran are:

1. Expansion of non-dollar transactions with Iran's trading partners: For example, the countries of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), India, and China Taipei, which have been important trading partners for Iran's oil exports, have ceased or severely reduced their trade with Iran under the influence of sanctions, are trading without dollars with China, which has provided the appropriate ground for the expansion of Iranian oil exports on a non-dollar basis. There are also common trading partners in the import field, such as Brazil, Turkey, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates. (Liu and Papa 2022; Molodyko 2020; Sciortino 2022).

Interestingly, regarding changes in the bases of exchange, the bulk of transactions is conducted in currencies pegged to gold by countries of origin (such as China and Russia), thereby reducing exchange risk (Sciortino, 2022). Central banks have also approved digital alternative currencies, officially launched, and used in exchange since spring 2022, and are priced in gold (Sciortino, 2022; Sutter & Nelson, 2021). However, the most important point for Iran in its exchange with China is a change in how oil deals are made. In addition to the possibility of signing Renminbi-based oil contracts from 2018, China has officially been encouraging oil-exporting countries to conduct financial transactions

in Renminbi since 2022 and has pushed some of its purchase and investment contracts in this direction (Sciortino, 2022). In general, at the beginning of 2023, China's financial exchange system has been fully connected to more than 100 countries, of which about 50 countries have trade exchanges with Iran, accounting for 70% of Iran's imports and 31% of Iran's exports, and this is possible for Iran to expand its trade with China from the process of de-dollarization in order to expand its trade with China. Use it itself.

2. Membership in BRICS and taking advantage of the commercial benefits of institutional cooperation: Iran will become a new member of the BRICS Organization starting in 2024, and leveraging these benefits will help expand Iran's business activity during sanctions. Membership in the BRICS Organization and the use of existing agreements and economic opportunities within this organization have differentiated the business processes of its members, so that they can be compared with those of Iran. However, since 2018, imposing sanctions on Iran and targeting it specifically to disrupt its trade relations will be a significant obstacle to Iran's use of BRICS membership. This is an important overlap with the de-dollarization theory and, as stated in the theoretical section, sanctions are considered the basis for de-dollarization policy. It is an important part of countries' efforts worldwide to develop solutions to ease these sanctions (Desai & Hudson, 2021).

The measures taken in the BRICS, including the payment system and alternative SWIFT systems in BRICS countries (China and Russia), provide a good platform to increase trade exchanges with Iran, and, if used, will make it possible to de-dollarize part of those exchanges. The most important steps taken in the BRICS to reduce the dollar are:

- Russia's de-dollarization policy, which reduced the dollar share from 79.6 to 55.7 percent from 2013 to 2020, while increasing the ruble's share from 10.2 to 14.7 (Shagina, 2022). In addition to replacing U.S. dollar reserves with other currencies, Russia has also pursued a gold strategy to reduce its exposure to U.S. assets. Russia has been the largest buyer of gold over the past few years, quadrupling its gold reserves over the past decade. Between 2018 and 2019, the value of Russian gold reserves rose 42 percent to \$109.5 billion. As a result, gold accounted for the largest share of Russia's total reserves since 2000. As of June 2020, gold accounted for 23% of Russia's central bank reserves, while the share of U.S. dollar assets fell to 22%. Russia's gold strategy has made it the leading BRICS member in this area (Sciortino, 2022).
- Brazil and China have de-dollarized more than \$40 billion in trade since 2013, settling trade in their own currencies. China is currently Brazil's largest trading partner (Liu & Papa, 2022).
- Since 2015, South Africa has de-dollarized trade with China. The use of the Renminbi in South African trade grew by 65% in 2016. Swift data shows that between 2013 and 2015, the number of South African payments on a Renminbi basis increased by 191 percent. By June 2015, the value of direct payments in Renminbi between South Africa and China reached 31.3 percent (Liu & Papa, 2022).
- Russia and China have taken the most important steps toward de-dollarization, and under the 2016-2020 agreement, \$24.5 billion in trade was paid annually through Renminbi swaps. Bilateral currency swaps were also useful for circumventing U.S. sanctions. Under the harsh sanctions imposed in 2014, bilateral currency swaps between the Russian and Chinese central banks enabled Russia to mitigate the effects of sanctions and strengthen the dynamics of de-dollarization between China and Russia (Sutter & Nelson, 2021). By the end of 2020, more than 83 percent of Russia's exports to China will be settled in euros. The share of the U.S. dollar in bilateral trade set-

tlement between Russia and China has fallen from nearly 90% in 2015 to 46% in 2020 (Liu & Papa, 2022).

- India and Russia have increased their ruble-based trade exchanges from 6 percent to 30 percent. Russia and India have increased their use of their national currencies for bilateral trade since 2014. Almost half of trade has been withdrawn from dollar transactions, and significant progress is being made in de-dollarizing Russian-Indian trade (Molodyko, 2020).
- In 2019, Russia and Turkey agreed to settle in national currencies: the Turkish lira and the Russian ruble. At the end of 2018, the share of trade settlements with Turkey in rubles and lira reached 22% (Sciortino, 2022).

According to data from the final year of the time series, more than 29% of Iran's imports came from China and Russia, both of which have been using SPFS (Russia) and CIPS (China) since 2022. Both countries have been able to design and implement their de-dollarization policies. At the same time, despite imposing sanctions on Iran, these two countries account for more than 10 percent of Iran's exports, which means that the use of these trading systems will result in a total of \$ 22 billion worth of Iranian trade in yuan and rubles, both of which are equated to gold by the central banks of these countries (Sciortino, 2022). Given that 14.5% of Iran's imports and 7.4% of exports are with these countries, even during the time of sanctions, it has a high capability to pursue a policy of de-dollarizing Iran's trade. In addition, India is the destination for 2% of Iran's exports. Given Iran's negative trade balance with Russia and India's need for rubles for trade, this possibility can also be used to reduce Iran's dependence on the dollar and diversify its currency holdings. Turkey, another trading partner that accounts for 6% of Iran's imports and 3% of Iran's exports, has begun trading with Russia in rubles since the end of 2022. The country's presence in Russia's financial exchange system has also provided the conditions for ordering and exchanging goods and services for Iran.

Conclusion

Iran has geopolitical and geo-economic importance in West Asia, which is of great importance for China, which is seeking to increase its role as a responsible shareholder in the international arena, along with its energy supply. That is why, as a review of the trade trends of the two countries showed, during the sanctions period, China played an important role in reducing the effects of sanctions on Iran. Given the pressures and limitations of the West, economic interaction between Iran and China is becoming increasingly important as one of the variables shaping relations between the two countries. A look at the sanctions imposed on Iran shows that economic angles, in terms of consumption, income, imports of goods and services, etc., are the target of sanctions and have affected these variables. Oil and non-oil exports are among the sanctions' goals. They can have a special place depending on Iran's conditions, because oil-exporting countries, including Iran, are heavily dependent on oil revenues and have been the pivot of economic development in these countries. However, shocks and changes in oil prices, the balance of payments, government plans, and current government expenditures affect the current government expenditures.

To reduce these destructive effects, Iran's strategy has been to develop petrochemical products, including polymers, plastics, and chemical fertilizers. This is also evident in exports to China: after the decline in crude oil exports after 2018, polymer exports increased and became Iran's first export product. However, the increase in petrochemical products did not replace Iran's oil revenue, and in paral-

lel, a strategy should be taken to expand oil exports. Iran's cooperation with China through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), as well as its exports to alternative currencies such as the yuan or gold, currently promoted by China, has provided fertile ground for Iran's return to the oil market. However, it should be noted that trade between Iran and China has been affected by sanctions and by restrictions on banking and finance, as well as changes in trade rules and regulations and bilateral policies. Increased pressure on international sanctions and economic sanctions against Iran could limit Iran's direct exports to China. In these cases, intermediary countries can act as mediators between Iranian exporters and Chinese buyers, enabling trade through financial transactions and indirect transactions. Some countries are known as Iran's main export destinations to China due to their geographical location, effective transportation systems, and strong trade relations with both Iran and China. These countries can serve as international bridges for exporting goods from Iran to China, generating revenue and trade opportunities.

In addition, one of Iran's policies to address financial and banking restrictions and problems caused by sanctions on money transfers and direct transactions with China is the use of digital currencies as a strategy to manage these issues. Using digital currencies allows international financial transactions with minimal restrictions and fees. Iran can use digital currencies to facilitate trade. These currencies can be used as international clearing units in business transactions that may not require restrictions and fees associated with traditional bank transactions.

Also, the use of blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies in the face of financial sanctions of the Islamic Republic of Iran has positive consequences. These consequences include increased economic connectivity and easier payments with other countries; reduced international costs and e-commerce; out-of-SWIFT payments and sanctions relief; the independence of the payment system from the United States; countering U.S. dollar hegemony; and gaining a competitive advantage.

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Agents 'all the way down': An Iranian critique of structure-war linkage

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Abstract

The inquiry into the causal origins of war remains a foundational concern within the philosophy of International Relations (IR). However, the causes of war have been examined at different levels from micro to macro. While at the micro level, for example, human nature and the quality of political systems are taken into account, at the macro level, most IR thinkers have addressed varying impacts of the anarchic nature of the international structure in starting wars. The purpose of this article is to show that there is no significant link between the anarchic structure and war. So, in this study, I adopt a non-Western lens and use Ferdowsi's views to argue that individual decision-makers, on a micro level of analysis, play a prime role in initiating as well as concluding wars. To confirm this statement, I first examine the relationship between anarchy and war in the western IR literature. Then, using Ferdowsi's thoughts, I demonstrate how agency is the prime matter in initiating and ending wars. By introducing Ferdowsi's conceptualization of "wisdom" (khirad) and the role of the "wise leader," this research proposes a novel conflict resolution model that transcends the limitations of structural determinism. Ultimately, this individualistic approach provides a framework for analyzing conflicts simultaneously at the domestic and international levels.

Keywords: Agency, structure, non-Western theory, Iranian literature, Ferdowsi's thought

Introduction

It is widely believed that Political Science and International Relations (IR) are distinguished by Hobbesian authority/anarchy, respectively (Onuf & Klink, 1989, p. 149). Although 'in recent years, a growing number of IR scholars have used the conceptual framework of authority to analyze patterns of hierarchical relationships among actors' (Voelsen & Schettler, 2019, p. 557), a review of IR literature indicates that anarchy still holds a prominent place among the causes of war discussed by IR thinkers (Thies, 2010; Levy & Thompson, 2010; Cerny & Prichard, 2017; Sjoberg, 2017). This position goes back, in part, to the historical-philosophical approaches of Thucydides and Hobbes, who have significantly con-

tributed to the concept of anarchy in the international system. Although Thucydides sees the problem of anarchy as essentially unsolvable, Hobbes believes that, thanks to Leviathan, it can be overcome (Ahrens Dorf, 2000, pp. 581-587). In the absence of Leviathan in the international system, anarchy becomes the inevitable reality of international relations. As such, explaining international politics requires a sound understanding of the concept of anarchy.

A review of the IR literature shows that there are at least two definitions of anarchy, namely, 'lack of order' and 'lack of government' (Milner, 1991, pp. 69-70). Many scholars of IR have proposed this distinction in various ways (Waltz, 1959, 1979; Bull, 1977; Guzzini, 2004, p. 504; Brown, 1992, pp. 20-21; Mercer, 1995, p. 229; Oye, 1985). Obviously, if each of these definitions is chosen for anarchy, different externalities are imagined in the international system. In this regard, it seems that the approach of IR thinkers could be divided into three categories: The first group attaches considerable importance to anarchy, whether with a positivist approach (Waltz, 1979) or with a non-positivist one (Wendt, 1999; Sjöberg, 2012); The second group, such as thinkers of liberalism (Keohane, 1984), the English School (Bull, 1977), and critical/post-structural theories (Linklater, 2007; Walker, 2003), attribute a lesser and more controllable role to anarchy; And the third group, which is more limited and mainly works in the field of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), focuses on micro level and does not pay much attention to the role of anarchy (Hudson, 2005; Hudson & Vore, 1995; Hudson & Day, 2019).

However, there is a relative consensus among IR scholars that anarchy and war are interrelated. This linkage has been considered at various levels and through different approaches in IR. Snyder (2002, pp. 7-45), for example, discusses the approaches of anthropologists and skeptics from a cultural perspective on the relationship between war and anarchy. Rosenau and Durfee (1996, p. 14) argue that anarchy creates a situation in which states must resort to self-help to maintain order and obtain the resources they need. According to Grieco (1988, pp. 497-498), states are aware that in anarchic conditions there is no universal authority to prevent others from using or threatening to use violence to destroy or enslave them. Levy and Thompson (2010, pp. 28-55), in their prominent work on the causes of war, specifically emphasize this connection at the systemic level. Anarchy, along with uncertainty about the enemy's intentions, creates a situation in which political leaders focus on 'short-term security needs' and are always ready for war (Levy, 2011, p. 16). Of course, there are thinkers who, relying on the 'first image' and the 'second image', are less concerned with the linkage between anarchy and war and do not accept it (Hudson, 2005; Byman & Pollack, 2001; Horowitz & Fuhrmann, 2018).

Here, it is necessary to define war. War, along with its causes, dimensions, and types, has been specifically studied by many IR scholars (Suganami, 2002; Gat, 2009; Lebow, 2010; Johnson, 2017; Wight, 2019). Lebow (2010) examines wars over three and a half centuries and argues that, contrary to conventional wisdom, only some wars were fought for security or material gain. Instead, most wars result from attempts to stand up and take revenge. War is one of the patterns of interaction between political units and has had a profound impact on the evolution of international actors and world politics. It can be defined as 'sustained, coordinated violence between political organizations' (Levy & Thompson, 2010, pp. 1-5). In this study, a broad definition of war, encompassing inter- and intra-state conflicts, is adopted, consistent with the Iranian/Ferdowsi lens applied in this article. This both helps us transcend the narrow, realistic boundaries between the domestic and external arenas and allows us to adopt a more comprehensive approach to understanding war.

Hence, the main question of this article is what role does anarchy play in starting a war? Explaining

and answering this question contributes significantly to understanding the causes of war. The greater the role of anarchy in initiating the war, the more deterministic approaches naturally prevail, and the more difficult it seems to limit the war. In contrast, the less anarchy plays a role in initiating a war, the easier it is to deal with war, and the greater the reliance on voluntarist approaches. IR thinkers seem to have, more or less, accepted the role of anarchy in initiating and concluding wars. However, in this article, using Ferdowsi's view, it is argued that there is no meaningful relationship between anarchy and war. "The methodology of this research is grounded in thematic textual analysis. By utilizing this method, the verses of the Shahnameh are analytically examined to identify the underlying patterns of agency and decision-making in Ferdowsi's thought."

The selection of the Shahnameh from among the vast corpus of classical Persian literature is predicated on its unique dual nature. While categorized as an epic, the Shahnameh maintains a rigorous engagement with the historical realities of the ancient Persian Empire and offers sophisticated analyses of warfare. Furthermore, its explanations regarding the origins of conflict provide a critical alternative to IR orthodoxy, offering novel theoretical insights. Although the Shahnameh sits outside the traditional IR 'canon,' this study contends that integrating such non-Western sources into contemporary disciplinary debates is both feasible and necessary for a more pluralistic understanding of the field. To this end, the article proceeds in three stages: first, it re-evaluates the link between anarchy and war through the lens of dominant IR paradigms; second, it interrogates the philosophical foundations of the anarchy/hierarchy dichotomy and demonstrates how a Ferdowsian approach shifts the focus away from structural determinism; and finally, it explores the causes of warfare within specific political 'situations' rather than rigid systemic structures.

Anarchy and war in IR: structure/agency dichotomy and beyond

Regarding the link between anarchy and war, two attitudes could be distinguished in IR: an approach that accepts this linkage and a view that rejects it or is silent about it. The older, western-oriented views of IR are mainly within the first category, but the critical approaches proposed over the past couple of decades have gone beyond the dilemma. Given the former, there seem to be two conceptions of anarchy in IR: anarchy as situation (Bull, 1977; Waltz, 1959; Singer, 1994; Keohane, 1984) and anarchy as structure (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 1995). The difference between an anarchic structure and an anarchic situation in relation to war is that the former is constitutive, whereas the latter is not. If anarchy is considered a structure, it has a causal relationship with war and is explained by the Aristotelian principle of causality (anarchy as the 'final cause' of war). It should be noted that the concept of Aristotelian causality has both epistemological and ontological aspects (Kurki, 2008, p. 26). That is, anarchy as a structure both helps us explain the war and causes it to start.

In contrast, if anarchy is considered a situation, it often correlates with war, and Hume's principle of correlation explains this. The point, here, is that statesmen do make decisions to go to war, but that they do so under certain conditions that are more or less pressing (anarchy amongst them). In this concept of anarchic structure, agency is also important. Agency, in general, is 'the capacity to act in international politics. To be more precise, an agent is an entity that can act in a specific context, and 'agency' is the corresponding ability to act (Braun, Schindler & Wille, 2019, 788).

These two conceptions of anarchy reflect the two definitions of it mentioned above: 'lack of order' and 'lack of government'. That is, those who believe in anarchy as a lack of order actually explain it as a

deterministic structure, and those who believe in anarchy as a lack of government see it as a situation. Many perspectives within IR take up the puzzle of anarchy and its relation to war: realist/liberalist views, constructivist conceptions, critical-theoretic perspectives, postmodern/poststructuralist accounts, among others. However, an anarchic structure/situation can be seen as a reflection of Neorealism/IR debate in this regard and traced to their approaches.

While a substantial body of literature has explored the nexus between anarchy and war (Glaser, 1994; Jervis, 1978; Mearsheimer, 1990; Booth, 1991; Walt, 1987), this discussion takes neorealism as its primary point of departure. Despite its dominance, neorealism has been criticized for promoting a profoundly Eurocentric interpretation of international systems—a limitation that undermines its claims to transhistorical and universal applicability (Buzan & Little, 1996). The core tenet of neorealism is anarchy (Kratochwil, 2000, p. 85). This is especially true of the Waltz approach in his two most famous works, *Man, the State, and War*, and *Theory of International Politics*. In the first book, Waltz (1959, p. 188) argues that anarchy is a situation in which every government must rely on its own resources and tools to ensure its well-being. In this case, anarchy is the facilitator or underlying cause of war (Waltz, 1959, p. 232). So, he sees force as a means of achieving a government's external goals because, in anarchy, there is no credible process for resolving conflicts of interest between similar entities.

Foreign policy in such circumstances is neither moral nor immoral, but merely requires a rational response to the world around us (Waltz, 1959, p. 238). Thus, Waltz considers war at three levels/images: the individual, the state, and the international system. Anarchy, as a structural feature of the international system, is just one of the causes of war. However, he later argues that anarchy is a decisive structure in which war is inevitable (Waltz, 1979, p. 102). In this work, Waltz developed a theory of international order that is admired for its parsimony but criticized for its simplicity (Griffiths, 2018). According to him, units run their affairs in the shadow of violence. Because some states may use force at any time, all of them must be prepared to use force. Hence, the natural state between states is war. This does not mean that war always happens, but it does mean that it is possible to start a war at any time. This view is strongly influenced by Hobbes' definition of war in the state of nature (Hobbes, 2006, p. 158) and Rousseau's metaphor of deer hunting. In addition, Waltz's analysis of the relationship between anarchy and war is largely influenced by the quality of the balance of power. Waltz's recent lens (anarchy as structure) has been widely criticized (Donnelly, 2009). Williams (2005, p. 65-6), for example, believes that Waltz's mistake is to describe the metaphor of deer hunting as an eternal determinant of the relationship between autonomous actors, while Rousseau sees it as the initial stage of human progress. Of course, the centrality of anarchy in the realist analysis of international politics is not limited to Waltz. Realists, either before Waltz or after him, explain international relations through anarchy. In this regard, Smith (1986, p. 13) considers Hobbes' analysis of the natural state to be the defining feature of realism. In other words, most realists assume that the international system has always been anarchic (Buzan & Little, 1994, p. 248), and this has affected their analysis of the war as well.

The liberal school, in contrast, is optimistic about the logic of anarchy and, in any case, emphasizes international cooperation. For example, scholars such as Nye (2000, p. 4) define anarchy as the absence of a superior government. Despite criticizing the anarchic structure of neoliberals and neoliberal institutionalists, David Lake (2001, p. 130-32) argues that international relations is a complex system consisting of institutions that are both anarchic and hierarchical. So, as Wendt (2003, p. 492) argues, most liberals in IR argue that international institutions, interdependence, and democratic states can

lead to cooperation and peace in anarchy. While different generations of liberalism differ slightly in their explanation of anarchy, they have all sought ways to facilitate cooperation under it and overcome war: some have emphasized the pluralism at the national level (Schmidt, 2002); Others have addressed the factors that perpetuate cooperation under anarchic conditions through economic interdependence or international regimes (Axelrod & Keohane, 1985; Keohane, 1982; Keohane, 1984); And the third group focuses on the relationship between democracy and war (Doyle, 1983a; Doyle, 1983b; Doyle, 1986; Doyle, 2005). In sum, liberals see anarchy not as the absence of order but as the absence of government, indicating a situation in which statesmen can choose to cooperate or fight others.

One of the most serious objections to Waltz's approach comes from Wendt (1992, 1999). He categorizes Waltz's three approaches to the relationship between war and anarchy in *Man, the State and War* as follows: (a) Anarchy as the permissive cause of war (war in anarchy is always possible); (b) Anarchy as the effective cause of war (expansionism of one or more actors provokes the reaction of others); And (c) anarchy as the 'active' cause of war (war is inevitable at any time) (Wendt, 1992). Wendt argues that these three approaches are reduced to the third in *Theory of International Politics*, and that the logic of anarchy is constituted by self-help and power politics. Wendt's critique suggests that, in his first book, Waltz sees war as a result of structural and agency factors (an anarchic situation). However, in the second, he emphasizes only structural factors (an anarchic structure). The very acceptance of the agent-oriented cause of war (the 'effective' cause) seems to reduce the anarchic structure to an anarchic situation, because it diminishes the structure's determinative state. Despite his critique of Waltz, Wendt himself offers differing views on anarchy and its impact on relations between states. First, Wendt argues that the structure has no existence or causality apart from the process. In his view, self-help and power politics are not the main features of the process. Thus, 'anarchy is what states make of it' (Wendt, 1992). Then, in explaining anarchy and the formation of self-help and power politics, Wendt emphasizes processes in state interaction rather than within states (Wendt, 1992, pp. 424-425). Third, Wendt defines an anarchic situation as a culture of anarchy and holds that culture can constitute cooperation or conflict. He goes on to name three types of anarchic cultures: Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian ones. Relationships among the actors in these three cultures are based on enmity, competition, and friendship, respectively, and war is explained in the context of these cultures (Wendt, 1999, pp. 246-312). In addition to Wendt, constructivists such as Onuf (2002, p. 224) and Kratochwil (1982, 1984) discuss the relationship between anarchy and war, reflecting their interpretations of anarchy as a situation.

Critical/poststructuralist thinkers have also made serious criticisms of Waltz's structuralism and neorealism. Linklater (2007, p. 54) argues that critical theory has been one of the most important theories to challenge the neorealist claim that anarchy forces all states to behave in the same way. For Ashley (1988, p. 236), anarchy refers to a situation characterized by the presence of states and the absence of global authority. Along with critical theory, the poststructuralist interpretation of anarchy also contradicts the universal, transhistorical, and given conception of it, and this is, to a large extent, equivalent to denying anarchy (Walker, 2003; Walker, 1995; Prozorov, 2009). Thus, anarchy is practically a situation in which decision-makers choose to cooperate or fight.

Over the past couple of decades, the link between anarchy and war has remained a subject of debate. However, the balance has shifted sharply in favor of critical approaches to this linkage. These approaches are based on different theoretical and meta-theoretical platforms in their criticisms.

Prichard (2017), for example, argues that contemporary theories of collective intentionality force us to think about anarchy in new and challenging ways. Anarchy reveals the contingency and inconsistency of hegemonic identities in IR, as well as the autonomy of the political (Newman, 2012). Drawing on Habermas, Jennifer Mitzen (2005, pp. 405-406) argues that containing anarchy in the international system requires strengthening 'communicative action' through three strategies: 'global positive law', 'the democratic peace', and 'interstate regimes.' In a free reading of these strategies, they could be interpreted as factors of war control in the anarchic conditions of the international system. Another platform that has been a frequent target of criticism of the structural approach, especially over the past two decades, upholds psychological lessons. While most IR models concern patterns of collective decision-making in units such as states, bureaucracies, armed groups, and so forth, the fundamental unit of interest in psychology is the individual (Gildea, 2020).

In this context, some recent critical approaches have focused on individual analysis, while others have explained the causes of war in a hierarchical (not anarchic) framework. Saunders (2011, p. 2-5), for example, argues that 'leaders vary systematically in how they perceive threats, and these different threat perceptions help explain when and how states intervene'. In her view, 'the critical variable distinguishing leaders is the degree to which they believe that the internal political, economic, or social characteristics of other states are the ultimate source of threats'. Accordingly, 'the most important source of willingness to intervene is the perception of a threat to national security, but even within the same state, leaders may differ in how they identify such threats.' Cerny and Prichard (2017, p. 380), in contrast, argue that anarchy becomes the ontological condition for all politics, an 'order without an orderer' in Waltz's (1979) words. Regardless of approaches such as this that rely on an anarchic structure, in recent years, we have seen a strong tendency toward analyses that rely on hierarchical structures across different lenses. Since 1919, world leaders have sought to uphold and advance international order by sponsoring a succession of global security hierarchies, understood as authoritative arrangements of global scope dedicated to mitigating international security challenges. These hierarchies have progressively broadened their inclusivity of security referents (Phillips, 2019). Adopting an oriental model, Phillips (2018) critically engages research that has cast Confucian hierarchy as a peaceful alternative to violent Westphalian anarchy.

Hence, the anarchy-war linkage has been contested both theoretically and practically in recent decades. On the one hand, hierarchical theories hold that anarchy is impossible in the international environment. This could be seen both at the theoretical and practical levels of international relations. While anarchy is conventionally associated with the emergence of an autonomous discipline of IR, Donnelly (2006, 2009, 2015) has argued that anarchy has never been central to IR (hierarchy is more weighty). His criticism targets not just concepts of anarchy but also theories of anarchy, thereby expressing an anti-theory ethos tacitly accepted in the discipline (Lechner, 2017). Practically, it seems that 'there is no anarchy in the international system. The world system is hierarchical, not anarchic, and the fear of 'anarchy' itself is used as a red herring by states in the context of the antagonism between statist, hierarchical structures and network social logics (Karatzogianni & Robinson, 2017, p. 283). On the other hand, atomistic approaches argue that agents are not influenced by any structure (anarchy or hierarchy). The end of the Cold War reduced the structural constraints that states normally face in anarchy (Walt, 2018).

Lastly, there is a growing tendency in IR to attribute anarchy and its consequences to developing

countries and failed states. Securitization theory, for example, finds 'primal anarchy' especially in 'Africa', which it casts as irrationally oversecured, making it a foil to 'civilized politics' (Howell & Richter-Montpetit, 2020, p. 5). Accordingly, 'primal anarchy' and the 'state of nature' serve as foils to this 'normal politics' within a teleological hierarchy of civilizational advancement from securitization to politicization. 'Following Hobbes, securitization theory locates this supposed progress in the West, particularly Europe' (Howell & Richter-Montpetit, 2020, p. 8). Howell & Richter-Montpetit (2020, p. 16) have illustrated that 'classic securitization theory is structured not only by Eurocentrism, but also by civilizationism, methodological whiteness, and antiblack racism.' Beyond this, Muggah defines fragile cities as entities in which the social contract crumbles and 'anarchy rules', thereby reproducing the normative characterization of fragile states as zones of anarchy (Lemay-Hébert & Jerrems, 2023, p. 10). So, explicitly racist and civilizational answers to the question 'security for whom' have given way to more cosmopolitan visions of security hierarchy (Phillips, 2019).

In sum, almost all schools of IR have equated anarchy with a self-help system and a lack of central authority capable of enacting and enforcing international law (Adem, 2002, p. 23). In the meantime, neo-realists believe in anarchy as a structure, and the rest of IR scholars mainly see it as a situation (if they see it at all). Thus, as explained, a debate between the two lenses of anarchy could be imagined, pitting neo-realists against many IR theorists; the gap between these perspectives is also crucial for explaining the causes of the war. The adoption of either of these two perspectives offers a different interpretation of the intensity of the relationship between anarchy and war. Despite their differences, both perspectives remain anchored in the presumed causal link between anarchy and war. This study seeks to transcend the structure/situation impasse by proposing an 'Oriental' alternative to the anarchy-war linkage. While certain critical and postmodernist scholars have attempted to bypass this dichotomy by 'generalizing the international' (Edkins & Zehfuss, 2005), the following analysis introduces a distinct framework rooted in an Iranian conceptual lens. Within this framework, an agent-centric approach takes precedence, demonstrating that the genesis of conflict is driven by influential factors situated outside the constraints of systemic anarchy. Furthermore, while anarchy and hierarchy are foundational to IR theory, their conventional definitions often fail to capture the complexities of political life throughout much of history (Haldén, 2017). The subsequent sections will elaborate on these dynamics through the lens of Ferdowsi's political thought.

Structure is at stake: Ferdowsi's view

Ferdowsi in the *Shahnameh*, focusing on the agents of war, explicitly does not address the role of anarchy, either as a structure or as a situation. However, the anarchic situation and the agent-centric approach could be inferred from his explanation of the war. To advance this argument, it is essential to delineate the conceptual boundaries of agency within the Ferdowsian tradition. In contemporary social theory, agency is frequently conceptualized through the lens of the human subject, characterized by historical consciousness, intentionality, and autonomous decision-making capacity. Conversely, more recent scholarly efforts have sought to decenter this anthropocentric understanding, redefining agency as a quality of 'vibrancy' or 'activeness' inherent in both human and non-human entities. Despite its ubiquity, IR scholars often struggle with conceptual clarity regarding 'what agency is, what it means to exercise agency, or who and what might do so' (Braun, Schindler & Wille 2019, 788). This study addresses this ambiguity by situating agency within the specific ethical and political parame-

ters of the Shahnameh. However, Wendt (1987, p. 359) discusses three capacities for agents, namely 'to have a theoretical understanding (however inaccurate) of its activities', 'to reflexively monitor and potentially adapt its behavior', and 'to make decisions'. Applying these capacities, Ferdowsi's approach could be better analyzed.

In an agent-centric approach, human nature becomes central as the basic agent of war, approaching the classical realist view of the cause of war (Hobbes, 2006; Morgenthau, 1948). The explanation of Classical Realism for the cause of war is rooted in the views of human nature held by Hobbes and Machiavelli (Ahrendsdorf, 2000). In addition to emphasizing human evil, Hobbes goes to war over several other assumptions. According to him, human beings are equal by nature. The result of equality is fear of each other, and war breaks out of fear (Hobbes, 2006, pp. 156-7). This makes anarchy in the state of nature. Of course, the 'new anarchy' in the international system is populated by 'uneven, unequal and only dimly perceived social, economic and political forces and processes' (Cerny & Prichard, 2017, p. 389). Anyway, if Hobbes's assumptions about inherent equality and human nature are accepted, the question arises of how human beings have lived together for thousands of years and how the subordinate/supraordinate classification has been formed.

Hobbes (2006, p. 157) answers the above question by fabricating a 'social contract' between bad people, which has almost no historical precedent. This creates a dichotomy between the natural/civil states. Hobbes' realist followers draw on his concept of the natural state to explain international relations (Morgenthau, 1948; Rosenau, 1990). Critics of this view rightly acknowledge that, despite repeated references to Hobbes as a theorist of international anarchy, most accounts of world politics show that states are not equal (Walker, 1995, p. 324; Donnelly, 2006, p. 144), whereas Hobbes's natural state requires the inherent equality of individuals. This approach has influenced Walker's (2003) explanation of inequality and violence in the international context. Furthermore, the use of 'anarchy' in IR theory differs significantly from its incarnations in political philosophy. Whilst realist scholars have used the term 'anarchy' to describe the absence of centralized political authority in which states wield differential power, political philosophers in the anarchist tradition have mounted a critique of the coercive and compulsory powers of states themselves (Cudworth & Hobden, 2010).

However, by taking Hobbes's approach in IR for granted, three fundamental ambiguities are formed: first, despite the importance of historicity in the social sciences, this approach does not pay attention to history in the discussion of inherent human equality and the formation of state based on social contract; Second, by modeling Hobbes's natural state to explain international relations, inequality between states is ignored; Third, when the international arena is likened to the natural state, the domestic arena is automatically equated with the civil state, and this leads to the disregard of internal conflicts and civil wars. Hence, anarchy's roots in, and association with, social contract theory and the state of nature have unduly narrowed how we might understand the concept and its potential in IR (Havercroft & Prichard, 2017).

Ferdowsi's view of human nature differs from Hobbes's approach. He believes in an inherent duality in human nature. This duality may be due to the dualistic approach in the religions and ideas of ancient Iran, which believed in the separation of the divine and evil worlds. Ferdowsi saw some people as good-natured and called them human beings (*adami*) or people (*mardom*) (Ferdowsi, 2003, pp. 220-23), and considered others as bad-tempered and called them demons (*div*) or evil devils (*Ahriman*) (Ferdowsi, 2003, pp. 253-54). In addition, he describes some as wise (in his own sense) and some as

foolish or brainless (Ferdowsi, 2003; Ferdowsi, 1998). So, it can be said that Ferdowsi considers man as unequal by nature. The result of inequality is the formation of government (Ferdowsi, 2003, pp. 251-52) and the emergence of the upper and lower classes. In other words, 'substantial material inequality creates an informal hierarchy that removes men from a state of nature' (Donnelly, 2009, p. 59). More importantly, because Ferdowsi does not distinguish between the domestic and foreign arenas, he considers war possible at both levels and adopts a coherent approach to its analysis. So, the distinctiveness of Ferdowsi's argument at this point comes from two things: first, he holds a different view of human nature; second, his transition from the dichotomy of hierarchy/anarchy (internal security/external insecurity) opens up the question of security in the internal sphere.

While the statist idea of 'anarchy', as seen in Hobbes, is actually a misperception of the affirmative power, the 'power-to', of social networks and social movements (Karatzogianni & Robinson, 2017, p. 284), it must be acknowledged that Hobbesian analysis of human behavior under the conditions of state of nature is a deliberate thought experiment devised in order to demonstrate the necessity of central authority. Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, in comparison, is a mythical epic that is more concerned with the social sources of injustice, power, greed, wisdom, jealousy, and hatred under unequal conditions. While the *Shahnameh* is not a self-consciously articulated treatise on political philosophy, it remains a profound repository of political thought from which a sophisticated philosophical framework can be extrapolated. Through a rigorous textual analysis, the following section conceptualizes Ferdowsi's perspective on the interplay between anarchic situations and the onset of war, offering an alternative to conventional structural interpretations.

If Ferdowsi's approach to structure is examined from the perspective of the historical period he is considering, it can be considered a situation among empire (Buzan & Little, 1994, pp. 247-48), heterarchy (Donnelly, 2009, p. 64), heteronomy (Onuf & Klink, 1989, p. 168), and hierarchy. However, when we refer to the text of Ferdowsi's work, a different interpretation is inferred. The history of *Shahnameh* developments can be divided into two periods, from a structural point of view: the period before the formation of separate countries (from the beginning to the rule of Fereydun); and the period after the formation of independent lands (after Fereydun). No image from the whole period before Fereydun can be found that shows anything like international relations (Ferdowsi, 2003, pp. 254-55). In other words, this period can be defined as the era of the world state of kings or of God's representatives¹.

Ferdowsi's assumption about the inherent inequality of man is evident at the beginning of the *Shahnameh*. In his view, the first man on earth (Keyumars) is also the first ruler. His rule was universal, encompassing both domestic and wild animals. Hushang, Tahmuras, Jamshid, Zakhākand, and Fereydun were also the second to sixth universal rulers, respectively. Fereydun divides the world among his three sons (Salm, Tur, and Iraj), and from this time on, an international interpretation of Ferdowsi's thought can be offered.

1. Ferdowsi's assumption about inherent inequality of man can be well seen at the beginning of *Shahnameh*. In his view, the first man on earth (Keyumars) is also the first ruler. His rule was universal and even ruled over 'domestic and wild animals'. Hushang, Tahmuras, Jamshid, Zakhākand and Fereydun were also the second to sixth universal rulers, respectively. Fereydun divides the world among his three sons (Salm, Tur and Iraj) and from this time on, an international interpretation of Ferdowsi's thought can be offered.

Moreover, this differs from what contract theorists such as Hobbes and even Rousseau say about the pre-contractual status. That is, in Ferdowsi's view, the conditions before the formation of states are not only different from the natural state depicted by Hobbes, but also a kind of global empire that prevents the growth of conflicts.

In *Shahnameh*, from the beginning to the rule of Zāhhāk, the wise are the upper and the ruling class. However, after that, unwise and irrational individuals came to power alternately, and periods of peace and war alternated (Ferdowsi, 2003, 1998, 2001, 2005). From Ferdowsi's point of view (2003, 254-55), the battlefield is formed in conditions of inequality and has little to do with internal hierarchy or external anarchy. Therefore, Ferdowsi's first step in explaining the causes of war differs from the Hobbesian view, which is useful for exploring many of the *Shahnameh*'s wars. In addition, a significant point evident in the *Shahnameh* is the insecurity in the internal hierarchical structure. Accordingly, the internal situation of many contemporary (failed) states could be explained.

According to Ferdowsi (2003, 1998, 2001, 2005), it is clear that, before any issue arises, the intentions of the agents play a role in initiating the war. In each of the *Shahnameh* wars, as soon as the agents wanted, the war started. This could support Waltz's view of structure as the permissive cause of war and, for Wendt, the "active" cause. Nevertheless, contrary to the view of these two, according to Ferdowsi's thought, no distinction can be made between the roles of these two causes in hierarchical or anarchic situations.

In explaining wars, Ferdowsi never separates internal from external or hierarchical from anarchic structures. Nevertheless, the ultimate victory in war in a hierarchical state is always achieved by a higher-status power, whereas in an anarchic state, victory is variable. On the other hand, the only war that resembles Waltz's determinist structure and Wendt's "active" cause occurred at the domestic (not international) level at the outset of the war, in stark contrast to Waltz and Waltz. Eleven of the twenty-two battles under review here have occurred in the domestic sphere, and the other eleven in the external sphere. The causes of war in Ferdowsi's thought are often consistent with those of contemporary theorists of IR. However, regardless of the prevailing discourse of today (influenced by Hobbes's natural/civil state), Ferdowsi differs in that he understands the real causes of the war and does not limit it to internal or external circumstances. In other words, he sees tangible causes at the beginning of wars that can be explained in terms of human behavior.

Ferdowsi seems to attribute the same role to the lack of superior power or external anarchy and to the existence of ruling power or internal hierarchical conditions at the beginning of the war. More precisely, he does not necessarily relate anarchy to the conditions of war and hierarchy to the conditions of the absence of war. However, in Hobbes's two-dimensional interpretations, anarchy is assumed to play a positive role in initiating war. At the same time, the internal hierarchical situation is the realm of the good and desirable life (Wight, 1960). Thus, in Ferdowsi's thought, the dichotomy of structure/agency loses its importance in the case of war, because this is effective if the role of the internal structure is different from the impact of the external structure at the beginning of the war. In other words, what is important in Ferdowsi's attitude is the agents of war, and this merely reduces both the internal structure (hierarchy) and the external structure (anarchy) to the situation in which wars take place. If hierarchy and anarchy are equally influential in starting a war and both serve as permissive causes, then both Wendt's "active" cause and the permissive cause itself lose their significance, because these causes are important only when we consider the difference between internal and external situations.

In these conditions, only the effective cause of the war is considered, and the agent-centric approach prevails. Thus, war agents play an important role at the beginning and end of wars in both anarchic and hierarchical situations, not just in anarchic ones.

Lastly, if the dichotomy of hierarchy/anarchy is questioned by the equal influence of both in war and the duality in human nature (Ferdowsi, 2003, 1998, 2001, 2005), the situational/structural conceptions of anarchy are reduced to the anarchic situation, since war is not considered external. Anarchy cannot be seen as the determining structure of war. In such circumstances, the agents of war, their characteristics, and capacities in explaining and analyzing the causes of war in anarchic and hierarchical situations are of great importance. These are discussed in the next section.

Agents and wars: textual analysis of Shahnameh

As mentioned, war in the modern sense of IR is mainly meaningful in the external arena, and the civil war represents an exceptional situation. Despite the new definition of war as an institution, Holsti (2004, pp. 275-283) believes that this phenomenon has been part of the interaction between independent political communities for 10,000 years. Nevertheless, exploring the verses of the Shahnameh reveals a very broad concept of war. War in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh is used in the same sense as the concepts of conflict, campaign, battle, invasion, attack, and so on. The heroes of Ferdowsi's poems narrate most of his views on war; Heroes that Ferdowsi praises as wise persons. Among these people, we can mention Fereydun, Iraj, Rostam, Zāl, and so on. The distinctive feature of all the above people is that, despite their superior power, they have never started a war and have always sought to prevent war and chaos (Ferdowsi, 2003, 1998, 2001, 2005). This shows the role of the powerful in peacebuilding, which, of course, is also expressed in modern IR literature through ideas such as Bull's (1977) approach to "real power management." Also, this indicates the role of individuals and their personalities in belligerence and pacifism. This point has been confirmed by experimental IR research to this day. For example, as leaders' age increases, they become more likely to both initiate and escalate militarized disputes (Horowitz, McDermott, Stam, 2005). Moreover, Byman and Pollack (2001, p. 109) contend that the goals, abilities, and foibles of individuals are crucial to a state's intentions, capabilities, and strategies. Indeed, individuals not only affect the actions of their own states but also shape the reactions of other nations, which must respond to the aspirations, abilities, and aggressiveness of foreign leaders. According to this interpretation, a wide circle can be given for the person's agency in war or peace.

The next most important point in studying Ferdowsi's approach to war is the agents. In his view, the agents of the war can be divided into two categories: sub-state agents, in which an individual, group or tributary local government enters into war or rebellion with another actor; and state agents, in which an individual, group or army of a country fights or suppresses insurgents on behalf of the king or on behalf of the state (Ferdowsi, 2003, 1998, 2001, 2005). The first category is a common issue in systems of scattered authority, such as the ancient Persian Empire, and the second is more limited but sometimes longer and more destructive. If three types of wars between sub-state and state, sub-state and sub-state, state and state actors are considered at both internal and external levels, a matrix of six types of wars can be drawn based on Ferdowsi's Shahnameh (See Table 1).

Table 1: Types and levels of war in Shahnameh

Typology of war based on its agents	Internal level	External level
sub-state and sub-state actors	sub-state and sub-state actors at the Internal level	sub-state and sub-state actors at the External level
state and state actors	state and state actors at the Internal level	state and state actors at the External level
sub-state and state actors	sub-state and state actors at the Internal level	sub-state and state actors at the External level

The multiplicity and variety of wars in the Shahnameh are revealed in Table 1. Even though Ferdowsi sometimes refers to several countries within the three empires of “Turan”, “Iran”, and “Rome and the East”, but in describing the wars, one can find an inferior, superior, or equal position of them. Thus, the wars between them are classified according to the types in Table 1. During the period under review, Ferdowsi described twenty-two wars, in all of which the role of agents and their motives as the causes of wars were highlighted (Ferdowsi, 2003, 1998, 2001, 2005).

A few points here need to be explained. Until the reign of Fereydun, all wars took place at the domestic level. The first three seemingly mythical cases can indicate Ferdowsi's view of man's inherent duality. Some believe that the demons in the Shahnameh represent the native inhabitants of Iran before the arrival of the Aryans in this land. In addition, demons serve as the king of Mazandaran's helpers during the Mazandaran war. If they are imaginary creatures, how can they interact with humans and even support the tax-paying kingdom of Mazandaran against the Shah of Iran and revolt? It seems that the ideas of Mithraism, especially its dualism (Ahuraian/demonic), have greatly influenced Ferdowsi's thought. In addition to the beginning of the story, which explicitly considers demons to be the companions of the devil, Ferdowsi always speaks of the devil's victory when the evils prevail (Ferdowsi 2003, 1998, 2001, 2005).

Even though all the wars before Fereydun were assumed to be a civil war and, therefore, only one universal government was defined for this period, the war between Zakhāk and Jamshid seems to be different. After Jamshid's ingratitude and Ahriman's influence on him, a group of Iranian soldiers went to Zakhāk (King of the Arabs) and elected him to the throne of Iran, while Jamshid was still ruling Iran as the king of the world. Thus, the war between the two can be considered on behalf of the country, but at the domestic level. With this interpretation, this war can be considered a unique example in the Shahnameh.

The first war discussed in the Shahnameh, which is very similar to the modern interpretation of the war as a Hobbesian hierarchy/anarchy, is the battle of Manuchehr in Iran against Salm and Tur from Rome and Turan. This war takes place during Fereydun's life. During Iraj's lifetime, Fereydun divided his worldwide rule among his sons, while still retaining some authority over them. Despite the “effective” cause of the war between the three brothers (Iraj, Salm, and Tur) on behalf of the three countries, Fereydun acted as a “permissive” cause that prevented war among his sons. During this period, he prevented them from fighting with his letters to Salm and Tur. After the assassination of Iraj and the replacement of Hushang, a war took place that had long had “effective” causes and led to the defeat of

Salm and Tur (Ferdowsi, 2003, pp. 440-53). Fereydun's role in this war is somewhat similar to that of international organizations in the contemporary era. These organizations operate successfully within the agents' operating environment until the "effective" cause of the war has not been strengthened.

Most of the wars after Fereydun take place abroad and between Iran and Turan. The description and explanation of the events of these wars culminate the story of Shahnameh and represent Ferdowsi's thought. A detailed description of the wars in this period helps clarify Ferdowsi's perspective on them. Although he always wants the glory of Iran and its victory in the wars of this period, in the margins of the verses, he tries to condemn the war and its initiators (Ferdowsi, 1998, 2001, 2005).

The two wars of Zāl/Turanians and Kashvād/Aghriratare are slightly different from each other. Although these two wars took place during the reign of Nowzar, and Zāl and Kashvād both fought the Turanians on behalf of Iran, the wars are described in two different ways. When Zāl fights the Turanians and defeats them, Nowzar is still alive and bears the title of Shah of Iran. Therefore, Zāl is considered the representative of Iran, and this war is defined as a state-to-state conflict at the international level. However, when Kashvād goes to war, despite fighting as an Iranian, the Turanians had occupied Iran, and Nowzar had been killed. In such circumstances, the war appears to be a battle between sub-state and state actors at the external level.

In addition to being careful about the causes of the wars, Ferdowsi also addresses the conditions of the two sides' alliance against a third party, the precedence in the war, the role of equal interests in the formation of the alliance, and so on. For example, Ferdowsi (2003, pp. 433-35) describes the injuries Salm and Tur sustain at the hands of Iraj and their extravagance. This causes the two to unite against their common enemy, Iraj. In addition, Ferdowsi is aware of the benefits of a balance of power and precedence in war. In the words of Fereydun (as a wise man), in his advice to Iraj, he points out that weakness versus power leads to destruction. "Ferdowsi acutely recognizes the existential necessity of defense, acknowledging that failing to neutralize an adversary often invites one's own destruction.

Nevertheless, he consistently prioritizes ethical truth and condemns warfare as a tragic endeavor (Ferdowsi, 2003). A comprehensive review of conflict in the Shahnameh reveals that the origins of war are invariably rooted in the psychological dispositions and character traits of individual decision-makers. This emphasis aligns with, yet expands upon, Kenneth Waltz's (1959) 'first image' of international relations, which situates the causes of war within human nature and individual behavior. Even in contemporary conflicts, the temperaments and personal ambitions of political leaders remain a decisive factor in driving aggression. Ultimately, these individual agents are central not only to the escalation of violence but also to the architecture of peace; as contemporary scholarship reaffirms, it is leaders who negotiate and conclude conflicts, rather than abstract state entities (Horowitz et al., 2018).

According to Ferdowsi, anarchy is reduced to a situation, and the causes of war are reduced to 'effective' ones. Hence, the agents of war become important, and their nature, instead of an anarchic structure, is influential in starting a war. This reductionist approach to wars is discussed in international relations today more than in the past. Byman and Pollack (2001, 114) argue that individuals play a central role in shaping international relations, including the causes of war, alliance patterns, and other areas that international relations scholars consider important. On the other hand, the war in Shahnameh is not limited to the external sphere but also includes the internal sphere. It may now be imagined that the agents of war in the Shahnameh become unbridled actors whom no element can confront. It should be noted that this is not the case.

Throughout the *Shahnameh*, Ferdowsi (2003, 1998, 2001, 2005) cultivates a concept that solves this problem: wisdom (Kherad). Wisdom, in Ferdowsi's view, is different from the instrumental rationality of the Enlightenment, which Adorno and Horkheimer (2006, p. 243-59) criticize and introduce its dialectical property as the cause of human confusion. Indeed, they contest the artificial separation of ethics and instrumental reason as a practice of domination and exploitation (Soudias, 2024, p. 3). This criticism does not apply to Ferdowsi's interpretation of wisdom, as he sees it primarily in the context of ethics. On the other hand, Ferdowsi's emphasis on wisdom as an individual trait may evoke Machiavelli's Virtue. However, given his emphasis on pacifism and the popularity of the wise, the concept of wisdom is fundamentally different from Machiavelli's Virtue. It may be thought that, in Ferdowsi's view, wisdom is an exceptional and ideal concept that is not achievable. However, Ferdowsi's interpretation of wisdom is both different from the instrumental rationality criticized by Adorno and Horkheimer (2006, p. 243) and tangible. Wisdom, in Ferdowsi's view, is a factor that makes the rulers attractive to the people. This is exactly what can be traced in today's societies, removing dictators and militants from the ranks of the wise. In his view, the way to achieve wisdom is to move in the direction of justice (dād)², and justice is the pillar of wisdom" (Ferdowsi, 2001, p. 205). For him, justice is incompatible with war, "guilt" and "dishonesty" and even prevents them. Justice in the *Shahnameh* is popular, altruistic, and rooted in the same wisdom (Ferdowsi, 2003).

Ferdowsi's view can help explain the relationship between wisdom and war in two ways: First, Ferdowsi sees wisdom as fundamentally incompatible with war. In his view, a good-natured and wise man never turns to enmity and war (Ferdowsi, 2003, p. 399). In addition, he believes that wisdom not only prevents war, but also prevents the formation of its grounds and contexts (Ferdowsi, 2001, p. 136). Second, in all the wars under review here, the wise men have never started a war. Compared to the democratic peace thesis, this is a significant point. Because in that thesis, democratic states do not fight only with other democratic actors, and there is always the fear that a country would be invaded by a democratic state as well. However, in the thesis derived from Ferdowsi's approach to wise actors, these agents are never the initiators of war, whether the other party is a wise actor or not. Therefore, the ruler's wisdom can prevent war. These are the things that indicate how the rule of the wise leads to a wise environment and creates a peaceful atmosphere. Using this perspective, the belligerence and militancy of many contemporary governments and politicians can be explained. Most of the great contemporary wars were started by governments ruled by authoritarian and militant persons.

Today, in comparison, Horowitz and Fuhrmann (2018) introduce the special feature of "Leaders, Crisis Behavior, and International Conflict" while individual leaders play a central role in world politics. However, international relations scholarship has downplayed or ignored leaders, focusing instead on system-wide variables and domestic political institutions. A new wave of research, however, has helped to reintroduce the leader-level back into models of international politics. Citing numerous historical examples, Byman and Pollack (2001) explain how leaders' personalities affect wars and other developments in international relations. In addition to leaders, the personality of their advisers is also important. So, the next step is a better understanding of the advisers who surround them. Saunders (2018) explores the often-hidden politics of leader-adviser interactions, focusing on how leaders strategically manage elite cues within their own circles that could mobilize otherwise dormant or per-

1. Ferdowsi always speaks of the connection between wisdom and justice.

missive public opinion. Advisers can serve as cue-givers when leaders contemplate the use of force, but leaders can shape which cues reach the public by accommodating them. It seems that the thesis derived from Ferdowsi's thought can contribute to this new theoretical wave about the role of leaders in peace and war.

Conclusion

Understanding the causes of war in the international anarchic situation/structure requires an awareness of the hierarchy/anarchy dichotomy rooted in Hobbes's interpretation of human nature, the inherent equality of man, and the distinction between the natural/civil state. In this way, it is seen how each of these clauses helped strengthen the others, culminating in the structuralist approach of anarchic determinism at the beginning and the conclusion of the wars. In contrast, this research draws on Ferdowsi's thought to challenge the traditional view of the individual nature and anarchic structure as the primary drivers of conflict. It seeks to deconstruct the presumed relationship between anarchy and war, presenting a novel explanatory framework. Through this Persian intellectual tradition, the article demonstrates that the causal link between systemic structures and the outbreak of hostilities is far more contingent and agent-dependent than contemporary IR theory suggests.

It is acknowledged that comparing Ferdowsi's work directly with the theories of realists and neorealists presents significant challenges. This is primarily because the ontology of the latter is predicated upon an empirically constructed international system, a conceptual framework that was not even accessible to Hobbes. Hobbes served as a starting point for scholars such as Waltz, Wendt, Walt, Jervis, and Mearsheimer. To be sure, their structuralist insights are based on an entirely different ontological unit: the modern nation-state. However, Ferdowsi's insights into human nature could certainly enrich some of these realist and neo-realist perspectives on decision-making and leadership psychology.

If we accept the dual nature of man with the interpretation influenced by Ferdowsi's thought, the inherent equality of man is questioned, the imaginary "social contract" is annulled, and the natural/civil state is challenged. The consequence of this trend for IR is the weakening of the dichotomy between hierarchy/anarchy, the disregard for situational/structural conceptions of anarchy, the invalidation of the structuralist interpretation of the causes of war, and, finally, the replacement of the agent-oriented, intentional explanation with it. It is in this context that Ferdowsi's concept of wisdom works and helps provide a solution to explain war. In this context, it seems that by focusing on willing agents, we can anticipate solutions that can help limit war by training or regulating agents. The solution that Ferdowsi proposes in this regard is the rule of wise and just people.

Finally, the question arises: to what extent can this approach be adapted to current objective conditions? Although it is difficult to apply this approach due to the significant differences between the objective conditions considered by Ferdowsi and the current state of international relations, it certainly offers new insights in this field. First of all, an approach inspired by Ferdowsi's view can explain why, despite the relatively stable international structure of recent centuries, we are at war at some periods and not at others. Secondly, we can explain the possibility of civil war, regardless of a country's hierarchical structure, using an approach influenced by Ferdowsi's view. Thirdly, according to Ferdowsi's view, the role of country leaders, especially wise leaders, in shaping the quality of their foreign policy and the peaceful nature of international relations is increasingly evident. These show the ability of Ferdowsi's view to explain war and anarchy in today's conditions.

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The Iranian Spirit: Existential Logic and Existential Threat

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Abstract

This study conducts a genealogical and ontological inquiry into the contemporary question of Iranian identity, positing that the ratio essendi (existential logic) of the Iranian nation is defined by a historical unity-in-plurality. Contrary to the modern sociological-ideological reduction of Iran to a "multi-ethnic" mosaic, this manuscript argues for the "Idea of Iran" as a transcendental spirit that sublates linguistic, religious, and regional particularities into a unified civilizational whole. The inquiry traces the genealogy of "ethno-nationalism"—identified here as the primary existential threat to Iranian unity—demonstrating its roots in the imported terminologies of Soviet Marxism-Leninism (specifically the Stalinist taxonomy of "peoples" and "nationalities") and its subsequent metamorphosis into the post-Cold War discourse of "identity politics" and "multiculturalism."

By analyzing historical developments, including the Soviet-instigated Azerbaijan crisis of the 1940s and the distinct mechanisms of Pan-Turkist and Pan-Kurdish currents, the text reveals how these ideologies function as a "Trojan horse." They impose standardized, monolithic "ethnic" categories upon Iran's complex, "compound social pluralities," effectively erasing the organic nuances of local identity to construct artificial political antagonisms. The study concludes that the intellectual and political defense of Iran requires rejecting these superstructural, foreign-derived categorizations in favor of a reassertion of the National Universal, in which the rights of the individual citizen are prioritized over the fabricated claims of the ethno-tribal entity.

Keywords: Iranian National Identity; Existential Logic; Ratio Essendi; Ethno-Nationalism; Identity Politics; Unity In Plurality; Civilizational Continuity

1. Introduction

Identity has emerged as a subject of paramount significance in public life over the past few decades. This phenomenon is largely attributable to the spillover of social and cultural transformations from Western societies into other communities, culminating in the formation of political and international-

al agendas that position identity as the axis of political action. In this sense, whereas from the early twentieth century until the final quarter of that century, socio-economic differences—interpreted as "class conflict"—were posited as the driving force of political struggle, from the late twentieth century onwards, following the collapse of class struggle ideology consequent upon the attenuation of the labor-capital antagonism within Western welfare states, the arena of contestation shifted to the domain of culture (Inglehart 2018, 1997, 1990, Inglehart & Welzel 2005). Throughout this transitional process, "identity" and identity-based differences were transformed into the propelling element of socio-political struggle. In both aforementioned historical periods, Iranian national unity and identity have been subjected to assault by combatants and propagandists alike.

Initially, with the advent of Marxist-Leninist ideology and its Iranian adherents in Iran during the early 1920s, and particularly from the 1940s through the 1980s–1990s when the activities of parties and factions espousing similar doctrines were widespread, the official terminology of that ideology was applied in a formulaic and unfounded manner to Iran's social structure. Terms such as *mas'ale-ye meli* ("the national question"), *melliyat-hā* ("nationalities"), and *khalq-hā* ("peoples") or *melal-e sāken-e Irān* ("nations residing in Iran"), "national oppression," "the right of nations to self-determination," and similar expressions constituted the key lexicon of identity-seeking ideology during that era. With the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc, the transformation of cultural values in the West, and the shift of the arena of contestation from "economy" to "culture," identity-seeking ideology underwent a superficial metamorphosis; it was compelled to divest itself of the threadbare garments of Marxism-Leninism and don the attire of "multiculturalism," "ethnicism," and "identity politics". Its essence underwent no substantial alteration, yet it assumed a more sophisticated and nuanced form to embed its desired policies within conventional educational, cultural, social, administrative, and human rights agendas. Its antagonistic nature vis-à-vis Iranian unity and identity remains unaltered, with the sole distinction that it has now concealed itself within a Trojan horse.

2. Iranian National Identity: National Unity and Existential Threat

Iran possesses an ancient, extensive, and intricate history and culture; accordingly, elucidating Iranian national unity and identity is a complex subject that cannot be adequately addressed through mere formulaic application of social science theories and concepts. In what follows, we must briefly delineate certain fundamental dimensions of Iranian national identity that constitute the epistemological foundation of our discussion concerning Iran.

2-1. The National Idea

Iran, from the time of the formation of its national culture in remote antiquity and the establishment of the first Iranian state order in the second half of the sixth century BCE, has consistently existed as a unified and integrated politico-cultural concept—a complex reality that certain Iranologists and scholars have denominated the "Idea of Iran" for purposes of description and elucidation (Gnoli, 1989; Daryaei, 2010; Curtis, 2005; Shahbazi, 2005; Ashraf, 2006). In this sense, throughout history, Iranian society, notwithstanding its various and evolving configurations, and the Iranian state institution, despite its diverse ancient and modern forms, has been founded at its most profound stratum upon a "hard core" (Ahmadi, 2009) or national concept. The national identity of Iranians—a people comprised of diverse lineages and groups throughout the long and tumultuous history of this country—reflects

the forms of their consciousness of this constitutive idea; an idea or spirit whose various dimensions have manifested themselves in national history—as the locus of the formation of national consciousness—and in the national language—as the expression of the experience of national consciousness.

It is upon this foundation that it has been asserted, and must be asserted, that Iranian identity, unlike the majority of the contemporary nations which are late products of the modern world, possesses an ancient foundation. This national foundation preserves social and cultural pluralities and diversities as parts in relation to a whole, while simultaneously endowing them with a unified form and identity. In this sense, Iran as a country, culture, and civilization has not been the negation of its internal differences; rather, it has been a nation that has "sublated" (*Aufhebung*) its diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, and geographical subsets while preserving their particularity within a national totality, thereby conferring upon them identity at a transcendental level. Thus, Iran constitutes a meaning-bestowing idea that constructs the unity of pluralities: a complex unity that preserves within itself interwoven social pluralities (combinations of individual interests, civic-urban identities, regional differences, religious diversity, local cultural customs and traditions, local languages and dialects, and other non-political components) while simultaneously integrating them within a unified politico-cultural identity (national identity).

By analogy, we may refer to the combination of two natural elements, chlorine and sodium, each of which, in isolation, is harmful to the human body. However, from the combination of these two elements emerges a substance without which human beings cannot survive—namely, table salt. Nevertheless, table salt cannot be comprehended through its individual components—or through the decomposition of its constituents.¹ Iranian national identity is similarly constituted. It is a unity that contains pluralities and diversities within itself, yet simultaneously, it is a transcendent spirit that cannot be apprehended through the separation of its interwoven components. As an example of such misleading and spurious disaggregations, one may point to a narrative that has been propagated in recent decades, which regards and presents Iran not as a nation of citizens, but as a "society composed of ethnic groups" or a "multi-ethnic country" (*sic*)—that is, an aggregation of several independent ethnic units, the substance of which is nothing other than an alternative expression of the term "multinational" (*kasr al-melle*) in the discourse of Marxist parties of the previous century. Such a narrative, in effect—whether intentionally or unintentionally—seeks to decompose a unified totality into separate components. Over centuries, the internal particularities of this totality have been dissolved into one another and into the national whole—that is, into Iranian civility, culture, and identity—while preserving certain local characteristics. Through this process, they have been sublated as the unified Iranian nation. However, the aforementioned ideological narrative attempts to disintegrate Iranian unity into components that, aside from local language or dialect, share robust commonalities in most collective characteristics, values, and social attitudes. (It suffices to compare the cultural proximity and commonality of a Kermanshahi and Sanandaji with an Isfahani, Khorasani, Ahvazi, and Ardabili, against their cultural difference from a Syrian Kurd.)

1. This analogy derives from Jamshid Gharajedaghi (2011) in his description of Iranian culture. According to his own account, he owes such an understanding of Iranian unity-in-plurality to what he learned from Walter Bruno Henning during the period when the German Iranologist was teaching at Berkeley.

2-2. National Unity and Compound Pluralities

Iranian unity-in-plurality, as an existential principle in the formation and continuity of the Iranian nation, pertains at the level of unity—or the universal—to the comprehensive and constitutive elements of national identity (the Persian language, national territory or country, national history, etc. Cf. Attarzadeh and Seyodini, 2022), and at the level of plurality—or particularity—denotes "compound pluralities" in social life. Herein, the relationship between the whole and its parts is configured thus: on the one hand, the universal—that is, the national—preserves and guarantees the compound parts or social pluralities; on the other hand, the existence of interwoven pluralities is possible only within national unity, which provides the conditions of possibility and actualization for civic rights and freedoms and for the existence of an independent sphere of civil, social, and economic activities (CF Tabatabai, 2018).

In explicating pluralities, two fundamental realities must be observed. First, pluralities are compound. Every Iranian citizen is the bearer of a combination of differences and diversities that constitute their individual identity: personal goals and aspirations, religious beliefs, social opinions, cultural interests, lifestyle, urban lineage, local dialect or language, professional and occupational affiliations, stratum-class habits and habitus, and so forth. Therefore, society as the domain of plurality cannot and must not be disaggregated into standardized collective units—such as "ethnicities"—thereby distorting its nature.

The second reality is that pluralities in national life are simultaneously integrated into the national society while preserving their particular existence and are elevated to the general and comprehensive level of national identity. Certain social diversities, although they become sources of difference by virtue of particular traits, simultaneously possess general characteristics, shared identity, and national bonds—because they are parts that have been integrated or sublated within the unity and national process of becoming civilized. For example, the substantive content of the values and attitudes of a Kermanshahi, a Khorasani, and a Gilani typically resides within a shared semantic system, even if expressed in different languages or dialects.

In the historical process of the formation of Iranian identity, comprehensive identity-bestowing elements, shared characteristics, and national institutions have been strengthened and expanded. At the same time, diverse and compound socio-cultural particularities have found their dwelling within this totality. The domain of plurality has always been living and generative in Iran; however, the concrete instances of the parts have undergone transformations throughout the course of Iran's social history. In traditional social configurations, the domain of plurality pertained to communities, groups, cities, regions, religious denominations, and tribes. In the modern era, however, although civil communities and groups continue to be recognized as social entities, the primary unit of the domain of plurality is constituted by individual citizens of the country, as persons who are the subjects of rights and obligations in relation to society and the nation.

In summarizing the above logical and historico-social premises concerning Iranian identity, it must be stated: in the relationship of unity-in-plurality, the universal and its elements possess a political nature—that is, they pertain to national political life. In contrast, the parts possess a non-political nature; however, as individual citizens possessing rights, they are capable of political action—that is, they may participate in political life whose end and purpose is the securing of public and national interests.

Today, the most significant existential threat against Iranian national identity and unity is the factor or

factors that negate the Iranian principle of unity-in-plurality, as a fundamental pillar of Iran's ratio es-sendi–existential logic. The most conspicuous instance of this existential threat in recent decades has been ethnicism or ethno-nationalism.

3. The Ideology of Ethnicism and Ethno-identitarianism

3.1. Distorting Narrative Mechanisms

Ethnicism, as the core of secessionist ideologies—once fabricated under the rubric of "internationalism of peoples" and today concealed behind guises such as "ethno-identitarianism"—threatens Iranian national identity through two distorting mechanisms.

We stated above that in explicating the domain of plurality in Iran's historical society, two fundamental realities must be observed: (1) pluralities are compound, and (2) pluralities, in national life, while preserving their guaranteed particular existence, are integrated into the national society and elevated to the general and comprehensive level of national identity.

Corresponding to these two fundamental principles and realities, the ideology of ethnicism distorts the reality of Iranian society and the unity-in-plurality through two narrative mechanisms. These two narrative mechanisms operate simultaneously and in conjunction; however, they may be analytically distinguished in the following logical sequence.

(1) The First Mechanism: Fabrication of Standardized Ethnic Units

The first mechanism isolates one element (such as language or dialect) or more (such as dialect and religious denomination) from the interwoven domain of societal plurality and, on this basis, constructs standardized ethnic units, fabricating for the desired ethnicity a unified history, culture, mythology, and territory. Naturally, in the construction and elaboration of this ideological narrative, ethnic competition and conflict—in which the self and other, or friend and enemy, are defined—constitutes an essential axis.

For example, in one version of the false ethno-nationalist narrative propagated by Marxist-Leninist parties such as Komala and PDKI—which portrays the plurality of citizens in Iran's western-north-western belt entirely under a single ethnic unit (formerly designated as a "people" [khalq] or "nationality" [melliyat])—the manifold social diversities are collectively rejected and negated. These include linguistic diversities (Kurmanji, Ilami, Sorani, Kermanshahi, Gorani, Kalhor, etc.), class stratifications, religious denominations, trade affiliations, cultural variations, and differences arising from lifestyle and individual interests in those regions—the majority of which, taken together, bear a very close resemblance to other Iranians in other parts of the country. Concurrent with this rejection and negation, ethno-nationalism presents a standardized image of a unified ethnicity with a unified language, identity, and territory, which, as a self-subsistent entity, is posited as a "we" standing against—in competition and conflict with—other "ethnicities." This distorting mechanism can also be identified in other versions of ethno-nationalism and identitarianism, such as Pan-Turkism and Pan-Arabism.

(2) The Second Mechanism: Elevation of the Standardized Ethnicity as a "Whole"

The second mechanism elevates standardized ethnicity as a whole and presents it as an entity rivaling Iranian identity. Iranian unity-in-plurality means that national identity constitutes the universal, and its comprehensive elements belong to all Iranians; simultaneously, the parts or compound pluralities

are situated within or under the universal, not as its equivalents or antecedents. In the ethno-nationalist narrative, the desired ethnicity is represented as a self-subsistent entity with its own territory, culture, history, and society—internally homogeneous and externally independent and distinct from other units or "ethnicities." In this manner, the attribute "ethnic" no longer denotes a part of the manifold and compound social strata within society; rather, it is itself regarded as a universality—a false whole that, whether explicitly stated or not, necessarily negates the universality of Iranian national identity and its constitutive elements—as the dimension of unity in the relationship of "unity-in-plurality of Iranian society." This mechanism, since it presents itself as a whole equivalent to and rival of Iranian national identity, effectively negates the very foundation of Iranian unity-in-plurality—the relationship between the whole and its parts.

For example, one may point to the case of Pan-Turkist activities in the northwestern regions of the country as another instance of ethno-nationalism. Azerbaijan has always been a region at the forefront of Iranian patriotism, national resistance, and the promotion of the Persian language and Iranian culture. Socially, the only difference it has with other regions of the country is the prevalence of the Azerbaijani language in this area. Pan-Turkism—whether overt or under the guise of "identitarianism"—has in recent years endeavored, by relying upon literary and theoretical sources and fabricated histories manufactured by neighboring countries, and through the construction of false narratives (for example, the distortion of the event of the liberation of Azerbaijan in 1946 and the elevation of a secessionist figure such as Jafar Pishevari and the Democrat Party [Ferqe-ye Demokrāt] as "national" figures and servants of Azerbaijan), to cobble together a history counterposed to Iran's national history. Alternatively, by relying upon and promoting literary works from Central Asia and Turkey, or by fabricating and appropriating the great cultural figures of the Iranian world, it seeks to construct for itself a culture and mythology separate from and opposed to Iranian culture.

3.2. Ideological Fabrication versus Socio-Historical Reality

The content of the term "ethnicity"—or "qowm" in Persian—in the dominant political discourse of recent decades in Iran is fundamentally different from, and essentially contradictory to, the meaning of qowm—or its plural form aqwām—in Iran's social history. The first meaning essentially pertains to migrant groups with distinct national origins rooted in contemporary Western history. In contrast, the second meaning has denoted a stratum of the compound characteristics and identities of Iranian citizens.

Therefore, what is referred to as aqwām-e Īrānī, if understood and conceived in the sense of "ethnicities"—whether through conscious or unconscious borrowing from the terms ethnic and ethnicity—which, regrettably, has gradually gained currency over the past two to three decades—constitutes an interpretation entirely contrary to the existential logic and socio-historical reality of Iran and logically leads to separatist ideologies.

The word qowm in Iran has historically had a meaning different from the one that has gained currency in recent decades. In its archaic sense—that is, the meaning that was in circulation prior to the accretion of today's ideological connotation—qowm has carried several meanings. One is "kin and relatives" (khīshān va khīshāvandān), which remains current in expressions such as qowm va khīsh (kith and kin) (Dehkhoda, 1998; Mo'in, 2007). Another, which is obsolete in Persian, is a group or congregation of men, a meaning found in the Holy Quran: "Let not a people (qowm) ridicule another people (qowm),

nor women ridicule other women" (Q. 49:11). Yet another is a group or category of people in a general sense—for example, *qowm-e fil* (the people of the elephant), synonymous with *ashāb al-fil* (the companions of the elephant); or "I saw a people who set fire to whatever they cultivated" (Balkhi [Rumi] 1986).

In both the Dehkhoda and Mo'in dictionaries, no reference enumerates the word *qowm* as meaning a linguistic or racial group with a distinct set of characteristics. Nevertheless, we know that at least until the first half of the fourteenth century (solar Hijri), the term *qowm* or *qowmiyyat* was occasionally employed in combination with "Iranian" in the public sphere and written texts—such as "the Iranian people" (*qowm-e Īrānī*) or "Iranian ethnicity/peoplehood" (*qowmiyyat-e Īrānī*), which was synonymous with the Iranian nation. (For example, see Persian writings from before the Constitutional Revolution in the 19th century CE such as treatises written by Zeyn al-Abedin Maraḡe-i and Abdorrahim Talebov; works from the early 20th century such as Forughī (1925, 157); and more recent writings such as the article by the Professor Sheikholeslami in the 1970s entitled "The Persian Language: The Noble Emblem of Iranian Peoplehood" (*Zabān-e Fārsī, Neshān-e Vālā-ye Qowmiyyat-e Īrānī*); Dariush Ashuri (1997, 189); Shahrokh Meskoub (2000); Moayyedi (1976, 11) and other works.

It appears that from the middle of the second Pahlavi era onward, the term *qowmiyyat* gradually acquired an ideological semantic charge synonymous with the vocabulary prevalent in the literature of leftist parties and grouplets of the time—terms such as "people" (*khalq*) and "nationality" (*melliyyat*). These were fabricated terms borrowed from official declarations and directives of Russian Marxism, which, for the first time, divided Iranians into "peoples" (*khalq-hā*) and "nations" (*melal*) based on certain linguistic and dialectal differences. With the bankruptcy of Marxist-Leninist currents after the Islamic Revolution, the literature of "peoples and nationalities" (*khalq-hā va melliyyat-hā*) also became obsolete—and is now employed solely among secessionist currents such as Pan-Turkists and parties like Komala and Ba'athist Harkat al-Nizal.

These latter terms, due to their radicalism, could not find purchase within Iranian society. However, the content of those terms had adherents among political activists and later found promoters in an imitative social science milieu—one that, heedless of Iran's social realities, considered itself obligated to translate the theories, concepts, and findings of the new social sciences. It is on this basis that in the early 1370s (1990s)—when the term *qowmiyyat* in its late and ideological sense had not yet become established—an article in the research journal *Jam'iyat* (Population), published by the National Organization for Civil Registration, correctly deemed the application of the concept of "ethnicity" in the terminology of the new social sciences (equivalent to ethnicity) irrelevant to Iranian society:

The very designation of ethnicity (*qowmiyyat*) may not be applicable in our country. The people who live with various dialects in our great country are not considered closed societies. This matter does not pertain to yesterday or today, nor to Western influence. Iranian society is as open to Kurds as it is to Lors or Baluchis. Their dialectal differences, which are currently diminishing rapidly, are a natural consequence of the lack of extensive communication in the past. (Parande 1993, p.27)

This correct awareness in the social sciences, however, was gradually marginalized. The easier path of imitation resulting from uncritical translation flourished, to the extent that today, some sociology instructors at universities, in order to dispel any ambiguity between the archaic meaning of *qowm* and its new, non-Iranian content as ethnic, speak of vacuous terms such as "the ethnics residing in Iran"

(etnik-hā-ye sāken dar Īrān). In reality, this terminology has no substantive difference from the ideological literature of secessionist currents that speak of "the nations residing in Iran" (melal-e sāken dar Īrān) as an alternative to the unified Iranian nation. (For clarification, one may compare this with the discourse of expatriate leftist and secessionist political groups that have, in recent years, continually spoken of something called "the ethnic question in Iran" [mas'ale-ye etniki dar Iran], whose intent is nothing other than the dismemberment of Iranian national society.)

4. Observations on the Logic of Iran's Formation and Continuity

Iran's formation and continuity are governed by a logic whose recognition and observance constitute the most fundamental strategic principle of statecraft. As is well known, the preservation of the state represents the supreme telos of government and its public institutions. In accordance with this logic, the diverse groups of Iranians who have historically inhabited various cities and geographical regions of the country, who have descended from manifold tribes and clans, who have adhered to differing Iranian creeds and religions, and who—in contemporary parlance—have been the kith and kin (aqwām va khīshān) of a single nation, have all contributed to the preservation and enrichment of the national culture and identity, and to the safeguarding of the Iranian state. In the domain of culture, from Tabriz and Khoy to Kermanshah, Hamadan, and Ray; from Tabaristan and Gorgan to Tus, Bayhaq, and Sabzevar; from Sistan and Kerman to Shiraz, Shushtar, and Ahvaz—innumerable sages and scholars have labored to enrich Iranian learning, culture, and Persian literature. These enumerated regions fell within the contracted national geography of the contemporary period; if one rightly considers the broader expanse of the greater cultural Iran—that is, the historical national geography—then Mesopotamia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia must likewise be taken into account. In the domain of politics and warfare, in the bureaucracy and the army, Iranians from all these regions have similarly contributed, to varying degrees and from the most ancient historical periods to the present day, and in their collective consciousness, the ultimate purpose has been the preservation of the Kingdom of Iran (mulk-e Iran).

Moreover, in Iran—particularly among the culturally and politically prominent strata—one observes a pervasive pattern of intermixture among diverse groups. A supreme illustration of this widespread phenomenon may be found in the Safavid dynasty. Shaykh Safi al-Din Ardabili, the progenitor of the Safavid royal house, traced his lineage to Firuzshah Zarrinkollah, a notable among the sādāt (descendants of the Prophet) of Kurdistan, who had settled in Gilan and passed away there. The descendants of Firuzshah subsequently migrated to Ardabil and the village of Kalkhuran, where Shaykh Safi was born in 650 AH (13th century CE). His mother tongue was Azeri Pahlavi, which at that time still prevailed in Azerbaijan and Ardabil; several couplets composed by the Shaykh in this language have survived (Savory, 1980; Riahi, 2002).

At that period, Iran was under the sovereignty of the Mongol Ilkhanids, who, as it happens, officially designated their dominion as Iranzamin (the Land of Iran). The Ilkhanid state collapsed in 1356 CE, and thereafter the weak and short-lived dynasties of the Chupanids and the Jalayirids—both of Mongol extraction—ruled over Azerbaijan, followed by the rise to power of the Turkmen tribal confederations, the Qara Quyunlu and the Aq Quyunlu. Throughout this period, the Safavids, as a house possessing considerable power and public esteem, witnessed the rise and fall of successive rulers and the gradual spread of the Turkic language in Azerbaijan (Savory, 1980).

In the fifteenth century CE, Shaykh Abu al-Nasr Junayd, the head of the Safavid house, married the sister of Uzun Hasan, the formidable chieftain of the Aq Quyunlu confederation. From this union, several children were born, among them Haydar. Upon the death of his father, Shaykh Shuja' al-Din Haydar was recognized as the Perfect Guide (murshid-e kāmīl) and the Supreme Sufi (sūfī-ye a'zam), a period that coincided with Uzun Hasan's rule over Azerbaijan. Uzun Hasan, the Turkmen, had a daughter named Marta, born of his marriage to the Christian Despina Catherine, daughter of the Emperor of Trebizond. Marta was wed to Shaykh Haydar and, unlike her mother, embraced Islam, thereafter being known as Alamshah Begum. From the union of the Safavid Supreme Guide—whose lineage extended to Kurdistan, Gilan, Azerbaijan, and the Turkmen Aq Quyunlu house—and the Byzantine-Turkmen Marta, a son, Ismail, was born in 1487 CE. Possessed of unparalleled genius, Ismail, at the age of fourteen, assumed the crown of the Shahanshahi and proclaimed himself Shah of Iran, establishing Shi'i Islam as the official religion of the realm (Savory, 1980; Newman, 2006).

The young Ismail, like his predecessors and successors, possessed a profound consciousness of Iranian nationality as the political and cultural identity that unified all Iranians. A fervent believer no less than a sovereign, he regarded himself as an Iranian, the ruler of the country of Iran, and the political heir of Iran's ancient kings and champions, figures who occupied a position of supreme reverence and dignity in the historical consciousness of the Iranian people. In a poem, he declares:

Today I have descended upon the earth: I am the sovereign, I am the Shah! Know that I am the son of Haydar; I am Fereydun, I am Khosrow, I am Jamshid; I am Rostam, son of Zāl! (Shah Ismail 2009).

His invocation of Haydar carries an arresting double entendre. On the one hand, Haydar is the name of his father; on the other, as a Shi'i king and the spiritual guide (murshid) of the Shi'is of his age, he professes a profound devotion to Ali, the first Shia Imam, whose epithet is Haydar (the Lion). In this brief passage of his poem, Ismail thus presents himself as fortified by the Shi'i faith. At the same time, his self-attribution to the ancient kings and heroes of Iran articulates the explicit foundation of his political and national legitimacy. In other words, what conferred identity upon him was not an ethnic lineage, but rather Iranian nationality and religious conviction.

During the reign of Shah Abbas—the greatest sovereign of Safavid Iran, who elevated culture, statecraft, and the art of war to their apogee in the Safavid era—one likewise witnesses the robustness of Iranian identity, the interweaving of national Iranian elements, and the contribution of Iranians from diverse regions and lineages to the preservation of the state. Shah Abbas ascended to power three years after the Ottoman Turks' occupation of Azerbaijan and the massacre of the people of Tabriz in 1585 CE. Over the course of years of sustained effort and perseverance—reorganizing both the civil and military forces of Iran—he at last marched against the formidable enemy in 1603 CE. Leading an army composed of Iranians drawn from various regions and tribes of the realm, he liberated Tabriz and Azerbaijan from Ottoman Turkish domination and subsequently campaigned toward the Caucasus, reclaiming those territories as well (Floor and Herzog 2015; Matthee, 2012; Savory, 1980).

Following the fall of the Safavids and the Afghan insurrection, amid years of tumult and disorder, Nader Shah rose to power, styling himself "Nāder-e Irān-zamīn, Khosrow-e Gītīstān" (Nader of Iran, Sovereign of the World). He united the entirety of the Iranian people under the banner of Iran and succeeded in suppressing and repelling the Afghan rebellions. Even recent scholarship and the re-examination of archival documents reveal that Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar—withstanding all the accounts of his severity and ruthlessness—understood his campaign to establish a government as

aimed at the restoration of the integrity of the Iranian state, rather than the pursuit of personal or tribal power (Zargarinejad, 2023).

In the contemporary era as well, from the Constitutional Revolution to the present—encompassing the constitutionalist movement, the suppression of the Soviet-installed puppet regimes in Azerbaijan, the Islamic Revolution, and the Iran-Iraq war—all strata and groups of Iranian society, irrespective of languages, dialects, and religions, have contributed and participated in the preservation of the country. The martyrs, war veterans, and soldiers of Iran in the Imposed 8-year War bear tens of thousands of names—Khala'tbari, Sattari, Abshanasan, Sayyari, Doran, Monfared Niyaki, Aryafar, Hushyar, Yasini, Mokhberi, Eskandari, Adami, Mohaqqueqi, Heydariyan, Heydari, Samadi, Zarghami, Hemmat, Bakeri, Fallahi, Fakuri, Ardestani, Mokhtari—natives of the most diverse regions of the country: from Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and Kermanshah to Ilam and Khuzestan; from Khorasan and the shores of the Caspian to the foothills of the Alborz; from the heart of the desert to Isfahan and Yazd; from Sistan-and-Baluchistan to Kerman, Fars, and the flanks of the Zagros; and from shore to shore of the Persian Gulf. Iranian men and women sacrificed their lives in the path of Iran, and we must not reduce them to their local, so-called "ethnic", class, or confessional affiliations.

The people of Iran have likewise been valiant and self-sacrificing on the field of battle in safeguarding Iranian national culture. The province of Azerbaijan, in particular, has been one of the foremost cultural poles in the defense of national identity and in the research, reinforcement, and promotion of Iran's national history, culture, and language. A conspicuous example of this may be seen in the resistance of the Azerbaijanis during the period of the puppet government of the Azerbaijan Democrat Party (Ferqa-ye Demokrāt) and in the subsequent liberation of Azerbaijan in December 1946. From the master Iqbal Azar—the great artist of Tabriz who courageously stood before the leaders and agents of the aggressors, and in his sonorous and resolute voice sang of the "boundless transgression" (ta'addī-ye bī-hadd) of the xenophiles and of "the borders of our homeless homeland" (hodūd-e khāna-ye bī-khānmān-e mā)—to Shahriyar, who on numerous occasions composed verses in celebration of patriotism, territorial integrity, the history and glories of Iran, the Persian language, and other elements of Iranian national identity, and who fiercely inveighed against ADP, ethno-nationalists, and those hostile to Iran.

Among Shahriyar's numerous patriotic poems are compositions written in the spirit of critique and repudiation of the ethno-nationalists during the ADP sedition and following the liberation of Azerbaijan. In an ode opening with the hemistich "It is a day of self-sacrifice, O wretched Azerbaijan", composed during the period of ADP's domination over Tabriz and addressed to "Azerbaijan" (and, by implication, to the people of Iran at large), he draws a line of nullification across the flimsy claims of the secessionists—those claims that, by making a pretext of the diversity of local languages and relying upon historical fabrications and false ideological propaganda, sought to represent Azerbaijan as an entity separate from Iran and to lay the groundwork for its dismemberment:

*Thou art the auspicious cradle of Zoroaster, and thy sons
Are the children of Iran, of the pure-faithed Aryan people.
The difference in dialect begets no nationality for anyone.
Rarely does the age recall a nation with but a single tongue.
If by such logic they told thee thou art not Iranian,
They have called the morning "evening" and the sky "a piece of string."*

In another courageous verse, Shahriyar delivers his definitive riposte to the ethno-nationalists who have made language the axis of separation and rupture among Iranians:

*Our Turkish is most dear to us—it is our mother tongue;
However, if it will not say "Iran," may this tongue be struck mute.*

Shahriyar, following the collapse of the Ferqa and the deliverance of Azarabadegan, in a poem of stern resolve, calls the ethno-nationalists "uninvited guests" devoid of gratitude, and rejoices at the flight of "Ahriman":

*The uninvited guest has plundered the feast and now departs.
That ingrate, having shattered the salt-cellar, now departs.
Though he battered the roof and door upon the head of the master of the house,
The house stands flourishing, for from the ruined abode the owl departs.
Say to the Seal of Jamshid: in the time of the Asef of the age, Qavam
I beheld that from the kingdom of Solomon, Ahriman departs.*

The concluding words of this section, too, we render in the voice of Shahriyar of Tabriz:

*My message to the valiant and the brave,
The youths and the chivalrous men of Iran:
If the enemy spills my blood, O Shahriyar,
Know you what I shall inscribe in blood? – "Iran."*

5. National Unity and Socio-Local Pluralities in Iran Prior to the Twentieth Century

Ethnicism or Ethno-nationalism is a relatively recent phenomenon in Iran. Historically, until the last century and the fruition of the modernization process—including the expansion of urbanization and sedentarization—approximately one-quarter of the country's population was composed of tribal confederacies (īlāt)¹; collectivities that harbored considerable internal diversity and could not be divided into several discrete "ethnicities" based on language or religion. Among those tribal confederacies in which a particular local dialect prevailed, not only was social homogeneity absent, but striking diversities and even conflicts existed. For example, the Bakhtiari confederacy was one of the groups among whom the Lori dialect was spoken, and this confederacy was itself subdivided into the branches Haft Lang and Chahar Lang, each with its own constituent clans (ṭawāyef), which had a long history of mutual conflict. The Khamse confederacy was formed of five tribes with diverse internal languages and dialects. Among the tribal confederacies in which various Kurdish languages and dialects prevailed, not only social differentiation and heterogeneity but also striking linguistic and religious diversity obtained: from the Jalali in the northwest of the country, who were predominantly Kurmanji-speaking and of the Shafi'i creed, to the Kalhor—speakers of the Kalhori dialect and Shi'a—in the West, and the Arkavazi confederacy in Ilam, who spoke Southern Kurdish and were predominantly Shi'a, there existed numerous large and small confederacies and clans (Houshmand, 2024). These Iranian tribal confederacies, while generally partaking of and cognizant of the treasury of Iran's cultural and identity-bestowing heritage, differed from their settled co-patriots in adjacent regions in their social struc-

1. *īlāt (tribal confederacies):* The term *īl* (pl. *īlāt*) in the Iranian context designates a large-scale tribal confederacy comprising multiple clans (*ṭāyefe*, pl. *ṭawāyef*) and sub-clans (*tīre*), organized around shared pastoral-nomadic or semi-nomadic modes of subsistence and bound by shifting allegiances to paramount chiefs (*īlkhānī* or *khān*).

ture, mode of life, and livelihood. Iranians who spoke the local Turkish language, although dispersed across various regions of the country, were for the most part concentrated in the province of Azerbaijan, situated south of the Aras River in the northwest. Although in this province, too, various tribal confederacies—including the Afshar, Shahseven, Shaqqaqi, and Donboli—had maintained a presence, the extent of sedentarization and urbanization in Azerbaijan was greater than in the aforementioned regions.

Apart from the tribal confederacies, among the urban and rural Iranians who constituted the majority of the country's population—and who, for various reasons and to varying degrees, maintained unstable relations with tribal and clan-based groups—a distinct mode of life and, consequently, particular social diversities obtained. Among other things, this settled majority defined its local identity not by tribe and clan, but most often by district, town, village, hamlet, and the like—a form of identification that was manifestly non-political and non-primordial. Nevertheless, what is observed among the majority of Iranians throughout the ancient history of Iran, in a manner that is nearly exceptional and remarkable, is a powerful collective consciousness and memory of a unifying political-cultural identity and civilization, one that had been constituted and perpetuated under the idea of Iran and its constitutive manifestations and elements. Iranians apprehended their internal social, local, and religious plurality not in opposition to Iran, but under the canopy of Iran and of being Iranian. It is in this manner that "unity in plurality" may be regarded as an essential element in the very existence of Iran.

At the threshold of the nineteenth century, apart from the powerful Iranian national identity prevalent both among urban and rural populations and among tribal confederacies and clans alike, the local identity of individuals was most often defined based on town and district, as well as family, clan, and tribal affiliation: for example, Tabrizi, Kho'i, Kermanshahi, Razi, Khorasani, Tusi, Shushtari, Kashi, Isfahani, Rashti, Kermani, Shirazi, and so forth; or Afshar, Ardalan, Zolfaqari, Sanjabi, Bakhtiari, Qashqa'i, and the like. Until the threshold of the fourteenth century Sh. (early twentieth century CE), the concept of "ethnicity" (qowmiyyat) in the sense that has gained currency in Iran today was virtually absent, and no political signification of qowmiyyat is to be found. This reality can be ascertained from the vast body of historical documents, including the records of the earliest censuses and statistical surveys of the Qajar era, the written sources of that period, and the transcripts of the deliberations of the first constitutional legislative assemblies.

With the entry into the modern era of Iranian history—particularly after the Constitutional Revolution—we witness a turning point in the formation of Iran's "unity in plurality." The *Zeitgeist*, the will of the nation, and the natural order of Iranian society demanded that the collectivist structures and tribal forces—whose very growth had been the product of centuries of turmoil during the medieval age of Iranian history—be weakened, and that, in their stead, civil society and civic individuality of the "persons of the nation" become, respectively, the principal locus and the primary unit of the "domain of plurality" in Iranian society.

6. Transformations in Social Structure and the Emergence of Anti-Iranian Ideologies: The Coincidence of Two Variables

From the beginning of the twentieth century, concurrent with the expansion of sedentarization and the growth of cities, tribal diversity gradually gave way to the social structure of the new society. By virtue of state policies and the internal dynamism of society, the structure and social organization

of tribal confederacies and clans progressively yielded their place to the organization of modern society and civic individuality.¹ Formerly, tribal individuals gradually came to identify themselves as members of towns and villages, or, conversely, of smaller clans and pastoral groups. Nevertheless, since the velocity of transformation in the social structure outpaced the gradual and not altogether continuous process of integrating tribal collectivities into the civic structure, a portion of this population—residual from the weakened tribal confederacies—became the object of political mobilization on the part of tribal chieftains disadvantaged by the course of social reform, as well as other domestic and foreign adventurers. One consequence of such a situation was, for example, certain tribal uprisings in the 1940s (1320s Sh.) and the insurrections following the land reforms, led by large landowners and tribal chiefs. However, from the standpoint of long-term analysis, with the gradual decline and disappearance of the tribal confederacies, several elements belonging to their complex, plural, and diverse social structure remained extant and, as it were, suspended within the public life of Iranian society, among them dialects, languages, kinship affiliations, and religious denominations. These social elements, which would in all probability have been naturally accommodated as diverse components of Iranian society within the framework of civic structures and relations—just as, prior to this period, the natural order of Iranian society among its settled majority had indeed so accommodated them—were, by virtue of new factors, particularly contemporary ideologies and foreign interventions, made the object and basis of the construction of an independent identity. In this manner, one component among the many social components of Iranian society—most often language and dialect—was transformed into the pivotal and cleavage-producing element in the politics of identity and ethno-nationalist narrative-making, which, at the cost of effacing the manifold diversities of Iranian local communities, sought to homogenize and standardize a population that was plural in its linguistic, dialectal, religious, and lineage-based diversities, and to create for them an independent and self-subsistent identity with a political content. Henceforth, for example, individuals descended from the numerous tribal confederacies and the urban and rural populations adjacent to them—who, notwithstanding the striking local differences and diversities among themselves, spoke cognate yet distinct local dialects and languages—had become the principal addressees of emergent ideologies that sought to create independent political identities in conflict with the national identity and unity of Iran. In this fashion, ethno-nationalism simultaneously effaces the local plurality and diversity among a portion of Iranians in favor of a constructed socio-political identity—or, stated otherwise, a standardized ethnicity—while, on the other hand, it challenges and combats Iranian national unity and identity. The consequence is that the Iranian unity-in-plurality, which has been and shall remain an essential element in the formation and continuity of Iran, is subjected to assault and attenuation. This is precisely what ethno-nationalist currents accomplish.

Consider, for example, the two armed Pan-Kurdish secessionist groups—namely, the Democratic

1. It is during this very period that the tribal elites and notables possessing power and privilege find their position imperiled by new social groups and the growing power of the state. Simultaneously, the foreign colonial powers, which in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had exploited influence over the tribal confederacies as a means of containing the Iranian state, set about seeking new instruments of power with which to undermine the workings of the state. In this manner, ethnic activists and foreign powers found a coalition in the construction of ethno-nationalist and, subsequently, secessionist ideology (see. Ahmadi, 2016).

Party of Iranian Kurdistan and the Komala organizations—both of which claim leadership over an illusive collectivity under such titles as "the Kurdish people" (khalq-e kord) and "the Kurdish nation" (mellat-e kord), which, in their view, possesses a vast homeland extending from Anatolia and the Levant and Iraq to Iran. The founders and leaders of these parties, over the course of half a century of political and armed activity, have been almost entirely Sorani-speaking and originating from a single, circumscribed geographical region.¹ The illusive "nation" or "ethnicity" of these parties is the product of homogenizing and standardizing Kurmanji, Sorani, Kermanshahi, Feyli, Ilami, Ahl-e Haqq, Shi'a, Sunni, and other communities and populations into a single, Sorani-Kurdish version committed to partisan ideological ideals. Moreover, since these plain versions have no roots in historical and social reality, they harbor in practice serious internal contradictions that at times find expression in bloody intra-party and inter-party battles, and at other times in the sacrifice of Kurdish-speaking populations and the slaughter of Iranian compatriots. Such a mechanism, of course, also obtains among Pan-Turkist groups and Turkish ethnicism, which in recent years has undertaken extensive activities, particularly given that it commands relatively considerable domestic resources and has also enjoyed the support of certain regional powers.

From the standpoint of historical development, and particularly from the 1940s onward, destructive ideologies constructed ethno-nationalism in two distinct forms. One form enlisted it as a component of a broader political agenda aimed at undermining the foundations of Iranian national unity; the other elevated it to the central axis of political struggle and secessionist action. The ethno-nationalist currents initially derived the conceptual apparatus of their narrative from Soviet Marxism-Leninism, designating Iranians—on the basis of fabricated cleavages—as "peoples" (khalq-hā) or "nationalities" (melliyyat-hā), each of which was to "determine its own destiny." Subsequently, with the transformation of power relations and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc's political order and ideological system, the terms "people" (khalq) and "nationality" (melliyyat) gradually ceded their place to "ethnicity" (qow-miyyat), followed in turn by such meaningless constructs as "ethnic and national rights"; likewise, softer euphemisms such as "identity-seeking" were deployed instead of "secessionism". Nevertheless, the adversary of the ethno-nationalists was not solely the Iranian nation and state; other ethno-nationalist rivals and ethnic "others" were likewise deemed enemies—though, depending on circumstance, collaboration with them against Iranian national unity remained a viable option.

An exemplary instance of such power relations may be observed in the Azerbaijan crisis following the Second World War. On Moscow's orders, two ethno-nationalist parties—one Turkic, one Kurdish—were established in Tabriz and Mahabad, respectively, each proclaiming an autonomous government to lay the groundwork for the dismemberment of Azerbaijan from Iran. However, ADP under the leadership of Pishevari and the Democrat Party under the leadership of Qazi Mohammad maintained a co-

1. By way of example, the names and birthplaces of the founders of the first congress and the current leaders of Komala: Abbasi, Sanandaj; F. Soltani, Marivan; Karimi, Saqqez; Vatandoust, Sanandaj; Moradbeygi, Boukan; Rahimi, Naqadeh; Iraj Farzad, Sanandaj; Ebrahim Alizadeh, Mahabad; Omar Ilkhanizadeh, Boukan; Mohtadi, Boukan. And likewise, the names and birthplaces of the founders and leaders of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan: Qazi Mohammad, Mahabad; Ahmad Towfiq, Mahabad; M. Saraji, Mahabad; Soleyman Mo'ini, Mahabad; Molla Avareh, Sardasht; Qasemlu, Urmia; Sadeq Sharafkandi, Boukan; Mostafa Hejri, Naqadeh; Khaled Azizi, Naqadeh; A. Hasan-zadeh, Sardasht.

alition against Iran, with the fall of the Ferqe and the deliverance of Azerbaijan, that coalition dissolved among the client successors of the two ethno-nationalist currents. The conflict between Pan-Turkist and Pan-Kurdist currents—which conduct their activities, both openly and covertly, within and beyond the country's borders, whether under such rubrics as "identity-seeking" and "ethnic rights" or within explicitly secessionist groups and parties—over the territories claimed in their respective illusive maps is of a character too fundamental for any prospect of long-term coalition to prevail over the acute tensions between them.

In this context, the province of West Azerbaijan has, in recent decades, constituted one of the most significant arenas of tension between these ethno-nationalist currents within Iran—currents that are the principal agents of the politicization of "ethnicity" and the attenuation of national unity, national identity, and social order and cohesion in the province. The path to confronting them, accordingly, passes through the strategic revitalization and reinforcement of the elements of national identity and the institutions of Iranian national unity.

7. The Construction of "Identity-Seeking" against Iranian Identity in the Contemporary Period

As we stated in the introduction, the question of "identity" gradually became a site of contestation in the Western world—from the second half of the twentieth century onward—in both the field of political action and theoretical studies oriented toward such action. In recent decades, the specter of "identity politics" has cast its shadow over the public life of Iranians, and its ideological concepts have secured a foothold within the social sciences. What naturally elevates this phenomenon beyond a merely academic discussion is its intimate nexus with projects and models of political action that, for the most part, possessed no roots in the historical lifeworld of Iranian society, but rather arose from long-term social transformations and the dominant paradigms of political struggle in Western societies. Just as, prior to this, the fabricated identity-demarcations that appeared in the twentieth century under such headings as "peoples" (*khalq-hā*) and "nationalities" (*melliyyat-hā*) were the handiwork of the Eastern Bloc and a weapon in what was called "class struggle". In both of the aforementioned cases, the categories of identity have been, and remain, not concepts for the description of social and cultural phenomena, but rather instruments for the redefinition of power relations, the rearrangement of social boundaries, and the legitimation of particular political objectives—objectives that are, more often than not, in profound rupture and tension with the unity, national identity, civility, and logic of historical continuity of Iran.

It was for the first time, in the wake of the Russian Revolution, that a group of Iranians resident in the Caucasus who had given their hearts to Marxism-Leninism established the Communist Party of Iran—the Ferqe-ye 'Adālat (Justice Party)—based on Comintern principles (the international platform of communist parties). Through a false representation of Iranian society within the framework of Leninist and Stalinist doctrines, they constructed a schema of fabricated identities under the title "nations of Iran" (*melal-e Iran*) and spoke of the dismemberment of the country. At the second congress of this party, convened in Urumia in 1927, Iranian society was explicated within the framework of what Stalin had termed "the national question, and the fragmentation of the Iranian nation into "nations"—or, in a later idiom, "ethnicities" (*qowmiyyat-hā*)—was openly broached. In 1913, Stalin had written a pamphlet entitled *Marxism and the National Question*, in which—with particular reference to the multinational Russian Tsarist Empire, which he had called "a prison of peoples"—he designated linguistic groups

possessing a territory attributed to themselves and a unitary economic life as "nations" (melal), and deemed support for their separation from existing states an ideological duty on the path of class struggle and socialist revolution. After the liberation of the "nationalities" from "national oppression", the turn would come for the international union of the proletariat. In this manner, the question of "identity" at this juncture, and in the view of classical socialism, was a superstructural phenomenon resting upon the substratum of class relations, and the militants availed themselves of it as a "tactic" for the advancement of their objectives.

When the Iranian socialists, as imitators of Bolshevism, sought to establish a party conforming to Comintern standards, they imprudently applied the official terminology and definitions of the elder brother—including the term "the national question"—to Iranian society, the result of which was such ludicrous formulations as the following:

The Communist Party of Iran must include among its program the demands and general slogans of all communist parties of the world regarding the question of nationalities—namely, the slogan of the right of every nation to complete independence, even secession from the central government—and act accordingly. (quoted in Atabaki, 1994 and Seifodini, n. d.)

At this same congress, for the first time, the term "multinational country" (keshvar-e kasir al-melleh)¹ was used to describe Iran. The said party declared its objective to be the establishment of a "republic"—one whose foundation would rest "upon the free union of the nations that are presently within the territory of the state of Iran."

In the early years of the fourteenth century, (the 1920s–1930s CE), Such utterances found few buyers. The realities and perceptions of Iranian society were so remote from the new ideologies that the communist slogans concerning "the liberation of nations" gained no purchase among either the common people or the elite. However, with the Allied occupation of Iran in September 1941 and the nearly five-year presence of the Red Army across a vast expanse of Iranian territory, the Tudeh Party of Iran commenced its activities with unparalleled power and resources, and propagated the doctrine of "the national question"—this time under the personal supervision of Stalin himself, who had by then donned the mantle of leadership of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics/ The Soviets and their devotees went so far that in 1945, under the ideological tutelage of Russian Marxism and with the backing of the Red Army, they undertook the creation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP) and the Republic of Mahabad for the purpose of dismembering northwestern Iran—a venture that, one year later, collapsed in ignominious defeat. Azerbaijan returned to the motherland of Iran.

From that time until approximately the 1980s, the discourse of "identity-seeking" and its stock concepts—such as "nationalities" (melliyyat-hā), "peoples" (khalq-hā), "the national question" (mas'ale-ye mellī), "double oppression" (setam-e moẓā'af), "the right of nations to self-determination" (haqq-e ta'yīn-e sarnevesht-e melal), "national autonomy" (khodmokhtārī-ye mellī), and the like—remained, for the most part, the inheritors of the doctrine that the imitators of the Comintern had first propounded.

Following the decline and subsequent collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the field of contestation gradually shifted, yet the essence of the conflict persisted. The arena of struggle had now shifted from politi-

1. It is a direct calque of the Russian *mnogonatsional'noe gosudarstvo*, the official Soviet designation for the USSR.

cal economy to culture, and "class struggle" had yielded to "identity politics." The new discourses of identity-seeking preserved the grammar of traditional ethno-nationalism, but replaced the classical vocabulary of Marxism-Leninism with an arsenal of new terms—terms buttressed by more elaborate mechanisms of justification and more sophisticated fallacies. The "political grammar" of identity-seeking is now what it always was; it is the terminology, however, that has changed. "The politics of difference," "multiculturalism," "differentiated group rights," "ethnicity and the ethnic," "the mosaic society," "linguistic rights," "ethnic federalism," and "the non-national state"—such terms, when applied to Iranian society, carry the very same ideological significations as the ensemble of terms "nationalities," "peoples," "the right to self-determination of the nations of Iran," and "national autonomy" once carried, only in a newfangled guise. This shift in discourse is far more than a sign of substantive metamorphosis; it is an indication of a turning in expression and form. Both modalities rest upon a mechanism of distortion, fallacy, and dissimulation, based on which certain elements of the interwoven plurality of Iran's historical society are distorted and depicted in the guise of elements of "difference" and "conflict"; thereafter, this false and anti-Iranian image is dissimulated as something natural, emancipatory, and subsumed under the rubric of human rights.

8. Conclusion

The extensive inquiry into the ontology of Iranian identity and the genealogy of the threats posed against it leads us to a decisive theoretical and practical resolution. The text has demonstrated that the contemporary question of ethnic identity in Iran is not an organic product of internal social friction, but largely the result of a superstructural imposition of imported ideologies—ranging from the Comintern's "National Question" to the postmodern formulations of "Identity Politics."

The fundamental premise established in this study is that Iran operates on a *ratio essendi* (existential logic) defined by unity-in-plurality. Unlike the modern nation-states of the post-Westphalian or post-colonial order, the Iranian nation constitutes a historical civilization-state. The Idea of Iran serves as a transcendental spirit that does not negate diversity but sublates it.

Therefore, the intellectual fallacy of ethno-nationalism lies in its attempt to reverse this historical alchemy. By seeking to decompose the "salt" of the Iranian nation back into the toxic isolation of its elemental components ("sodium and chlorine"), ethno-identitarianism acts as an agent of entropy. It seeks to reduce the complex, interwoven layers of the Iranian individual—who is simultaneously defined by city, trade, religion, dialect, and national culture—into a flattened, one-dimensional "ethnic" subject. This is not a liberation of the subject, but a mutilation of their complex historical identity.

Our historical analysis confirms that the conceptual toolkit currently employed to challenge Iranian unity is deeply rooted in the strategic arsenals of foreign powers and totalizing ideologies.

The taxonomy of "peoples," "nationalities," and "multinational state" was a specific fabrication of Stalinist Russia, designed to disintegrate the Tsarist empire and later applied formulaically to Iran by the Iranian Communist Party and the Tudeh Party. With the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, this anti-unitary mechanism shed its Marxist skin. It donned the liberal guise of "multiculturalism" and "human rights" as well as cultural leftism's "identity politics."

However, the mechanism remains identical: the Fabrication of Standardized Ethnic Units. By homogenizing the internal diversities of a region (e.g., erasing the differences between a Sorani, a Kurmanji, and other Kurdish language speakers, or a Shia and a Sunni) to create a monolithic "Nation-in-wait-

ing," these ideologies construct a "Trojan Horse" designed to dismantle the Iranian state from within. The evidence presented regarding the Azerbaijan crisis of 1945-46 and the ongoing rivalries between Pan-Turkist and Pan-Kurdish currents reveals the geopolitical dangers posed by these fabrications. These are not movements seeking civil rights within a national framework; they are competing irreconcilable projects that view Iranian territory as a contested vacuum.

Consequently, the defense of the Iranian nation cannot be passive. It requires a vigorous intellectual and political reassertion of the National Universal. Scholars and politicians must reject the nomenclature of "multi-nationalism," "ethnicism," "ethnic federalism," and the like, recognizing them as linguistic traps that prefigure disintegration. At the same time, the legitimate sphere of plurality in the modern era is the individual citizen, not the corporate "tribe" or "ethnos." The path to justice lies in the full realization of the rights of Iranian citizens—regardless of linguistic, regional, or religious background—under the rule of law and in Persian, the ancient medium of the Iranian collective consciousness.

Ultimately, Iran is not a mosaic of glued-together pieces; it is a solution in which the solutes have merged to create a distinct, historically continuous substance. To entertain the ideology of "ethnicism" is to invite the dissolution of this substance. The imperative for the contemporary Iranian state and intelligentsia is to strip away the "Trojan horse" of identity politics and reaffirm the civic and cultural unity that has sustained the Idea of Iran through millennia of distinct but unified existence.

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Iran in UAE Foreign Policy (2018-1992): The UAE's Search for Identity

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Abstract

From a constructivist perspective, foreign policy crises often coincide with processes of identity formation. In this context, the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) foreign policy toward Iran between 1992 and 2018 can be interpreted as part of an effort to reconstruct a distinct Emirati national identity. The UAE's complex internal structure and cultural diversity make identity a central element of its *raison d'être*. By adopting antagonistic policies toward Iran, UAE leaders have sought to rally domestic public opinion in order to reinforce national unity and nationalism. At the regional level, portraying Iran as an "enemy" or a definitive "Other" has elevated the UAE's profile in the Persian Gulf and enabled its leaders to redefine national interests in identity-based terms. Iran's domestic challenges and its comparatively weakened regional role during this period further encouraged Abu Dhabi to pursue this approach. Consequently, the UAE's unfriendly stance toward Iran aligns with its nation-building objectives by consolidating internal political cohesion and seeking validation and support within its regional environment. These policies of tension, therefore, are not merely expressions of power politics but serve the UAE's identity-driven strategy for regime legitimacy and regional stature.

Keywords: Constructivism; Foreign Policy; Nation-Building; Persian Gulf Politics.

1. Introduction

Iran's immediate neighborhood includes both Arab and non-Arab states with diverse relationships with the Islamic Republic. To Iran's south lie the Arab members of the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), mostly small monarchies that have experienced rapid economic growth over the past four decades due to abundant oil and gas resources. These Gulf states combine modern and efficient bureaucratic structures with traditional ruling systems, delivering effective governance and high living standards for their citizens, even though political power remains concentrated in ruling families (Foley, 1999). Geographic proximity between Iran and the Persian Gulf states has increased their mutual vulnerability and frequently produced overlapping or conflicting interests. Among these states, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) occupies a distinctive position. Over the past two decades, the UAE has outpaced

many regional countries in modernization and wealth creation and has maintained a particularly complex relationship with Iran. On the one hand, economic exchanges have strengthened ties between the UAE and Iran. The UAE was among Iran's top trading partners during this period—bilateral trade reached nearly \$13 billion in 2017 (Keynoush, 2021)—and in some years the UAE accounted for roughly 30% of Iran's total imports. On the other hand, political tensions between the two countries have persisted since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Despite the substantial economic benefits that the Emirati economy derives from trade with Iran, the UAE's policies—especially after 1979—suggest that its leadership has often tolerated, and at times even welcomed, friction in the relationship. This apparent paradox raises a central question: why has the UAE government accepted, and in some instances encouraged, tensions and hostile policies toward Iran?

This article investigates the significant role of identity in shaping the UAE's foreign policy behavior toward Iran during the period 1992–2018. The territorial dispute between the UAE and Iran over the islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb re-emerged as a prominent issue in the early 1990s. In April 1992, the UAE initiated a series of actions to advance its longstanding claims, initially focusing on Abu Musa and later extending to the Tunb islands (Mojtahed-Zadeh et al., 2012). Iran's decision in April 1992 to restrict access to Abu Musa and assert full administrative control triggered a renewed wave of diplomatic tension, prompting the UAE to elevate the issue in regional and international forums. This episode marked the first major escalation of the dispute since the 1970s.

From that point onward, the UAE launched an extensive international campaign to gain support for its territorial claims. Emirati officials engaged in sustained diplomatic efforts—ranging from media initiatives to high-level diplomatic engagements—aimed at reinforcing the UAE's claims over the islands. Iran, for its part, has consistently maintained that its sovereignty over Abu Musa and the Tunb islands is non-negotiable, while occasionally expressing willingness to discuss practical arrangements within the framework of the 1971 Memorandum of Understanding (Al Jazeera, 2004). Selecting 1992 as the starting point of this study allows us to capture this critical turning point, when a relatively dormant dispute became an active foreign policy issue. The period from 1992 to 2018 thus encompasses the renewed trajectory of the conflict and its evolution through the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, covering the key diplomatic, legal, and security developments from the dispute's re-emergence through its status in 2018.

In the field of international relations, cultural and ideational factors such as identity have often received less attention than material variables. Dominant paradigms such as realism and liberalism tend to prioritize military and economic power over ideational elements. In contrast, this study emphasizes how national identity can shape a country's perception of its interests and influence the behavior of its foreign policy.

2. Methodology

Constructivism, as one of the most influential approaches in contemporary international relations theory, has attracted considerable attention for offering a nuanced understanding of global politics and for bridging material and ideational perspectives. If realism is primarily materialist and idealism primarily ideational, constructivism occupies an intermediate position that integrates both dimensions. Constructivists, whether modernist or postmodernist, generally base their analysis on three core ontological propositions.

First, normative structures matter alongside material ones. Neorealism and neoliberalism assume that the main sources of power and influence in the international system are material capabilities, such as military and economic assets (Hopf, 1998). Constructivists argue, however, that norms, ideas, and culture play an equally important role in shaping international outcomes.

Second, identities constitute actors' interests and shape their actions. Identities are essential for reducing uncertainty, as they help states understand "who they are," which in turn influences what they want. While neorealists treat state interests as fixed and exogenously determined, independent of social interaction, constructivists emphasize that interests are constituted through identity. Explaining a state's interests, therefore, requires analyzing its identity (Price and Reus-Smit, 1998).

Third, actors and structures are mutually constituted. Constructivists maintain that while normative structures shape the identities of actors, these structures are themselves produced and reproduced through the practices of those actors. As Wendt (1992) argues, "it is through reciprocal interaction that we create and instantiate the relatively enduring social structures in terms of which we define our identities and interests."

Within this framework, identity and its role in foreign policy become central. A constructivist understanding of identity views it as neither permanent and unchanging nor entirely flexible and instrumental. Identity contains relatively stable themes while also taking dynamic forms. In other words, national identity is continuously reshaped, and it is not possible to regard it as permanently fixed (Nasri, 2006).

In constructivist foreign policy analysis, action and interaction are functions of actors' self-understanding. Each actor, possessing a particular identity, develops a specific self-conception and a set of role expectations, which shape how it approaches relations with others. Accordingly, an actor's perception of the "Other" informs its definition of interests and the policies that follow, even when these policies diverge from material considerations. The nature of interaction between actors largely depends on the distinction between the Self and the Other.

Constructivists further argue that identity provides a cognitive framework that reduces uncertainty. By knowing "who we are" and "who the enemy is," states can transform indecision into calculated policy. Identity motivates international actors to shape structures, while those same structures, in turn, influence actors' identities and interests. Within the broader structure of international norms, states express their identities through foreign policy behavior and derive a sense of security from this expression. Cultural factors and national identity, therefore, become crucial variables in understanding how national interests are formed. From this perspective, identity shapes worldviews and patterns of international interaction.

Constructivists also contend that what states want depends on whom they interact with, the degree of their dependence on those actors, what they learn through interaction, and how they legitimize their claims. Two propositions follow from this view. First, the more an actor's legitimacy is tied to the shared norms of a community, the more likely it is to accept policies it might otherwise reject on the basis of narrow self-interest. Second, an actor's fundamental priorities can change over time as continuous interaction leads to the redefinition of both the Self and the Other (Moshirzadeh, 2005).

In summary, within the constructivist framework, states are central actors whose behavior is not strictly predictable, particularly during periods of change. What alters state behavior is the evolving construction of identities and interests through interaction. Applying constructivism to foreign pol-

icy analysis helps explain why the UAE's policies toward Iran have taken their particular form, as the concept of identity provides insight into the UAE's behavior and decision-making in this relationship. Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative approach. Specifically, it employs discourse analysis of statements by UAE leaders and relevant policy documents to examine how Emirati leaders construct and articulate national identity in relation to Iran. Official speeches, press releases, and public statements concerning Iran—especially those referring to the three islands dispute and portraying Iran as an “enemy” or “Other”—serve as the primary sources for analysis. This qualitative interpretive method is consistent with constructivism's emphasis on the role of language, discourse, and ideas in shaping state identities and interests.

3. The Impact of Identity-Building on UAE Foreign Policy

Although a country's foreign policy is shaped by multiple factors, this article emphasizes the role of identity because its influence is often underestimated in the case of the UAE. The Emirati leadership's efforts at identity-building have at times overshadowed other priorities, including economic interests, in shaping foreign policy choices. In other words, identity-building has imposed significant material and symbolic costs on the UAE leadership, yet it continues to be a central investment (Davidson, 2008; Ulrichsen, 2011).

The primacy of identity considerations has led Abu Dhabi to securitize its approach toward Tehran, allowing security concerns to take precedence over economic ones. From a constructivist perspective, identity shapes worldviews and patterns of international interaction (Adib-Moghaddam, 2006; Barnett, 1998). The UAE's policy toward Iran is therefore influenced not only by regional challenges and territorial disputes but also by its Arab-oriented identity.

In the Middle East, multiple layers of identity coexist. Transnational identities such as Islam and Arabism overlap with subnational affiliations such as tribal and ethnic ties, alongside an evolving national identity. The competition among these identities across regional actors generates a complex pattern of cooperation and conflict. In the UAE, national identity assumes particular importance compared to some neighboring states and strongly influences the foreign policy calculations of the Al Nahyan ruling family. Abu Dhabi's approach to Iran is thus driven less by conventional material considerations of convergence or divergence and more by identity-building and nation-forming imperatives.

Using nation-building instruments, the UAE leadership has pursued domestic and regional policies aimed at reinforcing the cohesion of the national state. Consequently, the UAE's policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran is shaped less by material factors and more by ideational components, with material interests often framed in ways that support national identity objectives.

4. Why the UAE Is Searching for Identity

As a relatively young state, the United Arab Emirates has faced significant political and social challenges from a geo-cultural perspective. Issues such as a loosely integrated federal structure, a predominantly non-indigenous population, limited historical continuity, and extensive ethnic and religious diversity have contributed to a weak sense of shared national identity. For this reason, UAE officials have viewed nation-building and identity construction as essential tools for addressing these challenges. By promoting nationalism and cultivating a shared historical and cultural narrative, the leadership seeks to strengthen national unity and position the UAE as an influential regional actor.

4.1. The Lack of Historical Context

The UAE's identity challenges can be partly understood through its historical context. Sheikh Zayed once stated, "He who does not know his past cannot make the best of his present and future, for it is from the past that we learn." Despite this sentiment, there remains a notable lack of public knowledge about UAE history among both Emiratis and expatriates. A survey conducted for The National and Al Aan TV by YouGov found that very few respondents were able to answer basic questions about UAE history, even regarding relatively recent events (KHDA, 2012).

The UAE lacks a deeply entrenched, unified historical narrative and collective national memory, and therefore does not benefit from strong organic social cohesion. Emirati citizens constitute a relatively small minority of the population—only about one in five residents is a citizen—which further limits the development of a shared historical identity.

4.2. Structural Differences

Another challenge stems from the UAE's political structure. The country is a federal union of seven emirates, and political power is not evenly distributed among them. The designation of Abu Dhabi as the federal capital has gradually contributed to the centralization of authority in that emirate. This imbalance has periodically fueled tensions and rivalries among the emirates, particularly the three largest: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah.

For decades, the UAE government has also faced internal structural challenges, including scarce water resources, uneven distribution of capital and development across emirates, and social tensions between tradition and modernity (Foley, 1999). However, the federation has tended to display unity when confronted with external disputes or perceived foreign threats. Emirati officials have often mitigated internal discord by invoking territorial grievances or allegations of homeland "occupation" by neighboring states, especially Iran, thereby rallying citizens around a shared national cause.

4.3. Cultural and Ethnic Discontinuity

Tribal affiliations and demographic imbalance have further complicated the development of a cohesive national identity. As noted by Khalid al-Khazraji, "Dubai is home to 202 nationalities; the country has one of the highest rates of nationality diversity in the world" (Khaleej Times, 2006). Paradoxically, the combined Arab population (Emirati nationals and Arab expatriates) constitutes less than half of the total population, and only around one million residents—approximately 19 percent—are native Emiratis (Index Mundi, 2016).

This high degree of ethnic and cultural heterogeneity is often perceived by the government as a vulnerability, since greater societal cohesion could facilitate more effective governance and decision-making. The issue has been significant enough that Emirati commentator Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi suggested that the government consider granting citizenship to long-term foreign residents who have made meaningful contributions to society (Gulf News, 2013).

5. The Identity and the UAE from the Perspective of Constructivism

Constructivists argue that claims related to territory, sovereignty, and national identity are closely aligned with cultural ideals. In this context, the UAE's persistent territorial claims over the three islands can be understood as an extension of this principle. Since its formation, the United Arab Emir-

ates has engaged in sustained diplomatic and symbolic efforts regarding its claims of sovereignty over Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs. Some scholars suggest that segments of Emirati society—particularly younger generations—have experienced elements of identity uncertainty, prompting the leadership to pursue policies aimed at fostering a sense of unity and collective purpose through this political and cultural campaign. The dispute with Iran, which is linked to the absence of a deeply rooted pre-existing national identity, has thus been elevated into a central national issue through the UAE's claims over the islands.

Invoking territorial disputes with another state is a recognized strategy through which newly formed states seek to consolidate nationhood and articulate a clearer national identity. In the UAE's case, the dispute with Iran—the only non-Arab state on the Persian Gulf littoral—appears to have provided an opportunity to promote national unity and reinforce an Emirati Arab identity. Historically, comparable patterns of nation-building through territorial claims have appeared elsewhere in the region. For example, Iran under Reza Shah in the 1930s advanced claims over Bahrain as part of efforts to strengthen Iranian national consciousness, and Iraq's Baathist regime in the mid-twentieth century asserted claims over Iran's Khuzestan province ("Arabistan") to stimulate Iraqi Arab nationalism (Mojtahed-zadeh, 2006).

Such historical narratives contributed to the emergence of broader anti-Iranian (and at times anti-Persian) rhetoric among certain strands of Arab nationalism over several decades. One dimension of this involved attempts to alter established geographical terminology—for instance, promoting the term "Arabian Gulf" instead of "Persian Gulf," or referring to Khuzestan as "Arabistan"—in order to emphasize Arab identity and minimize Persian historical associations. In this respect, the UAE's approach has, to some extent, reflected similar strategies, with the perception that confronting a non-Arab presence in the Gulf could contribute to strengthening a distinct Emirati Arab identity.

The UAE has faced continuing challenges in fostering deep national cohesion among its seven emirates, each with its own tribal and local identity. The absence of a strong external challenge during the country's formative years meant that the nation-building process lacked a unifying stimulus often present in other state-building experiences. From a constructivist perspective, the UAE's firm positions regarding the islands and its broader critical stance toward Iran can therefore be interpreted as efforts both to reinforce national identity domestically and to enhance its standing and recognition at the regional and international levels (Mojtahed-zadeh, 2007).

5.1. Identity-Building for the Nation-State

Because the UAE's state structure was established before a fully consolidated nation had emerged, its leaders have had to actively pursue nation-building in order to strengthen social cohesion, enhance political stability, and improve the effectiveness of governance. Similar patterns can be observed in other states whose borders and institutions were shaped by external powers and which lacked an organic internal unity, leaving their national identity relatively fragile (Blake and Drysdale, 1985).

Given the UAE's limited historical social cohesion, one of the leadership's primary tasks has been to cultivate a compelling sense of nationalism through identity construction. This process is closely linked to the country's confrontational posture toward Iran. Ongoing tensions with Iran over the islands—and even symbolic issues such as the naming of the Persian Gulf—have been incorporated into a broader narrative that reinforces the state's *raison d'être* and fosters a sense of shared national pur-

pose. Historical experience suggests that the perception of an external threat can strengthen internal unity and solidarity. In the UAE's case, heightened tensions with Iran have often served to bring the seven emirates together, encouraging them to set aside internal differences and reinforcing federal cohesion. Such external disputes have contributed to national solidarity and stimulated expressions of Emirati nationalism at the popular level (Barzegar, 2012).

At the same time, the UAE remains highly heterogeneous in ethnic and religious composition, and a fully crystallized nation-state identity has yet to emerge. These conditions create internal vulnerabilities, particularly in an era of globalization when questions of identity and legitimacy become central political and security concerns. The leadership is also mindful of the destabilizing effects that major upheavals in neighboring states—such as revolutions or regime changes—could have on the UAE. In response, the country has sought to preserve the regional status quo with fellow Arab states, strengthen alliances with them, and maintain close ties with external powers, all as part of a broader strategy to accelerate its nation-building process (Mojtahedzadeh, 2006).

A heterogeneous population remains one of the main obstacles to deeper national integration and the development of a cohesive nation-state. In such socially diverse settings, populist narratives can emerge as a means of counteracting centrifugal forces. One example in the UAE context is the leadership's emphasis on using the term "Arabian Gulf" instead of "Persian Gulf," a practice that gained prominence after the formation of the UAE. By positioning itself within a longstanding historical and symbolic dispute and adopting a stance in opposition to Iran, the leadership has attempted to shape a shared historical-cultural framework for Emirati identity.

Beyond public rhetoric and media discourse, elements of this identity narrative have also appeared in educational materials. Reports suggest that some school textbooks have used terminology such as "Arabistan" when referring to parts of Iran's southern coastline. These efforts are intended to cultivate a stronger sense of collective identity and promote Emirati nationalism, reflecting policies that have been pursued since the country's early years (Mojtahedzadeh, 2006).

5.2. Identity-Building for Regional Standing

Between 1992 and 2018, the United Arab Emirates consistently sought to position itself as a key actor in the Persian Gulf region. In line with the internal and external challenges discussed earlier, Emirati leaders have repeatedly attempted to consolidate the country's legitimacy by cultivating perceptions of external threats or crises. In particular, Iran has been portrayed as a potential challenge to UAE statehood, both regionally and internationally. By highlighting this threat, the UAE strengthens domestic nationalism and internal cohesion, while simultaneously signaling its concerns to neighboring Arab states, many of which historically regard Iran with suspicion.

Abu Dhabi has strategically exploited the historical and ongoing Arab-Iranian tensions to reinforce its national identity and assert its role in the regional order. The UAE's policy of antagonizing Iran serves dual purposes: it bolsters internal legitimacy and national unity, and it secures political support from other Arab states, particularly members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This approach explains why the UAE has persistently raised its territorial claims against Iran in collective forums, including the GCC and the Arab League (Barzegar, 2012).

Security in the Persian Gulf is understood not only as a material reality but also as a mental construct. The perception of threats directly shapes how states define their interests and interpret their identi-

ties, which in turn guides their foreign policy behavior. Iran's long history and ancient civilization foster a self-conception of grandeur, which has contributed to anti-Iran sentiment—commonly referred to as “Iranophobia”—among some Arab audiences. This sentiment influences the foreign policies of several Gulf states, motivating counterbalancing measures against Iran (Roohidehbaneh, 2012).

The UAE finds a favorable historical and cultural context for framing Iran as an adversary. As a non-Arab state, Iran does not conform to the Arab identity predominant in the Gulf region; sectarian differences, particularly the Sunni-Shia divide, further accentuate this distinction. With Arab nationalism becoming a central element of regional identity, non-Arab states like Iran are increasingly cast as out-group actors. Historically, Iranian nationalism and Arab nationalism have often clashed: Pan-Arabism and Arab nationalist agendas frequently conflicted with Iran's national interests, and vice versa. Emirati leaders consciously leverage this long-standing Arab-Persian rivalry to advance their identity-building objectives, using it to consolidate national cohesion and regional influence (Roohidehbaneh, 2012).

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the UAE's policy toward Iran through a constructivist lens. The findings suggest that the United Arab Emirates' efforts at identity-building significantly shaped its strategic posture toward Iran during the period 1992–2018. By sustaining tensions with Iran, the UAE has sought to cultivate a stronger sense of national identity domestically while simultaneously enhancing its standing among regional peers. Abu Dhabi's firm posture has also been facilitated by Iran's relatively restrained responses during these years. Iran's internal socio-political challenges and its comparatively limited regional engagement created conditions in which Emirati leaders felt able to pursue their claims and objectives—closely tied to identity-building and nationhood—without anticipating substantial retaliation.

This analysis also helps explain why Emirati decision-makers have shown limited inclination toward rapprochement with Tehran. The dispute over the three islands, which came under Iranian control shortly before the UAE's independence in 1971, has served as a recurring focal point for national identity narratives. Particularly after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the UAE repeatedly emphasized its sovereignty claims over the islands as a unifying national issue. The federation's underlying geo-cultural challenges—including a loosely integrated federal structure, ethnic and religious diversity, the absence of a deeply rooted historical narrative, and the need for a clearly articulated political identity—have encouraged the leadership to promote a unifying external cause. Framing Iran as an external adversary has helped provide that cause, reinforcing nationalism internally while raising the UAE's profile in its regional environment.

Constructivist theory, with its emphasis on the interaction between material and ideational factors and the formation of “Self” and “Other” identities, offers a useful framework for understanding the UAE's behavior toward Iran. In contrast to realist or liberal approaches, constructivism highlights how the UAE's perceptions of itself and of Iran shape its understanding of national interests. In the decades since its formation, the UAE has achieved many of its material objectives through economic growth and development, becoming a major center of trade and commerce. The country's current priorities, however, extend beyond material prosperity to include the consolidation and internalization of a cohesive Emirati national identity.

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The Philosophical Foundations of the Idea of Iran in Medieval Islamic Governmentality

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Introduction

A philosophical approach to politics is a serious and purposeful endeavor. A thinker who devotes themselves to political philosophy first contemplates with the goal of uncovering the truths governing political life, and second, proceeds from the assumption that politics is not merely defined within the realm of practice but constitutes a form of philosophical life in itself. It can therefore be said that every political philosophy is necessarily a part of political thought, but not every political thought falls within the domain of political philosophy (Strauss, 1994: 2).

This article aims to explore the construction of political philosophy in post-ancient Iran, that is, the Sassanid era, around the challenging concept of governance, by attending to the nature of the political through an awareness of the transformations in political action. It further examines how this body of knowledge was transmitted to the medieval Islamic period through the Translation Movement, in order to address the crisis of Islamic governance.

Theoretical Framework

The central concern of this research is governance, which manifests in practice on the basis of specific intellectual foundations. "Governing" or "ruling" refers to a set of institutions, procedures, analyses, reflections, calculations, and techniques that enable the exercise of a particular and complex form of power. According to Foucault, this mode of operation is a tendency that, throughout the West and from ancient times, has incessantly led to the supremacy of a type of power that can be called "government." Government was a structure that, drawing upon all other forms of power, namely sovereignty and discipline, produced a coherent set of governmental apparatuses grounded in and dependent

upon knowledge. Foucault emphasizes the significance of a process in modern times that he terms the “governmentalization of the state,” which he contrasts with the “satiation of society.” The satiation of society refers to state intervention in all aspects of life, a model that aligns with the logic of sovereignty. In the model of governance, by contrast, the operative techniques aim primarily at producing a condition of “self-regulation,” or more precisely, processes of “self-constraint.”

Foucault’s concept of “governmentality” can be situated in relation to three categories, namely the state, power, and the subject, through the connections established between techniques of domination. From this perspective, Foucault introduces government as a form of power that seeks to displace domination by reconstituting the very identification of power (Dean, 2017: 135). The art of governing, in its exercise of power over a territory and its inhabitants, expresses sovereignty. The ultimate objective of politics, understood in this sense, is to establish a basis for the legitimacy of state power, which can be secured through the consent and satisfaction of those who inhabit the territory. Prevailing political theory rests on the assumption that power is embodied in state sovereignty (Ibid.: 52). Foucault, however, decouples power from the axis of sovereignty and the state. Political theories of the past two centuries have sought to locate the people as the source of the legitimacy of power, such that the people retain the capacity to dismiss the state if it deviates from agreed principles and to improve conditions through political change. Foucault rejects this view, asserting that “power should not be sought only within the realm of state sovereignty. Power is dispersed throughout all levels of society and cannot be found solely within the state apparatus” (Ibid.: 62). When addressing the smallest socio-political institution, Foucault consequently invokes the microphysics of power, meaning that he never approaches power at a macro level. Within this framework, a comprehensive theory of power cannot be reached, because power is in no way universal, timeless, or absolute; rather, it is operative in various and context-specific forms. In this perspective, sovereignty is the imposition of a law through which power is exercised, a power that inherently institutionalizes the orientation toward competence. From this standpoint, the question becomes: what theoretical understanding of governmentality, within the framework of the three elements of state, power, and subject, can be revealed as the foundation of practical action in reality? This question is explored through philosophical reflection on two historical periods, namely post-ancient Iran and the medieval Islamic era.

Genealogical Method

The genealogical method, unlike traditional historical approaches, does not seek any enduring essence, unchangeable nature, or sacred truth. Instead, it focuses on uncovering the gaps and discontinuities within the historical process. From this perspective, no fundamental or immutable rules exist; accordingly, every rule is understood as an interpretation that those in power have invested with value and practical significance within their discursive system. The further one pursues the interpretation and analysis of a text, the further one moves from any recoverable essence, arriving instead at the recognition that all interpretations have emerged from sources of power and are nothing more than constructs of a system of domination (Dreyfus, 2000: 37). Genealogy seeks to expose the historical events that have been presented as truths, to reveal the deceptions embedded in history, to trace the lineage of phenomena elevated to the status of truth, and ultimately to illuminate the role of the will to power in these historical processes. Through this approach, the strategies of power and the operations of the system of domination are dissected and analyzed. The aim is to identify the tactics, instruments, and

functions of power, as well as the network of relations through which they are governed (Ahmadpour, 2018: 483).

These relations are observable in the medieval Islamic period under the influence of the diverse ethnicities, cultures, and languages that underwent conversion to Islam. The transition from the Prophetic era to the Caliphate era, alongside the expansion of Islam into new territories, produced significant transformations in the Islamic social system and generated new formations of power in the political arena. This process shaped a series of historical events that, in the medieval period, gave rise to the intellectual and practical consolidation of Islamic governance. A genealogical re-examination of these events compels an analysis of the strategic relations of power and the system of domination operative in the late Umayyad period and at the height of the Abbasid era. Through this lens, one can apprehend the power-knowledge dynamics that manifested as a distinctive process of governance thinking. This governance thinking, embodied in the tactics, instruments, and functions of the power network, produced the knowledge necessary for managing this society. The system of knowledge that emerged from the semantic network of power relations in the medieval period gave rise to a new form of governance thinking, which this article explores through philosophical reflection on that semantic network.

Iranian Governance Thought in the Political Philosophy of the Sassanian Era

No nation or society generates thought and ideas in isolation; rather, it draws on the experiences of predecessors and the achievements of other nations. The Sassanid Empire, emerging from the social and political crisis precipitated by Alexander's invasion and shaped by its encounter with Greek and Roman ideas and cultures, sought to rethink and reconstitute the concept of Iranian governance as it had been expressed during the Achaemenid era. The fragmentation of political authority into feudal structures and the proliferation of ungrounded diversity plunged Iranian society, which was fundamentally unified beneath its diversity, into a condition of acute crisis. The limited literacy prevalent across different social classes further entrenched Iranian society within an elitist framework. Consequently, the efforts of Sassanid rulers, undertaken in collaboration with the Zoroastrian priesthood, to construct and articulate a coherent model of governance thought encountered numerous challenges and unresolved questions.

Within this context, beginning from the reign of Shapur, the Translation Movement became the primary vehicle through which the experiences and intellectual achievements of other nations were appropriated across various fields of knowledge, including politics, in order to produce a system of knowledge that would enable the rethinking and reconstitution of Iranian governance thought. This process reached its culmination during the reign of Khosrow Anushirvan, who, by virtue of his philosophical inclinations, provided systematic philosophical justification for many of the religious dilemmas and political challenges confronting the empire. This intellectual tendency was given philosophical form by Iranian Nestorian and Syriac-speaking Christian scholars, who engaged with Sassanid religious and political dilemmas through the conceptual framework of Neo-Platonism. The translation of numerous Greek philosophical works, ranging from Aristotle's logical treatises to a broad range of philosophical texts, into Syriac at institutions such as Nisibis, Edessa, and Gundeshapur gradually transformed Syriac into the preeminent scientific language of the Iranian Empire (Ibn al-Nadim, 2002: 447).

Historical Context of the Formation of Sassanian Governance Philosophy

Regarding the relationship between Iranians and philosophical knowledge, various hypotheses have been proposed, ranging from the claim that philosophical thought was absent in ancient Iran to the view that Iranians played a foundational role in its emergence. Thinkers such as Cornford, and even Plato in his theory of Forms, have been regarded as influenced by Zoroastrian conceptions of abstract entities and the spiritual realm. Moreover, Parmenides is also believed to have had intellectual connections with Iranian thought. Historical accounts further suggest that Plotinus joined the Roman army with the intention of being deployed to the eastern front in order to establish contact with Iran and gain access to its philosophical traditions. During the early Christian centuries, Zoroaster was known throughout much of the world more as a philosopher than as a prophet. Such evidence may be considered indicative of the existence and influence of philosophical knowledge in Iran (Nasr, 2011, pp. 272–273).

During the Sassanian period, a number of texts were produced from the perspective of Zoroastrian religious and philosophical thought. Works such as the *Bundahishn*¹, *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*², and *Wizīdagihā ī Zādspram*³, as well as portions of the third and fourth books of the *Dēnkard*⁴, demonstrate traces of philosophical reflection through their engagement with metaphysical, cosmological, and ethical issues from the standpoint of practical philosophy.

In the realm of political philosophy, the *Khwadāynāmag*⁵ literature of the Sassanian era occupies a particularly important position. Drawing upon the philosophical ideas embedded in these texts, later Islamic thinkers reported and interpreted Iranian views. The division of existence into the realms of light and darkness, the perpetual struggle between good and evil in the material world, the immaterial nature of the spiritual realm, the relationship between the spiritual and material worlds, explanations of humanity's position within both realms, the effects of human actions upon spiritual existence, and

1. *Bundahišn* (*Bundahishn*):

A major Middle Persian (Pahlavi) Zoroastrian cosmological text, whose title means “Primal Creation.” It presents Zoroastrian doctrines concerning the creation of the world, cosmology, anthropology, and the struggle between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman.

2. *Dādestān ī Dēnīg*:

A ninth-century Middle Persian Zoroastrian work, traditionally attributed to Manuščihr, consisting of theological, ethical, and legal questions and answers concerning religious doctrine and practice. The title may be translated as “Religious Judgments” or “Religious Decisions.”

3. *Wizīdagihā ī Zādspram*:

A Middle Persian Zoroastrian compendium attributed to the priest Zādspram (9th century CE). The work summarizes cosmological, mythological, and eschatological traditions derived from the Avesta and later Zoroastrian literature. Its title means “Selections of Zādspram.”

4. *Dēnkard* (*Dēnkart*):

One of the most important encyclopedic works of Zoroastrianism in Middle Persian, compiled during the ninth and tenth centuries CE. The *Dēnkard* preserves extensive information on Zoroastrian theology, cosmology, ethics, jurisprudence, and lost portions of the Avesta. Its title is commonly translated as “Acts of the Religion” or “Religious Deeds.”

5. *Khwadāynāmag* (“Book of Kings”), a lost Middle Persian chronicle of the late Sasanian period, which provided the foundation for many later Persian and Arabic histories of pre-Islamic Iran, including Ferdowsi’s *Shāhnāme*, and preserved traditions concerning Iranian kingship, genealogy, and national history.

the relationship between time and eternity constitute examples of philosophical themes reflected in these Sassanian sources. Alongside Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism also possessed substantial philosophical dimensions. This suggests that, during the Sassanian period, intellectual challenges arising from political transformations encouraged the spread of philosophical reflection as a means of addressing political, social, and ideological problems. Consequently, movements such as Manichaeism and Mazdakism employed philosophical reasoning to justify many of their doctrines and positions.

During the reign of Khosrow I (Khosrow Anushirvan), a group of Greek philosophers sought refuge in the Sassanian Empire, creating a favorable context for articulating and legitimizing the foundations of government through the intertwined concepts of religion and politics. Anushirvan himself made considerable efforts to foster and expand philosophical learning by establishing educational institutions in Nisibis, Edessa, and Gundeshapur that were designed to address the intellectual requirements of governance (Daneshpazhouh, 1357, p. 1). The Greek historian Agathias expressed astonishment at the fact that Anushirvan was familiar with the philosophical ideas of Aristotle and Plato. According to his account, Anushirvan commissioned the translation of Greek philosophical texts into Pahlavi for his own study. One of the philosophers, Priscianus, composed a treatise entitled Priscianus' Answers to the Questions of Khosrow, the King of Kings, which reflects the king's interest in philosophical inquiry and his engagement in discussions with philosophers. An incomplete Latin translation of this work survives today (Tafazzoli, 1378, pp. 159–160).

Furthermore, Ibn al-Nadim refers to sources describing exchanges of philosophical ideas between the Iranian and Roman monarchs. According to these accounts, the Roman king would send philosophical questions to the Iranian king through Hippocrates. The flourishing of scientific activity and the growing interest in philosophical debate facilitated political relations among states during this period. For example, in 532 CE, Anushirvan issued a decree granting Iranian philosophers' freedom of passage to Rome (Ibn al-Nadim, 2002, p. 450).

Revisiting Sasanian Political Philosophy Focused on the Iranian Concept of Governance

When social challenges attain sufficient magnitude, they create the conditions for philosophical reflection and systematic thought. Thinking through a problem of this order is an effort to resolve it, an intellectual orientation that guides and organizes political action on the basis of considered reflection. The rise of the Sassanid dynasty on the Iranian plateau was directed toward the revival of an idealized conception of monarchical governance, an objective that was itself a response to the social, political, and religious challenges generated by the encounter with Greek political thought. The most consequential of these challenges were the fragmentation of centralized power and the emergence of competing interpretations of Zoroastrianism, developments that undermined public welfare and severed the organic bonds between society and political authority. When the Sassanids sought to consolidate power, they confronted a series of intersecting crises, chief among which were those of legitimacy and governmental effectiveness. A society that had lived for centuries under feudal arrangements found it difficult to accept the unification of authority under a singular religious interpretation, particularly given that the Seleucid and Parthian periods had substantially disrupted the established class system. The attempt to reinforce an idealized monarchical order premised on a hierarchical, class-based worldview provoked resistance from subordinate social groups, as evidenced by movements such as those associated with Mazdak and Mani.

In this theoretical approach to power, the primary focus falls on the intellectual justification of the constructs through which a particular worldview is sustained. Ontological, epistemological, and anthropological conceptions, that is, those frameworks that explain and legitimize the existence of a centralized governmental structure organized around the institution of the monarchy, are central to this inquiry. The relationship between multiplicity and unity, and more specifically the question of how multiplicities proceed from unity or are integrated into a singular entity, can be understood as a constitutive problem in the construction of Iranian political authority. Equally significant is the task of justifying the position of the king and his relationship with the transcendent realm and with Ahura Mazda, within the context of the interplay between the material and the spiritual worlds. The nature and attributes of the spiritual world, its relationship with the material world, the mechanisms through which these two realms interact, and the process by which Ahura's grace is transmitted to the material world, all constitute philosophical questions that were systematically addressed during the Sassanid era.

Philosophical Foundations of Sassanian Political Thought

Religion constituted the most significant organizing framework of human thought during the traditional era, in the sense that all matters were interpreted through the lens of religious and metaphysical teaching. The crisis in the interpretation of religion that emerged during the Sassanid period therefore struck at the most fundamental element of political legitimation. The Sassanid era, drawing upon Zoroastrian teachings in theology, ontology, and anthropology, entered into a dialectical engagement with Greek philosophical thought, an engagement oriented toward the generation of new conceptual resources for explaining and justifying the epistemological foundations of political thought.

Ontological Foundations

The Iranian worldview, from an ontological perspective, rests on two opposing forces. The concepts of Giti⁶, that is, the material world, and Minu⁷, that is, the spiritual world, are central to Iranian thought concerning existence. Giti denotes the tangible, material world, while Minu denotes the intangible, invisible, and spiritual realm. The relationship between these two forms of existence is grounded in material existence; the epistemological movement from Giti to Minu constitutes the foundation of the Iranian worldview. As recorded in the Yasna: "At the beginning, there were two twins, two spirits, each with its own specific actions." This formulation implies that each force acts independently of the other. A further distinction in the Yasna reads: "Of my two spirits, the one that is more beneficial created all of the holy creation with words." The essential point is that existence and non-existence arise from these two forces or spirits.

6. *Gētīg* (Giti):

In Zoroastrian cosmology, the material and visible world, as opposed to the spiritual realm (mēnōg). The term denotes the physical dimension of creation in which the cosmic struggle between good and evil unfolds.

7. *Mēnōg* (Minu):

The spiritual, invisible, and transcendent realm in Zoroastrian thought, contrasted with the material world (gētīg). It refers to the non-material dimension of existence inhabited by divine and spiritual beings

Paul of Persia, drawing upon Aristotle's logic in his work *Gamma*⁸, articulates the fundamental principles of this question in the following terms: "One who has knowledge about things as such must be able to explain the most fundamental principles of everything. Such a person is a philosopher, and the most fundamental principle of all is one where deception has no place... Now we say, what is this principle: that being and non-being cannot both apply to the same thing at the same time and in the same respect." He elaborates on this principle with a slight modification: "In existing things, there is a principle about which one cannot be mistaken... and that is that the same thing cannot simultaneously be both 'being' and 'non-being'." Paul of Persia treats Zoroastrian dualism as a philosophical problem amenable to analysis from this standpoint, and accordingly attempts to resolve this ontological conflict through a Neo-Platonic framework.

The spiritual world is itself divided into a dualistic and antagonistic space. Spenta Mainyu⁹ represents the pure spirit or individual intellect. In the Avesta, intellect and pure spirit are identified with the meaningful soul, which signifies the source of thought and perception. Pourdavoud employs the term *gohar* or *johar*¹⁰ for greater conceptual clarity. By contrast, Angra Mainyu¹¹ represents the dark spirit, or Ahriman. In Iranian thought, both Minu and Giti are constituent parts of existence within the material world.

In the *Bundahishn*, which forms part of the Avestan corpus, it is stated that the spiritual world, divided into Spenta Mainyu and Angra Mainyu, subsists in a condition of stability and without commingling. These two forces intermingle and contend with one another only within the material world. According to this account, Zoroastrian ontology posits two worlds in which forces of good and evil are present, with the distinguishing feature that the spiritual world is governed by stability and the non-commingling of opposites. Everything occupies its proper place. In the material world, however, the force of evil contends with the force of good: evil strives to assert its dominance, while the force of good defends existence and resists it. In Iranian cosmology, a dualistic conception of the cosmos is accepted, one that regards material existence as inherently good and understands evil and impurity as

8. *Gamma* (Γ, γ):

A letter of the Greek alphabet, the third in order, used in a wide range of scholarly and scientific contexts. In mathematics and physics, γ commonly denotes variables such as the gamma function in analysis, the Lorentz factor in relativity theory, or radiation types in nuclear physics. In philological and textual studies, it may also appear as a conventional symbol for classification or notation within critical apparatuses.

9. Spenta Mainyu:

"The Beneficent Spirit" in the Avesta, representing the creative and life-affirming aspect of Ahura Mazda. In Zoroastrian theology, Spenta Mainyu embodies goodness, truth, and the divine agency responsible for the creation and preservation of the world.

10. *Gohar* (or *Johar*):

A Persian term meaning "essence," "substance," or "intrinsic nature." In philosophical and theological contexts, it is often used to denote the underlying reality or essential nature of a being, comparable to the Aristotelian concept of substance.

11. Angra Mainyu (Aṅra Mainyu):

*In Zoroastrian theology, the destructive or "hostile spirit," representing the ultimate principle of evil, falsehood (*druj*), and cosmic disorder. In the earliest Avestan sources, Angra Mainyu is the antithetical force opposing Spenta Mainyu and Ahura Mazda's creation, responsible for corruption, death, and the distortion of cosmic order (*asha*). In later Zoroastrian tradition, especially Middle Persian texts, he is fully personified as Ahriman, the adversary of Ohrmazd in a dualistic cosmological framework.*

external forces that assail the world, transforming it into a battleground between good and evil. Material life, given this conflict, acquires a quality of practical endurance against malevolence. This view stands in contrast to Manichaeism, which held that the cosmos is fundamentally dualistic in a manner that renders the world itself an embodiment of evil and impurity, producing a condition of universal wretchedness.

Philosophical Thinking on Government Based on Neoplatonism

The Sassanid interest in Plotinus' ideas stemmed from his engagement with two questions that were equally fundamental to Sassanid political thought, namely religion and philosophy, both of which required rational justification in the face of pressing intellectual and political challenges. Religion served as the foundational basis for the organization of governance in Iran and stood in need of rational validation, while philosophy provided a rational apparatus for explaining and justifying intellectual positions. In the domain of religion, Plotinus reflected on how the soul might return to its original purity. In Neo-Platonic philosophy, the soul is analogous to the human spirit in Zoroastrian thought, that is, a spirit that has separated from its existential origin in Minu and assumed a material body in Giti in order to combat evil. Philosophical inquiry involves understanding how the world is constituted and how its constitution can be rationally justified. The pursuit of the origin of the universe, which Plotinus regarded as the goal of philosophical contemplation and the ultimate aim of human endeavor, thus led Zoroastrian thinkers to address the question of human destiny through the framework of governance (Zanjani, 2010: 36).

Philosophical Thinking on Ideal Kingship

In the Iranian worldview, the cosmos is conceived as a unified whole, governed by order and stability. This order is, however, challenged by Angra Mainyu within the material world. In order to secure order and stability for human well-being, Ahura Mazda extends his power into the material world through the concept of kingship, in Persian shahriyari. The concept of kingship is central to the organisation of social relations and the mechanisms of power in material existence. Ideal Iranian kingship manifests as an ideal city in the material world, in the sense that through virtuous leadership and governance, the material world can attain stability and order, thereby reflecting asha¹².

In the *Shkand Gumanig Vazarg*¹³, that is, the Doubt Destroyer, it is stated in the sixth chapter, in the course of explaining material existence and the necessity of Ahura Mazda's guidance: "...It is clear that different things, due to having different essences and forces, cannot always be uncreated or without a creator; rather, they have a manager, creator, and doer. They have an impetus that moves and organ-

12. Asha:

A fundamental Zoroastrian concept signifying truth, righteousness, cosmic order, and the divinely established principle governing the universe. It stands in opposition to druj (falsehood, deceit, and disorder) and serves as a central ethical and cosmological doctrine in the Avesta.

13. *Škand Gumānīg Wizār (Shkand Gumanig Vazar):*

A ninth-century Middle Persian Zoroastrian apologetic and polemical treatise attributed to Mardānfarrox, son of Ohrmazddād. The title means "The Doubt-Dispelling Explanation." The work defends Zoroastrian dualism and critiques rival religious traditions, including Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Manichaeism.

ises them from one action to another, from one state to another, and from one time to another, not as the will and desire of the artifacts dictate but as the will and desire of the creator dictates" (Amouzgar, 2017: 466). This cosmological argument attempts to render philosophically coherent the existence of opposing forces in the cosmos and the situation of humanity within it, justifying the conflict of forces through the overarching management of a creator, Ahura Mazda. The text continues: "This world has no manager other than the wise and omnipotent deity" (Ibid.: 467). Having established the existence of God, the text proceeds to posit a manager for the world.

This divine power is embodied in the concept of *kshatra vairya*¹⁴ in the Gathas. This term refers to the divine sovereignty and kingship in the cosmic order, encompassing both *Minu* and *Giti*, which manifests as ideal or desirable rule in the material world. It signifies the ideal kingship of Ahura Mazda as exercised in material existence. Kingship is consequently envisioned as the human aspiration toward the highest attainable level of well-being and happiness, which is what renders it an ideal kingship (Mahmoudizadeh Dehbari: 293).

Fathollah Mojtabai, attending to this rational ideal of kingship, draws a comparison with Plato's philosopher-king. In his work *Plato's Beautiful City*¹⁵, Mojtabai discusses the influence of Iranian wisdom on Plato; however, setting aside the question of this influence and the specific intellectual challenges of the Sassanid period, the philosophical position of the Shah in relation to his role in existence and his eternal intellect, understood as Ahura Mazda-like in character, renders him genuinely comparable to Plato's philosopher-king. The ideology of Sassanid kingship is grounded in the concept of ideal kingship, a conception not unlike that of Plato's philosopher-king (Mojtabai, 2020: 54). Whether this resemblance exerted an influence on Plato or was elaborated independently during the Sassanid era does not alter the substance of the matter. The Iranian king, by virtue of characteristics such as eternal wisdom, possesses awareness of the "law of universal reason," which, according to the Iranian model, ensures human well-being and happiness in the material world (Rajai, 2019: 20). This model, grounded in a metaphysical understanding of the basis of well-being, makes its practical application in the material world possible.

Islamic Political Thought in the Realm of Political Philosophy

Political philosophy constitutes one of the most significant intellectual domains within Islamic governance thought during the medieval period. This body of knowledge emerged through the Translation Movement and addressed the complexities of political thought that arose during the Abbasid era. The necessity of providing rational justification for Islamic principles in relation to politics rendered the turn toward practical wisdom, or political philosophy, indispensable. The question at stake was how human reason-based political knowledge, grounded in the divine, could be reconciled with re-

14. *Khshathra Vairya* (*Kshatra Vairya*):

One of the six Amesha Spentas in Zoroastrianism, commonly translated as "Desirable Dominion" or "Ideal Sovereignty." It represents the divine principle of just rule, legitimate authority, and righteous governance, and is closely associated with the ideal exercise of power under Ahura Mazda's order

15. *Plato's Beautiful City and Ideal Kingship in Ancient Iran, a comparative study by Fathollah Mojtabai, examining the relationship between Plato's Kallipolis and the Iranian conception of ideal kingship in ancient Persian political and religious traditions.*

vealed authority, a question that arises directly from the effort to integrate Islamic political thought, which rests on the dual foundations of religion and politics, and to harmonize these two dimensions.

Historical Foundations of Islamic Political Philosophy Centered on Iranian Ideas

Iranians contributed to the development of Islamic philosophy in several interconnected ways, most significantly through the introduction of Greek thought into the Islamic world by means of translation, first from Greek into Pahlavi and subsequently from Pahlavi into Arabic. This process unfolded across two successive translation movements, the first during the Sassanid period and the second during the Islamic era. Greek philosophy, through its transmission to the Alexandrian school, gave rise to the development of Neo-Platonic philosophy, which was subsequently transferred to Iran through Syriac Christians and the Translation Movement, where it came to bear upon the ideological and philosophical challenges confronting the Sassanid order. The intellectual product of this philosophical engagement was Hikmat Khusrawani¹⁶. During the Islamic medieval period, the involvement of Iranians in power structures made the creation of a new political order and a renovated political thought both necessary and urgent, thereby generating the conditions for a new translation movement. Sustained engagement with the intellectual achievements of other nations produced diverse interpretations and schools of thought in relation to religion. This intellectual environment necessitated the philosophical articulation of a new social order, one that reflected the presence of both Arab and non-Arab Muslims within the new political formation and through which Iranian philosophical elements were introduced into the Islamic world.

Revisiting Islamic Political Philosophy through the Lens of Iranian Political Thought

If we accept that the challenges arising within a given region are the primary generative forces behind fundamental questions, and that thought is constructed through the essential questions that a society poses to itself, then it is evident that Iran has functioned, throughout its long history, as a land of problems, questions, and civilization-building ideas. This capacity to think through challenges across successive historical periods enabled Iranians to sustain their cultural and intellectual continuity by drawing upon the scientific and intellectual achievements of other nations.

Confronted with the necessity of self-redefinition within the Islamic world, Iranians succeeded in sustaining and redefining themselves within the Islamic framework. From the late first century AH onward, Iranians opened a new intellectual path in the Islamic world, one that contributed to a golden age of intellectual and cultural flourishing for Muslims through the Translation Movement. Even during periods of decline, Iranians did not abandon philosophical inquiry but sought, through philosophical means, a way beyond deterioration. Of particular significance is the fact that the shared philo-

16. *Hikmat-e Khusrawani* (*Hikmat-i Khosrowānī* / *Wisdom of the Kings*):

A term used in later Iranian intellectual and philosophical traditions—especially in the *Ishraqī* (Illuminationist) school of Suhrawardī—to denote an ancient Iranian “royal wisdom” associated with pre-Islamic Persian sages and philosopher-kings. It refers to a form of sapiential knowledge grounded in light metaphysics, ethical rulership, and the idea of a divinely inspired kingship, often contrasted with purely discursive or Aristotelian philosophy. In modern scholarship, it is frequently interpreted as a reconstructed or idealized tradition linking ancient Iranian political theology with philosophical mysticism.

sophical concerns between Iranian and Islamic thought illuminate the impact of Iranian philosophical experience on Islamic intellectual challenges. Questions such as the division of the world according to the principles of light and darkness, the struggle between good and evil, the abstract nature of the angelic realm, the relationship between the material world and the spiritual realm, the significance of human action in determining one's ultimate fate, and the continuity of divine governance through the superior human being as a channel of divine grace, all constitute shared philosophical concerns between Iranian and Islamic thought (Khurasani, 2014: 403).

In the context of this period of intellectual flourishing, the proposition advanced by the Mu'tazilites concerning the createdness of the Quran, and its subsequent adoption as a government-supported ideology under the caliphate of al-Ma'mun, generated an acute intellectual conflict between rationalists and traditionalists. Having become the official ideology of the Islamic government, opposition to this position was rendered indistinguishable from intellectual resistance to the state itself. Consequently, those who rejected the doctrine of the createdness of the Quran faced severe hardships and punishments. Despite the Mu'tazilites' reputation for free inquiry, this situation imposed significant constraints on Islamic scholars. The government's insistence on the "creation of the Quran" as a continuous state policy, directed against those under its authority who opposed this doctrine, shaped a crisis of governmental legitimacy in the minds of believers. Protest movements arising within religious and ideological debates simultaneously posed a threat to state security (Mohsen, 2006: 10).

Masudi records the ideological shift of the government in the following terms: "In the year 234, the theologian ordered the abandonment of the debates and controversies of the periods of al-Mu'tasim, al-Wathiq, and al-Ma'mun, and compelled people to submission and imitation, instructing prominent hadith scholars to promote the hadith and the Sunni and communal tradition" (Masudi, 2017: 304). Iranians, who had entered the political arena in the late first century AH with innovative ideas grounded in the Iranian model of governance thought, now confronted a profound challenge as a result of this ideological transformation. They sought to resolve this crisis with the aid of philosophy. Philosophy, which had initially occupied a marginal position within the Translation Movement, became a salvific form of knowledge at the onset of decline. The achievements of theological rationalism, which had formed the intellectual foundation of Islamic governance, faced destruction as a consequence of the ideological shift toward traditionalism and the closure of the space for independent intellectual and juristic inquiry. Farabi, recognizing this crisis, undertook a fundamental rethinking of Islamic political theory from a philosophical standpoint. He devoted considerable effort to the philosophical articulation of the intellectual foundations that had shaped Muslim political thought. Many of the principles of Islamic thought as reflected in the Quran and Sunnah were given philosophical form on the basis of the harmony between religion and reason, producing the ontological, theological, and anthropological frameworks necessary for a coherent political philosophy. He then advanced an ideal model of a state with appropriate governance. His works *Al-Siyasa al-Madaniyya*¹⁷ and *Ara' Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila*

17. *Al-Fārābī, Al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya (The Political Regime / Civil Politics):*

A major political-philosophical treatise by Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 950 CE), in which he develops a systematic account of political organization grounded in metaphysics and psychology. The work outlines the structure of the virtuous city (al-madīna al-fāḍila), the classification of non-virtuous regimes, and the conditions required for achieving human perfection through political association.

present the ideal political theory of Muslims. This model of political practice, elaborated during a period of decline, emerges as a means of attaining the ultimate happiness. Farabi's philosophical engagement with Muslim political theory is marked by sustained attention to the constructed model of the Abbasid era. The idea Farabi develops in political thinking constitutes an extension of the Iranian concept of governance (Mahdi, 1990: 74).

Philosophical Foundations of Islamic Political Thought in the Medieval Period:

In this historical phase, the Islamic system of knowledge had ceased to develop productively in the fields of jurisprudence and political theory. The need to reconstruct this system of knowledge on new intellectual foundations had become apparent. Philosophy came to be regarded as the only available means of rethinking power relations and arresting the decline of political thought, thereby preserving the achievements of the Islamic civilization's golden age.

Among the philosophers of this period, Abu Nasr al-Farabi occupies a distinctive and formative position in the history of Islamic political philosophy. Al-Farabi pursued the study of logic and philosophy under prominent scholars, including Yohanna ibn Haylan, the foremost logician of his time. His significance lies in his mastery of the teachings of his Syriac mentors in logic and philosophy, and in his capacity to reorient those teachings toward the intellectual challenges confronting the Islamic world, thereby establishing Islamic philosophy as an independent tradition (Fakhri, 2016: 10). He was the first Muslim philosopher to transcend the limits of the Syriac tradition in the study of Aristotelian logic, applying those aspects of it that Syriac Christians had avoided on religious grounds to Islamic philosophical reflection. In doing so, he guided the trajectory of logic and philosophy from Greece through Alexandria and Iran into the Islamic intellectual sphere. Accordingly, Seyyed Javad Tabatabai has argued that philosophy in the Islamic world both begins and ends with Al-Farabi: all who came after him interpreted, elaborated upon, and commented on his views in various languages and from various standpoints, but the intellectual process that began with Al-Farabi remained, in its essential character, his own and did not advance beyond him (Tabatabai, 2017: 180).

Ontology

Al-Farabi, having established the foundational aspects of philosophical thought on Neo-Platonic grounds, articulates his political theory through the depiction of an ideal hypothetical government. The Madina al-Fadila¹⁸ represents an ideal model of governance grounded in religious teaching, one capable of serving as an orienting framework for overcoming crises through rational approaches within Islamic political thought. Al-Farabi's political philosophy takes as its point of departure the concept of politics itself. According to him, the ultimate goal of human life is the happiness of the soul, and politics is accordingly the practice through which citizens can attain this happiness. Al-Farabi states: "Politics consists of actions that arise from the practice of governance, including the creation

18. *Al-Fārābī, Ārā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila (Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City):*

A foundational work of Islamic political philosophy by al-Fārābī, presenting a comprehensive vision of the ideal state. It integrates Aristotelian and Neoplatonic elements with Islamic intellectual traditions, describing the metaphysical hierarchy of existence, the role of the First Cause, and the function of the philosopher-prophet as ruler of the virtuous city. The text is central to classical Islamic theories of political order and happiness (sa'āda).

of actions, virtues, and qualities in society and the preservation of these. This type of politics is acquired through the knowledge and experience specific to politicians” (Al-Farabi, 1967: 54). In common with the Iranian perspective, Al-Farabi regards politics as a specialized knowledge belonging to a particular class or group, though in his social context, rigid social stratification is not a prevailing feature. Nevertheless, he does not treat politics as a commonly accessible activity but as a form of knowledge practiced by specific individuals for the purpose of cultivating virtues and qualities within society. He states: “Politics is that through which politicians and citizens attain virtues that cannot be achieved otherwise” (Al-Farabi, 1971: 92).

This account implies that everything manifests in the cosmos, from metaphysics to physics, originates from a rational and coherent order. The creator and ruler of the cosmos is a singular entity that generates diverse multiplicity on the basis of pure rationality. Existence is therefore an organized multiplicity subsisting under the domain of a single creator. The theory of emanation reflects the differentiation of existence from a singular entity; a differentiation achieved through the active intellect and resulting in a spectrum of being that proceeds from the one.

The Concept of Islamic Political Thought in Political Philosophy

Al-Farabi, having established the foundational aspects of philosophical thought on Neo-Platonic grounds, articulates his political theory through the depiction of an ideal hypothetical government. The Madina al-Fadila represents an ideal model of governance grounded in religious teaching, one capable of serving as an orienting framework for overcoming crises through rational approaches within Islamic political thought. Al-Farabi’s political philosophy takes as its point of departure the concept of politics itself. According to him, the ultimate goal of human life is the happiness of the soul, and politics is accordingly the practice through which citizens can attain this happiness. Al-Farabi states: “Politics consists of actions that arise from the practice of governance, including the creation of actions, virtues, and qualities in society and the preservation of these. This type of politics is acquired through the knowledge and experience specific to politicians” (Al-Farabi, 1967: 54). In common with the Iranian perspective, Al-Farabi regards politics as a specialized knowledge belonging to a particular class or group, though in his social context, rigid social stratification is not a prevailing feature. Nevertheless, he does not treat politics as a commonly accessible activity but as a form of knowledge practiced by specific individuals for the purpose of cultivating virtues and qualities within society. He states: “Politics is that through which politicians and citizens attain virtues that cannot be achieved otherwise” (Al-Farabi, 1971: 92).

Al-Farabi also devotes sustained attention to the terms *siyasa madaniyya*, that is, civil politics, and *ilm madani*, that is, civil science. In *Al-Madina al-Fadila*, he employs *ilm madani* in two senses, sometimes as the science of happiness and at other times as the science of power. In *Ihsa’ al-’Ulum*, civil science is treated as an independent discipline, which Al-Farabi defines in *Al-Huruf* in contradistinction to the natural sciences. This science concerns the rational dimensions of human volition, encompassing the various voluntary actions, virtues, qualities, and habits from which human behavior proceeds (Al-Farabi, 1990: 67). From Al-Farabi’s perspective, politics is therefore an activity constitutively related to the madina, that is, the city or community. The madina Al-Farabi envisions draws on historical paradigms, most notably the transformation in social and communicative relations that occurred with the Prophet’s migration to Yathrib, through which tribal and ethnic bonds gave way to civil relations

grounded in law. This fundamental reorientation of social relations is directed by Al-Farabi toward a philosophy compatible with divine law. Just as post-ancient Iranians in the Sassanid era apprehended existence as subject to metaphysical or divine laws through Platonic perspectives, Al-Farabi situates material existence under the governance of metaphysical elements administered by a divine, abstract, and rational intellect, a governance that is communicated through divine revelation to the Prophet and made manifest as law.

From its inception through to the period of Al-Farabi's active engagement with its development, Islamic political thought centered on law, understood as a synthesis of divine law, that is, shari'a, and human law, that is, nomos. The former is grounded in revelation and oriented toward God, while the latter is grounded in human reason and oriented toward the rational person. During the formative period, by virtue of the Prophet's presence at the helm of political authority, shari'a and nomos existed in harmony. As political thought developed, however, the expression of divine law took institutional form through jurisprudence. This divine law, at its highest level, governs Muslim rule. Al-Farabi addresses this effort to provide rational justification for the organization of human relations in a crisis-ridden society by arguing that virtuous actions and customs do not persist among people unless they are institutionalized within cities and nations. No one attains governance or leadership without the force of service and qualities accepted by the people, what he terms kingship, and this produces what he defines as politics. Al-Farabi distinguishes between two forms of happiness, genuine and illusory, and correspondingly divides leadership into virtuous and ignorant types. Virtuous leadership guides people toward true happiness through the cultivation of virtuous actions, customs, and qualities; such a city is called Madina Fadila and its people Umma Fadila. Ignorant leadership, by contrast, directs people toward conduct and ethics that yield only illusory happiness (Tabatabai, 2017: 189).

Al-Farabi's philosophical engagement with the challenges of the Islamic world in the domain of political theory should be understood as a continuation and deepening of the traditions of Shari'a scholarship and political treatises. The political theories developed by Shari'a scholars and political thinkers were grounded in the idealised model of Iranian kingship. Al-Farabi, drawing simultaneously on their intellectual efforts and on the Greek philosophy that had been assimilated and reoriented in Iran, offered a refined model of governance suited to a period of decline. His philosophical rethinking aimed to restore political theory to the correct path, one capable of regenerating an era of intellectual and cultural flourishing.

In Al-Farabi's view, whenever virtuous leadership loses its animating wisdom as a result of the separation between theory and practice, the virtuous government undergoes a rupture. The values of virtuous governance become distorted, and political vices, which are in the nature of diseases within virtuous politics, are mistaken for virtues under leadership devoid of wisdom. The connection between government and wisdom is thereby severed, producing political instability and decline. In *Ihsa' al-'Ulum*, Al-Farabi links the stability of the virtuous city to the adherence of rulers to consistent and principled conditions, warning against discontinuity and stagnation in the succession of virtuous rulers. He argues that rulers lacking wisdom are unworthy of leadership because they do not engage in either theoretical or practical philosophy. Ignorant rulers, through imitation of their predecessors, pursue self-interested ends such as pleasure and ostentation (Al-Farabi, 1405: 79). Al-Farabi thus appears to evaluate the relationship between wisdom and governance against the standard set by the Iranian model.

Drawing upon a profound understanding of the philosophical precedents established by Plato and Aristotle, as well as Iranian thought and the Islamic political tradition, Al-Farabi reconstructs and develops the concept of governance grounded in prophetic wisdom as a solution to political disorder. Interpretations of Al-Farabi's political system have nonetheless varied considerably. Some scholars approach him through the lens of Greek philosophy, while others situate him within a Shi'ite framework. Reza Davari, for instance, raises the question of how a philosopher of Al-Farabi's standing constructed a political system congruent with the principles and foundations of the Shi'a Imams (Davari, 1374: 243). A crucial question concerns what objective Al-Farabi sought to achieve through his political system at the height of decline in the caliphate and under conditions of absolute monarchy. It appears that Al-Farabi did not intend merely to affirm the principles of Shi'ite Imamate but instead advanced an idealised Islamic reinterpretation of Iranian political thought. The ideal Iranian king, who in Al-Farabi's thought serves as the mediating figure between the divine and earthly realms, is transformed into a philosopher-prophet. Since, however, the Iranian conception of ideal kingship implies a continuous chain of rulers, in Islamic thought the philosopher-prophet is regarded as the founder alone; his successors are not in a position to establish new laws on the basis of his principles.

Al-Farabi's aim was to place constraints on the absolute caliphate and on Muslim rulers by giving this idealized political theory a philosophical form. He held that the element most conspicuously absent from Islamic governance was law and lawfulness, since intellectual and cultural advancement in the medieval period was understood to be predicated on legal order. Consequently, the foundational knowledge of this political theory was jurisprudence, which was intended to organize social and political structures around the principle of unity in diversity. Al-Farabi specifies roles and powers for distinct levels of government on the basis of lawfulness, as is evident in the five levels of governance delineated in *Al-Madina al-Fadila* and *Ara' Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila*. Without this framework, Al-Farabi would appear as a proponent of absolute despotism in Islamic political theory, a characterization inconsistent with his political thought, since the continuity of prophetic governance was not premised on unconditional Iranian political principles but on a rational governance bound by accepted legal and customary norms.

In examining the structure of governance in Al-Farabi's political philosophy, one encounters a multi-tiered model of leadership consisting of several distinct layers.

The first is the First Leader, the *Rais Awal*, who, comparable to a prophet or philosopher-king, is connected directly to the Active Intellect, that is, to divine revelation. Within Al-Farabi's framework, this leader is the legitimate and absolute ruler of the ideal city, the *Madina Fadila*. Titles such as Imam, Prophet, King, Philosopher, and Lawgiver are employed to designate this leader, though not with the intention of implying a Shi'ite perspective. Rather, these titles draw from Iranian traditions and reflect a model of ideal kingship. The *Rais Awal* is the foundational figure who embodies the unity of divine revelation and reason, serving as the mediating link between the divine and earthly realms.

The second tier comprises the Secondary Leaders, the *Rusa' al-Mutabi'ah*, who may be characterized as Imams of Guidance or Rulers of the Righteous. These leaders are connected to the Active Intellect through their own form of divine favor or infallibility, *fara'izadi*, though they do not possess the direct and primary connection to the Active Intellect that belongs to the *Rais Awal*. They uphold the principles established by the *Rais Awal* and administer the city in accordance with his teachings, resembling the Iranian model of governance in their adherence to law.

The third tier is the Scholar-King, the Fuqaha or King of Sunnah, whose leadership is exercised by jurists or scholars who rule on the basis of jurisprudential principles rather than direct prophetic or philosophical insight. This model reflects a debate present in both Iranian and Islamic political thought regarding whether the sovereign should himself be a religious scholar or should instead rely on the expertise of scholars. In this framework, the ruler's legitimacy derives from the capacity to interpret and apply Islamic law, that is, shari'ah, rather than from the possession of innate divine wisdom.

Al-Farabi also contrasts these three models with a council-based form of governance in his works, one that includes the governance of the Rulers of Tradition, the Rusa' al-Sunnah, in which leadership may be shared between a philosopher and a jurist, or between two jurists, for the purpose of governing in accordance with the shari'ah and the principles established by the earlier models of leadership.

Al-Farabi's political philosophy thus reflects a nuanced understanding of leadership in which the ideal city is governed by a hierarchy of leaders, each with distinct roles and connections to divine wisdom and law. His model embodies a sophisticated synthesis of philosophical, religious, and legal principles, drawn from both Iranian and Islamic traditions.

Conclusion

Political philosophy in both the Iranian and Islamic worlds emerged as a response to political crisis and the imperative of legitimate governance, opening new pathways in political theory. This philosophy, which initially travelled from Greece to Alexandria and thence to Iran through Syriac-speaking Christians, profoundly shaped the relationship between religion and the state. Iranian political philosophy, confronted with the legitimacy challenges posed by religious movements such as those of Mani and Mazdak, developed responses to questions of political authority that were subsequently revisited by Farabi in the Islamic period, in order to advance an ideal model of governance and arrest political decline.

Farabi's philosophical analysis, rooted in both Greek and Iranian traditions, was directed toward the improvement and elevation of political and philosophical systems. His work, which reinterpreted Greek and Iranian political philosophy within an Islamic context, sought to address and rectify political decline by advocating a form of government grounded in reason and law.

Farabi's philosophy, examined through the lens of both Greek and Iranian intellectual traditions, foregrounds the shared understanding of the laws governing the material world and the orientation of humanity toward happiness through the extension of divine management into material existence by the perfect human being, directing the struggle between good and evil toward the ultimate reign of light. This philosophical contribution, which reflects the assimilation and transformation of Greek philosophy through the Iranian context, should be regarded as a significant historical intellectual experience that shaped the formation of Islamic political philosophy. Understanding Islamic political philosophy therefore requires a genealogical approach, one that traces and incorporates the insights derived from Iranian philosophical traditions.

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Women and the Environment; New Actors in the Transformation of the Global Order

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Abstract

Centuries of male-centered dominance in political thought and International Relations have systematically excluded both women and nature from the sphere of political agency. Yet contemporary developments suggest that women and the environment are increasingly becoming consequential forces in the redefinition of the global order. Ecofeminism, one of the central strands of third-wave feminist theory, foregrounds the structural interconnectedness between the subordination of women and the domination of nature, offering a critical framework through which these transformations can be understood. This article examines how ecofeminism accounts for the emergence of women and the environment as actors in the reshaping of the global order, and what implications this perspective carries for the field of International Relations. Drawing on a qualitative-normative methodology and the approach of political philosophy, the study critically engages with ecofeminist concepts, propositions, and theoretical foundations in relation to international relations scholarship. The findings suggest that by challenging the epistemological premises of modernity and prevailing development discourses, ecofeminism not only broadens the conventional understanding of “actor” in International Relations but also invites a fundamental rethinking of core concepts such as power, security, and sustainable development. Within this framework, women and the environment emerge as norm-generating forces that play an increasingly significant role in shaping a transforming global order. The article concludes by briefly reflecting on the relevance of ecofeminist debates to the Iranian context, with particular attention to the intersections of gender, environmental crisis, and political participation in contemporary Iran.

Introduction

The discipline of International Relations is conventionally dated to 1919, when the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics was established at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. Following the Second World War, however, the field developed primarily within the United States and came to be in-

creasingly shaped by the positivist and behavioral frameworks associated with American political science. Grounded in the prevailing assumption that social problems are amenable to scientific resolution, the historical, legal, and normative dimensions of the discipline were progressively marginalized, as International Relations scholarship gravitated toward social-scientific modes of inquiry. Methods borrowed from economics were deployed to identify the laws and regularities governing international behavior, particularly in relation to conflict and war. By the 1970s, as economics consolidated its status as the most formally rigorous of the social sciences, its methodological influence on International Relations deepened considerably. Rational choice theory and game-theoretic models came to be widely regarded as indispensable tools for analyzing state behavior and inter-state interaction under specified assumptions (Nagar, 2016).

The field of International Relations encompasses a range of well-established theoretical traditions, including realism, liberalism, critical theory, and constructivism. Among the more recent additions to this landscape is feminism which is a critical paradigm that introduces a fundamental rupture into mainstream IR discourse by contending that the history of global political thought has been overwhelmingly authored by men, and that philosophy, mythology, religion, and science have been constituted through masculine narratives. Feminist scholars advocate for the rights of women and, by interrogating the foundations of masculinist rationality, seek to reintegrate into political life the half of the population that has long been excluded from the public sphere. From a feminist standpoint, this exclusion has operated across multiple domains as education, economics, society, and politics alike. Historically, women have been consigned to the private realm of the household, child-rearing, and marriage, constructed as the “second sex” and effectively rendered non-citizens (Dobson, 2006: 53). Women’s presence in formal politics has remained marginal, and even in the twenty-first century, their role in policymaking and institutional leadership is strikingly limited. The relegation of women to the private sphere and their constitution as inherently unequal subjects whose rights must be secured through sustained struggle. That represents one of the most consequential silences in modern political history, a silence that feminist scholarship has directly and persistently challenged.

International politics, too, remains a distinctly masculine domain: a world of diplomats, soldiers, government officials, and international representatives overwhelmingly composed of men, in which women exercise minimal influence over the direction of foreign policy. In the United States in 1987, for instance, women held fewer than five percent of senior foreign service positions, and fewer than four percent of executive roles within the Department of Defense. Yet women’s underrepresentation in senior governmental positions is compounded further at the level of international politics, where the widespread belief, held by men and women alike, that military service and strategic policymaking are inherently unsuited to women continues to operate as a structural barrier. Attributes such as capability, autonomy, rationality, and decisiveness are culturally coded as masculine, and these qualities are regarded as prerequisite for effective engagement in foreign policy and national defense. The protection of the nation, and of women and children within it, is correspondingly framed as a masculine obligation, such that even women with substantive foreign policy experience are frequently deemed inadequate on the grounds of presumed emotionality and an alleged incapacity to bear the weight of major defence decisions (Nagar, 2016).

Feminist approaches in International Relations introduce gender as a fundamental analytical category for examining governance at the international level. Nevertheless, the impact of feminist analysis on

actual international policymaking has remained limited, and its insights have frequently been dismissed or ignored by policymakers. Women's contributions to the creation and maintenance of international norms and institutions tend to be treated as unremarkable, rendered invisible precisely by being naturalized (True, 2001; Tickner, 1992).

Feminist scholars argue that this marginalization reflects the entrenched assumption that formal politics is an exclusively masculine domain, and that the confrontation and resolution of international problems is the proper province of men alone. Consequently, the actors and decision-makers of foreign policy are overwhelmingly conceived – and constructed – as male (Enloe, 1993).

Among the most influential feminist voices in International Relations is J. Ann Tickner, who has argued forcefully for the inclusion of women in international studies and demonstrated that the international system, as currently structured and apprehended through a masculine lens, rests on a systematically incomplete vision of political reality. She underscores the necessity of a female epistemological standpoint, one capable of conceptualizing an alternative world order, and calls for the establishment of a feminist epistemology within the discipline. This reorientation would not only broaden women's access to International Relations as a field of inquiry but would also enrich prevailing understandings of global politics. In advancing this agenda, Tickner seeks to dismantle the structural barriers to women's participation in both politics and political analysis, without subordinating feminist concerns to the so-called "hard" realities privileged by mainstream IR.

Drawing on ecofeminist theory, this article critically engages with the hegemony of patriarchal realist perspectives within International Relations, while also offering a rigorous and systematic account of political ecology as a feminist strand with direct implications for global politics. Ecofeminists highlight the structural connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature, and foreground women's central roles in caregiving, social reproduction, and community sustenance demonstrating that the burdens of environmental degradation fall disproportionately on women. Women's meaningful participation in international relations therefore extends beyond its peace-building dimensions: it sharpens attention to ecological concerns and advances objectives such as the negotiation of international environmental agreements, the inclusion of women in multilateral forums, the protection of female migrants and refugees, and the expansion of educational and research opportunities. These debates acquire particular urgency in the context of contemporary Iran, where mounting environmental crises, including water scarcity, desertification, air pollution, and broad ecological deterioration, intersect in complex ways with questions of gender, social justice, and political agency. Iranian women have been visibly active in environmental movements, local ecological initiatives, and civil society organizing, while Iranian feminist scholarship has advanced substantive critiques of prevailing development models, sustainability frameworks, and patriarchal structures. Examining ecofeminism within the framework of International Relations thus offers the prospect of a more grounded and contextually sensitive understanding of the relationship between gender, environment, and global politics in the Iranian setting

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The present study is structured within a qualitative and normative approach and is grounded in Leo Strauss's political philosophy methodology. In contrast to the dominant positivist and scientific methods in international relations, this approach emphasizes a return to the fundamental questions

of political philosophy, the critique of the epistemological foundations of modern science, and the restoration of ethics and norms in political analysis. From Strauss's perspective, the crisis of modern political thought arises from the dominance of scientism, value relativism, and instrumental rationality, which have stripped politics of meaning, moral purpose, and inquiry into the "good" (Strauss, 1953; Strauss, 1988).

Straussian methodology, through its critique of scientism, particularly in the social sciences and international relations, demonstrates that reducing politics to a set of empirical data, managerial techniques, and power calculations leads to the exclusion of normative, ethical, and human dimensions of politics. Strauss views modern science as incapable of responding to the deep crises of modernity due to its claim of value neutrality and its severance from classical political philosophy (Strauss, 1959). Within this framework, the present study adopts a normative approach that prioritizes conceptual analysis, critical interpretation of theoretical texts, and philosophical re-examination of concepts such as power, security, development, and nature, rather than empirical hypothesis testing.

The theoretical framework of the article rests on the assumption that dominant theories of international relations—particularly realism and liberalism—are manifestations of modern political thought which, through their emphasis on instrumental rationality, state-centrism, and the primacy of hard security, have contributed to the exclusion of ethics, gender, and the environment from political analysis. From a Straussian perspective, this condition is the result of the rupture between political philosophy and political science and the abandonment of fundamental normative questions (Strauss, 1953). In this study, feminism and political ecology are understood as marginalized voices within the modern epistemic order that expose the ethical and philosophical deficiencies of political modernity.

The Straussian methodology employed in this article, with its defense of ethics, norms, and the philosophical reconstruction of modernity, provides a theoretical foundation for linking political philosophy, feminism, and political ecology. By emphasizing the importance of classical political philosophy, Strauss calls for a renewed focus on justice, the common good, and moral responsibility in politics (Strauss, 1988). This approach allows environmental crises and the structural exclusion of women from global politics to be analysed not merely as technical or managerial problems, but as ethical and epistemological consequences of the modern order.

Accordingly, the theoretical framework of the present research, grounded in a normative-interpretive method inspired by Straussian political philosophy, seeks to move International Relations beyond empirical and technocratic analysis and to redefine it in relation to gender justice, environmental ethics, and sustainability. Within this framework, political ecology and ecofeminism are understood not merely as critical approaches, but as part of a broader project of ethical and philosophical rethinking of politics in the modern world—a project that enables a simultaneous critique of dominant masculine rationality, the exclusion of women from the political sphere, and environmental degradation

1. Feminism and the Reconsideration of Politics in International Relations

Realism, as one of the most foundational theories of international relations, emphasizes the role of nation-states, the anarchic structure of the international system, the balance of power, and diplomacy. Since 1945, particularly in the United States, this theory has become one of the most influential analytical frameworks in international relations. Nevertheless, from a feminist perspective, realism has been subject to serious criticism. Within realist logic, the international system is portrayed as a realm

in which states, in order to ensure their survival and security, are compelled to rely on the principle of self-help and the accumulation of power. The enhancement of one state's security capabilities is perceived as a threat by others, thereby increasing tensions among states—a process that ultimately leads to balance-of-power politics and, under acute conditions, to conflict.

In contrast, liberalism adopts a more optimistic view of the international system, challenging realism by emphasizing cooperation, international institutions, and interdependence; however, these critiques are not always methodologically persuasive (Lascurin and Villafuerte, 2016). Despite the dominant position of realism in the history of international relations, many of its assumptions fail to reflect the complex and dynamic transformations of the contemporary international system. This theory primarily focuses on formal equality, while issues such as access to healthcare, literacy, retirement, unemployment benefits, and other dimensions of social policy constitute some of the most significant concerns of feminist policymaking. Feminist theory formally entered the field of International Relations in the 1980s. Similar to other areas of the social sciences, feminist scholars of International Relations argued that the discipline is shaped by instrumental logic and male-cantered rationality. They raised fundamental questions, including whether the predominance of men among global foreign policy leaders matters, why women have been so extensively marginalized in foreign and military policy domains, and why state foreign policies are often legitimized through hegemonic masculine traits, while wars are predominantly led and executed by men.

These critical questions have rarely been raised within traditional foreign policy frameworks, as many of them are not considered amenable to articulation or verification within the positivist epistemology and methodology of the social sciences (Negar, 2016). Although numerous scholarly works in International Relations have been published since the 1980s, feminism has attracted limited attention within foreign policy studies. In cases where feminist scholars have raised classical liberal-feminist questions, even the theoretical foundations of foreign policy have been challenged. The question “Where are the women?” constitutes one of the most central feminist inquiries in this field.

First, feminist researchers have sought to make visible the presence of women and their roles in international relations, particularly in the supplementary processes of foreign policy. Second, feminists alongside other critical theorists have expanded the scope of the discipline, thereby marginalizing the exclusive focus on traditional foreign policy studies (Negar, 2016).

1-1. Epistemological Critique of Realism and Liberalism from a Feminist Perspective

From an epistemological standpoint, feminist scholars examine the nature of knowledge, the positionality of knowers, and the politics of gendered consciousness in international relations. Despite their considerable internal diversity, virtually all feminist approaches share a common orienting objective: identifying the structural sources of inequality, discrimination, and oppression against women, and elaborating strategies to overcome them (Tickner, 1992). Within the dominant epistemology of International Relations, the recognition of women as producers of knowledge and political consciousness has been systematically foreclosed.

Feminists argue that realism reproduces a masculine mode of knowing the world, ultimately encoding male dominance as the primary object of political consciousness (True, 2001). Enloe (1991), in her analysis of diplomacy, identifies the role of diplomats' spouses as integral to the cultivation of “informal relations” – relations that enable male diplomats to advance their diplomatic objectives and sustain

trust among men in volatile environments. She observes that informal male-to-male negotiations conducted in private settings, facilitated by the presence of women, are more likely to produce successful outcomes.

Enloe argues that incorporating women's lived experiences into international politics yields a more accurate account of how policies are actually implemented. From the standpoint of feminist epistemology, three principal orientations can be identified. First, modern science must recognize and foreground the valuable forms of knowledge embedded in women's practices, thereby acknowledging their contributions to the formation of human civilization. Second, cultural-radical feminism positions women as agents of knowledge and originators of new theoretical frameworks, treating women's experiences as a foundation upon which more critical and transformative theories of international relations can be constructed. Third, socialist and postmodern feminisms offer distinct but related perspectives: socialist feminists argue that women's social positions are shaped by structures of economic production and domestic reproduction, and therefore emphasize women's multiple and intersecting roles in explaining their social conditions (Tickner, 1992). Postmodern feminists, by contrast, critique this framework on the grounds that privileging the experiences of "white women" risks reproducing the very binaries – between self and other, center and margin – that feminism seeks to dismantle within patriarchal discourse.

Within this framework, feminist approaches have opened new and generative horizons in the study of international relations. They demonstrate that comprehending the international system need not be confined to the conventional frameworks of liberalism and realism, and that gender analysis offers a productive lens through which these theories can be critically reinterpreted. Even realism, with its deeply embedded gendered assumptions, has in recent years become the object of sustained feminist scrutiny. Within this context, the further development of International Relations theory necessitates genuine engagement with feminist epistemological questions and a substantive reconsideration of core concepts such as power, security, and agency. Crucially, the relationship between feminism and International Relations extends beyond the theoretical plane; it is bound up with broader disputes over the nature of knowledge, academic legitimacy, and disciplinary power namely disputes that continue to shape contemporary debates in the field.

1-2. Masculine Rationality, Power, and the Exclusion of Women in Global Politics

In the course of deconstructing International Relations theory, feminist scholars argue that its foundational categories have largely been defined by men and structured around the female/male binary – a dichotomy in which women are cast as the "other" against which the dominant norm is constituted. From a feminist perspective, this gendered role assignment has been continuously reproduced to exclude women from the public and political spheres. Yet despite this entrenched historical marginalization, emerging international movements and new forms of political agency are actively contesting and redefining this condition (Grant and Newland, 1991; Tickner, 1992).

Adopting a gendered analytical approach, feminist scholars deconstruct the dominant order of International Relations into its social constituents and then reconstruct it through a feminist reading. Tickner argues that International Relations has historically been saturated by masculine hegemony; nevertheless, even a growing number of male scholars now acknowledge the necessity of fundamental change in the political realm. Because the naming of state behavior and the production of knowledge

in International Relations have been grounded almost exclusively in male experience, an extensive range of human experiences, namely experiences that could have opened new analytical horizons, have been systematically excluded. Accordingly, feminism in International Relations is not a matter of simply adding women to the study of global politics; it demands a profound reconsideration of the theoretical foundations of the discipline itself (Tickner, 1992).

Political science literature in the 1970s and 1980s devoted considerable attention to women's lives and their roles in economic development, particularly in the Global South. These studies provided an important foundation for linking peace, justice, and development, and contributed to the emergence of the "Women in Development" paradigm. This approach demonstrated that masculine biases embedded in development processes generate ineffective projects and inadequate policymaking. Its primary aim was the empowerment of women through their meaningful participation in development-related decisions affecting their own lives, a recognition that women are not external to development but positioned at its very center (Lascurin and Villafuerte, 2016).

Alongside the rise of development discourse, the concept of sustainable development, and particularly its environmental dimension, gained increasing prominence. The dominance of masculine instrumental rationality in scientific knowledge and state institutions has not only marginalized women but has also produced extensive environmental degradation, enacting a logic that treats nature itself as an object of exploitation and control (True, 2001). In this context, ecofeminist critiques seek to dismantle the organizational structures shaped by masculine bias and to advance sustainable alternatives grounded in women's autonomy and local self-reliance in relation to ecosystems (Tickner, 1992). Research also indicates that securing women's basic rights carries positive implications for peace and security within United Nations operations, as women's participation allows a broader range of voices to be heard in peace processes. Since 1945, increased female participation has measurably enhanced the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations (Nagar, 2016).

Feminist scholars in International Relations have expanded the concept of security well beyond the boundaries of the nation-state to encompass its social and gendered dimensions. From this perspective, war and conflict are generated within patriarchal nationalist frameworks, and their deeper roots lie in masculine myths of militarism. Feminists also foreground the suffering borne by women and children through death, injury, sexual violence, and displacement, as well as the indispensable roles women play in peacebuilding (Youngs, 2004).

Zalewski argues that gender differences have been deliberately institutionalized within the security sphere. The construction of war as an essentially masculine activity, and the image of the male soldier as its archetypal subject, reflect and reinforce a patriarchal order. The traditional exclusion of women from combat has not been designed to protect them but to preserve male privilege and authority. Myths surrounding masculinity and femininity, whether consciously enacted or unconsciously reproduced, contribute to the intensification and perpetuation of armed conflict (Zalewski, 1995).

Tickner further argues that because women are disproportionately among the first economic casualties of crisis conditions, they are positioned to offer distinctive insights into the relationship between militarism and structural violence. Feminist theory must therefore challenge the foundational concepts of International Relations, that is to say power, sovereignty, security, which are deeply entangled with constructions of masculinity. Reconsidering these concepts from a feminist standpoint enables their reformulation in ways capable of addressing the diverse and intersecting forms of insecurity that

characterize the contemporary world (Tickner, 1992). Feminist scholars broadly advocate for a more inclusive and expansive definition of security applicable to all human beings. Within this framework, Tickner (1992) and Peterson (1992) have illuminated the fundamental tension between state-centred national security projects and the imperatives of global human security. Human rights violations, military threats, structural economic inequalities at both national and international levels, and environmental degradation are all understood as major sources of insecurity and human suffering. Feminist scholars also draw attention to the structural violence produced by gender inequality, arguing that women's systemic insecurity operates simultaneously at national and international scales (Peterson, 1992).

Notwithstanding the expansion of feminist approaches, a number of significant criticisms have been levelled at their application within International Relations. Among these are doubts regarding their practical efficacy, as well as concerns about essentialism and the risk of reifying a fixed, homogeneous conception of "woman" (Tickner, 1992). It has also been emphasized that Western feminist experiences cannot be straightforwardly transposed onto other societies, given that gender relations are profoundly shaped by cultural and regional specificity. Context-sensitive and localized analyses must therefore be central to any engagement between feminism and International Relations.

A further criticism concerns the conceptual conflation of "gender" and "sex." Gender is a socially constructed category pertaining to power, policy, and social structure, whereas sex refers to biological difference. In some studies, however, gender has been implicitly reduced to "woman," producing a reductionist coding that narrows feminism's contribution to International Relations into a simplistic sex/gender distinction and obscures its theoretical depth. This conflation has at times generated a framework that centers primarily on women's victimization, at the expense of more complex and structural analyses (Lascurin and Villafuerte, 2016).

2. Political Ecology and Ecofeminism: Extending Feminism to the Realm of Nature

The convergence of ecology and feminism has given rise to a social theory and political movement that challenges gender relations, social organization, economic systems, scientific paradigms, and the positioning of humanity within the biosphere. According to Spretnak (1988), ecofeminists engage a wide spectrum of concerns, from reproductive technologies and development in the Global South to toxic contamination and the construction of alternative economic and political models. King (1989) similarly conceptualizes political ecology as a potentially global movement grounded in democratic participation, pluralism, and resistance to all forms of domination.

The novelty of this movement, the breadth of its thematic concerns, and the diversity of its intellectual contributors have generated considerable ambiguity surrounding the definition and scope of political ecology. Broadly construed, this theoretical framework analyses multiple and interlocking forms of domination, particularly the oppression of women and the exploitation of the environment, and seeks to employ ecological and feminist principles as the foundation for political organization and modes of life premised on social justice and environmental sustainability. Across all its internal variants, political ecology is united by its commitment to linking individual, social, and environmental concerns through integrated, multi-centered political action (Warren, 1990).

The term "ecofeminism" was first introduced in 1974 by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne, in the context of the women's movement and the defence of the Earth. The numerous definitions sub-

sequently proposed share a common emphasis on the connection between women and the environment, treating their experiences of oppression and exploitation as structurally analogous. Warren (1996) describes ecofeminism as an umbrella concept encompassing socialist, cultural, radical, and ecological variants, all of which stress the relationship between the domination of women and the domination of nature.

Feminism has not, however, been the sole intellectual force shaping political ecology. Social ecology movements, women's spirituality movements, and critical theory associated with the Frankfurt School have each contributed to its development. Grounded in ecofeminist principles, a structural link is posited between the oppression of women, the marginalization of other subordinate groups, and the exploitation of non-human nature. Elucidating these relationships and identifying emancipatory possibilities for both women and the natural world constitute the philosophical core of ecofeminism (Davoudi-Muqaddam and Gholipour, 2016).

Many ecologists and feminist theorists have argued that what is required is simultaneously an ecological feminism and a feminist ecology. Despite political ecology's considerable internal diversity, its shared premise remains the recognition of the symbolic and mutually reinforcing character of domination over women and domination over nature.

From an ecofeminist perspective, the relationship between women and nature has deep historical roots, sustained across culture, language, and history. This connection was reinvigorated by the social movements of the 1960s, particularly the women's liberation movement and the nascent ecological movement, and became especially visible with the establishment of Earth Day in 1970. Both movements foreground egalitarian values and call for a fundamental redefinition of humanity's relationship with nature and with social structures (Merchant, 1989). The feminine principle, understood as a reflection of women's distinctive relational orientation toward nature, has been conceptualized as a guarantor of care and ecological attentiveness. Western colonialism, however, fundamentally transformed this relationship by reducing nature to a passive resource for extraction, generating environmental destruction and legitimizing harmful technologies (Enayat and Fathizadeh, 2009).

Political ecology did not fully consolidate as an academic discourse until the late 1980s, when its geographical reach became evident across the United States, Canada, north-western Europe, India, and Australia (Twine, 2001). As both a theoretical framework and a practical orientation, political ecology seeks to connect feminist analysis with the urgency of ecological crisis. Within this discourse, nature and women are both constituted as objects of domination under the modern project, and environmental degradation is understood as a logical extension of patriarchal systems and instrumental rationality (Sandilands, 1999; Moshirzadeh, 2004).

2-1. The Epistemology of Political Ecology and the Status of Women

From an epistemological standpoint, political ecology establishes a meaningful connection between women and nature. Women disproportionately bear the greatest burdens of environmental crises and ecological degradation, a reality that has drawn attention to them as conscious actors and environmental experts. Within this framework, it is argued that women, compared to men, possess deeper ecological knowledge due to their direct engagement with subsistence practices and natural resources (Lorentzen, 2002).

Some theorists explain that in rural regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, activities such as gar-

dening and agricultural production are predominantly undertaken by women, leading to the formation of extensive knowledge of natural processes. In contrast, “maldevelopment” grounded in masculine logic perceives nature merely as a potential commodity within the market economy, whereas indigenous women emphasize the preservation and protection of natural resources to ensure the well-being of future generations. Consequently, women are seen as instinctively assigning higher priority to environmental protection (Beal, 2011).

Furthermore, essentialist perspectives argue that women exhibit greater empathy toward nature, which in turn facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the natural environment. However, women’s epistemological advantage is not rooted in biological differences but rather in a historically, socially, and gendered relationship with nature (Twine, 2001).

Women’s environmental concerns often stem from their lived experiences within the private and domestic spheres. The environment becomes a political issue when it threatens the security of home and family. From this perspective, the private sphere acquires political significance for women, and politics manifests itself in their everyday practices. Although women generally express greater concern for environmental issues than men, their participation in collective environmental action tends to be lower (Sandilands, 1999). Research also indicates that the involvement of ecofeminist women scholars in the production of theoretical texts—particularly in countries such as the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, Australia and the United States—has remained limited (Twine, T.R., 2001).

The concept of “maternal environmentalism” represents one way in which women, as a group with specific social relations, articulate their environmental concerns. In contrast, some analysts suggest that women’s environmental engagement is primarily a response to immediate threats to children and future generations, driven more by short-term interests than by commitment to abstract ethical, aesthetic, or ecological principles.

Nevertheless, the dominant theory in ecofeminism emphasizes the structural similarities between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. The prefix “eco” in feminism refers to the concept of “home”, the Earth as a shared home, whose connection to everyday human life has been shaped largely through women’s experiences. Within this framework, political ecology, as both a theory and a social movement, demonstrates a broad capacity to respond to social and environmental issues and embodies a dynamic, creative, and integrative character (Sandilands, 1999).

Although voices within political ecology are diverse, their shared axis lies in recognizing and affirming the link between domination over nature and domination over women. In patriarchal societies, culture and rationality are constructed as masculine traits, set in opposition to nature and emotion, which are coded as feminine, thereby producing unequal valuations between these binaries. In contrast, proponents of political ecology seek to generate forms of awareness that transcend such gendered dichotomies and emphasize biological, cultural, and social diversity (Karen, 1996).

2-2. Political Ecology in International Politics

To date, approximately 280 international and regional treaties and agreements related to environmental protection have been adopted, of which around 70 conventions and protocols possess global scope. The inaugural United Nations conference on the human environment, known as the Stockholm Conference, was convened in 1972, followed by the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, both of which represent

landmark moments in the history of international environmental politics.

Among the key instruments in this evolving legal architecture are the Ramsar Convention (1971), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (1973), the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer (1985), the Basel Convention (1989), the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), the Convention to Combat Desertification (1994), the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (2000), and numerous related agreements that together constitute the legal framework for global environmental governance.

Given the inherently transboundary nature of environmental problems, the imperative to connect women-led ecological movements and ecofeminism in particular with the formal structures of International Relations has become increasingly apparent. Accelerating global environmental degradation has heightened public awareness, and women, by virtue of their roles in household management and daily subsistence, have frequently been among the first to experience the tangible consequences of ecological crisis. This lived proximity to environmental harm has positioned women as informed actors and consequential voices in environmental affairs.

Some feminist scholars argue that, because women are more severely affected by pollution and environmental degradation than men, environmental issues are inherently gendered in their impacts. Rising toxic emissions, intensifying greenhouse effects, climate change, and environmental contamination exert direct pressures on women's lives – particularly those of rural and agricultural women – and pose serious threats to their health, including elevated incidence of certain cancers with gender-specific dimensions (Moshirzadeh, 2004: 422).

Throughout the history of political ecology, women have played active and visible roles in protesting environmental destruction at the global level: from opposition to deforestation in the Himalayas and forest degradation in Ecuador, to resistance against desertification in Kenya and the expansion of genetically modified crops. In Iran, environmental challenges including water scarcity, drought, desertification, air pollution, and the degradation of wetlands have generated forms of environmental activism in which women have assumed important roles. Iranian women activists, local organizations, and civil society groups have participated in campaigns for water protection, sustainable agriculture, and environmental awareness. These developments illustrate that environmental politics in Iran cannot be disentangled from broader questions of gender, social participation, and sustainable development. From an ecofeminist perspective, the Iranian case demonstrates how environmental crisis may catalyze the emergence of new forms of social and political agency among women. The protection of foundational environmental resources, namely water, soil, and biodiversity, constitutes one of the central commitments of the ecofeminist movement.

As a critical philosophy and social movement, political ecology interrogates the effectiveness of prevailing state-centered and institution-based environmental governance frameworks and foregrounds the role of grassroots movements, particularly women's movements, in achieving meaningful ecological protection. It maintains that global ecological sustainability is attainable only through the economic, social, and political empowerment of women. Accordingly, contemporary political ecology places its primary emphasis not on theoretical elaboration alone but on women's effective activism within political and environmental arenas.

Although women's roles in International Relations have historically been marginal and the field has remained predominantly male-dominated, the urgency of environmental crisis and women's deeper re-

lational engagement with the natural world underscores the pressing need to redefine these roles. By challenging the dominant paradigms of realism and liberalism, political ecology exposes the incapacity of these frameworks to deliver sustainable development and adequate environmental protection. In their place, political ecology through the integration of thought and action foregrounds ecological restoration and women's active participation in public life, treating peace, freedom, good governance, and sustainability not as optional aspirations but as outcomes that are contingent upon embracing this transformative approach.

2-3. Ecofeminism, Environmental Crisis, and Women's Activism in Iran

Contemporary environmental crises in Iran have progressively transformed ecological deterioration into an urgent social and political concern. Challenges including water scarcity, desertification, air pollution, deforestation, soil erosion, and the drying of wetlands and lakes have generated wide-ranging debates about sustainable development, environmental governance, and social justice. Among the most pressing of these, the ecological crisis of Lake Urmia, recurring dust storms across western and southern Iran, and chronic urban air pollution have vividly illustrated the interconnectedness of environmental degradation and human security in the Iranian context. These developments make clear that environmental challenges in Iran cannot be understood merely as technical or managerial failures; they must also be analysed in relation to the broader political, economic, and social structures that shape them.

Within this context, Iranian women have increasingly engaged in environmental activism, local ecological movements, and civil society initiatives oriented toward sustainability and public welfare. Although environmental activism in Iran operates under complex political and institutional constraints, women's participation in environmental campaigns, community-based initiatives, and public awareness efforts has expanded considerably in recent years. From an ecofeminist perspective, this growing participation reflects the emergence of new forms of social and political agency through which women engage with questions of environmental protection, sustainable livelihoods, and local ecological knowledge. Environmental activism in this context functions not only as a response to ecological crisis but as a form of civic engagement deeply connected to broader concerns of gender justice and social responsibility.

Ecofeminist analysis is particularly pertinent to the Iranian context because environmental degradation often affects women disproportionately, especially in relation to household management, access to water, family health, food security, and rural livelihoods. Research conducted in Iran suggests that women generally display greater environmental concern and stronger support for environmentally responsible behavior, including energy conservation, waste management, and sustainable consumption (Hosseinnezhad, 2017). These patterns should not be interpreted through a lens of biological essentialism; rather, they emerge from women's socially situated experiences and their historically gendered interactions with everyday environmental conditions.

At the theoretical level, the Iranian case also highlights the limitations of universalizing Western feminist frameworks across non-Western contexts. Iranian feminism has developed within specific cultural, religious, and political conditions that differ substantially from liberal feminist trajectories in Europe and North America. Consequently, the relationship between feminism, environmentalism, and political participation in Iran reflects localized dynamics shaped by questions of development,

state policy, civil society, and cultural identity. From the perspective of International Relations, these dynamics demonstrate that environmental politics and gender politics are increasingly and irreversibly intertwined within contemporary global and regional debates over sustainability, governance, and human security.

Feminism in International Relations and Political Ecology: A Normative Reconsideration of Global Politics

Feminism in International Relations and women's political ecology can be understood as two complementary dimensions of a single theoretical project aimed at the normative reconsideration of global politics. By subjecting dominant rationalities and patriarchal power structures to sustained critique, feminism creates a space in which global politics is apprehended not merely as a domain of competing interests and security calculations, but as a terrain of ethical, social, and environmental contestation. Women's political ecology extends this analytical horizon by demonstrating that the same logic of domination responsible for the exclusion of women from politics has also reduced nature and the environment to instrumental concerns at the margins of political life. From this perspective, environmental questions are not an external addendum to International Relations analysis but represent a deepening and completion of the feminist critique of modern politics.

Within this framework, ecofeminism by foregrounding the connection between women's lived experiences and environmental crisis enables the substantive redefinition of concepts such as power, security, and development. This reorientation resonates with Leo Strauss's political philosophy, which subjects scientism and instrumental rationality to rigorous critique and calls for the restoration of ethics, virtue, and normative reasoning to the center of political life (Strauss, 1953; Strauss, 1964). Women's political ecology, as a theoretical extension of feminism in International Relations, thus offers a horizon within which global politics can be reimagined on the basis of ethical responsibility toward both humanity and the natural world.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that contemporary environmental crises cannot be adequately understood as the product of policy failure, insufficient international cooperation, or institutional inefficiency alone. Rather, these crises are rooted in the epistemological, normative, and ethical foundations of modern politics itself. The dominant frameworks of International Relations, realism and liberalism in particular, by privileging instrumental rationality, hard security, economic growth, and material interests, have systematically marginalized the gendered, ethical, and environmental dimensions of political life. This marginalization has not only generated theoretical blind spots in the comprehension of environmental complexity but has also, in practice, reproduced structures of domination that reduce nature to an exploitable resource and women to peripheral actors. The environmental crisis must therefore be understood as part of a deeper crisis of political modernity, one in which the rupture between politics and ethics has eroded the capacity for sustainable and just engagement with global challenges.

Feminist approaches in International Relations, by exposing the gendered character of concepts such as power, security, development, and rationality, open a new critical horizon for global politics and reveal that what is presented as "neutral" or "objective" knowledge is, in fact, constituted through un-

equal relations of power. Building on this foundation, ecofeminism and women's political ecology lay bare the structural link between the domination of nature and the domination of women, arguing that environmental degradation and persistent gender inequality are products of a single logic of control, exploitation, and instrumentalization. These approaches reconstitute the environment not as a technical or managerial matter but as a profoundly political, ethical, and social concern, one intimately bound up with bodies, livelihoods, care, and social reproduction.

From the standpoint of political philosophy, ecofeminist analysis finds resonance with Strauss's critique of modernity, particularly in its insistence on the ethical crisis of modern politics, the hegemony of scientism, and the suppression of fundamental questions concerning the good, justice, and the ends of political life. Within this framework, women's political ecology represents a project of ethical reconstruction – one that, by amplifying marginalized voices, contesting purely instrumental values, and rethinking the relationship between humanity, nature, and power, makes possible the articulation of an alternative vision of global politics. This alternative conceives politics not merely as a competitive, security-driven arena but as a space for ethical responsibility, care, and sustainability on a planetary scale.

The Iranian context further illustrates that ecofeminist perspectives cannot be reduced to Western feminist experiences alone. In contemporary Iran, environmental crisis intersects with gender justice, civil society participation, and sustainable development in ways distinctively shaped by cultural, political, and social conditions. The growing engagement of Iranian women in environmental activism reflects the emergence of new forms of political agency that simultaneously challenge ecological degradation and gendered exclusion from public life. The Iranian case thereby underscores the importance of contextually sensitive and locally grounded approaches within feminist International Relations theory.

This article ultimately argues that the realization of sustainable peace, meaningful development, and good governance at the global level is unachievable without simultaneous and serious commitment to gender justice and environmental protection. Women's political ecology opens both a theoretical and practical horizon for global politics, one in which nature is no longer instrumentalized, ethics is restored to the center of political life, and women are recognized not as marginal participants but as indispensable agents in shaping the political and ecological future of the world.

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Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and Order in International Relations

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Abstract

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) constitutes one of the most significant multilateral agreements of the post-Cold War era and has generated extensive debate within International Relations scholarship. Existing studies have primarily examined the agreement through realist, liberal institutionalist, and constructivist perspectives, yet its implications for international order remain underexplored. Drawing on the English School of International Relations, this article examines the extent to which the JCPOA contributed to the maintenance of international order, and what its subsequent erosion reveals about the resilience of international society. Methodologically, the study employs qualitative document analysis and process tracing grounded in primary sources, including the JCPOA, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231, International Atomic Energy Agency reports, and official statements by the participating actors. The analysis centers on the primary institutions of international society, namely diplomacy, international law, balance of power, and great-power management. The article argues that the JCPOA constituted an order-maintaining arrangement through which major actors sought to reconcile non-proliferation objectives with regional stability and conflict avoidance. The United States' withdrawal from the agreement in 2018, however, exposed the fragility of institutionalized order in the absence of sustained great-power consensus. These findings demonstrate that the English School offers a distinctive framework for understanding both the formation and deterioration of the JCPOA, in that it emphasizes the relationship between shared rules, institutions, and international order.

Keywords: JCPOA; English School; International Order; International Society; Diplomacy; Great-Power Management.

Introduction

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), concluded in July 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), constitutes one of the most important multilateral diplomatic agreements of the post-Cold War period. Designed to address concerns regarding Iran's nuclear program through a framework of reciprocal commitments, monitoring mechanisms, and sanctions relief, the agreement was endorsed by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 and widely regarded as a major achievement of international diplomacy (United Nations Security Council [UNSC], 2015). Beyond its immediate nuclear dimension, the JCPOA constituted an effort by major international actors to manage a potentially destabilizing security dispute through negotiation, legal commitments, and institutional cooperation rather than military confrontation.

The significance of the JCPOA extends beyond the Iranian nuclear issue. The agreement emerged in an international environment characterized by increasing geopolitical competition, regional instability in the Middle East, and growing uncertainty concerning the effectiveness of multilateral institutions. Under such conditions, the successful conclusion of a complex agreement among states with divergent interests raised important questions concerning the maintenance of international order. At the same time, the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018 and the subsequent deterioration of the agreement generated new debates about the durability of international commitments, the resilience of international institutions, and the capacity of international society to preserve cooperative arrangements in the face of political disagreement.

The JCPOA has attracted substantial scholarly attention within International Relations. Existing studies have commonly examined the agreement through realist, liberal institutionalist, or constructivist perspectives. Realist analyses generally interpret the agreement as a product of strategic bargaining, coercive diplomacy, and calculations of relative power. Liberal institutionalist approaches emphasize the role of international institutions, monitoring mechanisms, and mutually beneficial cooperation in reducing uncertainty and facilitating compliance. Constructivist scholarship, in contrast, focuses on the role of norms, identities, and discursive interactions in shaping the preferences and behavior of the negotiating parties. Although these approaches have produced valuable insights, comparatively less attention has been devoted to examining the JCPOA as a mechanism of international order and to evaluating its implications for the functioning of international society.

This limitation is particularly important because the JCPOA involved several institutions traditionally associated with the maintenance of order in international relations. The agreement was negotiated through sustained diplomatic engagement, embedded in a framework of international law, supported by international organizations, and maintained through cooperation among major powers. Consequently, the JCPOA offers an important opportunity to investigate how states seek to manage conflict and preserve order through institutionalized practices rather than through coercion alone.

The English School of International Relations provides a useful framework for addressing this issue. Unlike approaches that prioritize either power, institutions, or norms as independent explanatory variables, the English School examines how order is maintained within an international society composed of sovereign states that recognize common rules, institutions, and interests (Bull, 2012). From this perspective, international order is not merely a consequence of material power but also the product of shared practices and institutions that facilitate coexistence among states. Hedley Bull

(2012) identified diplomacy, international law, balance of power, and the management of great powers as among the principal institutions through which international society preserves order. Subsequent English School scholarship has further emphasized the role of these institutions in maintaining stability and managing conflict within international society (Buzan, 2004; Buzan & Schouenborg, 2018).

The concepts of international system, international society, and international order occupy distinct but related positions within the English School framework. An international system exists when states interact and affect one another's decisions. An international society emerges when states recognize common interests and values and regard themselves as bound by a shared set of rules and institutions (Bull, 2012). International order, in turn, refers to the patterns of activity that sustain the elementary goals of social life among states, including security, stability, and the fulfillment of agreements (Bull, 2012). This conceptual distinction is important because the present study does not treat the JCPOA merely as an episode of strategic interaction within an international system; rather, it examines the agreement as an institutional arrangement through which international society sought to preserve international order.

Against this background, the article addresses the following research question: To what extent did the JCPOA contribute to the maintenance of international order, and what does the subsequent erosion of the agreement following the United States' withdrawal in 2018 reveal about the resilience and limitations of international society? The article pursues three objectives. First, it examines the JCPOA through the theoretical lens of the English School. Second, it analyzes the role of diplomacy, international law, balance of power, and great-power management in the negotiation and implementation of the agreement. Third, it evaluates the implications of both the establishment and partial breakdown of the JCPOA for the maintenance of international order.

The central argument advanced here is that the JCPOA embodied an order-maintaining arrangement created through the institutions of international society. The agreement reflected a shared interest among major actors in preventing nuclear proliferation, reducing regional instability, and avoiding military conflict. Through diplomacy, legal commitments, and verification mechanisms, the participating parties established a framework intended to reconcile competing interests within a common set of rules. However, the United States' withdrawal from the agreement in 2018 demonstrated that the durability of institutionalized order remains dependent upon the continued commitment of major powers to those rules and institutions. The trajectory of the JCPOA therefore illustrates both the capacity of international society to generate order and the limitations of that order when great-power consensus deteriorates.

This article contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it extends existing studies of the JCPOA by focusing on its implications for international order rather than exclusively on its nuclear or strategic dimensions. Second, it demonstrates the analytical value of the English School by showing how diplomacy, international law, and great-power management operated simultaneously in the negotiation and implementation of the agreement. Third, by examining both the creation and subsequent erosion of the JCPOA, the article highlights the strengths and limitations of international society as a framework for understanding the durability of multilateral agreements.

Methodologically, the study employs qualitative document analysis and process tracing. The analysis draws upon primary sources, including the JCPOA text, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231, reports issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and official statements by the

principal parties to the agreement. These materials are examined alongside relevant English School scholarship and broader International Relations literature.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical foundations of the English School and clarifies the relationship among international system, international society, and international order. The third section presents the methodological framework. The fourth section analyzes the JCPOA as a mechanism of order maintenance, while the fifth section examines the implications of the United States' withdrawal and the subsequent deterioration of the agreement. The final section discusses the broader implications of the findings for English School theory and international order before presenting the conclusions.

The English School and International Order

The English School occupies a distinctive position within the discipline of International Relations. Emerging from the works of scholars such as Martin Wight, Hedley Bull, Adam Watson, and later Barry Buzan, the English School seeks to explain how order is maintained in a world characterized by political diversity and the absence of a centralized authority (Bull, 2012; Buzan, 2004). Unlike realism, which primarily emphasizes power and security competition, or liberal institutionalism, which focuses on cooperation through formal institutions, the English School is concerned with the broader social and normative foundations of international order.

The central contribution of the English School is its argument that international politics cannot be understood solely through the concepts of anarchy or power distribution. Although the international system lacks a world government, states do not interact in a purely conflictual environment. Rather, they form an international society in which they recognize common interests, shared rules, and institutions that regulate their behavior (Bull, 2012). Consequently, the English School holds a middle position between realist and liberal approaches. It accepts the realist insight that sovereign states remain the principal actors in world politics while simultaneously recognizing the importance of rules, norms, diplomacy, and institutions in shaping international outcomes (Dunne, 1998).

A central distinction within English School theory is the relationship among international system, international society, and international order. According to Bull (2012), an international system exists when states interact regularly and affect one another's decisions. International society emerges when states recognize common interests and values and regard themselves as bound by a common set of rules and institutions. International order, in turn, refers to the patterns of activity that sustain the elementary goals of social life among states, including security, stability, the limitation of violence, the keeping of agreements, and the preservation of sovereignty. These concepts are analytically distinct but closely related. While an international system may exist without a high degree of cooperation, international order is most effectively maintained when states operate within an international society characterized by accepted rules and institutions.

The concept of order assumes a particularly important place within English School scholarship. Hedley Bull similarly defined order as a pattern of activity that sustains the primary goals of society (Bull, 2012). At the international level, these goals include the preservation of the society of states, the maintenance of state independence, the limitation of violence, and the fulfillment of agreements. From this perspective, order is not synonymous with peace or harmony. Rather, order refers to the existence of stable arrangements that enable states to manage conflict and pursue coexistence despite divergent

interests and values. The maintenance of order therefore requires mechanisms capable of regulating interactions among states and reducing the likelihood of destructive conflict.

To explain how order is maintained, the English School identifies a number of primary institutions of international society. Bull (2012) emphasized five principal institutions: the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, war, and the special managerial role of the great powers. These institutions are not formal organizations but rather enduring social practices that structure state behavior. Diplomacy facilitates communication and negotiation among states; international law establishes rules and expectations governing conduct; the balance of power prevents the emergence of overwhelming domination; and great-power management contributes to the preservation of stability by coordinating responses to major security challenges. Together, these institutions constitute the normative and practical foundations of international order.

More recent English School scholarship has expanded and refined this framework. Buzan (2004) distinguishes between primary institutions, which are fundamental social practices of international society, and secondary institutions, such as international organizations and formal regimes. He argues that international order is maintained through the interaction of both types of institutions. Similarly, Buzan and Schouenborg (2018) emphasize that contemporary international society has become increasingly global in scope and characterized by a growing density of institutional arrangements. These developments make the English School particularly useful for analyzing contemporary multilateral agreements that combine legal commitments, diplomatic negotiations, and institutional monitoring mechanisms.

The English School also provides a distinctive perspective on the JCPOA when compared with competing theoretical approaches. A realist interpretation would primarily view the agreement as the product of strategic bargaining and power calculations among Iran and the major powers. A liberal institutionalist perspective would emphasize the role of cooperation, verification mechanisms, and international institutions in reducing uncertainty and facilitating compliance. A constructivist analysis would focus on norms, identities, and the social construction of interests. While each of these perspectives captures important dimensions of the agreement, the English School offers a broader framework by examining how diplomacy, international law, and great-power management collectively contributed to the preservation of international order. In this sense, the JCPOA can be understood not merely as a nuclear agreement but as an institutionalized attempt by international society to manage a major security dispute through accepted rules and practices.

The English School is therefore particularly relevant to the present study. The negotiation, implementation, and subsequent deterioration of the JCPOA provide an opportunity to examine whether the institutions of international society were capable of maintaining order in the face of a complex international security challenge. By analyzing the agreement through the concepts of international society, order, diplomacy, international law, and great-power management, the article seeks to assess both the strengths and limitations of order-maintaining mechanisms in contemporary international relations.

International Order and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

The concept of order occupies a central position in English School theory and provides the principal analytical framework for understanding the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Hedley Bull defined order as “a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of social life” (Bull,

2012, p. 16). At the international level, these goals include the preservation of the society of states, the maintenance of state sovereignty, the limitation of violence, and the fulfillment of agreements (Bull, 2012). According to Bull, international order is maintained through the interaction of three fundamental elements: common interests, rules, and institutions. Together, these elements enable states to manage conflict and pursue coexistence despite differences in power, ideology, and national interests.

From the perspective of the English School, international order does not require complete harmony among states. Rather, it depends upon the existence of a minimum consensus regarding certain fundamental objectives. States may disagree on many political issues while simultaneously recognizing shared interests in avoiding war, preventing instability, and maintaining predictable patterns of interaction. The importance of common interests is particularly evident in the case of the JCPOA. Although Iran and the P5+1 states held divergent views regarding regional politics and security, both sides shared an interest in preventing a further escalation of the nuclear dispute and avoiding the costs associated with military confrontation.

The negotiations that led to the JCPOA reflected this convergence of interests. For Iran, the agreement offered the prospect of sanctions relief, reintegration into international economic networks, and recognition of its right to pursue a peaceful nuclear program under international safeguards. For the United States and its partners, the agreement provided a mechanism for extending the breakout time of Iran's nuclear program, strengthening verification measures, and reducing concerns regarding nuclear proliferation in the Middle East (JCPOA, 2015). While the specific interests of the parties differed, the agreement reflected a broader shared interest in managing a major international security dispute through diplomacy rather than coercion.

The existence of common interests alone, however, is insufficient to sustain order. Bull argued that order also depends upon rules that define acceptable conduct and establish expectations regarding state behavior (Bull, 2012). Rules enable states to coordinate their actions by providing standards of legitimacy, obligation, and compliance. In the case of the JCPOA, these rules were embodied in a detailed framework of reciprocal commitments concerning nuclear activities, verification procedures, sanctions relief, and dispute-resolution mechanisms (JCPOA, 2015). The subsequent endorsement of the agreement through United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 further strengthened its normative and legal authority within international society (UNSC, 2015).

The JCPOA therefore constituted more than a political understanding among governments. It established a structured set of expectations regarding the conduct of the participating parties. The agreement specified technical limitations on uranium enrichment, restrictions on nuclear facilities, verification procedures implemented by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and mechanisms for addressing disputes concerning implementation. These provisions created a rules-based framework intended to reduce uncertainty and facilitate cooperation among actors with otherwise conflicting interests.

The third component of order identified by Bull is the existence of institutions. Within English School theory, institutions are not limited to formal organizations. Rather, they consist of durable social practices that regulate relations among states and contribute to the maintenance of order (Bull, 2012; Buzan, 2004). A distinction is commonly made between primary and secondary institutions. Primary institutions are fundamental practices of international society, such as diplomacy, international law,

balance of power, and great-power management. Secondary institutions, by contrast, are formal organizations and regimes created by states to pursue specific objectives, including the United Nations, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the global nuclear non-proliferation regime (Buzan, 2004).

This distinction is especially useful for understanding the JCPOA. The agreement itself can be viewed as a secondary institution embedded within a broader framework of primary institutions. Its negotiation depended upon diplomacy, its implementation relied upon international law and verification procedures, and its sustainability required cooperation among the major powers involved in the negotiations. In this sense, the JCPOA was not an isolated diplomatic arrangement but rather part of a wider institutional structure through which international society sought to manage a significant security challenge.

Among the primary institutions identified by Bull, diplomacy played a particularly important role in the creation of the JCPOA. The agreement emerged after years of negotiations involving Iran, the P5+1, the European Union, and the IAEA. Diplomatic engagement enabled the parties to reconcile competing interests and transform a highly contentious issue into a framework of negotiated commitments. Likewise, international law contributed to the agreement's legitimacy by linking its provisions to existing non-proliferation norms and embedding them within the framework established by UNSCR 2231. The role of great-power management was equally significant, as the participation and coordination of the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom were essential to both the negotiation and implementation of the agreement.

At the same time, the subsequent trajectory of the JCPOA highlights the limitations of institutionalized order. The United States' withdrawal from the agreement in May 2018 demonstrated that even highly institutionalized arrangements remain vulnerable when political support among major powers deteriorates. From an English School perspective, this development does not necessarily invalidate the order-maintaining function of the JCPOA. Rather, it illustrates a central insight of the theory: international order depends not only on rules and institutions but also on the continued commitment of powerful states to uphold them. Consequently, the experience of the JCPOA reveals both the capacity of international society to generate cooperative solutions to security challenges and the fragility of such arrangements when great-power consensus breaks down.

The following sections examine in greater detail how the primary institutions of international society, namely the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, and great-power management, shaped the negotiation, implementation, and subsequent erosion of the JCPOA.

International Law and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

Within English School theory, international law constitutes one of the primary institutions through which international society maintains order. Unlike realist approaches, which tend to view international law as largely dependent upon the distribution of power among states, the English School regards law as an essential mechanism for regulating relations among sovereign states and facilitating coexistence in an otherwise anarchic environment (Bull, 2012). Drawing on the Grotian tradition, English School scholars argue that states do not merely compete for power; they also recognize common rules and legal obligations that enable stable and predictable interaction (Suganami, 2010).

For Hedley Bull (2012), international law contributes to international order because it establishes

common standards of conduct, clarifies rights and obligations, and provides a framework within which states can pursue their interests while limiting conflict. International law therefore performs both a normative and a practical function. Normatively, it defines legitimate behavior. Practically, it reduces uncertainty by creating expectations regarding the conduct of states. In this sense, international law is not separate from international order but one of its principal foundations.

The relevance of international law to the JCPOA is evident in both the negotiation and implementation of the agreement. Although the JCPOA was not formally adopted as a treaty under international law, it was embedded within an international legal framework and derived much of its authority from that framework. The agreement explicitly reaffirmed the rights and obligations of the parties under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of nuclear weapons (NPT) and specified detailed commitments regarding nuclear activities, verification procedures, sanctions relief, and dispute-resolution mechanisms (JCPOA, 2015).

The legal significance of the agreement increased substantially with the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 on 20 July 2015. Through Resolution 2231, the Security Council endorsed the JCPOA, called upon all member states to support its implementation, and created the legal framework through which previous sanctions measures would be modified or terminated upon verification of Iranian compliance (UNSC, 2015). From an English School perspective, the endorsement of the agreement by the Security Council reflected an attempt by international society to institutionalize a negotiated solution to a major security dispute through internationally recognized legal procedures.

A further manifestation of international law in the JCPOA was the central role assigned to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The agreement instituted extensive monitoring and verification arrangements designed to ensure transparency regarding Iran's nuclear activities. IAEA reports issued between 2015 and 2018 repeatedly confirmed Iran's implementation of its nuclear-related commitments under the agreement (IAEA, 2016; IAEA, 2017). These verification procedures provided an institutional mechanism through which legal commitments could be monitored and assessed, thereby strengthening confidence among the participating parties.

The dispute-resolution provisions of the JCPOA also illustrate the importance of legal and quasi-legal mechanisms in maintaining order. The agreement set out procedures through which disagreements concerning implementation could be addressed through consultation, review, and collective decision-making rather than unilateral action (JCPOA, 2015). Such provisions reflected the broader English School assumption that rules and institutions contribute to order by providing peaceful mechanisms for managing conflict among states.

At the same time, the subsequent deterioration of the agreement highlights the limitations of international law as an instrument of order maintenance. The unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA in May 2018 demonstrated that legal frameworks alone cannot guarantee compliance when political support among major powers weakens. Despite the continued existence of the agreement and the legal framework established by Resolution 2231, the effectiveness of the arrangement depended upon the willingness of its principal participants to uphold their commitments. From an English School perspective, this development illustrates an important point: international law contributes to order, but its effectiveness ultimately depends upon the continued support of states, particularly the major powers responsible for sustaining international society.

The experience of the JCPOA therefore demonstrates both the strengths and limitations of international law as a primary institution of international society. On the one hand, legal commitments, Security Council endorsement, and verification mechanisms facilitated cooperation and helped manage a major international security dispute. On the other hand, the erosion of the agreement after 2018 revealed that legal rules alone are insufficient to preserve order in the absence of sustained political commitment. The JCPOA thus provides an important example of how international law can contribute to the maintenance of international order while simultaneously illustrating the conditions under which such legal arrangements may become vulnerable.

Balance of Power and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

The balance of power occupies a central place in English School thinking and is regarded by Hedley Bull as one of the primary institutions through which international order is maintained (Bull, 2012). Unlike purely realist interpretations, which often view the balance of power primarily as the outcome of competition among states, the English School treats it as a social institution that contributes to the preservation of international society by preventing the emergence of overwhelming dominance and reducing the likelihood of major conflict. In this sense, the balance of power serves not merely strategic purposes but also broader order-maintaining functions.

According to Bull (2012), the balance of power helps preserve the independence of states, limits the concentration of power, and contributes to the continuity of international society. Similarly, Little (2007) argues that the balance of power should be understood not only as a distribution of capabilities but also as a set of practices through which states seek to maintain acceptable political and security arrangements. From this perspective, the institution of balance of power is closely connected to diplomacy, international law, and great-power management.

The relevance of the balance of power to the JCPOA emerges from the widespread concern among regional and international actors regarding the potential consequences of Iran's nuclear program. Prior to the conclusion of the agreement, many governments feared that continued escalation of the nuclear dispute could alter regional security dynamics, increase the risk of military confrontation, and potentially trigger broader proliferation pressures in the Middle East. Whether these concerns accurately reflected Iran's intentions is less important for the present analysis than the fact that they influenced the behavior of the negotiating parties and shaped the diplomatic process that culminated in the JCPOA.

From an English School perspective, the agreement can be understood as an attempt to manage these concerns through institutionalized cooperation rather than through coercive balancing alone. The restrictions on uranium enrichment, limitations on nuclear stockpiles, redesign of the Arak reactor, and extensive verification measures established under the JCPOA were intended to reduce uncertainty concerning Iran's nuclear activities and thereby mitigate perceived threats to regional and international stability (JCPOA, 2015). In this respect, the agreement functioned as a mechanism for preserving strategic equilibrium while avoiding military confrontation.

The role of the balance of power is also evident in the participation of the major powers in the negotiation process. The involvement of the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany reflected a shared interest in preventing the escalation of a security issue that could have broader implications for regional and international order. Rather than pursuing unilateral solutions,

these actors sought to manage the dispute through a collectively negotiated framework endorsed by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 (UNSC, 2015). Such cooperation is consistent with the English School view that the balance of power often operates in conjunction with diplomacy and great-power management as part of a wider effort to preserve order.

At the same time, the subsequent deterioration of the agreement illustrates the fragility of balance-of-power arrangements when political consensus weakens. The withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA in May 2018 reintroduced uncertainty about the future of the agreement and contributed to renewed tensions between Iran and Western states. From an English School perspective, this development demonstrates that balance-of-power arrangements are not self-sustaining. Their effectiveness depends upon the continued willingness of key actors to support the institutional mechanisms through which stability is maintained.

The JCPOA should therefore not be viewed simply as a technical nuclear agreement. It also served as an effort by major actors to manage perceived shifts in regional and international power relations through diplomatic and institutional means. By reducing uncertainty, limiting the risk of escalation, and providing a framework for monitoring and verification, the agreement contributed to the maintenance of strategic stability and thus fulfilled one of the core functions traditionally associated with the balance of power in English School theory. Nevertheless, the challenges that emerged after 2018 confirm that such arrangements remain vulnerable when the political foundations supporting them begin to erode.

Diplomacy and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

Among the primary institutions identified by the English School, diplomacy occupies a central role because it provides the principal mechanism through which states communicate, negotiate, and manage their relations within international society. Hedley Bull (2012) defines diplomacy as the conduct of relations between states and other entities in world politics through official representatives and peaceful means. For Bull, diplomacy is not simply a foreign-policy instrument but a constitutive institution of international society because it enables states to pursue their interests while preserving order and coexistence.

The significance of diplomacy in English School theory derives from its contribution to the maintenance of international order. According to Bull (2012), diplomacy performs several essential functions: facilitating communication among governments, negotiating agreements, gathering and transmitting information, minimizing misunderstandings, and helping to manage international crises. Through these functions, diplomacy reduces uncertainty and creates opportunities for cooperation even among states with conflicting interests. As Watson (1992) argues, diplomacy has historically been one of the most important institutions through which international society has regulated relations among sovereign states.

More recent English School scholarship has further emphasized the role of diplomacy as a mechanism for sustaining international society. Buzan (2004) argues that diplomacy serves as a primary institution because it creates predictable patterns of interaction and helps maintain the shared rules and expectations upon which international order depends. Likewise, Dunne and Reus-Smit (2017) note that diplomacy enables states with divergent political interests to participate in common institutional frameworks without requiring ideological consensus. From this perspective, diplomacy is particularly

important in situations where cooperation must be achieved among actors that possess fundamentally different political systems, security concerns, and strategic objectives.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action constitutes one of the most significant contemporary examples of diplomacy operating as an institution of international society. The agreement emerged after more than a decade of negotiations concerning Iran's nuclear program. Diplomatic engagement began with negotiations between Iran and the EU-3 (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom) in 2003 and gradually evolved into a multilateral process involving the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany. The negotiations culminated in the conclusion of the JCPOA on 14 July 2015 after nearly twenty months of intensive bargaining following the election of President Hassan Rouhani in 2013 (European Union External Action Service [EEAS], 2015).

From an English School perspective, the negotiation process itself is as significant as the substantive provisions of the agreement. The JCPOA demonstrated that diplomacy could provide a framework for managing a highly contentious security dispute without resorting to military force. During the negotiations, the parties maintained fundamentally different positions regarding Iran's nuclear activities. Iran consistently emphasized its right to peaceful nuclear technology under Article IV of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), while the United States and several European governments focused on concerns regarding nuclear proliferation and regional security. Despite these differences, diplomatic engagement enabled the parties to identify areas of overlapping interest and develop mutually acceptable arrangements (JCPOA, 2015).

The diplomatic character of the agreement is reflected in several of its key provisions. The JCPOA established detailed commitments concerning uranium enrichment, stockpile limitations, centrifuge numbers, verification procedures, and sanctions relief. These provisions were not imposed unilaterally but emerged through prolonged negotiation and reciprocal concessions. In this regard, the agreement illustrates one of Bull's (2012) central arguments: diplomacy enables states to reconcile competing interests through peaceful bargaining rather than coercive confrontation.

The role of diplomacy continued after the conclusion of the agreement. The JCPOA created a Joint Commission composed of representatives from Iran and the P5+1 to oversee implementation, review disputes, and coordinate compliance efforts (JCPOA, 2015). The creation of this body institutionalized diplomatic communication and reflected the English School view that diplomacy is an ongoing process rather than a single event. Through regular meetings and consultations, the Joint Commission sought to preserve cooperation and manage disagreements before they escalated into broader political conflicts.

The importance of diplomacy can also be observed in the reactions of international actors to the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018. Although the withdrawal significantly weakened the agreement, the remaining participants, namely Iran, the European Union, Russia, and China, continued diplomatic efforts to preserve elements of the arrangement. European governments set up the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) and repeatedly reaffirmed their commitment to the agreement as a means of preventing its complete collapse (EEAS, 2019). While these efforts ultimately faced substantial limitations, they nevertheless illustrated the continued reliance of international society on diplomatic mechanisms to manage conflict and preserve order.

The JCPOA therefore provides evidence for one of the central propositions of English School theory: diplomacy is an indispensable institution for the maintenance of international order. The agreement

was achieved through sustained diplomatic engagement, implemented through institutionalized diplomatic mechanisms, and partially preserved through continued diplomatic efforts even after the emergence of significant political disagreements. At the same time, the difficulties encountered after 2018 reveal the limits of diplomacy. Diplomatic institutions can facilitate cooperation and reduce conflict, but their effectiveness ultimately depends upon the political willingness of states, particularly major powers, to uphold negotiated commitments. Consequently, the experience of the JCPOA confirms both the strengths and the limitations of diplomacy as an institution of international society.

Great-Power Management and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

Great-power management holds a distinctive place among the primary institutions identified by the English School because it reflects the unequal distribution of capabilities within international society. While all states are formally sovereign, they do not possess equal capacities to influence international outcomes. Consequently, certain states acquire special responsibilities for maintaining international order and managing issues that affect international peace and security. Hedley Bull (2012) argued that great powers play a crucial role in preserving international society because they possess the material capabilities and political influence necessary to address major international challenges. In this sense, great-power management functions as an institution through which order is maintained despite the absence of a central authority in world politics.

According to Bull (2012), great powers contribute to international order in two principal ways. First, they manage their relations with one another in order to prevent conflicts that could threaten the stability of the international system. Second, they cooperate in addressing broader international problems that affect the society of states as a whole. Great-power management therefore involves both competition and cooperation. While major powers frequently pursue divergent interests, they also recognize a common interest in preserving a minimum level of international order and preventing the escalation of conflicts that could undermine international stability.

The JCPOA provides a particularly useful case through which to examine the operation of this institution. The Iranian nuclear issue was not merely a regional dispute but a matter that engaged all five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, alongside Germany and the European Union. The participation of the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom reflected a shared recognition that the dispute had implications extending beyond the Middle East and potentially affecting the broader international order. From an English School perspective, the involvement of these actors illustrates the operation of great-power management in response to a significant international security challenge.

The negotiation process that culminated in the JCPOA required an unusual degree of coordination among major powers with otherwise divergent geopolitical interests. During the negotiations, the United States and Russia were experiencing increasing tensions over Ukraine, while strategic competition between the United States and China was becoming more pronounced. Nevertheless, these powers cooperated within the P5+1 framework to negotiate a common approach toward Iran's nuclear program. This cooperation reflected what Bull (2012) described as the managerial responsibilities of great powers: despite disagreements on other issues, they recognized a common interest in preventing nuclear proliferation and reducing the risk of regional instability.

The legal endorsement of the JCPOA through United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 fur-

ther demonstrates the role of great-power management. The unanimous adoption of the resolution by the Security Council in July 2015 constituted an important expression of collective support among the major powers for a negotiated solution to the nuclear dispute (United Nations Security Council [UNSC], 2015). Through this process, the permanent members of the Security Council collectively exercised their institutional authority to support and legitimize the agreement. From the perspective of English School theory, this illustrated an important example of great powers acting as managers of international order through established institutions and legal mechanisms.

The implementation phase of the JCPOA likewise depended upon continued cooperation among the major powers. The agreement's effectiveness relied not only on Iranian compliance but also on the willingness of the participating states to fulfill their own commitments regarding sanctions relief, verification procedures, and dispute-resolution mechanisms. In this respect, the JCPOA reflected a broader principle emphasized by the English School: international order is maintained not solely through rules and institutions but through the active support of the states possessing the greatest influence within international society (Bull, 2012; Buzan, 2004).

The subsequent deterioration of the agreement after 2018 provides an important test of the English School argument. The unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA revealed how changes in the policies of a major power can significantly affect the stability of international arrangements. Although the remaining participants, namely Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the European Union, continued to support the agreement, the withdrawal of one of its principal architects weakened the political foundations upon which it depended. From an English School perspective, this development highlights both the strengths and limitations of great-power management. The successful negotiation of the JCPOA confirmed the capacity of major powers to cooperate in preserving order, while the subsequent erosion of the agreement illustrated the fragility of such arrangements when consensus among great powers breaks down.

The JCPOA therefore provides important evidence concerning the role of great powers in international society. Its creation reflected a shared commitment among major powers to address a potentially destabilizing security issue through diplomacy, international law, and institutional cooperation. At the same time, its later difficulties show that the effectiveness of great-power management depends upon sustained political commitment and continued agreement among the principal actors. The experience of the JCPOA thus supports a central proposition of English School theory: international order is significantly shaped by the willingness and ability of great powers to fulfill their managerial responsibilities within international society.

Conclusion

This article examined the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) through the theoretical framework of the English School of International Relations in order to assess its contribution to the maintenance of international order. The central research question asked to what extent the JCPOA contributed to the preservation of international order and what the subsequent deterioration of the agreement reveals about the resilience and limitations of international society. Drawing upon the English School's understanding of order as a product of common interests, rules, and institutions, the analysis explored the role of diplomacy, international law, balance of power, and great-power management in the negotiation, implementation, and subsequent evolution of the agreement.

The findings suggest that the JCPOA constituted an important order-maintaining arrangement within contemporary international society. The agreement emerged from a convergence of interests among Iran and the P5+1 regarding the management of a potentially destabilizing security dispute. Through diplomatic negotiations, legal commitments, verification mechanisms, and coordination among major powers, the participating actors established a framework designed to reduce uncertainty, prevent escalation, and preserve regional and international stability. In this respect, the JCPOA reflected the operation of the principal institutions identified by the English School as essential to the maintenance of international order.

The analysis further demonstrates that diplomacy played a central role in transforming a highly contentious security issue into a framework of negotiated cooperation. International law provided legitimacy, predictability, and institutional procedures for implementation and verification, particularly through the endorsement of the agreement by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 and the monitoring activities of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The agreement also reflected concerns regarding regional and international stability associated with the balance of power, while its successful negotiation depended heavily upon cooperation among the major powers. Collectively, these findings support the English School argument that international order is sustained not solely through material power but through a combination of shared interests, accepted rules, and institutionalized practices.

At the same time, the experience of the JCPOA reveals important limitations in the capacity of international society to maintain order. The withdrawal of the United States from the agreement in May 2018 exposed the fragility of institutional arrangements that depend upon continued political support from major powers. Although the legal framework of the agreement remained formally intact and other participants continued to support its implementation, the erosion of great-power consensus significantly weakened its effectiveness. This development highlights a central insight of English School theory: institutions and rules can facilitate cooperation and contribute to order, but their durability ultimately depends upon the willingness of influential states to uphold them.

The article also contributes to the broader literature on the JCPOA and International Relations theory. While realist approaches emphasize power and strategic bargaining, liberal institutionalist accounts focus on cooperation and formal institutions, and constructivist perspectives highlight norms and identities, the English School offers a broader framework that links these dimensions to the question of international order. The analysis shows that the value of the English School lies in its ability to examine simultaneously the interaction of power, law, diplomacy, institutions, and shared interests within a single analytical framework. Consequently, the JCPOA serves as a useful case through which to explore both the creation and the erosion of order in contemporary international politics.

More broadly, the experience of the JCPOA suggests that multilateral agreements continue to constitute important instruments for managing international security challenges. However, the durability of such agreements depends not only on their legal design or technical provisions but also on sustained political commitment among the principal actors involved. The case therefore illustrates both the possibilities and the limitations of institutionalized cooperation in contemporary international society. Future efforts to address complex international security issues are likely to face similar challenges, making the relationship between diplomacy, international law, and great-power management an enduring subject of scholarly and policy relevance.

Ultimately, the JCPOA confirms that international order is neither self-sustaining nor purely coercive. Rather, it is a dynamic and contested process that depends upon the continuous interaction of common interests, rules, institutions, and political commitment. The English School provides a valuable framework for understanding these dynamics and for explaining both the achievements and vulnerabilities of contemporary efforts to maintain international order. Future research could compare the JCPOA with other major non-proliferation and security arrangements in order to evaluate the conditions under which institutions of international society successfully preserve order despite changing patterns of great-power relations.

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Militarized Masculinity and the Legitimacy of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (2005-1988)

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Abstract

The expansion of United Nations peacekeeping operations after the Cold War transformed the scope and nature of international interventions in conflict-affected societies. While multidimensional peacekeeping missions were designed to support peacebuilding, state reconstruction and civilian protection, numerous allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by peacekeeping personnel raised concerns regarding the gendered dynamics embedded within these operations. This article examines the impact of militarized masculinity on United Nations peacekeeping missions between 1988 and 2005. Drawing upon feminist security studies and critical gender perspectives, the study argues that institutional cultures shaped by militarized forms of masculinity contributed to unequal power relations, normalized certain forms of violence, and undermined the legitimacy of peacekeeping efforts. Through an explanatory analysis of United Nations reports, Security Council resolutions, policy documents and selected mission experiences, the article explores the relationship between gendered institutional practices and operational outcomes. The findings suggest that gender mainstreaming initiatives, including Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), represented an important normative shift; however, their implementation was constrained by persistent structural inequalities, limited accountability mechanisms and the underrepresentation of women within peacekeeping institutions. The article concludes that strengthening women's participation and addressing militarized institutional cultures remain essential for enhancing the effectiveness, legitimacy and accountability of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Keywords: UN Peacekeeping Operations; Militarized Masculinity; Women, Peace and Security; Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, Gender Mainstreaming.

1. Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations have undergone a profound transformation in both scale and function. Originally designed as a mechanism for monitoring ceasefires and preventing the resumption of hostilities between states, peacekeeping gradually evolved into a multidimensional enterprise encompassing peacebuilding, state-building, electoral assistance, human rights monitoring, civilian protection, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), and security sector reform.

The dramatic increase in intra-state conflicts after 1989, combined with growing expectations regarding the United Nations' role in maintaining international peace and security, expanded the geographical reach and operational responsibilities of peacekeeping missions. Between 1988 and 2005, the number, size, and complexity of UN peacekeeping operations increased significantly, making peacekeeping one of the most visible instruments of global governance in conflict-affected societies. The post-Cold War expansion of peacekeeping was accompanied by a broader redefinition of security. Traditional understandings of security, which had focused primarily on interstate military threats, increasingly gave way to multidimensional approaches emphasizing human security, civilian protection, governance, and sustainable peace. Consequently, peacekeepers were no longer deployed merely as neutral observers positioned between armed actors; they became active participants in post-conflict reconstruction processes and were expected to engage directly with local communities. While this transformation enhanced the relevance of peacekeeping operations, it also exposed peacekeepers to new social, political, and ethical challenges that traditional peacekeeping doctrines had not anticipated. One of the most significant challenges emerged in the form of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) committed by peacekeeping personnel. Beginning in the early 1990s, reports from several peacekeeping missions, including Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Somalia, Mozambique, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, revealed instances in which peacekeepers became involved in prostitution networks, transactional sex, sexual exploitation of vulnerable populations, and, in some cases, acts constituting serious violations of international human rights standards.

These incidents generated widespread criticism of the United Nations and raised fundamental questions regarding the legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. The significance of these allegations extended beyond individual cases of misconduct. Scholars increasingly argued that sexual exploitation and abuse should not be understood solely as the result of personal moral failure or isolated disciplinary violations. Rather, such behavior was understood as reflecting broader institutional cultures, structural inequalities, and gendered power relations embedded within military and security organizations. Consequently, analytical attention shifted from individual perpetrators to the organizational environments within which misconduct occurs. This reorientation contributed to the growing influence of feminist security studies and gender-sensitive analyses of peacekeeping operations.

Within this literature, the concept of militarized masculinity holds a central place. Militarized masculinity denotes a cluster of social norms, institutional practices, and cultural expectations that associate military effectiveness with traits such as aggression, dominance, emotional control, physical strength, and hierarchical authority. Scholars have argued that military institutions frequently reproduce particular forms of masculinity that privilege coercive power and reinforce unequal gender

relations.

According to this perspective, military organizations are not gender-neutral institutions; rather, they are social environments in which specific understandings of masculinity are cultivated, rewarded, and normalized. These institutional dynamics may shape not only operational behavior but also interactions between peacekeepers and local populations. The relevance of militarized masculinity to peacekeeping operations has attracted increasing scholarly attention over the past two decades. Researchers such as J. Ann Tickner, Cynthia Enloe, Sandra Whitworth, Carol Cohn, Laura J. Shepherd, Gina Heathcote, and Sabrina Karim have demonstrated that gender is not merely an additional variable in peacekeeping but a constitutive element of security governance itself. Their work challenges conventional assumptions that peacekeeping operations can be analyzed independently of the gendered structures within which they operate. Instead, these scholars argue that gendered power relations influence institutional decision-making, operational priorities, accountability mechanisms, and patterns of interaction with conflict-affected communities. At the policy level, growing concern regarding gender inequality and sexual misconduct contributed to a series of important institutional reforms within the United Nations. The adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2000 represented a landmark development in international security governance. The resolution recognized the importance of women's participation in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction, while also emphasizing the need to protect women and girls from gender-based violence. Subsequent initiatives, including gender mainstreaming policies, codes of conduct for peacekeeping personnel, the Secretary-General's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2003), and the Zeid Report (2005), sought to address persistent deficiencies in accountability and institutional culture. Despite these reforms, however, concerns regarding sexual exploitation, abuse, and gender inequality within peacekeeping missions persisted.

This persistence raises an important analytical question: why have formal reforms often failed to produce the transformative outcomes envisioned by United Nations policymakers? Existing explanations have emphasized several factors, including weak accountability mechanisms, jurisdictional limitations, insufficient training, inadequate reporting systems, and the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of local populations. While these explanations provide valuable insights, they do not fully address the role of gendered institutional cultures in shaping peacekeeping practices and outcomes.

A review of the existing literature reveals an important gap in this regard. Although substantial scholarship has examined sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping operations, and an equally extensive body of research has analyzed the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, relatively few studies have systematically investigated the relationship between militarized masculinity and the operational legitimacy of peacekeeping missions during the critical period between 1988 and 2005. This period is particularly significant because it encompasses the post-Cold War expansion of peacekeeping, the emergence of large multidimensional missions, the adoption of Resolution 1325, and the development of the United Nations' first comprehensive responses to allegations of misconduct. Examining this period, therefore, provides valuable insights into the structural conditions that shaped both the successes and shortcomings of peacekeeping reform efforts.

This article seeks to address that gap by examining the impact of militarized masculinity on United Nations peacekeeping operations between 1988 and 2005. Rather than treating misconduct as a se-

ries of isolated incidents, the study examines how gendered institutional practices contributed to unequal power relations, patterns of impunity, and challenges to the mission legitimacy. The analysis draws upon feminist security studies, critical gender perspectives, United Nations policy documents, Security Council resolutions, and selected peacekeeping experiences to investigate the relationship between militarized organizational cultures and peacekeeping effectiveness.

The central research question guiding this study is: How did militarized masculinity influence the legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping operations between 1988 and 2005? The article advances the argument that militarized forms of masculinity contributed to the reproduction of hierarchical power relations and institutional practices that undermined the implementation of gender-sensitive peacekeeping reforms. While militarized masculinity should not be regarded as the sole explanation for peacekeeping failures, it constituted an important structural factor that interacted with weak accountability mechanisms, limited oversight, and persistent gender inequalities. The article proceeds in six sections. The first section reviews the relevant literature and theoretical debates concerning militarized masculinity, feminist security studies, and peacekeeping governance. The second section outlines the methodological framework and research design. The third section examines the evolution of United Nations peacekeeping operations after the Cold War. The fourth section analyzes the relationship between militarized masculinity and patterns of sexual exploitation and abuse within selected peacekeeping missions. The fifth section evaluates institutional responses undertaken by the United Nations between 1998 and 2005. Finally, the article discusses the implications of these findings for contemporary debates on gender, accountability, and the future of peacekeeping operations before presenting concluding observations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Peacekeeping and the Transformation of International Security

The end of the Cold War marked a turning point in the evolution of United Nations peacekeeping operations. While traditional peacekeeping missions were primarily designed to monitor ceasefires and maintain buffer zones between states, post-Cold War missions became increasingly multidimensional. Peacekeepers were tasked not only with maintaining security but also with supporting democratic governance, monitoring human rights, facilitating elections, disarming former combatants, promoting the rule of law, and assisting in post-conflict reconstruction (Karim & Beardsley, 2017). As a result, peacekeeping operations became deeply embedded within the social and political structures of host societies.

The expansion of peacekeeping generated a substantial body of scholarship examining the effectiveness, legitimacy, and accountability of UN missions (Shepherd 2008). Early studies focused primarily on operational effectiveness, mandate implementation, and institutional learning. Scholars generally assessed success in terms of conflict management, conflict termination, and the prevention of renewed violence. However, these approaches often treated peacekeeping institutions as gender-neutral actors and paid limited attention to the social relations through which peacekeeping was practiced.

By the late 1990s, growing evidence of sexual exploitation and abuse, trafficking networks, and unequal interactions between peacekeepers and local populations challenged these assumptions. Researchers increasingly argued that peacekeeping operations could not be fully understood without

examining the social and gendered dimensions of security governance (Tickner, 2001). Consequently, questions concerning gender, power, and institutional culture gradually moved from the margins to the center of peacekeeping scholarship.

2.2. Feminist Security Studies and the Gendered Nature of Security

The emergence of Feminist Security Studies (FSS) represented one of the most significant developments in contemporary security scholarship. Feminist scholars challenged conventional approaches that conceptualized security primarily in military and state-centric terms. Instead, they argued that security institutions are embedded within social structures characterized by unequal power relations, including gender hierarchies.

Cynthia Enloe's pioneering work demonstrated that international politics and military institutions depend upon gendered assumptions that frequently remain invisible within mainstream security analyses (2000). Enloe argued that militarization is not merely a process of military expansion but a broader social phenomenon through which military values become normalized within political and social life (2014). In this way, military institutions are shown to rely upon particular constructions of masculinity and femininity.

Similarly, Carol Cohn emphasized the importance of language, discourse, and institutional practices in reproducing gendered understandings of security (2013). Her work illustrated how dominant security narratives privilege forms of knowledge associated with masculinity while marginalizing alternative perspectives. Feminist scholars were thus led to interrogate whether military institutions designed around masculine norms could adequately address the needs and vulnerabilities of diverse civilian populations.

Building upon these insights, feminist security studies increasingly focused on peacekeeping operations as sites where global security governance intersects with local gender relations. Rather than viewing gender as an additional variable, feminist scholars conceptualized gender as a constitutive element of security itself. This reconceptualization established a foundation for analyzing the gendered dynamics of peacekeeping operations and their consequences for mission legitimacy and effectiveness.

2.3. Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Peacekeeping Operations

The issue of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) has become one of the most extensively studied aspects of contemporary peacekeeping. Reports emerging from Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Haiti, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo revealed persistent concerns regarding the conduct of some peacekeeping personnel. These incidents generated considerable debate regarding accountability, institutional responsibility, and the effectiveness of existing oversight mechanisms.

One strand of scholarship attributes SEA primarily to deficiencies in accountability systems. According to this perspective, peacekeepers often operate within legal environments characterized by fragmented jurisdictional arrangements. Since criminal prosecution generally remains the responsibility of troop-contributing countries, disciplinary responses have frequently been inconsistent. Weak enforcement mechanisms, insufficient reporting systems, and difficulties in gathering evidence have contributed to persistent challenges in addressing misconduct.

A second body of literature emphasizes socioeconomic inequalities between peacekeepers and local

populations. Researchers have demonstrated that post-conflict societies often exhibit high levels of poverty, displacement, and social vulnerability. In such environments, significant disparities in income and authority may create conditions that facilitate exploitative relationships, even when overt coercion is absent.

A third perspective highlights institutional culture as a critical explanatory factor. Scholars such as Whitworth (2004), Jennings (2015), Westendorf (2013), and Simm (2020) argue that patterns of misconduct cannot be understood solely through individual-level explanations. Instead, they contend that organizational norms, military socialization, and gendered power relations contribute to environments in which exploitation becomes more likely. This literature provides an important bridge between studies of peacekeeping misconduct and broader debates concerning militarized masculinity.

2.4. Women, Peace and Security: Progress and Limitations

The adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 marked a significant normative shift within international security governance. The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda challenged the traditional marginalization of women within peace processes and emphasized the importance of participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery.

Subsequent scholarship has generally recognized Resolution 1325 as a transformative development in international law and policy. Researchers have demonstrated that increased participation of women can enhance community engagement, improve communication with local populations, and strengthen reporting mechanisms relating to gender-based violence. Furthermore, gender mainstreaming initiatives have contributed to greater awareness of the differentiated impacts of conflict on women, men, girls, and boys (Shepherd, 2021).

Nevertheless, scholars have also identified significant limitations. Critics argue that implementation has often lagged behind normative commitments (Heathcote, 2021). In many peacekeeping missions, gender units remain under-resourced, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions, and gender perspectives are frequently treated as secondary considerations rather than core operational concerns. Consequently, a substantial gap persists between the normative aspirations of the WPS agenda and realities on the ground.

2.5. Research Gap

The existing literature provides valuable insights into peacekeeping effectiveness, sexual exploitation and abuse, and the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. However, these strands of scholarship have often developed in parallel rather than in dialogue with one another. Studies of SEA frequently focus on legal accountability and institutional reform, while research on WPS primarily examines participation and representation. Comparatively few studies have systematically investigated how militarized forms of masculinity influenced the legitimacy and effectiveness of peacekeeping operations during the critical period between 1988 and 2005.

This article addresses that gap by examining militarized masculinity not as an individual characteristic but as an institutional and structural phenomenon shaping peacekeeping practices. By connecting feminist security studies, peacekeeping scholarship, and analyses of accountability, the study advances a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges confronting United Nations peacekeeping operations during the formative years of post-Cold War interventionism.

3. Theoretical Framework: Militarized Masculinity and Gendered Security Institutions

The theoretical framework of this study draws upon the concept of militarized masculinity as developed within feminist security studies. The framework integrates three complementary perspectives: hegemonic masculinity, militarization, and gendered institutionalism.

3.1. Hegemonic Masculinity

The concept of hegemonic masculinity, developed by R.W. Connell, designates the culturally dominant form of masculinity that legitimizes unequal power relations and establishes standards against which alternative masculinities and femininities are measured. Hegemonic masculinity does not describe the behavior of all men; rather, it represents an idealized model associated with authority, control, strength, and dominance (2005).

Within military organizations, hegemonic masculinity is frequently reinforced through recruitment practices, training procedures, hierarchical structures, and organizational norms. Traits such as toughness, emotional restraint, competitiveness, and willingness to use force are often valued as indicators of professional competence. While these characteristics may contribute to military effectiveness in certain contexts, they may also normalize unequal power relations and reduce sensitivity to civilian vulnerabilities (Heathcote, 2021).

3.2. Militarization and Militarized Masculinity

Building on Enloe's work, militarization can be understood as a social process through which military values become embedded in political institutions and everyday life. Militarized masculinity emerges when ideals associated with military culture become linked to broader understandings of authority, legitimacy, and social status (2014).

Sandra Whitworth argues that military institutions frequently cultivate forms of masculinity that privilege dominance and control while marginalizing empathy, vulnerability, and cooperation. Importantly, this argument does not suggest that all military personnel engage in misconduct. Rather, it highlights how organizational cultures may create conditions that facilitate particular patterns of behavior and discourage critical reflection regarding power inequalities (2004).

In peacekeeping environments characterized by substantial disparities in economic resources, authority, and mobility, these dynamics may contribute to exploitative interactions between peacekeepers and local populations. Militarized masculinity therefore functions as a structural factor that shapes opportunities, perceptions, and institutional responses.

3.3. Gendered Security Institutions

Recent scholarship has moved beyond analyses of individual behavior to examine security institutions themselves as gendered organizations. According to this perspective, gender is embedded within formal rules, informal practices, leadership structures, and decision-making processes.

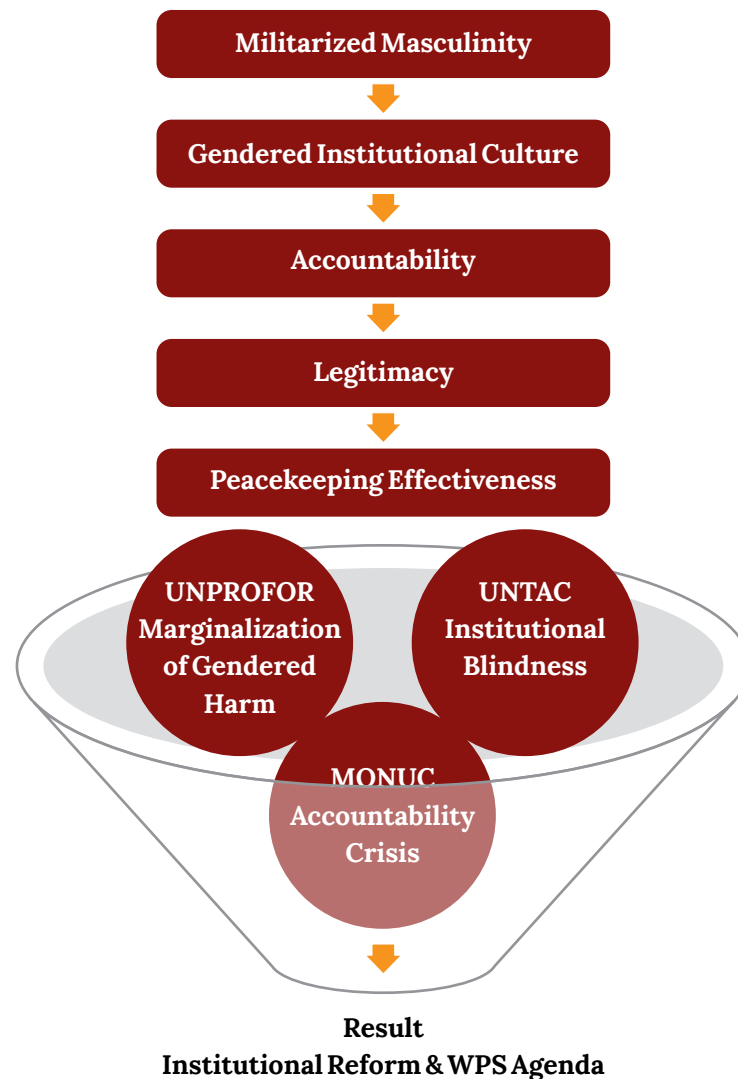
Gendered institutionalism suggests that organizations may reproduce inequalities even in the absence of explicitly discriminatory policies. Within peacekeeping operations, this may be reflected in the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, insufficient integration of gender expertise, limited responsiveness to allegations of abuse, and the prioritization of traditional security con-

cerns over community-based approaches to peacebuilding (Shepherd, 2008).

This study therefore conceptualizes militarized masculinity as an institutional phenomenon operating through organizational structures, professional norms, and patterns of authority rather than through individual attitudes alone.

3.4. Analytical Proposition

Based on the foregoing discussion, this article advances the proposition that militarized masculinity contributed to the reproduction of unequal power relations, institutional impunity, and limited accountability within peacekeeping operations between 1988 and 2005. These dynamics, in turn, undermined the legitimacy and effectiveness of peacekeeping missions and complicated the implementation of gender-sensitive reforms introduced through the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.



Figur 1. Peacekeeping Operations & Samples

Source: The authors

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative explanatory research design to investigate the relationship between militarized masculinity and the legitimacy of United Nations peacekeeping operations between 1988 and 2005. Given the complex and socially embedded nature of gendered institutional practices, a qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for examining the mechanisms through which organizational cultures influence peacekeeping outcomes. Rather than seeking to establish statistical correlations, the study identifies causal processes linking gendered institutional norms to patterns of misconduct, accountability failures, and challenges to mission legitimacy (Autesserre, 2014).

The research adopts a process-tracing methodology. Process tracing is especially useful for identifying intervening variables and causal mechanisms operating within institutional settings (Ackerly, Stern, & True, 2006). In the present study, militarized masculinity is conceptualized as a structural and institutional phenomenon that influences patterns of behavior through organizational norms, hierarchies, and professional socialization. The analysis therefore seeks to trace how these norms interacted with accountability structures and local power asymmetries within peacekeeping missions.

4.2. Case Selection

Three peacekeeping missions were selected through purposive case selection:

- UNTAC (Cambodia): Peacekeeping Economies, Gendered Power Relations and Institutional Blind Spots
- UNPROFOR (Bosnia): Neutrality, Trafficking Networks and the Marginalization of Gendered Harm
- MONUC (DRC): Sexual Exploitation, Accountability Failures and the Emergence of Institutional Reform

4.3. Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relies primarily on documentary evidence, including United Nations reports, policy documents, investigative reports, and secondary academic literature. While these sources provide valuable insights into institutional practices and policy developments, they do not offer direct access to the perceptions and experiences of all actors involved in peacekeeping operations.

Second, the analysis is affected by the well-documented problem of underreporting in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. Existing evidence suggests that many incidents remain unreported due to fear of retaliation, social stigma, lack of access to reporting mechanisms, or limited confidence in accountability processes. Consequently, documented cases should be understood as potentially representing only a portion of the broader phenomenon.

Third, institutional culture, and particularly militarized masculinity, is inherently difficult to measure directly. As a result, the study does not attempt to quantify organizational culture; it examines instead how institutional priorities, policy responses, and accountability practices reflect underlying gendered assumptions and organizational logics.

Fourth, the research adopts a retrospective comparative approach focused on three historical peacekeeping missions between 1988 and 2005. While this design is appropriate for theory building and process tracing, caution is warranted when generalizing findings to all contemporary peacekeeping

operations. Subsequent reforms, particularly those implemented after the Zeid Report and the consolidation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, may have altered some institutional dynamics. Despite these limitations, the comparative analysis of UNTAC, UNPROFOR, and MONUC provides a robust basis for identifying recurring institutional patterns and developing a theoretically informed explanation of the relationship between militarized institutional culture, accountability, legitimacy, and peacekeeping effectiveness.

5. Findings and Analysis

5.1. From Traditional Peacekeeping to Social Intervention

The transformation of peacekeeping after the Cold War fundamentally altered the relationship between peacekeepers and host societies. Traditional missions generally maintained limited interaction with civilian populations. By contrast, multidimensional operations placed thousands of military personnel, police officers, and civilian staff within fragile post-conflict environments for prolonged periods.

This transformation created new opportunities for peacebuilding and civilian protection. At the same time, it generated unprecedented asymmetries of power. Peacekeepers possessed financial resources, mobility, political authority, and institutional protection that were unavailable to most members of local communities. These asymmetries constituted a critical contextual condition through which gendered institutional practices acquired practical significance.

Viewed through the lens of feminist security studies, the expansion of peacekeeping did not simply enlarge the scope of international intervention; it also expanded the spaces within which militarized forms of authority operated.

5.2. UNTAC and the Gendered Consequences of Peacekeeping Presence

The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) represented one of the earliest and most ambitious multidimensional peacekeeping operations. Deploying approximately 22,000 personnel, UNTAC was tasked with supporting political transition, supervising elections, and facilitating national reconstruction.

Although the mission achieved several of its formal objectives, it also generated significant controversy. Contemporary reports documented a dramatic expansion of prostitution in areas surrounding peacekeeping deployments. While direct participation by all peacekeepers was neither alleged nor demonstrated, the mission became associated with increased demand for commercial sexual services and the growth of exploitative economic relationships.

From a conventional perspective, these developments might be explained solely through market dynamics. However, a gendered institutional analysis reveals deeper structural factors. Peacekeepers occupied positions of authority, mobility, and economic privilege relative to local populations emerging from years of conflict and poverty. Militarized organizational cultures often failed to recognize these asymmetries as matters of institutional concern (Simm, 2013).

The significance of the Cambodian case therefore lies less in individual acts of misconduct than in the normalization of power relations that rendered exploitation difficult to identify, regulate, or challenge. The case illustrates how militarized masculinity may operate indirectly through institutional indifference toward gendered vulnerabilities (Jennings, 2015).

5.3. UNPROFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Neutrality, Trafficking Networks, and the Marginalization of Gendered Harm

The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), deployed in the former Yugoslavia between 1992 and 1995, occupied a distinctive position in the evolution of post-Cold War peacekeeping. Unlike Cambodia, where debates primarily concerned the social consequences of peacekeeping presence, Bosnia confronted the international community with systematic campaigns of ethnic cleansing, mass displacement, detention camps, and widespread sexual violence. The Bosnian conflict fundamentally challenged prevailing assumptions regarding the nature of contemporary warfare and exposed significant limitations in traditional peacekeeping doctrines.

One of the most important legacies of the Bosnian war was the international recognition of conflict-related sexual violence as a matter of international peace and security. Investigations conducted by international organizations, human rights groups, and later international tribunals documented extensive patterns of rape, sexual enslavement, forced pregnancy, and other forms of gender-based violence. These practices were not isolated incidents but formed part of broader strategies of terror, displacement, and ethnic domination (Ní Aoláin et al., 2011).

The emergence of such evidence challenged longstanding assumptions embedded within traditional security thinking. For decades, dominant approaches to international security had prioritized military confrontation, territorial control, and interstate violence, and gender-based violence was routinely treated as a secondary humanitarian concern rather than a core security issue. The Bosnian conflict exposed the inadequacy of this distinction, as sexual violence emerged not as a by-product of war but as a strategic instrument of conflict itself.

Within this context, UNPROFOR operated under significant institutional constraints. Established as a peacekeeping mission rather than an enforcement operation, the mission was guided by principles of consent, impartiality, and limited use of force. These principles had been developed during an era in which peacekeeping was primarily conceived as a mechanism for monitoring ceasefires between states. Bosnia, however, presented a markedly different environment characterized by fragmented authority structures, deliberate targeting of civilians, and systematic violations of international humanitarian law.

A growing body of scholarship has argued that traditional interpretations of neutrality created significant challenges for responding to gendered harms during the conflict. In practice, institutional priorities frequently focused on ceasefire monitoring, humanitarian access, and negotiations among political and military elites. Violence experienced primarily by women often received less sustained institutional attention despite its scale and strategic significance (Shepherd, 2008).

This dynamic is particularly important for understanding the relationship between militarized masculinity and peacekeeping governance. Militarized organizational cultures tend to prioritize threats that correspond to conventional understandings of security, including armed attacks, territorial control, and military capabilities. Harms that disproportionately affect women and girls may be perceived as humanitarian or social concerns rather than central security issues. As a consequence, institutional resources and political attention are often allocated unevenly.

The Bosnian case therefore illustrates how gendered assumptions can shape organizational perceptions of security. Feminist security scholars have long argued that security institutions do not merely respond to threats; they also participate in defining which threats are considered significant.

Through this process, certain forms of violence become highly visible while others remain marginalized. The treatment of conflict-related sexual violence during the Bosnian war provides a powerful example of this phenomenon.

The issue became even more complex in the post-conflict period. Following the Dayton Peace Agreement, a range of international organizations, military contingents, humanitarian agencies, and private contractors became involved in reconstruction efforts throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. Subsequent investigations revealed the expansion of trafficking networks and the exploitation of women through prostitution and organized criminal activities operating across parts of the region.

Although responsibility varied significantly among actors, and many international personnel fulfilled their duties with professionalism and integrity, evidence emerged indicating that some members of the international presence, including individuals associated with peace support and stabilization efforts, were linked to environments in which trafficking and sexual exploitation flourished (Simm 2013). These revelations generated profound concerns regarding accountability and institutional responsibility.

Importantly, feminist analyses caution against reducing these developments to questions of individual criminality alone. The more significant issue concerns the broader institutional environment within which exploitation occurred. International personnel enjoyed considerable economic resources, legal protections, and mobility relative to local populations struggling to rebuild their lives after years of conflict. Such asymmetries created conditions in which exploitative relationships could emerge and persist.

The concept of militarized masculinity helps illuminate why institutions frequently struggle to recognize these dynamics as matters requiring systematic intervention. Military and security organizations often emphasize operational effectiveness, hierarchy, discipline, and mission accomplishment. While these attributes may contribute to organizational cohesion, they may also discourage critical reflection on informal power relations that extend beyond formal mission mandates.

In Bosnia, the prioritization of political stabilization and security sector concerns sometimes overshadowed attention to gendered forms of insecurity. Issues such as trafficking, sexual exploitation, and the long-term consequences of conflict-related sexual violence frequently occupied a secondary position within broader peacebuilding agendas (True 2012). Consequently, institutional responses often remained reactive rather than preventive.

The Bosnian experience also reveals important limitations in the concept of impartiality itself. Prominent scholars in this field have argued that impartiality should not be confused with indifference. Treating all forms of violence as equivalent can inadvertently obscure the specific vulnerabilities experienced by particular groups. In situations where women are disproportionately affected by systematic forms of abuse, neutrality may unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities if institutions fail to recognize the gendered nature of violence (Puechguirbal, 2010).

From this perspective, the challenge confronting UNPROFOR was not simply operational but epistemological. The mission was shaped by security frameworks that had not yet fully integrated gender-sensitive understandings of conflict. Consequently, institutional actors often lacked the conceptual tools necessary to identify gender-based violence as a strategic issue directly relevant to mission effectiveness and civilian protection.

The significance of the Bosnian case extends far beyond the conflict itself. Experiences in Bosnia con-

tributed to a broader transformation in international security discourse during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Growing recognition of conflict-related sexual violence influenced developments within international criminal law, human rights advocacy, and ultimately the emergence of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 can be understood, in part, as a response to lessons derived from conflicts such as Bosnia and Rwanda, where gendered dimensions of violence had been systematically underestimated.

For the purposes of this study, Bosnia provides a critical illustration of how militarized masculinity influences peacekeeping legitimacy through institutional prioritization. The central issue was not that peacekeepers directly caused widespread sexual violence; rather, institutional cultures shaped the ways in which gendered harms were perceived, categorized, and addressed. By privileging conventional understandings of security, peacekeeping institutions struggled to respond effectively to forms of violence that did not fit traditional military frameworks.

The case therefore, supports the broader argument advanced in this article. Militarized masculinity operates not only through individual behavior but also through organizational assumptions concerning what constitutes security, whose experiences are considered relevant, and which forms of harm warrant institutional attention. These processes influence accountability practices, shape interactions with local populations, and ultimately affect the legitimacy of peacekeeping operations themselves.

In comparative perspective, Bosnia represents a transitional moment in the evolution of international peacekeeping. Whereas Cambodia exposed the consequences of institutional blindness toward gendered vulnerabilities, Bosnia revealed the limitations of traditional security paradigms for understanding conflict-related sexual violence. Together, these experiences laid important foundations for subsequent reforms associated with gender mainstreaming, civilian protection, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

5.4. MONUC in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Sexual Exploitation, Accountability Failures, and the Emergence of Institutional Reform

The United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), established in 1999, represents one of the most significant turning points in the history of United Nations peacekeeping. Unlike earlier controversies surrounding peacekeeping conduct, allegations emerging from MONUC did not merely generate criticism of individual personnel. Instead, they triggered a fundamental re-evaluation of institutional accountability mechanisms within the United Nations system itself. For this reason, MONUC constitutes a critical case for understanding how militarized institutional cultures, accountability failures, and legitimacy crises interact within contemporary peacekeeping operations.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo presented an exceptionally complex operational environment. Following years of armed conflict involving state forces, rebel movements, regional actors, and local militias, the country experienced widespread insecurity, displacement, economic collapse, and severe humanitarian suffering. By the early 2000s, MONUC had become one of the largest and most challenging peacekeeping missions ever deployed by the United Nations.

The mission operated within a context characterized by profound asymmetries of power. Peacekeepers possessed access to resources, mobility, salaries, and legal protections that were unavailable to

many local communities. Large numbers of civilians, particularly women and children, faced extreme poverty, displacement, food insecurity, and limited access to social services. Such conditions produced a social environment in which relationships between international personnel and local populations were inevitably shaped by structural inequalities.

Beginning in 2004, a series of investigations conducted by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) revealed allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving peacekeeping personnel in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Reports documented a range of misconduct, including transactional sex, exploitative relationships involving minors, and allegations of sexual abuse committed by individuals associated with peacekeeping contingents. These findings generated considerable international concern because they appeared fundamentally inconsistent with the normative objectives of peacekeeping missions and the broader humanitarian principles upon which international intervention was justified (United Nations, 2005).

The significance of these allegations extended beyond the specific incidents under investigation. What attracted particular attention was the apparent inability of existing institutional mechanisms to prevent, detect, and respond effectively to misconduct. In many cases, accountability procedures were fragmented across multiple jurisdictions. While peacekeeping missions operated under United Nations authority, criminal jurisdiction frequently remained with troop-contributing countries. As a result, institutional responsibility and legal responsibility were often separated, creating significant obstacles to effective enforcement.

This fragmentation exposed a structural weakness within the architecture of peacekeeping governance. Existing accountability mechanisms had largely been designed for traditional peacekeeping operations in which interactions between military personnel and civilian populations were relatively limited. The multidimensional peacekeeping environments of the post-Cold War era generated new forms of social interaction that existing regulatory frameworks were poorly equipped to address.

From the perspective of feminist security studies, these accountability failures cannot be understood solely as administrative shortcomings. Rather, they reveal deeper institutional assumptions concerning authority, professionalism, and organizational priorities. Militarized institutions often emphasize operational effectiveness, command structures, and mission accomplishment. While these priorities are essential for maintaining organizational cohesion, they may also contribute to the marginalization of issues perceived as peripheral to core security objectives.

The MONUC experience illustrates this dynamic particularly clearly. Prior to the public emergence of the allegations, concerns about exploitation were consigned to a secondary position relative to broader operational challenges such as ceasefire monitoring, disarmament initiatives, civilian protection, and support for political stabilization. Consequently, institutional attention was often directed toward traditional security concerns while social harms affecting vulnerable populations received less systematic scrutiny.

Feminist scholars have argued that such patterns are symptomatic of militarized masculinity operating at the institutional rather than the individual level. Militarized masculinity should not be understood simply as a set of personal attitudes held by peacekeepers; rather, it functions as a broader organizational logic that influences how institutions define priorities, allocate resources, and interpret responsibility (Whitworth, 2004; Westendorf, 2020). Within this framework, threats to operational effectiveness may be treated as urgent security concerns, whereas harms experienced by local wom-

en and girls may be categorized as disciplinary or humanitarian issues.

The consequences of this institutional hierarchy of concerns became increasingly apparent as allegations continued to emerge. Public confidence in the mission suffered significant damage. Media coverage, advocacy campaigns, and criticism from human rights organizations generated growing concerns regarding the credibility of United Nations commitments to human rights, civilian protection, and gender equality.

The resulting legitimacy crisis is particularly important for the argument advanced in this article. Legitimacy in peacekeeping operations is often conceptualized as deriving from Security Council authorization, host-state consent, or successful mandate implementation. The MONUC case demonstrates that legitimacy is also socially constructed through everyday interactions between peacekeepers and local communities. Regardless of formal legal authority, institutions may experience declining legitimacy when they are perceived as failing to uphold the norms they claim to represent.

This dynamic reveals an important causal mechanism linking gendered institutional culture to peacekeeping effectiveness. When allegations of exploitation are inadequately addressed, the consequences extend beyond individual incidents of misconduct. Trust between peacekeepers and local populations may be weakened, cooperation with civilian communities may decline, and the broader credibility of international intervention may be undermined. In this sense, accountability is not merely a legal requirement but an operational necessity.

The growing recognition of these challenges contributed directly to one of the most significant reform initiatives in the history of United Nations peacekeeping. In 2005, Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein submitted the report *A Comprehensive Strategy to Eliminate Future Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*. Commonly known as the Zeid Report, the document represented a landmark effort to address the institutional dimensions of misconduct within peacekeeping operations (United Nations, 2005).

The report marked a significant departure from earlier approaches. Rather than treating incidents of exploitation as isolated disciplinary problems, the Zeid Report emphasized systemic vulnerabilities within peacekeeping institutions. It identified deficiencies in training, reporting procedures, investigative mechanisms, command responsibility, victim assistance, and accountability frameworks. Importantly, the report acknowledged that organizational culture played a crucial role in shaping institutional responses to misconduct.

From a theoretical perspective, the Zeid Report can be interpreted as an implicit recognition of many concerns raised by feminist security scholars (Karim and Beardsley, 2017). Although the report did not explicitly employ concepts such as militarized masculinity, it nevertheless highlighted the need to address structural and institutional conditions that facilitated exploitation. The reform agenda therefore reflected a growing understanding that accountability required organizational transformation rather than merely punitive measures directed at individual offenders.

The MONUC experience also coincided with the broader consolidation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda following the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325. Consequently, debates regarding sexual exploitation and abuse increasingly became linked to questions of gender mainstreaming, representation, and institutional reform. The issue was no longer understood solely as a matter of misconduct; it became a test of the United Nations' capacity to integrate gender-sensitive principles into peacekeeping governance.

In comparative perspective, MONUC differs from both Cambodia and Bosnia in one crucial respect. Whereas earlier missions revealed institutional blind spots and conceptual limitations, the Democratic Republic of the Congo generated a crisis severe enough to produce significant institutional change. The mission therefore represents a transitional moment in which the legitimacy costs of accountability failures became impossible to ignore.

The case provides strong support for the central argument of this article. The persistence of exploitation cannot be explained exclusively through individual misconduct, nor can institutional reform be understood solely through legal analysis. Rather, the interaction between gendered organizational cultures, unequal power relations, and fragmented accountability structures shaped both the emergence of the crisis and the subsequent reform process.

Ultimately, the significance of MONUC lies not only in the misconduct that occurred but also in the lessons that emerged from institutional responses to it. The mission demonstrated that legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness are deeply interconnected dimensions of peacekeeping governance. It further revealed that efforts to strengthen peacekeeping effectiveness must address not only operational capacities but also the gendered institutional cultures through which authority is exercised. In this respect, MONUC serves as the clearest empirical illustration of the causal pathway proposed in this study: militarized institutional cultures contribute to accountability deficits, accountability deficits generate legitimacy crises, and legitimacy crises ultimately shape the effectiveness and future evolution of peacekeeping operations.

5.5. Comparative Analysis: Militarized Masculinity as a Structural Factor

The three cases reveal important contextual differences, yet several common patterns emerge.

First, each mission operated in environments characterized by significant power differentials between peacekeepers and local populations. Second, institutional responses initially focused on individual misconduct rather than structural conditions. Third, accountability mechanisms often lagged behind operational expansion. Finally, concerns regarding gender inequality repeatedly emerged as issues affecting mission legitimacy rather than merely disciplinary compliance.

These findings do not suggest that militarized masculinity alone caused sexual exploitation and abuse. Economic vulnerability, weak oversight, legal fragmentation, and conflict-related instability also played important roles. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that militarized institutional cultures function as an enabling condition that shape how power was exercised, how misconduct was interpreted, and how organizations responded to allegations.

Consequently, militarized masculinity should be understood not as a deterministic explanation but as a structural factor that interacts with other institutional and contextual variables to influence peacekeeping outcomes.

6. Discussion: From Militarized Masculinity to Peacekeeping Legitimacy. Toward a Gendered Institutional Theory of Peacekeeping Effectiveness

6.1. Beyond Individual Misconduct: Reframing the Problem

The dominant institutional response to sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping operations has frequently been framed through the language of individual misconduct. Investigations, disciplinary procedures, and policy reforms have often focused on identifying offenders and strengthening pu-

nitive mechanisms (Westendorf, 2020). While such measures remain necessary, the findings of this study suggest that this perspective captures only part of the problem.

Across the three cases examined, namely Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, patterns of exploitation emerged within markedly different political, cultural, and operational environments. The recurrence of similar challenges across these diverse contexts suggests that explanations centered exclusively on individual behavior are insufficient. If misconduct were simply the product of individual deviance, substantial variation would be expected across missions. Instead, the evidence indicates the presence of common institutional mechanisms operating across cases.

The comparative findings therefore encourage a shift in analytical focus from individual actors to institutional structures. The central question is thus not merely why certain individuals engaged in exploitative behavior, but why peacekeeping institutions repeatedly struggled to recognize, prevent, and respond effectively to exploitative relationships. This distinction is significant because it transforms misconduct from a disciplinary issue into a governance problem.

From this perspective, the most significant finding of the study is not the existence of misconduct itself but the persistence of institutional vulnerabilities that allowed misconduct to emerge, remain insufficiently addressed, and ultimately undermine mission legitimacy.

6.2. Militarized Masculinity as an Institutional Logic

The findings support a reconceptualization of militarized masculinity as an institutional logic rather than a set of individual characteristics.

Much of the existing literature associates militarized masculinity with traits such as aggression, dominance, emotional restraint, or risk-taking behavior (Connell, 2005; Enloe, 2014; Whitworth, 2004). While these characteristics remain analytically useful, the case studies suggest that militarized masculinity operates most powerfully through organizational processes.

In each mission examined, institutional priorities consistently privileged forms of expertise associated with traditional security thinking. Operational effectiveness, force protection, command cohesion, ceasefire monitoring, and political stabilization received substantial organizational attention. By contrast, gendered vulnerabilities, exploitative social relations, and everyday insecurities affecting local populations were often treated as secondary concerns.

This pattern reveals that militarized masculinity is embedded within institutional understandings of what counts as a security problem. Rather than simply shaping behavior, it shapes perception. Institutions influenced by militarized logics tend to privilege threats that can be measured through conventional security indicators while marginalizing harms that emerge through social relationships and structural inequalities.

The Cambodian case illustrated this process through institutional indifference toward unequal power relations surrounding transactional sexual economies. Bosnia demonstrated how traditional security paradigms struggled to recognize conflict-related sexual violence as a central security concern. MONUC revealed how accountability mechanisms remained underdeveloped until legitimacy costs became impossible to ignore.

Taken together, these cases indicate that militarized masculinity functions not only through coercion but also through what may be termed selective institutional visibility. Certain harms become legible to organizations while others remain at the margins. This process of differential visibility constitutes

one of the primary mechanisms through which gendered power relations are reproduced within peacekeeping operations.

6.3. Accountability as a Mediating Variable

A second theoretical insight emerging from the analysis concerns the role of accountability.

Existing scholarship often treats accountability as an independent institutional objective. Discussions generally focus on reporting procedures, disciplinary frameworks, investigative mechanisms, and legal jurisdiction. While these issues remain important, the present study suggests that accountability occupies a more complex position within peacekeeping governance.

The comparative evidence indicates that accountability functions as a mediating mechanism linking organizational culture to institutional legitimacy.

This relationship can be conceptualized as follows:



Figure 2. The accountability functions linkage

Source: The authors

Under this framework, accountability mechanisms are more than technical instruments for enforcing compliance; they also embody institutional assumptions about responsibility, authority, and vulnerability. When militarized organizational cultures prioritize operational effectiveness over social accountability, misconduct allegations tend to be handled as isolated disciplinary matters. In contrast, institutions that view gendered power relations as essential to mission effectiveness are more likely to implement proactive accountability systems.

The MONUC case provides particularly strong evidence for this argument. Institutional reforms accelerated not simply because misconduct occurred, but because failures of accountability generated broader legitimacy crises. Accountability therefore emerges not only as a governance mechanism but also as a source of institutional credibility.

This finding suggests that future peacekeeping reforms should conceptualize accountability as a core component of operational effectiveness rather than an external regulatory requirement.

6.4. Legitimacy as a Socially Constructed Outcome

A third contribution concerns the concept of legitimacy itself. Mainstream peacekeeping scholarship has traditionally conceptualized legitimacy in relation to legal authorization, host-state consent, or successful mandate implementation (Bellamy, Williams, & Griffin, 2010). Although these dimensions remain important, the findings suggest that legitimacy is also produced through everyday social interactions between peacekeeping institutions and local communities.

The three case studies demonstrate that legitimacy cannot be reduced to formal legal authority. Peacekeeping operations may hold robust legal mandates yet still face declining credibility among local populations, emphasizing the importance of local perceptions and everyday governance. However, the present study extends these arguments by demonstrating that legitimacy is fundamentally gendered.

Gendered legitimacy denotes the extent to which security institutions are perceived as capable of protecting individuals from unequal and exploitative power relations. From this perspective, allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse are not merely reputational problems; they challenge the normative foundations upon which peacekeeping authority is based.

When institutions fail to address gendered harms effectively, they undermine their own claims to impartiality, protection, and moral leadership. Legitimacy deficits therefore emerge not only through operational failure but also through failures of institutional responsibility.

6.5. Toward a Gendered Institutional Theory of Peacekeeping Effectiveness

The principal theoretical contribution of this article is the development of what may be termed a Gendered Institutional Theory of Peacekeeping Effectiveness.

Traditional approaches generally explain peacekeeping effectiveness in terms of military capabilities, mandate design, resource availability, political support, or operational performance. Feminist scholarship, by contrast, has emphasized gendered power relations and institutional inequalities (Heathcote, 2018).

The findings of this study suggest that these perspectives should be integrated rather than treated as competing explanations.

The proposed framework identifies four interconnected mechanisms:

1. **Militarized Institutional Culture** shapes organizational perceptions of security and vulnerability.
2. **Power Asymmetries** between peacekeepers and local populations create opportunities for exploitation and unequal social relations.
3. **Accountability Mechanisms** mediate the relationship between organizational culture and institutional responses to misconduct.
4. **Legitimacy Outcomes** influence the broader effectiveness of peacekeeping operations by shaping trust, cooperation, and institutional credibility.

The resulting causal pathway can be summarized as follows:



Figure 3. The pathway of Peacekeeping Effectiveness

Source: The authors

Importantly, the model does not claim that militarized masculinity is the sole cause of misconduct or institutional failure. Economic inequality, post-conflict instability, legal fragmentation, and political constraints remain significant explanatory variables. Rather, the framework identifies militarized institutional culture as an enabling condition that shapes how institutions perceive, interpret, and respond to these challenges (Shepherd, 2021).

This approach bridges a longstanding divide between feminist security studies and mainstream

peacekeeping research. Instead of treating gender as an additional variable, the framework positions gendered institutional dynamics at the center of explanations of peacekeeping effectiveness.

6.6. Implications for Future Research

The theoretical model developed here opens several avenues for future research.

First, future studies should examine whether reforms adopted after the Zeid Report successfully altered institutional cultures or merely improved compliance mechanisms. Second, comparative research could investigate whether missions with higher levels of female participation demonstrate different patterns of accountability and legitimacy. Third, scholars should explore the relationship between local perceptions of legitimacy and institutional responses to gender-based harms.

More broadly, future research should move beyond the question of whether gender matters in peacekeeping and focus instead on how gendered institutional dynamics shape the effectiveness of international intervention itself.

Viewed in this way, gender is not a peripheral concern within peacekeeping governance. It is one of the mechanisms through which authority, legitimacy, and effectiveness are produced and contested.

7. Conclusion

This article examined the influence of militarized masculinity on United Nations peacekeeping operations between 1988 and 2005. Drawing upon feminist security studies and a qualitative analysis of the UNTAC, UNPROFOR, and MONUC missions, the study investigated how gendered institutional cultures shaped accountability practices, interactions with local populations, and perceptions of mission legitimacy.

The findings indicate that misconduct within peacekeeping operations cannot be fully explained through individual-level accounts. Rather, organizational cultures, institutional norms, and structural power asymmetries played an important role in shaping both the emergence of exploitative practices and the effectiveness of institutional responses. Across the three cases, recurring patterns of unequal power relations, limited oversight, and delayed accountability contributed to legitimacy challenges that extended beyond individual incidents of misconduct.

The study further demonstrates that militarized masculinity influenced peacekeeping operations not simply through interpersonal behavior but through broader institutional processes. Organizational priorities, professional socialization, and assumptions regarding authority shaped how misconduct was understood, reported, and addressed. These dynamics frequently limited the effectiveness of reforms intended to promote accountability and gender equality.

The analysis also contributes to contemporary debates concerning the Women, Peace and Security agenda. While Resolution 1325 and subsequent reforms represented significant normative advances, the findings suggest that meaningful transformation requires more than increased representation or policy innovation. Sustainable progress depends upon addressing the institutional cultures and structural inequalities that continue to shape security governance.

More broadly, the article argues that legitimacy and accountability should be recognized as core dimensions of peacekeeping effectiveness. Peacekeeping operations cannot achieve their long-term objectives if the populations they are intended to protect perceive them as unresponsive to exploitation and abuse. Strengthening accountability mechanisms, integrating gender perspectives into op-

erational planning, and promoting inclusive institutional cultures are therefore essential not only for protecting vulnerable populations but also for enhancing the credibility and effectiveness of international peacekeeping itself.

Future research should examine whether the reforms introduced after 2005 have succeeded in addressing the structural dynamics identified in this study. Comparative analyses of contemporary missions may provide valuable insights into how the relationship between militarized masculinity, accountability, and legitimacy has evolved in the context of twenty-first-century peacekeeping operations.

Although this study focuses on peacekeeping operations conducted between 1988 and 2005, its findings remain highly relevant to contemporary debates on international peacekeeping. Over the past two decades, the United Nations has implemented significant reforms aimed at addressing sexual exploitation and abuse, strengthening accountability mechanisms, and advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda. These initiatives include the adoption of the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy, enhanced reporting procedures, victim-centered approaches, conduct and discipline units, and expanded gender mainstreaming strategies.

Nevertheless, allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse have continued to emerge in several contemporary missions, including operations in the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Such cases suggest that formal regulatory reforms, while necessary, may be insufficient if underlying institutional cultures remain unchanged. The persistence of these challenges reinforces the central argument of this article: accountability failures are not solely legal or administrative problems but are also shaped by deeper organizational assumptions concerning authority, vulnerability, and responsibility.

The study therefore has implications for ongoing discussions regarding peacekeeping effectiveness. Contemporary evaluations increasingly recognize that mission success cannot be measured solely through ceasefire maintenance, electoral assistance, or mandate implementation. Sustainable effectiveness also depends upon the capacity of peacekeeping institutions to establish and maintain legitimacy among local populations. In this context, gender-sensitive accountability should be viewed not as a supplementary normative objective but as an essential component of operational effectiveness.

The findings further suggest that future peacekeeping reforms should move beyond compliance-oriented approaches and place greater emphasis on institutional transformation. Efforts to increase women's participation in peace operations, strengthen gender advisory structures, improve community engagement, and enhance transparency in accountability processes are likely to contribute not only to gender equality but also to the broader legitimacy and effectiveness of international interventions.

Viewed from this perspective, the historical experiences of UNTAC, UNPROFOR, and MONUC remain more than episodes in the evolution of United Nations peacekeeping. They continue to offer important lessons regarding the relationship between institutional culture, accountability, legitimacy, and the future of international peace and security governance.

Ultimately, the experience of post-Cold War peacekeeping demonstrates that the pursuit of international peace and security cannot be separated from questions of gender, power, and institutional responsibility. Understanding these relationships remains essential for building peacekeeping operations that are not only operationally effective but also socially legitimate, accountable, and responsive to the communities they serve.

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