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# **Analysis of the Islamic Republic of Iran - Iraq Relations within the Framework of Complex Interdependence Theory**

*Mohammad Ali Rafiei*

## **Abstract**

The bilateral relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Iraq, despite fluctuations and political-security crises, have experienced a growing trend of expanding interactions. It can be argued that over the past two decades, signs of a transformation in the pattern of relations from a security-centered approach to complex, multidimensional, and interwoven interactions have become evident. The purpose of this study is to explain bilateral relations and their transformation based on the theory of complex (and asymmetric) interdependence. The main research question is: how can the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq become resilient against endogenous vulnerabilities and third-party threats? The research hypothesis is that, in order to strengthen the resilience of bilateral relations through multidimensional interdependence, policies should focus on institutionalizing economic relations, expanding cultural and social cooperation, promoting environmental and service-oriented collaborations, reinforcing institutional ties while reducing personalization, and enhancing resilience against third-party states. These measures aim to: (1) create multidimensional and balanced relations; (2) move interdependence from an asymmetric toward a more symmetric form; (3) ensure that interactions become institutional, public, and transparent, rather than merely individual or security-based; and (4) establish new structures to deter external actors from undermining the relationship. In this way, greater trust will be generated on the Iraqi side, broader cooperation across all fields will emerge, and the vulnerability of bilateral relations will be significantly reduced. This article employs a descriptive-explanatory method, with data collected through library sources, academic journals, and reliable online platforms.

## **Keywords**

The Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Foreign Policy, Interdependence Theory, Bilateral Relations

## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

Over the past two decades the bilateral relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Iraq has evolved from a predominantly security-centric interaction into a dense, multidimensional web of state, societal, economic, and transnational linkages. This study asks how Iran–Iraq relations can be made resilient to endogenous vulnerabilities and third-party pressures, and it advances the hypothesis that deliberate institutionalization and sectoral diversification — pursued through policies that transform asymmetrical dependencies into more balanced interdependence — will reduce bilateral vulnerability. The conceptual frame rests on Complex Interdependence Theory, explicitly foregrounding three of its core premises for this regional case: the decline in the utility of military force to resolve interstate problems, the existence of multiple channels of interaction that connect state and non-state actors, and the absence of a strict hierarchy among issues so that economic, environmental, social, and cultural domains can be as consequential as security questions. Building on these premises, the study treats linkage strategies, agenda-setting, and the growth of transnational and trans-governmental relations as the principal political processes through which interdependence either generates resilience or crystallizes fragility.

### **Methodology**

This article employs a descriptive-explanatory method, with data collected through library sources, academic journals, and reliable online platforms.

### **Literature Review**

The core body of literature on Iran–Iraq relations, encompassing realist and balance-of-threat approaches, multi-level and elite analyses, soft-border and soft-power studies, as well as integrative mappings, provides the foundation for the conceptual framework of this research. Within this body of work, four overlapping streams can be identified. The first includes

realist and balance-of-threat analyses, which emphasize Iran's active engagement in Iraq and the security posture it has adopted in response to regional threats. The second highlights elite- and leadership-focused studies, showing how shifts in Iraq's political leadership and domestic landscape shape Baghdad's foreign policy orientations. A third stream concerns soft-border and informal trade analyses, which underscore the role of cross-border exchanges and religious tourism in sustaining Iran's socio-cultural influence. Finally, integrative studies attempt to combine these diverse elements, though they frequently suffer from the lack of operational indicators and robust field evidence. While acknowledging the diversity of these perspectives, this research situates the central problem within the framework of Complex Interdependence Theory, arguing that the most effective pathway to reducing mutual vulnerability lies in a balanced combination of institutional frameworks, sectoral diversification, and transparency mechanisms.

## **Discussion**

The findings reveal a complex and conditional picture. First, multiple channels — formal state institutions, provincial and municipal contacts, religious networks, private commercial ties, and expert epistemic communities — generate mutual sensitivity but not uniform vulnerability. In energy and infrastructure, Iraq's dependence on Iranian fuel and cross-border logistics creates marked vulnerabilities; in security domains, Iranian sensitivity to instability in Iraq and to the political disposition of Iraqi elites constrains Tehran's options. Second, the decline in the military instrument's utility is observable in practice: while force and coercion retain salience as signaling tools, their capacity to produce lasting policy gains is constrained by entrenched social and economic interlinkages and by international and regional costs, which encourages actors to privilege non-coercive instruments. Third, because there is no clear hierarchy among policy issues, control over the bilateral agenda and the way issues are linked becomes decisive for whether interdependence produces

stability or fragility. Agenda-setting and the politicization of specific topics can work in two directions: they stabilize relations when positive linkage bundles complementary domains, but they destabilize relations when issues are securitized or instrumentalized, thereby turning sectoral asymmetries into coercive leverage. The effectiveness of any linkage strategy is conditional: powerful actors may attempt to tie disparate issues to extend influence, yet in conditions of complex interdependence—where no single issue routinely dominates—such attempts are uncertain, and agenda shifts driven by domestic actors or third-party interventions can rapidly reorder which domain defines the bilateral relationship.

Transnational and trans-governmental relations emerge as critical political processes. Networks of religious authorities, academic exchanges, provincial administrations, and cross-border business associations mediate conflicts and create routinized problem-solving channels that are less vulnerable to national-level political swings. Where such networks are robust and formally linked to state institutions through transparent mechanisms, they increase the costs of unilateral rupture and support the institutionalization of cooperation. Conversely, personalization of state-to-state ties and the privileging of informal patronage channels amplify fragility.

The theoretical–analytical findings can be summarized as follows: First, the Iran–Iraq relationship should be seen as *multi-dimensional*, comprising a network of overlapping and sometimes competing interactions. Second, the current dependence is *asymmetric*—Iraq is significantly more sensitive and vulnerable in economic and energy dimensions, while Iran maintains more structural leverage in security and political spheres. Third, the durability of the relationship is fully contingent on institutionalization: when exchanges are formalized, transparent, and embedded in long-term agreements, it becomes possible to adjust asymmetries and reduce the political and economic costs of disruption. These conclusions align with the work’s argument that institutional building (e.g., strategic councils, joint energy and transit commissions, and

co-managed religious-tourism bodies) is essential for transforming dependence from fragile to resilient.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Iran–Iraq relations are best understood as an instance of complex interdependence (characterized by multiple channels, the absence of a strict issue-hierarchy, and a declining utility of military force) so resilience cannot be achieved through security measures alone. The study explicitly advocates “de-personalizing” relations and institutionalization as a strategy for mitigating asymmetry. Building durable resilience therefore requires deliberate institutionalization, sectoral diversification, greater symmetry of dependencies, transparent transnational and trans-governmental links, and positive linkage strategies that bundle economic, environmental, and cultural cooperation. Practical obstacles include domestic political volatility, sanctions, and the politicization of specific issues, yet adopting long-term economic and energy accords, organized pilgrimage and provincial cooperation, and a permanent bilateral council would reduce third-party leverage and increase mutual trust. Empirically, the next step is to operationalize measurable indicators and apply mixed methods to test whether institutionalization and symmetric interdependence in fact lower vulnerability and increase stability.

# **Examining the Possibility of Change in Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Policy towards the European Union in the 14<sup>th</sup> Administration based on the Kingdon model**

*Mehdi Abbaszadeh Fathabadi  
Hanieh Talebizadeh Sardari*

## **Abstract**

Given the developments in global politics and changes in strategic situations, examining Iran-EU relations in different periods requires a detailed and comprehensive analysis. These relations have been affected by numerous factors such as sanctions, Iran's nuclear program, and humanitarian issues, and have been challenged at different times. In this regard, the election of Masoud Pezeshkian as President of the Islamic Republic of Iran could be a sensitive and important period for these relations. His approach to foreign policy may be an opportunity to improve relations with the European Union and create a positive atmosphere for dialogue and cooperation. The aim of the present study is to examine the possibility of change in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the European Union based on John Kingdon's multiple currents theoretical model and using the content analysis method. The main question of the article is: How is the possibility of change in Iran's foreign policy towards the European Union under the Pezeshkian government based on the Kingdon model? The research findings show that in the period under discussion, using the analysis of the contents of existing texts and works, there is analytical evidence that the problem stream, the political stream, and the political stream accompanied the opening of a window of opportunity for change in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, despite the existing opportunities, serious obstacles have also cast a heavy shadow on the relations between the two sides.

## **Keywords**

Foreign Policy, Islamic Republic of Iran, European Union, Pezeshkian, Change

## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

The coming to power of the 14th government and the approach of the Pezeshkian government regarding the revival of interaction with the West to resolve the nuclear issue and lift international sanctions against Iran are worthy of reflection. The election of Pezdekian as the President of Iran created a vision of change and evolution in Iran's foreign policy. The present study seeks to examine the possibility of change in Iran's foreign policy towards the European Union during the Pezdekian period. In this study, the analysis of Iran's foreign policy towards the European Union has been conducted based on John Kingdon's theoretical model of multiple currents. Accordingly, the main question of the study is: What is the possibility of change in Iran's foreign policy towards the European Union in the Pezdekian government based on Kingdon's theoretical model?

### **Theoretical Framework**

One of the models that is widely used in analyzing how policy is determined, formulated, and implemented is Kingdon's multiple streams model. The model considers the formation and implementation of policies to be the result of the combination of three main streams: the problem stream, the policies stream, and the politics stream. According to Kingdon, the intersection of the three streams opens a window for problem solving and decision-making, and policy is achieved through their mutual influence. This model deals with policymaking and decision-making in ambiguous and uncertain conditions. A multi-level examination of the policymaking process allows the factors, components, and streams that play a role in policymaking to be easily examined and analyzed.

### **Method**

In order to achieve the main objective of the research, first, using library resources, through research keywords, Persian and Latin sources in the form of books, articles, and news and analytical sites, sources were searched, and after reading and reviewing, reliable and relevant sources were selected based on theoretical sampling, and using thematic analysis method, the main themes were identified. In the coding stage, to adapt the theoretical model to the

research topic, the codes were identified and categorized based on the key concepts of the theoretical model to reach the "thematic saturation" stage.

### **Finding**

In fact, public dissatisfaction due to economic and livelihood problems, which in turn were caused by the Western international sanctions against Iran, in the form of a problem stream caused the idea or solution of interaction with the West as one of the foreign policy strategies to solve the problem of sanctions to prevail in the policy stream. And finally, the public tendency to change and reform foreign policy to solve problems emerged in the form of a politics stream, and the result was a tendency towards the reformist stream and the election of Pezdikian as president. By merging the three streams, a political window was opened for interaction and improvement of relations with the West, including the European Union. At this stage, political entrepreneurs in the field of diplomacy, including Araqchi, Takht-Ravanchi and Gharibabadi, were employed in the new government, and through consultations, the preparations for changing foreign policy were prepared by gaining support at the popular and elite levels. Currently, nuclear talks with the European troika are proceeding slowly, although the obstacles and challenges are much greater than the opportunities, and the shadow of the obstacles and challenges is very heavy and widespread.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, it should be said that with the new approach of the 14th government in foreign policy and relations, a new opportunity has been created for greater interaction with the Western world, especially the reconstruction of Iran's relations with Europe. Regarding the prospects for future relations between Iran and the European Union, it can be said that without an internal consensus on a sustainable approach based on de-escalation in Iran's foreign policy towards the West and Europe, in the absence of serious and comprehensive talks between the two sides on the issues of dispute, and also in the case of tense relations with the United States, one cannot hope for a sustainable and long-term improvement in Iran-Europe relations. Unfortunately, it should be said that the Israeli war against Iran in June 2025 has also intensified the atmosphere of tension in Iran-West relations and, with increasing distrust, has reduced the hope for improving relations in the short term.

# **Comparative Analysis of Soft Power in the Foreign Policy of the I.R.Iran and Turkey in West Asia with an Emphasis on Palestine**

*Danyal Rezapoor  
Mohammad Hossein Nikzad*

## **Abstract**

The West Asian region is one of the most important international regions that has faced profound and widespread changes in recent decades. Considering the increasing importance of culture in international relations and the impact of this component on countries, especially the effectiveness of the cultural elements of Iran and Turkey, the authors have raised the fundamental question within the framework of Joseph Nye's soft power theory and with a comparative approach: What is the impact of Iran's and Turkey's soft power on their foreign policy towards the Palestinian issue and what are its limitations? The main hypothesis of the research is that Iran's soft power is mainly manifested in the Palestinian resistance layer (such as supporting resistance groups through public diplomacy and cultural media), while Turkey's soft power is more focused on the diplomacy and economy layer (such as assistance from the Cooperation and Aid Agency and trade exchanges), but both face limitations such as value-practical contradictions and challenges to public absorption. The comparison shows that Iran is more successful in attracting resistance layers (with an impact of 70% based on regional surveys), while Turkey is a leader in economic diplomacy but faces challenges. This research is based on a descriptive-analytical approach and uses qualitative research methods, and information was collected from documentary-library sources and reputable cyberspace websites.

## **Keywords**

Soft power, Palestine, Islamic world, comparative study, foreign policy.

## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

West Asia, often referred to as the Middle East, has long been a focal point of international politics due to its strategic geography, rich energy resources, and dense web of ethno-religious conflicts. Among the numerous conflicts shaping the regional order, the Palestinian question has been one of the most enduring and symbolically significant. Beyond being a humanitarian tragedy and a site of recurrent wars, Palestine represents a political, cultural, and ideological touchstone for many states in the Islamic world. In particular, Iran and Turkey—two major non-Arab powers with deep historical legacies and competing regional ambitions—have consistently engaged with the Palestinian issue not merely as a matter of foreign policy but as an arena for projecting influence and cultivating legitimacy in the wider Islamic world. With the growing importance of “soft power” in global politics, the Palestinian cause has become a crucial testing ground for states seeking to wield influence not only through military or economic means but also through culture, values, and public diplomacy. Joseph Nye’s concept of soft power—the ability to shape the preferences of others through attraction rather than coercion—offers a valuable framework for understanding how Iran and Turkey approach the Palestinian question. Whereas Iran has embedded Palestine into its ideological narrative of resistance against oppression and imperialism, Turkey has often sought to position itself as a pragmatic mediator, humanitarian actor, and defender of Palestinian rights in international fora. This study therefore asks: What is the impact of Iran’s and Turkey’s soft power strategies on their foreign policies toward the Palestinian issue, and what are the limitations of these strategies? The main hypothesis is that Iran’s soft power manifests primarily through its support for the “resistance” dimension of the Palestinian movement—via public diplomacy, media narratives, and direct assistance to groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad—whereas Turkey’s soft power is more concentrated in diplomacy and economics, such as aid provided by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) and trade relations. Nevertheless, both countries face significant challenges, including contradictions between rhetoric and practice, domestic political constraints, and difficulties in sustaining broad-based popular appeal.

## Literature Review

The academic and policy-oriented literature on Iran and Turkey's regional roles provides significant insights but has not systematically compared their respective soft power strategies toward Palestine.

Çevik (2024), in his report *"Turkey's Peace-Building Efforts in West Asia's Ambitions and Constraints within a Changing Regional Order,"* emphasizes Turkey's post-2021 reconciliation initiatives with Syria, Egypt, Israel, and the UAE. He concludes that while Turkey has managed to normalize relations with Egypt and advance cooperation with the UAE, its rapprochement with Syria and Israel remains fragile, largely due to Erdoğan's pendulum-like foreign policy driven by domestic considerations and low mutual trust.

Wastnidge (2024), in *"Strengthening the Resistance: Iran and the Levant in a Multipolar West Asia,"* highlights the centrality of the Levant in Iran's geopolitical strategy, particularly after Hamas's "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation and the unprecedented escalation with Israel. He underscores that Iran's investment in Syria and broader resistance networks forms the backbone of its regional soft power. Similarly, Loft (2024), in *"Iran's Influence in West Asia,"* broadens the scope of concern beyond Iran's nuclear program to include other players in West Asia like Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iraqi militias, the Ansarullah Government in Yemen, and Palestinian factions, all of which serve as conduits of its ideological and cultural soft power.

Cengiz (2022), in *"The Future of Iran-Turkey Relations: Limited Geopolitical Rivalry or Potential Escalation?"* stresses the growing divergence between Tehran and Ankara's regional priorities. Although their rivalry was once tempered by robust trade and pragmatic balancing, Turkey's rapprochement with Israel and Gulf rivals of Iran raises the prospect of intensified competition in Syria, Iraq, and the South Caucasus. Meanwhile, Kural and Erdem (2022) in *"Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy toward Turkey during and after the Arab Spring"* reveal how Turkey's activism during the Arab Spring challenged Saudi Arabia's regional hegemony, illustrating how Ankara has used political change as an opportunity for influence projection. Taken together, these works show that while Iran's resistance strategy and Turkey's reconciliation efforts

have been examined separately, few studies have conducted a comparative analysis focusing on Palestine as a symbolic and practical arena of competition. This study contributes to filling that gap by analyzing how both states deploy soft power resources in relation to Palestine, how these resonate among regional publics, and what structural and domestic constraints limit their effectiveness.

## **Methodology**

This research employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical methodology within the framework of Joseph Nye's theory of soft power. The study relies primarily on secondary sources, including scholarly articles, policy reports, and credible online platforms. Data were collected through documentary and library research, complemented by discourse analysis of media outputs, speeches, and diplomatic communications. The comparative approach provides a systematic way to contrast Iran's ideologically driven, resistance-oriented soft power with Turkey's diplomatically and economically oriented approach. Additionally, the study considers regional public opinion surveys—where available—to assess how these strategies are received among Arab publics. For instance, data cited suggest that Iran enjoys roughly 70% influence among constituencies aligned with the Palestinian resistance, whereas Turkey is more effective in economic diplomacy but faces domestic credibility issues due to authoritarian practices.

## **Discussion**

The findings suggest clear distinctions between Iran's and Turkey's soft power strategies:

### **1. Iran's Soft Power: Resistance and Ideology**

Iran's discourse frames Palestine as a moral and religious obligation tied to the broader struggle against imperialism and Zionism. This framing resonates strongly with resistance groups in Gaza and beyond, enabling Iran to position itself as the "Center of Resistance." Tools of attraction include cultural diplomacy through state media (e.g., Al-Alam, Press TV), religious narratives highlighting justice and martyrdom, and visible

support for armed groups. Moreover, certain economic problems undermine its attractiveness among broader Arab publics.

## **2. Turkey's Soft Power: Diplomacy and Humanitarianism**

Turkey emphasizes its role as a humanitarian actor and diplomatic mediator. Through TİKA and other agencies, Ankara provides development aid in Gaza, supports reconstruction projects, and hosts high-profile diplomatic initiatives advocating Palestinian rights at the UN and OIC. Turkey's cultural appeal, via media exports (notably Turkish television series), further enhances its image. Yet, its credibility is compromised by fluctuating relations with Israel, where periods of harsh rhetoric are followed by pragmatic normalization, leading to perceptions of inconsistency. Additionally, Turkey's domestic political environment—marked by suppression of dissent and polarization—limits the authenticity of its democratic appeal.

## **3. Comparative Dynamics and Limitations**

**Effectiveness:** Iran's soft power is more effective in mobilizing resistance constituencies, while Turkey's resonates more at the diplomatic and economic levels. **Limitations:** Both face contradictions. Iran's revolutionary rhetoric contrasts with its pragmatic statecraft, while Turkey's pro-Palestinian stance clashes with its economic and political dealings with Israel. **Regional Implications:** The Palestinian issue remains both a unifying cause and a field of competition. Iran leverages it to cement the Axis of Resistance, whereas Turkey uses it to expand diplomatic visibility. However, both approaches encounter skepticism, fragmentation of Arab politics, and the overshadowing influence of great-power rivalries in the region.

## **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that Iran and Turkey, despite their shared concern for Palestine, employ divergent soft power strategies rooted in their domestic politics, ideological orientations, and foreign policy priorities. Iran projects soft power primarily through resistance narratives and direct alignment with Palestinian militant groups, gaining credibility among resistant constituencies but facing limits in broader Arab public opinion.

Turkey relies more on diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and cultural exports, achieving visibility in international forums but suffering from credibility gaps due to inconsistent policy and domestic authoritarian practices. Both states encounter certain limitations: contradictions between values and practices, the volatility of regional politics, and the challenge of sustaining genuine attraction rather than rhetoric. Nevertheless, their continued engagement with the Palestinian issue reflects its enduring significance as a stage for regional power projection. By comparing Iran's and Turkey's soft power in relation to Palestine, this study not only contributes to a more nuanced understanding of West Asia's regional dynamics but also highlights the ways in which soft power—though often overshadowed by hard power—remains a vital dimension of foreign policy. In an era of shifting alignments and multipolar competition, the Palestinian question continues to function as both a symbol and a test case for the effectiveness of soft power in shaping political outcomes in West Asia.

# **The Pathology of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Public Diplomacy in Malaysia (1979–2022)**

*Mehdi zadeh -Ali*

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## **Abstract**

Public diplomacy, as a modern tool for advancing foreign policy objectives, plays a key role in shaping public opinion in target countries. This study, focusing on Iran's public diplomacy in Malaysia, seeks to answer the central question: How has Iran's image been formed in Malaysian public opinion, and how effective has it been in advancing Iran's foreign policy goals? The research hypothesis posits that Iran's public diplomacy in Malaysia has not been entirely successful due to structural challenges, a lack of long-term planning, and weaknesses in media engagement. Using the theoretical framework of public diplomacy and a mixed-methodology approach (including library research, interviews, and a survey of 512 individuals), the findings indicate that while Iran's image in Malaysia is generally positive, inefficiencies in institutional coordination and underutilization of cultural and media capacities have hindered optimal outcomes. Through a detailed analysis of these challenges, this study offers practical solutions to enhance Iran's public diplomacy efforts in Malaysia.

## **Keywords**

Malaysia, Iran, Public Diplomacy, Critical Analysis, Iranian Capabilities.

## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

This study critically examines Iran's public diplomacy in Malaysia from 1979 to 2022, assessing its effectiveness in shaping Malaysian public perceptions and advancing Iran's foreign policy objectives. Public diplomacy is positioned as a vital instrument for influencing international opinion, with Iran leveraging cultural, religious, and historical ties as a

regional power. The research addresses a significant gap in existing literature by conducting a focused analysis of structural weaknesses in Iran's public diplomacy apparatus in Malaysia, including institutional fragmentation and media engagement deficits. This investigation aims to provide actionable insights for enhancing Iran's diplomatic outreach in Southeast Asia.

### **Literature Review**

Prior scholarship on Iran-Malaysia relations has largely overlooked systematic analysis of public diplomacy challenges. Existing studies exhibit three critical gaps: First, limited examination of non-state actors and media roles (e.g., Bani Kamal & Hossain's 2016 diaspora study ignored diplomatic implications). Second, absence of comprehensive research on Iran's image within Malaysian public opinion. Third, insufficient scrutiny of structural barriers – while Pourahmadi (2010) explored Iran's soft power generally, Southeast Asian contexts were neglected, and Dehghani (2014) discussed cultural diplomacy without Malaysia-specific operational critiques. This study bridges these research voids through a multidimensional analytical framework.

### **Methodology**

A mixed-methods approach was rigorously implemented. Qualitative methods included archival analysis of Iranian and Malaysian diplomatic records plus semi-structured interviews with three key informants (former diplomats, policy experts, and Iranian expatriates). Quantitative components featured a stratified survey of 512 Malaysian citizens using Likert-scale questionnaires, with sampling designed to represent major ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, Indian), youth demographics (19-34 years), and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Thematic analysis processed qualitative data while descriptive and inferential statistics interpreted survey responses, ensuring methodological triangulation for robust findings.

### **Discussion**

The analysis reveals a complex landscape. While 78.8% of Malaysians perceive Iran as safe and 80.1% express travel interest – indicating positive baseline perceptions – significant operational deficiencies undermine diplomatic effectiveness. Structural flaws include institutional fragmentation among Iran's Embassy, Cultural Office, and media entities, creating uncoordinated efforts. The 10,000+ Iranian diaspora remains underutilized despite their cultural brokerage potential. Media representation proves particularly problematic, with 31.7% of Malaysians relying on Western-sourced news that amplifies negative narratives. Practical shortcomings emerge in abandoned Persian language programs at Malaysian universities and stagnant tourism (only 3,000–5,000 visitors pre-COVID despite high halal tourism compatibility). Notably, Malay respondents demonstrated greater susceptibility to sectarian narratives post-2010, while Chinese and Indian groups maintained historically positive views. These issues stem fundamentally from reactive, personality-driven initiatives rather than sustained strategy and inadequate audience research, exemplified by overlooking Malaysian cultural priorities like Jawi script preservation.

## **Conclusion**

Iran's public diplomacy in Malaysia generates residual goodwill but fails to achieve strategic objectives due to systemic weaknesses. Core issues include poor inter-institutional coordination, ad hoc programming, and media mismanagement. To transform effectiveness, four evidence-based solutions are proposed: First, establish a unified command structure integrating diplomatic, cultural, and media entities. Second, systematically engage the Iranian diaspora as cultural ambassadors. Third, develop media partnerships through journalist exchanges and co-produced content. Fourth, revive Persian language programs and aggressively market halal tourism. Ultimately, success requires institutionalizing these approaches beyond state-centric models, empowering non-state networks to authentically rebuild Iran's image through sustained cultural dialogue. This transition from reactive projects to embedded processes represents the critical pathway for diplomatic revitalization.

# **Institutionalization of National Branding in South Korea's Foreign Policy: Lessons for the Islamic Republic of Iran**

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*Amir Hossein Arabpour*

## **Abstract**

Institutionalization and governance in national branding is one of the important issues in the field of brand management and economic development of countries. National branding means the image and identity that a country creates in the minds of people and global markets. This brand can have a great impact on attracting investment, tourism, exports, and even national culture and identity. Many countries have institutionalized their national brand and international reputation management and have tried to improve their position by establishing non-governmental institutions. Accordingly, the main question of this research is what institutions and structures have South Korea created to manage its national brand? And what approaches do these experiences have for the Islamic Republic of Iran? The research method is based on library resources, descriptive-analytical and used case studies and content analysis. Accordingly, the successful experience of South Korea is examined to examine the structures of national branding and it can be concluded that one of the most important components of national brand management and international reputation of this country is strategic institution building. The experience of this country shows that the Islamic Republic of Iran should establish non-governmental institutions in order to reduce global sensitivity towards the country's national branding by creating coherence and unity of command under a supranational institution.

## **Keywords**

National vision, foreign policy, Islamic Republic of Iran, South Korea.

## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

In the past, marketing was primarily regarded as an efficient tool in the domain of commercial exchanges and the facilitation of product sales. However, with the expansion of its applications, new approaches have emerged in the realm of international policymaking, grounded in the exchange of ideas and values. Within this framework, states have sought to enhance their global influence and power by employing purposeful strategies. A key component of this process is the construction of a nation brand and the management of a country's image on the international stage.

Governments have long been engaged in the development and promotion of their nation brand to external audiences—both nations and states—with the aim of improving their regional and global standing. The name of each country evokes a particular perception and mental image, which may be positive, negative, or neutral. A nation brand refers to the collection of perceptions held by foreign populations about a country's nation identity and competencies, including its culture, politics, trade, tourism, investment, and migration. The purpose of nation branding is to eliminate dominant negative stereotypes and, based on the country's capabilities and behavior in both domestic and foreign policy, to replace them with a desirable image and positive perception of the country.

In order to implement nation branding strategies within society and to safeguard and promote their interests on the international level, states need to create institutions and structures capable of advancing these programs. In essence, nation brand governance materializes through institutional design and structural development. Institutionalization refers to the creation and strengthening of social, economic, and political structures that can contribute to the advancement of nation branding. These institutions may include the government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and civil society. Some countries may have well-designed nation brand programs; however, without a proper structure and model for implementation, these plans remain ineffective. Successful examples, such as South Korea, have managed to develop strategic nation branding programs while

simultaneously establishing institutions and organizations that effectively implement those programs.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, which has been the target of extensive media attacks and a coordinated Iranophobia campaign by its adversaries, must undertake immediate yet strategic measures in response to efforts aimed at damaging its international image. Strategic efforts in the field of nation branding require cohesive governance and institutional development to ensure the proper execution of Iran's nation branding initiatives.

Currently, several institutions unofficially play roles in managing Iran's nation brand. These include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the World Service of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Al-Mustafa International University, among others. However, due to the lack of coordination and the absence of a unified command structure, nation brand-building efforts have become fragmented and increasingly vulnerable. The consequences of this disarray can be observed in the decline of inbound tourism, the production of films that portray Iran in a distorted and negative light, reduced levels of foreign investment, and a growing trend of emigration by Iranian citizens.

Accordingly, the present article aims, first, to examine the experience of selected countries in establishing nation branding institutions and organizations, and second, to provide practical strategies for the Islamic Republic of Iran by drawing on expert interviews.

### **Literature review**

A brand is the best idea that customers have about a product, and a nation brand is the perception of global public opinion about a country. Accordingly, nation branding seeks to create a distinctive image of a nation in the public opinion of other countries in order to counter the phenomenon of globalization and cultural homogeneity of countries, so that the resulting economic, political, and cultural opportunities can be exploited. Keith Deeney, another famous theorist in this field, defines a

nation brand as “a unique and multidimensional combination of elements that differentiates a nation from other nations and includes goals such as increasing tourism, foreign investment, and exports.” In general, nation branding is not a new phenomenon. Countries have always tried to improve their image and help increase nation wealth through symbols, anthems, values, customs, art, and music, etc. They compete with each other globally for resources such as creativity, talent, tourism, and investment. Therefore, branding a country is a key element in determining a country's financial strength, economic growth, and even nation security.

The process of brand building requires long-term and committed actions, and short-term actions do not bring sustainable benefits. Therefore, nation branding should be viewed with a strategic and long-term approach. Although opinions differ on what nation branding refers to, how a nation brand is related to nation branding, and what nation branding should or can do. The root of such confusion lies in the diverse interpretations of nation brands and branding. There, interpretations can be divided into six or seven levels. At level (a), the simplest way is to treat a nation brand as a visual symbol and a slogan. In this way, it can be easily branded and communicated. At level (b), a nation brand is considered as an umbrella brand that encompasses many sectoral brands, for example, in tourism or exports. A nation brand can also be considered as a brand name, ingredient or co-brand, such as the association of Samsung with South Korea and Sony with Japan. At level (c), a nation brand is related to the image, reputation and position of the country, which plays a role quite similar to that of corporate branding. At level (d), nation branding is done with the aim of creating and maintaining the competitiveness of a country. At level (e), the nation brand helps to strengthen the soft power of a country and finally, at level (f), the nation brand is related to nation identity. This link may seem quite clear, but in reality it is very complex. The important point at all these levels is the institution-building and the way in which nation brand strategies are implemented, which is done differently in each country.

## **Methodology**

The approach of this research is qualitative and exploratory. The research method is descriptive-analytical research and case study has been used. The use of case study as one of the research strategies in social science studies, especially in small-scale research, is rapidly spreading. The purpose of case study is to establish a bridge between library studies on the one hand, and real-life information on the other hand, so that scientific principles and theories do not remain behind the walls of the university. Therefore, by reviewing library resources and optimizing the successful experience of South Korea in how to use established institutions and institutions to strengthen the nation brand is examined. It is worth noting that this country was selected for the present study based on the existence of more study and analytical resources.

In addition, to discuss the institutionalization of the nation brand in Iran, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 experts in the field of nation branding. After conducting the interview, it is time to analyze the interview data, which was analyzed using thematic analysis.

## **Discussion**

Many countries have established special institutions and organizations, given the importance of governance and institution-building for managing their national image and brand. Considering previous studies and the limitations of reliable data, South Korea is examined to examine the structures of nation branding, and it can be concluded that one of the most important components of nation brand management and international reputation of this country is strategic institution-building.

Branding activities prior to 2009 lacked institutional coherence, with branding-related tasks scattered across 13 different ministries without central coordination. This institutional inefficiency is also reflected in statistics, with South Korea ranked 33rd out of 50 countries in the 2008 Anholt Nation Brand Index (NBI).

*Establishment of the Creative Content Agency:* The Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) plays a key role in South Korea's cultural and economic development. Formed in 2009 from the merger of several organizations, including the Korea Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), the Korea Game Agency (KOGA), and the Digital Content Business

Group (KIPA), the agency is recognized as the leading authority in supporting Korea's creative industries. The agency's main objective is to facilitate and develop the cultural and creative industries through financing, establishing educational infrastructure, and providing technical support. The agency also focuses specifically on strengthening media content production, nurturing emerging talents, and promoting technological innovation in the music, film, television, video games, and digital media industries.

*Creation of the Presidential Council:* In 2009, the Presidential Council for Nation Branding (PCNB) was established to manage the country's nation image. The council coordinated all branding-related activities in the public and private sectors. Among its most important goals were to enhance Korea's role in the world, promote traditional culture, strengthen international relations, and attract active citizen participation in nation projects. The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism played the largest role in policymaking and strategic decisions were implemented under its supervision. The functions of this council included monitoring the proper implementation of nation brand policies, strengthening cooperation between the public and private sectors, and evaluating branding-related projects in ministries.

*Hallyu:* The Korean Wave or "Hallyu" refers to a cultural phenomenon that describes the global popularity and influence of South Korean cultural products, including K-pop (Korean pop music), television series, films, and video games. This wave has not only played an important role in introducing Korean culture to the world, but has also become a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy and strengthening the country's soft power.

*Iran and the Institutionalization of the Nation Brand:* Analysis of the research findings shows that there is no specific institution or custodian for nation branding in the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the other hand, despite the existence of such numerous institutions, the Islamic Republic of Iran does not have a comprehensive plan and an autonomous custodian institution that can create consensus and fundamental will in most of the country's institutions to manage its global image. To this end, it seems that a council or working group at a

macro level (like the South Korean experience) should be formed to manage the nation brand of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### **Conclusion**

A study of South Korea's experience in institution-building for nation branding showed that the country's successful approach to strengthening the national image and promoting soft power was based on coherent governance and the establishment of specialized institutions, including the nation branding Council under the supervision of the President and the Creative Content Agency. In this model, the aforementioned institutions not only assume the role of planning and leadership, but also enjoy functional coherence and systematic communication with other government and private agencies.

In contrast, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, although numerous institutions directly or indirectly play a role in shaping the country's national image in the international arena, the lack of an institutionalized and coordinated structure for managing the nation brand has led to fragmentation, parallel work, and sometimes conflict in policymaking and activities. For example, the Islamic Culture and Communications Organization, as a subsidiary of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, is responsible for cultural diplomacy and promoting Iran's cultural and religious values internationally, but it lacks a strategic approach in the field of nation brand in its comprehensive sense. The Saadi Foundation also follows part of the process of strengthening Iran's cultural identity by focusing on teaching and promoting the Persian language in the world, but due to the lack of media, economic, and diplomatic connections in its actions, it can not be considered an institution in line with the governance of nation brand. On the other hand, institutions such as the Overseas Deputy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Radio and Television, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, and the Trade Development Organization of Iran also play a role in shaping Iran's image, but the actions of these institutions are mostly uncoordinated, fragmented, and lack a single strategy in the field of nation branding. Also, non-governmental and cultural institutions such as the World Mustafa Society, the Saadi Foundation, the Islamic Denominations Proximity Forum, and other

non-governmental institutions, although active in the form of cultural and religious diplomacy, their structure is more mission-oriented and propaganda-oriented and not based on scientific and sustainable principles of nation branding. Therefore, using the experiences of successful countries, the Islamic Republic of Iran should first form a council or working group at the macro level (such as the South Korean experience) whose members are from the Supreme Leader, the President or the First Vice President, and relevant agencies (including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, the Ministry of Intelligence, the Trade Development Organization, the Islamic Culture and Communications Organization, etc.), in order to manage the nation brand of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Then, by strengthening and supporting foundations and non-governmental institutions, it should strive to expand the scope and activities of these institutions so that some of the international sensitivities towards Iran's government and sovereign actions due to the Iranophobic climate are reduced. In this regard, the role of non-governmental institutions, with a priority on the private and economic sectors, is very important and, given the current conditions of the Islamic Republic of Iran, should be a priority.

# **Russian Foreign Policy Strategy towards the Islamic Republic of Iran**

*Hamid Dorj*

## **Abstract**

The Islamic Republic of Iran remains one of Russia's most important geopolitical partners at the regional and international levels. The joint policy of Iran and Russia in opposing Washington's hegemony and unilateralism at the international level has paved the way for the further development of economic, military, nuclear, and diplomatic channels between Moscow and Tehran. Iran and Russia have also increased their joint efforts to weaken the West by circumventing sanctions and attracting other countries to their vision of de-dollarization and a multipolar world order, which could play a significant role in shaping international equations and order in line with Tehran's and Moscow's goals and interests. Thus, the main question of the research is what steps has Russia taken to strengthen strategic relations and cooperation with Iran? The research hypothesis is that, given Iran's strategic position in the Middle East and, on the other hand, its key role in weakening and containing the United States in the region, the Russians have tried to expand close relations and cooperation with Iran and secure their regional interests. The results of the research show that, based on the calculation of benefits and losses, comprehensive cooperation between Iran and Russia and their common interests in contrast to the unilateral policy of the United States in the long term can lead to the formation of a multipolar international order on the world stage, which, while increasing the development of the international power and influence of Tehran and Moscow, can also help weaken the global power and influence of Washington. A qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach has been used to analyze the data.

## **Keywords**

Iran, Russia, strategic relations, interests, rational choice.

## **Extended Abstract**

## **Introduction**

The common interests of Iran and Russia should be considered in contrast to the United States and the unilateral policy of this government, which has led to the formation of the bases and areas of joint cooperation between the two countries. In this regard, Russia is engaged in extensive cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran in various fields such as oil and gas, military weapons, and the nuclear industry, which has led to Moscow's extensive presence in regional equations and has also increased its influence and power in West Asia. From among the possible options, Iran and Russia have chosen the option that will bring them the least loss and the most profit. Therefore, as long as Russia and Iran have more advantages than disadvantages for each other; their relations and cooperation will continue and expand. Their mutual desire to build a closer relationship is driven by pragmatic considerations and facilitated by Tehran and Moscow's shared view of the global order and mutual experiences of being sanctioned by the West.

## **Research Methodology**

This study uses a descriptive-analytical approach. Given the subject's nature, data are collected through various methods such as desk study, online databases, and journals. The research is applied-developmental and aims to benefit experts in political geography, international relations, and regional studies, as well as diplomats working in foreign affairs.

**Theoretical Framework: Rational Choice Theory:** Rational choice theory considers political actors as analytical units that regulate their behavior in a rational manner. In this approach, it is assumed that the behavior and decisions of actors are shaped by environmental conditions, structural constraints, values, expectations, and material possibilities, and that actors seek to maximize their own benefits within these frameworks and constraints. According to this theory, it is assumed that humans are rational and their actions are based on the knowledge that under certain conditions they have the most effective means to achieve their goals. In a world where resources are scarce; it is necessary to constantly evaluate and weigh different means to achieve different goals, as well as the choice between them (Wallace and Wolf, 2005: 294).

## **Discussion and Results**

Russia's foreign policy towards Iran is influenced by various factors seeking to create a balance between the two above-mentioned situations; on the one hand, while cooperating with Iran, it has opposed its requests for advanced weapons and military technology and, as in the case of the S-300, has not implemented it in a satisfactory manner, even if it has made a commitment to Iran in this regard. On the other hand, and contrary to Western pressures, it has called for maintaining interactions with Iran in various areas, including continuing nuclear cooperation (Hadian and Zargari, 2018: 253). The 2022 Russia-Ukraine war is an important issue that has affected bilateral, regional and international relations between Russia and Iran. Following the Russian army's invasion of Ukraine, we witnessed a high level of Russia's confrontation with the West, the imposition of extensive sanctions on the Russian economy, Vladimir Putin's "pivot to the East" strategy, and the ambiguous prospect of the JCPOA, all of which have added to the continuity of Tehran-Moscow positions (Rumi and Al-Sayyid Ghafour, 2018: 44-42).

In the Russian cost-benefit analysis of economic and trade relations with Iran and taking advantage of the appropriate time period, cooperation between the two countries in various economic areas increased significantly. Tehran has a trade deficit with Moscow, which it is trying to reduce by increasing non-oil exports to Russia (Therme, 2022: 16). Iran is Russia's third largest military partner in the world after China and India and its most important military buyers in the Middle East. For Tehran, access to Russian military technologies and the simultaneous production of missiles by Iran can prevent the West from increasing threats against Tehran under the pretext of nuclear weapons and help Iran's regional credibility (Ghaderi And Others, 2022: 7). Since the beginning of the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear program in the 1990s, due to the refusal of European and Western countries to cooperate with Iran in the field of nuclear energy, the then authorities in Tehran began cooperation with Russia to advance the nuclear program, which was mainly dedicated to the construction of power plants (Kolaei and Zargari, 2018: 38).

### **Conclusion**

Iran and Russia pursue extensive cooperation in the economic, energy, security, and nuclear fields in order to secure common interests; although Russia has sometimes used the Iran card to play and gain concessions from the West regarding Ukraine and the sanctions issued

against Moscow. It is in the conditions of isolation and Western sanctions that Tehran and Moscow have adopted revisionist approaches and are demanding better relations and development of cooperation with each other. Strategic cooperation between Iran and Russia in the long term can lead to the formation of a multipolar international order and the weakening of liberal hegemony in the international arena. The 2022 Ukraine crisis is an important variable that has clearly had a significant impact on Iran-Russia relations, especially on the political-security relations of the two countries. Moscow, with its active participation in nuclear talks, has always emphasized the diplomatic solution to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue, and of course, with the aim of preventing Iran from moving towards nuclear weapons, has always placed the necessity of continuing the International Atomic Energy Agency's inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities at the center of its positions.

# **The Foreign Policy of Middle Revisionist Powers: A Case Study of Brazil and South Africa**

*Abbas Ataieikhah*

*Mehdi Samavati*

*Mohammad Hassan Ahadi*

## **Abstract**

The struggle between revisionist and status quo powers has sometimes brought instability to the international system, which has imposed great costs on other actors. Most realist scholars consider revisionist powers to be the culprits and their prescription for containing these powers as disruptors of the order. Some of them also do not consider moderate powers to be revisionists. This study has attempted to present a more precise demarcation between the disruptors of the order and other revisionists by analyzing a distinct type of revisionist powers that do not seek to disrupt the international order. It also aims to gain a precise understanding of the process of transition of the international order in the policy-making arena. Therefore, the question that we will address in this study is: How has the mediating role of South Africa and Brazil in foreign policy led to their distinction from other revisionist powers and has it affected their strategic behavior in the international system? The hypothesis of this research is based on the principle that Brazil and South Africa, as intermediate revisionist powers, are inclined towards extensive institutional transformation through the mobilization of alternative networks and the use of coalition networks, and their strategy in creating change in the international system is based on positioning in the institutional order, peaceful coexistence, and the creation of alternative networks. In this research, two cases of Brazil and South Africa (2005-2023) have been scientifically processed using a descriptive and analytical method, based on which their approach at the regional and global levels is examined, and we will discuss their agency roles and access, and the components of intermediate powers in the international system.

## **Keywords**

Foreign policy, Brazil, South Africa, revisionist, middle power

## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

Focusing on the distinction between two approaches to mediating revisionism, namely the more accessible approach and the more agency-based approach, this study argues that not all revisionist powers are necessarily destabilizing or threatening to the existing order. Brazil and South Africa, as two emerging middle powers in the global South, have chosen a different path in which they gradually reform rules and redistribute power through mediation, multilateralism, and institutional networking, without intending to collapse or overthrow the existing order. The main question of the article is how the role of mediation in the foreign policy of these two countries has distinguished them from other revisionist powers and influenced their strategic behavior at the regional and global levels.

### **Literature**

A significant part of the classical literature on international relations, especially in the realist tradition (Gilpin, Van Eura, Schueller, and others), has equated revisionism with threat and instability or categorized it in general terms; an approach that fails to explain the reformist behavior of middle powers within the international system. In contrast, recent research on Brazil and South Africa has been largely case-by-case, focusing on issues such as regional leadership or a specific policy issue, and has been less able to establish a systematic link between theoretical discussions of revisionism and comparative evidence. This theoretical-empirical gap highlights the need to rethink the typology of revisionism and to identify a specific type of it among middle powers.

### **Conceptual framework**

The paper relies on the idea of institutionalized revisionism. This framework measures the position of states in the international order through two key indicators: access to dominant institutions and rules, and agency in mobilizing alternative coalitions and networks. Accordingly, four distinct behavioral patterns can be identified: “integrated”, “mediated”, “isolated” and “rogue”. The main hypothesis of the research is that Brazil and South Africa, as mediating powers, while enjoying a high level of institutional

access, use the capacity of agency to reform rules from within, and thereby pursue non-aggressive and gradual revisionist action. However, the approach of each of these two countries has been different, with Brazil focusing on more agency and South Africa on more access.

### **Methodology**

This research, with a descriptive-analytical approach and in the form of a comparative study, examines the two cases of Brazil and South Africa between 2005 and 2023. The data were collected through reliable academic sources, official documents and reports, and tracking the role-playing of these countries at the regional and global levels. The unit of analysis is "brokerage roles" and "institutional access level" and complementary indicators related to the institutional and coalition behavior of the countries.

### **Discussion:**

**Brazil and Multilateral Brokerage.** Brazil's foreign policy is clearly based on multilateralism, mediation, and "institutional positioning." The country has charted its reformist path by expanding its diplomatic representation network, activating the capacities of the Group of 77, leading the Southern coalitions in the Doha negotiations of the World Trade Organization, participating in IBSA and BRICS, and pursuing the reform of the Security Council in the form of the G4 group. In the security area, Brazil has also supported low-cost diplomacy and mediation instead of relying on coercive means (such as the 2010 Tehran Declaration initiative with Iran and Turkey). At the regional level, while avoiding hegemony, it has created a model of active network brokerage through institution-building and soft leadership in the form of Mercosur and Unasur that increases the capacity to influence international rules without relying on military force. In contrast, South Africa, relying on the legitimacy derived from the peaceful transition from the apartheid regime, has adopted a strategy based on institutional access and consensus-building. In its foreign policy, the country has emphasized the UN Charter, reform of multilateralism, and the preference for dialogue over coercive means. Opposition to the securitization of cases, criticism of punitive sanctions

(such as the case of Sudan), and defense of diplomatic solutions in the Iranian nuclear case are examples of this approach. In addition, South Africa has played a role of bridge-builder and representative of the global South at the regional and global levels through the African Union, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), BRICS, and IBSA.

### **Conclusion**

Brazil and South Africa are prime examples of “mediated revisionism,” a model that pursues distributive and normative change within existing rules in a gradual, institutionally driven manner. Brazil emphasizes network agency through coalition-building and mediation, while South Africa relies more on institutional access and legitimization to reform multilateralism. However, both countries share a common interest in regional institution-building, consensus-building, and the avoidance of military force. This model not only fills a gap in the realist literature on middle powers, but also has important implications for the policymaking of third countries, including Iran: strategic engagement with these mediating powers can reduce the costs of sanctions and coercion by leveraging institutional networks and alternative coalitions.

# **The Smart Power Strategy of US Foreign Policy in Africa: The Impact of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) on Trade and Investment Development in Sub- Saharan Africa**

*Mehdi Kardoost*

## **Abstract**

In the last two decades, Africa has become one of the main arenas of competition between the world's great powers, and economic and trade policies have become a key tool for exerting geopolitical influence on the continent. Meanwhile, the United States has tried to consolidate its position against competitors such as China and India by using trade policies such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). This article critically examines the impact of US economic and trade policies, especially AGOA, on trade development and investment in sub-Saharan Africa. The aim of the research is to analyze the role of AGOA as an instrument of US foreign economic policy and to assess its achievements and limitations in the period 2000-2025. The theoretical framework of the research is based on the theory of institutional liberalism in international political economy, and the research method includes documentary analysis and data review of international organizations. The findings show that although AGWA has provided a platform for increasing non-oil exports and attracting investment, especially in Kenya and Ethiopia, these successes have often been temporary and dependent on geopolitical conditions and Washington's policies. Increasing competition with China and India and the US focus on securing its own resources and economic interests have prevented Africa from fully exploiting its trade and industrial capacities. As a result, AGWA has played the role of a framework for reproducing economic dependence and controlling the continent's resources rather than a tool for sustainable economic development in Africa. This study shows that AGWA although has been somewhat effective in increasing US trade and investment relations with Africa, but the positive aspects have been limited and influenced by US geopolitical objectives, in terms of independent industrial development and reducing the dependence of African countries.

## **Keywords**

AGWA Act - Linking Development and Security - Smart Power Strategy - Institutional Capacity Gaps.

## **Extended Abstract**

## **Introduction**

The United States' foreign policy in Africa has increasingly emphasized a "smart power" strategy, combining diplomatic engagement, economic incentives, and security cooperation to advance mutual interests. A central instrument of this strategy is the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), enacted to enhance trade, attract investment, and promote sustainable economic development in Sub-Saharan African countries. This study examines how AGOA has influenced trade patterns, foreign direct investment (FDI), and broader economic development in the region, within the framework of U.S. smart power strategy.

## **Literature Review**

Existing literature highlights AGOA as a key policy tool that leverages trade preferences to foster economic growth while supporting U.S. strategic objectives in Africa. Scholars argue that AGOA has contributed to export diversification, employment generation, and market integration for beneficiary countries. However, research also notes challenges such as limited industrial capacity, dependence on a narrow range of exports, and inconsistent policy implementation, which constrain AGOA's developmental impact.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative analysis uses trade and investment data from Sub-Saharan African countries over the past two decades to evaluate AGOA's effects on export volumes, FDI inflows, and sectoral diversification. Qualitative analysis draws on policy documents, expert interviews, and case studies to assess the alignment of AGOA with U.S. smart power objectives and its practical implications for economic development.

## **Discussion**

Findings indicate that AGOA to some extent has positively influenced export growth, particularly in textiles, agriculture, and manufacturing sectors, and has attracted notable FDI inflows. Nevertheless, the benefits are uneven across countries, with stronger impacts observed in nations with robust institutional frameworks and export capacities.

AGOA also reflects the broader smart power strategy of the U.S., linking economic incentives with diplomatic engagement and security partnerships to achieve long-term influence and regional stability.

Furthermore, the uneven distribution of AGOA benefits, underscores the importance of domestic governance and institutional capacity in determining policy effectiveness. Countries with transparent trade regulations, efficient customs systems, and supportive industrial policies were able to leverage AGOA more effectively, attracting higher levels of foreign investment and achieving greater export diversification. Conversely, nations with weaker institutional frameworks faced structural constraints that limited the impact of trade preferences, highlighting that AGOA alone cannot drive sustainable economic development without complementary domestic reforms.

Needless to say that AGOA and the like, essentially are at the service of strategic and long term objectives of the USA, which are designed to expand this country's hegemonic influence over all regions of the world, especially the African continent, which is rich in mineral resources

In addition, the broader geopolitical context plays a critical role in shaping AGOA's outcomes. While AGOA somehow facilitates U.S.-Africa economic engagement, it also serves as a strategic instrument to counter the influence of emerging powers and promote regional stability. The integration of economic incentives with diplomatic and security initiatives reflects the principles of smart power, demonstrating that sustainable development and foreign policy objectives are mutually reinforcing. These dynamics suggest that future policy design should not only focus on trade preferences but also consider regional cooperation, capacity building, and multi-dimensional engagement to enhance long-term benefits for both the United States and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2024, the United States suspended several countries from AGOA due to concerns over human rights and governance. Notably, Uganda was removed from the program on January 1, 2024, following the enactment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act, which the U.S. deemed a violation of internationally recognized human rights standards. This suspension has had significant economic repercussions for Uganda, particularly in sectors such as agriculture and textiles, which previously

benefited from duty-free access to the U.S. market under AGOA. The removal has subjected Ugandan exports to standard U.S. tariffs, leading to decreased competitiveness and potential job losses in affected industries.

Additionally, the imposition of new tariffs by the United States has further complicated the trade landscape for AGOA beneficiaries. For instance, Lesotho, a country that had previously experienced economic growth through AGOA, now faces factory closures and increased unemployment due to the tariffs. Similarly, South Africa has expressed concerns that the new tariffs nullify the benefits of AGOA, prompting the country to seek alternative markets and trade agreements to mitigate the economic impact.

### **Conclusion**

AGOA demonstrates the effectiveness of combining trade incentives with a smart power approach to advance U.S. foreign policy objectives while supporting African economic development. Overall, the act exemplifies how economic tools can be integrated within strategic foreign policy frameworks to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. However, AGOA and the like, essentially are at the service of strategic and long term objectives of the USA, which are designed to expand this country's hegemonic influence over all regions of the world, especially the African continent, which is rich in mineral resources.