The Relationship Between National Interests and Ideology in the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran

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Abstract

The concepts of ideology and national interests tend to exhibit a propensity for contradiction and conflict when the foreign policy of a political system is ideologically intense or, in other words, inclined to prioritize idealism over realism. The research method used in this article is descriptive and analytical. In terms of the role of variables, national interests and ideology are considered independent variables, while foreign policy is the dependent variable. In response to the research question, the article proposes the following hypothesis: "Despite the emphasis of proponents of the integrative approach on the compatibility of the concepts of ideology and national interests in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the relationship between the two is incongruent and has diverged from national interests under the influence of ideological doctrines." In such cases, ideals both reinforce and emerge from ideology, while national interests are rooted in and inspired by realism. Therefore, the orientation of a country's foreign policy becomes meaningfully linked to the concepts and themes of ideology and national interests, drawing closer to or distancing from each based on the type and nature of the political system's foreign policy. In this sense, a realist foreign policy offers an expansive interpretation of national interests and adopts a restrictive stance toward ideology. Conversely, an idealist foreign policy is closely tied to ideology in its conventional sense and tends to narrow the scope of national interests. Furthermore, a realist foreign policy, in terms of methodology, is devoid of value judgments and can be described as positivist. According to established principles, its benefits typically outweigh its costs and it engages consistently with international standards in ongoing interaction and pursuit. However, an idealist or ideologically driven foreign policy simultaneously rejects the established order in the international system and seeks to initiate a new model for global governance, aiming to alter existing values and norms. In this pursuit, it favors subjective rules over objective laws. Within this framework, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is an example of political conduct that, through a pronounced ideological orientation, has subordinated its national interests. Based on this, the fundamental question posed by the article—which aligns with its title—is the following: What is the nature of the relationship between national interests and ideology in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and from what source is this relationship nourished?

Keywords: National interests, ideology, foreign policy, constructivism, Islamic Republic of Iran.

1. Introduction

There are two dominant perspectives regarding the relationship between national interests and ideology in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. One perspective, advocated by supporters of the current foreign policy, asserts that there is no antagonistic relationship between national interests and ideology; rather, the two often converge. This is because, on the one hand, both ideological values and national interests are fluid and ever-changing and should not be assumed as fixed or inherently affirmative. On the other hand, ideology inherently contains and supports national interests, and these two concepts are not inherently contradictory. Moreover, the structure of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on ideology. From this standpoint, ideology is considered fundamental, whereas national interests are seen as incidental and secondary phenomena. Thus, it is not deemed appropriate to confront ideology—especially considering that ideological principles are universal and supranational, not confined to any specific nationality or territory.

Before Mehdi Bazargan's epistemological shift regarding the relationship between religion and politics, figures such as Morteza Motahhari and Ali Shariati also advocated for the unification of ideology and national interests in foreign policy, each in their own way. In the official discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran, although these concepts are not explicitly defined, there is a strong belief that national interests and ideology are not only non-conflicting but also synergistic in the international sphere.

The second perspective, however, holds a view that national interests and ideology are heterogeneous, incompatible, and mutually exclusive. As a critique of current foreign policy, it argues that the Islamic Republic of Iran is an ideological system in which national interests—both structurally and in terms of approach—have been overshadowed by Islamic ideology. From this viewpoint, scholars have warned about the consequences of ideological dominance in foreign policy. Abdolkarim Soroush, Rouhollah Ramazani, and Mohammadreza Dehshiri are among the proponents of this perspective, asserting that ideology and national interests have never overlapped in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic.

This article adopts the second viewpoint, considering several decades of foreign policy practice by the Islamic Republic of Iran, its minor and major outcomes, and its confrontational impacts on the international stage. It challenges the first perspective's efforts to argue that national interests are not equivalent to the collective interests of individual citizens, and that political systems, cultural norms, and dominant values define national interests. It also contests the idea that ideology is not a sudden phenomenon but rather the result of a prolonged and complex evolution, and therefore that ideological interests constitute a form of national interest. The article maintains that these claims cannot obscure the profound influence of ideology on national interests in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Clearly:

First, national interests are the linking chain of policies, positions, and orientations of the nation-state system in foreign and international politics and are translated as the "national will."

Second, national interests are both the key criterion for measuring the success of foreign policy and the outcome of public preferences regarding the decision-making institution's priorities, which, according to James Rosenau, may also be rooted in values.

Third, in democratic societies, the plurality of opinions, scientific polling, political parties, civil society, and free media aggregate national interests. Given the free flow of information, the political system undergoes self-correction and rectifies its mistakes. In contrast, in non-democratic systems, the signifier "interests" does not reflect the signified "society." Therefore, it cannot be accepted that ideology is the axis of foreign policy in advanced societies. In those societies, ideology is neither pre-designed nor prescribed. Moreover, it is not interwoven with political discourse but is rather a cultural and socially constructed phenomenon. Ideology in the foreign policy of developed societies is not foundational or directive; it is instead superficial and facilitative.

Fourth, the intertwining of ideology and national interests in foreign policy has become a major challenge in the field of geopolitics and its associated advantages. Ideological conflict has translated into geopolitical conflict. This overlap has also fostered theoretical challenges, such as the absence of transparency and analytical formulation, methodological challenges such as fluctuations between ideology and national interests, and structural challenges like unclear responsibilities and duties.

Given this, the article, following the abstract and introduction, provides a concise explanation of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic, defines the concepts of ideology and national interests, outlines their functions within the Islamic Republic

of Iran, and ultimately concludes that national interests and ideology are heterogeneous and irreconcilable concepts in foreign policy. Hence, foreign policy must be directed toward the pursuit of conventional national interests by recognizing the distinct features of each concept.

2. Theoretical Framework

Due to the intertwining of national interests and ideology in the cultural, social, political, and international realms, constructivist theory was chosen as the theoretical foundation of this article. Constructivism, a relatively new theory in international relations, claims to integrate both material and non-material interests. Prominent proponents of this theory include Adler, Onuf, Ruggie, and Alexander Wendt. Constructivism posits that political culture and social identity shape structures, and that agents and actors are subject to these constructed structures. The theory argues that interests, identities, and values are interrelated and are defined and redefined through socialization.

Accordingly, the rationale behind choosing constructivism as the article's theoretical foundation is grounded in the following insights:

First, constructivism is categorized among critical theories in international relations. It challenges the mechanistic view of human nature and the assumption of rational order in classical rationalist discourse. Constructivism seeks to expose the shortcomings of grand theories in international relations and to offer a novel framework.

Second, ontologically, constructivism defends idealism against materialism and subjectivism against objectivism, making it a non-material, socially oriented theory in international relations.

Third, in this article—based on qualitative research that seeks to examine the relationship between national interests and ideology in a norm-based and value-driven system such as the Islamic Republic—constructivism is an effective and suitable theoretical approach, even though not all norms and values are universally applicable.

Fourth, constructivism, alongside the Copenhagen School and its concept of security communities, places significant emphasis on norms, identities, cultures, and symbols of soft power. Thus, it aligns more closely with qualitative and non-material themes. Issues such as ideology and even national interests, understood as perceptions of benefit and utility, fall within the scope of constructivist concerns.

Fifth, from the constructivist perspective, the perceptions and mental frameworks of the Islamic Republic's leaders and policymakers in foreign policy stem largely from their identity layers, and ideological considerations play a significant role in shaping their international strategies and orientations.

Sixth, constructivism pays considerable attention to the transnational dimensions of foreign policy and to the interaction between structure and agency, particularly in identity-oriented systems. It challenges the negligence shown by other international relations theories in this regard.

Seventh, constructivists argue that since both national interests and identities are socially constructed, they are defined through socialization and are closely linked. Thus, the pursuit of national interests and ideology in international affairs is considered a key element of state behavior and orientation.

Based on these seven dimensions, constructivists believe that the world and human society are not predefined and determinate entities. There is no fixed reality whose rules can be discovered through scientific research or explained by a single scientific theory. Instead, reality is an intersubjective domain that is given meaning by society, inhabited by society, and perceived by it. Constructivists, embracing post-positivism, argue that there is no such thing as a singular truth. In line with positivists, they believe that we gather awareness from the world. They go as far as Alexander Wendt's assertion that the state is a myth and not truly an actor but merely a social construct. From a constructivist standpoint, identities and norms shape actors' priorities and define collective goals. They influence foreign policy design and implementation much like ideas, religions, and cultures. In other words, it is these ideas that describe power and interest, and national interests are understood through them. Transnational constructivists particularly emphasize the influence of norms that are collectively employed by society or its subsets (Fatollahi, 2024).

Despite these theoretical insights into structuration and constructivist theories, and the assumptions of both structure-oriented and agency-oriented approaches—including those of Giddens (structuration), Roy Bhaskar, and Jessop (critical realism)—neither agency nor structure alone is the primary cause of action. Both viewpoints fall short, as social phenomena

are not linearly related, nor is their occurrence attributable to a single variable or factor. Most social phenomena result from multiple actions and diverse factors (Kazemi, 1993).

Therefore, structuration theory illuminates the reciprocal, dialectical relationship between agency and structure. In this view, agent and structure are intertwined in a dialectical synthesis. Foreign policy is not merely a meta-theoretical domain; it cannot be understood solely through meta-theoretical debates but requires a relative departure from such discourse to engage with concrete subjects. Thus, agency in foreign policy has no meaning without the domestic environment and the state. According to Robert Putnam, foreign policy is at least a two-level game, though the diversity of rules and societies has made it increasingly complex (Kazemi, 1993).

Constructivists continue to maintain that international relations, like other areas of human interaction, is a social field. They emphasize semantic factors such as cultures, norms, images, and identities, enabling agents to exercise creative agency within structural constraints. Meanwhile, the English School or the International Society theory also stresses the importance of institutions, norms, and ideational factors in international life. According to Hedley Bull, shared interests and values within society shape international relations, bringing this theory close to constructivism because norms, like rules, define identities (Mohammadi Kia, 2023; Mohammadi Kia & Deheshiri, 2020).

In this context, ideology becomes a puzzle within constructivist theory. On the one hand, ideology may be interpreted in a highly negative light—as a critical concept referring to distorted consciousness or necessary deception. On the other hand, it may be viewed positively as the worldview of a particular class, not of society as a whole. In either case, the resulting shift in the perception of norms and values risks distorting the issue at hand. Clearly, this same analysis also applies to the concept of national interests (Kazemi, 1993).

3. Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran

In political literature, there are multiple definitions of foreign policy. For example, it has been described as the use of political influence to persuade other countries to exercise their legislative power in a preferred manner (Motaghi & Poostinchi, 2011), or as the strategy and policy devised by a country's decision-makers in relation to other countries, entities, or international institutions, aimed at achieving specific objectives defined based on national resources. In other words, foreign policy is a dynamic process through which relatively stable interpretations of national interests are reconciled with highly variable international conditions and factors in order to determine a strategic direction, which is then implemented through diplomatic relations (Firahi, 2003).

In any case, foreign policy primarily reflects the goals and objectives that may either stem from a state's own initiative or be a reaction to the initiatives and actions of other states. Specifically, it involves the following stages:

1. Formulating opinions and ideas concerning national interests and transforming them into goals and objectives.
2. Identifying relevant factors pertaining to domestic and international conditions.
3. Analyzing the country's capabilities to achieve desirable outcomes.
4. Designing a plan or strategy to utilize national resources in response to variable and influential external factors.
5. Regular and principled evaluation of achievements and outcomes.

Based on this, foreign policy is characterized by the following attributes:

- Foreign policy is not absolute; it is relative.
- Foreign policy is not unrestrained; it is conditional and constrained.
- Foreign policy is linked and dependent on both time and place.
- Foreign policy is a tool for strengthening the country's authority and position within the international system.
- Foreign policy is not a threat to national security but a guarantor and producer of it.
- Foreign policy is not about slogans, bombastic rhetoric, or mass-driven emotionalism; it is a specialized and elite domain.
- Foreign policy is a field of competition, not hostility; opportunity creation, not opportunity loss; engagement, not confrontation.
- Foreign policy is intelligent, flexible, multifaceted, active, and balance-seeking.

- Foreign policy is development-oriented, result-oriented, utility-driven, and cost-efficient (Velayati, 2020).

Evidently, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran lacks many of the aforementioned characteristics due to the adoption of the following approaches:

- Supporting the oppressed and liberationist movements against the hegemonic global order.
- Confrontational posture toward states identified as global arrogance and international Zionism.
- Designing the "Axis of Resistance" in opposition to the "Axis of Compromise" in the region.
- Ideology-based foreign policy rooted in fundamental principles of Shi'a Islamic knowledge.
- Pursuing national interests based on the expediencies and preservation of the Islamic Republic system.
- Challenging, norm-making, and discourse-generating against dominant institutions in international relations and the liberal-democratic order.
- Pursuing a "Look to the East" policy in contrast to Western-centric external approaches, grounded in the revolution's worldview.
- Ummah-oriented policy and the export of the revolution to Muslim and Third World societies.
- A hard, one-dimensional conception of national security (Hasanvand, 2023).

Setting aside normative orientations and value judgments regarding the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, one can argue that the adoption of such political behavior is the result of two fundamental components that have played an unparalleled role in shaping the system's foreign policy orientations:

A) The first component is negative, confrontational, and rooted in a historically negative mindset. From this perspective, the Islamic Republic of Iran is a country and a political system that:

- Emerged from the collapse of great empires and underwent extensive fragmentation.
- Possesses a challenging external and peripheral environment in terms of territory, borders, and politics.
- Holds a religious, Islamic, and ideological outlook on international interests and domains.
- Makes decisions primarily in closed and channeled environments.
- Demonstrates a kind of timidity and penitential sentiment toward the global order and international system.
- Is influenced by three factors: the historical consciousness of Iranians, the experience of contemporary history, and Islamism and its jurisprudential components.

B) The second component is affirmative and arises from the structure of the political system and its internal and external characteristics. Accordingly:

1. The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is shaped based on top-tier documents such as the Vision Statement, the Islamic-Iranian model of progress, constructive interaction with the international system, inspirational leadership in the Islamic world, revolutionary values, and the general policies of the system.
2. The type and nature of the political system are relevant to the definition of national interests. In democratic systems, national interests are defined by public opinion—not by a single individual or a small oligarchic elite. In such societies, civil society, mass media, and elite consensus guide foreign policy, fostering public trust, internal solidarity, domestic consensus, and expert-driven diplomacy. In contrast, in non-democratic and Third World systems, decisions are often made by an individual or the ruling class. Due to the lack of free circulation of information, absence of feedback mechanisms, personal authoritarianism, and other factors, their foreign policies tend to be flawed. Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine exemplifies this form of external political conduct.
3. Geopolitical position and neighborhood context also play a significant role in shaping foreign policy. For example, countries with numerous land and sea borders or a high number of neighboring states display greater dynamism in foreign and international affairs.
4. A country's high economic capacity enhances its international standing, and alongside it, military strength and the ability to defend territorial integrity empower its foreign policy with offensive and interventionist capabilities.
5. Understanding the process of globalization, the interconnectedness of the international system, and advanced technologies contributes significantly to redefining concepts such as independence, foreign investment attraction, expansion of communications, comparative advantages, and intelligent participation in the global division of labor (Sari' al-Qalam, 2000).

The aforementioned depiction of components, strategies, and the blending of national interests and ideology in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has given rise to contradictory assumptions, conceptions, and narratives, expanding the issue to the level of a complex puzzle. Some consider it unsuccessful, while others view it as successful or relatively effective. Some perceive it as lacking necessary capacity, while others seek broad potential within it. Some have cast doubt on the absence of a coherent strategy, and others have questioned its diplomatic capabilities. Some see the Islamic Republic's foreign policy as steeped in ideology, while others interpret it as immersed in national interests. Some regard it as revolutionary and radical, while others consider it cautious and conservative. Finally, some view it as principled and coherent, while others perceive it as fragmented and inconsistent.

4. Ideology as a Foundation

Ideology, when detached from realities, carries no particular semantic weight and, in fact, conveys no meaning unless it is interwoven with other concepts and contents. Accordingly, in this article, ideology is examined through the lens of politics, governance, and, most importantly, the concept of power, which is the subject of politics. Based on this premise, ethical policymaking and political conduct require the use of ethical methods and instruments. Otherwise, the tools and methods will alter the nature of the goal, and when the attributes of politics and governance acquire an ideological character, experience and history show that the result is a hollow form of politics. Fairclough's interpretation of ideology, which frames meaning as serving power, reflects this very notion: that ideologies are constructed meanings that contribute to the production, reproduction, and transformation of relations of domination (Salehi & Razavi, 2017).

Ideologies are largely rooted in class, gender, and emotion. Naturally, if this assumption is accepted, ideology becomes not an explanatory but a justificatory framework that seeks to symbolically merge the idea of human institutional purification with the principles of the struggle for survival and the survival of the fittest as seen in social Darwinism, thereby justifying the preservation of the fittest and the elimination of the weak (Salehi & Razavi, 2017).

In this line of thought, all beliefs about ideology constitute a kind of ideology in themselves, and some beliefs are even more ideological than others. In this sense, ideology may be considered a counterpart to its rival, national interest, which has existed for less than three centuries and is a product of political, social, and intellectual transformations (McLellan, 2006). Although ideology has a fluid and dispersed nature, its ideological geography extends beyond conventional and familiar territories. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the concept of ideology has transcended the realm of vocabulary and terminology and has acquired discursive qualities in the domains of science, politics, society, governance, and philosophy. It must thus be analyzed within the broader discursive frameworks commonly employed in political and social literature.

From this perspective:

a. In Marxist discourse, ideology refers to false consciousness or the deception of an era aimed at preserving ruling power, bearing inherently negative connotations.

b. In Leninist discourse, ideology means thought as action. Here, ideology is the action plan of a social group for transitioning from the current condition to a new one.

c. In liberal discourse, ideology is a dogmatic and sectarian system of thought that denies and suppresses any understanding or reading other than its own, and it strongly resists criticism. In this sense, ideology is the root of totalitarian and repressive regimes.

d. In neo-Marxist discourse, ideology is a system of thought and values from which no human being can escape, meaning no mind can be imagined as value-neutral.

e. In postmodern discourse, ideology is embedded in all epistemological systems, including the epistemology of modern science, and is based on the history and culture of knowledge systems.

f. In Shariati's discourse, ideology means constructive thought, self-awareness, and even the recognition of responsibility.

g. In Soroush's discourse, ideology is defined as illusion, false knowledge, and ultimately a veil over reality, a form of deception of the mind (Soroush, 1982, 2000).

Historically, the term "ideology" was first used by the French writer Destutt de Tracy, and after 1796, as he translated and elaborated upon it, the term spread and came to mean the science of ideas or the study of beliefs. For this purpose, metaphysical and religious prejudices had to be set aside, as scientific progress could only occur by avoiding erroneous beliefs. In this regard,

John Locke made the first scientific effort to describe human intelligence through observation and experience, and after him, Condillac further developed and completed Locke's ideas.

Fred Halliday also reduced ideology to a set of explicit or systematic beliefs about politics and thought. Similarly, Raymond Aron, in *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, described ideology as composed of apparently ordered realities that include interpretations, ideals, and prophecies (Ebrahimi, 2009).

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt wrote that ideology is recognized by its scientific character. Ideologies merge scientific approaches with essentially philosophical conclusions and claim to possess a scientific philosophy (Berman, 2021).

Thus, as a common denominator across all definitions, ideologies ultimately act as decision-makers for the future and aspirations of humanity. The mission of any ideology is to formulate a coherent way of thinking for the long-term interests of social classes and groups, to define objectives for societal progress, to organize the relations of production, distribution, and consumption, and to offer humanity a comprehensive set of ideas, beliefs, science, art, philosophy, ethics, politics, economics, and society (Bakhshi & Bayat, 2008).

At the same time, due to their identity-based foundations, ideologies, from any angle of inquiry, encounter epistemological constraints and appear negative and risk-laden. In this article as well, ideology is defined in opposition to national interest. Otherwise, there would be no need to assess the relationship between these two within the realm of foreign policy. This comparison primarily reveals their duality and otherness. That is:

1. Ideologies do not tolerate philosophical questioning, scientific skepticism, or mystical tolerance, and thus offer an oversimplified view of complex social realities.
2. Ideologies are often extracted from theological systems, and traditions are transformed into ideologies through Salafism, re-sacralization, bricolage, selection of beliefs, syncretism, and ultimately millenarian messianism.
3. Ideologies are constructed according to the nature of the enemy and the type of struggle, as ideology depends on and is defined by the enemy; without a real or hypothetical enemy, it cannot survive.
4. Ideologies are based on a teleological worldview and, under its light, claim absolute truth. Though they are not concerned with discovering truth, they are concerned with generating motion—ideologies seek movement, not stasis.
5. Ideologies are replete with heroes, myths, and cults of personality. In this framework, they present a systematic model of leadership and political thought, giving them extraordinary power in motivating and mobilizing movements.
6. Ideologies are products of crises and tension-filled environments. They are inherently crisis-oriented but contain empirical and normative elements for navigating out of such crises.
7. Ideologies are, by their very nature, monolithic, impervious to reinterpretation (ijtihad), and deemed infallible; they consistently tend toward ideological purity and conceptual purging (Firahi, 2003).

In conclusion, considering the aforementioned components of ideology, the Islamic Republic of Iran, through its use of the ideology of the Islamic Revolution in advancing foreign policy, has deployed its utmost capacity in the form of national authority, national credibility, national cohesion, regional influence, and discourse creation.

5. National Interests as Meaning

National interests, a highly frequent and recurring concept in political and international discourse and often cited by politicians and diplomats as the axis and driving force behind decision-making actions, has, from a genealogical perspective, its roots in early human self-interest. In this sense, early humans in the hunting era pursued examples of interest through securing food and survival. In the agricultural era, ownership of land and agricultural produce represented new forms of interest. In the industrial age—marked by broader social formations than before—tribes, clans, and ethnic groups gradually settled as urban populations within defined geographical boundaries. With this development, individual and group interests gave way to collective interests, and new examples of interest emerged (Bakhshi & Bayat, 2008).

From a functional perspective, the earliest use of "national interests," under the term "public interest," can be found among Greek thinkers such as Diodotus and Thucydides. Thucydides, the prominent Greek historian, defined "interest" as a state's status in terms of power and wealth. This notion may be rooted in Athenian democracy, under which the concept of national

interest was more aligned with the collective interest of individuals, thus approximating the modern understanding of national interest. Moreover, whether in Athenian democracy or in non-democratic systems, interest remained the central concept driving motivations and efforts. In fact, interest has been the most reliable guide for state behavior and the primary directive for rulers and sovereigns, as it is the only domain where failure is not accepted (Ramazani, 2007).

Historically and through a chain of cause and effect, the emergence of the concept of national interest resulted from three major transformations in Europe's political and social history:

1. The formation of centralized and absolute monarchies.
2. The rise of national sovereignty.
3. The establishment of the state as an institution independent from individuals and emerging from collective will (Hasanvand, 2023).

Subsequently, the French Revolution brought the concept of national interest to its highest manifestation. After the revolution, the nation was recognized as the foundation and source of governance, legitimacy, and legislative authority, and the parliament gained prominence. However, during and after the Napoleonic Wars, the classical principle of national interest—which was a blend of old and new understandings—prevailed (Bakhshi & Bayat, 2008).

Theoretically, Charles Beard was the first to introduce the concept of national interest into international relations literature, initiating its theoretical analysis. Beard cleverly framed the concept of "national interest" as a formula or rule to trace its evolution through political discourse. From this standpoint, the intellectual and historical roots of the concept of national interest cannot be separated from the justifications rulers provide for state policies. In political discourse, interest is a contested concept with multiple meanings. Thus, the term "national interest" exemplifies a notion with legal and economic dimensions that, within a specific historical, social, and economic process, has undergone conceptual expansion (Burchill, 2021).

Terminologically, in international relations, national interest is defined as a fundamental goal, an ultimate benchmark, and a general guide for explaining foreign policy, or as the general understanding of elements essential for a state's most vital needs, including territorial integrity, economic welfare, and national prestige. In the Platonic model, national interest refers to anything considered beneficial for the people and citizens of a society. This can be determined either through objective, scientific, and observable data or through conscious and rational decisions by elites. In this sense, a combination of objectivity and subjectivity defines the content of public interest. Unlike Plato's autocratic idealism, the Aristotelian model is infused with democratic ideals. Aristotle is thus considered a pioneer in thinking that affirms the objectivity of national interest. From this viewpoint, national interest is derived from an ongoing process of collective thought and is validated through the majority vote of society's representatives, who hold diverse and often conflicting interests. The Brookings Institution defines national interest as what a nation perceives to be essential for its survival, security, and welfare, viewing it as the reflection of general and enduring goals toward which a nation must act (Hasanvand, 2023).

Among the definitions of national interest, the most significant view is perhaps that of classical realists. From their perspective, unless the concept of national interest is unambiguous, no theory can determine whether political units are following the correct policies. Objective realists consider national interests both objective and measurable, with power as the element that gives them substance. In contrast, subjective realists view national interest as a mental construct, emphasizing the role of decision-makers and their cognitive patterns. Thus, for subjectivists, the elements of national interest vary, as they equate securing national interest with authoritative decisions made by key policymakers based on each nation's needs and desires (Ramazani, 2007).

Hans Morgenthau, a prominent objective realist, equates national interest with the state's pursuit of power. Another objective realist, James Rosenau, believes that national interests are rooted in societal values and serve as tools in both political action and analysis. In practice, they justify, affirm, or negate the actions of rulers and politicians; in political analysis, they serve as indicators for interpreting and evaluating foreign policy (Bakhshi & Bayat, 2008).

Subjectivists, however, define national interest as the outcome of varying and sometimes conflicting perspectives held by different groups within a country, articulated as preferences rather than objective necessities. Advocates of decision-making theory are among the subjectivists. They argue that national interests consist of the values that people desire and that the only way to discern what people want is to examine how their needs and wants are reflected in the decisions of policymakers. Subjectivists believe national interests are composed of values that cannot be objectively measured, even by the scale of power.

Subjectivist theorist Joseph Frankel argues that national interests are general and enduring objectives for which a nation strives. Therefore, national interests have a defined nature, a degree of continuity, and are linked to political action (Khalilzad, 2024).

Within the framework of subjectivism, Frankel classifies the concept of national interest into three levels for purposes of political analysis and comparative politics, assigning each level a distinct role:

- Aspirational level: associated with a nation's ideals.
- Operational level: referring to the sum of current interests and policies of a country.
- Justificatory level: linked to the statements, arguments, and justifications of official state authorities (Bakhshi & Bayat, 2008).

Based on this tripartite framework:

- National interest is the primary motivation behind state behavior in the international environment.
- National interest comprises the general and enduring objectives of nations in pursuing their ideals.
- National interest is the benchmark for political and economic activities of states and political communities.
- National interest is a concept upon which the fate and future of countries depend.
- National interest is the standard for distinguishing right from wrong and sound from unsound policy.
- National interest is the key to the survival of states and political units in today's complex and interconnected world.
- National interest symbolizes territorial integrity, the preservation of societal values, and the fulfillment of citizens' demands.

Nevertheless, despite the aforementioned discussions and both affirmative and critical arguments about national interest, reaching a consensus in political societies, countries, and academic institutions remains extremely challenging due to the following reasons:

1. The erroneous assumptions on which the concept of national interest is built.
2. The lack of clear distinction between long-term and short-term interests.
3. The influence of various ideologies on national interest.
4. Emerging changes in domestic and international arenas.
5. The evolving definition of national interest due to changes in national security and the rise of mutual human interests.
6. Ambiguity regarding whether the concept of nation is intrinsic or incidental, individual or collective.
7. The absence of consensus on the concept of public good or general welfare.
8. Insufficient understanding of the international environment and the operational field of national interests.
9. Ambiguities surrounding the ideals, principles, and objectives of foreign policy.
10. Methodological disputes and the conflation of micro and macro levels of analysis regarding national interest.

In the discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran, national interest has never become a general descriptor or an all-encompassing discourse capable of reconciling the conflict between national interest and Islamic values. Consequently, some argue that any definition of national interest in foreign policy must account for the Islamic identity of the Islamic Republic, as this identity plays a crucial role in shaping the values and components of national interest (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2020, p. 143).

Others attribute this failure to the public policy process of the Islamic Republic over recent decades, characterized by poor policy-making driven by cognitive imitation, semantic vagueness, and shallow problem understanding, wherein both tangible and intangible elements have been lost alongside considerations of time and place (Zolghadr, 2024).

Still others argue that within the Islamic Republic of Iran, there are significant disagreements regarding national interest—so profound that conflicting interpretations have rendered the concept indefinable, causing a vacuum of comprehensive and exclusive definition both internally and externally (Fathollahi, 2024).

Another perspective attributes the lack of consensus on national interest and the absence of a national interest discourse to the intense ideological orientation of the Islamic Republic. It views Iran as an idealistic, millenarian, and messianic system that, in Platonic terms, believes in "no-place" or utopia (Tohidfam, 2019).

6. The Functional Role of Ideology in the Islamic Revolution

In the classification of ideologies into conservative and revolutionary types, the Islamic Revolution and the political system emerging from it belong to the latter, seeking to transform existing value systems and structures in the international arena. For the supporters and defenders of the Islamic Revolution, ideology is not only neither negative nor destructive but, according to Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, a theorist of the revolutionary front, it is something whose fortifications must be safeguarded. Without ideology, there are no boundaries, no formation of "otherness," no identity, no meaning in fighting the enemy, and no basis for ethical prescriptivism in world affairs. Thus, the understanding of ideology is inherently different and distinctive. Therefore, when ideology is labeled dogmatic or accused of methodological flaws, it evokes no concern among its proponents, as this mode of thinking reinforces commitment to belief. The problem becomes even more acute when the object of ideological thought changes. Ideology, when immune to critique, may be based on class, motive, or belief. In Marxism, ideology is class-based, centered on the proletariat or wage-earning urban class.

In contrast, as Seyyed Ahmad Fardid asserts, ideology in the Islamic Revolution is grounded in religious and specifically Shi'a beliefs. For this reason, it does not matter that Marx and Engels considered ideology a form of period-specific deception or false consciousness—that it distorts real relations, shackles the mind, empowers emotion over reason, dulls logical judgment, and replaces deliberation with the clamor of violence, where the sound of bullets substitutes for dialogue. It is precisely in this substitution that catastrophe begins (Soroush, 1982).

Accordingly, ideology serves as a mental framework for policymaking—domestic and foreign—within which realities acquire meaning. Consequently, one can speak of two "ideological geographies" in the Islamic Republic, since a substantial portion of Iran's political and geopolitical maneuvering post-revolution has involved leveraging the "Shi'a card," enabling ideological and strategic expansion aligned with Iran's national interests.

The geocultural realities of the Middle East reveal that the extent to which ideological components and Shi'a symbolism are employed, the greater Iran's strategic advantage. Since ideology is fluid, diffuse, and expansive in nature, the ideological geography of Iran's national interests surpasses its territorial geography.

The significance of Islamic ideology and Shi'a revolutionary values in Iran's foreign policy is also accentuated by the messianic role ascribed to the Supreme Leader. For this reason, the founder of the Islamic Republic characterized the revolution as radical, ideological, and revolutionary, aimed at challenging the political roles of major world powers (Motaghi & Poostinchi, 2011).

The ideology of the Islamic Revolution—or Shi'a Islam—consistently threatens conservative regional leaders and provokes reactions through the tool of exporting the revolution. According to its defenders, it drives traditional societies to pursue independence and disengagement from foreign powers.

In reality, the ideology of the Islamic Revolution has served two principal functions in Iran:

First, the emancipation from subjugation and humiliation.

Second, resistance against hegemonic powers equipped with complex media, military, and economic tools (Fathollahi, 2024).

From the viewpoint of believers in the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, ideals and thought play an unmatched role in social transformations. Ideology accentuates this role because, as Althusser explained, the primary function of ideology is subject-formation. Just as nature shapes the individual, ideology shapes culture and constructs subjects.

Given that Islam is a comprehensive and complete religion encompassing all dimensions of human life—including politics, economics, society, culture, science, and ethics—it offers a more effective and subject-producing ideology compared to other major revolutions. This ideology not only includes distinctive concepts such as *Velayat-e Faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist) but also incorporates the positive elements of other revolutionary ideologies, such as liberty, equality, independence, and development. Most notably, independence is one of the key elements shaping the ideology of the Islamic Revolution—something against which global powers have mobilized.

More importantly, the ideology of the Islamic Revolution is culturally endogenous and expansive in scope, representing a unique advantage (Motaghi & Poostinchi, 2011).

Defenders of the vitality and legitimacy of ideology in Iran's domestic and foreign policymaking have identified certain elements which, in their assessment, distinguish the ideology of the Islamic Revolution both in substance and form from other major global revolutions. These elements operate beyond the typical boundaries of conventional political practice. Notable among these are:

1. National Power:

Here, power derived from ideology does not signify authoritarianism as commonly interpreted in political literature (i.e., totalitarian regimes), but rather refers to the outcome of national interest indicators, regarded as prerequisites of national strength. These include safeguarding the political system, ensuring national security, and maintaining military capabilities against hostile and extraterritorial actors. In addition to Iran's geopolitical and natural features, its national power also draws from two elements of soft power: Shi'a religious ideology among Sunni border populations and Iran's ancient historical legacy. The synergy of these factors has positioned Iran as a distinguished leader in political thought, modernity, and Islamic advocacy (Sari' al-Qalam, 2000).

2. National Prestige:

The concept of national prestige—translated from "prestige"—is often associated with national pride and confidence. Its construction or restoration is a reaction to a legacy of humiliation, which Iran has continuously endured over the past two centuries. This history includes backwardness, territorial fragmentation, identity crises, foreign subjugation, capitulation, repeated coups, and domestic despotism—all of which have wounded public sentiment and instilled a deep fear among Iranian elites. National prestige, both abstract and concrete, is the counterpart of national power and its byproduct. Advocates of revolutionary ideology argue that post-revolution developments such as strategic independence from Western blocs, advances in science and technology, military empowerment, and regional influence have significantly boosted national pride and even enhanced national unity.

3. National Cohesion:

Regarding Iranian national identity, there are two prevailing views. Some believe the Iranian society is nourished by three identities—Islamic, Iranian, and modern—while others propose four: Iranian, Islamic, modern, and ethnic. Although these identities have expanded or contracted with changing conditions and historical events, modernization and the emergence of modern states have generally marginalized these identities in relation to modernity. Successive governments have adopted various stances toward these identities based on their ideologies. Proponents of the Islamic Revolution contend that Islam has become the central axis of national cohesion and that the revolution harmonized all four identities through mutual recognition (Motaghi & Poostinchi, 2011).

4. Regional Influence:

Following the revolution, Iran withdrew from Western-oriented regional alliances and aspired to become a regional power. The U.S. seeking Iranian assistance in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria—even amid mutual hostility—demonstrates Iran's regional clout. This influence is not like the Soviet model of dispatching troops and appointing puppet regimes but is instead rooted in inspiration and popular legitimacy. The concept of the *ummah* (Islamic community) is the shared link between Iran and the broader Islamic world—a connection that did not exist pre-revolution. While Muslims are considered primary stakeholders in Iran's national interest, the core of Iran's political-strategic interests lies with Shi'a communities. The relationship between Shi'a political identity and the exportation of the revolution reflects a context in which both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, disillusioned by modernist and non-Islamic ideologies, mobilized to change unjust social conditions. This process has been visibly influenced by Iran's foreign policy dynamics (Khalilzad, 2024).

Based on this, it may be asserted that Iran's regional influence has been shaped by disrupting Western regional agendas (e.g., resolution of the Palestinian issue, the "New Middle East" plan), by instilling a spirit of resistance, launching Islamic ideological movements, creating Quds Day, proclaiming *Bara'at from the Polytheists* during the Hajj, and fostering religious devotion across the region—all supported by soft and media-based backing for Muslims against Western narratives (Hasanvand, 2023).

5. Mobilization of Masses:

Psychologically and socially, the Islamic Revolution injected both individual and collective hope into society. There is a positive correlation between the level of personal and collective hope and mass political participation. Individually, hope

involves the belief that desirable outcomes are more likely than undesirable ones and is thus accompanied by optimism. Socially, hope generates rational planning and agency. Social hope is the belief in the attainability of defined goals through collective, realistic, and organized effort. Conversely, despair negates this possibility and fosters pessimism (Mohammadi Kia, 2023).

The Islamic Revolution and its resultant political system fused the social movement with a philosophical outlook on the nature of power, governance, and society. Simultaneously, charismatic leadership played a decisive role in galvanizing disorganized masses. Manuel Castells, a key theorist of *The Information Age* and social movements, argues that politics is fundamentally emotive. He states that movement leaders are the prophets of the modern era. Their social activity is characterized by identity formation and community-building. The Islamic notion of the *ummah* parallels the concept of the contemporary network society. Accordingly, networked social movements require a particular kind of charismatic leadership that becomes the voice of the voiceless, with exceptional capacity to influence public consciousness. These leaders:

- Provide symbols for the movement.
- Illuminate the movement's path and affirm its aspirations.
- Mobilize masses around shared values.
- Strengthen unity through new interpretations.
- Maximize societal recruitment around identity-based goals.
- Inspire action over organizational management (Bakhshi & Bayat, 2008).

6. Discourse Formation:

The discourse of political Islam in post-revolutionary Iran successfully appropriated religious ideological components to marginalize nationalist, pre-Islamic, and modernist discourses and establish itself as dominant. This discourse sees no contradiction between *ummah*-centrism and nationalism, integrating them. Through discourse analysis concepts such as antagonism, hegemony, master signifier, and floating signifier, it constructs counter-concepts: replacing imperialism with "arrogance" and the United States with "the Great Satan."

In the cultural sphere, it reproduces heroic and religious concepts like *Ashura*, *Karbala*, and *Alawi justice* in opposition to liberalism, cultural decay, and value-neutrality. It links these to global discourses such as democracy, peace, human rights, and freedom for political utility.

Here, ideology becomes the guiding framework of Iran's foreign policy, shaping its orientations. Its primary function includes enemy/friend delineation, legitimizing decisions and actions, stance declarations on international events, and interpreting environmental changes—contributing to clarity and tension management. Thus, foreign policy strategies rooted in this ideology include: advocacy for the elimination of Israel, "Neither East nor West," adherence to the Non-Aligned Movement, and the defense of "Pure Muhammadan Islam."

National objectives such as preserving independence and territorial integrity are fused with transnational goals, including establishing a global Islamic government, promoting Islamic unity, and supporting the oppressed (Sotoudeh, 2006).

7. National Interests in the Discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran

National interests constitute a multifaceted, emergent concept beneficial to the individuals of a society and a nation. In the realm of foreign policy, this concept legitimizes the actions of the governing political system and serves as a decisive factor in a country's foreign policy decision-making. From a sociological perspective, national interests represent a universal and enduring reality, articulated by nations striving to preserve their identity within the confines of their borders, populace, and governance.

Despite this, in the discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran, national interests have not achieved a universal characterization nor evolved into an all-encompassing framework that reconciles conflicts between national interests and Islamic considerations. Consequently, some scholars argue that delineating national interests in foreign policy necessitates incorporating the religious nature and identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as this identity plays a pivotal role in defining the values and components that constitute Iran's national interests (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2007).

Others attribute this shortfall to the public policy approaches of the Islamic Republic of Iran over recent decades, which have been marked by a series of suboptimal policies stemming from cognitive imitation, ambiguity in meaning, and misinterpretation of issues. This has led to the neglect of both tangible and intangible elements, encompassing economic, social, cultural, security, and foreign affairs domains, particularly resulting in futile and costly confrontations in foreign affairs. For instance, in economic matters, this has culminated in both economic warfare and a wartime economy, rendering the future susceptible to inefficiencies and vulnerabilities. Foreign policy, as the science of strategic interests, has become unidimensional, overlooking other critical components. Moreover, due to ideological influences, certain aspects within this policy appear to contradict national interests. A case in point is the stance of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding Russia's war against Ukraine, which does not align with the nation's national interests unless one adopts an unconventional definition of such interests. Similarly, the outright opposition to Israel's existence and support for proxy movements in the region have not engendered national consensus and, in some instances, have been contradictory. Furthermore, the lack of support for the Uyghurs in China or Muslims in Myanmar and Chechnya, which starkly contrasts with the general ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has created a meaningful paradox and undermined the national discourse (Zolghadr, 2024).

Some contend that within the Islamic Republic of Iran, there exists significant divergence regarding national interests, leading to contradictory interpretations that render the concept indefinable and create a vacuum both domestically and internationally, thus plunging the country into crisis. Contributing factors include the prioritization of security in a narrow sense over broader interests, the precedence of partisan, group, factional, and personal interests over public welfare, and the emphasis on threat-based approaches over opportunity-driven strategies in both foreign and domestic policies. This implies that national interests are defined predominantly through the lens of threats and the perception of adversaries (Fathollahi, 2024).

Others argue that the absence of consensus on national interests and the failure to establish a national interest discourse stem from the pronounced ideological orientation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. They believe that Iran operates as an idealistic, millenarian system, adhering to a utopian vision that amalgamates various sacred beliefs with tradition, thereby necessitating formidable adversaries to elevate the revolution's grandeur, rendering national interests incongruent within this framework (Fathollahi, 2024).

Some scholars assert that the Islamic Revolution, under the revolutionary Shiite discourse, lacked a clear and defined ideology from its inception. The proposed ideology was primarily an interpretation of Shiite-Islamic principles by figures such as Imam Khomeini, Ali Shariati, and Jalal Al-e-Ahmad, who collectively criticized the Pahlavi regime's foreign and domestic policies, particularly its alignment with the West. Their ideology was more negative than affirmative. Imam Khomeini's primary political objective was to identify the essence of Islam and demonstrate its compatibility with Shiite political theory, asserting that Islam encompasses all necessary laws and principles for human perfection. For Shariati, religion served as an effective weapon against imperialism and Western cultural dominance, emphasizing that underdevelopment and economic inequality result from Western cultural hegemony, that religion and politics are inseparable, and that Islam is an anti-imperialist revolutionary ideology rejecting both Western and Eastern influences. Consequently, the discourse of the Islamic Revolution, as it evolved, increasingly marginalized leftist and secular discourses while placing limited focus on national interests (Mohammadi Kia, 2023).

In practice, the Islamic Republic of Iran, emerging from the Islamic Revolution, has not exhibited a conventional approach to pursuing national interests, prompting extensive critiques. National interests are not unidimensional; even traditional realists, who define national interests in terms of survival and existence, acknowledge that survival encompasses physical, political, cultural, and identity aspects. Notably, Hans Morgenthau, a pioneer of classical realism, emphasizes the non-material elements of national interests. However, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, national interests have been predominantly defined in material terms, focusing on threats, particularly military and security threats. Given the close relationship between power and national interests, power has been construed primarily as military hardware. This perspective has led to the neglect of sustainable human development, public welfare, and citizen satisfaction. Therefore, national interests should be viewed hierarchically, beginning with survival and extending to other dimensions. Even a careful examination of Article 176 of the Constitution reveals that the composition of the Supreme National Security Council encompasses more than military threats, aiming for a balanced definition of national interests. The Foreign Minister symbolizes foreign policy and diplomacy; the Interior Minister represents national and social cohesion; the Intelligence Minister signifies internal security; and the Head of the Planning and Budget

Organization embodies economic development, with only one military figure included. However, in practice, the other aspects have been sacrificed for the military dimension. Thus, all components of power should be integrated into the definition of national interests. Influence is necessary, but it is motivational and meaningful, differing from presence, which is material; without this balance, even military interests are jeopardized. Moreover, as the scope of presence expands, so do costs and vulnerabilities.

8. Conclusion

First, this article examined the idea that ideology is an abstract concept which, unless anchored to a specific text or attribute, lacks a definitive meaning and remains inert. Moreover, due to its transformation into a discourse or epistemic construct, it has come to embody contradictory and fallacious meanings, resembling a compendium of opposites. Ideology, especially due to its political dominance in past centuries—particularly the twentieth century—has evolved into a devouring and distasteful doctrine or tendency, often devoid of general or ethical defenders outside of political-ideological beneficiaries. Accordingly, ideology gradually became intertwined with power, fundamentalism, pressure groups, ideological mafias, and teleological worldviews, transforming into an instrument of action rather than a means of discovering truth. In this trajectory, it has led to dogmatism, authoritarianism, exclusivity, irrationality, hate propagation, violence, suppression of pluralism, and the assertion of absolute truths. With these features, ideology becomes a universal concept that has maintained a relatively consistent function across historical, political, cultural, and geographical contexts, playing a role along a rigid, linear path. Ideology is nuanced and cannot be traded or exchanged—it is enveloped in standards of right and wrong, which obstruct the mental processes of agents and decision-makers.

Second, while the concept of national interest has historical depth, its meaning and nature have always lent themselves to disagreement, resistance, and divergence. This condition has made consensus among elites and scholars nearly impossible and blocked paths to reconciliation and understanding. Despite its seemingly objective nature, national interest is difficult to define, as the notion of "nation" itself lacks a singular definition and is subject to extensive debate. Moreover, national interest is intrinsically tied to power and often interpreted subjectively. Contrary to dominant assumptions, national interests do not rest upon immutable principles but are deeply influenced by cognitive and environmental changes. Their prioritization also undermines their absoluteness. Thus, both the concept of "interest" and the concept of "nation" remain in flux, and their combination does not yield an easily comprehensible or straightforward definition.

Third, constructivism—as the theoretical foundation of this article—is an effective non-materialist and social theory suited for qualitative inquiry, especially in examining the relationship between national interests and ideology within a value-based and norm-driven system such as the Islamic Republic of Iran. Constructivist theory, closely aligned with the Copenhagen School and its security complex theory, focuses on norms, identities, cultures, and symbols of soft power, making it increasingly compatible with value-laden, emotional, cultural, and artistic themes. Accordingly, both ideology and national interest—as concepts of benefit and utility—are prioritized within this intellectual tradition. Constructivists believe that the mindset of foreign policy decision-makers is shaped primarily by layers of identity and ideological considerations. On this basis, there exists a close and continuous interaction between structure and agency in the decision-making process. Epistemologically, constructivists perceive the world as indeterminate—there is no fixed or tangible reality that can be discovered or refuted by a scientific theory. Instead, intersubjective theorizing is used to construct and understand society and the prevailing system. Therefore, the foundation of an ideological system is not derived from scientific rules, but rather from norms, identities, ideas, religions, and cultures, through which power and interest are defined and interpreted. In constructivist theory, ideology becomes a puzzle that embodies both negative-critical and positive-affirmative dimensions. As such, referring to constructivist theory allows for a more comprehensive understanding of transnational provisions in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, such as supporting the oppressed, promoting human well-being, universal Islamic culture, and the comprehensive role of religion, alongside ideological approaches in foreign policy.

Fourth, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic, due to its adherence to ideological slogans, has deviated from a balanced and pragmatic path, resulting in strategic confusion. This situation has become so deep and complex that neither structures nor agents have been able to overcome it. Various administrations within the Islamic Republic—whether focused on reconstruction, reform, moderation, or conservatism—have failed to untangle this impasse, since ideological principles operate beyond the

domain of individual governments. Experts refer to this phenomenon as a crisis of identity or meaning. One manifestation of this crisis is the lack of consensus on concepts such as the ummah (Islamic community) versus the nation-state. In recent interpretations from religious seminaries, foreign policy has been reduced to involvement in "appearance" geographies—territories like Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, and possibly Mecca and Medina. Ideology and national interest are contentious, elastic, interpretive, ambiguous, pluralistic, multifaceted, and indeterminate concepts. Naturally, reconciling these two elusive concepts is even more difficult than conceptually or contextually defining them. Even if national interest is operationalized through a positivist, cost-benefit framework, the subjective ideological manifestations—including myths, ethics, religions, beliefs, and doctrines—resist easy assimilation. As Jean Baechler noted, these forces are inherently adversarial and thus remain in a state of conflict and divergence rather than understanding and convergence. Consequently, overcoming this dilemma requires a deep effort in interpretive analysis, prioritization, and assessment of the outcomes of foreign policy over the past decades, along with the elimination of its numerous weaknesses.

Fifth, fundamental and multiple questions about the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran remain inadequately addressed in international diplomacy and academic, intellectual, and analytical circles. Key among them are: Is the Islamic Republic's foreign policy ideological, and does it sacrifice national interests for ideology? Or is it an opportunistic and interest-seeking government that uses ideology to deceive other nations—in which case, ideology becomes a tool for manipulating the masses? Furthermore, if ideology is the basis of foreign policy, is its origin rooted in nationalism or Shiite expansionism? If so, the relationship between these two varies—sometimes intersecting and sometimes conflicting—making one dominant and the other secondary. Reflecting on these questions reveals the complex path of meaning-making and puzzle-solving that lies ahead for those in charge. Without proper navigation, the system will remain mired in a whirlwind of pendulum-like and volatile policies—oscillating between alignment and convergence, alliance and coalition, confrontation and conflict, cooperation and participation, balance and unilateralism—with no path to liberation.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

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