



THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF STUDYING THE CENTRAL ASIAN VECTOR IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Fayzullaev Sarvarbek Abdusattor Ugli

Independent Researcher Of Tashkent State University Of Oriental Studies, Uzbekistan

ABOUT ARTICLE

Key words: “Heartland” theory, Islamic culture, cultural diplomacy, Constructivism, Islamic-Iranian heritage.

Abstract: In the article, the author analyzed the theoretical aspects of studying the Central Asian vector in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Received: 20.08.2023

Accepted: 25.08.2023

Published: 30.08.2023

INTRODUCTION

The Central Asian region is uniquely positioned at the crossroads of the ancient and now planned Silk Road connecting East and West. The region is also known for its wealth of oil and gas, natural and humanitarian resources, and its vulnerability to the development challenges of neighboring countries in South Asia and the Middle East. It is not for nothing that the region is considered the "Heartland" of the "Eurasian Balkans", which occupies such an important place in the current geopolitical and geoeconomic competition in the world. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, Central Asia is the most turbulent region of the Heartland¹. Also, in her research work, Guli Yuldasheva states that one of the complex problems of the development of the Central Asian region is the clash of many conflicting geopolitical aspirations and interests. He emphasizes that the countries of Central Asia are not only integrated into the world community, but are also experiencing the influence of various subjects of international relations that have promoted their development model². According to Boris Rumer, this new "great game" in the heart of Central Asia is not among the old colonial powers, but the former countries, many of which are just emerging from colonial rule and seeking to define their roles in their regions and the world. It is developing among the countries below³.

THE MAIN PART

¹ "Heartland" - it is a term used in Halford John Mackinder's research paper The Geographical Axis of History. // The Geographical Journal, Vol. 170, No. 4, December 2004. – P. 298-321.

² Guli Yuldasheva. Геополитические процессы в современной Центральной Азии: Иран и США. – Ташкент: "NisoPoligraf", 2018. – С. 7.

³ Boris Z. Rumer. "The Gathering Storm in Central Asia". // Orbis, Vol. 37, No. 1, 1993. – P. 89.

After the collapse of the government of the Soviet Union, the emergence of new republics in Central Asia changed the geopolitics of the northeastern regions of Iran. Thus, the borders of this region, formerly known as the borders of threat, have become an opportunity to reassert Iran's role in a region that has been outside of Iran's direct influence for nearly five centuries. The end of the 8-year war between Iran and Iraq and the independence of Central Asian countries caused Tehran to focus on the republics of this region as a new opportunity. During this period, with the coming to power of five governments, the construction, reforms, principles and planning of relations with the Central Asian region were continued in various political-security, economic and cultural spheres. However, the results were not as expected. Therefore, in this research conducted with a descriptive-analytical approach, we want to study the desired model of Iran's foreign policy in the Central Asian region, and in particular, what are the main interests of Iran in Central Asia in foreign policy?

A large part of Central Asia has long been considered a part of the Iranian lands and the Greater Khorasan region. This multicultural country includes many peoples and different dialects of Persian and Turkish, as well as a mixture of different Iranian and local cultures. This area was also considered a meeting place of different religions. Nevertheless, the influence of Iranian culture has always been strong⁴.

The adoption of Islamic culture and its integration with Iranian civilization left such a glorious history in this land that despite the pressures of the communist era, Iran-friendship and Islamism are still preserved in these areas. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new republics in the region created a suitable perspective for Tehran to play a role. The role of an independent government in the international system is faced with serious problems in front of the republics of the region, which are not ready to take responsibility.

Among its Central Asian neighbors, with a growing economy, access to open waters, convenient transportation routes, and cultural proximity, Iran is an ideal option for developing relations and facilitating the post-independence transition. This topic raised great hopes among Tehran officials to strengthen their presence in Central Asia after 5 centuries. However, three decades after the independence of the Central Asian republics, and compared to rival countries, it is clear that the initial forecasts are too optimistic.

It seems that Iran has not had a coherent and long-term approach to the Central Asian region, despite the efforts made by the United States and the presence of regional rivals. In other words, Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia is a kind of chaos, confusion of approaches and debates. Therefore, in this study, we analyze Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia.

Results and discussion. Research conducted in the field of relations between Iran and Central Asia can be classified as follows:

The first category: studies focused on the field of political security. Hafez Nia studies Iran's geopolitical interests in Central Asia and discusses how it affects Iran's role in the region. Darraj and Antar's articles in this field examine Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia and the Caucasus, emphasizing Tehran's pragmatic approach⁵. Yazdani studied Iran's security approach to the region in his research on the

⁴ Golden Peter B. *Central Asia in World History*. // Oxford University Press, 2011. – P. 125.

⁵ Dorraj Manochehr and Entessar Nader. *Iran's Northern Exposure: Foreign Policy Challenges in Eurasia*. // Center for International and Regional Studies Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, 2013. – P. 10-11.

political and security problems of the Central Asian republics. Kolaee studied the security environment in Central Asia and focused on Tehran's capabilities in this field⁶.

The second category: studies focused on economic issues. In his article, Nurmohamdi considered the economic opportunities in the relations between Iran and Central Asia. In another study, Daman Pak Jami, studying the role of economic diplomacy, focused on the impact of economics on the relations between Iran and Central Asian republics.

Category Three: Studies focused on the cultural field. In the research of Shakohi and Hajiobadi, they listed the cultural connections between Iran and Central Asia and studied the factors of Tehran's inability to use these opportunities. Mirfahrai and Firuzmandi Bandi analyzed Iran's cultural diplomacy in Central Asia in their article⁷. In his research, Kiani studied Iran's public diplomacy towards the Central Asian republics and the opportunities and problems in this field. Basiri and others compared Iran's cultural diplomacy in Central Asia with the two countries of Arabia and Turkey, and discussed Iran's tools and actions in this field⁸. In his research on the role of cultural diplomacy, Zarqani studied the relations between Iran and Uzbekistan⁹. In another study, Andersen focused on the cultural exchange between Iran and Tajikistan¹⁰. The conducted studies are deficient due to the lack of perspective on the priorities of Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia.

Therefore, the current study seeks to achieve a unique systemic role in Iran's foreign policy in the region by examining the variables that influence Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia.

Constructivism and foreign policy: Constructivism entered the field of international relations in the early 1990s. This theory, put forward against the materialist theory of the mainstream of international relations, rejects rationalist views and presents a logical-social perspective to world politics that emphasizes the importance of normative, material structures and their role in the formation of identity. The theory of constructivism has a new perspective in political analysis, emphasizing the social essence of activists and focusing on how their personality is formed. In the constructivist approach, people's identities, norms, and culture play an important role in world politics, and the interests of governments are influenced by cultural norms and interactions.

Constructivism attempts to examine the uniqueness of each state and how factors such as culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, race, and nationalism affect foreign policy¹¹.

In this way, constructivism is the only paradigm that considers culture as a factor in understanding international relations. Since the 1990s, with the development of the theory of constructivism, cultural studies has expanded in international relations. Constructivism emphasizes culture and identity as

⁶ Kolaee Elaheh. Iran's Foreign Policy in Central Asia, Eastern Vector: Issues and new o- Portunities. // Political and international a- Proaches, 2020. – P. 170.

⁷ Mirfakhrai Sidhsan and Firouzmandi Bandpi Majid. Cultural Diplomacy of Iran in Central Asia and the Caucasus, opportunities and Challenges. // Central Eurasian Studies, Volume 10, Number 2, 2016. – P. 433-434.

⁸ Basiri Mohammadali and colleagues. Comparison of cultural diplomacy of Iran and Turkey in Central Asia. // Contemporary political essays, number 2, 2019. – P. 29-63.

⁹ Zarghani Seyed Hadi and colleagues. The Importance of the Role and Diplomacy of Culture in Expanding the Relations between Iran and Uzbekistan. // Contemporary Political Research, Number 2, 2019. – P. 56-31.

¹⁰ Anderson Lukas. Iran's New Cultural Nationalism: Iranian cultural diplomacy in Tajikistan. // Central Asian Affairs, 6, 1, 2019. – P. 10.

¹¹ Khodaverdi Hassan and Shahmohammadi Yosef. The Role of Culture in International Relations Theories. // International Journal of Political Science, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2017. – P. 9.

constructs of international politics, and the field of foreign policy must be understood in relation to culture¹².

Cultural diplomacy, which prioritizes semantic components in foreign policy, can play a major role in implementing a constructivist approach to foreign policy. The beginning of cultural diplomacy in modern international politics dates back to the years after the First World War. All the great powers of the time (the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy) developed public relations as part of a new diplomatic behavior aimed at reducing unfavorable images of their countries.

This type of diplomacy is based on the exchange of cross-cultural ideas, information, arts, and other aspects of culture between nations to strengthen mutual understanding. Foreign policy culture and behavior can be evaluated as a set of customs, beliefs, values and symbols that are passed from generation to generation through socialization. In fact, this is a type of mutual culture between members of society. A common culture between different peoples and countries can treat political issues between these countries as a mutual understanding.

The atmosphere of trust created in cultural diplomacy in relations between the two countries is more stable than economic and political relations and can strengthen intergovernmental cooperation in various fields. This approach is not only limited to the cultural sphere, but it can be the basis for many political, security and economic treaties and agreements¹³.

Emphasizing cultural preferences and priorities in decision-making allows foreign policy to achieve its goals and national interests at the lowest cost by targeting and influencing public opinion. Thus, cultural expansion, culture and cultural invasion are of great importance in the relations between governments and international institutions.

The existence of a common Islamic-Iranian heritage based on a constructivist approach to foreign policy indicates that there are special opportunities in the cultural sphere between Iran and Central Asia, and if appropriate approaches in the form of cultural diplomacy are used, this will have a significant impact on the development of relations between the two sides.

Today, the main goal is to accelerate the development of an effective model with the participation of Iran. Its prospects are not clearly defined, but Iran will play an important role in all the models of the development of the Silk Road that are currently being promoted.

In conclusion, the situation around Central Asia is characterized by the following opposite trends:

1. Geographical, religious and cultural proximity of Muslim countries, the dangers and problems of fundamentalism and terrorism, often related to their territory;
2. Geographical and historical-cultural proximity of Russia and China, the danger of absorption by one of these countries;
3. The military-technical and financial resources of the USA and the EU, their global interests, sometimes do not correspond to the interests of their close regional partners in Central Asia.

Nevertheless, regional preferences and the geopolitical choice of the Central Asian region itself influence the strengthening of the geopolitical status of a certain regional power and, accordingly, determine the new balance of power and the international order.

REFERENCES

¹² Atai Farhad and Sadat Waseizadeh Nasim. From cultural relations to the cultural theory of international relations: a review of the role of culture in international relations. // Political Research Quarterly International, number 15, 2012. – P. 19-46.

¹³ Xu Liang. The effectiveness of cultural diplomacy in state trust building between China and the UK. // Lancaster University, 2018. – 242 p.

1. Guli Yuldasheva. Геополитические процессы в современной Центральной Азии: Иран и США. – Ташкент: “NisoPoligraf”, 2018. – С. 7.
2. Boris Z. Rumer. “The Gathering Storm in Central Asia”. // *Orbis*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 1993. – P. 89.
3. Golden Peter B. *Central Asia in World History*. // Oxford University Press, 2011. – P. 125.
4. Dorraj Manochehr and Entessar Nader. *Iran’s Northern Exposure: Foreign Policy Challenges in Eurasia*. // Center for International and Regional Studies Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar, 2013. – P. 10-11.
5. Kolaee Elaheh. *Iran's Foreign Policy in Central Asia, Eastern Vector: Issues and new opportunities*. // *Political and international approaches*, 2020. – P. 170.
6. Mirfakhrai Sidhsan and Firouzmandi Bandpi Majid. *Cultural Diplomacy of Iran in Central Asia and the Caucasus, opportunities and Challenges*. // *Central Eurasian Studies*, Volume 10, Number 2, 2016. – P. 433-434.
7. Basiri Mohammadali and colleagues. *Comparison of cultural diplomacy of Iran and Turkey in Central Asia*. // *Contemporary political essays*, number 2, 2019. – P. 29-63.
8. Zarghani Seyed Hadi and colleagues. *The Importance of the Role and Diplomacy of Culture in Expanding the Relations between Iran and Uzbekistan*. // *Contemporary Political Research*, Number 2, 2019. – P. 56-31.
9. Anderson Lukas. *Iran’s New Cultural Nationalism: Iranian cultural diplomacy in Tajikistan*. // *Central Asian Affairs*, 6, 1, 2019. – P. 10.
10. Khodaverdi Hassan and Shahmohammadi Yosef. *The Role of Culture in International Relations Theories*. // *International Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2017. – P. 9.
11. Atai Farhad and Sadat Waseizadeh Nasim. *From cultural relations to the cultural theory of international relations: a review of the role of culture in international relations*. // *Political Research Quarterly International*, number 15, 2012. – P. 19-46.
12. Xu Liang. *The effectiveness of cultural diplomacy in state trust building between China and the UK*. // Lancaster University, 2018. – 242 p.