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# The Strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran toward the Decline of U.S. Hegemony in the Persian Gulf Region

*Mojtaba Ferdosipour<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract**

The Persian Gulf has always been the center of great power competition, and the United States has been the dominant hegemon in this region since World War II with the establishment of military bases and security pacts. However, now there are signs of America's relative decline, which is rooted in the transition to a multipolar system, the emergence of China, America's failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, the decline in the trust of traditional allies, the increase in Iran's deterrence capability, and the transformation in the world's energy equations. The present study, aiming to formulate the strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the face of this hegemonic decline, addresses the question of what smart strategy Iran can adopt to solidify its position as the architect of the new security order in the Persian Gulf while maintaining its national security.

This applied-developmental research was conducted with a descriptive-analytical method and a mixed approach (qualitative-quantitative) between 2013 and 2025. Data were collected from 40 experts through a researcher-made questionnaire, and its validity and reliability were confirmed. The findings showed that 35 factors in five components (macro-strategic, security-defense, political-diplomatic, socio-cultural, and economic) are effective in reducing US hegemony, and 10 opportunities and 8 threats were identified. Ultimately, 10 sub-strategies were formulated, along with the main strategy of 'smart transition from mere deterrence to sustainable participatory regional order-building,' based on active deterrence, multifaceted diplomacy, and endogenous development.

**Keywords:** Strategy, reducing hegemony, United States of America, Islamic Republic of Iran, Persian Gulf

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## **Extended Abstract**

The Persian Gulf has always been the center of great power competition, and the United States has been the dominant hegemon in this region since World War II with the establishment of military bases and security pacts. However, now there are signs of America's relative decline, which is rooted in the transition to a multipolar system, the emergence of China, America's failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, the decline in the trust of traditional allies, the increase in Iran's deterrence, and the transformation in the world's energy equations. The present study, aiming to formulate the strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the face of this hegemonic decline, addresses the question of what smart strategy Iran can adopt to solidify its position as the architect of the new security order in the Persian Gulf while maintaining its national security.

## **Research background**

Davoud Ramezani Taklimi (1402) in a study titled "The Decline of American Military Hegemony and Its Impact on the National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran" conducted at the National Defense University concluded that among the factors affecting the decline of American military hegemony, only the country's internal factors (such as the lack of a spirit of compromise and lack of seriousness in decisions) have a significant impact on Iran's national security, and external factors play an indirect role in this process. In a study titled "The Decline of America's Unique Hegemony," published in the Egyptian University Journal of Business Studies and Research, Darya Shafiq Bassouni and Hoveida Shawqi (2024) examined the question of whether the one-dimensional hegemony of the United States serves its interests or is the beginning of its decline. The findings of the study indicate that the current international system has entered an important transitional stage and has moved away from unilateralism. In a study titled "Challenges to American Hegemony in the Light of New International Changes," conducted at the Near East University and the Department of International Relations, Shamal Hussein Mustafa and Zain Raed Hamid al-Jalali (2025) answered the question of how the United States will act to maintain its dominance and international.

## **Research Methodology**

The present research is a developmental-applied one with a mixed approach (qualitative-quantitative) and a predominance of qualitative methods. Scenario writing based on intuitive logic (Shell School) with a 2x2 matrix forms the main framework. Twelve experts were selected using a purposive and snowball method. Tools: Document study, semi-structured

interview, two-round Delphi and scenario-building workshop. Validity and reliability were ensured with standard methods. Qualitative analysis was conducted with triple coding and intuitive logic and quantitative analysis was conducted with Excel and impact / uncertainty matrix.

### **Geopolitical Theories and International Relations**

Key geopolitical theories: critical geopolitics (emphasis on the politics of geographical determination of politics), neorealism (emphasis on anarchic structure and distribution of power), Rimland theory (importance of peripheral territories for US security), geo-economics (competition over natural resources), and network geopolitics (concentration of power in global networks).

Geopolitical resilience: The concept of resilience at the national level is defined as the ability of a country to maintain basic functions in the face of multidimensional threats. At the international level, models such as the “National Resilience Index” and the “Early Warning Indicator of Crisis” have been developed. The existing theoretical gap is the lack of application of this concept in West Asia and Iran. By introducing “active geopolitical resilience” (a combination of smart deterrence, variable coalition building, and strategic alert), the present study emphasizes “leap-forward” and “transforming threats into opportunities.”

Strategic Ecology: *Global Level*: Four macro trends: the collapse of the multipolar order and the emergence of a security bipolarity; the emergence of transnational actors and asymmetric warfare; the technological revolution in cyber warfare; and energy geopolitics in the era of national security.

*Regional Level*: The transition from proxy warfare to direct hybrid warfare and hostile security networking; Arab-Zionist security convergence.

*National Level*: Iran faces deterrence advantages (missiles, drones, cyber, the axis of resistance) and severe vulnerabilities (sanctions, economic imbalance, technological gap).

### **Key Drivers from the Experts' Perspective**

1. The final direction of Iran's nuclear program
2. Changes in the international system and the future of US hegemony
3. The future of the resistance axis and the regional influence network
4. The sanctions system and the besieged economy
5. Domestic political stability and leadership succession
6. Corridor competition and transit corridors
7. Cyber warfare and technological developments.

## Findings and Scenarios

After conducting semi-structured interviews with 12 experts and systematic library studies, 23 drivers affecting Iran's position were identified and categorized into five main categories (defense-security, economic-financial, political-diplomatic, socio-cultural, and technological) and at two levels of analysis (global order and regional order). Key drivers: The two drivers with the highest importance and uncertainty scores were: "Continuation of the Iran-US conflict and its ultimate pattern in the future horizon" (score 37) and "Intensity, scope and effectiveness of economic and financial sanctions against Iran" (score 35). Based on these two critical uncertainties, a 2x2 matrix of scenarios was drawn.

Four scenarios were developed:

1. Attrition siege: continuation of the conflict with fully effective sanctions, erosion of the resistance axis and activation of anti-Iranian coalitions.
2. Contained war under low-impact pressure: continuation of the conflict, but with a gradual decrease in the effectiveness of sanctions through circumvention mechanisms, eastern ties and domestic resilience; a kind of "unstable equilibrium" between pressure and resistance.
3. Armed peace and sustained pressure: military ceasefire, but with the maintenance of the sanctions structure and limitations on economic reconstruction.
4. Fragile opening and strategic realignment: Relative containment of the conflict along with weakening sanctions and increasing Iran's regional role, but with fragility and mutual distrust.

Most likely scenario: The "contained war under low-impact pressure" scenario was identified as the most likely path due to four main factors: (1) both sides avoiding full-scale war due to heavy costs and mutual deterrence, (2) a relative decrease in the effectiveness of sanctions compared to the "maximum pressure" period, (3) consolidation of the "active resistance" model and multi-layered deterrence in Iran's foreign policy, and (4) the congruence of warning signs (continuation of tension without full-scale war, growth of ways to circumvent sanctions, increased cooperation with the East) with the current situation. Other scenarios were assessed as less likely due to structural constraints (erosive siege), lack of political will for a sustainable ceasefire (armed peace), and lack of readiness for a strategic opening (fragile opening).

## **Conclusion**

The strategic environment of West Asia is affected by the continuation of the structural conflict between Iran and the United States, which has not led to a full-scale war nor to a lasting peace, but has turned into a “contained war” at the security, intelligence, proxy and economic levels. The scenario of “contained war under low pressure” was identified as the most likely path.

Sanctions, despite their intensity, are less effective than during the “maximum pressure” period, and part of the pressure has been neutralized through sanctions evasion, informal financial networks, eastern ties and domestic resilience. At the same time, the security environment remains tense and the pattern of “active resistance” and multi-layered deterrence has been established. This combination has created an “unstable equilibrium” in which neither unilateral withdrawal is possible nor complete imposition of will. Other scenarios are less likely: “attrition siege” faces structural limitations; “armed peace” requires a durable ceasefire and channels of negotiation that do not exist; and “fragile opening” requires a serious reduction in tensions and new understandings that have not yet been achieved. The future of the region will be the continuation of a contained, costly, multi-level conflict in which external pressure is not the absolute determinant and internal resistance alone is not sufficient. The consequence of this situation is continued uncertainty, the erosion of power resources, and the need for strategic rethinking.

# Formulation of a National Branding Model by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Mohammad-Reza Esmaili<sup>1</sup>

Hojatollah Niki Maleki<sup>2</sup>

Maryam Keshavarzi<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

As competition in the fields of image-building and national credibility has intensified in recent years, nation branding has become a key instrument for enhancing countries' positions in the international system. However, in the absence of a coherent national branding model, efforts in this domain often fail due to fragmentation and the lack of a unified strategic direction, resulting in missed opportunities and the weakening of national soft power at the global level.

In this regard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the main executor of foreign policy, can play a pivotal role. Various forms of diplomacy—particularly public diplomacy and international interactions—provide an appropriate platform for presenting national capabilities and strengthening a country's global image. Accordingly, the main research question of this study is: *How can a national branding model be designed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran?*

This study aims to design an indigenous and effective national branding model for Iran by employing the grounded theory methodology to examine existing capacities, challenges, strategies, and outcomes in this field. The research adopts a qualitative approach and collects data through semi-structured interviews with 21 experts and managers in the fields of media, exports, branding, and diplomacy. The data were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding, resulting in 1,215 initial codes, 132 axial codes, and 49 categories.

The findings identify brand-creating diplomacy as the core category of the model and explain the causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, as well as the strategies and consequences associated with its implementation. Introducing the concept of brand-creating diplomacy and analyzing its dimensions constitute the main innovations of this research.

**Keywords:** National Brand, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, Diplomatic Relations

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## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

In the contemporary international system, competition among states increasingly extends beyond material power to the management of reputation, identity, and global perceptions. Nation branding has therefore emerged as a strategic instrument for strengthening soft power, attracting investment and tourism, promoting exports, and improving international standing. Iran possesses substantial historical, cultural, civilizational, economic, scientific, and tourism capacities; nevertheless, these assets have not been translated into a coherent and sustainable international image. Fragmented institutional action, lack of a unified strategic orientation, and negative external narratives have limited the effectiveness of existing efforts. Given its responsibility for foreign policy and its diplomatic, consular, media, and international networks, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can play a central role in organizing and directing national branding. Accordingly, this study asks how a national branding model can be designed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and seeks to develop an indigenous and operational framework suited to Iran's context.

### **Literature Review**

The study draws on several complementary perspectives. Anholt's nation brand framework emphasizes tourism, exports, governance, culture and heritage, people, and investment and immigration as major dimensions shaping national image. Social Identity Theory explains how collective belonging influences perceptions of nations, while Agenda-Setting Theory highlights the role of media salience and framing in constructing public perceptions. Nye's soft power framework shows how culture, political values, legitimacy, and attraction can influence international preferences. In addition, nation brand governance literature stresses institutional coordination among government, the private sector, and other stakeholders, while the new public diplomacy approach replaces one-way communication with dialogue, networking, trust-building, and two-way engagement.

Previous Iranian studies have examined nation branding through tourism, sport, social media, economic diplomacy, regional development, and the "Made in Iran" brand. International research has explored the relationship between public diplomacy and nation branding, economic determinants of national image, the role of embassies, the attraction of foreign direct investment, and experiences such as Qatar's. However, the

reviewed literature reveals a specific gap: no prior study has directly developed a comprehensive nation branding model centered on the institutional and coordinating role of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### **Methodology**

This applied study adopts a qualitative, exploratory grounded theory approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 21 experts and managers from four groups: Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials and public diplomacy experts; academics and specialists in branding and nation branding; experts in economics, commerce, and exports; and tourism managers and professionals. Theoretical sampling, supported by snowball sampling, was used, and interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached at the twenty-first interview. Data were analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding based on the Strauss and Corbin paradigm. The analysis generated 1,215 initial codes, 132 axial codes, and 49 categories, organized into causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, consequences, and a central phenomenon.

### **Discussion**

The central finding is the emergence of “brand-creating diplomacy” as the core category of the proposed model. This concept reframes nation branding from a primarily promotional and communicative activity into an integrated diplomatic strategy. Iran's national brand cannot be effectively constructed solely through isolated cultural, economic, media, tourism, scientific, or political initiatives; rather, these domains can operate within a single, coherent strategic framework coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Brand-creating diplomacy comprises four major dimensions. First, multidimensional diplomacy aligns tourism, cultural, artistic, media, economic, public, scientific, and sports diplomacy with one another to produce a comprehensive, multilayered representation of national identity. Second, synergistic diplomacy emphasizes strategic alignment among government institutions, the diplomatic apparatus, the private sector, and civil society. Third, targeted diplomacy for nation-brand creation replaces undifferentiated public communication with purposeful, audience-centered narratives built around a single, unified national brand vision. Fourth, technology-based diplomacy incorporates artificial intelligence, social media, digital monitoring, and data-driven communication into the analysis of international public opinion and the management of national image.

The model also identifies a set of causal, contextual, and intervening conditions. Strengthening the capacities of the Ministry and its diplomatic missions, the role of political leadership, the formation of nation-brand governance, political stability and security, Iran's cultural and civilizational assets, extensive digital-media penetration, and geopolitical developments **in West Asia** are among the key contextual factors. Conversely, policy discontinuity arising from changes in government, sanctions, Iranophobia, media weaknesses, economic and structural export-related problems, insufficient social capital and public trust, resource constraints, tourism infrastructure deficiencies, and the absence of integrated nation-brand governance may obstruct implementation of the model.

The proposed strategies include establishing an “Iran Nation Brand Office” within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, developing specialist human capital, transforming embassies into active platforms for brand diplomacy, drawing on the capacities of the Iranian diaspora, the private sector, and NGOs, creating a unified visual identity and national narrative, engaging strategically with mainstream and alternative media, expanding regional diplomacy and presence in international organizations, supporting Persian-language chairs and language institutes abroad, and employing artificial intelligence and digital platforms. Expected outcomes include stronger soft power, an improved international image, greater national identity and social cohesion, increased tourism, investment and exports, attraction of international talent, and enhanced credibility for Iranian products and the “Made in Iran” brand.

## **Conclusion**

The findings indicate that Iran's principal nation-branding challenge is not a shortage of cultural, historical, economic, or diplomatic assets, but the absence of a coherent theoretical and institutional architecture capable of aligning these capacities along a single path. In response to this gap, brand-creating diplomacy, positions the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the strategic coordinator of an integrated nation-branding system, shifting the management of the country's image from fragmented, reactive activities tied to political cycles toward a sustained, coordinated, audience-centered, and proactive process.

Sustainable national image management also requires simultaneous attention to economic, cultural, media, scientific, technological, and political dimensions. The four dimensions of brand-creating diplomacy — multidimensional, synergistic, targeted, and technology-based diplomacy — provide the operational logic for this transition. Theoretically, the

model connects the nation-branding literature with diplomacy studies, linking causal, contextual, and intervening conditions to strategies and consequences of branding. Practically, it offers policymakers a framework for moving from institutional fragmentation toward integrated nation-brand governance, converting Iran's existing capacities into a more coherent, credible, and sustainable international image.

# **Representation and Thematic Analysis of the Statements by Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's Martyred Leader, Regarding United States Foreign Policy (2016–2025)**

*Behnam Rashidizadeh<sup>1</sup>*

*Ali Asghar Nasiri<sup>2</sup>*

## **Abstract**

The present study aims to represent and analyze Ayatollah Khamenei's statements in the face of the foreign policy of the United States from 2017 to 2026. The importance of this period lies in the fact that the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA and the imposition of unprecedented sanctions and the 12-day war marked one of the most complex periods of the foreign relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The main question of this study is how Ayatollah Khamenei has interpreted and represented the behavior and strategies of the United States. The research method of the present article is qualitative content analysis, which uses the approach of content analysis to collect, code, and analyze the complete set of official and public statements of Ayatollah Khamenei during the aforementioned period.

The research findings show that Ayatollah Khamenei's statements were represented in the form of six central themes. The inherent nature of the difference between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States, the unreliability of the United States, and the JCPOA experience are among the most important central themes that represent the root of the problems and issues of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the United States. Strengthening domestic power, exposing America's hostile policies, and the need for intelligent resistance by the nation, and the need to maintain national unity and cohesion are among the most important central themes that explain the solutions to confronting America's foreign policy. The final outcome of the research is that although Ayatollah Khamenei's statements were in response to American pressures during this period, the solutions he presented acted as a stable and meaningful framework and guided Iran's foreign policy, promoted national power, and organized public opinion in line with the resistance discourse.

**Keywords:** Ayatollah Khamenei, foreign policy, United States, Trump.

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## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

The present study aims to represent and analyze Ayatollah Khamenei's statements in the face of US foreign policy since 2017 to 2026. In this period marked by the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" policy (since 2018) and its continuation under the Biden administration, the United States' unilateral withdrawal from the nuclear deal, the re-intensification of sanctions, 12-day imposed war in June 2025 as well as the Terrorist riots in January 2026, Ayatollah Khamenei's statements take on doubly strategic importance. These statements not only reflect the strategic analysis and official position of the Islamic Republic against the United States, but also serve as a tool for internal legitimization, social mobilization, and consolidation of the discourse of resistance and national identity. Ayatollah Khamenei's statements during this period have several dimensions: news dimensions that describe and analyze US policies and behaviors, compositional dimensions that include strategic recommendations and orders to the institutions and society, commitment dimensions that establish Iran's lines of resistance and principled strategies, and declaration dimensions that reflect official positions and symbolic messages. A systematic analysis of these actions provides the opportunity to examine how the United States is represented, the direction of Iran's foreign policy, and the role of the leader's speech in establishing and legitimizing domestic and regional strategies. Accordingly, the main research question is: How do Ayatollah Khamenei's statements, especially during the two terms of Trump's presidency, give meaning and represent US foreign policy, and what functions and consequences does this meaning have for Iran's foreign policy direction and domestic and regional legitimization?

### **Literature Review**

A review of the literature related to the subject of this study shows that although valuable efforts have been made to analyze Ayatollah Khamenei's statements, there has been less research that specifically and systematically addresses "the representation and content analysis of Ayatollah Khamenei's speech acts in the face of US foreign policy, especially during the two terms of the Trump administration (2017 to 2026)." This research gap highlights the need for a comprehensive, qualitative, and strategic study which this research attempts to address.

### **Methodology**

The research method of the present article is a qualitative content analysis that uses the content analysis method, with a content network approach, to

collect, code, and analyze the complete set of official and public statements of Ayatollah Khamenei during the mentioned time period. This method allows for the discovery of semantic patterns, discursive strategies, and messaging systems in Ayatollah Khamenei's statements and provides a platform for inferential analysis of the identity, strategic, and foreign policy dimensions of the leadership's discourse towards the United States.

## **Findings**

The research findings show that Ayatollah Khamenei's statements were represented in the form of six central themes. The inherent nature of the difference between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States, the unreliability of the United States, and the JCPOA experience are among the most important central themes that represent the root of the problems and issues of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the United States. Strengthening domestic power, exposing the hostile policies of the United States, and the need for intelligent resistance of the nation, and the need to maintain national unity and cohesion are among the most important central themes that explain the solutions to confront the foreign policy of the United States.

## **Conclusion**

The present research indicated that Ayatollah Khamenei, in response to the foreign policies of the United States, especially during the period of maximum pressure and the Joe Biden era, has drawn up a comprehensive and long-term strategy to confront foreign threats by carefully analyzing the situation in the country and the world. This strategy is based on strengthening domestic power, increasing national resilience, and maintaining internal cohesion, which is considered not only as a defensive strategy, but also as a strategic approach that guarantees the preservation of Iran's national independence and dignity. With his firm and explicit positions against the hostile policies of the United States, he had effectively guided the Iranian foreign policy agenda and strengthened the internal legitimacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran against foreign pressures. Based on the research findings, a conceptual model of Ayatollah Khamenei's discourse in the face of US foreign policy can be drawn, in which "threat representation" (in the form of themes such as the innateness of difference and distrust) acts as input, and "strategy prescription" (in the form of themes such as strengthening domestic power, smart resistance, and national cohesion) acts as output. This model indicates that the leadership's discourse has a coherent internal logic that moves from the level of reality interpretation to the level of strategic direction.

# **The Rationale for Iran's Redefinition of the Strait of Hormuz Passage Regime: A Historical, Legal, and Geopolitical Analysis**

*Morteza Damanpak Jami<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract**

Due to its geographical location, its role in connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and international waters, its significance in energy and commodity transit, and its position at the center of historical and contemporary rivalries among regional and extra-regional powers, the Strait of Hormuz has consistently ranked among the world's most critical strategic waterways. Recent security developments and shifting regional dynamics have underscored the necessity of rethinking the foundations, mechanisms, and transit arrangements governing this strait. Employing an analytical-strategic methodology and drawing upon library resources, legal documents, and historical data, the present study examines the following question: on the basis of which historical, legal, and geopolitical grounds can Iran proceed to redefine transit arrangements in the Strait of Hormuz? The central hypothesis of this research posits that the historical continuity of Iran's presence and exercise of sovereignty in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, the unique geographical position of the Strait of Hormuz, the principles of customary international law, the sovereignty of the coastal state over its territorial sea, historical rights, certain judicial precedents, and the security transformations resulting from fundamental changes in circumstances collectively provide a robust and logical set of arguments for the revision of past arrangements. Within this framework, the present study distinguishes between conditions of war and direct threat on the one hand, and stable peacetime arrangements on the other. The research findings indicate that future transit arrangements in the Strait of Hormuz cannot be predicated exclusively on either the logic of unilateral control or unlimited navigational freedom; rather, they must be designed on the basis of establishing a balance among freedom of transit, the security of coastal states, maritime safety, environmental protection, and regional cooperation. Accordingly, the proposed transit arrangements include respect for the principle of coastal state sovereignty, the application of the

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concept of safe and innocent passage, the clarification of the status of threatening vessels, the revision of transit corridors and traffic separation schemes, the provision of safety and navigation services, and the establishment of cooperation and dispute resolution mechanisms. The principal conclusion of this study is that the sustainability of any new arrangements in the Strait of Hormuz depends, above all, on the transformation of competition and external intervention into cooperation among coastal states, and on the creation of consensual, regional transit arrangements acceptable to the strait's users.

**Keywords:** Strait of Hormuz, Transit Arrangements, Territorial Sea, Innocent Passage, Historical Rights, Geopolitics, Maritime Security.

## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

The Strait of Hormuz has always been one of the world's most important strategic passages due to its geographical location, its role in connecting the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman and the high seas, its importance in the transfer of energy and goods to international markets, and its role as the center of historical and contemporary rivalries among regional and trans regional powers. The importance of this waterway does not only stem from the high volume of energy and goods passing through it, but also from the simultaneous inter-connectivity of geography, maritime power, trade, security, international law, and rivalries around this waterway.

### **Literature Review**

The literature on the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz is extensive in terms of subjects but largely scattered. In general, a review of the literature on the subject in Persian and foreign sources shows that there is no coherent literature that considers all aspects of the subject, especially the developments after the recent US aggression against Iran and its impact on the Strait of Hormuz. On the other hand, in many Persian and even foreign works, the "Persian Gulf" and the "Strait of Hormuz" have not been studied separately, but rather the Strait of Hormuz has been examined as a strategic extension of the Persian Gulf and its connection to the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean. The most important gap in the Persian literature on the issues of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz can be considered the lack of a comprehensive and interdisciplinary study that has examined these two issues simultaneously from the three perspectives of history and geography, international law of the seas, and geopolitical issues, and taking into account new developments in this region.

## **Discussion**

Based on the discussions in this article, the passage in the Strait of Hormuz have been shaped by historical developments, patterns of power and influence, the presence of foreign powers, and regional security developments. For this reason, examining the current situation in the Strait requires simultaneous attention to history, international law, and geopolitics. Recent security developments in the region arising from the US and Zionist aggression against Iran have raised fundamental questions about the legitimacy and efficiency of past transit arrangements through the Strait of Hormuz and highlighted the need to rethink the foundations, mechanisms, and arrangements for passage through this waterway. Accordingly, this article attempts to explain the hypothesis that “the historical continuity of the presence and exercise of sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, special geographical location of the Strait of Hormuz, the principles of customary international law, the principle of the coastal state’s sovereignty over its territorial sea, historical water rights, judicial procedures of the International Court of Justice, and security developments resulting from fundamental changes in the situation, provide a set of solid and logical arguments for Iran to review past arrangements.”

Considering the historical background and current developments, Iran has practically shown that it can challenge the previous passage arrangements through the Strait of Hormuz and redefine it based on its own national interests and sovereign principles. In this regard, taking into account a set of solid and logical factors and reasons, such as customary international law, the sovereignty of the coastal state over the territorial sea, the principle of persistent protester, fundamental changes in circumstances, the judicial decisions of the International Court of Justice and the law of historical waters, Iran intends to base the principle of “innocent and safe passage” on the new arrangements for the Strait of Hormuz. Subsequently, Iran and Oman, as coastal states of the Strait, are trying to put a new passage arrangement on the agenda; an order that, on the one hand, ensures the security, sovereignty and ecological interests of the coastal states of the strait and, on the other hand, is consistent with the general principles of international law. The first step in this direction was taken by issuing a joint statement by the two countries on temporary arrangements for passage through the strait and decision to continue technical negotiations between the two sides with the aim of agreeing on a permanent maritime corridor and the future management of the strait.

The current conditions prevailing in the Strait of Hormuz show that Iran has the upper hand against the enemy in order to consolidate its

sovereign rights and defend its national security, by practically controlling the Strait of Hormuz and reaching a bilateral agreement with Oman on a temporary passage arrangement in the waterway. However, Iran must be able to transform its most important strategic lever, namely the ability to control the Strait of Hormuz, into a sustainable rule, and transform the achievements of national resistance against the enemy into political and economic advantages. The most important issue in transforming the Strait of Hormuz lever into a persistent and logical rule is its acceptance by the countries of the region and its compliance with the customary and recognized principles of international law so that it does not become a negative tool and a new factor to intensify international pressure against Iran.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this research show that the future arrangements for passing the Strait of Hormuz cannot be based solely on one of the two logics of unilateral control or unlimited freedom of navigation but should be designed based on creating a balance between freedom of passage, security of coastal governments, navigational safety, environmental protection, and regional cooperation. Based on this, the proposed “innocent and safe passage” includes strengthening the principle of sovereignty of coastal governments, applying the concept to all ships, defining the status of threatening ships, redefining transit corridors and traffic separation plans, providing safety and navigation services, and establishing cooperation and dispute resolution mechanisms. The main result of the research is that the sustainability of any new arrangements in the Strait of Hormuz depends more than anything on the transformation of competition and foreign intervention into cooperation between coastal governments and the creation of a consensual, regional and acceptable passage arrangement for waterway users.

# Diplomacy in Crisis Zones: Experiences from Afghanistan

*Bahador Aminian<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract**

Iran's strategic environment encompasses a range of critical regions and neighboring countries, and over the past several decades, the Iranian diplomatic apparatus has accumulated invaluable practical experience in operating within these volatile contexts. This paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing theoretical and practical discourse on diplomacy in crisis-prone regions by systematically documenting a portion of this accumulated experience in one of the most acutely challenging geopolitical arenas—namely, Afghanistan—while simultaneously preserving this empirical knowledge for future analytical and operational reference. Afghanistan, as one of the most complex geopolitical theaters in Central Asia, has persistently served as a locus of interaction, contestation, and transformation in the foreign policy calculus of regional actors. The documentation and conceptualization of these experiences in the present study have been undertaken with a view toward enhancing the operational efficacy of Iran's diplomatic apparatus in analogous critical contexts. To this end, alongside a theoretical exploration of diplomatic practice in such regions, specific dimensions of diplomacy in crisis zones have been identified and critically examined, drawing upon several years of practical diplomatic engagement. The article concludes by synthesizing the key thematic discussions and offers a structured framework for future research endeavors, aimed at further refining the conceptual and operational dimensions of diplomacy in strategically sensitive and high-stakes environments.

**Keywords:** Crisis diplomacy; Afghanistan; Iran; foreign policy; regional security

## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

IRAN is situated in a very critical region. Iran's strategic environment includes regions and countries which are in the crisis situation, and over

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the past few decades, Iran's diplomatic apparatus has had valuable practical experiences in these countries and regions. This article attempts to compile some of these experiences in one of these extremely critical regions, Afghanistan. The main question of this article is what Iran's experiences in a crisis environment like Afghanistan were and what lessons these experiences have for similar situations. This article seeks to examine the nature of diplomacy in high-risk environments with an analytical-descriptive approach and by using a comparative method and especially by utilizing experiences in the crisis environment of Afghanistan.

### **Literature Reveiw**

Although a rich and significant literature has been produced on the issue of crisis management, especially in subnational issues and even at the level of superpowers, not much has been published in Persian on the subject of diplomacy in crisis areas, and most of the resources published in other languages are mainly based on the experiences of great powers. So far, nothing has been published on the experiences of Iranian diplomacy in crisis areas, and this article attempts to be an important and influential effort on this issue. Charles Herman states that crisis is recognized as a situation in which the goals and survival of the unit are in a threatening state that requires urgent decision-making. International relations literature emphasizes that success in these environments requires a deep understanding of local and international power dynamics. Understanding the mechanism of diplomacy in these crisis areas requires extracting experiences and conceptualizing them. On the other hand, Afghanistan has become a field of secret diplomacy and also covert diplomacy of many countries, including Iran. here I try to record this valuable experience to help compile and conceptualize diplomacy in crisis regions.

### **The conceptual framework**

In the context of the Afghan crisis, Iran pursues four parallel objectives: short-term management of security risks (realism), influence over domestic narratives (constructivism), the creation of shared interests for long-term engagement (game theory), and the establishment of people-to-people communication bridges (Para diplomacy). Accordingly, the four theoretical frameworks of realism, constructivism, game theory, and para diplomacy may be identified as constituting the conceptual and analytical basis underpinning Iran's conduct and policy orientation in Afghanistan.

## **Discussion**

Iran's diplomacy towards Afghanistan is defined within the framework of "crisis diplomacy". To act effectively and successfully in this critical and tense environment, Iran cannot rely on the traditional and unilateral method or on the use of its political and security levers, but its success depends on the ability to shape a strong region and coordinate the use of economic levers alongside soft diplomacy and Para diplomacy. A strong region is one that can control the crisis in this region. Iran faces several fundamental challenges to succeed and achieve a stable situation, which are effective in exacerbating the critical situation in the region. It should be noted that the severe crisis of regime changes in Afghanistan occurred during the difficult period of the coronavirus, which created additional restrictions and was considered a special crisis in itself. Finally, this article summarizes the aforementioned topics and presents a plan for future research.

Crisis zones have specific characteristics. These zones face a set of structural challenges that pose serious threats to effective actors. Competition and conflict between great powers or regional and local actors, ethnic and religious conflicts, environmental disasters and competition for resources are some of these structural challenges, but one of the most important features of crisis zones is the lack of strong governance or the governance of bankrupt or fragile states. The Afghan crisis is complex and multi-layered in nature, each of its dimensions challenging Iran's interests while simultaneously containing exceptional opportunities for Iran, these layers of crisis in Afghanistan are: political and Security, Humanitarian and migration, identity and religious, water resources (Hirmand): drugs and the power mafia.

In addition to the theoretical study of the issue of diplomacy in crisis, some dimensions of diplomacy in crisis regions have been identified and examined based on several years of experience. These experiences, which occurred during the extremely critical period of the withdrawal of American occupying forces, the collapse of the republican system, and the rule of the Taliban, have been categorized in this article.

## **Conclusion**

This article has demonstrated that Iran's diplomacy toward Afghanistan is defined within the framework of 'crisis diplomacy.' The Islamic Republic of Iran, in order to act effectively and achieve success in this critical and high-tension environment, cannot rely on traditional, unilateral approaches or merely on the utilization of its political and security leverage. Rather, its success depends on the ability to shape a robust region and coordinate the

deployment of economic leverage alongside soft diplomacy and para diplomacy.

As a result of this article, fundamental questions are also raised that should be the basis for future research. The main questions that need to be answered are: What lessons can Iran learn from international experiences to increase the effectiveness of its diplomacy in crisis areas? In environmental and theoretical factors: What theoretical and environmental factors (structural and factorial) affect the success or failure of diplomacy in crisis areas? In terms of successful models: Which countries have been able to create strategic opportunities through diplomatic tools (a combination of hard and soft) in crises? And in terms of Iran's foreign policy requirements: What features should be strengthened in Iran's foreign policy approaches and structure so that it can operate more effectively in such environments?.

# Competing Approaches to Security Architecture in the Persian Gulf after the U.S.-Israel War against Iran

*Mohammad-Hassan Sheikholeslami<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract**

The geopolitical landscape of the Persian Gulf stands at a critical juncture following the historic US-Israeli war against Iran. This conflict has severely disrupted the traditional US-centric regional security architecture, accelerating shifts such as diminished trust in exclusive Western protection, rising multipolarity, and renewed interest in indigenous security mechanisms. This article establishes a comparative analytical framework to systematically evaluate the five competing strategic paradigms currently shaping the discourse on the future of Persian Gulf security.

Utilizing Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) alongside discourse analysis, the study examines scholarly, policy, and think-tank literature published in English and Arabic since February 2026. The strategic options are rigorously measured against structural variables (threat perception, sovereignty, and polarity) and operational variables (alliance structures and defense orientations).

The findings reveal that while the first four paradigms—extending traditional US balancing, integrating with Israel, multipolar diversification, and relying on a concert of middle powers—offer tactical advantages, they carry deep structural liabilities that risk exacerbating regional polarization, institutional fragmentation, and chronic security dilemmas. Conversely, the fifth paradigm—an endogenous, cooperative security model rooted in an Iran-Saudi Arabia axis—demonstrates the highest capacity to address the root causes of regional instability. The article concludes that future security arrangements will not emerge from the absolute dominance of a single framework. Instead, the region has entered a complex geopolitical transition characterized by the simultaneous interaction, friction, and overlapping of these competing strategic paradigms.

**Keywords:** Persian Gulf Security; US-Israel-Iran War; Strategic Hedging; Indigenous Security; Regionalism; Multipolarity

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## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

The geopolitical architecture of the Persian Gulf has entered a profound period of structural transition following the devastating United States-Israeli military conflict against Iran. Historically recognized as one of the world's most critical geostrategic nodes due to its concentration of hydrocarbon reserves and vital maritime chokepoints, the region's security apparatus has long been anchored by external powers. Following the British withdrawal from east of Suez and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States established itself as the primary external security guarantor through a network of military bases, bilateral defense pacts, and massive arms transfers. However, this US-centric order faced progressive erosion over the past two decades due to regional systemic shocks, including the 2003 Iraq War, the Arab Spring, intensifying regional proxy conflicts, the rise of China, and Russia's re-entry into Middle Eastern politics. The recent US-Israeli war against Iran serves as the ultimate historical catalyst, exposing the acute vulnerabilities of regional infrastructure, the limitations of traditional external deterrence, and the complex interdependence of Persian Gulf security. Consequently, a vibrant strategic discourse has emerged across the Arab world and international policy circles, centering not merely on tactical policy adjustments, but on deeply rooted transformations in strategic culture, geopolitical alignment, and competing conceptions of sovereignty and regional order. This study addresses a central research question: How will these competing regional and extra-regional strategic approaches shape the future security architecture of the Persian Gulf in the post-war era? The core hypothesis posits that instead of a single model achieving absolute hegemony, the future order will be defined by a volatile geopolitical transition where overlapping and contradictory elements of five distinct strategic paradigms interact, accelerating regional strategic uncertainty.

### **Literature Review**

The academic and policy literature evaluating Persian Gulf security has evolved across distinct intellectual and geopolitical epochs. During the Cold War, scholarly analysis predominantly operated within a classical realist framework, focusing on superpower rivalry, the geopolitics of oil, and the necessity of external balancing to maintain regional equilibrium. Post-Cold War scholarship heavily documented the institutionalization of the US-led security umbrella. Prominent realists interpreted this arrangement as an essential offshore balancing mechanism capable of

guaranteeing maritime security, deterring revisionist regional actors, and maintaining the unhindered flow of energy to the global economy.

This consensus fractured following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, as scholars increasingly questioned the long-term sustainability of American hegemony, highlighting the destabilizing effects of forced regime change, sectarian polarization, and state collapse. The subsequent Arab Spring further reoriented the literature toward regime security, ideological rivalries, and transnational proxy warfare, demonstrating that regional insecurity could no longer be understood strictly through conventional state-centric military balances. In recent years, the literature has been dominated by the concept of "strategic hedging" within an increasingly multipolar global system. Scholars argue that a perceived decline in US long-term commitment has driven Gulf states to avoid rigid, exclusive alliances, choosing instead to develop parallel alignments with rising global powers like China and Russia to maximize autonomy and mitigate strategic vulnerabilities. Following the recent war, the literature has splintered into highly polarized policy camps: Western and Israeli think tanks emphasize integrated technological defense shields, whereas Arab strategic discourses increasingly critique hyper-militarization and advocate for indigenous, dialogue-based regionalism.

## **Methodology**

To systematically map and evaluate these shifting security paradigms, this study adopts a qualitative, multi-method research design combining Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) with strategic discourse analysis. The empirical corpus relies on scholarly studies, policy briefs, official government statements, and prominent media analyses published in both English and Arabic. To capture the immediate post-war strategic environment, the data collection focuses extensively on primary and secondary sources generated after February 2026.

To ensure analytical rigor and avoid descriptive event-driven reporting, the QCA framework evaluates the five emerging strategic doctrines against two distinct sets of macro-variables:

- **Structural Variables:** These assess the cognitive and theoretical foundations of each paradigm, specifically mapping the perceived primary source of threat, orientation toward power distribution in a multipolar system, and the conceptual definitions of sovereignty and strategic autonomy.
- **Operational Variables:** These analyze the functional mechanics of each paradigm, focusing on military-armament orientations, preferred alliance architectures, and concrete post-war strategic objectives.

The five paradigms are treated as "ideal types" rather than rigid, mutually exclusive policy categories, allowing the study to account for the hybrid strategic behaviors frequently exhibited by contemporary regional actors.

## **Discussion**

The core contribution of this research is the systematic comparative analysis of the five competing strategic approaches.

1. **US-Centric External Balancing:** This approach advocates for reinforcing the traditional post-Cold War security architecture. Proponents argue that Iran remains the primary revisionist threat and that the United States possesses irreplaceable power-projection capabilities. Critics counter that this institutionalizes structural dependency and reduces the strategic autonomy of Gulf states.
2. **Integrated Israel-Gulf Architecture:** Born out of the expansion of the Abraham Accords, this paradigm seeks direct Israeli integration into a tech-driven, anti-Iran military alliance. While promising advanced anti-drone, cyber, and missile defense integration, critics emphasize that it suffers from profound legitimacy deficits within Arab societies, leaves the Palestinian issue unaddressed, and risks locking the region into permanent block-based polarization.
3. **Multipolar Strategic Diversification:** This approach embraces global multipolarity by fostering parallel strategic partnerships with Washington, Beijing, Moscow, and Brussels. While maximizing diplomatic leverage, critics warn it can lead to institutional fragmentation and dangerous strategic ambiguity.
4. **Regional Concert of Middle Powers:** Rejecting great power dominance, this option proposes a quad-lateral security alignment consisting of regional middle powers, specifically Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, and Pakistan. However, skeptics question whether these powers possess the unified institutional capacity to sustain long-term regional equilibrium.
5. **Endogenous Iran-Saudi Cooperative Security:** This paradigm envisions an inclusive, indigenous architecture built upon diplomatic detente, economic interdependence, and joint maritime stewardship. Critics argue that deeply ingrained geopolitical mistrust and unresolved ideological rivalries present severe obstacles to its near-term implementation.

The study finds that while the first four models offer localized tactical benefits, they perpetuate the structural security dilemmas that drive regional instability. Conversely, the endogenous model, despite its immense operational hurdles, offers the only viable pathway toward transforming the underlying structural dynamics of conflict.

## Conclusion

This article demonstrates that the post-war Persian Gulf has transitioned away from a linear, hegemonically enforced security order. The traditional US-led framework is severely contested, yet the alternative paradigms remain caught in deep geopolitical friction. Ultimately, the long-term stability of the Persian Gulf will depend less on external military dominance and more on the institutional capacity of regional actors to forge indigenous, cooperative mechanisms. For policymakers, the study recommends a dual-track strategy: an **affirmative track** focused on building practical, low-sensitivity regional structures—such as joint maritime safety institutions, shared cybersecurity platforms, and collaborative climate diplomacy—complemented by a **negative track** dedicated to risk mitigation, including crisis hotlines and mutual non-aggression protocols to prevent accidental escalation in a highly fragmented strategic landscape.

# The Transformation of the United States' Representation as the "Other" in China's National Security Documents: From Regional Rivalry to Global Competition (2014–2022)

*Elham Rasooli Sani-Abadi<sup>1</sup>  
Zoreh Araabi<sup>2</sup>*

## Abstract

Over the past decade, the United States has been the most significant "Other" in China's national security discourse—an "Other" that has evolved from being a regional rival to becoming a global competitor. China's national security documents, particularly China's Military Strategy (2015) and China's National Defense in the New Era (2019), provide a clear depiction of this transformation. Drawing on the constructivist approach and Alexander Wendt's concept of the "Other," this study analyzes the representation of the United States in these documents. The central question is how China represented the United States between 2014 and 2022, and what impact this representation had on its foreign relations. The findings reveal that China has predominantly portrayed the United States as a "rival Other" in its national security documents, a rivalry that first emerged at the regional level in areas such as East Asian security, the Taiwan issue, and the South China Sea disputes, and later expanded to the global stage through issues such as the trade war, advanced technologies, geopolitical competition, and the international order. Accordingly, the representation of the United States as a "rival Other" has not only shaped China's defensive and security orientations in its immediate environment but also reinforced its strategies on the global stage, including deepening cooperation with Russia, expanding engagement in international institutions, and seeking to redefine the international order.

**keywords:** China, Constructivism, National security documents, Other, United States, Rival Other

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## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

The relationship between the United States and China has emerged as one of the central themes in contemporary international relations. These two powers are not only major economic and military actors but also identity-shaping forces in the international order. One of the key arenas that reflect the evolving dynamics of this relationship is China's national security documents, which are officially published to articulate the Chinese leadership's perception of the international environment and the position of major powers within it. Examining the representation of the United States in these documents provides new insights into China's identity-building process and foreign policy orientation. In recent years, as regional rivalry has gradually expanded into global competition, the importance of such an inquiry has increased significantly.

The central question of this research is: How has the representation of the United States in China's national security documents changed between 2014 and 2022, and what are the implications of this transformation for China's foreign policy? The primary objective is to trace the process through which the U.S. has shifted from being portrayed as a "regional other" to being constructed as a "global rival." This transformation indicates China's transition from focusing merely on regional threats to defining its role as a global power.

The study is situated within the constructivist school of thought, particularly drawing upon Alexander Wendt's insights. From a constructivist perspective, the identities of states and their construction of "the other" play a crucial role in shaping interests and behavior. China's understanding of the United States cannot be explained solely in material terms; rather, it emerges through processes of identity construction and representation embedded in official discourse. By analyzing China's national security documents, this study reveals how the U.S. has evolved from a regional rival in East Asia to China's primary competitor in the international order.

### **Literature Review and Research Background**

Previous research on Chinese foreign and security policy has emphasized several dimensions. Scholars such as Yahuda (2016) and Swaine (2017) have highlighted the persistence of strategic distrust between China and the United States. Erickson (2019) and Campbell & Doshi (2021) have underlined the role of military competition and technological rivalry in shaping bilateral relations. In the Iranian context, researchers like Ahmadi

& Karimi (2018) have drawn upon constructivist perspectives to explain how the identity of the “Other” affects state behavior. Nevertheless, few studies have systematically analyzed the textual construction of the United States as the “Other” in China’s official documents, especially with attention to the period after 2019 and the implications of the Ukraine crisis in 2022. This research aims to fill this gap.

### **Methodology**

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative approach and content analysis of official documents. The primary sources include China’s Military Strategy (2015) and China’s National Defense in the New Era (2019), along with official statements and reports up to 2022. Through thematic analysis, this research identifies recurring patterns in the representation of the U.S., and by comparing the documents, it highlights both continuities and changes in China’s strategic outlook. This approach enables the study to capture not only the explicit wording but also the deeper identity-based shifts underlying China’s security narratives.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study employs constructivism as its theoretical foundation, with particular reference to Alexander Wendt’s theory of identity and the role of the “Other” in international relations (Wendt, 1999). According to this approach, states do not only act based on material interests but also construct their identities and define their interests through social interaction. By framing the United States as a threatening “Other,” China simultaneously defines itself as a responsible, multilateral, and rising power. This theoretical lens enables a deeper understanding of the interplay between discourse, identity, and foreign policy.

### **Discussion**

The findings show that the 2015 Military Strategy framed the United States primarily as a regional rival. The focus was on issues surrounding East Asia, including Taiwan, the South China Sea, and U.S. military presence in the region. The U.S. was represented as an interventionist and destabilizing force in China’s immediate security environment. In contrast, the 2019 National Defense in the New Era document portrayed the United States as China’s principal global rival. The tone was more confrontational, accusing the U.S. of unilateralism, hegemonism, and attempts to globally contain China. Beyond traditional security concerns, new areas of competition such as technology, economics, and geopolitics were emphasized. This indicates a clear shift from regional rivalry to global confrontation. Developments

after 2019 further reinforced this trend. The U.S.–China trade war, restrictions on advanced technology exports, and the visit of Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in 2022 intensified China’s negative portrayal of the United States as a global rival. Moreover, in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war, China accused the U.S. of exacerbating the crisis by expanding NATO and provoking Russia, which demonstrates how China’s security discourse now links the U.S. to global-level challenges beyond the Asia-Pacific.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the representation of the United States in China’s national security documents between 2015 and 2022 underwent a fundamental transformation. This shift moved from portraying the U.S. as a “regional rival” in East Asia to defining it as a “global other” across multiple domains, including security, technology, economics, and geopolitics. The implications for Chinese foreign policy can be observed at two levels. First, China has reinforced its regional security and deterrence measures in response to U.S. actions in East Asia. Second, China has expanded its global engagement through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), deeper strategic cooperation with Russia, and a more active role in multilateral institutions.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings confirm that the construction of “the other” plays a decisive role in redefining state identity. By framing the United States as a “global rival,” China has simultaneously defined its own identity as a responsible, multilateral, and ascending power. This identity construction underpins China’s ambition to reshape the international order and assert itself as a central player in global governance. Looking ahead, the trajectory suggests that Sino-American relations are heading toward a long-term, multidimensional rivalry. This rivalry will not be confined to military or regional domains but will also extend to advanced technology, digital economy, energy security, and global governance structures. Therefore, analyzing the representation of the U.S. in China’s national security documents is not only key to understanding Chinese foreign policy but also essential for anticipating the future dynamics of the international order.

# **A Comparative Study of Chinese and Russian Positions Regarding the Taliban in the UN Security Council (2021–2025)**

*Mohammad-reza Siavashpour<sup>1</sup>  
Mohammad-Hassan Khani<sup>2</sup>*

## **Abstract**

This study conducts a comparative examination of the positions and policies of China and Russia toward the Taliban following the fall of Kabul on August 15, 2021. The research seeks to answer three key questions: First, what perceptions and attitudes do China and Russia hold toward the Taliban? Second, what are the strategic expectations of these two powers from the new Afghan government? And third, what fundamental differences do these two countries exhibit in their attitudes and expectations? Given the need for up-to-date comparative studies and the perceived gap in this area, the present research attempts to focus on "official statements in the UN Security Council" to explore the less-examined dimensions of the foreign policies of these two powers. The primary data for this study consists of the speeches of representatives and ambassadors of the two countries in formal UN Security Council meetings. By extracting and analyzing key themes from ten selected meetings (from September 2021 to June 2025), this research identifies the core patterns of each power's foreign policy and explains the evolution of these policies based on reconstructed narratives. This comparative analysis, while highlighting strategic differences—including China's focus on border security and economic cooperation and Russia's emphasis on regional stability and counter-terrorism—contributes to understanding how the policies of the two countries have evolved in the face of challenges such as human rights and instability in Afghanistan.

The findings indicate that despite both countries accepting the new political reality in Afghanistan, the policies of China and Russia toward the Taliban are distinct, and their paths and pace of adaptation to this reality have differed. Russia, adopting a realist approach and emphasizing the Taliban's capability and security control, officially recognized the new Afghan government in 2025, prioritizing geopolitical interests over human rights

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considerations. In contrast, China has acted more cautiously, emphasizing the need to guide the Taliban, and regards Afghanistan's political stability and economic reconstruction as an integral part of its broader regional strategies.

**Keywords:**

Afghanistan, Taliban, China, Russia, United Nations Security Council

## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction**

The fall of Kabul in August 2021 and the return of the Taliban to power after two decades marked a turning point in contemporary international relations. This shift created a unique geopolitical landscape where traditional Western influence in Afghanistan diminished, leaving a vacuum that regional powers, specifically China and Russia, sought to manage. While both nations share a common interest in regional stability, their diplomatic approaches within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have revealed nuanced differences. This research addresses the problem of how these two permanent members of the UNSC have navigated the "Taliban dilemma"—balancing the need for pragmatic engagement with the constraints of international law and human rights. The study covers the period from September 2021 to June 2025, providing a longitudinal analysis of their evolving policies.

### **Literature Review**

A systematic review of relevant databases revealed that few studies directly address China-Russia relations with the Taliban in light of recent developments; most existing literature examines the two countries' policies separately. On China, analyses show a paradigm shift from a security-driven approach to geo-economic strategy. Saniei, Torabi, and Rezaei (2022) argue that China sees the Taliban's return as a chance to fill the US power vacuum and pursue "soft balancing" via the Belt and Road Initiative. Manouri, Keshvarian Azad, and Sedaghati (2022) add that Beijing seeks "constructive intervention" in South Asia. Marvati, Ahmadi, and Zakerian (2022) emphasize a move toward "strategic partnership" to secure rail routes to Europe. Sajjadi and Momeni (2024) explain China's approach through neo-mercantilism. Two English works are notable: Iqbal et al. (2024) on Sino-Pakistani counter-terrorism cooperation, and Ehsan et al. (2023) on pragmatic Sino-Afghan relations. On Russia, the literature

indicates a shift from “threat management” to “active interventionism.” Davoudi and Kiani (2024) argue that Moscow now seeks an active role in the peace process. Davoudi, Kiani, and Barzegar (2022) highlight a pragmatic, instrumental engagement with the Taliban as a deterrent against ISIS and US pressure. Comparative studies are rare. Only Tajik, Bogheiry, and Hashemi (2024) offer a comparative analysis, but its conference format limits coverage of recent developments (e.g., Russia’s recognition of the Taliban). This study fills that gap by providing an updated comparative analysis of Sino-Russian convergences and divergences, uniquely focusing on UN Security Council statements.

## **Methodology**

The study employs a qualitative-comparative methodology based on thematic analysis of primary diplomatic documents. The core data consists of official statements, speeches, and voting explanations delivered by Chinese and Russian permanent representatives during ten selected UNSC meetings. These sessions include crucial debates on the extension of UNAMA’s mandate, counter-terrorism resolutions, and humanitarian aid. By extracting key themes—categorized into "Recognition and Legitimacy," "Security Concerns," "Humanitarian/Human Rights Issues," and "Economic Cooperation"—the research reconstructs the diplomatic narratives of Beijing and Moscow to identify patterns of convergence and divergence.

## **Key Findings and Discussion**

**Evolution of Diplomatic Narratives:** In the immediate aftermath of the U.S. withdrawal (late 2021 to 2022), both China and Russia adopted a "wait and see" approach, emphasizing the formation of an inclusive government as a prerequisite for recognition. However, as the Taliban consolidated power, the narratives began to shift.

- **Russia’s Narrative:** Initially characterized by security-centric pragmatism, Russia’s stance evolved into a "realist acceptance." By 2024, Moscow increasingly focused on the Taliban as the only viable force capable of preventing a total state collapse and containing ISIS-K.
- **China’s Narrative:** Beijing’s rhetoric was consistently framed around "developmental peace." China’s statements in the UNSC frequently linked Afghan stability to regional connectivity and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), positioning itself as a constructive partner rather than a security guarantor.

**Security and Counter-terrorism:** Security remains the primary driver for both nations, but their targets differ. Russia is predominantly concerned

with the spillover of religious extremism and narcotics into Central Asia, viewing the Taliban through the lens of a "border guard." China, while sharing these concerns, has a more specific focus on the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Chinese representatives in the UNSC repeatedly urged the Taliban to fulfill their counter-terrorism commitments as a condition for deeper economic integration.

**Human Rights and the "Internal Affairs" Doctrine:** A significant part of the analysis focuses on how both powers handled the Taliban's restrictive policies on women's education and employment. Both China and Russia utilized the principle of "non-interference in internal affairs" to criticize Western-led sanctions and "human rights conditioning." However, China maintained a more consistent rhetorical pressure on the Taliban to adopt moderate policies, whereas Russia's criticism of the Taliban's social policies noticeably softened as its bilateral ties with Kabul deepened toward 2025.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that between 2021 and 2025, the Sino-Russian relationship regarding Afghanistan transitioned from a "tactical partnership" to a "strategic division of labor." Russia provides the political and security legitimacy at the regional level, while China provides the economic lifeline. However, the divergence in their final positions—Russia's formal recognition versus China's conditional engagement—reveals that Beijing is more concerned with long-term "guidance" and structural reforms within the Taliban, while Moscow is satisfied with a stable, albeit authoritarian, "buffer state." This comparative analysis underscores that the future of Afghanistan will be shaped by these two distinct regional models of engagement, which challenge the traditional Western-centric norms of the UN Security Council.