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Exploring the Role of the Security Council in Confronting Emerging Threats to International Peace and Security; a Case Study of Israel's 12-day War against Iran

*Heidar Piri
Zahra Khavari*

Abstract

The UN Security Council, in theory, possesses extensive authority to address wars, acts of aggression, and grave violations of international law. In practice, however, the Council's performance has been consistently hampered by structural and political challenges. Using a descriptive-analytical method, this study examines the gap between the Council's theoretical mandate in confronting emerging threats and its actual performance. The main question is to identify the structural, legal, and political obstacles that reduce the Council's efficacy and legitimacy in contemporary crises. The research hypothesis focuses on three key obstacles: the veto-based decision-making structure, ambiguity in defining a "threat to peace" regarding emerging threats, and the incompatibility of the Council's traditional mechanisms with the technological nature of these threats. The findings indicate that the Council's effectiveness is severely influenced by the structure of the international system, the national interests of its permanent members, and the instrumental use of the veto power; factors that have led to inefficiency, lack of transparency, double standards, and the weakening of the Responsibility to Protect. The case study of the twelve-day war of Israel against Iran (June 2025) precisely confirmed this finding: due to the political considerations of its permanent members (direct participation of the United States and the cautious silence of Russia and China), the Council suffered complete paralysis and took no effective action to condemn or stop the war. The final ceasefire was also imposed not based on a Council resolution, but unilaterally requested by the United States following a military power balance. This study demonstrates the predominance of major powers' interests over the principles of collective security and a transition from classical international law to power-based diplomacy.

Keywords

UN Security Council, Veto power, Collective security, 2025 Iran–Israel war, Aggression, Emerging Threats

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), under Article 24 of the UN Charter, holds the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. This body, through the powers granted by Chapter VII of the Charter and the development of concepts such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), theoretically possesses extensive authority to counter wars, aggression, and gross violations of international law. However, the post-Cold War era, and especially the 21st century, has witnessed a fundamental transformation in the nature of threats to international peace and security. Emerging threats, such as cross-border cyber warfare, sophisticated drone strikes, proxy conflicts, and the use of autonomous weapons systems, are increasingly hybrid, technologically advanced, and often blur the traditional lines between war and peace, state and non-state actors, and domestic and international domains.

This evolution has exposed a significant and growing gap between the UNSC's legal mandate and its operational effectiveness. The Council's mechanisms, largely conceived in 1945 for interstate conventional warfare, struggle to categorize, assess, and respond to these ambiguous, fast-paced, and often attribution-less challenges. The central research question of this study is: What structural, legal, and political obstacles does the Security Council face when dealing with emerging threats to international peace and security, and how do these obstacles reduce its effectiveness and legitimacy in contemporary crises? The research hypothesizes that three intertwined obstacles are paramount:

- The veto-powered decision-making structure, which subordinates collective security to national interests of permanent members;
- Conceptual ambiguity in defining a *threat to the peace* under Article 39 concerning novel, technology-driven threats; and
- A fundamental mismatch between the Council's state-centric, deliberative procedures and the transnational, networked, and rapid nature of hybrid conflicts.

To test this hypothesis, the study employs the Twelve-Day War between Israel and Iran (June 2025) as a detailed case study. This conflict, while featuring conventional military exchanges, was quintessentially

hybrid, integrating widespread cyber-attacks on financial and critical infrastructure, drone and precision strikes, active proxy involvement, and the direct participation of a permanent member (the United States). It thus serves as an empirical lens to examine the UNSC's paralysis in the face of contemporary multimodal warfare.

2. Literature Review

Researchers extensively critique the UNSC's performance, highlighting its structural pathologies. A significant body of work focuses on the veto power as a tool of geopolitical competition, transforming the Council from a law-based institution into an arena for great power rivalry, leading to selective enforcement and double standards (e.g., Bozorgmehri & Khorami, 2014; Rajabi et al., 2021). Parallel research tracks the evolution of security threats, analysing how cyber warfare, asymmetric conflicts, and hybrid wars challenge the classic UN Charter framework designed for conventional interstate aggression (e.g., Momeni Rad & Haji Azizi, 2021; Zamani & Safdari Kohnehshahri, 2024; Hoffman, 2007). Studies on specific crises like Syria, Ukraine, and Gaza document the Council's repeated deadlock when the interests of a permanent member or its ally are involved (e.g., Fathi, 2025). However, a gap persists in the literature. While many studies address either the UNSC's structural flaws or the character of new threats in isolation, fewer integrate these threads through the empirical analysis of a specific *hybrid conflict* where both elements converge. This research aims to fill that gap. It synthesises the theoretical framework on emerging threats with a granular analysis of the June 2025 Iran-Israel war, providing a concrete test case to examine how structural-institutional constraints manifest in the Council's operational failure during a complex, multimodal crisis. This approach moves beyond abstract criticism to a documented, case-driven demonstration of the theory-practice gap.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology centred on a single, in-depth case study. The case study approach is justified as it allows for an intensive, holistic investigation of a contemporary phenomenon (the UNSC's response to a hybrid war) within its real-world context, enabling

the detailed tracing of causal mechanisms linking structural constraints to operational outcomes.

Data collection was conducted through documentary analysis of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include: the UN Charter; official UNSC meeting records, press releases, draft resolutions, and presidential statements related to the 2025 crisis; letters from involved states to the Council President and Secretary-General; and reports by the UN Secretary-General on emerging threats. Secondary sources comprise academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles in international law and international relations, and analyses from reputable international think tanks and news agencies. The analytical process involved thematic analysis to identify recurring obstacles (e.g., veto use, definitional ambiguity) and process-tracing to map the sequence of events during the Iran-Israel Twelve-day war against the UNSC's simultaneous (in)actions, thereby explicitly linking causes to effects.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings confirm the research hypothesis, revealing a profound disjunction between the UNSC's legal authority and its practical efficacy. The analysis identifies three core, interconnected obstacles:

The Structural-Veto Barrier: The veto power, intended to ensure permanent members consensus, has become an instrument of political paralysis. It enables permanent members to shield themselves or their allies from accountability, leading to strategic silence and crippling the Council's ability to take binding action, even in the face of clear aggression.

Conceptual Ambiguity: Article 39 of the UN Charter provides no clear definition for cyber aggression, drone strikes, or proxy warfare. This legal grey area allows for diametrically opposed interpretations (e.g., hostile act vs. anticipatory self-defence), preventing the consensus needed for the Council to make a determinative finding of a threat to peace.

Procedural-Operational Mismatch: The Council's state-centric, deliberative, and often secretive processes are ill-suited to threats that are networked, occur at digital speed, and involve ambiguous attribution. Its tools, sanctions, peacekeeping, military authorization, require a clarity of context and perpetrator that hybrid conflicts deliberately obfuscate.

The Twelve-day Iran-Israel war served as a perfect real-time experiment validating these theoretical obstacles. The war was a paradigm of hybrid warfare. Alongside missile duels, it featured a massive cyber-attack on Iran's Sepah Bank and Nobitex cryptocurrency exchange, attributed to the Predatory Sparrow group; targeted drone assassinations; and the overt involvement of US military and cyber units alongside Israeli operations.

Despite urgent meetings, the Council failed to pass any resolution, presidential statement, or even agree on a unified call for ceasefire. The US, as a direct participant, blocked any action against Israel. Russia and China, while expressing concern, exercised cautious silence, avoiding a confrontation with Washington. This resulted in total institutional inertia.

The conflict was terminated not by UN mandate but by a unilaterally request of US for ceasefire, following a military stalemate. This sequence demonstrated that in crises involving a permanent member of UNSC, security is dictated by bilateral power dynamics and military balances, not by multilateral collective security mechanisms.

The case study crystallises how the theoretical obstacles manifest. The veto ensured political considerations overrode legal assessments. Conceptual ambiguity around cyber attacks and pre-emptive strikes prevented a unified Charter-based response. The operational mismatch was evident as the Council debated while the conflict raged across physical, digital, and financial domains. The outcome underscores a historic shift: the *de facto* transition from a Charter-based collective security system towards a *rules-based order* selectively interpreted by major powers, where bilateral diplomacy and military posturing supersede UNSC authority. The Council's inaction in Iran-Israel war, mirroring its record in Syria and Gaza, deepens its crisis of legitimacy, especially in the Global South, and incentivises states to seek security outside the UN framework.

5. Conclusion

This study conclusively demonstrates that the UN Security Council is structurally ill-equipped and politically constrained from effectively addressing emerging hybrid threats to international peace and security. The hypothesis is validated: the veto-based architecture, the lack of legal clarity on novel threat vectors, and the archaic nature of its response mechanisms

combine to render the Council paralysed in the face of contemporary warfare.

The 2025 Iran-Israel war is not an anomaly but a stark illustration of a systemic failure. It proved that when a permanent member is party to a conflict, the collective security system is rendered inoperative. The ensuing *security gap* is filled not by international law but by raw power politics and bilateral bargaining. This reality suggests an ongoing transition away from post-1945 multilateralism towards a more fragmented and power-centric international order.

For future research, this analysis points to the need to examine:

- Comparative patterns of UNSC paralysis across Ukraine, Gaza, and the 2025 Iran-Israel war;
- The practical efficacy of alternative mechanisms like the General Assembly's Uniting for Peace resolution; and
- The long-term impact on the non-proliferation regime and regional security architectures following military strikes on safeguarded nuclear facilities.

Ultimately, without meaningful reform, particularly regarding the veto and the development of adaptive frameworks for cyber and hybrid threats, the UNSC's role as the primary guardian of international peace and security will continue to diminish, with profound implications for global stability.

Examining I.R.Iran's Foreign Policy Regarding the 2022 War between Russia and Ukraine

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, Ukraine has consistently been an arena of competition and conflict among major global powers. The Russia-Ukraine war in 2022 is one of the most significant international developments, closely monitored by other countries. The primary objective of this research is to examine I.R. of Iran's foreign policy regarding the 2022 war in Ukraine. The main question is: what was Iran's foreign policy towards the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022? The research hypothesis posits that Iran, by adopting a realistic and pragmatic policy, while opposing the resort to war, emphasized balancing and tactical alignment with Russia against Western pressures. The results of the research indicate that Iran's foreign policy, framed as neutrality and an emphasis on international norms, reflects a balancing approach within the context of a transitioning global order. This approach aims to strengthen Iran's position within the Eastern axis and reduce its dependence on the West. Among the influential factors have been the pursuit of a "Look to the East" policy, opposition to NATO's expansion, and attempts to capitalize on the war, particularly in the areas of energy sales and enhancing its corridor capacity. This research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach and a documentary (library) method.

Keywords

Foreign policy of Iran, Russia, Ukraine war, crisis, balance of power

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Ukraine has consistently been one of the most contested geopolitical spaces in Eastern Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Due to its strategic location between Russia and Western institutions such as NATO and the European Union, Ukraine has become a focal point in the rivalry between major global powers. The Russian military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked a significant turning point in international politics, signaling intensified great-power competition, the militarization of security dilemmas, and accelerated transformations in the international order.

For regional powers such as Iran, the Ukraine war constitutes a complex external crisis that, despite its geographical distance, produces indirect strategic, political, and economic consequences. Iran's foreign policy behavior during this conflict has been shaped by its broader rivalry with the West, its strategic partnership with Russia, ongoing nuclear negotiations, and its long-standing opposition to NATO expansion. This study seeks to examine Iran's foreign policy approach toward the 2022 Russia–Ukraine war and identify the key determinants influencing Tehran's stance.

The central research question is: How has Iran's foreign policy been shaped in response to the 2022 Russia–Ukraine war? The main hypothesis argues that Iran, while formally opposing war as a means of conflict resolution, pursued a policy of tactical convergence with Russia alongside strategic confrontation with the West. Methodologically, this research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach grounded in neorealist theory.

Literature Review

Existing scholarship on the Russia–Ukraine war has largely focused on its implications for the international system, global security, energy markets, and the future of US and European leadership. Studies employing future-oriented and scenario-based analyses emphasize that the Ukraine war represents a critical juncture in the transformation of the international order toward greater polarization and geopolitical fragmentation. Other works highlight the war's economic repercussions, particularly inflationary pressures and disruptions in global energy markets.

A number of studies address the triangular relationship between the United States, Russia, and Ukraine, portraying the conflict as a proxy war designed to weaken Russia through prolonged attrition. Research on energy security explores how Russian oil and gas exports, price discounts, and redirection toward Asian markets affect countries such as Iran. Additionally, some scholars assess the war's impact on Iran's nuclear negotiations, suggesting that Tehran's alignment with Moscow may have marginalized the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Western priorities.

Despite these contributions, the literature has not sufficiently examined Iran's foreign policy behavior as an independent analytical focus. Most studies address Iran only tangentially or as a secondary variable. This research fills that gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of Iran's foreign policy orientation toward the war and the structural and strategic factors shaping it.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical methodology, utilizing primary sources such as official statements by Iranian leaders, diplomatic positions expressed in international organizations, and speeches by Russian officials, alongside secondary academic literature. The analysis is framed within neorealist theory, particularly concepts of anarchy, balance of power, threat perception, and strategic alignment. By examining Iran's behavior at the systemic level, the study explains how structural pressures within the international system constrain and shape Tehran's foreign policy choices during the Ukraine crisis.

Discussion

From a neorealist perspective, the Russia–Ukraine war reflects Russia's attempt to ensure regime survival, protect its strategic depth, and prevent NATO expansion into its near abroad. Iran's interpretation of this conflict largely aligns with this structural reading. Iranian policymakers framed the war as a consequence of NATO's provocative expansionism and US hegemonic ambitions rather than solely as Russian aggression.

Iran's official position initially emphasized neutrality, respect for international law, and the necessity of dialogue and ceasefire. Tehran

avoided explicitly endorsing Russia's military actions, refrained from recognizing territorial changes, and underscored opposition to war in principle. However, as the conflict progressed, Iran's posture evolved toward relative political alignment with Russia, particularly in diplomatic rhetoric opposing NATO expansion and Western sanctions.

Several key factors influenced Iran's policy. First, Iran's long-standing "Look to the East" strategy gained renewed importance following the deterioration of relations with the West and US withdrawal from the JCPOA. Russia, alongside China, is perceived as a strategic partner in resisting Western pressure. Second, concerns over NATO's potential expansion toward the Caucasus and proximity to Iran's northern borders heightened Tehran's threat perception. From this viewpoint, Russia's military action was interpreted as a preemptive response to Western encroachment.

Third, the war intersected with Iran's nuclear negotiations. Moscow's role in the JCPOA talks and its demands for guarantees against sanctions influenced Tehran's strategic calculations. Iran faced the dual challenge of avoiding becoming a bargaining chip in Russia–West negotiations while attempting to exploit the crisis as leverage in its own dealings with the United States and Europe.

Finally, the conflict significantly affected energy geopolitics. The sanctions imposed on Russian energy exports created both opportunities and constraints for Iran. While rising global energy prices and Europe's search for alternative suppliers potentially increased Iran's strategic value, continued sanctions and competition with discounted Russian oil limited Tehran's ability to fully capitalize on these opportunities.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that Iran's foreign policy toward the 2022 Russia–Ukraine war has been characterized by active neutrality combined with tactical convergence with Russia. While Iran has consistently opposed war and emphasized political solutions, its broader strategic rivalry with the West, support for multipolarity, opposition to NATO expansion, and reliance on Russia within the "Look to the East" framework have drawn Tehran closer to Moscow.

Iran's behavior reflects a pragmatic neorealist calculation aimed at preserving national interests under systemic constraints rather than unconditional alignment. The war has reinforced Iran–Russia cooperation, intensified Iran's concerns about NATO's regional reach, and reshaped Tehran's approach to nuclear diplomacy and energy policy. Ultimately, the Ukraine war has become both a challenge and an opportunity for Iranian foreign policy, highlighting the complex balancing act Tehran must perform within a rapidly transforming international system.

Energy Capacity Building in I.R.Iran's Foreign Policy in Central Asia (A Case Study of Turkmenistan)

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Abstract

Today, the role of energy in the foreign policies of countries has become more prominent due to its growing importance in global political and economic developments; to the extent that energy geopolitics and geoeconomics now play a major role in shaping the foreign policies of nations. In this context, the main question of this article is: How does energy capacity function in shaping Iran's foreign policy towards the countries of Central Asia, particularly Turkmenistan? In response, the research hypothesis posits that, based on the combined theoretical framework of energy geopolitics and geoeconomics, and by analyzing data using a qualitative method and a descriptive-analytical approach, and considering the presence of both Iran and Turkmenistan among energy-producing and exporting countries, energy capacity in Iran's foreign policy can function as a strategic tool. It can work towards harmonizing the energy-oriented interests of the two countries, while simultaneously playing a role in reducing Turkmenistan's geopolitical challenges and Iran's geoeconomic challenges. The research findings indicate that although Iran and Turkmenistan, as natural gas producers, might be considered rivals, cooperation based on gas transit and swaps can pave the way for expanding bilateral relations and advancing mutual interests. Furthermore, routes such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the connection of Chabahar port to it can play a significant role in facilitating Turkmenistan's gas exports and solidifying Iran's position in the regional energy transit chain. However, the operationalization of these capacities faces structural challenges such as unilateral sanctions and transit competitions, overcoming which requires active bilateral and multilateral diplomacy at the regional level.

Keywords

Iran, Turkmenistan, Energy Geopolitics, Geoeconomics, Foreign Policy.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Energy has become one of the most decisive variables in contemporary foreign policy because it links national power to both political influence and economic resilience. In regions where hydrocarbon resources and transit routes intersect, such as Central Asia and the Caspian basin, energy functions not only as a commodity but also as a strategic instrument that can reform alliances, reduce vulnerabilities and create new forms of regional interdependence. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asian states gained political independence, yet many quickly faced structural constraints that limited their full economic autonomy. Turkmenistan is an important example, despite possessing vast natural gas reserves, its landlocked geography and dependence on external transit corridors have restricted its access to global markets. Iran, meanwhile, holds major gas reserves but confronts a different set of constraints such as high domestic consumption, winter seasonal gas imbalance in its northern provinces and the limiting effects of unilateral sanctions on investment and exports. Against this backdrop, the present study asks: How does energy capacity operate in shaping Iran's foreign policy toward Central Asia, particularly Turkmenistan? The main hypothesis argues that under a combined theoretical framework of energy geopolitics and geoeconomics, energy capacity can function as a strategic tool in Iran's foreign policy. By aligning energy-centered interests, Iran–Turkmenistan cooperation, especially through gas transit and swap mechanisms, can simultaneously help reduce Turkmenistan's geopolitical constraints (landlocked status and limited export routes) and address Iran's geoeconomic challenges (seasonal gas shortages and sanction-related restrictions). The article further proposes that initiatives such as the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Chabahar port connection can strengthen Iran's role as a sustainable energy-transit gateway while facilitating Turkmenistan's export diversification.

Literature Review

Existing scholarship on Iran–Turkmenistan relations has addressed neighborhood policy, geography, and regional cooperation, yet it often treats energy as one dimension among many rather than conceptualizing

it as a foreign-policy “capacity-building” mechanism. Barzegar and Tavakoli (2021), in their study on economic diplomacy and Iran’s neighborhood policy toward Turkmenistan, emphasize the decisive role of geography and argue that expanding cooperation with Ashgabat can help Iran reduce the impact of U.S. pressure and improve Iran’s reach into Central Asia. Karmi and Salavarzi-Zadeh (2023), in their strategic–preventive analysis of Iran’s foreign policy toward Turkmenistan, highlight shared cultural-historical ties and geographic proximity, but they conclude that Iran’s policy has often been unsuccessful, which has limited the development of a stable and effective pattern of engagement with Turkmenistan. From a broader regional angle, Shaffer (2022) argues that much of the literature on Iran focuses on West Asia, while Iran’s policy toward its northern neighborhood is frequently interpreted through domestic-security concerns, including sensitivities related to ethnic groups. This perspective helps explain why energy opportunities in Central Asia sometimes remain secondary to political-security calculations. In energy-focused work, Shayan and Basiri (2023) analyze Iran–Turkmenistan–Turkey energy relations through the lens of regional integration, showing that although the two neighbors can be reliable partners, projects such as transit toward Turkey and Europe encounter obstacles related to bilateral tensions, Turkish market dynamics, and European conditions. Several sources illuminate the competitive structure of gas geopolitics. Deitl (2022) in *The Great Gas Game* (translated edition) stresses how pipeline politics and geopolitical rivalries block seemingly rational routes in Eurasia, emphasizing the difficulty of realizing major pipeline visions. Similarly, Karmi (2023), in his study on geopolitical competition among Iran, Qatar, Russia, and Turkmenistan, shows how major exporters, especially Russia and Qatar, have incentives to prevent Iran from emerging as a major regional exporter due to Iran’s potential cost advantage, while Turkmenistan’s landlocked geography produces a distinct pattern of dependence on transit options. On the geoeconomic side, Navakhti Moghaddam and Osouli (2021) identify energy, transit, engineering services, investment, and ECO frameworks as major opportunities, but they also stress banking constraints, investment risks, visa barriers, and the role of external actors, particularly the United States, as enduring challenges.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative design with a descriptive–analytical approach. It relies on documentary analysis of academic works, policy reports and available statistical sources on reserves, production, consumption, pipeline infrastructure, and regional transit projects. The analysis proceeds in three steps:

1. establishing the theoretical logic of energy geopolitics and geoeconomics for interpreting state behavior;
2. mapping Iran and Turkmenistan’s structural positions in gas production, consumption, and export options; and
3. evaluating practical mechanisms of cooperation (pipelines, swaps, corridors, and institutional platforms), alongside constraints such as sanctions, legal disputes in the Caspian Sea, and competition among transit routes.

Discussion

The findings show that Iran and Turkmenistan can appear as potential competitors because both are natural gas producers. However, competition does not automatically dominate their relationship; instead, complementarities emerge when infrastructure, geography and seasonal demand patterns are considered. Turkmenistan’s main limitation is not production capacity but export dependency on a narrow set of routes and buyers, particularly reliance on the China corridor and a constrained relationship with Russia. Proposed alternatives such as TAPI and the Trans-Caspian pipeline face persistent political, security, legal, and environmental obstacles. Iran’s geographic position provides a distinctive advantage, it connects the Caspian region to open waters and major consumer markets, and it offers a relatively safer and shorter transit option compared to routes passing through unstable areas. At the same time, Iran’s domestic gas imbalance, especially in winter months in northern provinces, creates a rational incentive for imports or swap arrangements with Turkmenistan as a cost-effective alternative to expanding long-distance internal transmission from the south. Historically, Iran–Turkmenistan gas relations have experienced tensions, especially regarding pricing and debts, but these disputes have generally remained sectoral rather than escalating into broad diplomatic rupture.

Operationally, two pillars define “energy capacity-building” in this relationship. First, gas swaps and pipelines allow Iran to meet northern demand and earn transit revenues while enabling Turkmenistan to access additional markets indirectly. Second, transit connectivity projects, notably INSTC and the potential Chabahar linkage, enhance Iran’s role in regional logistics and can support Turkmenistan’s longer-term goal of export diversification. However, several constraints limit full operationalization: unresolved issues in the Caspian legal regime (especially seabed delimitation), internal infrastructural limitations and the external pressure of sanctions and major-power competition. The United States has historically opposed projects that increase Iran’s role in regional energy distribution, while Russia and China seek to shape export routes and bargaining leverage in ways that can restrict Iran’s transit centrality.

Conclusion

This study concludes that energy capacity can function as a strategic tool in Iran’s foreign policy toward Turkmenistan when framed through combined geopolitics-geo-economics lens. Rather than treating Iran and Turkmenistan primarily as competitors in gas exports, the evidence supports a more nuanced interpretation: cooperation through transit and swap mechanisms can generate mutual gains by addressing Turkmenistan’s geopolitical landlocked constraint and Iran’s geo-economic challenges related to seasonal imbalance and sanctions. Policy implications follow directly from this logic. Durable outcomes require institutionalized, predictable, and transparent arrangements, especially in pricing, settlement mechanisms, and long-term contracting, so that recurring commercial disputes do not disrupt strategic cooperation. Iran can strengthen its role by prioritizing neighbor-oriented diplomacy, investing in the reliability of transit infrastructure, and using regional platforms (such as ECO) to normalize technical standards and facilitate multilateral coordination. Ultimately, Turkmenistan can serve as a gateway for Iran’s broader engagement with Central Asia, while Iran can be framed not merely as a consumer of Turkmen gas but as a sustainable transit gateway that supports Turkmenistan’s export diversification and regional integration.

A Foreign Policy Strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Regarding the Threats of ISIS-Khorasan Narco-Terrorism (2018-2025)

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Mohsen Ezzati*

Abstract

In the period from 2018 to 2025, the Islamic Republic of Iran has faced multi-layered security threats on its eastern borders, primarily stemming from instability in Afghanistan. These threats include terrorism from groups such as ISIS-Khorasan, organized drug trafficking, and border insecurities, which have directly impacted Iran's national security, internal stability, and economic development. Iran's geopolitical position and long border with Afghanistan have transformed these threats from merely external challenges into matters of domestic security. Therefore, analyzing Iran's foreign policy strategy to counter these interconnected challenges holds significant scientific and practical importance, not only for understanding Tehran's regional orientations but also for charting a sustainable security roadmap. Main Question of this research is that what has been the foreign policy strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding these combined threats in Afghanistan during this period, and on what pillars is it based. Findings while using a descriptive-analytical method based on the theory of defensive realism and utilizing credible sources, the answer indicate that Iran's strategy has been a combination of 'strict military-security action at the borders' and 'active and pragmatic diplomacy with domestic and regional actors,' designed with the aim of containing threats at their source, crisis management, and maintaining strategic influence. To that end, Iran has adopted a multifaceted approach: military reinforcement of the eastern borders, conducting cross-border intelligence operations, direct and pragmatic engagement with the Taliban to compel them to contain terrorist groups, and activating regional diplomacy through mechanisms such as the Moscow Format. Although this strategy has not been able to completely eradicate the threats, it has played an effective role in containing them and preventing their escalation within Iran's territory.

Keywords

ISIS-Khorasan, Narcoterrorism, Defensive Realism, Iranian Foreign Policy

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Between 2018 and 2025, the Islamic Republic of Iran has faced a complex set of interconnected security threats along its eastern borders, particularly its long border with Afghanistan. These threats, rooted in instability and a power vacuum within Afghanistan, have manifested in the form of a compound phenomenon known as "narco-terrorism" or "drug terrorism." The terrorist group ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K or ISKP) has been the primary actor in this arena. By merging a takfiri extremist ideology with a criminal economy based on drug trafficking, it has simultaneously pursued several objectives: financing through extensive drug smuggling networks, recruiting from disaffected and unemployed populations, and carrying out transnational terrorist operations. For Iran, this phenomenon has not been merely an external threat; due to geographical proximity, it has evolved into a serious challenge to national security, domestic stability, and territorial integrity. Terrorist attacks in cities such as Kerman and the spread of insecurity along the borders are clear evidence of this claim. Therefore, analyzing Iran's strategy in confronting this complex threat is of great importance, both from a scientific perspective (understanding state behavior in an anarchic environment) and a practical one (charting a security roadmap).

2. Theoretical Framework

Central Question: What has been the foreign policy strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the composite threats of ISIS-Khorasan narco-terrorism in Afghanistan during the 2018-2025 period, and upon what foundations has it been based?

To answer this question, the research employs the theoretical framework of "Defensive Realism" and, more specifically, Stephen Walt's theory of "Balance of Threat." According to this theory, states balance not against pure "power," but against perceived "threat." The level of threat stems from a combination of factors such as geographical proximity, offensive capabilities, expansionist intentions, and aggregate power. ISIS-Khorasan, possessing all these components (operating in Iran's neighborhood, carrying out offensive attacks, harboring intentions to

establish a caliphate in the historical Khorasan region, and deriving economic power from drugs), constitutes a multi-dimensional threat for Iran.

Main Hypothesis: In response to this threat, the Islamic Republic of Iran has adopted a combined and multi-faceted strategy resting on two main pillars:

1. Stringent and preemptive security-military measures within and along its borders.
2. Active and pragmatic diplomacy with internal actors in Afghanistan (especially the Taliban) and other regional countries.

The ultimate goal of this strategy is to contain the threat at its source (Afghanistan), manage the crisis along the borders, and preserve Iran's strategic influence in the developments of Afghanistan and Central Asia.

3. Research Findings

The findings indicate that to implement this combined strategy, Iran has undertaken a set of coordinated actions:

A. Security-Military and Border Measures:

- **Decisive Military Reinforcement of Eastern Borders:** Increased deployment and equipment of border guard and military units to prevent the infiltration of terrorists and traffickers.
- **Intelligence and Extraterritorial Operations:** Conducting intelligence and potentially operational activities on Afghan soil to target ISIS-Khorasan networks and leaders.

B. Pragmatic Diplomacy and Engagement with the Taliban:

- Despite ideological differences with the Taliban, Iran pursued a pragmatic approach based on security interests. This engagement aimed to compel the Taliban towards two key actions:
 - Containing and combating ISIS-Khorasan as a common rival.
 - Exerting control over the production and transit of drugs, which serve as the financial lifeblood of ISIS.
- This cooperation materialized in frameworks such as the formation of a joint military-security border commission (May 2023) and the signing of joint economic and investment

agreements (e.g., oil projects) to create shared interests and reduce incentives for drug cultivation.

C. Activation of Multilateral and Regional Diplomacy:

Recognizing the transnational nature of the threat, Iran sought to establish a collective balance against the narco-terrorism threat:

- **Membership and Role Activation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO):** Iran's accession to this organization as a full member provided a platform for advanced security cooperation, intelligence sharing, and joint counter-terrorism operations with powers like Russia and China, as well as Central Asian countries. This move aligned with Iran's "Look to the East" policy and aimed at strengthening a non-Western security order.
- **Leadership and Cooperation within the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO):** Within the ECO framework, Iran emphasized the design and implementation of a "Supportive Policy for Afghanistan." The objective was to strengthen Afghanistan's economy through infrastructure and commercial projects (such as the development of Chabahar Port and railway lines) to reduce poverty and unemployment as root causes of recruitment into terrorism.
- **Signing Bilateral Security Documents with Central Asian Countries:** For instance, Iran signed security cooperation agreements with countries like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan for the joint fight against terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking. The Trans-Afghan Railway project (connecting Central Asia to Pakistan via Afghanistan with Iran's participation) is an example of economic-security convergence aimed at fostering stability.

4. Conclusion

Overall, Iran's foreign policy strategy in confronting ISIS-Khorasan narco-terrorism is assessed as largely successful in containing and controlling the threat in the short and medium term. This strategy, based on balancing threat, has managed, through a combination of hard and soft power tools, to prevent the escalation of the crisis and

the widespread infiltration of terrorism into Iranian territory, while maintaining relative border stability. Cooperation with the Taliban has also, to some extent, encouraged them to counter ISIS-Khorasan.

Application of the Strategic Model of Cultural Diplomacy in the Digital Age: A Case Study of National Image Management under Sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran

Mohammad-Taha Ghaem-Panah

Abstract

In the complex world of international crises, cultural diplomacy, as a key instrument of soft power, offers unique capacities for de-escalating tensions, rebuilding trust, and strengthening intercultural communication. This research aims to operationally explain and empirically evaluate the role of cultural diplomacy in managing international crises within the digital context, conducting a case study on the sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran (as the main case study). It seeks to answer the question: Through what mechanisms can cultural diplomacy play a role in managing international crises, and what challenges hinder its effectiveness? This study first develops an integrated conceptual model (based on soft power, cultural diplomacy, and digital diplomacy) and then analyzes its mechanisms (narrative-building and trust-building) in the selected case study. Data were collected and analyzed with a focus on this case study using a mixed-methods qualitative-quantitative approach, through a survey of 78 experts and 15 semi-structured interviews. Qualitative thematic analysis and quantitative evaluation indicate that cultural diplomacy operates through redefining narratives (with an average impact of 4.2 out of 5 in the survey), informal mediation, and perceptual institutionalization, with digital tools amplifying its effects. However, challenges such as institutional constraints, technological disparities, and cultural misunderstandings reduce its effectiveness. By providing a practical conceptual model and crisis-oriented operational indicators, this study assists policymakers in enhancing countries' soft power capacities in facing crises and facilitating intercultural dialogue.

Keywords

Cultural Diplomacy, Soft Power, Digital Diplomacy, Crisis Management, National Image-Making.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The contemporary global order is characterized by an escalating frequency and complexity of international crises, ranging from geopolitical conflicts to deep-seated economic and social tensions. In this challenging environment, Cultural Diplomacy (CD)—defined as the strategic deployment of cultural resources to achieve foreign policy objectives—has emerged as an indispensable instrument of soft power. It holds unique, often untapped, potential for effective tension mitigation, the restoration of ruptured trust, and the establishment of robust, resilient cross-cultural communication channels. Recognizing that the traditional mechanisms of CD are insufficient in the modern landscape, this research is driven by a singular, critical objective: to systematically investigate and empirically assess the role of Cultural Diplomacy in contemporary crisis management, specifically within the transformative and instantaneous context of the digital ecosystem through the operational application of a focal case study.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study proposes and validates an integrated conceptual model that seamlessly blends the theoretical foundations of Joseph Nye's Soft Power, the practice of Cultural Diplomacy, and the emerging field of Digital Diplomacy. The model is designed to analyze the specific, causal mechanisms underpinning both the successful outcomes and the structural failures of CD interventions during periods of international volatility. Employing a rigorous mixed-methods (Qualitative-Quantitative) research design, the study adopted a Focal Case Study Approach, primarily concentrating on the operational application of the model amidst the complex sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran (economic and political crisis). While the analysis utilized comparative data from other contexts (the Ukraine Crisis, European Union relations) for contextual validation, the in-depth operational assessment was rooted entirely in the Iranian case. Data were meticulously gathered through three distinct instruments: a comprehensive expert survey administered to 78 recognized scholars and practitioners; 15 semi-structured, in-depth interviews to capture nuanced

insights; and a systematic analysis of relevant media and policy documents.

Key Findings and Operational Mechanisms

The analytical synthesis of qualitative thematic findings and quantitative statistical assessment reveals that Cultural Diplomacy is not a passive activity but operates actively through three principal, interlinked mechanisms, as empirically demonstrated through the operational analysis of the Iranian sanctions case:

- **Redefinition of Narratives:** CD functions by actively countering prevailing negative or monolithic national images and substituting them with complex, human-centered narratives. The quantitative survey strongly supports this, showing the redefinition of narratives as the most influential factor in crisis management (average impact score of 4.2 out of 5).
- **Informal Mediation:** CD facilitates crisis communication by establishing informal, non-state-centric communication pathways between divided populations and non-official stakeholders.
- **Perceptual Institution-Building:** It contributes to a long-term shift by establishing shared cultural understandings that lay the groundwork for formal institutional cooperation.

Crucially, the study finds that modern digital tools (social media, open access platforms, etc.) serve as indispensable strategic amplifiers for all three mechanisms. However, the research also highlights significant systemic obstacles to full effectiveness, including rigid institutional limitations within foreign ministries, acute technological inequalities that restrict access and participation for certain groups, and the persistent danger of cultural misunderstandings stemming from digital misinterpretation.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

This research makes a pivotal contribution to both academic theory and international policy by moving beyond descriptive analysis to provide a practical, operational conceptual model for strategic cultural diplomacy. The study concludes by presenting a set of empirically derived operational indicators for measuring the transition from Narrative-Building to Trust-Building. These findings, validated by the in-depth

analysis of the focal case study, are directly actionable, offering clear guidelines to policymakers seeking to strategically enhance their nations' overall soft capacities when facing complex international crises, thereby maximizing the potential for conflict resolution and fostering deep, sustainable intercultural dialogue in the digital age.

Sports Diplomacy as a Tool for Improving National Image and Brand: A Meta-Synthesis Review

*Zohreh Karim-Mian
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Abstract

Sport is recognized as one of the most effective tools for public diplomacy and national branding. Sport diplomacy, as a branch of public diplomacy, refers to the use of sport to achieve foreign policy goals, people-to-people diplomacy, strengthen national identity and image, and enhance international relations. This article examines the impact of sport diplomacy on national branding and the national image of countries, analyzing and synthesizing existing studies in this field, which include a range of 183 articles from the Web of Science. The main research question is how sport diplomacy can serve as an effective tool in enhancing the national brand and image of countries. The findings show that sport diplomacy significantly contributes to the elevation of countries' global standing through increasing global recognition, strengthening national identity, attracting foreign investment, promoting the tourism industry, and improving international relations. The findings also address successful cases such as the impact of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, while also exploring challenges and barriers such as the high costs of hosting and political challenges. Ultimately, the results indicate that in today's world, where the importance of soft power has increased, sport diplomacy can be an effective tool in improving a country's image, international relations, and global standing.

Keywords

Sport, Public diplomacy, sports diplomacy, national branding, national image.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

In today's increasingly interconnected world, countries' international image and reputation have gained growing importance. Governments therefore seek to strengthen their national brand through instruments such as public diplomacy. Within this context, sport particularly elite sport and mega sporting events has been recognized as an effective tool of sports diplomacy and an avenue for improving international relations. By leveraging sport's extensive media coverage and social influence, sports diplomacy can positively affect a country's image, national brand, national identity, and even its tourism destination image, transforming sporting success into a symbol of national capability and progress. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to examine the role of sports diplomacy in shaping and strengthening countries' national brand and national image. To address the question of how sports diplomacy influences these dimensions, the study reviews the relevant concepts in the theoretical literature and employs a meta-synthesis research method in the methodology section.

Theoretical Framework

National image refers to the general international perception of a country and influences political, economic, and cultural decision-making. According to the four-dimensional model proposed by Buhmann and Ingenhoff, national image comprises functional, normative, aesthetic, and emotional dimensions, indicating that a country's image extends beyond objective capabilities to include values and emotions. The concept of the national brand, introduced by Anholt, likewise refers to the set of tangible and intangible perceptions associated with a country and is reciprocally linked to national image; a positive national image facilitates tourism attraction and foreign investment. In this context, sports diplomacy—operating as an effective instrument of public diplomacy and soft power—utilizes sporting success, the hosting of mega events, and sports cooperation at macro, meso, and micro levels to enhance national branding, improve country image, increase cultural attractiveness, and reduce international tensions.

Methodology

Meta-synthesis is a qualitative research method that systematically analyzes and interprets the findings of multiple qualitative studies to develop a comprehensive, integrated perspective and generate new knowledge on a specific topic. The process involves stages such as problem definition, systematic search, study selection, content analysis, and synthesis of findings. Commonly applied in the social sciences to examine complex phenomena, this method requires rigorous selection and analysis of sources. In this study, meta-synthesis was employed to examine the role of sports diplomacy in national branding and country image. A systematic search of the Web of Science database yielded 183 initial articles; after screening and refinement, 73 English-language peer-reviewed journal articles—including case studies, theoretical reviews, and empirical research—were selected for final analysis.

Findings

Over the past two decades, sports diplomacy has evolved into a multilayered and strategic instrument of countries' soft power. The literature indicates that sport functions as more than competition; it constitutes an effective platform for representing national identity, image, and brand. This role is realized through mechanisms such as hosting mega events, people-to-people diplomacy, athletes acting as informal ambassadors, the use of cultural symbols and rituals, the display of technological innovation, the promotion of progressive values such as gender equality, the reframing of negative narratives, the strategic use of media and social networks, the agency of non-state actors, private sector involvement, tourism development, and alignment with foreign policy objectives. However, studies simultaneously highlight risks such as sportswashing and potential damage to the national brand when sport is used instrumentally or without coordination. Sustainable impacts of sports diplomacy therefore depend on strategic national brand management, stakeholder coordination, and continuous organizational learning.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the last two decades, sports diplomacy has become a strategic and multidimensional policy instrument through which sport and

international events contribute to national branding, the redefinition of country image, the strengthening of national identity, the improvement of international relations, and the creation of economic and cultural opportunities. Hosting mega events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup, employing athletes as informal ambassadors, leveraging media, social networks, and emerging technologies, and aligning sports diplomacy with foreign policy goals are among the key mechanisms in this process. Nevertheless, challenges such as sportswashing and potential harm to the national brand persist. Using a meta-synthesis approach and analyzing 183 articles from the Web of Science database, this study clarifies the role of sports diplomacy in shaping national image and branding and offers practical recommendations for aligning sporting events with branding objectives, investing in infrastructure, fostering social participation, and ensuring event legacy continuity. The study's contribution lies in its comprehensive synthesis of prior research. Acknowledging geographical, temporal, and source-related limitations, it also proposes directions for future research, including digital media, ethical and social dimensions, cross-country comparisons, and the economic and tourism impacts of sports diplomacy.

The Pendulum State and the Dynamics of Turkish Foreign Policy;

Case Study: The Ukrainian War

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Abstract

Turkey's foreign policy, as it enters the 21st century, has developed a dynamic and multifaceted framework that necessitates new analytical approaches for comprehensive understanding. This study aims to elucidate this dynamism by analyzing Turkey's proactive engagement during the 2022 Ukraine conflict through the lenses of the global swing state concept and the theory of complex adaptive systems. The central hypothesis posits that Turkey's swing behavior constitutes a calculated response to geopolitical imperatives, systemic pressures, and internal dynamics, all aimed at achieving strategic independence. Employing a qualitative methodology with a descriptive-analytical framework, this research involved data collection through extensive library studies. Turkey's actions were scrutinized using five key indicators of global swing states: geopolitics, economy, military, diplomacy, and smart power, as well as through the principles of systems theory. The findings indicate that Turkey assumed the role of a swing state during the Ukraine crisis by implementing a dual strategy that involved military support for Ukraine while simultaneously sustaining economic relations with Russia. By leveraging geopolitical tools (such as the Montreux Convention), economic initiatives (including energy corridors), and diplomatic efforts (notably the mediation of the grain agreement), Turkey successfully maintained its influence over both belligerent parties. This swing activism has transformed Turkey's position from that of a subordinate ally to a pivotal regulator within the international order. While this approach has facilitated the achievement of strategic independence, it has also introduced structural risks, including a credibility vacuum and the perception of Turkey as an unreliable ally.

Keywords

Ukraine War, swing state, Türkiye Foreign Policy, Systems Theory, Dynamic alliances and coalitions.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The foreign policy of Turkey is characterized by continuous evolution, influenced by systemic international factors, the changing geopolitical landscape of neighboring regions, and domestic political dynamics. This research seeks to conceptualize Turkey's foreign policy dynamics as that of a "global swing state," using the 2022 Ukraine war as a focal point for analysis. Situated within the broader structural transformations of the post-liberal order—marked by the decline of Western hegemony and the emergence of multiple power centers—Turkey's strategic geopolitical position has enabled a recalibration of its foreign policy posture, facilitating a nuanced balance between Eastern and Western influences. This study posits that Turkey's "swing behavior" constitutes a strategic response to the uncertainties presented by new international dynamics, evolving regional geopolitics, and the domestic leadership's imperative to maintain authority. The primary objective is to analyze the dynamics of this foreign policy during the Ukraine war through the analytical framework of the pendulum state concept.

Literature review

Scholarship concerning the domain of "Global Swing States" remains highly limited, with the preponderance of existing literature emerging primarily from think tanks. Notably, within the Iranian academic context, there has been a complete absence of codified research examining swing activism through the conceptual lens of systems theory in international relations. Consequently, the present study endeavors to contribute to the enrichment of theoretical literature and case studies in this field by introducing and applying this analytical framework. While substantial research has addressed Turkey's multifaceted foreign policy and its multilateral approach toward the 2022 Ukraine war, a significant lacuna persists regarding novel theoretical perspectives, particularly systems-oriented approaches to international relations and emerging frameworks such as swing activism; this research aims to address this specific deficiency.

In the broader discourse, Fontaine and McKinley, in their analysis "Global Swing States and the New Great Power Competition," argue that

swing states maintain simultaneous relations with the United States, Russia, and China by adopting a policy of multi-alignment. These nations share a reluctance to enter into exclusive strategic alliances with a single great power and actively seek to reform global governance institutions to their own advantage. The authors emphasize that these six states possess sufficient collective geopolitical weight for their policy preferences to disproportionately influence the future trajectory of the international order (Fontaine & McKinley, 2025). Similarly, Ünlühisarcıklı, in his work "Alliances in a Changing Global Order"—specifically under the section "Turkey: The Quest for Autonomy"—posits that Turkey's grand strategy entails escaping dependency on any single power by balancing its robust Western ties against other global powers. He characterizes Turkey's policy toward the Ukraine war as an exemplar of this pattern, describing the stance as "pro-Kyiv without being overtly anti-Moscow" (Ünlühisarcıklı, 2023).

Quantitative and comparative approaches also feature in the literature. Poulshock's "Swing States in the Midst of Great Power Competition" utilizes an economic interdependence simulation to rank Turkey as the ninth most influential swing state in the power balance between the U.S. and China, highlighting that despite its traditional alliance with the U.S., Turkey faces a genuine geopolitical dilemma due to deep economic entanglement with China (Poulshock, 2022). Furthermore, Fontaine and Kundnani identify Turkey as one of four key global swing states alongside Brazil, India, and Indonesia. They argue that while Turkey possesses the capacity to strengthen the international order due to its economic growth and strategic location, its approach remains fluid and occasionally contradictory—aligning with global norms in trade and finance while challenging them in areas such as maritime rights and human rights (Fontaine & Kundnani, 2012). Focusing on security regimes, Garcia's research on "Global Swing States and the Non-Proliferation Order" examines Turkey's independent role. He notes that while Turkey supports the non-proliferation regime as a NATO member, its mediation efforts regarding the Iranian nuclear file and defense of rights to peaceful nuclear technology exemplify a multifaceted foreign policy that occasionally generates friction with Western allies (Garcia, 2012).

Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study is qualitative, characterized by a descriptive-analytical approach. This methodology facilitates a detailed examination of the complexities inherent in Turkish foreign policy, as well as an in-depth analysis of its constituent factors across multiple levels. Given the novelty of the "swing state" concept within this context, the study is grounded in a comprehensive review of existing literature that bears the closest conceptual and semantic relevance. The data collection process is supported by library-based research and a thorough review of pertinent sources related to the topic.

Findings

The findings suggest that Turkey's foreign policy during the Ukraine conflict exemplifies the characteristics of a pendulum state, strategically oscillating between competing blocs to safeguard its national interests. Ankara adeptly employed a combination of hard and soft power instruments, including drone exports, mediation in grain export negotiations, and selective abstention from sanctions, thereby positioning itself as a significant intermediary actor. In both the diplomatic and military realms, Turkey adopted a dual strategy by supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity while simultaneously preserving economic and political channels with Russia. Geopolitically, Turkey capitalized on the Ukraine conflict as an opportunity to bolster its status as a critical hub within global supply chains, particularly in light of the disruptions in northern corridors. This pendular agency is not merely a reactive response; rather, it is profoundly rooted in Turkey's domestic context, its multifaceted identity, and its pressing economic and security imperatives.

Conclusion

In an era characterized by profound transformations, the concept of the pendulum state has emerged as a significant analytical framework for understanding the foreign policy behavior of middle powers, particularly Turkey. This study argues that pendular agency constitutes a deliberate and strategic approach inherent in Turkish foreign policy, enabling the nation to adeptly navigate the complexities between Eastern and Western blocs while preserving its strategic autonomy. This strategy has redefined

Turkey's international status from that of a traditional ally or "buffer state" to a crucial "regulator" within Eurasian geopolitics. While this approach has enhanced Turkey's autonomy and resilience, it has concurrently introduced risks associated with a credibility deficit and strategic volatility in its relationships with major powers, thereby positioning Turkey as a potentially unreliable ally in the perception of its partners.

The Evolution of South Korea's Foreign Policy in West Asia: From Economic Centricity to Multidimensional Engagement (2000-2024)

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Abstract

With its strategic geopolitical location, vital corridors, and a significant share of global oil and gas reserves, West Asia plays a decisive role in the power structure, energy equations, and international security architecture. For South Korea, which obtains most of its vital energy needs from this region, West Asia is of strategic and irreplaceable importance. Although Seoul's previous interactions with this region were mainly focused on energy-based cooperation and the implementation of construction projects, since the 2000s it has gradually included areas such as new technologies, peaceful nuclear cooperation, infrastructure development, weapons system exports, military-security cooperation, and cultural diplomacy .

The main question of the research is how has South Korea's foreign policy in West Asia changed between 2000 and 2024? Using the theoretical framework of institutional neoliberalism and a descriptive-analytical method, this study examines the institutional, economic, and structural mechanisms of this transformation. The results show that increasing economic and energy interdependence, the development of institutional arrangements in the fields of energy, technology, and infrastructure, strengthening the rules of cooperation, and the growing role of large Korean companies in the form of multi-level cooperation networks have been the most important factors in the transition of Seoul's foreign policy from an economy-oriented model to a multidimensional and institution-based interaction model. Following this transformation, South Korea's relations with West Asia have enjoyed greater institutional coherence, and the position of this region in Seoul's foreign policy macro strategy has been enhanced.

Keywords

South Korea, West Asia, Institutional Neoliberalism, Interdependence, Multidimensional Interaction.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

West Asia occupies a pivotal position in the international system due to its strategic geography, critical maritime corridors, and substantial share of global energy reserves. For South Korea, whose export-driven industrial economy depends heavily on imported energy, the region represents an irreplaceable strategic arena. Historically, Seoul's interaction with West Asia centered on energy procurement and large-scale construction projects.

Since the early 2000s, however, South Korea's regional policy has expanded to encompass advanced technologies, infrastructure development, peaceful nuclear cooperation, defense exports, maritime security initiatives, and cultural diplomacy. This shift has occurred amid increasing geoeconomic competition, alliance commitments, and efforts to diversify foreign partnerships while managing regional instability.

This study asks: How did South Korea's foreign policy in West Asia evolve between 2000 and 2024? Guided by institutional neoliberalism, it argues that Seoul's transition from an economy-oriented approach to multidimensional engagement was driven by four interconnected mechanisms: rising economic and energy interdependence; the expansion of institutional arrangements across key sectors; the strengthening of cooperation rules that reduce uncertainty and transaction costs; and the deepening of multi-level interaction between governments and major Korean conglomerates.

Literature Review

Existing scholarship on South Korea's engagement with West Asia has predominantly focused on energy security and economic cooperation, reflecting Seoul's structural dependence on the region's hydrocarbon resources. Early studies emphasize South Korea's pursuit of stable oil and gas supplies through long-term contracts and construction-driven partnerships. More recent research identifies Seoul's growing profile as a middle power, highlighting the gradual diversification of its regional engagement toward infrastructure development, technology transfer, and strategic diplomacy.

Parallel analyses address the expanding security dimension, particularly South Korea's increasing defense exports and participation in multilateral maritime and peace-support operations. These works suggest that Seoul seeks to enhance its strategic visibility while minimizing political and operational risks by acting through internationally legitimate frameworks. Another strand of literature examines South Korea's soft power and cultural diplomacy, emphasizing the global diffusion of Korean popular culture and language education as tools for fostering societal acceptance and facilitating broader cooperation.

Despite these contributions, the literature remains fragmented across economic, security, and cultural domains, often lacking an integrated theoretical framework capable of explaining how these dimensions converge into a coherent foreign policy transformation. This study addresses this gap by applying institutional neoliberalism to analyze South Korea's evolving engagement with West Asia as a transition from transactional economic relations toward institutionalized, multidimensional cooperation.

Methodology

The research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach based on documentary and library-based sources, including academic publications and authoritative analytical materials. The analytical framework is derived from institutional neoliberalism, emphasizing complex interdependence, the role of institutions in facilitating cooperation, the pursuit of absolute gains, and the importance of multi-level networks linking state and non-state actors. Economic, security, and cultural dimensions are examined as interrelated components of a single foreign policy trajectory rather than as isolated domains.

Discussion

Findings reveal a clear transformation from transactional energy-centered engagement toward institutionalized multidimensional cooperation. Economic relations remain foundational, yet their character has evolved. Energy dependence has encouraged South Korea to pursue long-term supply agreements, joint investments, and participation in regional energy and infrastructure projects, thereby increasing predictability and

mutual stakes. These arrangements elevate the costs of disruption and reinforce incentives for sustained cooperation.

Institutionalization has expanded beyond trade into technology-intensive sectors, particularly peaceful nuclear and advanced energy cooperation. Such collaboration requires legal frameworks, technical standards, monitoring mechanisms, and continuous institutional coordination, signaling a shift from ad hoc exchanges to rule-based partnerships capable of enduring political and market volatility.

Multi-level cooperation networks constitute a central driver of this transformation. Major Korean conglomerates operate alongside state diplomacy to implement large-scale projects, facilitate technology transfer, and mobilize financial resources. The convergence of governmental support and corporate execution capacity embeds cooperation within durable commercial and technical ecosystems. This alignment generates a reinforcing cycle in which successful projects enhance trust, enable broader agreements, and stimulate further collaboration.

The security dimension has also expanded, though in a calibrated and institutionally mediated manner. South Korea has favored participation in multilateral peace-support and maritime security operations that safeguard critical trade routes while limiting exposure to high-risk military entanglements. Simultaneously, defense exports and security-industrial cooperation have grown through long-term contracts, training programs, and technology-oriented partnerships. These initiatives intertwine economic and security objectives, contributing to the institutionalization of defense relationships.

Cultural diplomacy complements these developments by strengthening the social foundations of cooperation. The diffusion of Korean popular culture and the establishment of language and cultural institutions reduce societal distance, enhance mutual perceptions, and create a favorable environment for sustained engagement. In institutional-neoliberal terms, soft power lowers intangible transaction costs and supports the legitimacy of long-term partnerships.

Nevertheless, the study also identifies structural constraints. Regional instability, geopolitical rivalries, external sanctions, and energy market fluctuations periodically disrupt cooperation, demonstrating that institutionalized relations remain sensitive to the broader international environment.

Conclusion

This study concludes that South Korea's foreign policy toward West Asia between 2000 and 2024 shifted from an economy-centered, energy-focused model to a multidimensional, institution-based engagement strategy. This transformation was driven by deepening interdependence, the expansion of institutional frameworks, the consolidation of cooperation rules, and the emergence of multi-level networks linking state diplomacy with major Korean firms. As a result, South Korea's relations with West Asia achieved greater institutional coherence and strategic prominence within Seoul's broader foreign policy orientation.

Sustaining this trajectory will depend on strengthening flexible yet robust cooperation mechanisms, diversifying into renewable and advanced energy collaboration, enhancing legal and technical standards, and developing adaptive risk-management frameworks. Overall, the findings support the institutional-neoliberal proposition that durable cooperation emerges not through power balancing alone but through the institutionalization of interdependence, rule-governed interaction, and multidimensional partnerships.