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«ЦИВИЛИЗАЦИОННОЕ ГОСУДАРСТВО» ИЛИ «НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЕ ГОСУДАРСТВО»: ПЕРСПЕКТИВА ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКИ ИРАНА

Авторы данной статьи полагают, что изучение внешнеполитического поведения Исламской Республики Иран следует проводить скорее с использованием конструкции «цивилизационного государства» и ее правильной трактовки, нежели через призму теории «национального государства».

Концепция «национального государства» предполагает международную систему, обусловленную и сформированную поведением государства. Поскольку природа международной системы определяется анархией, неореализм требует накопления власти для обеспечения выживания государства. А наступательный неореализм определяет «максимизацию власти» и «гегемонию» как конечную цель входящих в систему государств.

В своей внешней политике Иран не ставит целью достижение гегемонии. Имея древнюю историю, богатую культуру и самобытную цивилизацию, Иран позиционирует себя как «цивилизационное государство», а не «национальное». В этой связи влияние выходит за пределы

национального государства, и пытается охватить цивилизационный ареал и использовать культурное наследие и общность исторических судеб с народами Западной Азии, Кавказа и Центральной Азии. Иран имеет древнюю историю, богатую культуру и самобытную цивилизацию. В отличие от модели гегемонии «национального государства», «цивилизационное государство» в первую очередь уделяет внимание культурным и человеческим факторам. Речь скорее идет о потоке «мягкой силы». Авторы полагают, что такой подход способствует лучшему пониманию внешнеполитического поведения Ирана.

Ключевые слова: цивилизационное государство, национальное государство, гегемония, Иран, внешняя политика.

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“CIVILIZATION STATE” OR “NATION STATE”: A PERSPECTIVE ON IRAN’S FOREIGN POLICY

The authors of the present paper argue that Iran’s foreign policy behavior has to be analyzed, not through the prism of “nation state” but “civilization state” if one is seeking to get it right.

Under the idea of “nation state”, the structure of the international system determines the behavior of a state. Since the nature of the international system is defined by anarchy, the neorealism mindset prescribes power accumulation to ensure survival. And offensive neorealism defines “maximization of power” and “hegemony” as the end goal of states.

But the purpose of Iran’s foreign policy is not to seek hegemony. Iran has an ancient history, a rich culture and a distinct civilization. It behaves within the framework of

a “civilization state”, not a “nation state”. Iran’s influence goes beyond the border of a “nation state” because of its civilizational reach, its cultural heritage, and its historical links with modern nations in Western Asia, Caucasia and Central Asia. Contrary to the pattern of hegemony pursued by a “nation state”, a “civilization state” focuses on cultural and human factors first. It is the flow of ‘soft power’. That’s a true way to understand Iran’s foreign policy practices.

Key words: Civilization State, Nation State, Hegemony, Iran, Foreign Policy.

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The Realism School of Thought argues that
1. States are central actors in international politics
2. The international political system is anarchic, meaning there is no global government or anyone being in charge internationally
3. States are rational actors and behave in their rational self-interest, and
4. States desire power to survive. They build militaries to ensure self-preservation. Survival is their primary concern and their highest goal.

The focus of Neorealism is on the anarchic structure of the international system. There is no equal distribution of power and there is no central global authority. “Nation states” have an appetite for power. That’s why they resort to “self-help” to survive as this is a pre-condition to pursue all other goals. States have no choice but to rely on themselves as they seek to increase their own capabilities and

undermine the power of others. This generates “balance of power” as states pursue their own interests. It is the anarchic structure that causes states to compete [3].

While Defensive Neorealism emphasizes on “security”, Offensive Neorealism insists on “accumulation of more power” since states cannot trust the intentions of other states. Because of lack of trust, they develop offensive military capabilities to increase their power as much as possible in order to ensure their survival. So, Neorealism explains international relations in terms of power. That’s why realists judge the actions of a “nation state” on the basis of power and competition, not moral or cultural principles.

The West insists on watching the world through “nation state” prism. It considers itself and its values superior to all others. It largely sees Iran in this context. The inconsistency of Iran’s ruling system and its actions with Western values are interpreted and judged according to those values.

The Western world in general, the United States in particular, has not tried to understand Iran in its own terms. That’s why their predictions _ from the imminent fall of the Islamic Republic after the 1979 Islamic Revolution to the break-up of the country _ have all gone wrong. And they will continue to get it wrong as long as they don’t understand Iran in its own terms.

Iran is very much different from the West. The most fundamental difference is that Iran doesn’t behave merely as a “nation state” but as a “civilization state”. Iran has been a “nation state” in the Western sense of the term since 1925 but the fact of the matter is that it is several millennia years older than that. Iran is one of the oldest civilizations on Earth, with historical and urban settlements dating back to 7000 BC or earlier.

So, Iranians think of themselves as a civilization rather than a nation. Iran’s identity goes beyond its modern borders of a “nation state”. Iran’s sense of identity has predominantly been shaped by its history as a “civilization state” embracing different nations and cultures. That has greatly influenced its way of thinking. “Nation state” accounts for a very short period of its very long history.

Looking at Iran’s foreign policy from Neorealism perspective, the Islamic Republic has security fears in the anarchic structure of the international system. Given the ideology of Iran’s ruling system and the history of its relations with global powers, serious security concern is evident.

Based on this perspective, Iran seeks to accumulate as much power as possible to its own benefit and to the detriment of its rivals. This approach doesn’t bring into account Iran’s internal considerations and civilizational reach. It defines Iran’s survival, whether it’s a monarchy or a clerical-led Islamic Republic, in terms of the three following steps:

1. Reducing threats to its survival
2. Employing “balance of power” strategy to balance regional and extraterritorial powers
3. Upgrading Iran’s might and turning itself into a regional hegemon

This approach attributes foreign policy actions of the Pahlavi dynasty and the Islamic Republic to Iran’s hegemonic intentions. Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s desire to turn Iran into a major power and his power projection in the 1970s after Britain left the Persian Gulf and his rejection of Western demands to curtail oil prices are seen as examples of that.

It views the Islamic Republic’s competition with regional rivals, its attempts to spread the values of its 1979 Islamic Revolution abroad, or its nuclear and missile programs as evidence of Iran’s hegemonic intentions.

Authors of this study, while challenging the Neorealist view, argue that although the structure of the international system prescribes a pattern of regional competition and, at a higher stage, hegemony to Iranian strategists, the purpose of Iran’s foreign policy is not to become a regional hegemon. Instead, Iran’s civilizational and cultural reach and its historical experiences require it to act as a “civilization state”. That’s profoundly different from hegemony pattern.

Based on this introduction, we put forward the two main questions of this research:

1. Is the Islamic Republic of Iran seeking to become a regional hegemonic power?
2. What is the ideal and achievable pattern for Iranian foreign policy with regard to Iranian history, civilization and culture?

In response, two theories are put to test:

1. Iran has not sought to become a regional hegemon although the anarchic structure of the international system prescribes competition and hegemony.
2. A hegemonic pattern for Iranian foreign policy is in conflict with its cultural heritage, its history and the nature of its government. Instead, the model consistent with its culture, civilization and history is to act as a “civilization state”, which is fundamentally different from hegemony.

This research has employed analytical and explanatory method. In the first part, three patterns of power balancing, hegemony and civilizational state are described. The second part explains the Islamic Republic of Iran’s behavior in foreign policy with regard to these three models.

Positive and negative balance-making pattern

From the structural realism’s point of view, anarchy in the structure of the international system compels states to balance their rivals. States work to increase their own power and undermine the capabilities of their rivals. Balance-making is considered the most optimal and rational foreign policy choice that can, without engaging in a military conflict, alter the balance of regional or international power to the benefit of some states and to the detriment of others.

At the same time, balance-making is a dominant strategy that reproduces anarchy [14]. The international system favors balancing and digests balance-making behaviors but resists revolutionary ones [20, p.11].

Balance-making, which is subdivided into positive and negative balance-making in this paper, differs from the concept of balance of power. Balance of power refers to a particular combination of power distribution in the international system that has emerged under multipolar, bipolar, and uni-multipolar systems [4, p.324]. The structure of the international system is shaped and developed by the balance of power.

From the perspective of realists, balance of power is a situation that provides relative political stability in the anarchic structure of the international system and prevents permanent wars in the international arena. Balance of power always exists. It may change in favor of one actor and to the detriment of another actor [20, p.10]. From Neorealism perspective, the goal of all international actors is to change the balance of power to their own benefit. This goal is sometimes achieved by war and sometimes by diplomacy.

But positive and negative balance-making, first of all, is one of the essential tools to change the balance of power in the international system. Second, balance-making is not a reactive behavior. It is a dynamic process in foreign policy while, in contrast, balance of power is relatively a static condition, and it is the output or product of balance-making by states.

In the last five centuries, Iranian governments have employed balance-making strategy as a means to ensure their security and simultaneously confront foreign enmity effectively. Balance-making in this sense means creating alliance and coalition with my enemy's rival or my enemy's enemy. That is intended to confront the enemy in a more effective and economical manner.

The strategy of balance-making actually prescribes alliance or coalition with one or more states which share common goal(s) with Iran. Entering into permanent or temporary alliance with a third force has been one of strategies employed in the history of Iran's foreign relations in order to create balance-making. The third force was a newly-emerged global power meant to contain the first and second powers whose practices were a constant threat to Iran.

Britain during the reign of Shah Abbas Safavid¹ in 1622, France during the first period of Iran-Russia wars in 1807, Austria and the United States of America

during the reign of Amir Kabir² in 1851; Germany during World War I and II, and finally the U.S. after World War II, were all examples of a third force that Iranian governments attempted to use within the framework of the strategy of balance-making.

Subdividing balance-making into positive and negative types is based on the security results of this strategy in Iran's foreign relations over the past five centuries. The strategy of balance-making has been effective and useful whenever Iran enjoyed a solid and balanced internal power structure. It did reduce threats to Iran's security with minimum of cost. We call these historical junctures "positive balance-making".

But in most periods, the strategy of balance-making adopted by Iranian governments, whether being a temporary or permanent alliance with a powerful state, or the use of a third force against the first and second forces, due to the shaky and uneven structure of internal power, not only failed to diminish security threats, but it also paved the way for direct or indirect interference of those powers in Iran's internal affairs.

For instance, Iran's alliance with Britain during Iran-Russia wars or the siege of Herat eventually led to the extensive loss of Iranian land in the north and the east in the 19th century. Another example is the experience of Iran relying on a third force. Relying on Germany provided an excuse for Iran's occupation during the two World Wars. Or relying on the United States to marginalize Britain and Russia, led Washington to being an influential power in Iran itself. We call this type "negative balance-making".

Strong and balanced construction of power within the country depends on high military, economic, political, social and cultural capabilities and capacities. That includes government's legitimacy and popularity, which is one of the most essential components of a state's power. A government enjoying solid social base and relatively supported by masses, even if it is weak in terms of material elements of power, possesses a potent bargaining chip when confronting other states. Consequently, balance-making by such a state will be largely beneficial and, at least in the short term, "positive balance-making" [10, p.34].

Many experts around the globe analyze Iran's behavior at both regional and international levels on the basis of the concept of "positive balance making". To them, the Islamic Republic, learning from the bitter experiences of "negative balance-making" of the Qajar³ and Pahlavi⁴ dynasties in the 19th and 20th centuries, which led to Iran's insecurity and loss of many lands, seeks "positive balance-making" at regional and international levels. It relies

1 Shah Abbas, or Abbas the Great, was the 5th king of the Safavid Dynasty in Iran. He governed from 1588 to 1629. Shah Abbas is regarded as one of the greatest rulers in Iranian history.

The Safavid Dynasty was one of the greatest ruling dynasties in Iran from 1501 to 1736. At their height, they established control over what is now Iran, Azerbaijan Republic, Armenia, Georgia, Bahrain, parts of the North Caucasus, Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan as well as parts of Turkey, Syria, Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It was the Safavids who introduced Shia Islam as the state religion of Iran.

2 Mirza Taghi Khan Farahani, better known as Amir Kabir, was chief minister to Naser al-Din Shah Qajar. He served just for three years from 1848 to 1851. He was murdered in 1852. Amir Kabir is widely considered as "Iran's first reformer". He sought to bring gradual reform to Iran and modernize the country.

3 The Qajar Dynasty ruled Iran from 1789 to 1925. It had succeeded the Afsharid Dynasty. Under weak Qajar family, Iran lost many lands to the Russians in the 19th century.

4 The Pahlavi Dynasty ruled Iran from 1925 to 1979.

on its endogenous power to reduce regional and international threats through engaging in coalitions and alliances; thus changing the regional balance of power to its own benefit and to the detriment of its rivals, specifically Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

From this perspective, the Islamic Republic took advantage of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry during the Iran-Iraq war through balance-making tactics. Iran's policy of détente with its Arab neighbors following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and in the wake of the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent expulsion of Iraqi troops in 1991 by a U.S.-led coalition was aimed at altering the balance of power in Iran's favor and to the detriment of Saddam Hussein. Critical dialogue between Iran and the European Union in the 1990s was also intended to balance the U.S. and reduce security threats against Iran.

Under this approach, Iran's policy of appeasement towards Russia and China over Iran's nuclear dispute with the 5+1 group is analyzed within the framework of "positive balance-making".

With the outbreak of Arab Spring in 2011, balance of power at the regional level was disrupted. Regional powers including Turkey, Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia employed all their strategic and diplomatic capacities to alter the balance of power in their own favor and against their rivals. Rivalry between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey in Syria was a struggle for power under a zero-sum approach. The conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the internal crises of Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain and Yemen is analyzed in this context.

From structural realism perspective, Iran's behavior indicates that it pursues "positive balance-making" with the aim of changing the balance of power to its own benefit and to the detriment of its regional rivals. From this perspective, Iran, Turkey, Israel and Saudi Arabia, foremost, want to maintain the regional balance of power. But as soon as a power vacuum is created, struggle for a new power balance to the benefit of oneself and to the detriment of regional rivals starts.

Pattern of regional hegemony

The strategy of balance-making is conservative. It's opposite of hegemony model, which is revisionist. A country that tends to be a hegemonic power does not want to maintain the balance of power but seeks to permanently disrupt it by resorting to its ideological and material capacities in order to achieve the status of a regional or global hegemon.

Once a regional or global power achieves hegemony, it attempts to create a set of powerful rules and regimes by using its superiority in various military, political, economic and cultural areas to maintain its hegemonic status, regional stability and order.

The important question is: What are the characteristics of a hegemonic power and what challenges a hegemon is faced with? Robert Gilpin¹

believes that for a regional power to become a hegemonic power, it must meet the following four criteria [17, p.142 - 145]:

1. Unrivaled military power at the regional level,
2. Ability to create a political system in the region (forming alliances or coalitions and leading them),
3. Enjoying commercial and economic advantages so as to be able to pay the costs of hegemonic order in the region and to digest free riders with its economic power,
4. Being an ideological power in such a way that its values are acceptable to other countries in the region and include a lifestyle for peripheral countries.

Some structural realists consider the Islamic Republic's behavior in the region to be consistent with a hegemonic pattern. They explain Iran's hegemony with the concept of "Safavidism".

During Safavid era in the 17th century, especially under Shah Abbas, Iran was an unrivaled political-military power. It was one of the international trading poles through its monopoly of silk production and its possession of the ideological power of Shiism.

According to this group of experts, the realization of the Islamic Republic of Iran's hegemony in the region rests on Tehran's negative behavior with the goal of disrupting a Middle East order sought by the United States and its Western allies. The Islamic Republic, by resorting to military and political means as well as engaging in a confrontational discourse with liberal democracy values, has adopted an anti-U.S. hegemony stance in order to create proper conditions for its own hegemony in the region.

From this perspective, Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution was not confined to its national borders. It was a revolution with an international message aimed at the global audience. Its international overflow resulted from its discourse that confronted the liberal democracy order. The radius of the Islamic Revolution discourse was defined to cover all continents of the world [7, p.2-3].

This discourse confrontation has emerged in regional security equations. Therefore, Iran rejects regional engineering of great powers, especially that of the United States. The Islamic Republic's opposition to the Camp David Accords² of 1978 was the starting point for this discourse conflict. Iran's support of resistance groups in Lebanon and Palestinian territories fighting Israel is an important feature of the Islamic Revolution's conflict with the liberal discourse. Liberal discourse describes Iran's behavior as "Iran's opposition to the Middle East peace process [2, p.34]."

¹ Robert Gilpin was an American political scientist and an influential figure in the field of international political economy. He was a "realist" who promoted "hegemonic stability theory". The theory holds that the international system is more likely to remain stable when a single nation-state has political, economic or military dominance over others.

² The Camp David Accords were two political agreements signed in 1978 between Egypt and Israel at the White House following secret negotiations at Camp David in Maryland, U.S. The agreements, mediated by U.S. President Jimmy Carter, led to the 1979 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.

Within the framework of this discourse conflict, Iran opposed the 1991 U.S. invasion of Iraq and declared neutrality despite being able to annihilate its avowed enemy, the Saddam regime, by entering into an undeclared coalition with the United States. Theoretically and practically, Iran opposed the “New World Order” and the “Greater Middle East” approaches put forward by George H. W. Bush, the 41st U.S. president. The Iranian government formally opposed the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, although it adopted positive neutrality in practice. It also opposed the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq but, this time, practiced negative neutrality.

The U.S. administration sought to establish a secular government in Iraq that would be loyal to Washington, but elections proved that power would be in the hands of Iraqi Shiites, who make up a majority of the population, also indicating Iran’s vast spiritual influence among Iraqi Shiites [12, p.12].

With the elimination of Saddam, Iran and Iraq became natural allies. Iran supported the government elected by the Iraqi people and opposed the breakup of Iraq and the weakening of its central government. Iran’s most outstanding hegemonic behavior, explained by liberal democracy discourse in the form of negative behavior and opposition to the “Middle East peace process”, was Iran’s support for Hezbollah in the 33-day Lebanon War of 2006 and Hamas in the 22-day Gaza War of 2008-2009, two wars that led to Israel’s first historic defeat against the Arabs [1].

Iran’s support of the Syrian government of President Bashar Assad, Ansar Allah movement¹ in Yemen, and Shiite parties opposing the Bahraini government are explained and analyzed in this context. Iran’s security behavior in these cases was based on opposition to U.S. intervention in the region and rejection of the regional “order” designed by Washington. The U.S. and its regional as well as European allies have labeled Iran’s security behaviors in the Middle East as “disruptive to regional order” with the aim of achieving its own hegemonic intentions.

Civilizationism Pattern

The pattern of civilizationism is fundamentally different from the pattern of hegemony. There are few states that have the potential to become a “civilization state” in their region. The main prerequisites for being a “civilization state” are cultural and civilizational capacity, a long history of influencing peripheral societies, a rich cultural heritage and civilizational attractions [4, p.54].

A “civilization state” derives its legitimacy from its distinct civilization while a “nation state” seeks its legitimacy in the concept of territorial integrity, language and citizenry.

1 Ansar Allah movement, also known as the Houthis movement, is a predominately Zeidi Shia force. It took over Sanaa, the capital, in 2014. Since March 2015, they’ve been resisting a Saudi-led military invasion of Yemen. The Houthis are supported by Iran.

Under this definition, China, Russia, India, Iran, Egypt and Italy are among countries possessing the potential to become civilizational states in their regions and justify their behavior in civilizational terms.

On the contrary, states such as Iraq or Lebanon, which lack ethnic or historical unity or have experienced a long history of violence and militarism cannot fundamentally play the role of a “civilization state” in their respective regions. Regional civilizationism has a lot in common with the concept of “eldership”, or the white-bearded old man in Iranian culture. A white-bearded man is nickname for someone who is trusted by the community because of his human dignity, justifiable behavior, and altruism. He is a wise elder whom people refer to for guidance in order to resolve their disputes.

In contrast to hegemonic strategy, which is primarily based on material components (military, political, economic), and only later attends to cultural dimensions, civilizationism begins with cultural and human components and then becomes a material and objective product. It has a humane approach to overcome global challenges, specifically now that the world is witnessing ever intensifying strategic competition. Civilizationism is already laying the ground for a new world order. It’s the inevitable flow of “soft power”. The more a country shows vigilance, influence and creativity, the more it owns the future [11, p.107 - 123].

Civilizationism originates from a government that has a stronger sense of civilizational and cultural greatness. Political elite in a “civilization state” have a high sense of confidence in their legitimacy to play such a role. A “civilization state” does not consider itself a “nation state” and disregards the requirements resulting from the anarchic structure of the international system. Rather, it considers itself a “civilization state” by relying on its civilizational background and cultural capacities.

The key condition to achieve the status of a “civilization state” is to avoid adopting a policy of intervention. Intervention is the main instrument of a hegemon to achieve hegemony through military, economic, political, and ideological means.

Weak governments engage in covert and overt contacts with powers outside their region to balance the regional hegemon and gain a higher level of security. This is why a “civilization state” must not pursue a policy of intervention and hegemony [6].

Civilizationism pattern can be achieved when regional states indirectly acknowledge the spiritual leadership of that country and don’t consider it a threat. They trust it and grant it legitimacy to mediate in regional disputes and even in their internal affairs.

In other words, a “civilization state” influences the peripheral countries and, through its fatherly policies, prevents foreign reaction to its influence at the regional level. Maintaining this balance is the biggest challenge for a “civilization state”.

To better understand civilizationism pattern, we present five prerequisites and five strategic policies for a “civilization state” to differentiate it from hegemony pattern:

Requirements for becoming a “civilization state” include:

1. A donor culture as well as an ancient and absorbing civilization.
2. Considering itself a “civilization state” rather than a “nation state”.
3. Enjoying the enduring idea of independence among its political elite, and more importantly, their belief, confidence and consensus to play the role of a “civilization state”.
4. Lacking a history of invasion of peripheral countries.
5. A quiet and minimum-tension environment.

Policies required to become a “civilization state” include:

1. Not adopting policy of intervention (not acting as a regional power for the purpose of becoming a mighty regional power).
2. Eliminating the perception of threat on the part of peripheral states from itself.
3. Trusting the peripheral states in order to gain their trust.
4. Seeking participation not as a tool but as a goal.
5. Enjoying the necessary material capacity to transfer regional roles to peripheral countries.

Unlike hegemony pattern, which is predominantly based on material components, civilizationism pattern primarily focuses on spiritual and cultural elements. Obviously, material components also play an important role in the civilizationism pattern.

A “civilization state” must possess all the necessary economic and military capacities to delegate its regional roles to the peripheral countries, to trust them without any security fear in order to gain their trust in the long run and consequently, release its cultural and civilizational capacities to perform its role in the region. Furthermore, advancing “civilization state” pattern requires a calm regional environment with a high sense of cooperation and minimal tensions.

Iran and Regional Civilizationism

Cultural attractions, ancient civilization and, most importantly, behavior of Iranian governments in the past five centuries represent Iran's aptitude to play the role of a “civilization state”. A state manifests its historical integrity in foreign behaviors, especially at the time of war. The history of Iran's practices in foreign policy in the past five centuries shows that Iranians, while always being attacked by neighbors and world powers, have never initiated a war.

After the establishment of Safavid rule in 1501, the Ottoman Empire launched constant attacks against Iran. The Ottomans from the west and the Uzbeks from the northeast were always eager to exploit any

internal weakness of Iran _ either as a result of the death of a king or internal power struggle _ to invade Iran. Interestingly, Iran at the peak of its military and political might in the 17th century, during the reign of Shah Abbas, could have seized parts of Ottoman territory to compensate previous Ottoman invasions but did not do so.

During the reign of Shah Abbas, Iran emerged as a world power. European states were eager to establish relations with Iran. Shah Abbas preferred to settle his differences with neighboring countries, especially the Ottomans, through dialogue and diplomacy [18, p.99]. Having pushed back the Ottomans and liberating Tabriz, which had been invaded and briefly occupied by the Ottomans, Shah Abbas wrote a letter to the Ottoman king at the height of his power in 1608, showing the peaceful nature of Iranians. While the Iranian army, in terms of international norms, could cross the Iranian border and conquer parts of Ottoman territory and boast victory, he didn't retaliate. Shah Abbas wrote in his letter [15, p.61]:

“... I have no intention to occupy your territory. Give up claims against Iran so that I can make peace with you ...”

Among Iranian kings, Nader Shah¹ is referred to as a warmonger. Some historians liken him to Tamerlane. A glance at the history of the Nader period reveals that only after the Iranians were severely humiliated at the end of the Safavid era by the Afghan invasion of Isfahan and the advance of Ottomans and Russians inside Iran did he expel the invaders. Even after he invaded India and defeated its Gurkani king, he gave up the occupation of Indian lands and restored Iran's borders at the same previous geographical location [19, p.523].

In the 19th century, Iran became a scapegoat of great powers. Disloyalty of Britain and France and the destructive role these two powers played during the two periods of Iranian defeat by Russia at the beginning of 19th century were the starting point of anti-colonialist sentiments among Iranians. Britain's devastating role in drafting Golestan and Turkmenchay treaties _ which led to ceding many lands including what is now Daghestan and large parts of Georgia, Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia to the Russian Empire _ greatly increased anti-British sentiments in Iran. The end of 19th century coincided with Russia suppressing the constitutional movement in Iran in support of the tyranny of Mohammad Ali Shah. Despite Iran's declaration of neutrality in World

¹ Nader Shah Afshar was king of Iran from 1736 to 1747. He founded the Afsharid Dynasty. He came to prominence during chaotic days during the final years of the Safavid Dynasty. Nader Shah reunited Iran, after Ottomans and Russians had seized Iranian territory in the final years of the Safavid era, and removed the invaders. However, the Afsharid Dynasty he had founded disintegrated quickly after his assassination in 1747 during a rebellion.

War I, the Allies occupied Iranian territory. Iran was also occupied in 1941 during World War II by Allies Powers despite Iran's declaration of neutrality.

Britain and the U.S. overthrew the popularly-elected government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953 after hatching a military coup, an outright act of interference in Iran's internal affairs. The coup against Mossadegh's legitimate government set the stage for the 25-year tyranny of Mohammad Reza Shah. Foreign interference and internal tyranny in the 19th and 20th centuries had a direct and effective impact on shaping the 1979 Islamic Revolution that toppled the Pahlavi Dynasty, abolished monarchy and established the Islamic Republic.

The central motto of revolutionaries in 1979 was "independence" (from foreign interference), "freedom" (from internal tyranny) and "Islamic Republic" (future political system).

In 1980, the newly-established Islamic Republic was subject to Saddam Hussein's territorial invasion, but even after the start of the war, the Iranian leader was reluctant to fight, and was keen to end the bloody war in return for Iraq's apology.

Founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, shortly after Saddam's invasion of Iran, said: "... A thief came and threw a stone and fled. He does not have the power to repeat it. God willing, once it becomes a serious issue, I would order all (the Iraqi nation and army) to act seriously and place Iraq in its place. God willing, such a day won't come" [13].

And, during the war, although Saddam's regime repeatedly resorted to chemical weapons against Iranian and Iraqi civilians, Iran never retaliated in kind despite having the knowledge to produce them. Retaliation would have killed many innocent Iraqi people, many of whom considered Iran their mother country.

Iran declared neutrality during the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 1991 while it could have joined the coalition to avenge the 1980-88 war. In 1997, after the Afghan Taliban killed members of the Iranian consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif, Iran's Supreme National Security Council, led by reformist President Mohammad Khatami, voted to invade Afghanistan. But Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final power to declare war or peace under Article 110 of the Constitution, prevented Iran from attacking the Taliban regime. Iran adopted a position of "positive neutrality" in 2001 after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. And Iran strongly opposed the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and adopted a policy of "negative neutrality".

Thus, Iran's political history in the last five centuries proves that Iranians are peace-loving and never initiated a war. They always preferred peace and dialogue to war even when they had the legitimate right to take retaliatory military action.

The historical experience and political culture of Iranians shows that the Iranian state does not enjoy sufficient power to engage in unilateral intervention since intervention is the product of effective control over other governments. Such a policy is in conflict with the nature of Iranian governments. Iran's history supports the assumption that its security is not separate from that of its neighbors. Enhancement of security for neighbors equals security for Iran. This assumption is the exact opposite of security dilemma under the notion of "nation state" that gives priority to accumulation of power and dictates a zero-sum approach.

The historical characteristic of Iran is not defined by political or military intervention but cultural influence. The spread of Iranian culture in the past did not occur because of border demarcations and antagonism but because of cultural absorption. Iranian culture, as its literature and mysticism shows, has a donor culture while admiring the cultural values of others.

Being a donor culture means being a source of inspiration and having a capability to transfer values to other nations. It has no sign of seeking to dominate neighboring nations. Iranian culture has also absorbed the cultural elements of others.

Enjoying a donor culture, while welcoming, praising, and recognizing the values of a neighbor, is a prerequisite for a "civilization state". The Iranian culture attests that it does possess this characteristic.

The context of cultural development, which provides conditions for Iran being a "civilization state", requires a calm environment with minimal tensions and maximum friendships. But is the Middle East a calm region? History shows that, since the 18th century, the peripheral region of Iran, including the Persian Gulf and the entire Middle East, has experienced tensions, wars, and instability due to structural conflicts and intervention of big powers. Therefore, Iran's tendency to play its role as a "civilization state" has faced obstacles: Structural conflicts in the peripheral environment of Iran and the interference of extraterritorial powers. What is the Islamic Republic's solution to advance its role as a "civilization state"? We will answer this question in the following section.

"Civilizationism", an ideal strategy for Iran

The profound influences of Shiite thinking, 150 years of humiliation resulting from foreign interference and internal despotism during the Qajar and Pahlavi periods, and 38 years of Khomeinism, prescribe the great and ideal goal of "civilizationism" for the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy.

This goal has two pillars: 1. Regional independence
2. Intellectual and cultural heritage

Realization of these two could be achieved through a multi-layered strategy of employing an anti-hegemony direction, eliminating the notion that Iran is a threat, maintaining a peaceful and stable regional environment, and following fraternal neighborly

policy with Islamic countries. Like a captain who only likes calm seas for the speedy journey of his ship, the Islamic Republic seeks a peaceful and secure regional environment to accomplish its lofty foreign policy goals. This is contrary to Western propaganda accusing Iran of disturbing regional order. As is evident in the ideas of Iranian leaders and their foreign policy in the past four decades, the materialistic profit-seeking approach, geographical expansion, and political or economic interventions are not the dominant aspects of Iranian foreign policy.

The Islamic Republic considers its prosperity dependent on the existence of a peaceful and stable region free from interference of foreign powers. It defines the realization of this peaceful environment in terms of a struggle against the Israeli regime.

From the Iranian perspective, Israel is the source of instability in the Middle East and the main cause of interference of major powers in regional conflicts. Therefore, fighting Israel is Iran's operational strategy to achieve a secure and stable Middle East. Such a stable environment will pave the way for Iran to successfully perform its role as a "civilization state".

Civilizationism prescribes opposition to the intervention of major powers in the Middle East and hostility towards Israel for Iranian leaders, but it rejects conflict and hostility towards Islamic countries and neighbors. In order to act as a "civilization state", it is not only necessary for Iran to refrain from pursuing hostile policies in the region but also avoid a policy of competition. Competition is an attempt to take something from someone and add it to your pocket [8, p.2 – 3].

Iranian religious teachings dictate that, to achieve material resources, not only is there no need for hostility, but also competition is not necessary. Vital and material resources for human survival are not reducible resources. The Earth holds enough resources for all nations under just conditions. Therefore, competition is not necessary. A participation spirit is essential instead. And maintaining a sense of participation is even more essential for a country that wants to be a "civilization state". This is where inviting participation becomes a goal itself, contrary to the knowledge of international relations that defines participation as a means of achieving material goals.

The big goal of Iran's foreign policy is to facilitate conditions for the expansion of Iran's progressive cultural capacities at the regional level. The calmer and more stable the environment, the more Iran's cultural capacities expand and the more it engages in effective dialogue with the peripheral cultures and communities.

For the Iranian government, good neighbor policy, peaceful coexistence and living in tranquility are more beneficial because spread of Iran's historical content requires a secure and stable environment. In other words, a sense of satisfaction and trust in Iran's peripheral environment is Iran's inherent need in order to release its progressive culture.

Therefore, the stronger and more influential Iran is, the greater its need to obtain the satisfaction of its neighbors. The prevailing mentality in Beijing echoes a similar sentiment that China's rise will not threaten peace, regional order and the national interests of neighboring states [5].

Gaining the trust of neighbors is the key in civilizationism. Obtaining the confidence of neighbors requires putting trust in them, in-depth understanding of their language and sentiments, and expansion of informal relationships with them, both at governmental and non-governmental level [16, p.5].

These relationships go beyond formality and the conservative give and take patterns. They get ethical and spiritual dimensions. This policy is the same foreign policy Khomeini called "Islamic brotherhood".

The policy of brotherhood does not eliminate borders but diminishes their relevance. The nature of the Iranian government is based on the idea of brotherhood in foreign policy. The Islamic Republic has been more committed to this doctrine than any other Iranian government in various periods, as the doctrine promoted by Khomeini and the current Supreme Leader suggests. In the foreign policy doctrine of Iran, Islamic governments, even non-elected governments, are called brothers of the Islamic Republic, but when hostile confrontation arises between Islamic governments and their people, civilizationism pattern supports the people.

The Islamic Republic supports the Assad government because it believes that Syria's civil war is not a war between the Syrian people and its government but a war between paid foreign mercenaries and the Syrian government. Therefore, Iran's strategy in Syria supports Syrian-Syrian dialogue to determine an elected government. Iran's support of freedom movements in Bahrain and Yemen came to light when the governments of Bahrain and Yemen clashed with their own people. Thus, pattern of civilizationism in Iran's foreign policy has made anti-hegemonic policy, confrontation with foreign interference, conflict with Israel, brotherhood with Islamic states, and support for oppressed nations its priorities.

There is a general rule saying the more developed a state is, the more it needs to have calm and extensive relations with its weaker neighbors. This view does not lead to imperialism and hegemony because expansionist practices of a regional hegemonic government will activate the link between its neighbors and extraterritorial powers. Therefore, regional hegemony will be practically in favor of weak neighbors and extraterritorial powers. That is why the U.S. portrays Iran's missile program as a threat to its neighbors and the entire Middle East.

Iran enjoys influence in its own periphery because of its historical and civilizational reach in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Caucasus and Central Asia. Many people in different parts of the Middle East consider Iran as their "mother country". Iran captures hearts, not territories. But the West misinterprets _ or deliberately

misrepresents _ Iran's "influence" as "interference". The idea of Iran acting as a "civilization state" is the foundation for understanding Iran in its own terms.

Because of its distinct civilization, rich culture and ancient history, Iran's power is not dependent on competition with regional powers or hegemony. The Iranian government does not possess the necessary power to unilaterally engage in political, economic, and military intervention. The nature of the Iranian government lies in its "soft power", which has made it a "civilization state". Iran's power flourishes in the region when life for all nations in the region is humanized. But this approach faces structural barriers.

Civilizationism is a new political discourse that questions the Western liberal order. The cultural homogeneity a "civilization state" promotes stands in direct contradiction to the Western liberal secular values.

Iran's policy of confronting extraterritorial powers, strengthening its defensive capabilities, confronting Israel, and supporting oppressed nations in the region are intended to prepare a favorable environment for the realization of its role as a "civilization state" in the Middle East. The doctrinal strategy of the Islamic Republic at regional level is to dispel the idea of "Iran as a threat". Simultaneously, Iran's security and defense strategy is to strengthen its missile capability in order to deter extraterritorial powers from invading its territory.

But the U.S. government portrays Iran's enhanced missile capability as a threat to countries in the region and works hard to make them fear Iran. Security fear of the peripheral states of Iran paves the way for the expansion of American hegemony in the Middle East. At the same time, it delays the supreme goal of Iran's foreign policy: Performing as a "civilization state".

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