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Discursive-Cognitive Death Conceptualization in the Iranian Official Media Case Study: Bombing of the Eyn al-Asad Military Base

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study examines how Iranian media represents and conceptualizes the bombing of the Eyn al-Asad military base as part of the "Revenge Operations" following the assassination of Qassem Soleimani. From a native perspective, this cognitive-discursive analysis focuses on how these events are formulated and conceptualized within Iranian media narratives. The media differentiates between the deaths of ordinary individuals and those considered ideological adherents, referring to the latter as martyrdom, while characterizing the deaths of out-group members as acts of killing and destruction. This border-making media-based image is a step toward antagonizing the others, who, in this context, are the Americans and Israelis.

Method: The analysis is done in three levels. The first level examined word choice and its metaphorical conceptualization. The second level involved categorizing the identified metaphors according to their semantic conceptualizations. The third level focused on discourse analysis, illustrating how these categories reflect antagonistic attitudes toward out-groups.

Findings: Employing metaphor theory to explore the cognitive dimension and the concept of antagonism to analyze the discursive dimension, the findings reveal that Iranian formal media uses the metaphor "Death as Destruction" to depict the deaths of out-group members negatively, whereas positive, in-group deaths are conceptualized through metaphors such as "Death as Journey," "Death as Loss," "Death as Sleep," and "Death as Salvation."

Conclusion: According to this media narrative, aligned with the hegemonic ideology, the world is portrayed as a battleground between forces of good and evil, positioning Iran as the leader of an anti-imperialist front, the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors. In the cognitive conceptualization promoted by Iranian media, members of the oppressed group who are killed attain heaven, while their adversaries are consigned to hell. This perspective is influenced by elements such as mystical traditions, the principles of *Wilāyat* and Imamah in Shi'a Islam, and the Islamic Revolution's interpretation of jihad. Within this theological framework, death is cognitively represented as a form of sacred suffering and the beginning of eternal life marked by divine satisfaction.

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Introduction

Many aspects of Iranian Shi'a lifestyle appear to be closely associated with the concept of death. In their daily lives, Iranians are frequently engaged with the manifestations and imagery of death, some of which hold significance equal to that of life. These beliefs may influence attitudes and behaviors, although the extent of this influence varies across contexts. This perspective may stem from their historical memory and collective consciousness. Some scholars argue that the interregnum period contributed to a cultural tendency toward fatalism and determinism. A semi-mystical view of death is reflected in certain cultural narratives and practices among Iranians. Generally, death is not perceived as a purely rational or natural event; rather, it is imbued with meaning and mysticism. From this eschatological standpoint, death is not the end of life but a transition from the material to the immaterial world, where a person's good and bad deeds are judged, and reward or punishment awaits.

Iranians, who in the interregnum years of the rule between the fall of the Sassanids and the emergence of the Pahlavi, faced a kind of anxiety in response to the nature and essence of death, encountered a mixture of Iranian-Shi'a and Sufi nature with the Sufis. During this period, Iran reemerged on the world map; the heritage and tradition of Iranshahri, along with the Iranian ideal type (Shahriar Armani), were revived, and Sufism was established as the intellectual and ontological foundation. In contrast to Sunni identity, Shi'a identity gained prominence, the Sunni governmental system became internalized, and eventually, Western intellectual and technological ideas and products entered Iran's social context. These developments laid the groundwork for rethinking the concept and nature of death. Power shaped the knowledge system, which in turn formulated the semantic framework and redefined the semantic and identity constructs of death for Iranians.

After the 1979 revolution and the rise of Islamism in Iran, the religious-traditional beliefs replaced the semi-modern, nationalist ones. Some analysts suggest that the Islamic revolution and the war with Iraq contributed to a fusion of mystical beliefs about death with ideological interpretations of religion; this represented itself in some concepts like Jihad and Martyrdom. Those who were killed during the revolution or against Saddam's aggression were given the title of martyr, and their work was called "Fighting in the path of God."

The concepts of martyr and martyrdom are among the significant sources of legitimacy for the Islamic system in Tehran. This issue has been defined and redefined in various ways, particularly in the literature of revolutionary leaders and elites.

Accordingly, the concept of martyrdom, beyond its common forms, has been represented in different categories such as missing martyrs, unknown martyrs, martyrs who defended the holy shrines, health martyrs, zeal martyrs, border guard martyrs, and others.

Martyrdom is mainly sought in the dual fight of the oppressed and the oppressors or the domination system and the anti-domination system. From the point of view of the ruling elites in the Islamic Republic, the world is a stage of struggle between the two fronts of the oppressed and the oppressors, and in this route, there is no other way than martyrdom and sacrificing one's life for the oppressed and deprived. This mission is historical, religious, and humanitarian; anyone who follows this path is a martyr and deserves the highest rewards in divine paradise. These martyrs are those who have stepped in line with the element of Shi'a Imamate and Wilayat and fulfilled their duty. As a result, it is stated by the Iranian leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, that "Martyrdom is the death of a businessman, the death of shrewd people." (https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1979/Leader-s-Speech-to-Families-of-Martyrs-and-War-Veterans-of-Kerman) Or as General Soleimani states, "The condition of becoming a martyr is to be a martyr."

One of the figures whose death has attracted significant attention since the Islamic Revolution is General Qassem Soleimani. Soleimani was the commander of the IRGC's Quds Force and has been described in official narratives as a key military figure in post-revolutionary Iran. The responsibility of Soleimani and the Quds Force was to expand the strategic depth of the Islamic system. In other words, his duty was to ensure the transmission and export of the discourse of the Islamic Revolution to the nations of the region and beyond. Soleimani and his accompanying team, especially *Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis*, during the early hours of Friday, January 3, 2020. He was killed by the missiles fired by the US drone at Baghdad International Airport.

This research, conducted from a native perspective, aims to achieve two objectives: "First, to understand how the death of Qassem Soleimani is portrayed in Iranian official media; and second, to explore how the death of Eyn al-Asad is conceptualized." Accordingly, the following sections will first define the three levels of analysis, micro, meso, and macro, then introduce the tools used at each level, and finally present the discourse analysis. The data analysis begins with an assessment of conceptual metaphors, followed by a critical-cognitive discourse analysis of antagonism.

The continuance of an antagonistic relationship can lead to a severe polarization. Accordingly, the formal media in Iran always tries to define and represent the Iranian identity through presenting two opposing poles, which are contesting and fighting the world. In this cognitive framework, Media discourse often portrays Iran's identity as one constructed around resistance and struggle. Within this identity-based representation, life and death are determined by the way one confronts the antagonistic polarization. The post-revolutionary Iran is a resisting one and the *Umm al-Qurā* of the Muslim world and the leader of the oppressed of the world, which will never give up fighting the oppressors and the imperialists and reconcile with them. In this path, death is eternal bliss, that is martyrdom, and this discourse idealizes martyrdom as a desirable form of death within certain ideological frameworks. This kind of media discourse is not life-based but death-based. The positive death in this situation is a kind of sacred suffering.

Literature Review

Examining conceptual metaphors within the political discourse of a specific individual or government is crucial for uncovering the underlying cognitive and ideological structures that shape political messaging and public perception. Such analysis reveals how metaphorical language strategically frames complex issues, legitimizes authority, and influences collective attitudes toward policies, identities, and international relations. Wei (2001) analyzed metaphorical expressions in Taiwanese political discourse, identifying metaphors related to marriage, weather, and economic transactions. Uvehammer (2005) examined a presidential debate, revealing use of war metaphors by candidates. Vestermark (2007) studied metaphors used by US presidents, finding that they employed metaphors from storytelling, sports, and battlefields to shape public perception. Musolff (2013) analyzed metaphors in European Union political discourse, observing metaphors related to family, building, and human beings. Yu (2008) compared conceptual metaphors related to the body in Chinese and English. Taiwo (2010) studied metaphors in Nigerian political discourse, identifying metaphors of battle, journey, and path. Petrica (2011) explored conceptual metaphors in Malaysian political discourse, including those related to home, family, and historical context. Krimova (2015) examined the role of political metaphors in Obama's speeches, highlighting their power in shaping public opinion. Etino, Owino, and Atiang (2016) reviewed studies on metaphors in Kenyan political discourse,

emphasizing their role in helping citizens understand political issues. Burcic, Kanizaj, and Kresul (2016) analyzed metaphors used by the former president of Croatia.

Pourebrahim (2020) investigated election metaphors in Iranian political newspapers. The study used Chilton's (2004) Deictic Dimension Model to analyze how metaphors legitimize certain candidates and ideologies. Huang (2022) applied the "Discourse Dynamics Framework for Metaphor (DDFM)" to a political speech by Xi Jinping on fighting COVID-19. Ghafourisaleh & Kazemi (2021) examined conceptual metaphors and their functions within the political discourse of a specific government. The article contributed to the field by examining the specific use of conceptual metaphors within a particular political context. Brugman, Burgers & Vis (2019) presented a meta-analysis (k=91, N=34,783) comparing the persuasive impact of metaphorical framing in political discourse at both the word and concept levels. The results indicated that both metaphorical words and metaphorical concept frames positively influence beliefs and attitudes, but the effect is larger for metaphorical concept frames. Shokati Moqarab and Rahimian (2022) investigated how conceptual metaphors contribute to the construction of identity boundaries and the attainment of political legitimacy.

Theoretical Framework

The present study aims to investigate how death is cognitively conceptualized within the Iranian ideological context. To achieve this, it employs a combination of cognitive linguistics and critical discourse analysis, framed within Hart's (2010) cognitive critical discourse analysis approach. Hart (2011: 270) notes, "Within Fairclough's (1995) tripartite model of discourse and discourse analysis, it is description-stage analysis which has received the most attention." "CDA requires an approach that takes serious stock of research in contemporary Cognitive Science." (Hart, 2010: 6) Such research provides the analyst with an expressive analysis. The theoretical framework of this study consists of three levels. In the first level (micro-level), conceptual metaphor is analyzed, in the second (meso-level), the data is semantically categorized, and then the results are investigated through cognitive critical discourse analysis in the third (macro) level. The data are analyzed discursively by focusing on the element of antagonism in the last level.

Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis

Christopher Hart, in his publications (2011, 2010), combined Cognitive Linguistics (CL) with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). He utilized techniques such as Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Force Dynamics, Event Construal, and Blended Mental Spaces to reveal the cognitive frameworks that exist within discourse. These studies examined how specific language choices in the media, such as describing immigration as a "Force" or political protests as "Aggressive events," influence the attribution of blame, emotional responses, and ideological perspectives. By linking cognitive processes to discourse, Hart provided a method for analyzing how language subtly reinforces power dynamics and societal prejudices, particularly through strategies like framing, metaphor, and mental space theory. This approach uncovers the deeper cognitive mechanisms that shape language in ideological contexts.

In Hart's (2010) viewpoint, CDA lacks the interpretation stage to explain how linguistic choices affect discursive articulations. Hart (2011, p. 271) states, the key claim of Cognitive Linguistics for CDA, in this view, is that cognitive categories are structured around "Construal." Construal refers to the conceptualization of a fact in any number of ways, but a special language structures particular conceptualizations on the scene.

Cognitive linguistics offers various concepts that can be utilized in CDA to examine manipulation and ideology within discourse, extending beyond the study of metaphor.

Where Cognitive Linguistics has been applied in CDA, then, this has largely been at the description rather than the interpretation stage, where texts and discourses have been analyzed but the practice of discourse itself has not been addressed. This is because Conceptual Metaphor Theory is a theory of conceptual organization. Conceptualization is an 'online' cognitive process of meaning construction, which takes place during discourse and results in mental representations of the situations and events described. (Evans and Green 2018: 162).

The concepts of conceptualization and entrenchment in cognitive linguistics connect linguistic representations in text with the ideologies or cognitive models necessary for CDA to explain how discourse can shape society. The relationship between discourse, text, and discourses outlined in CDA parallels the relationship between cognitive models, language, and conceptualization described in cognitive linguistics (Hart, 2010).

A Discursive Approach to Agonism and Antagonism

Agonism, as defined by Mouffe (2002), involves a democratic confrontation between adversaries who share a common "Grammar of democratic life." This shared understanding serves as a limiting and moderating element in their confrontation, emphasizing the left/right distinction. Connolly (2002), another leading theorist of agonism, argues that agonistic respect is a civic virtue that enables political actors to express and negotiate their differences respectfully. Through self-remaking practices, political actors confront the agony of existence, recognizing it as intrinsic to the processes of identity formation. Connolly's concept of agonism does not imply a subdued form of conflict; rather, it embodies an ethic of care for life, allowing individuals to cultivate an awareness of the contingency, interdependence, and contestability of their value systems (Tambakaki, 2014: 2).

Social antagonism occurs when different identities mutually exclude one another. Although a subject may possess multiple identities, these identities do not necessarily have to relate to each other in an antagonistic manner. The implication of Hobsbawm's example is that one can be a "Worker" and a "Scot" at the same time. But if the worker identity excludes obligations to the country in war, for instance, or if the national identity summons people to kill those whom they consider to be fellow workers in other countries, then the relationship between the two identities becomes antagonistic (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002: 47-48).

Antagonism, in Laclau's words (1990: 51), is the result of a dislocation that has arisen from the structure's break by those forces which act outside it. Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 137) call this threatening outside the constitutive outside. They believe that each domain of the internal relations consists of an implied reference to an outside social antagonism. Mouffe indicates that a significant part of my argument will consist in examining the consequences of the negation of antagonism in several areas, both in theory and in politics. It is my contention that envisaging the aim of democratic politics in terms of consensus and reconciliation is not only conceptually mistaken, it is also fraught with political dangers. The aspiration to a world where the we/they discrimination would have been overcome is based on flawed premises and those who share such a vision are bound to miss the real task facing democratic politics. (Mouffe, 2005: 2).

Conceptual Metaphor

The cognitive element of this study is conceptual metaphor, which has different approaches to the issue of death and its conceptualization in a variety of contexts. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson who introduced Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which significantly transformed the study of metaphors. Metaphors are now recognized as essential mechanisms that shape human thought, rather than merely verbal constructs primarily used in rhetoric and poetry (Nabavi Zadeh Namazi, 2024). As Kövecses (2010: 4) states, "Metaphor is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain… conceptual domain A is conceptual domain B, which is what is called a conceptual metaphor." In other words, as Kövecses (2010) explains, "A conceptual metaphor consists of two conceptual domains, in which one domain is understood in terms of another. A conceptual domain is any coherent organization of experience." Therefore, the two domains that participate in conceptual metaphor have special names. The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the target domain. Thus, life, arguments, love, theory, ideas, social organizations, and others are target domains, while journeys, war, buildings, food, plants, and others are source domains. The target domain is the domain that we try to understand through the use of the source domain (Kövecses, 2010: 4).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) adopted a strategy for naming such mappings, using mnemonics that suggest the mapping. Mnemonic names typically (though not always) have the form: "Target domain is source domain or alternatively, target domain as source domain." In this case, the name of the mapping is love is a journey. "When we speak of the love is a journey metaphor, we are using a mnemonic for a set of ontological correspondences that characterize a mapping." (Lakoff, 2006: 189-190)

Method of data collection and selection

The study data are specifically focused on the news broadcast after Iran attacked the Eyn al-Asad base, called the "Revenge Operations" of the assassination of General Soleimani by the USA on 8 January 2020. The related data is collected from the official news agencies in Iran, mainly FARS[1], Tasnim[2], and ISNA[3]. All the data were

1 https://www.farsnews.ir/

2 https://www.tasnimnews.com/

3 https://www.isna.ir/

analyzed line by line to examine how these sites reflected the event's news. Statements containing keywords such as death, killing, martyrdom, and similar terms were extracted for metaphorical and discursive analysis. The analysis was conducted on three levels: "The first level focused on word selection and their metaphorical conceptualizations; the second involved categorizing the analyzed metaphors based on their semantic conceptualizations; and the third level was discursive in nature." The third, discursive, level demonstrates how the categories represent antagonistic approaches against the out-groups. Therefore, the metaphorical analysis of each statement is followed by its categorization, to place the analyzed data in their conceptual related categories, and the resulting categories are analyzed discursively, focusing on the "Antagonism" element of Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) discourse theory.

Data Analysis

This section explores the conceptualization of death through construal systems, with a particular focus on conceptual metaphor. The corpus is analyzed to investigate how death is metaphorically represented and how these metaphors contribute to the expression of antagonism both in real-world contexts and within political discourse. To illustrate these processes, Persian statements are provided alongside literal translations, demonstrating how death is conceptualized in Iranian discourse.

Death as loss

One of the death metaphors is death is/as losse, in which "The euphemisms losing and missing take the perspective of those left alive-or, to use the metaphor of death as a journey, those left behind. People are conceptualized as valuable possessions, who thus can be "Lost"… The "Loss" image is also found in statements about the loved one being taken (either by a god or by malevolent fate) (Allan, 2018: 50).

In the studied corpus, this loss is also attributed to the death of General Soleimani, who was regarded as a loved one. The sorrow experienced from losing a loved one is expressed as profound grief. Therefore, attacking the American base in Iraq is seen as a way to alleviate this pain.

Today, to some extent, we can feel a little pain from the loss of martyr general Soleimani, who was truly beloved by all Iranians, although this pain will never be forgotten.

The loss here refers to the death of General Soleimani and its effect on the people who love him.

Death as Grim Reaper

Another death metaphor is death as grim reaper. "In this conceptualization, the lifetime of human beings is conceptualized as the lifecycle of a plant, and death as harvesting. Based on this metaphor, the image of a reaper cutting down a plant, corresponds to the person dying." (Allan, 2018: 48) Accordingly, in the news analyzed, the attack on Eyn al-Asad's base is described as plowing the land, with all those injured or killed in the base likened to plants harvested by the Grim Reaper. It is said, "Eyn al-Asad's plow shook the arrogance." The act of plowing consists of everything and every person in the base, and there is no difference between those killed.

Another statement with such conceptualization is the following:

"You saw how Iran plowed the largest US military base in the region."

In this statement, Iran is depicted as the Grim Reaper who has plowed through the base, indiscriminately killing those within it. The base is defined as a land whose people and equipment are being simultaneously harvested.

Death as Destruction

One of the frequently used metaphors in the corpus is death as destruction. In this metaphor, as Lakoff (1994: 238) states, "Destruction and devouring are actions in which an entity ceases to exist. The same is true of death. The overall shape of the event of death is similar in this respect to the overall shapes of the events of destruction and devouring." The act of imposing death and destruction on an entity by an enemy is highlighted in this metaphor (Foreman, 2011: 171). Killing as destroying is one of the main conceptualizations that is frequently used to infer the Other (enemy) being attacked. Using the word "Killed" in the Iranian context implies the harshest way of death imposed on others.

At least 80 American terrorists were killed in the IRGC revenge operations. The goal was not to kill anyone, but if we wanted to, we would have left 5 thousand killed. They have certainly killed many. They have definitely suffered a lot of casualties and damage.

This kind of other-making is applied in this context to show that "Our Other" is destroyed through "Killing." In the following statement, the news agencies literally

use the word "Eyn," translating it to "Like Something" and conceptualizing the result of attacking the base "Eyn al-Asad" to something that is destroyed and turned to "A thing like a corpse." Accordingly, this corpse is lifeless, unable to do anything, and implies the destruction of all the power the US claimed.

Turning Eyn al-Asad into Eyn al-Asad (like a corpse) was the destruction of the imaginary power of America.

This statement, like other examples, represents the attack as a move toward destroying not only those in the base but also the US power. In another statement, killing is exactly stated as destroying the others who are defined as terrorists.

The destruction of 80 American terrorist soldiers in Eyn al-Asad base.

The complete removal of an actor from the political landscape functions as another way of representing the destruction of the Other. In the following statement, Americans' influence in the Middle East is presented as contingent on Israel's continued existence, and the statement even suggests that Israel could be eliminated by limited military operations. Thus, in this discourse the "Removal" of an entity denotes not only its political eradication but also the physical annihilation of its people.

America is here because America's life is in Israel's glass, and Israel will be completely removed from political geography with a limited operation.

One of the other serious other-makings from the beginning of Islam was between Muslims and Jews. As it is mentioned in a verse of the Quran, "Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with thee unless thou follow their form of religion." In the contemporary era, this struggle manifests primarily between Iran and Israel, centering on Jerusalem (al-Quds) and the broader Arab-Israeli conflict. Those who are killed along this path are regarded as martyrs and are believed to become companions of the awaited Imam. The issue of Jerusalem and Palestine thus serves as the most significant point of connection and ideological linkage between Shi'a Iran and the Sunni world. Consequently, within this discourse, Palestine and the resolution of its conflict are symbolically foregrounded through the principle of resistance. Accordingly, the Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, in the funeral procession of the General, termed Soleimani as the "Martyr of Quds."

Another point regarding the destructive concept is the use of which implies completely breaking or knocking something or someone down. Following this, a group of American riflemen is sent back to their country in a coffin. Thus, after the act of smashing, the destruction occurs, and those who are destroyed or killed are sent home in coffins.

"Today, at the same time that the enemies of God and the enemies of God's righteous servants (the enemy of Allah, and your enemy) assassinated our martyr Soleimani, the first smash of consecutive smashes was delivered to arrogance and we sent the first group of American riflemen sent back to America with a coffin and it has just begun. With the martyrdom of General Soleimani, your gradual death has accelerated, and each of us, wherever we find you, the arrogant people, will dry up your roots as a religious obligation. The martyrdom of Lieutenant General Soleimani, the starting point of the collapse of the Arrogant Front."

The word "Eyn" is an Arabic word meaning both "To be like something" and "Eye." In conceptualizing the destruction of the American base in Iraq, the official news agencies in Iran used both meanings to represent their other-making with the USA. Previously, it was shown that this word was used in the news as "Being like a corpse" and in the following, it is used in a context meaning "Eye." Furthermore, "Asad" as an Arabic word means lion, and attacking the American base is conceptualized as blinding the eye of the lion. A kind of totally literally translating of the name of the base to depict its destruction. "The lion's eye was blinded!"

An example of embodiment through metaphors can be found in a news headline describing the decline of the United States' military presence in the region. In this context, the attack on the American base in Iraq is metaphorically depicted as the backbone of a human figure lying in the area. The phrase "Breaking the backbone" symbolizes the destruction of the essential pillars supporting this military force.

"The military backbone of the US in the region broke."

In the analyzed data, the arrogance is metaphorically conceptualized as a human, and the attack of the American base is equivalent to a death blow. So, "Death Blow" is used to imply the attack and killing of the American army as a destruction imposed on the enemy.

"The death blow to the dignity of arrogance in Eyn al-Asad."

Death as Sleep

There is an evident similarity between a sleeping body and a dead one, and sleep has often been regarded as a temporary death, a period when the soul leaves the body to later return to it when it awakens (Allan, 2018: 51). "When death is described as sleep, we imagine that it, too, is temporary; no wonder that death notices often substitute sleep for death. The commonly used abbreviation of R.I.P. (rest in peace) also draws on the metaphorical image of death as being a final (and eternal) resting point, this

image is also borne out on euphemistic tombstone inscriptions such as finally at peace or peace at last." (Migut 2016: 189 cited in Allan, 2018: 51)

Lakoff and Turner (1989: 18-19) explain the death is sleep metaphor as follows (Rasse, 2022: 85):

In the death is sleep metaphor, the corpse corresponds to the body of a sleeper, and the appearance of the corpse, inactive and inattentive, to the appearance of the sleeper. Optionally, the experience of the soul after death corresponds to our mental experiences during sleep, namely dreaming. And just as death is a particular sort of departure, a one-way departure with no return, so death is a particular sort of sleep, an eternal sleep from which we never waken.

In the metaphorical explanation of the death of Gen. Soleimani through the death as sleep metaphor is also evident in this context. Using the phrase "Sleep Well" and repeating it implies that this death is like sleeping, in which the resting point is reached.

Sleep well, general, in your eternal home, but know that the shrine will not be defenseless!

Death as Journey

Based on Ralston (2016: 84), "One of the most conventional metaphors for death is that of departure, and of death being the final stage of life's journey. This metaphor negates the finality of death by applying a sense of continuous movement to the deceased, so that they are considered to be somehow alive in another place." Furthermore, Turner and Lakoff (2009: 7) explain that "The death as departure metaphor is often extended in religious traditions where the departure is seen as the beginning of a journey to a final destination. This makes use of the basic metaphor that states are locations that one can be in, enter, or leave. Being dead is a final state and, therefore, metaphorically a final location. A change of state is metaphorically a change of location. Via death is departure, this final location is the final destination toward which one departs. The specific details of this final location vary: "It can be, for example, God the Father's house, punishment in hell, an assigned spot in the underworld, final rest, or the place of one's origin, which can be one's home."

Within this discursive context, death is conceptualized as a purposeful journey culminating in the attainment of a sacred destination, one that signifies both transcendence and emancipation. Among the most revered of these destinations is reunion with the founder of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. In

the narrative under analysis, General Qasem Soleimani is metaphorically aligned with *Mālik Ashtar*, the loyal and trusted commander of Imam Ali, the first Imam in Shi'a Islam. By extension, Ayatollah Khomeini is symbolically equated with Imam Ali (AS), positioning Soleimani as his devoted general who has now rejoined him. This act of reunion is portrayed not merely as a consequence of death, but as the fulfillment of a spiritual journey, one that began in life and reached its divine conclusion in martyrdom.

"This time's *Mālik Ashtar* joined Ruhollah."

Another conceptualization of this assassination is achieved by defining death as the attainment of a high level of martyrdom. Martyrdom is thus considered the highest form of death, distinct and superior to that of ordinary individuals. This level is attained by members of the in-group, while out-group members are merely killed or destroyed.

"O! Loving warrior and devout mystic, who at the hands of the evilest enemies of the Iranian nation and the Islamic world, that is, the criminal America, reached the lofty level of martyrdom and reached your long-standing desire…"

Martyrdom in the Persian context is an act of "Reaching." As the literally translated utterance proves, Gen. Soleimani reached this destination, that is martyrdom.

In this discourse, death is not the end of the life journey, but it's the beginning of a new journey. In the following line, it is emphasized that this death is the start of a new route. In the Islamic culture, animal slaughter starts with mentioning the name of God. There is a kind of intertextual relationship between this culture and talking about a new beginning. The hard revenge is intertextually related to this kind of slaughtering.

"The bloodline is not the end of Soleimani/Be afraid that this is the beginning of the name of God."

Death as Salvation

While it is said that "Good things in general (like life) are metaphorically up, light, warm, and valuable, while bad things (like death) are down, dark, cold, and maybe also nonvaluable," (Kovecses, 2000: 44) in the studied context, death is conceptualized as emancipation and deliverance. It is formulated in the up-down image schema. In this schema, up is specific and for the in-groups, and down is reached by the out-groups. So, the up schema delivers the dead to the salvation and emancipation levels. As via (2012: 223) indicates, "Paul in 2 Cor 4:7-2 understands salvation as a metaphorical reliving of the death and resurrection of Jesus."

However, based on Dunn (2001: 156) "The difficulties that have accrued around the sacrificial atonement metaphor of salvation, exacerbated by its almost exclusive use for centuries, do not negate the importance of the cross or the power of sacred suffering. Rather, new theological interpretation is called for that will head debilitating complications off while doing justice to the centrality of Jesus death "For us." By setting the cross in its historical context, Jesus' research contributes to this needed solution. It offers a new imagination with which to appreciate the Messiah's saving work.

Throughout history, Shi'ism has generally been a minority faith. Prior to the Safavid era, when a central government was established in the name of Shi'ism, Shi'as held little power except during limited periods. From the perspective of its elites, Shi'a history has been marked by oppression and injustice. The notion of *Taqīyyah*, meaning the concealment of belief and faith in Shi'a doctrine to avoid harm and persecution by non-Shi'a rulers, was coined in this context. As is known, in contrast to Sunnis, who prioritize practice over theory, Shi'ism places greater emphasis on idea and theory over practice. This means that Sunnis, having held power, first engaged in actions, and then their thinkers, jurists, and scholars formulated justifications and related theories. In Shi'ism, however, the processes of idea-making and theorization were carried out for years in secrecy. These ideas were only put into practice after the emergence of the Safavid dynasty, when the opportunity for action became available.

One of the important points in comprehending the Shi'a discourse in general and concerning death in particular is to understand that Shi'as have always perceived themselves as being oppressed because of not having power. In the shade of this approach, the idea of resistance has circulated among Muslims. This has caused the Shi'as, like the Jews, to be occupied with notions based on salvation and emancipation. The Shi'as are killed, and the fighters are martyrs who have been sacrificed in their path to reaching salvation and emancipation.

For the Shi'as, especially after the Safavids, three events of Ghadir centered on Imam Ali (AS), *'Āshūrā* centered on Imam *Ḥusayn* (AS) and the emergence of Shia messiah (the awaited Imam) centered on Imam Mahdi (AJ) have been very important and prominent. These events are considered the biggest border-making of the Shi'as against their others. According to Shi'a doctrine, the historical lines in the struggle between good and evil are defined and drawn through these events, and the salvation and emancipation of Shi'as are realized within this framework. These three events are

regarded as the primary sources of the concepts of jihad and martyrdom in Shi'a thought.

An interesting aspect of the Shi'a-Iranian discourse on death is that dignified death is regarded as the highest form of death, namely, martyrdom in the path of righteousness and truth. In this view, Imam *Ḥusayn* (AS) sacrificed his life in the event of *'Āshūrā* so that the path of righteousness and truth would endure eternally throughout history. Imam *Ḥusayn* (AS) is considered the ever-living martyr of history and is the shining light of guidance and the ark of salvation. This red line, based on the two elements of jihad and martyrdom, will last forever after this event. Armageddon and Shia messianism will also be based on these two elements of jihad and martyrdom. The ideal point is that the Shi'as wish to be one of the 313 messiahs (Imam Mahdi)'s special companions. Tolerating any kind of hardship in the way of fighting arrogance and defending the oppressed is considered a form of sacred suffering.

Based on this approach, the resistance front required Gen. Soleimani's blood to be immortalized; his death led to the unity of the Muslim nation. Therefore, an ordinary death could not produce such outcomes. In this ideology, the suffering of being killed to save the Muslim world results in emancipation.

"The immortalization of the Resistance Front demanded the blood of Haj Qasim, and you knew that your martyrdom would lead to the unity of the Islamic nation, and that your blood would create miracles..."

This kind of death is defined as serving Islam and a way toward emancipation. So, martyrdom is a level of reaching emancipation.

"Just as your life was to serve Islam and the revolution, your martyrdom should be like your life to serve Islam."

Gen. Soleimani is regarded as a legend in the Muslim world and the resistance front. This characterization indicates that his death leads to emancipation and solidifies his status as a legend.

"Lieutenant General Martyr Soleimani is a legend of the Muslim world and the resistance front."

This process of myth-making of people is seen in some events regarding Qassem Soleimani like including March 20th as "National Heroes' Day" in the official calendar of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This process of hero-making was also mentioned by some researchers and analysts like Peterson (2016), who explained the approach toward Soleimani as a living commander elevated to a hero status: "Not a Shi'a

religious figure and not a martyr, Qassem Soleimani, the living commander of Iran's elite Quds Force, has been elevated to hero status."

In another statement, emphasis is placed on his presence in heaven and his observation of the operations targeting the American base. A person in heaven is considered to have attained emancipation. He and his comrades are described as being in heaven to highlight that those following this path are on a redemptive journey.

"Surely, the pure soul of Haj Qasim the Great and his Mujahid comrades in heaven were witnessing and helping this victorious operation."

The official media uses the interpretation of "Soleimani Jewel" in this regard. Based on this interpretation, jewel is the ring's gemstone, which has a special place in the Iranian-Shi'a culture, and even the beliefs and ideas are engraved on it. In the "Soleimani Jewel," Soleimani is both the name of the figure and the name of Solomon as the ruler of all the world, in all of the Abrahamic religions. So, Soleimani is assimilated to a gemstone of a ring which is going to be universal. It is meant that Soleimani's blood is not going to be trampled, but it's going to be universal like the Kingdom of Solomon. Thus, the Solomon Kingdom would be revived through this blood. It should be noted that the color red is also a symbol in Shi'a culture, representing positive death or martyrdom. This color appears in images of Soleimani's gemstone to signify his connection to Shi'a tradition.

Although black is the symbol of death and sorrow in the Iranian-Shi'a culture, red is the continuance of the green color of *Wilāyat* and Imamah and depicts martyrdom. In the Shi'a view, martyrdom is represented as a line containing all the martyred oppressed throughout history. The culmination of this martyrdom red line is the incident of *'Āshūrā*. When someone is martyred, they are remembered by referencing Imam *Ḥusayn* (AS) and are regarded as his soldier and companion. This state of being a soldier can be seen on Soleimani's gravestone with a text of "Burial place of soldier Qassem Soleimani." On the other side, the martyrdom red line finally leads to the doctrine of *Mahdaviyat* (Shi'a messianism), which the martyrs are paving the way to the emergence of Imam Mahdi (AJ).

Cognitive Death-Based Antagonism

Antagonism has two subjective and objective dimensions. In other words, interaction appears in the subjective and objective domains. We have images and concepts of the self and other borders in our minds and act in accordance with them. On the other side, reality and the objective domain also formulate and shape our mental forms of our

identity bordering with the others. Regarding the belief in different sorts of positive and negative deaths, there has always been a kind of cognitive action in the image-making of the Iranian post-revolutionary media. This media, in some cases like the assassination of Gen. Soleimani and the Eyn al-Asad event, tries to formulate the Iranian mentality and conception. In this reading, Soleimani is the symbol of fighting for the right, and in the words of the Iranian leader, "Soleimani's shoe is more valuable than the head of his murderer." This mental formulation is in contrast with Trump's illustration, who says, "US killed a monster. He was a monster. And he's no longer a monster. He's dead."

The cognitive-media conceptualization of death in the Iranian mass media tries to make an intersubjective link with the constituent elements of the Iranian identity. Accordingly, all the Iranians should comprehend those killed in the way of the idea of Islamic resistance as "Martyr"; a person who is killed in line with the divine guardianship (the trinity of God, the prophet Muhammad, and obeying those of authority) preserving and strengthening Iran's nationality and land, and finally protecting humanity and mankind. These martyrs are simultaneously represented as the martyrs of defending the holy shrines (martyrs in line with the idea of Shi'a-Islamic resistance), martyrs for Iran, border guards Martyrs, and martyrs in line with humanity and fighting terrorism (ISIS neo-fundamentalism). On the other hand, the dead of the opposite front are represented as people against this idea who are not only against Iran and Muslims' security and interests, but also are evil against humanity and mankind.

The reflected comprehension in the Islamic Republic's mass media on the positive and negative death is not an innovative and novel idea but a revivalist one. As it was mentioned, both the Iranians and the Shi'as, due to not having power and a representative state (especially from the fall of the Safavids to the rise of the Sufis), have passed the *Taqīyyah* and their hidden life and fight. Accordingly, minority ideologies are regarded as more empathetic and capable of fostering solidarity. In such contexts, protective frameworks offer broader coverage. Mental symbolization shapes the cognitive orientation of the in-group society in opposition to the dominant hegemonic mainstream, which expands its influence. The negative fight of the *Taqīyyah* era turns to ideologies of fighting in the Islamic resistance era; a trend which in Iran's post-revolutionary era since 1979, affected by the special spirit of revolutionary leaders and elites, some social activism trends, and some effects of leftist currents and ideologies, has gained more color and intensity.

Based on the analyzed metaphors, it is evident that the Iranian mass media metaphorically represents the death of the other as a negative and destructive way, while the self or the in-group's ideological self is not dead but martyred in the way of the idea of resistance and the ideals of Shi'ism. This death is metaphorically represented by concepts of a journey toward a transcendental end, reaching the religious and revolutionary figures and gaining salvation. These metaphors are applied to draw a border between the in-groups, who are the martyrs, and the out-groups, who in the studied context are the Americans who were killed in Eyn al-Asad base. So, metaphor is a way of representing antagonism and rejecting others.

Discussion and Conclusion

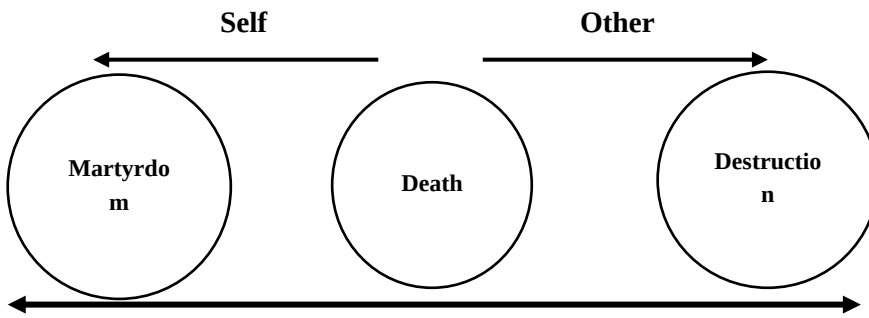
In the discourse of the Islamic Revolution in the field of death, there is a kind of valuation and classification. The quality of death is different based on the meaning included in front of it and compared to the Shia-Iranian reading of the conflict between right and evil. Normal death is for normal people; those citizens who are occupied with their daily lives and have not chosen the path of fighting. In official discourse, "Normal Death" is often framed as neutral and lacking ideological significance. Along with the concept of death, there is a fundamental duality: death on the path of truth, which is martyrdom, and death on the front of evil, which is called destruction.

This is the cognitive-discursive aspect of the issue. The official discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran consistently seeks to instill a belief in the duality of death: "Death based on truth and martyrdom, versus death associated with falsehood, evil, or destruction." This dichotomy is rooted in Shi'a social and religious symbolism, particularly as shaped by the event of *'Āshūrā*. According to the official interpretation of death, the individual and collective mentality of Iranians should be cultivated to distinguish between positive and negative death, encouraging them to choose martyrdom in the path of truth and righteousness. Within this discourse, the Islamic Republic is portrayed as perpetually oppressed and violated due to its central role in leading the front of the oppressed against the arrogant and dominating global powers. The discourse encourages citizens to adopt a mindset that valorizes martyrdom as a form of positive death and is prepared to denounce its negative counterpart.

In the official discourse of the Islamic Republic, which is prevalent in its media, the world is a stage for the continuous conflict of the two forces of right and wrong and good and evil. In official narratives, the Islamic Republic is portrayed as the

embodiment of truth and resistance against perceived global evil. This dualistic framing has been interpreted by some scholars as influenced by Manichean elements within Shi'a thought, which seeks to dichotomize between good and evil in every issue. The theme of death is also seen in this context, and there is good and bad death. Death has different types and classifications, depicting the relationship between the deceased and the official discourse of the Islamic Republic in this issue.

Fig 1. The Polarized Logic of Death Conceptualization



The assassination of Qassem Soleimani and his accompanying team is regarded as a profound example of martyrdom in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Martyrdom is understood as a commitment to truth and God, often imbued with divine and heavenly significance. In official media portrayals, Soleimani is depicted as a martyr representing national, religious, and humanitarian ideals, truth, and the fight against terrorism. He is considered a transnational martyr, connected to all Muslims and humanity as a whole. From a mystical and ideological perspective, He is portrayed in ideological narratives as a symbol of resistance and martyrdom aligned with the values of truth and justice.

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Contemporary Researches on Islamic Revolution

The Pattern of Interaction of the Islamic Government in Dealing with Opponents: An Analysis of Ethical, Educational, and Military Strategies in *Nahj al-Balāghah*

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aims to explain the pattern of interaction between the Islamic government and its opponents, based on the conduct of Imam Ali (AS) as reflected in *Nahj al-Balāghah*. The government's interaction with political opponents, as a foundational principle of governance in Islamic political theory, plays a decisive and central role in consolidating the legitimacy of the political system, preserving sustainable social cohesion, ensuring national security, and strengthening public consensus and political stability. The main question addressed is: What strategies and methods did Imam Ali (AS) employ in his interactions with opponents?

Method/Approach: This paper was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method, adopting a text-centered interpretive approach and drawing on an integrated theoretical framework that combines Islamic foundations with modern political theories.

Results/Findings: The findings derived from the text of *Nahj al-Balāghah* indicate three broad approaches, ethical, educational, and military, in dealing with opponents. Imam Ali (AS), relying on the guiding principles of Islamic governance and taking temporal and spatial circumstances into consideration, developed a systematic typology of opponents and employed diverse, context-sensitive strategies for constructive engagement.

Conclusion: The most important strategies of interaction include active tolerance, forgiveness, and rational dialogue with nonviolent opponents, alongside conditional, proportionate, and Sharia-based coercive measures against armed insurgents. This advanced model is founded upon a structural distinction between "Legitimate lawful opposition" and "Violent armed rebellion," emphasizing that the ethical and legitimate use of coercive force is permissible only in cases involving severe violations of national security and existential threats to the integrity of the Islamic system. By presenting a systematic, indigenous, and practical framework derived from the Alavid Sirah, this study offers an innovative model as well as practical and policy-oriented recommendations for conflict management in the contemporary Islamic political system.

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Introduction

Interaction is exchange and reciprocal engagement (Mahyar, n.d.: 61). It is inherently bilateral and occurs between two individuals or two groups. Imam Ali's (AS) manner of dealing with ideological and political opponents reflects his capacity, greatness, and elevated status across various fields, particularly in governance and administration, especially when confronting different groups and personalities under diverse circumstances. If the methods of this interaction are extracted and analyzed accurately, they can contribute significantly to solving numerous challenges in management and political relations (both domestic and international politics).

Today, in some Islamic countries, challenges exist in trilateral interactions (government-people relations, relations between Islamic governments, and relations between Islamic and non-Islamic governments). The interactional methods of Imam Ali (AS), as a figure respected among all Muslims, may play a constructive role if adapted to contemporary contexts. Imam Ali displayed such chivalry and magnanimity that he did not act unjustly even toward his enemies and did not initially seek the destruction of his opponents or adversaries. He recognized rights even for enemies and, on this basis, instructed *Mālik al-Ashtar*:

"Do not betray your covenant, do not violate your pledge, and do not deceive your enemy." (Letter 53)

The present study aims to answer the central question:

- What strategies and methods did Imam Ali (AS) employ in his interactions with opponents?

- In other words, what were his approaches in dealing with opposition under different circumstances?

If it becomes clear to what extent Imam Ali (AS) emphasized soft methods and the role dialogue played in his engagement with opponents, this could provide guidance for contemporary interactions among governments. Reaching clear conclusions may help determine the priorities of governmental institutions and, by presenting a phased set of recommendations, provide a clear horizon for both citizens and officials of Islamic countries, enabling them to regulate their relationships and interactions according to the proposed framework. Naturally, the principle of peace and rational reconciliation takes precedence over interactions rooted in hostility and enmity.

Although some of these methods may appear to be derived from reason alone, it should be noted that such judgments are made from a contemporary perspective after

centuries of historical development; otherwise, these methods were unprecedented and unparalleled in their own time. Furthermore, the exemplary nature of Imam Ali's (AS) conduct establishes the application of such methods as normative principles. In this article, the term opponents includes the first three caliphs, the *Nākithīn* (those who broke allegiance), the *Qāsiṭīn* (the unjust faction), the *Māriqīn* (the seceders), and part of the *Qā'idīn* (those who remained neutral). Since the central source of this study is *Nahj al-Balāghah*, the main focus has been placed on the text of this work. Accordingly, the entire text was examined from beginning to end, relevant passages were extracted, and the extracted materials were subsequently categorized and organized under thematic headings.

Literature Review

A number of studies have addressed this topic in scattered form. Some of the most relevant works include:

- The book "Political Positions of Imam Ali (AS) toward Opponents" by Jalal Derakhsheh generally discusses Imam Ali's life before and after the caliphate, including his encounters with opponents.

- The thesis "Methods of Confronting Soft Warfare by Opponents in Imam Ali's Conduct," by Ahmad Foroudi (Master's thesis, University of Yazd, 2014 AD/1393 SH), examines examples of soft warfare and some methods of responding to it.

- The article "Freedom of Political Opponents under the Government of Ali (AS)" by Mohammad Hasan Saeidi (Islamic Government Quarterly, No. 19) discusses freedom of thought and belief and Imam Ali's position regarding them.

- The article "Educational Principles and Methods for Dealing with Opponents in Imam Ali's Ethics of Communication" by Mohammad Ali Latifi and Hossein Zarifiyan Yeganeh (Ethics Research Journal, No. 15, Spring 2012 AD/1391 SH) emphasizes communication ethics and its underlying principles.

- The article "The Styles of Imam Ali's Argumentation against Opponents in *Nahj al-Balāghah*" by Ali Akbar Abbasi (Shi'a Studies Journal, No. 44, Winter 2014 AD/1392 SH) addresses Imam Ali's encounters with the caliphs, *Ṭalḥa, Zubayr, Mu'āwīyah*, and *Ash'ath*.

- The article "Behavioral Analysis of Imam Ali (AS) toward the First Internal Opponents of the Islamic Government" by Masoumeh Shirdel, et al., (Alavi Studies Journal, No. 2, Autumn–Winter 2017 AD/1396 SH) provides statistical data from Imam Ali's statements concerning his interactions with opponents.

- The article "Methods of Interaction of Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (AS) with Opponents" by Sayyid Mohammad Emam and Gholamhossein Moharrami (Lifestyle Studies Journal, No. 4, Spring–Summer 2017 AD/1396 SH) discusses verbal methods (such as dialogue, exhortation, and correspondence) as well as nonverbal methods (such as tolerance and military confrontation) in engaging with opponents.

- The article "The Pattern of Communication with Opponents during the Rule of Imam Ali (AS) (A Case Study of the Sermons and Letters of *Nahj al-Balāghah*)" by Meysam Farrokhi and Batoul Ahmadi (Alavi Studies Journal, No. 2, Autumn–Winter 2017 AD/1396 SH) examines the methods, tools, and etiquette of Imam Ali's communication with opponents.

- The article "The Rights of Opponents Before and During War from the Perspective of *Nahj al-Balāghah*" by Kazem Ghazizadeh and Fatemeh Nikkhah Monfared (Journal of Qur'anic and Hadith Studies, Spring 2014 AD/1393 SH, No. 21) discusses issues including the rights that Imam Ali observed in warfare against Muslims, negotiation, and the completion of proof with the enemy before the commencement of war, and refraining from violent methods.

The above-mentioned studies, relying on historical sources, have addressed subjects such as Imam Ali's (AS) approach to governance, ethics of communication with others, and examples of opposition among the Companions. They have reached conclusions regarding the etiquette of dialogue with opponents, methods of confronting soft warfare, Imam Ali's intellectual openness, and his commitment to ethical principles in dealing with opponents.

A review of the existing literature shows that despite the efforts undertaken, many dimensions of the topic remain unexplored, and most studies have focused primarily on historical discussions. Unlike previous works, the present article focuses on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, making it distinctive in its own right. Adopting an applied perspective, it also specifies the levels and categories of opponents and their corresponding

examples, so that the discussion is presented in a precise, purposeful, and transparent manner. Consequently, it has the potential to serve as a model for Islamic societies.

The innovation of this study lies in presenting a threefold model of interaction with opponents (ethical, educational, and military) that systematically integrates the principles of Islamic governance with modern political theories, particularly Easton's systems theory (1965) and Habermas's theory of communicative action (1984). For the first time, the present study employs a text-centered interpretive method to extract and systematize Imam Ali's (AS) strategies of interaction as reflected in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, while providing an indigenous framework that enables the application of this model within contemporary Islamic governance.

Another innovative aspect of the study is the development of criteria for distinguishing among categories of opponents by integrating Islamic standards and modern political theories, as well as the presentation of a hierarchical model of interaction that prioritizes peaceful strategies.

Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study is based on a qualitative interpretive approach (Taylor, 1971), with a focus on textual analysis of *Nahj al-Balāghah* as the primary data source.

Within this approach, *Nahj al-Balāghah* is regarded not merely as a historical source but as a "Living Text" possessing multiple layers of meaning (Ricoeur, 1971), requiring deep interpretation and hermeneutic engagement. The interpretive approach adopted emphasizes understanding beyond the text's surface meaning, uncovering implicit concepts, and extracting the socio-political implications of Imam Ali's (AS) discourse.

Drawing on textual hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1960), this method analyzes the text's discursive structure, contextual setting, and core messages.

Data collection was conducted through documentary analysis, focusing on the complete text of *Nahj al-Balāghah* (*Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd*'s commentary edition). Using purposive sampling, all sections relevant to the research topic (engagement with opponents) were extracted and analyzed through a deductive-inductive approach.

During the analytical process, the data were first subjected to close reading, and initial concepts were identified. Subsequently, by integrating textual findings with the study's theoretical framework, the final model was derived.

Theoretical Framework of the Research

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach to analyze Imam Ali's (AS) interaction with opponents. The theoretical framework of the research rests upon three principal foundations. First, the theological-jurisprudential foundations of Islamic governance, including the principles of justice, consultation, enjoining good and forbidding evil, and the preservation of human dignity, constitute the study's theoretical basis.

Second, the theory of differentiation among opponents, developed through integrating Easton's (1965) perspective on levels of political support with Islamic criteria, which classifies opponents into three categories: intra-systemic opponents, armed extra-systemic opponents, and ideological opponents.

Third, Habermas's theory of communicative action (1984) emphasizes constructive dialogue and the creation of an ideal communicative environment for interaction. The theological-jurisprudential foundations governing interaction with opponents in Islamic political theory are based on principles derived from the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Islamic reason.

First, the principle of justice (al-Ḥadīd: 25), as the most central pillar of governance, emphasizes the necessity of fair judgment and equitable conduct even toward opponents. Second, the principle of consultation (al-Shūrā: 38) requires collective participation in decision-making and consultation with knowledgeable individuals. Third, the principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil (Āli ʻImrān: 104) defines the supervisory responsibility of both government and society in confronting deviations. Fourth, the principle of preserving human dignity (al-Isrā': 70) insists upon the intrinsic worth of all human beings, including political opponents. Fifth, the principle of public interest, inferred from jurisprudential sources, serves as a criterion for evaluating governmental decisions.

Together, these principles establish a comprehensive framework for Islamic governance that simultaneously respects individual rights and secures the collective interests of society. Unlike secular theories of government, these foundations emphasize the divine and ethical dimensions of governance and regard the ultimate objective as attaining nearness to God by establishing justice and equity within society.

Within the framework of Easton's systems theory (1965), the political system is viewed as an open system interacting continuously with its environment. In this

model, political opposition is considered one of the inputs to the political system and may manifest as either demands or support.

By distinguishing between specific support and diffuse support, Easton provides a framework for analyzing different levels of opposition. Accordingly, opponents may be classified into three main groups:

1. Intra-systemic opponents, who maintain diffuse support while demanding changes in policies;
2. Nonviolent extra-systemic opponents, who reduce diffuse support but refrain from violence;
3. Armed extra-systemic opponents, who completely reject the legitimacy of the political system and resort to violence.

This classification facilitates a deeper understanding of the nature of opposition and assists in selecting appropriate strategies of engagement.

Habermas's theory of communicative action (1984) emphasizes the importance of rational dialogue and achieving mutual understanding within the public sphere. From Habermas's perspective, communicative action stands in contrast to instrumental action, in which parties seek to impose their will upon one another.

In this theory, communicative rationality serves as the foundation for constructive interaction with opponents and rests upon four components: "Comprehensibility, truth, sincerity, appropriateness."

Through the concept of the ideal public sphere for dialogue, Habermas outlines conditions under which all participants enjoy equal opportunities to express their views, and none are subjected to domination or coercion.

This theoretical framework for interacting with opponents emphasizes rational argumentation, transparency, sincerity, and the pursuit of shared understanding while rejecting force and deception as illegitimate means.

Accordingly, the model of interaction in the Alavid tradition is based on a threefold system:

- The ethical approach, centered on respecting opponents, exercising tolerance, forgiveness, and avoiding insult;
- The educational approach, emphasizing guidance and clarification through rational dialogue, responding to doubts, and promoting transparency;

- The military approach, observing the principle of proportionality, avoiding excess, and prioritizing the public interest.

This tripartite framework operates according to a clear hierarchy that prioritizes peaceful methods and permits coercive action only as a last resort.

The concepts of the present study are formed within the proposed theoretical framework around the central notion of the "Interaction model of the Islamic government with opponents."

The core concept of Islamic governmental interaction is a dynamic, multi-layered process comprising deliberate, systematic strategies for addressing political opposition.

This concept stands in contrast to approaches based exclusively on either coercion or excessive accommodation and, by integrating Islamic foundations with modern political theories, emphasizes proportionality between strategy and the type of opposition.

Within this framework, opponents are not viewed as uniform threats but rather as multidimensional phenomena possessing varying degrees of legitimacy and distinct modes of engagement.

The subsidiary concepts of the study include:

Ethical approach (including tolerance, forgiveness, and avoidance of insult);

Educational approach (including rational dialogue, clarification, and transparency);

Military approach (including conditional and proportionate coercive confrontation).

These three concepts constitute the building blocks of the interaction model and operate within a hierarchy of engagement that prioritizes peaceful strategies and permits coercive measures only as a final option.

Furthermore, Islamic government, as the principal context of this model, is defined by principles such as justice, consultation, enjoining good and forbidding evil, and the preservation of human dignity, thereby distinguishing it from secular models of governance.

4. Ethical Approach

Imam Ali (AS) consistently made ethics the foundation of governance and did not depart from ethical principles even under the most difficult circumstances. That a religious and political figure could navigate numerous and diverse governmental challenges while maintaining ethical conduct, even toward opponents and enemies, offers a valuable model for others.

4.1. Good Conduct and Refraining from Insults

God forbids insulting opponents in the Qur'an:

"And do not insult those they invoke besides God…" (al-Anʿām: 108) The Prophet Muhammad also discouraged abusive speech and considered it a cause of hostility:

"Do not insult people, lest you create enmity among them." (Kulaynī, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 2, 360)

Imam Ali (AS) likewise prohibited abusive language and regarded habitual insult as a sign of low character: "Whenever two people exchange insults, the baser of them prevails." (Āmidī, n.d.: 224; Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, n.d.: 19, 24)

Throughout *Nahj al-Balāgha*, when speaking about the first three caliphs, especially *Abū Bakr* and ʿ*Umar*, and while offering sincere criticism of some of their methods and conduct, Imam Ali does not resort to insult or humiliation. In various places, he explains the actions of unjust and unqualified rulers of his own era and the future, yet often avoids naming them directly and instead describes the signs of deviation and unfitness (cf. Sermon 144). During the Battle of *Ṣiffīn*, some of Imam Ali's companions insulted the people of Syria (the Syrian forces). Imam Ali (AS) responded firmly that he disliked such behavior. Rather than cursing opponents, he advised describing their actions objectively, praying for reconciliation, and seeking reform and guidance even for one's enemies:

"I dislike that you should become people who curse. Instead, if you describe their actions and mention their condition, that would be more accurate in speech and more convincing as an excuse." And instead of cursing them, say: "O! God, spare our blood and theirs, reconcile them and us, and guide them out of their error…" (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 206)

Accordingly, one may speak to opponents with respect and civility.

4.2. Forbearance, Gentleness, and Tolerance

As Amir al-Mu'minin, Imam Ali (AS) demonstrated patience at various stages of life because of his position, his long-term perspective, and his ultimate goal of guidance. He had learned from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that practicing forbearance helps achieve the fundamental objectives of Islam. Although many hypocrites in Medina mocked and harassed the Prophet and his companions, the Prophet did not

respond harshly toward them; thus, both the Prophet and Imam Ali (AS) are portrayed as exemplars of tolerance.

In his dealings with *Mu'āwīya*, Imam Ali did not immediately resort to war or coercion. Instead, he consistently pursued different means to prevent bloodshed. He sent *Jarīr ibn 'Abdullāh al-Bajallī* to Syria to seek *Mu'āwīya*'s pledge of allegiance. At that time, some of Imam Ali's companions, pointing to the envoy's delay and suspecting deception or a possible enemy attack, proposed beginning military action. Imam Ali (AS) rejected this suggestion and stated that because his envoy was still among them, initiating war would close the door to peace and push the Syrians away from any possibility of reconciliation. Therefore, patience was necessary until the outcome became clear: "My preparing for war against the people of Syria while *Jarīr* is still among them would close the way to Syria and turn its people away from any good they may intend. Yet I have set a time limit for *Jarīr*; if he remains beyond it, then he is either deceived or disobedient. In my view, the proper course is patience, so proceeds calmly." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 43)

These statements reflect Imam Ali's spirit of tolerance, patience, and composure in dealing with opponents (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, n.d.: 2, 322).

As long as the *Khawārij* remained merely political opponents, Imam treated them with tolerance and responded to their harshness with gentleness. He never dealt with them aggressively and consistently prioritized kindness and accommodation (Delshad, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 60). Accordingly, his manner of speaking and engaging with the Kharijites, while realistic, was filled with reasoned argument, gentleness, and hope for their reform.

He also exercised restraint and tolerance toward the *Nākithīn* (those who broke allegiance), the *Qāsiṭīn* (those considered unjust/oppressive) (ibid: 74-75), and likewise the *Qā'idīn* (those who remained inactive) (ibid: 70), as far as circumstances allowed. This occurred despite the prevailing customs and political culture of the time, according to which refusing allegiance to the caliph or breaking one's pledge could result in execution and severe punishment (for further discussion, cf. Delshad Tehrani, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 107-113).

4.3. Benevolent Admonition

One of Imam Ali's methods in dealing with opponents was compassionate and sincere counsel. When people gathered around Imam Ali and complained about *Uthmān ibn*

ʻAffān's misconduct, they asked him to speak with the caliph. Imam Ali (AS) visited *ʻUthmān* and offered sincere and compassionate advice, including:

"Do not become an instrument in Marwan's hands, allowing him to drive you wherever he wishes." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 164)

Imam Ali warned ʻUthmān that if he continued on that course, people would revolt against him and ultimately kill him. Therefore, out of concern, he told him: "Do not become the slain leader of this community…" (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 164) Thus, well-intentioned advice can sometimes resolve serious conflicts, as the Qur'an states that reminders benefit believers (al-Dhārīyāt: 55).

During *ʻUthmān*'s caliphate, when others remained passive, Imam Ali (AS) fulfilled what he regarded as his duty by offering constructive criticism of the caliph (Sermon 37). On several occasions, he attempted to prevent rebellion, unrest, and *ʻUthmān*'s downfall, and he became so concerned for *ʻUthmān*'s welfare that he said:

"By God, I defended him until I feared that I might become blameworthy [before God]." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 240)

4.4. Forgiveness

Imam Ali (AS) was known for forgiveness and advised: "If you gain power over your enemy, make forgiveness of him an expression of gratitude for having power over him." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying 11)

According to the account of sayyid *Raḍī*, one day Imam Ali (AS) addressed a gathering. A man from the Kharijites exclaimed:

"May God kill this unbeliever, how knowledgeable he is in religion? People rose to kill the man, but Imam Ali said: "Remain calm. He has merely uttered an insult, and its proper response is only an equivalent reply, though forgiving him is better. He then pardoned the man." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Saying 420) Throughout his life, Imam Ali dealt with the Kharijites with considerable restraint. He even advised his followers not to fight them after his death, explaining that they were mistaken but apparently sought truth, unlike those who intentionally pursued falsehood and attained it, referring to Muʻāwīya: "Do not fight the Kharijites after me, for one who seeks truth but misses it is not like one who seeks falsehood and finds it."

(Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 61) After the Battle of the Camel, Imam Ali (AS) released *Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam* through the intercession of *Ḥasan* and *Ḥusayn*, which Marwan himself had requested. Imam Ali also declined Marwan's pledge of

allegiance and remarked: "His hand is a Jewish hand; if he pledged allegiance with it, he would betray with his backside [i.e., immediately break it]." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 73)

4.5. Silence and Non-Engagement

In dealing with opponents, wise silence can sometimes be an effective method. Imam Ali stated: "Many words are answered by silence" (Āmidī, ibid: 215) and elsewhere: "Silence toward the foolish person is the best reply." (Āmidī, ibid: 77)

Although Imam Ali (AS) sometimes chose silence in the face of opponents, he explained that this silence did not stem from fear of death; rather, it arose from hidden realities known to him but unknown to others (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 5). However, absolute silence is not considered desirable. Imam Ali criticized silence in certain circumstances, stating: "There is no good in remaining silent about the truth." (Āmidī, ibid: 70)

He adopted different approaches toward the rumors and criticisms circulating in society against him. At times, he would not react to rumors and futile remarks that had only a limited reach (Adyani, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 148-149).

When Imam ʿAli (AS) heard about the conversation between *ʿAmmār* and *Mughayra ibn Shuʿba*, he advised *ʿAmmār* to leave *Mughayra* alone, because he sought from religion only that which served worldly gain, not because the matter was unclear to him:

"Leave him, O! *ʿAmmār*, for he has taken nothing from religion except what brings him closer to worldly benefit. Deliberately he has confused the matter for himself, so that doubts may serve as an excuse for his lapses." (Nahj al-Balāgha, Wisdom 405)

"He also states elsewhere that the worst of people is the one whom God leaves to himself." (Sermon 103) Therefore, this approach can be learned from God: in situations where speaking has no effect on the other party, one may resort to leaving them to themselves.

5. Educational Approach

Alongside the ethical approach, Imam Ali (AS) sometimes sought to explain conditions, issues, and his own positions. Through different methods, he clarified his intentions and aimed to raise awareness. These positions are grouped under the educational approach.

5.1. Preserving Unity and Avoiding Division

Imam Ali (AS) placed exceptional importance on unity. He declared that no one was more committed than he was to preserving the unity of the Prophet's community (Letter 78). Even in the face of conspiracies and destructive actions by oath-breakers, he refrained from harsh reactions and announced that as long as social unity was not endangered, he would remain patient (Sermon 169).

After the campaign of *Busr ibn Arṭāt*, one of *Mu'āwīya*'s commanders, in Yemen, Imam Ali criticized the sluggishness of his supporters and remarked: "Your enemies are united upon falsehood and obey their leader, while you are divided despite standing upon truth and disobeying your leader." (Sermon 25)

Similar themes appear in Sermon 27. For the sake of preserving Islam, Imam Ali even gave allegiance to the caliphs (Letter 62), although the details and political context require broader discussion. He further stated: "Unity in something unpleasant is better than division in something desirable.

He added that God granted no good to past or present people through division." (Sermon 176)

In other words, reluctant unity is preferable to preferred division. People of different languages, races, and backgrounds should live together peacefully, united by Islam rather than by tribal or familial loyalties. Imam Ali (AS) refers to the early period of Islam and notes that Muslims fought even against some of their own non-believing relatives. What mattered to them was God and religion (Sermon 56). Faith was their common bond and source of unity; they did not favor their kinship ties over belief. Their movement along the path of guidance was firm and steadfast, though accompanied by hardship and endurance (Ibn Maytham, 1983 AD/1362 SH: 2, 149).

5.2. Cooperation and Assistance

To advance the ultimate objectives of Islam and prevent harm to the foundations of the religion, Imam Ali (AS) sometimes assisted the caliphs when he considered it in the public interest. When opposition and criticism against *'Uthmān* intensified, Ali (AS) spoke to the caliph on behalf of the people and advised him in hopes of resolving the crisis. Then, acting on behalf of *'Uthmān*, he addressed the people and called for calm (Sermon 164).

When *'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb* consulted Imam Ali (AS) about personally participating in the war against Persia, Imam Ali sincerely offered detailed advice

aimed at protecting both the caliph's interests and those of the Islamic government (Sermon 146).

During the caliphate, Ali (AS) demonstrated close cooperation with the caliphs. Even when the third caliph repeatedly ordered him into exile, he accepted it.

According to Sayyid *Raḍī*'s introduction to Sermon 240, when *'Uthmān* was under siege, *'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās* brought a letter from *'Uthmān* to Imam Ali (AS) asking him to go to *Yanbūʿ* so that people would speak less of Ali (AS) as a candidate for the caliphate. *'Uthmān* had made the same request before.

Imam Ali responded: "*Uthmān* wants nothing except that I should be like a water-carrying camel, coming and going with a large bucket. He sent me away, and then sent for me to return, and now he sends me away again. I defended him so much that I feared I had become blameworthy (or sinful)." (Sermon 240)

The Imam also told the people: "Leave me and seek someone else; I will support whichever ruler you choose." (Sermon 92)

He even encouraged his followers to show solidarity and pledge allegiance to the caliphs (Ahmadpour, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 124-125). Likewise, he participated in Friday prayers and congregational prayers and encouraged others to do the same (ibid: 154-155).

5.3. Clarification and Responding to Doubts and Accusations

The Commander of the Faithful (AS) maintained that whenever suspicion develops within society toward a ruler, the ruler should clearly explain matters to the people and remove the grounds for mistrust, because such conduct is closer to justice (Letter 53).

The fact that Imam Ali responded publicly to some of the claims and statements of his opponents indicates, first, that freedom of expression existed to a considerable degree, and second, that the Imam remained regularly present among the people and directly experienced social realities (Adyani, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 148-149).

In response to one companion's question regarding why he had been passed over for the caliphate despite his qualifications, Imam Ali explained that greed and monopolization of authority had caused it (Sermon 162). He repeatedly rejected accusations that he had been involved in *'Uthmān*'s death and explicitly stated that not only was he not the killer, but that he had actually helped and defended *'Uthmān* (Sermon 30).

He further emphasized: "Does not the knowledge that the sons of *Umayyah* possess about me prevent them from attributing faults to me?" (Sermon 75) In a letter to

Mu'āwīya, he declared: "I was among the people most opposed to shedding *'Uthmān*'s blood." (Letter 8) In response to the complaints and anger of *Ṭalḥa* and *Zubayr*, Ali (AS) stated: "Will you not tell me in what matter I withheld one of your rights from you, or in what affair I gave preference to myself over you? I had neither desire for the caliphate nor need for governance, but you compelled me toward it and placed that responsibility upon me." (Sermon 205)

He criticized them for becoming angry because he implemented God's rulings and followed the Prophetic tradition (Sunnah). The Kharijites, in addition to their rigid and dogmatic mindset, committed acts of violence. They brutally killed *'Abdullāh ibn Khabbāb ibn Aratt* along with his pregnant wife, and in addition, murdered three other women. After hearing of these events, Imam Ali (AS) sent *Hārith ibn Murrah* to verify the reports and obtain accurate information from the Kharijites, but they killed him as well.

As a result, Imam Ali (AS) was compelled to move toward them. At *Nahrawān*, he first demanded that they surrender the murderers so they could face legal retribution (*Qiṣaṣ*), after which he proposed that they proceed together toward Syria for battle. However, the Kharijites not only rejected his proposal but also declared war against him. Even then, Ali (AS) continued dialogue and clarification in an attempt to dissuade them from fighting.

After Imam Ali's explanatory address, a large number abandoned the Kharijite camp and joined his army. Approximately 2,800 (or, according to another report, 1,800) remained; those remaining were killed in battle and only eight Kharijites survived (Delshad, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 98-104).

Although in Imam Ali's view, blood relationship alone did not confer superiority; his political rivals and opponents had relied heavily on lineage and used it effectively to obtain power. Therefore, in order to remove their pretexts and argue on their own terms, Imam Ali repeatedly referred to his kinship with the Prophet (PBUH) (Ahmadpour, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 93).

In responding to the Kharijites, who regarded him as sinful and even unbelieving, Imam Ali argued: The Prophet (PBUH) punished those who committed wrongdoing but still regarded them as Muslims; even when an adulterer died, he performed the funeral prayer over them. On what basis, then, do you declare a sinner an unbeliever? (Sermon 127)

Naturally, Imam Ali (AS) was not presenting himself as a sinner; rather, he was reasoning hypothetically for argumentative purposes. These remarks were delivered

before the Battle of *Nahrawān* during debates with the Kharijites. In confronting the Kharijites' narrow-mindedness and impulsiveness, Imam Ali (AS) consistently maintained composure and relied on reason and logic. He never resorted to unilateral violence against them and instead engaged them in discussion (Sermon 40).

When sending *Ibn ʻAbbās* to debate the Kharijites, Imam Ali advised him not to argue with them primarily from the Qur'an, but rather to rely on the Prophetic tradition (Sunnah), because Qur'anic interpretation allows multiple readings (Letter 77).

Although Imam Ali allowed people the freedom to choose whether to pledge allegiance to him, he continually used rational arguments to oppose incorrect interpretations and religious innovations.

Reacting to *Zubayr*'s breaking of allegiance, Imam Ali (AS) explicitly declared that *Zubayr* had pledged allegiance sincerely and inwardly; therefore, he could not later claim that his pledge had merely been formal. If he wished to make such a claim, he must provide evidence, otherwise he should return to his pledge (Sermon 8). Imam Ali (AS) consistently spoke what he regarded as the truth. He informed Muʻāwīya that his criticisms of the third caliph concerned religious innovations and were not matters requiring apology (Letter 28).

He also wrote to *Muʻāwīya*: "The same people who pledged allegiance to *Abū Bakr*, *ʻUmar*, and *ʻUthmān* have pledged allegiance to me." (Letter 6) This statement illustrates an argument based on the opposing side's assumptions and accepted premises: if they accept those premises, they are logically compelled to accept the conclusion as well.

5.4. Presenting the Virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS)

As part of raising public awareness, Imam Ali (AS) emphasized his own virtues and those of the Ahl al-Bayt at various points in time. Presenting these virtues gave audiences, especially opponents, a perspective that, if they did not properly understand who he was, they might refrain from hostile actions upon recognizing the status of the Ahl al-Bayt.

A portion of those who opposed Ali (AS) had been influenced through intimidation, inducement, or deception by his principal adversaries and lacked a proper understanding of whom they were opposing. Therefore, Imam Ali clarified his and his family's status. Among his statements were that the Ahl al-Bayt were the most

deserving of the caliphate (Sermon 74), and that whoever rejects the Ahl al-Bayt will enter Hell (Sermon 152).

At times, he referred to the closeness of his relationship with the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Prophet's affection for him (Sermon 192). He also described the Ahl al-Bayt as those firmly grounded in knowledge and, by pointing to their exalted rank, regarded them as worthy of leadership (Sermon 144).

5.5. Revealing the True Face of the Enemy

Imam Ali (AS) described the oath-breaking instigators of the Battle of Jamal as the party of Satan, opening one of his sermons with: "Indeed, Satan has mobilized his party…" (Sermon 22)

Elsewhere, he characterized *Ṭalḥa* as hot-tempered and *Zubayr* as mild-tempered, advising Ibn Abbas to negotiate with *Zubayr* but not to meet *Ṭalḥa* (Sermon 31). In another statement, while discussing their personalities and ambitions, he asserted that each was willing to eliminate the other to gain political power (Sermon 148). When *Ṭalḥa* and *Zubayr* confronted him under the banner of avenging *'Uthmān'*s death, Imam Ali (AS) stated that *Ṭalḥa* himself was implicated in responsibility for *'Uthmān*'s killing and that no one had shown greater eagerness for *'Uthmān*'s death than *Ṭalḥa* (Sermon 174).

From Imam Ali's perspective, the *Umayyads* oppressed everyone, made unlawful things lawful, and violated their covenants (Sermon 98). In another statement, he identified the tribulation of the *Umayyads* as the most dangerous of all trials and described it as a blind and dark fitna (Sermon 93).

Imam Ali (AS) portrayed *Mu'āwīya* as misguided, ill-intentioned, lacking insight, driven by desire, and hypocritical (Letter 7). In his letters, he also referred to *Mu'āwīya* as:

- One whose religion had been adopted under compulsion (Letters 17 and 20),
- One pampered while bound to Satan (Letter 10),
- Deviant (Letter 28),
- Lacking sound judgment (Letter 64),
- Deceptive (Letter 65),
- And even as "Satan." (Letter 44)

He likened Umayyad rule to someone tasting only a little water and then spitting it all out (Sermon 87).When *Mu'āwīya* blocked access to the Euphrates River for Imam Ali's forces, Imam Ali stated that *Mu'āwīya* withheld necessary knowledge from the people and ruled through exploiting their ignorance and deceiving them. Through cunning, he misled groups of people and maintained authority over them (Sermon 51).

On another occasion, during a dispute between Imam Ali (AS) and *'Uthmān, Mughayra ibn al-Akhnas*, described as one of the hypocrites, boldly told *'Uthmān* that he alone was sufficient to defend him against Ali. Imam Ali (AS) did not allow him to exploit the disagreement; instead, he exposed his true nature, calling him accursed and cut off, and ordered him to leave their gathering (Sermon 135).

During his caliphate, Imam Ali (AS) also exposed the intrigues, plots, and true character of *Ash'ath*. *Ash'ath ibn Qays*, through manipulation, deceived people, encouraged enemies against Muslims, and was continually involved in sowing discord (Sermon 19).

Likewise, regarding *Mu'āwīya* and his policies, Imam Ali (AS) famously declared under oath: "By God, *Mu'āwīya* is not more clever than I am; rather, his method is treachery and sin." (Sermon 200)

After the arbitration following the Battle of *Ṣiffīn*, Imam Ali (AS) delivered a sermon in which he identified following personal desires and introducing religious innovations as the starting point of social discord. He explained that the enemy takes a portion of truth and a portion of falsehood and mixes them together; when truth and falsehood become intertwined, some seekers of truth can no longer distinguish between them (Sermon 50).

Imam Ali (AS) condemned the actions of the People of *Jamal* and clarified their beliefs and conduct for the public (Sermon 13). *Ṭalḥa* and *Zubayr* claimed to seek vengeance for *'Uthmān*'s blood, while, according to Imam Ali's view, they themselves had been implicated in his killing. Yet they stirred unrest and confused the public's understanding to incite people against the Imam (Sermon 137).

6. Military Approach

Following the ethical and educational approaches, another method Imam Ali (AS) adopted in dealing with opponents was the military approach.

Naturally, when all reasonable and peaceful means of engagement with opponents and enemies had been exhausted, yet the opposing side continued with sabotage, insecurity, killing, looting, and aggression, the government had a duty to protect the

interests of the broader public by confronting armed adversaries through the exercise of coercive authority.

However, even within the military approach, Imam Ali consistently prioritized measures to prevent military confrontation. Only if such efforts failed would he proceed to warnings, deterrence, and ultimately armed conflict. Even during and after warfare, he continued to observe the ethical principles of war, as discussed below.

6.1. Dialogue to Prevent War

Under Imam Ali's government, freedom of belief and expression was understood to have a broad scope, and tolerance of criticism was extensive. Accordingly, opponents, and even enemies, could speak with him directly and express their views without fear, and he did not seek to impose his opinions upon others.

Addressing the people of Kufa, Imam Ali stated: "I have no right to compel you to do something you do not wish to do." (Sermon 208)

Imam Ali (AS) even treated the Kharijites with notable magnanimity, as long as they had not taken up arms. Not only did he refrain from curtailing their rights, but he also granted them freedom of expression and assembly.

Regarding the Kharijites, he stated: "They have three rights over us: "We do not prevent them from entering the mosques where God's name is mentioned; we do not deprive them of public revenues and war gains as long as they fight alongside us; and we do not fight them unless they fight us." (Delshad, 2012 AD/1392 SH: 305) To engage in dialogue with the Kharijites, Imam Ali (AS) first sent three of his companions, *Ibn 'Abbās, Ṣa'ṣa'ah ibn Ṣuḥān,* and *Zīyād ibn Naḍr*, to guide and persuade them. However, they were unsuccessful, and the Kharijites remained firm in their positions (Karimi, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 246).

Afterward, the Imam personally went to them and entered into direct negotiations. He visited the Kharijite military encampment and asked them to divide themselves into two groups according to whether or not they had participated in the Battle of *Ṣiffīn*. He then spoke separately to each group in a manner suited to their circumstances (Sermon 122; Delshad, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 85-90).

Following extensive explanation and discussion, approximately six thousand people reportedly left the Kharijite camp and rejoined Imam Ali's side (Karimi, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 250).

However, another interpretation puts the more accurate figure at around 2,000 Kharijites from *Ḥarūrā* who returned to the Imam's army (Delshad, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 93).

6.2. Delaying War for the Purpose of Guidance

From the perspective of Imam Ali (AS), the fundamental principle is peace, and reconciliation should always take precedence over war (Ṭabarī, 1979: 4, 479; Ibn Athīr, 1965 AD/1385 AH: 3, 224).

During his rule, Imam Ali (AS) strongly avoided violence and bloodshed. War and bloodshed were not compatible with his intellectual and moral foundations, because his aim in exercising power and governance was to build a prosperous society marked by abundance, where justice would prevail throughout society and the political system, and where even the weak could claim their rights from the powerful without hesitation or fear (Letter 53).

For this reason, he wrote to *Mālik Ashtar*: "Beware of bloodshed and shedding blood unlawfully, for nothing invites divine punishment more quickly, magnifies sin more severely, destroys blessings more completely, or shortens life more surely than unjust bloodshed. On the Day of Resurrection, God will begin judgment among His servants concerning the blood they have shed. Therefore, do not strengthen your government by shedding forbidden blood, for unlawful killing weakens and undermines authority and may even transfer rule from one person to another. Neither before God nor before God will there be any excuse for killing unjustly, for retaliation is required for it." (Letter 53)

On the eve of the Battle of *Ṣiffīn*, Imam Ali (AS) delayed issuing the order to fight. Some criticized this decision. The Imam explained that the reason for postponing the battle was to allow an opportunity for the guidance of some opponents and enemies, stating: "This is more pleasing to me than killing the Syrians while they remain misguided." (Sermon 55)

He also predicted that before long, the *Umayyads* themselves would see this rule pass into the hands of others and ultimately into the homes of their enemies. (Sermon 105) In letters addressed to *Muʿāwīya*, Imam Ali (AS) advised his opponent and urged him to remain mindful of God, reflect on his actions, and save himself from the precipice of misguidance and loss (Letters 30 and 32).

If an enemy seeks peace, and if that peace accords with God's pleasure, peace should be accepted because it brings security and tranquility to society. However, one

should remain cautious afterward so that the enemy does not exploit proximity to launch surprise attacks. Therefore, naïve trust toward an enemy is not advisable (Letter 53).

Imam Ali (AS) also recommended that treaties with enemies should never contain ambiguous or double meanings, because an enemy is always prepared to strike. Thus, he said: "Whoever sleeps should not assume his enemy sleeps." (Letter 62) Meaning: "If someone becomes complacent toward an enemy, they should remember that the enemy remains alert. During the Battle of *Jamal*, Imam Ali (AS) repeatedly entered into dialogue with *Ṭalḥa* and *Zubayr* and spared no effort to guide them. His words had no effect on *Ṭalḥa*, but they influenced *Zubayr* to the extent that, by reminding him of a saying of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the Imam persuaded him to withdraw from continuing the war (cf. Delshad, 2012 AD/1392 SH: 610-612; citing Ansāb al-Ashrāf, 3, 51-52; Murūj al-Dhahab, 2, 362-363).

6.3. Warning and Deterrence

In response to the unrest and sedition created by the People of *Jamal* after they broke their pledge of allegiance, Imam Ali (AS) declared that if they chose to fight him, he would have no fear and would fight courageously. Affirming that he had no doubt regarding his religion, he stated that he would fight them with certainty in God (Sermons 22 and 10).

In a letter to *Mu'āwīya*, Imam Ali (AS) wrote that he considered it a mistake to continue responding to *Mu'āwīya*'s letters because *Mu'āwīya* was immersed in heedlessness. He added that he was capable of delivering blows so forceful that they would crush bone and melt flesh (Letter 73).

Responding to *Mu'āwīya*'s boasts, Imam Ali remarked: "When have you ever seen the sons of *'Abd al-Muṭṭalib* turn their backs on enemies or fear the sword?" (Letter 28)

In another letter, after recounting the negative characteristics and poor record of *'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ*, Imam Ali (AS) warned him directly (Letter 39).

He also declared that if he remained alive, he would cast the *Umayyads* aside like dirt-covered entrails (Sermon 77). In one of his forceful speeches addressed to the Kharijites, Imam Ali warned them to reflect on the consequences of their reckless actions and not drive themselves toward destruction (Sermon 36).

6.4. Combat

In confronting armed and oppressive opponents, when no other avenue proved effective, Imam Ali (AS) resorted to defensive warfare. Regarding his approach toward *Mu'āwīya*, he states that he examined the matter thoroughly, both outwardly and inwardly, until sleep left his eyes. He found only two options before him: either to fight the enemies or to deny Islam and disbelieve in the Prophet (PBUH). Therefore, he chose war (Sermon 54).

Accordingly, in the famous sermon on jihad, responding to the accusations of some ignorant individuals who claimed that Ali did not understand warfare, he declared: "Is there anyone who has spent more time than I on the battlefield?!" (Sermon 27)

In response to *Mu'āwīya*'s conspiracies, Imam Ali (AS) emphasized his courage in battle (Letter 29) and answered *Mu'āwīya*'s military threats firmly and decisively. (Letter 28) When *Mu'āwīya* launched raiding attacks against the territories of the Islamic state, Ali (AS) stated clearly to his brother *'Aqīl* that as long as he remained alive, he would continue fighting them (Letter 36).

Whenever Ali (AS) was compelled to choose the military option, he encouraged and prepared his troops for courage and steadfastness in battle (Sermons 26 and 34). At the same time, while maintaining the principle that peace is preferable to war, he instructed them in humanitarian principles, military ethics, and the proper conduct of warfare, offering guidance on what should and should not be done in war (Letters 11-16).

6.5. Reducing the Costs of War

The Commander of the Faithful (AS) instructed his soldiers not to initiate combat, not to kill fleeing enemies, and not to harm women or vulnerable individuals (Letter 14). The objective of war, in his view, was not killing but guidance and reform. At the same time, in response to the sedition and rebellion of the People of *Jamal* after they broke their pledge of allegiance, Imam Ali declared publicly that if the oath-breakers chose to wage war against him, he had no fear and would certainly fight them because he had certainty in God and no doubt concerning his religion (Sermon 22).

Therefore, there was no place for hesitation or fear. After people pledged allegiance to him, some companions urged him to punish the rebels immediately. Imam Ali (AS) explained that he would try to resolve the matter without war, and only if no alternative remained would he fight, because: "The last remedy is cauterization." (Sermon 168)

This expression means that coercive force should be treated as a last resort, not a first response. Imam Ali (AS) also grieved over the deaths of his opponents. Passing by the body of *Ṭalḥa* and other casualties of the Battle of Jamal, he expressed sorrow and said: "*Ṭalḥa* lies here as a stranger. By God, I did not wish that the men of *Quraysh* should lie beneath the stars." (Sermon 219)

Imam Ali (AS) also opposed distributing the enemy's property as spoils of war and did not permit his soldiers to seize the enemy's possessions (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, ibid: 1, 250). This position led some of his own troops to object.

His effort to avoid war and minimize its destruction went so far that, when battle became unavoidable, he tried to begin fighting later in the day so that it would end sooner and darkness would reduce casualties and allow fleeing combatants to escape the battlefield (cf. Delshad Tehrani, 2012 AD/1392 SH: 620).

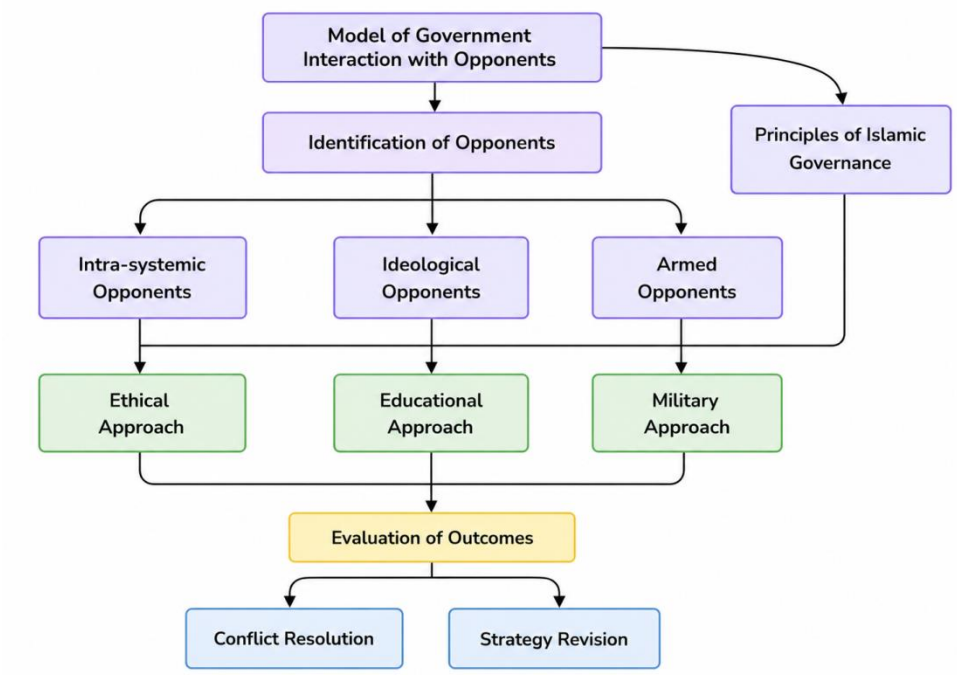
7. Model of Interaction Between the Islamic Political System and Opponents Based on the Conduct of Imam Ali (AS)

The model proposed in this study, derived from the conduct of Imam Ali (AS), presents a hierarchical and dynamic framework for engaging with opponents. The process begins with identifying and classifying opponents into categories, including: "Intra-systemic opponents, ideological opponents, armed extra-systemic opponents."

Based on this classification, an appropriate response strategy is selected, either: "An ethical-educational approach, or a conditional military approach." Inspired by Islamic principles of governance such as justice, consultation, enjoining good and forbidding wrong, and preserving human dignity, this model prioritizes peaceful strategies, including: dialogue, tolerance and accommodation, and clarification and public awareness.

It permits coercive measures only as a final resort, and only under compliance with religious and ethical constraints, including avoiding excess and respecting the rights of noncombatants.

A defining feature of this model is its flexibility, cyclical engagement process, and capacity for continuous feedback and reassessment, making it a potentially effective framework for contemporary Islamic governance.



The Model of the Islamic Government's Interaction with Opponents Based on the Conduct of Imam Ali (AS) in *Nahj al-Balāghah*

Conclusion

This study, through an examination of Imam Ali's (AS) conduct as reflected in *Nahj al-Balāgha*, demonstrates that he adopted a threefold model of engagement, ethical, educational, and military, as a systematic and prudent approach to dealing with opponents. The findings indicate that, while adhering to the theological-jurisprudential principles of Islamic governance such as justice, consultation, and preservation of human dignity, Imam Ali (AS) maintained a balanced and rational course even toward those who opposed him. By distinguishing among categories of opponents (intra-systemic opponents, armed extra-systemic opponents, and ideological opponents) and applying proportionate strategies to each, he consistently prioritized dialogue, forbearance, and rational clarification. Only in necessary circumstances, and only after exhausting peaceful methods, did he resort to legitimate coercive action. The model derived from this study not only offers an indigenous and religious framework for conflict management in Islamic governments, but, through integrating Islamic

foundations with modern political theories (such as Easton's systems theory and Habermas's theory of communicative action), also possesses the capacity to adapt to the complexities of contemporary political conditions.

This model may serve as a foundation for developing a strategic framework for engagement with opposition in Islamic political systems. By emphasizing the proportionality of strategy to the type of opposition and prioritizing peaceful methods, it aims to contribute to the realization of just and rational governance in public policymaking. I've translated and arranged the references into an APA-style reference list (7th edition format, adapted for translated Persian/Arabic sources and with missing publication details preserved where unavailable).

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Contemporary Researches on Islamic Revolution

Political Neuroscience Theory for Explaining National Cohesion Under Conditions of Threat: A Comparative Study of the 12-Day Iran–Israel War

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study explains the relationship between external threat and the durability of national cohesion in two societies involved in the 12-day Iran–Israel war. It presents the theoretical model of the "Cohesion Strategy," inspired by principles of political neuroscience, to demonstrate how threat perception activates neural-cognitive, social-identity, and institutional-discursive mechanisms, ultimately producing sustained normative cohesion.

Research Method: The study was conducted using a descriptive–analytical method based on library sources and supplemented by secondary analysis of publicly available media data from Iran and Israel during the period 13 June to 24 June 2025 (23 Khordad-3 Tir 1404). Data were coded across four clusters, threat, reassurance, social-identity, and institutional-discursive factors, and a Composite Cohesion Index (CCI) was calculated to evaluate the three-stage model of "Shock-stabilization-normalization."

Results: Findings indicate that the durability of national cohesion depends on aligning threat messages with signals of reassurance and effectiveness, an inclusive narrative of "We," and transparent institutional discourse. In Iran, coordination across these three levels led to a transition from temporary emotional cohesion to more durable normative cohesion. In Israel, by contrast, cohesion remained more short-term and critical in character. The Composite Cohesion Index (CCI) showed that a higher ratio of reassurance messages to identity narratives, relative to threat, increases the likelihood of sustained cohesion.

Conclusion: The research emphasizes that the coordinated timing of messages and interactions among neural-cognitive, social-identity, and institutional levels is central to achieving stable national cohesion. The findings offer practical guidance for crisis communication design, spokesperson architecture, and continuous monitoring of cohesion indicators, and suggest that simultaneous measurement of threat and reassurance messages, combined with identity narratives and institutional transparency, may help prevent the breakdown of cohesion and strengthen it.

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Introduction

During security crises, societies often experience a short-term surge in public support and social convergence; however, the central question is how this emotional surge can be transformed into durable, normative cohesion and protected from erosion once the crisis subsides. To address this question, this article formulates the "Theory of Cohesion Strategy in Political Neuroscience," a framework explaining that threat perception leads to sustained cohesion only when three levels operate in concert:

1. At the neural-cognitive level, the combination of warning plus reassurance and efficacy transforms initial arousal into purposeful action;
2. At the social-identity level, an inclusive narrative of "We" together with low-cost rituals and symbols translates emotional alignment into norms of legitimate compliance;
3. At the institutional-discursive level, transparent and appropriately timed communication stabilizes public trust. This process unfolds across three phases: "Shock, stabilization, and normalization." The article pursues two objectives: "First, to provide a theoretical explanation of this three-level mechanism within a measurable, time-sensitive framework; and second, to propose a measurement protocol for future empirical testing. In the current version, quantitative content analysis is conducted in an exploratory manner, and its results are reported in the findings section; however, neuroscience-based empirical testing is reserved for future studies."

   In other words, the present research is a conceptual study and employs no direct neuroscience-based data. Any references to neural mechanisms are made only at the level of theoretical correspondence with existing findings.

   The central research question is formulated as follows: "During the 12-day war, what combination and timing of threat and reassurance messages, together with what quality of identity narrative and institutional discourse, increase the likelihood of transitioning from temporary emotional cohesion to durable normative cohesion?"

   Methodologically, the study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach based on library sources and is supplemented by secondary analysis of publicly available media data collected during the period 13-24 June 2025 (23 Khordad-3 Tir 1404) in the two societies of Iran and Israel.

   Finally, the article clearly presents its policy implications, risk communication design, spokesperson architecture, and symbols of unity, along with the structure of the remaining sections: "Literature review,

theoretical framework, method and protocol, explanatory evidence, policy implications, limitations, and conclusion."

1. Literature Review

Research on national cohesion under conditions of threat has a long history in the literature of political science and social psychology. Each approach has explained part of the phenomenon, but most have lacked cross-level integration and connection to findings from political neuroscience.

1.1. The "Rally around the Flag" Effect

The concept of the "Rally around the flag" effect was first systematically introduced by Mueller, who described the temporary increase in public approval and support for the government following international crises (Mueller, 1970).

Subsequent studies demonstrated that this effect is generally short-lived and tends to fade as the perceived threat declines (Baum, 2002: 267). Nevertheless, this body of literature has paid relatively limited attention to the psychological and neural processes underlying the formation of this effect.

1.2. Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory explains how external threat accentuates the boundaries between "Us" and "Others" and increases in-group cohesion (Tajfel and Turner, 1986: 14). Studies by Huddy have shown that during security crises, when governments are able to provide a unified narrative and shared symbols, political loyalty and collective participation are strengthened (Huddy, 2015).

Although this approach clarifies the identity dimension of cohesion, it pays comparatively less attention to the neural-cognitive layer and the role of institutional framing.

1.3. Terror Management Theory

Terror Management Theory, first proposed by Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon (1986), emphasizes the role of mortality awareness in strengthening commitment to cultural values and social norms. It explains that under conditions of external threat, social convergence and support for national institutions tend to increase (Pyszczynski et al., 2004: 840).

This theory explains the motivational dimension of cohesion; however, its connection to political structures and communication strategies still requires further development.

1.4. Political Neuroscience and Threat Perception

Research in political neuroscience has shown that threat processing in structures such as the amygdala and the "Bed Nucleus of the Stria Terminalis" (BNST) is associated with security-oriented and political tendencies (Pedersen et al., 2017: 778).

Findings by Leong et al. further suggest that neural responses to political and threat-related stimuli may predict political orientations (Leong et al., 2020).

This perspective illuminates the neural layer of the phenomenon; however, its connection to national cohesion and macro-level policymaking has received less attention.

1.5. Securitization

Securitization Theory, developed by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998), explains how an issue enters the sphere of security policy when it is framed as an existential threat. When accompanied by practical and symbolic measures, such framing may produce either temporary or long-term societal convergence (Balzacq, 2011: 9).

This approach focuses primarily on the discursive and institutional level and requires integration with neural–cognitive insights to achieve a more complete explanation.

1.6. Recent Studies

Building on these developments, the study of national cohesion in recent decades has entered a new stage in which, alongside classical political science approaches, findings from cognitive neuroscience are increasingly incorporated. Contemporary research seeks to explain neural, cognitive, emotional, and institutional mechanisms within an integrated framework.

Landau and Wells (2024) argue that theories of international relations should incorporate neuroscientific findings on threat processing and demonstrate how individual-level threat perception shapes broader security decisions.

Similarly, Panish (2024) examined the relationship among anxiety, threat sensitivity, and political orientation from a neuroscientific perspective and showed that under conditions of threat, political tendencies become associated with specific connectivity patterns within brain networks.

On the other hand, Harel (2025) examined the concept of "In-group affective polarization" under conditions of threat and showed that external threat can increase emotional convergence among group members, thereby strengthening collective identity and, consequently, national cohesion.

Likewise, Rezakalivari (2022 AD/1401 SH), using a grounded theory approach, proposed a paradigmatic model of ethnic-cultural empathy in social networks, demonstrating how communication platforms can reinforce identity convergence. Although this study focused on virtual environments, its concepts are potentially transferable to conditions of national threat.

In the field of domestic security, Eyvazi and Ghasemi (2023 AD/1402 SH) examined strategies to address threats stemming from social polarization. Emphasizing the role of policymaking and institutional intervention, their research showed that communication management and the creation of shared frameworks can prevent the erosion of national cohesion and may even strengthen it during times of crisis.

The existing literature addresses different pieces of the puzzle of national cohesion under conditions of threat. The rally effect focuses on short-term behavioral responses; Social Identity Theory addresses the identity dimension; Terror Management Theory explains the motivational dimension; political neuroscience explores the underlying neural dimension; and security framing (securitization) emphasizes the discursive and institutional dimensions.

It may also be argued that recent studies, both international and domestic, have explained scattered elements of national cohesion under conditions of threat. However, none of these approaches has simultaneously integrated the neural–cognitive, social–identity, and communicative-institutional levels into a unified and time-sensitive model.

Despite extensive theoretical evidence and neuroscience reviews, no study has yet directly linked neuroscience-based data to national cohesion. Therefore, the present research considers only the theoretical compatibility of these domains.

This gap highlights the need to propose a "Political Neuroscience Theory for Explaining National Cohesion under Conditions of Threat."

2. Theoretical Framework

The present study is based on the central hypothesis that national cohesion under conditions of threat is the outcome of a dynamic, multi-level process emerging from interaction among three levels: "Neural-cognitive, social-identity, and institutional-discursive."

These three levels influence one another not only sequentially but also reciprocally and simultaneously, ultimately contributing to the formation, strengthening or erosion of national cohesion.

The explanations presented below are offered at the theoretical and conceptual level and are grounded in consistency with findings from neuroscience, social psychology, and securitization theory.

No direct neural or physiological data were collected in this study, and all neuroscience-related references are included solely as theoretical correspondences.

2.1. Neural-Cognitive Level: Biological and Neural Mechanisms of Threat Perception

2.1.1. Brain Structures and Threat Processing

Research in political neuroscience indicates that threat perception is initially processed within the limbic system, particularly the amygdala. The amygdala plays a central role in identifying threatening stimuli and initiating emotional responses, especially fear and anger (Pedersen et al., 2017: 778).

The bed nucleus of the Stria Terminalis (BNST) is likewise associated with the processing of ambiguous or prolonged threats, a condition that corresponds to extended crises such as multi-day wars (Avery et al., 2016: 127-128).

Recent reviews further suggest that interactions among the amygdala, BNST, and prefrontal cortex play an essential role in evaluating ambiguous and persistent threats and contribute significantly to the formation of social biases (Pessoa, 2013: 45; Mobbs et al., 2020: 145).

2.1.2. The Role of Brain Networks and Hormones

Beyond the amygdala and the bed nucleus of the Stria Terminalis, the salience network, centered on the insula and anterior cingulate cortex, is activated to identify and prioritize threatening stimuli (Seeley et al., 2007: 2351).

Activation of this network, in interaction with hormonal systems such as the release of cortisol and adrenaline, strengthens immediate behavioral and cognitive responses and facilitates the alignment of attention with security-related messages (Hermans et al., 2014: 305-306).

In real crisis environments, these same processes may increase attention to official warning or reassurance messages and strengthen psychological readiness for social convergence.

The references above are included solely to demonstrate theoretical consistency with findings in neuroscience and do not constitute empirical inference within the present framework.

Recent reviews have further shown that threat perception not only triggers physiological responses but also reconfigures attentional patterns and cognitive bias,

which may align collective attention with official warning and reassurance messages (Pessoa, 2022).

Accordingly, although the present study does not employ neural data, the theoretical consistency between these mechanisms and collective behavior under crisis conditions provides the foundation for the proposed model.

2.1.3. Connection to Political Behavior

Panisch's (2024) study suggests that greater threat sensitivity is associated with stronger preferences for conservative and security-oriented policies.

Within the framework of the 12-day war, it may be theoretically argued that repeated stimulation of neural-emotional pathways through images, news coverage, and media messaging could increase tendencies toward political unity and support for defensive decisions at the collective level.

In other words, neural-cognitive arousal at the individual level may, through social and institutional mechanisms, be translated into political cohesion at the national level. However, this relationship is presented only as a theoretical correspondence and requires empirical testing in future research.

2.2. Social-Identity Level: Redefining the Boundaries of "Us" and "Others"

2.2.1. Activation of Group Identity

According to Social Identity Theory, external threats make the boundaries between "Us" and "Others" more salient and increase in-group cohesion (Tajfel and Turner, 1986: 14).

This process may operate simultaneously with the neural mechanisms described in the previous section. In other words, emotional arousal generated by threat can intensify activation of national identity and increase normative alignment and collective conformity (Huddy, 2015).

2.2.2. Emotional Convergence and Social Cohesion

Harrell's research (2025) has shown that external threat produces intragroup emotional polarization; that is, members become more aligned at the emotional level, and this affective convergence provides the basis for strengthening collective identity and, consequently, national cohesion. In the short term, intense crises such as the 12-day war, this phenomenon can explain why society experiences widespread emotional convergence in a very short period.

2.2.3. The Role of Narratives and Symbols

Alongside the activation of collective emotions, shared narratives and symbols, from the flag and national heroes to commemorative rituals, play a central role in institutionalizing the identity of "We." The present framework suggests that the effectiveness of symbols reaches its maximum when accompanied by the emotional arousal generated by threat; otherwise, symbolic messages will lack a convergent effect. Consequently, the simultaneity of neurocognitive arousal and narrative-symbolic identity formation is the key to transforming temporary shared feeling into enduring social cohesion.

2.3. The Institutional-Discursive Level: Securitization and Cohesion Policy

2.3.1. The Process of Securitization

According to securitization theory, political elites transfer an issue into the sphere of national security by declaring it an existential threat (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). Balzacq emphasizes that the success of this process requires linking effective messaging with practical action so that public support may be secured and the legitimacy of compliance may emerge (Balzacq, 2011: 9). From the perspective of this research, the quality of the speech act, including sender consistency, transparency about "What we know/do not know," and a clear cost-benefit ratio, together with timing coordinated with the audience’s emotional-cognitive rhythm, constitutes the condition for converting temporary emotional cohesion into durable normative cohesion.

2.3.2. Alignment with the Neuro-Social Level

In the proposed model, institutional messaging must align with society's lived experience and emotional-cognitive perceptions. If people do not experience a threat at the neurocognitive level, or if collective identity is not activated, the government’s security messages will have less effect.

2.3.3. Examples from the 12-Day War

During the 12-day war, both sides, Iran and Israel, used security discourse to mobilize public opinion. In Iran, emphasis on "Legitimate defense" and "National steadfastness" was accompanied by religious-national symbols, while in Israel; the emphasis was placed on "Existential threat" and the "Right to self-defense." Although these two patterns differ in content, within the present theoretical framework both are

instances of securitizing speech acts that, in connection with collective emotions, can generate either temporary or lasting cohesion.

2.4. The Synergy of the Three Levels and the Time-Bound Process of Cohesion

In this version, the three-level model is formulated conceptually, and an initial test is presented through exploratory quantitative content analysis; more advanced causal tests are left to future research.

2.4.1. The Three-Stage Model

The model proposed in this study describes national cohesion under conditions of threat as a time-bound process consisting of three stages:

A) Rapid reaction stage: Neurocognitive activation and the creation of shared emotional arousal;

B) Convergence stage: Activation of national and social identity on the basis of emotional stimulation;

C) Stabilization stage: Institutional framing and discursive messaging for preserving and institutionalizing cohesion.

2.4.2. The Durability or Decline of Cohesion

The durability of cohesion depends on the degree of positive interaction among these three levels. If, after the rapid reaction stage, collective identity is not activated or institutional messaging is ineffective, cohesion quickly subsides, much like the rally ’round the flag phenomenon. However, if these levels are coordinated, cohesion may continue for some time even after the threat has receded.

Therefore, the theoretical framework proposed in this study is essentially a conceptual integration of the neurocognitive, social-identity, and institutional-discursive levels, with the potential for empirical testing in future studies.

3. Research Methodology and the Proposed Measurement Protocol

3.1. Aim and Rationale

The logic of the method derives from the three theoretical levels: "At the neurocognitive level, threat perception aligns arousal and attention; at the social-identity level, this arousal is transformed into convergence and in-group norms; and at the institutional-discursive level, it becomes durable cohesion through credible discourse and clear guidance." Since the aim of this version is to present a theoretical and testable protocol for future studies, no neuro-based data were collected.

Nevertheless, a quantitative content analysis of media data within the period under study was conducted on an exploratory basis, and the proposed indicators were calculated.

3.2. Scope, Time Frame, and Unit of Analysis

The field of study covers Iran and Israel from 23 Khordad to 3 Tir 1404, including the shock, stabilization, and normalization phases. The unit of analysis is defined as a "News item/commentary/post," using a fixed definition across all sources, either the headline and lead or the full text, so that comparisons remain homogeneous.

3.3. Data Sources and Collection

The sources include Iranian domestic media, such as the newspapers Iran, Keyhan, and Jomhouri-ye Eslami, and the news agencies IRNA, ISNA, Fars, Mehr, and Mizan; Persian-language media critical of the Iranian government, such as BBC Persian, Iran International, and Manoto; as well as official Israeli sources and mainstream Israeli media, including the official websites of the Government of Israel (GOV.IL) and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), newspapers such as The Times of Israel, Ynet, Haaretz, and i24NEWS, and their official social media accounts.

For each item, the title, media outlet, Persian/Gregorian date, format, link, and a one-line summary are recorded to ensure the information remains easily traceable. The inclusion criterion covered all items related to the 12-day war and national cohesion within the period under study. Materials were retrieved using keywords such as "12-day war," "Attack," "Ceasefire," "National cohesion," and related terms in the digital archives of media outlets. Duplicate or irrelevant items were removed, ensuring the final sample contained only crisis-related content.

3.4. Coding and Measures

The content analysis is conducted in a directed manner, and each item is coded for the presence or absence of a reference and its intensity across four clusters.

- Threat indicators include attack, siren, casualties, and "Existential Threat."
- Reassurance/efficacy indicators include successful interception, crisis control, service resilience, phased reopening, and a "Clear Next Step."
- Social-identity indicators include the "We" narrative, appreciation of service providers, rituals and symbols of unity, and calls for mutual assistance.

- Institutional-discursive indicators include the legal/existential naming of the threat, specific behavioral instructions, and periodic reports on progress or cost-benefit outcomes.

For each item, the presence or intensity of reference to each cluster is coded using a three-point scale: 0 = absent, 1 = implicit reference, 2 = explicit reference. A detailed coding manual (codebook), including definitions, clear examples, and borderline cases, is provided below in order to enhance replicability.

3.5. Expected Descriptive Outputs

At the end of each day of the study period, the share of reassurance/efficacy messages among total relevant coverage is reported to observe the presence of calming messages alongside warnings. The balance between threat and reassurance coverage is described in simple percentage terms to make shifts in the narrative direction clear. The frequency of symbols and rituals of unity, as well as the volume of official instructions, is also recorded to map the phases of shock, stabilization, and normalization.

3.6. Analytical Strategy

At the descriptive level, the daily trend in the "Threat/Reassurance" balance and the narrative's identity-institutional indicators are traced to clarify the three-phase transition. At the comparative level, differences in the calibration of messages and in the quality of institutional discourse between Iran and Israel are explained so that their effect on the durability or decline of cohesion can be interpreted (Balzacq, 2011: 79; Stritzel, 2014:17; Huddy, 2015: 530).

3.7. Reliability and Bias Control

In this study, 32% of the sample was randomly recoded. Cohen’s kappa coefficient for the four main clusters was 0.81, indicating a high level of agreement among coders. In addition, the list of terms is compiled with an emphasis on specific, unambiguous terminology to reduce the likelihood of divergent interpretations. For each key claim, data triangulation is conducted using one official source and one comparable media source to reduce reliance on a single channel.

3.8. Composite Cohesion Index (CCI) and the Half-Life of Cohesion

To aggregate the data, a Composite Cohesion Index (CCI) is defined in order to measure, for each day, the relationship between threat and reassurance messages and the degree of presence of social and institutional indicators.

The proposed formula is as follows:

$$CCI = 0.4 \times (E/S) + 0.3 \times H + 0.3 \times I$$

where:

- (E/S) = the ratio of reassurance messages to threat messages,
- (H) = the index of symbols and unity narratives,
- (I) = the index of clear institutional messages.

The values of the variables are normalized on a 0 to 1 scale. The daily CCI is then calculated, and its temporal trend is plotted. The initial peak point, that is, the maximum CCI, is taken as the 100% cohesion level.

3.9. Validation and Robustness Tests

Given the theoretical nature of this study and to provide a basis for robustness testing in future empirical research, several proposed tests are envisaged. The iterative exclusion of high-output media outlets is recommended to assess the extent to which the results depend on a limited number of prolific sources. A sensitivity test may also be conducted by removing ambiguous terms and retaining only explicit, stringent ones. An event study of the announcements of warnings, reassurance messages, ceasefires, and reopenings is recommended to observe shifts in patterns. It is likewise suggested that a "Baseline week without events" be included in equal time periods before and after the war in order to distinguish the event effect from the broader trend.

3.10. Content Analysis Protocol and Index Calculation

Relying on the three-point coding design, (0 = absent, 1 = implicit, 2 = explicit), for the four clusters of threat/reassurance/identity/institutional, the data were recorded at the level of the media item and aggregated for each day and for each country. In accordance with the research design, the analytical time frame extends from 23 Khordad to 3 Tir 1404 (13-24 June 2025) in Iran and Israel, covering the three phases of shock, stabilization, and normalization.

At the day/country level, the following variables were calculated:

1. (E/S) = the ratio of the total reassurance messages to the total threat messages;
2. (H) = the mean score of the social-identity cluster;
3. (I) = the mean score of the institutional-discursive cluster.

For day-to-day comparison, all indices were normalized to a 0-1 scale. The Composite Cohesion Index (CCI) was then defined on the basis of theoretical weights:

$$CCI = 0.4(E/S) + 0.3H + 0.3I$$

In addition to the daily calculations, time-series charts were plotted, along with event markers, such as the outbreak of conflict, the announcement of a ceasefire, and key statements, to display the three-phase trend and major turning points. The logic of this visualization is consistent with the study's analytical strategy, which daily tracks trends in "Threat/Reassurance" and identity-institutional indicators.

The statistical testing includes cross-country difference tests based on frequencies, specifically, the chi-square test (X^2) for the presence/absence of each cluster.

3.11. Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Data collection was conducted exclusively from publicly available sources and official accounts in order to respect privacy. Because of their media-based nature, the measures should be regarded as proxy indicators and interpreted with caution. For more precise causal testing, it is recommended that future studies incorporate a short-term wave survey and a small-scale experimental design (Hermans et al., 2014: 306; Avery et al., 2016: 127; Huddy, 2015: 522).

4. Research Findings

The findings of the present study are based on a secondary analysis of media data from Iran and Israel from 23 Khordad to 3 Tir 1404 (13-24 June 2025). The data were extracted from news reports, commentaries, and official statements and coded into four main clusters: threat, reassurance, social identity, and institutional-discursive.

Although this study is conceptual in nature, this version includes an exploratory quantitative content analysis and simple statistical tests to preliminarily assess the indicators.

4.1. The Neurocognitive Level

The temporal analysis showed that in the early days of the crisis, the frequency of threat messages was dominant in both countries. This pattern is consistent with the "Shock" stage in the proposed three-level model, a stage in which messaging is primarily focused on communicating danger and emergency conditions. Subsequently, as the intensity of the threat declined, reassurance/efficacy messages began to appear alongside threat messages, indicating a transition to the "Stabilization" stage. This

shift in the ratio of messages suggests that communication moved from warning alone to warning combined with efficacy.

4.2. The Social-Identity Level

In the middle phase of the crisis, a relative increase in identity narratives and emphasis on the collective "We" was observed in both countries. This pattern indicates activation of the social-identity level within the proposed model. The coexistence of threat messages and identity elements shows that crisis management relied not only on communicating danger but also on reproducing narratives of collective solidarity. The difference between the two countries was observable more in the timing and intensity of these narratives than in their basic presence.

4.3. The Institutional-Discursive Level

The examination of institutional messages showed that behavioral instructions and official reports continued throughout the crisis. This pattern aligns with the institutional level of the three-level model and indicates that message management during the crisis was not limited to representing the threat but also included behavioral guidance and institutional framing. The continuity of this type of messaging, especially in the final days of the crisis, may be regarded as a sign of transition to the "Normalization" stage.

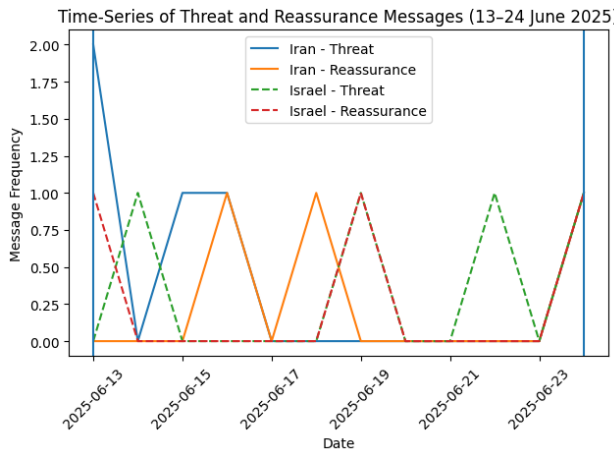
4.4. Condensed Temporal Analysis of Message Distribution

In order to illustrate the phasing of the crisis and to operationalize the three-stage model of "Shock-stabilization-normalization," the distribution of "Threat" and "Reassurance/Efficacy" messages during the period from 13 to 24 June 2025 (23 Khordad to 3 Tir 1404) was examined in aggregate form.

Table 1. Aggregate Frequency of Threat and Reassurance Messages

Country	Threat	Reassurance/Efficacy	E/S Ratio
Iran	5	3	0.60
Israel	4	3	0.75

The E/S ratio (reassurance-to-threat) was calculated as an indicator of message calibration. Higher ratios indicate a greater coexistence of warning messages with signals of efficacy. To display the temporal trend, the daily frequency of threat and reassurance messages in each country was plotted as a time series.



The temporal pattern shows that in both countries, the initial days were marked by the dominance of threat messages (shock phase). Subsequently, reassurance/efficacy messages appeared alongside threat messages (stabilization phase). As the cycle approached its end, the share of reassurance messages increased, and a relative balance was established (transition to normalization). Nevertheless, the relative persistence of threat messaging in Israel was more noticeable in the final days.

This condensed temporal analysis shows that the proposed three-phase model is empirically observable and that the ratio of reassurance to threat messages can serve as a simple indicator for assessing media calibration in a crisis.

4.5. Test of Differences in Message Ratios (X^2)

To examine differences in the pattern of message calibration between Iran and Israel, the aggregate frequencies of "Threat" and "Reassurance/efficacy" messages across the entire period from 13 to 24 June 2025 were compared in the form of a 2×2 contingency table.

Table 2. Contingency Table of Threat and Reassurance Messages

Country	Threat	Reassurance	Total
Iran	5	3	8
Israel	4	3	7
Total	9	6	15

The chi-square test showed that the difference in the ratio of reassurance to threat messages between the two countries was not statistically significant:

$$X^2 (1, N = 15) = 0.02, p = 0.88$$

The effect size (Phi) was 0.04, indicating a very small difference.

Although no statistically significant difference was observed, the temporal analysis in the previous section showed that the main difference lies not in the total volume of messages but in the timing and phasing of message calibration. This finding points to the importance of the temporal distribution pattern alongside aggregate comparisons.

4.6. Composite Cohesion Index (CCI)

To operationalize media cohesion, the Composite Cohesion Index (CCI) was defined on the basis of three components: the reassurance-to-threat ratio (E/S), the social-identity cluster (H), and the institutional-instructional cluster (I). After normalizing the components to a 0-1 range, the index was calculated as follows:

$$CCI = 0.4 (E/S) + 0.3H + 0.3I$$

To evaluate the internal convergence of the components, Pearson correlations among the dimensions were calculated; all were positive and ranged from 0.29 to 0.41. This indicates that the components moved in the same direction within a single construct.

The internal reliability of the index was estimated using Cronbach's alpha, which was 0.78, indicating acceptable internal consistency in this sample. On this basis, aggregating the three components into the CCI is conceptually and statistically defensible.

5. Analysis and Discussion

This section, relying on descriptive media data from 13 to 24 June 2025 (23 Khordad to 3 Tir 1404), provides explanatory examples across three levels: "Neurocognitive, social-identity, and institutional-discursive." In this version, in addition to theoretical explanation, exploratory quantitative content analysis and simple statistical tests have been implemented.

5.1. Three-Level Integration of Findings: From Observation to Conceptualization

The analysis of media data from both countries showed that in crisis phases, threat perception begins with a sudden surge in warning messages and the synchronization of emotional signals.

In the stabilization phase, reassurance messages and narratives of unity in Iran, and messages of operational coordination in Israel, provided the ground for the readjustment of cognitive arousal and emotional alignment. This phenomenon can be

theoretically interpreted as a "Feedback interaction between threat circuits and prefrontal cortex regions," which guides collective behavior toward cooperation by reducing ambiguity (Mobbs et al., 2020; Pessoa, 2022).

However, in the normalization stage, clear differences emerged between the two societies: "In Iran, the continuity of the unity narrative and the stability of institutional discourse led to the stabilization of trust; whereas in Israel, the repeated quantification of threat and the highlighting of executive failures caused a shift in cohesion from emotional to critical. This difference can be explained by the variation in the "Synchronization between the neurocognitive and institutional-discursive levels."

Overall, the findings confirm that the balance between threat and reassurance messages, the synchronization of identity narratives, and the stability of institutional discourse are the three pillars constructing the durability of cohesion, though this relationship is interpreted at a theoretical rather than a purely empirical level.

5.2. Theoretical Explanation: The Shock-Stabilization-Normalization Cycle

A) Shock Phase: Initial Arousal Regulation

In the first phase, the society enters a state of simultaneous arousal: "Warning messages, images of violence, and immediate threat data stimulate neural systems involved in the perception of danger."

If reassurance messages are absent at this stage, the ambiguous threat perception becomes chronically stabilized. In contrast, the coexistence of threat and reassurance messages in the very initial phase reduces collective anxiety by readjusting salience circuits (Pessoa, 2022).

In Iran, the relative presence of reassurance signals from the third day of the crisis led to a faster transition from shock to stabilization. In Israel, the lack of reassurance signals and the continuous quantification of danger led to a longer arousal phase.

B) Stabilization Phase: Synchronization of Emotions and Identity

At this stage, initial arousal is rearranged within the framework of collective narratives and symbols of unity. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986: 14) and recent research in social neuroscience (Harrell, 2025: 500) show that external threats activate empathy circuits and emotional resonance, thereby strengthening the perception of "Us."

Would you like to proceed with translating the remaining parts of the Stabilization Phase or the Normalization Phase?

In Iran, religious and national narratives of resistance, together with emphasis on "National will" and "Resilience," transformed feelings of fear into feelings of pride and efficacy. In Israel, unity formed around the home front, but the absence of an integrated national narrative left this cohesion temporary.

Theoretically, when the neurocognitive and social-identity levels operate simultaneously, the likelihood of transition from emotional cohesion to normative cohesion increases; otherwise, cohesion will remain fragile and short-lived.

C) Normalization Phase: Reconstruction of Meaning and Institutional Trust

In the final stage, society needs to redefine the experience of threat and return it to the level of rational discourse. From the perspective of securitization theory, this stage is equivalent to the "Deactivation of the state of exception." (Buzan et al., 1998)

In Iran, official discourse, with the stability of its senders (the Leadership, the government, and national media) and the renewed emphasis on the legitimacy of defense, smoothed the path for the reconstruction of meaning. In Israel, the rapid shift in media focus toward criticism of government performance indicated an early return to ordinary discourse and the breakdown of crisis consensus.

From a theoretical perspective, the more the period of normalization is accompanied by institutional transparency and accountability, the more durable public trust becomes.

5.3. Proposed Explanatory Model: The Synchronization Cycle of Cohesion

Based on the descriptive findings and theoretical arguments, the following cycle may be proposed as the explanatory model of the theory of cohesion in political neuroscience:

- Threat perception (neurocognitive level): Activation of threat circuits → increased shared attention and anxiety;
- Readjustment of perception (reassurance messages): Coexistence of threat and reassurance → reduction of ambiguity and regulation of anxiety;
- Emotional resonance (social-identity level): Shared narrative and symbols of unity → strengthening the sense of "We";
- Institutionalization of cohesion (institutional-discursive level): Transparent official discourse and stability of message senders → trust and legitimate compliance;

- Reconstruction of meaning (normalization stage): Summarizing achievements/costs and constructing a collective memory narrative → continuity of normative cohesion

Theoretically, the above cycle can provide a basis for developing predictive models in future research; for example, examining the effect of the reassurance-to-threat ratio on the durability of cohesion (CCI) or assessing the relationships between symbolic indicators and institutional trust.

5.4. Final Comparative Analysis: Differences in the Paths of Cohesion Durability

A) Iran

In Iran, the three theoretical levels were activated almost simultaneously and in the same direction:

Neurocognitive arousal in the initial phase was quickly moderated by reassurance messages and a narrative of unity; at the social level, religious-national symbols generated a sense of shared identification; and at the institutional level, clear security discourse and stability in the source of messages reduced ambiguity. As a result, the media evidence shows that the messaging pattern in Iran was more closely aligned with the theoretical indicators of transition from emotional cohesion to normative cohesion.

B) Israel

In Israel, the first stage (arousal) was longer, and the third stage (normalization) was shorter. The focus on quantitative data and the lack of an inclusive narrative prevented the continuation of the sense of unity. At the institutional level, frequent changes in spokespersons and the rapid rise of political criticism slowed the pace of trust stabilization. As a result, cohesion remained defensive and short-term and, in the post-crisis phase, became critical cohesion.

These differences show that the temporal coordination of the three theoretical levels (neural, social, and institutional) is a key factor in the durability of cohesion. In other words, if governments and the media can recognize the emotional rhythm of society and harmonize their messages with it, the likelihood of sustained cohesion increases significantly.

Explanatory Conclusion

The observed difference between Iran and Israel, rather than being a sign of two completely conflicting logics, reflects a different calibration of the three levels: "The

combination of "Threat plus reassurance and the unity narrative" in Iran strengthened the context for transforming emotional surges into normative trust." In Israel, "Behavioral normalization plus the quantification of threat" built a powerful cohesion during the combat phase; however, after the war, with the activation of the accountability circuit, it shifted into a phase of critical cohesion. This explanation is consistent with neuro-based assumptions regarding the role of the BNST in chronic threats and with the predictions of Social Identity Theory regarding the post-crisis phase (Tajfel and Turner, 1986: 14).

6. Policy Implications and Intervention Design Based on the "Strategic Theory of Cohesion in Political Neuroscience"

6.1. Strategic Principles

- Alongside every warning message, objective examples of reassurance and efficacy must be provided to regulate arousal and curb emotional exhaustion.
- The official narrative should rely on an inclusive "We" and low-cost rituals of solidarity to strengthen in-group boundaries and diminish micro-fissures.
- A limited number of credible and consistent spokespersons should be selected to maintain source stability and ensure the consistency of institutional discourse.
- The timing of messages must be harmonized with the audience's emotional rhythm: shock should be paired with "The next action," stabilization with a unified narrative, and normalization with transparent summation.

6.2. Risk Communication Design in Three Phases

A) Shock

- Initial messages should be short, precise, and actionable to transform inaction into purposeful behavior.
- Exaggeration and temporal ambiguity must be avoided to prevent chronic vague threats and to stop the intensification of anticipatory anxiety.

B) Stabilization

- A narrative of "Efficacy and solidarity" should be formulated to translate shared feelings into a norm of compliance.
- Simple, trackable instructions should be published alongside periodic reports to strengthen civil discipline.

C) Normalization

- Achievements and costs must be summarized honestly to convert emotional support into institutional trust.
- The roadmap for normalizing the national environment should be announced in stages to increase perceptual predictability and sustain cohesion.

6.3. Institutional Architecture of Message and Decision

- A joint communication command center with a coherent message calendar should be established to reduce timing discrepancies and informational contradictions.
- Spokesperson roles should be differentiated into security-operational, public services, and media coordination to reduce the audience's cognitive load and strengthen trust.
- Short and regular windows of accountability should be planned to limit the field for rumors and stabilize informational authority.

6.4. Symbols and Unity Rituals

- Non-political appreciation of service groups should be institutionalized to strengthen shared symbols and stabilize a sense of belonging.
- Short, real-life narratives with verifiable data should be published so that storytelling relies on shared experience and sustains emotional resonance.

6.5. Media and Social Network Management

- A roadmap for responding to rumors with ready-made "One-liner" responses should be developed to reduce the cost of misinformation and resolve communication ambiguity.
- The ratio of messages within the 24-hour cycle must be calibrated so that, alongside every piece of threat news, a piece of reassuring news and an example of unity are also published, guiding the emotional path toward cooperation.

6.6. Ethics and Rights in Crisis Communication

- The principle of minimum truthfulness should be observed so that "What we know/what we do not know" is stated transparently and institutional trust is not eroded.

- The privacy of ordinary individuals should be respected so that narratives rely on collective and institutional data, and the legitimacy of discourse is preserved.
- Trans-factional symbols of unity should be chosen so that the internal boundary of "Us/Them" does not emerge and internal cohesion is not undermined.

6.7. Monitoring and Recalibration

- The portfolio of messages, identity, and institutions should be monitored regularly so that any decline in the share of reassurance or compliance is detected in time and message calibration can be readjusted.
- Action thresholds should be predetermined so that necessary changes to the narrative and instructions can be implemented without delay and the path from stabilization to normalization does not deviate.

6.8. Risk Scenarios and Boundary Conditions

- Under ambiguous and prolonged threat, verifiable reassurance messages and phased time horizons should be increased to reduce ambiguity and strengthen perceived efficacy.
- In cases of sudden escalation or multiple concurrent events, communication should be conducted only through anchor spokespersons to prevent message interference and preserve audience absorption capacity.
- Under conditions of narrative polarization, political labeling should be avoided, and the focus on shared civic duties should be maintained to strengthen critical cohesion.

6.9. Executive Summary

- Alongside every warning, the government should provide a verifiable sign of reassurance, strengthen the "We" narrative through inclusive rituals, maintain consistent spokespersons, and publish transparent, periodic reports so that institutional trust stabilizes and cohesion becomes sustainable.
- A daily monitoring system should be established, and whenever declines in indicators are observed, the composition of messages and instructions should be recalibrated to prevent the gradual erosion of cohesion.

Conclusion

The "Strategic Theory of Cohesion in Political Neuroscience" sought to establish a clear and measurable link among the neurocognitive, social-identity, and institutional-discursive levels, and to show how societies can move beyond the short-term surge of support in the shock phase and, through the calibrated coexistence of warning with signals of reassurance/efficacy, through an inclusive "We" narrative, and through transparent and accountable institutional discourse, achieve durable normative cohesion. The comparative study of the 12-day war between Iran and Israel, as a conceptual testing framework, showed that different calibrations of these three levels can lead to distinct patterns in the durability and configuration of cohesion and, through this, offer concrete policy implications for the design of crisis communication, the timing of messages, and the institutional architecture of spokespersonship.

The main added value of this research lies in its temporalization of the path from shock to stabilization to normalization and in its definition of operational, monitorable indicators. This feature makes it especially useful for policymaking under threat, because policymakers can, by monitoring the balance of threat versus reassurance messages, signs of shared identity, and indicators of compliance/institutional trust, identify in a timely manner the points at which narratives and instructions should be recalibrated and thereby prevents the gradual erosion of cohesion. At the same time, the emphasis on the theoretical/protocol-based nature of this version makes clear that the next step should be the empirical implementation of the protocol on multi-source and time-sensitive data, so that the assumed causal links may be tested more precisely and the predictive capacity of the theory assessed across different environments. Through this gradual path, the theory can contribute to both the growth of the scholarly literature and the improvement in the quality of crisis communication governance, while recalibrating the relationship between threat and reassurance in favor of the durability of national cohesion.

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Contemporary Researches on Islamic Revolution

Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Opportunities and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The "al-Aqsa Flood" operation, launched by Hamas on October 7, 2023 (15 Mehr 1402 SH), marked a historical turning point that brought about profound and far-reaching developments in the history of the Palestinian resistance, as well as within the Axis of Resistance in West Asia, particularly with respect to the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Consequently, Iran's foreign policy has continually been influenced by complex regional and international developments such as the al-Aqsa Flood.

The main research question: 'Based on the combined theory of Resistance and Indigenousism, what opportunities and challenges has al-Aqsa Flood created for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran?'

Objective: The present study assumes that the relationship between al-Aqsa Flood and Iran's foreign policy can be examined through five key concepts derived from this combined theoretical approach: "Independence and national sovereignty; emphasis on cultural and religious identity; resistance to domination and arrogance (hegemonic powers); strengthening regional cooperation; support for the oppressed and human rights."

Conclusion: The findings indicate that, on the one hand, al-Aqsa Flood created opportunities such as: "Enhancing Iran's deterrence capability and military power; greater coordination between the battlefield and diplomacy; expansion of the discourse of resistance on a global scale; strengthening regional and trans-regional alliances; Israel's growing domestic crisis and international isolation; and the promotion of an active, resistance-oriented foreign policy." On the other hand, it also generated challenges, including: "The fall of Assad's government in Syria and the disruption of Iran's geographical connection with the Axis of Resistance; direct threats and attacks by Israel; regional instability and heightened insecurity; and U.S. efforts to undermine regional and trans-regional agreements." These developments have significantly affected the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Research Method: This paper employs a qualitative analytical method.

Data Collecting Method: Drawing upon library sources, documentary evidence, and official reports to collect and analyze data.

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Introduction

The al-Aqsa Flood operation, launched by Hamas on October 7, 2023 (15 Mehr 1402 SH), can be viewed as a natural continuation of the Palestinian people's long history of resistance. The term refers to the military operation carried out by Palestinian resistance groups, particularly Hamas, in response to attacks and aggression by the Israeli regime. It encompasses a range of military, political, and social actions. The Palestinian people have a long history of resistance against occupation and oppression. From the early uprisings of the 1920s and 1930s to the First and Second Intifadas, their resistance has persisted in the face of pressure and aggression by the Israeli regime. al-Aqsa Flood represents the continuation of this historical trajectory and demonstrates the Palestinian people's steadfast determination to defend their homeland. In recent years, increasing social, economic, and military pressures on the Palestinian population have created a growing sense among various resistance groups of the need for a stronger and more coordinated response. al-Aqsa Flood emerged as a natural reaction to these pressures, seeking to foster renewed unity and strengthen the spirit of resistance among Palestinians.

It appears that global and regional developments following the al-Aqsa Flood have contributed to strengthening the Axis of Resistance and increasing international support for the Palestinian people. In this regard, al-Aqsa Flood may also be regarded as an opportunity to draw greater global attention to the Palestinian issue.

From this perspective, the operation represents not merely a military action but also a political and social movement aimed at strengthening the Palestinian national identity and the discourse of resistance. In other words, al-Aqsa Flood reflects solidarity and cooperation among Palestinian resistance groups and with states that support the Axis of Resistance. This solidarity can be regarded as a natural factor underlying the emergence of the operation, since resistance groups have consistently sought to unite against common threats. Therefore, al-Aqsa Flood is not only a military response but also a natural continuation of the Palestinian people's historical resistance. It symbolizes the determination and resolve of the Palestinian nation in confronting the hegemonic order, while also expressing unity and solidarity in the struggle for their rights and homeland.

Indeed, al-Aqsa Flood marked a historic turning point, bringing about profound, far-reaching changes in regional and international dynamics, particularly in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the leader of the Axis of Resistance. Foreign policy reflects a state's objectives and policies in the sphere of international relations with other states, societies, and international organizations.

In formulating its foreign policy, every country acts according to established principles that define the overall orientation of the ruling government and adopts strategies to maximize its national interests. What is important, however, is that states do not formulate their foreign relations entirely independently; rather, a variety of institutions and factors influence foreign policy decision-making. It should be noted that the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially regarding recent developments such as al-Aqsa Flood, is a complex and multidimensional subject that extends beyond the activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic actors. In addition to examining diplomatic initiatives, this study also considers the underlying principles, objectives, and grand strategies of Iran's foreign policy, the positions of the country's leadership, and other influential factors shaping its external relations.

Accordingly, the central question of this study is: 'What opportunities and challenges have Operation al-Aqsa Flood created for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran?' The study hypothesizes that, based on a combined framework of Indigenousism and Resistance Theory, al-Aqsa Flood has simultaneously generated both opportunities and challenges for Iran's foreign policy. The findings indicate that, on the one hand, the operation created opportunities such as enhancing Iran's deterrence capability and military strength; fostering greater coordination between diplomacy and military operations in foreign policy; expanding the discourse of resistance internationally and stimulating global demonstrations in support of Palestine and against Israel; strengthening regional and trans-regional alliances, including BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; promoting joint military exercises among Iran, China, and Russia; contributing to Israel's domestic political crisis and growing international isolation; and reinforcing an active, resistance-oriented foreign policy.

On the other hand, the rapid succession of events following October 7, including the fall of Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria and the disruption of Iran's land connection with the Resistance Front, the continuation of Israeli threats and military attacks, increasing regional instability and insecurity, and Western efforts to undermine regional and trans-regional agreements, have all posed significant challenges and have substantially affected the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Accordingly, this article employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical method, drawing on library resources, documentary evidence, and official reports to collect and analyze the data. Its principal objective is to analyze the implications of Operation al-Aqsa Flood for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The present study is innovative in two respects. First, it focuses on Iran's foreign policy following the al-Aqsa Flood, treating the operation as a recent event and a turning point in the history of the resistance movement. Second, it analyzes the consequences of this operation using a combined framework of Indigenousism and Resistance Theory, grounded in five key analytical indicators.

Given that numerous security initiatives have been proposed for the West Asian region by various actors, some of which are based on accepting the role of external powers and pursuing accommodation with Israel, neglecting the concepts of Indigenousism and Resistance, as well as their functions across different domains, could create an opportunity to promote a favorable image of such initiatives and, consequently, undermine the region's future developments. Therefore, adopting an Indigenousist and Resistance-based approach in the region, particularly given the presence of foreign powers over the past two centuries, is a strategic necessity and serves as the conceptual framework for this study.

Such an approach can contribute to more effective foreign policy decision-making in the Islamic Republic of Iran by enabling analysts and policymakers to adopt a more comprehensive perspective on regional and international issues and to formulate more effective responses to emerging challenges. Accordingly, the relationship between each of the five analytical indicators, al-Aqsa Flood, and the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is examined separately. This organization ultimately provides a comprehensive assessment of the opportunities and challenges facing Iran's foreign policy in the aftermath of al-Aqsa Flood.

- **al-Aqsa Flood, National Independence and Sovereignty, and the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

This section examines how Operation al-Aqsa Flood has strengthened Iran's sense of national independence and sovereignty. Specifically, it analyzes the emphasis placed on the right to self-defense and support for resistance groups as instruments for safeguarding national independence and sovereignty within Iran's foreign policy.

- **al-Aqsa Flood, Cultural and Religious Identity, and the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

This section explores the operation's impact on reinforcing Iran's cultural and religious identity. It examines how al-Aqsa Flood has enabled the Islamic Republic of

Iran to present itself, at both the regional and international levels, as a defender of Islamic and national identity.

- **al-Aqsa Flood, Resistance to Domination and Hegemony, and the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

This section analyzes the role of Operation al-Aqsa Flood in reinforcing the Islamic Republic of Iran's approach to resisting Western domination, particularly that of the United States. It examines how the operation has strengthened Iran's resolve to maintain its policies toward the major powers.

- **al-Aqsa Flood, Support for the Oppressed and Human Rights, and the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

This section examines the role of Operation al-Aqsa Flood in shaping Iran's discourse of support for oppressed peoples and the promotion of human rights within its foreign policy. It analyzes the operation's impact on Iran's human rights position and how this issue has been used to strengthen Iran's international diplomacy.

- **al-Aqsa Flood, the Strengthening of Regional Cooperation, and the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

This section examines how Operation al-Aqsa Flood has strengthened Iran's cooperation with neighboring countries and resistance groups. It analyzes how such cooperation enables the Islamic Republic of Iran to consolidate its position as a key regional actor and how it may enhance its ability to address common security threats.

1. Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Articles such as "Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the Application of the New Resistance Paradigm in the Islamic World" (Alishahi, 2023 AD/1402 SH) and "Examining the Outcomes of the October 7 Operation in the Competition among Hegemons and the Role of Regional Actors in the Middle East" (Golmohammadi et al., 2024 AD/1403 SH) have analyzed the impact of al-Aqsa Flood on the political and security dynamics of the region.

Khani (2021 AD/1400 SH), in an article titled "The Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and New Developments in the Resistance Front," examines the Resistance Front as an emerging actor in the international system and analyzes the Islamic Republic of Iran's role in its establishment and development. Hakimi et al. (2022 AD/1401 SH) analyzes the discourse of resistance in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran following the Islamic Revolution.

Niakouei and Mousavi Kordmiri (2024 AD/1403 SH), in their article "Explaining the Divergent Outcomes of the Power Struggle in Syria after the Arab Spring: From Civil War to the Fall of Bashar al-Assad's Government," examine the causes of Syria's civil war and the collapse of the Assad government. Their analysis highlights such contributing factors as social fragmentation, the support of certain groups for the government, the gradual erosion of Assad's legitimacy, corruption, economic crises, and the weakening of the Syrian military.

The article "The Pursuit of Dignity as Foreign Policy: A Framework for Analyzing Iran's Foreign Policy and the Axis of Resistance" by Arab Ameri et al. (2023 AD/1402 SH) examines the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in regional political and military developments, particularly in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq.

Bandari et al. (2024 AD/1403 SH), in "Designing a Systemic Model of Security Deterrence in the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Based on Operation True Promise," develop a framework for security deterrence in Iran's foreign policy. Their study is based on Operation True Promise and focuses on responses to threats posed by Israel and other regional security challenges.

Nakshband et al. (2024 AD/1403 SH), in their research article "The Political and Security Consequences of Operation al-Aqsa Flood in West Asia," investigate the operation's profound impact on the political and security environment of the West Asian region.

Pourhassan (2023 AD/1402 SH), in the article "The Consequences of Operation al-Aqsa Flood for the Abraham Accords," argues that al-Aqsa Flood not only halted the process of normalization between several Arab states and Israel but also, by intensifying public hostility toward Israel and exposing its objectives more widely, significantly undermined prospects for a "Warm Peace" between Arab countries and Israel.

Compared with the existing literature, the novelty of the present study lies in its analytical approach. Whereas previous studies have primarily focused on Operation al-

Aqsa Flood itself or its regional consequences, this article employs a combined theoretical framework of Indigenousism and Resistance Theory to examine the opportunities and challenges that the operation has created for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

It is hoped that the findings of this research will contribute to a deeper understanding and a more comprehensive analysis of post-al-Aqsa Flood developments and their implications for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

2. Theoretical Framework

The present study adopts a combined framework of Indigenousism and Resistance Theory. This approach enables the researcher to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of developments following Operation al-Aqsa Flood and their implications for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Specifically, it examines the evolution of resistance groups and Iran's policies in response to key events such as the al-Aqsa Flood and analyzes the reciprocal interaction between domestic and external developments.

The Islamic Indigenousist model emphasizes the Islamic and cultural identity of both the resistance groups and the Islamic Republic of Iran, regarding Islamic values and principles as the foundation of their policies and strategies. Resistance Theory, in turn, facilitates analysis of the strategies adopted by resistance groups and the Islamic Republic of Iran to confront external threats and domestic challenges, as well as the implications of these strategies for Iran's foreign policy. By integrating these two approaches, the study offers a multidimensional analysis of post-al-Aqsa Flood developments and their impact on Iran's foreign policy. Indigenousism, as an expression of the ideology of resistance, seeks to reaffirm indigenous and Islamic cultural values in response to the challenges of modernity (Javadi Arjmand et al., 2019 AD/1398 SH: 366).

This approach focuses on phenomena such as thought, ideology, ideas, culture, values, emotions, and ethnicity, all of which exert profound influences on human behavior. Consequently, unlike the natural sciences, the phenomena studied in the humanities are not entirely objective; rather, they are intrinsically linked to values, subjective perceptions, and cultural paradigms. One of the central concerns of the Indigenousist approach is its emphasis on the local context, since many imported theories and concepts are presented as though their findings can be universally applied to

developing countries, particularly Islamic societies. However, the phenomena and findings of the humanities within Western civilization differ substantially from those of Eastern civilizations and Islamic countries.

For example, the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 AD/1357 SH took many scholars and theorists by surprise, as they had been unable to predict it. The revolution astonished a significant number of Western intellectuals. Its victory is regarded as one of the most significant phenomena of the twentieth century and as one of the most important socio-political movements in modern history. It challenged existing definitions and theories of revolution and created the need for new conceptualizations and theories of revolutionary change (Foran, 1993: 11).

The Resistance approach, as a central principle of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has consistently been understood through the three principles of dignity, wisdom, and expediency of the Islamic system, underpinned by intelligent resistance and the rejection of all forms of domination. Resistance Theory is presented as an indigenous and emancipatory theory that constitutes a paradigm for confronting all forms of hegemony and is based on the revolutionary narrative derived from what it describes as the authentic teachings of Islam. Such resistance is viewed as an active and dynamic form of resistance inspired by the Islamic Revolution and rooted in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (Qaderi Kangavari, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 7).

Islamic resistance ideology provides the foundation for transforming the existing order by seeking to reconstruct a lost identity, a process that, according to this perspective, can only be achieved through resistance (Mottaqi, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 225).

Following the Islamic Revolution, various movements and organizations emerged as components of the Axis of Resistance to confront the influence of the United States and Israel in West Asia. Drawing upon its five defining principles, the Islamic Republic of Iran adopted a new foreign policy approach based on resistance-oriented Indigenousism, which has since become a central feature of its regional strategy.

Accordingly, these five indicators are interrelated and collectively shape Iran's overarching policies toward regional and international developments:

1) Preservation of National Independence and Sovereignty

Resistance, as an approach, emphasizes the preservation of national independence and sovereignty. Likewise, Indigenousism stresses the importance of addressing the country's domestic needs and realities. From this perspective, Operation al-Aqsa Flood acted as a catalyst for the Islamic Republic of Iran, reinforcing its sense of independence and sovereignty in the face of external threats. By supporting resistance groups and emphasizing the right to self-defense, the Islamic Republic of Iran seeks to preserve its national identity and independence, as reflected in Article 152 of its Constitution. In other words, one of the principal factors contributing to unity among the resistance forces has been the perceived efforts of the hegemonic international order, led by the United States, to fragment states and undermine their sovereignty. Since the Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran has sought to raise awareness among nations, particularly within the Islamic world, regarding what it characterizes as such regional strategies (Center for Islamic Revolution Documents, 18 November 2022).

2) Cultural and Religious Identity

Cultural and religious identity occupies a central place in Iran's foreign policy. As a symbol of Islamic resistance, Operation al-Aqsa Flood is viewed as reinforcing Iran's religious and national identity while strengthening its self-image as a principal supporter of Muslims and oppressed peoples. This religious identity has shaped not only Iran's domestic policies but also its foreign diplomacy, leading the country to respond to regional and international challenges in accordance with its Islamic principles and cultural values.

3) Resistance to Domination and Hegemony

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran toward Western domination particularly that of the United States is grounded in the principles of resistance (see Article 152 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran). As a symbol of resistance against occupation and domination, Operation al-Aqsa Flood has provided the Islamic Republic with an opportunity to more effectively challenge what it regards as hegemonic policies. This approach is reflected not only in official statements and policy positions but also in Iran's diplomatic activities and regional cooperation.

4) Support for the Oppressed and Human Rights

Support for oppressed peoples and the promotion of human rights constitute one of the principal pillars of Iran's foreign policy. Operation al-Aqsa Flood is presented as a concrete example of oppression and injustice, enabling Iran to portray itself internationally as a defender of human rights and an advocate for oppressed peoples. This approach reinforces Iran's human rights discourse in foreign policy and, from the study's perspective, strengthens its position in responding to international criticism. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, through its resistance-oriented approach, also declares support for the rights of all people; particularly Muslims and the world's oppressed people, as one of the fundamental principles of its foreign policy (see Article 154 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran).

5) Strengthening Regional Cooperation

Indigenousism and Resistance function not only as distinct approaches but also as complementary principles for strengthening regional cooperation. Operation al-Aqsa Flood has provided the Islamic Republic of Iran with an opportunity to deepen its relations with neighboring countries and resistance groups. Such cooperation is viewed as a strategy to address common security threats and enhance regional stability, while also enabling the Islamic Republic of Iran to consolidate its role as a key factor in regional affairs.

Accordingly, the principles enshrined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as they relate to Operation al-Aqsa Flood, demonstrate the profound and multifaceted influence these principles exert on Iran's foreign policy. They serve as fundamental foundations for shaping the country's diplomatic and strategic approaches. As a symbol of resistance, Operation al-Aqsa Flood has provided the Islamic Republic with an opportunity to reinforce its positions against what it views as global hegemonic domination while projecting its Islamic and national identity on the international stage. At the same time, the operation has contributed to strengthening a sense of solidarity among Islamic countries and support for the rights of oppressed peoples, which, according to the authors, has enhanced Iran's international standing and credibility.

3. Opportunities for the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Following al-Aqsa Flood

3.1. Enhancement of Iran's Deterrence Capability and Military Power

Deterrence refers to a particular type of political relationship between interacting actors in which one party seeks to influence the behavior of another in order to prevent undesirable actions, primarily through the threat of punishment or the denial of expected benefits. In this context, throughout its existence, the Islamic Republic of Iran has consistently faced the challenge of preventing undesirable actions by its rivals or adversaries. This issue has constituted one of the principal concerns of Iran's foreign policy (Qasemi, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 98).

Since 2024 AD/1403 SH, Iran's defense industry has taken significant steps to strengthen its defensive capabilities, with the objective of enhancing national security and increasing its deterrence capacity. This period is regarded by the authors as a key phase in the development of the Islamic Republic's defense capabilities, characterized by the adoption of advanced technologies, the expansion of domestic defense industries, and greater international cooperation, which together resulted in notable achievements.

Following Operation al-Aqsa Flood and in response to perceived threats from Israel, Iran undertook a series of measures aimed at further strengthening its military and defensive deterrence capabilities. These included: "Conducting large-scale military exercises; unveiling advanced missile and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) systems; commissioning the Shahid Bagheri drone carrier, reportedly capable of carrying 60 UAVs and 30 missile-launching vessels; and holding amphibious assault and beach-landing exercises by the Ground Forces in the waters of the Persian Gulf and the northern Arabian Sea during 2024 AD/1403 SH (Al-Alam, 24 February 2025).

According to the authors, Iran's military and security capabilities, including its advanced missile program, security forces, and self-sufficiency in defense production, reflect a defense policy based on the twin strategies of resistance and deterrence, which are central to the foreign policy priorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iran's missile and drone strike against Israel, conducted under the name Operation True Promise, was launched in response to Israel's attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus on 1 April 2024 (13 Farvardin 1403 SH). According to the text, Iran carried out 331 strikes, consisting of 185 drones, 36 cruise missiles, and 110 surface-to-surface missiles directed toward Israel.

The article quotes Major General Salami, then Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as stating: "Despite Israel's very extensive air defense systems, when we launched our missiles, 581 missiles struck the ground."

The article further argues that Iran's response conveyed to Israel and its allies that the Islamic Republic possesses both the determination and the capability to defend itself. It also claims that satellite imagery from Operation True Promise indicated substantial damage to Israeli military and air force installations, including Tel Nof Airbase and the Nevatim and Ramon air bases (Eghtesad Online, 15 September 2025). The Islamic Republic of Iran also carried out Operation True Promise III, launching more than twenty waves of attacks against strategic, military, and infrastructure targets in the occupied Palestinian territories. According to Douglas Macgregor, a senior fellow at The American Conservative and a former senior adviser to the U.S. Secretary of Defense during the Trump administration: "From the very beginning of this war, my greatest concern was that the Israelis were on a suicidal path. Nine million against ninety-two million. And contrary to the common perception, those ninety-two million are not uneducated peasants. Who are we trying to fool? This is a new world; it is not forty-six years ago. We have to accept that we are not alone on this planet. Even if we are a superpower, there are other countries with talented populations capable of producing real military power."

Furthermore, the United States' entry into the Twelve-Day War and its aerial strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities under the operation known as "Midnight Hammer" did not, according to the authors, lead to the passivity or retreat of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Instead, Iran responded through an operation entitled "Glad Tidings of Victory," in which it launched missile strikes against Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, one of the United States' most important military installations in the region.

Although President Trump claimed that Iran had coordinated the attack on Al Udeid with the United States and that all incoming missiles had been intercepted, a narrative subsequently echoed by numerous international and anti-Iranian media outlets, the publication of satellite imagery later led to acknowledgments that Al Udeid Air Base had sustained damage estimated at approximately US$15 million (BBC, 12 July 2025).

3.2. Coordination between Diplomacy and the Battlefield

One of the most significant priorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran in recent years, particularly following Operation al-Aqsa Flood, has been the effort to coordinate military operations (the battlefield) with diplomacy. The late Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs, regarded the unity of the various fronts and movements of the Axis of Resistance as the key to victory on the battlefield. He argued that the integration of the diplomatic, resistance, and political fronts had enabled the resistance movement to achieve significant successes (Mehr News Agency, 3 July 2024).

This coordination can be observed in the intensive meetings between military officials of the Axis of Resistance and diplomatic representatives, as well as in the repeated visits of senior Iranian foreign policy officials to neighboring countries. In addition, the media have played an increasingly important role in foreign policy decision-making. In other words, media have transformed foreign policy into a technology-driven practice in the twenty-first century; as a social force, they have not only influenced foreign policy but have also fundamentally reshaped diplomatic behavior (Zolfaghari, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 17).

In this regard, Sayyid Abbas Araghchi, Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated during the closing ceremony of the conference "al-Aqsa Flood and Gaza: Realities and Narratives": "Alongside the battlefield and diplomacy, there is a third pillar, and that is the media. The media play a crucial role in constructing the narrative of both the battlefield and diplomacy, and ultimately in shaping the narrative of victory and defeat. We may succeed in the military and diplomatic arenas, but if we fail in the media and narrative arena, our achievements will not be properly conveyed. Alongside the military battle taking place in Gaza, there was also a diplomatic battle. In that arena, the enemies of the resistance did not achieve major successes, while the resistance movement performed effectively in the media sphere." (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting News Agency, 4 February 2025)

Accordingly, during this period, the Islamic Republic of Iran has sought to advance the objectives of the Axis of Resistance by closely coordinating military operations with its foreign policy, while simultaneously seeking to maximize the protection of its national interests and what it defines as the interests of the Islamic community.

3.3. Expansion of the Discourse of Resistance at the Global Level and Worldwide Demonstrations Against Israel in Support of Palestine

Following operation al-Aqsa flood and the developments that ensued, public awareness, particularly among young people in Western countries, regarding the Palestinian resistance and the actions of the Israeli government has, according to the authors, increased significantly. In this context, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, in his letter to the youth of the United States and Europe, stated that "Today they stand on the right side of history."

The authors argue that this heightened awareness has been reflected in public demonstrations held across many countries in support of the Palestinian people and in condemnation of Israel's actions. These demonstrations, which featured Palestinian flags and, in some cases, the burning of Israeli flags, were intended to express opposition to Israel's military campaign in Gaza and to U.S. support for Israel. The article also notes that workers in several countries participated in strikes and work stoppages as part of these protests (Keyhan Newspaper, 7 April 2025).

According to the authors, Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the subsequent actions of Israel created conditions in which global public opinion increasingly questioned the values and legitimacy of Western civilization. They contend that the inability of what they describe as the U.S.-led Western order to respond effectively to these criticisms has accelerated the decline of Western civilization. From this perspective, advocates of freedom and oppressed peoples around the world now have an opportunity to contribute to the emergence of a new civilization whose defining characteristics would include respect for human dignity and the meaningful participation of millions of ordinary people.

3.4. Regional and Transregional Alliances

Developments in recent years have, more than ever before, highlighted what the authors describe as a shift away from a U.S.-centered unipolar international order. China, Russia, and Iran, countries that have consistently opposed such an order while advocating multilateralism in international affairs, now face circumstances that have put this vision to a significant test.

The performance of organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS in responding to contemporary international issues, as well as their capacity to act effectively in relation to the U.S.- and Western-led international order,

provides an important measure of the extent to which multilateralism and a transition beyond a U.S.-centered order can be realized.

In light of the instability caused by Israeli military actions, growing insecurity, and the spread of political and security crises worldwide, the authors argue that the role and significance of regional and trans-regional organizations have become more prominent than ever, as these institutions can offer alternatives to Western-led approaches.

One of the Islamic Republic of Iran's most significant foreign policy initiatives following Operation al-Aqsa Flood, according to the article, has been its accession to the trans-regional organizations BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The authors also identify the "3+3" Regional Cooperation Platform for the South Caucasus, comprising Iran, Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, as an important mechanism for promoting cooperation and addressing shared challenges.

Furthermore, the restoration of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, together with Iran's active participation in the joint summit of the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) amid the post-al-Aqsa Flood developments, is presented as an important step toward strengthening unity and cohesion among Islamic countries.

Accordingly, the authors argue that, through its indigenous, resistance-oriented foreign policy and cooperation with emerging Eastern powers such as Russia and China, as well as with Islamic countries and the Axis of Resistance, the Islamic Republic of Iran is well-positioned to utilize regional and trans-regional alliances to counter U.S. unilateralism and mitigate the effects of economic sanctions and external pressure.

3.5. Israel's International Isolation and Domestic Crisis

According to the authors, Operation al-Aqsa Flood not only produced military and political consequences throughout the region but also had profound effects on public opinion and social attitudes within Israel. The conflict heightened Israelis' sense of vulnerability and undermined public confidence in the country's political and military leadership.

The article argues that the Israeli leadership now faces serious challenges at both the domestic and international levels, including a growing sense of insecurity among

Israelis regarding life in the occupied territories. The authors further suggest that these developments may contribute to increased outward migration from Israel in the future.

According to the authors, Israel's current challenge extends beyond its ability to achieve victory on the battlefield, where, they argue, it already faces fundamental difficulties. Citing a report by the Israeli media outlet Makor Rishon, the article claims that, following Operation True Promise II, Iran demonstrated its capability to launch direct attacks against Israel. According to the report, Iranian missiles successfully struck strategic Israeli installations, and some of the missiles possessed capabilities that Israel's air defense systems were unable to intercept (Keyhan Newspaper, 8 June 2025).

The article argues that this report has intensified concerns within Israel regarding Iran's ability to conduct direct attacks against sensitive strategic targets. It further contends that the acknowledged inability of Israeli air defense systems to intercept certain Iranian missiles reveals significant vulnerabilities in Israel's defensive capabilities.

The authors also maintain that Israel has become one of the most internationally isolated states in terms of both governmental and popular opinion. They note that since the outbreak of the wars in Gaza and Lebanon, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu repeatedly stated that "Israel is fighting on seven fronts," referring to the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Iran. According to the authors, however, Israel has failed to achieve victory on any of these seven fronts and has, in addition, opened an eighth front encompassing global public opinion (Mashregh News, 14 September 2025).

Accordingly, the article concludes that the international environment following Operation al-Aqsa Flood has shifted in favor of the Palestinian cause and that Israel is moving toward increasing international isolation.

3.6. An Active Resistance-Oriented Foreign Policy

The policy of "Active deterrence and the strategy of resistance" constitutes one of the key principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran's defense strategy, particularly in the context of tensions and confrontation with Israel. According to the authors, following the conflicts that emerged after Operation al-Aqsa Flood, the Axis of Resistance, and especially Iran, reached a turning point in demonstrating its military and diplomatic capabilities.

The authors argue that these developments not only strengthened Iran's position in confronting external threats but also altered neighboring states' perceptions of Iran's defense strategy. An examination of this policy, they contend, demonstrates how Iran has relied on deterrence, prudent diplomacy, and heightened domestic unity, particularly following the Twelve-Day War, to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity while simultaneously fostering new alliances and strengthening relations with countries in the region.

In this view, by combining active diplomacy with efforts to enhance its economic, political, and cultural influence, Iran, as the leading advocate of the discourse of resistance, has the potential to emerge as a regional hegemonic power.

The deterrence logic underlying the Operation True Promise campaigns, together with what the authors describe as the foreign ministry's "Smart Diplomacy," including intensive diplomatic visits and consultations with other countries, worked in close synergy to convey a clear message to neighboring states and the wider region: "Iran's military capabilities are defensive and deterrent in nature. According to the authors, Iran does not seek to expand the conflict but remains firmly committed to defending its national sovereignty and territorial integrity." They argue that these events demonstrated to the international community that, after being subjected to military threats by Israel, the Islamic Republic of Iran responded decisively within a framework of deterrence.

The condemnation of the Zionist attacks on Iran by Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and Turkey's acknowledgment that Iran has the right to respond to Israeli aggression on its territory represent an important indication of growing regional acceptance of the defensive nature of Iran's military capabilities. This development significantly facilitates the advancement of Iran's neighborhood policy (Center for International and Political Studies, 10 November 2024).

4. Challenges of the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Following al-Aqsa Flood

4.1. The Fall of Syria and the Disruption of Iran's Land Connection to the Axis of Resistance

Before Operation al-Aqsa Flood, despite the existence of Axis of Resistance members, policies aligned with Arab states and Israel created difficulties for the Islamic Republic of Iran in supporting this axis. For instance, measures such as disrupting

Hezbollah's supply lines and labeling the movement as a terrorist organization by major international powers such as the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as punitive actions against missile programs, were largely the result of Israeli-Arab lobbying efforts (Landau, Noa, 2020: 15).

The rapid developments following the Al-Aqsa Flood led to serious tensions and escalations between Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran, with cycles of retaliation continuing between the two sides. A major turning point occurred on 17 December 2024, with the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria, one of the key members of the Axis of Resistance and the geographical land bridge connecting Iran to Hezbollah and Hamas.

Following Assad's fall, Syria experienced significant military, security, and social transformations. Various regions of the country witnessed numerous security and military incidents. Large-scale Israeli attacks on southern Syria within a short timeframe reflected the ongoing instability and security challenges in Syria after the collapse of the Assad government. The continuation of this trend could increase the likelihood of intensified conflict and further regional instability.

At the same time, military actions against groups aligned with the interests of the Axis of Resistance have consistently been part of a broader strategy to weaken this axis. By undermining Iran's regional allies, as the leading power of the Axis of Resistance, Iran reduces its regional influence and operational capacity.

Although the fall of Bashar al-Assad may appear to pose a significant challenge to the Axis of Resistance, it does not necessarily imply its defeat or collapse. The networked and discursive structure of the Axis of Resistance has enabled it to function on the basis of ideological and strategic solidarity rather than dependence on any single individual or government. Therefore, Assad's fall should not be interpreted as a severe blow to Iran's regional policies or as the end of the Axis of Resistance in the region.

4.2. Instability and a Sense of Insecurity in the Region

Events following Operation al-Aqsa Flood clearly revealed the depth of Israel's vulnerability to actors of the Axis of Resistance. In other words, the Zionist regime is highly vulnerable due to its geographical constraints, namely, its narrow width and limited strategic depth. For this reason, expanding these dimensions and creating strategic depth have been considered among the main objectives of the "New Middle East" project.

On the other hand, achieving this goal requires weakening existing powerful states and causing the fragmentation of current countries. The collapse of states, in turn, necessitates weakening unifying ideologies and replacing them with new intellectual frameworks that do not conflict with Western capitalism and liberalism. Discourses such as Islamic identity, which are based on transnational ideologies, are seen as threats to Western interests and the Israeli regime. For this reason, resistance movements and Islamist currents have been heavily targeted by Western campaigns.

Accordingly, within the framework of Indigenousism and Resistance Theory, the increasing aggressive actions of Israel against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of regional Islamic countries, including Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Iran, Qatar, and others, following Operation al-Aqsa Flood, and in line with the so-called "Greater Israel" plan and the fragmentation of states and weakening of the Axis of Resistance, can be interpreted as contributing to a situation that ultimately produces insecurity and instability in West Asian countries. Naturally, such conditions adversely affect economic, trade, and energy exchanges in the region, posing a serious challenge not only to Iran's foreign policy but also to all regional states. Consequently, the security developments resulting from these aggressions affect not only regional stability and security but also international and economic relations among states, pushing the region toward greater instability and polarization in the future.

4.3. Western Efforts to Neutralize Regional and Trans-regional Agreements

Iran's membership in trans-regional alliances such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS represents a major challenge to Western hegemony, particularly that of the United States, and offers significant advantages. These memberships not only strengthen Iran's international role but also help counter its political and economic isolation under unilateral U.S. and Western pressure. For this reason, the United States employs a range of tools, including pressure, threats, and economic and military sanctions, to limit Iran's ability to form and strengthen alliances. These sanctions have particularly targeted the energy and banking sectors, aiming to deprive Iran of the financial resources needed to support its partnerships.

The United States also seeks to weaken Iran's regional influence by supporting opposition groups and fomenting internal tensions in neighboring countries, including backing opposition factions in Syria and Iraq, in order to advance its own national interests. These confrontations represent one of the major challenges in the foreign

policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and may have profound effects on future regional developments.

Furthermore, U.S. efforts to pressure key members such as Brazil, India, and South Africa, as well as potential entrants such as Turkey, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia, pose another challenge to these blocs (IRNA, 21 August 2023).

4.4. Direct Threats and Military Aggression by Israel Against Islamic Countries, Especially Iran

Another key challenge is the Israeli regime's aerial penetration capabilities through covert technologies, which significantly reduce Iran's operational freedom in the region (Norlen, Tova, 2021: 6). A major turning point in the escalation of tensions between Iran and Israel was the Israeli airstrike on Iran's consulate in Syria, which subsequently led to further escalation through Operations True Promise I, II, and III.

The Islamic Republic of Iran's decisive response to Israeli aggression is regarded as a turning point in regional military doctrine and deterrence strategy. As prominent offensive realist theorist John Mearsheimer states: "If Israel thinks that by tearing apart every country in the region it will eventually achieve security that is an illusion. That will not happen, and in the end, Israel will inflict enormous damage on itself. Iran is the best example. Israelis, and of course Donald Trump, alongside the warmongers in the United States, claimed that we delivered a crushing blow to Iran. In my view, Iran's nuclear program is still alive. Israel did not solve the problem; in fact, it made it worse. The point is that even without nuclear weapons, Iran has many advantages." (Tabnak, 15 July 2025)

Nevertheless, one of the most significant challenges for the Islamic Republic of Iran following recent Israeli attacks is the emergence of a perception among Israeli and American officials that direct strikes on Iranian territory are feasible. This perception could lead to fundamental changes in Iran's military and security strategies and introduce new threats to national security.

For this reason, the Islamic Republic is compelled to continuously update its security and defense calculations and further strengthen its deterrence capabilities. Moreover, such a perception may escalate regional tensions and expand the scope of conflict to other countries in the region, including Qatar, Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

Operation al-Aqsa Flood, as a historical turning point, has produced profound and wide-ranging transformations in the history of the Palestinian resistance and the Axis of Resistance in West Asia, particularly in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Accordingly, Iran's foreign policy has consistently been shaped by complex regional and international developments, including the al-Aqsa Flood. In other words, the post-al-Aqsa Flood environment has simultaneously created both opportunities and challenges for Iran's foreign policy. The most important opportunities are as follows:

1. Enhancement of Iran's deterrence capability and military power: Following Operation al-Aqsa Flood, Iran continued to strengthen its military and security capabilities. Recent military developments indicate a shift in regional power balances and an increase in Iran's deterrence capacity against external threats, particularly from the Israeli regime. By utilizing advanced technologies, strengthening its defense industries, and conducting military exercises, Iran has significantly enhanced its power.
2. Coordination between diplomacy and the battlefield: In recent years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has sought to establish close coordination between its diplomatic efforts and military operations. This strategy, by emphasizing unity within the resistance front and diplomacy, has strengthened the Islamic Republic of Iran's power in the face of threats. This approach has not only managed to portray military achievements on the international stage but has also helped construct a strong narrative of resistance against oppression and occupation.
3. Expansion of the Discourse of Resistance at the Global Level: Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the crimes committed by the Israeli regime in Gaza have contributed to the expansion of the discourse of resistance globally. This discourse has gained attention not only in Palestine but also in Islamic countries and even within Western societies. Large-scale demonstrations and international expressions of support for the Palestinian people, particularly by prominent figures and social activists, reflect a shift in public attitudes toward the Palestinian issue and Israel's actions.
4. Regional and Trans-regional Alliances: Through the formation of regional and trans-regional alliances, particularly with countries such as China and Russia, the Islamic Republic of Iran has strengthened its position against the system of domination. These developments, especially Iran's accession to international organizations such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,

demonstrate Iran's efforts to reinforce multilateral diplomacy and counter Western unilateralism.

5. Israel's International Isolation and Domestic Crisis: Operation al-Aqsa Flood led to increased international isolation of the Israeli regime. Israel's actions in Gaza not only resulted in widespread condemnation from various countries but also exposed serious weaknesses in its security system. This situation has contributed to a decline in the regime's credibility and growing domestic dissatisfaction.
6. Adoption of an Active, Resistance-Oriented Foreign Policy: An active foreign policy based on resistance against the system of domination has functioned as a key strategy in defending Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Particularly after the Twelve-Day War, Iran has strengthened its position against external threats by demonstrating both military and diplomatic power. By applying the logic of deterrence and resistance diplomacy, Iran has also influenced neighboring countries' perceptions of its defense strategy.

Despite these developments, the Islamic Republic of Iran has faced several challenges in its foreign policy after Operation al-Aqsa Flood:

1. The fall of Syria and the disruption of Iran's land connection to the Axis of Resistance: The collapse of the Assad government in Syria, as a key member of the Axis of Resistance, created serious challenges for Iran and severed its geographic link to this axis. Continued developments in Syria, combined with the emergence of armed groups and Israeli airstrikes against Hezbollah and Hamas positions, could further complicate the geographical cohesion of the Axis of Resistance.
2. Instability and a sense of insecurity in the region: Following the al-Aqsa Flood, insecurity and instability increased in Islamic countries, particularly near Iran's borders. Given Israeli aggression, this situation could lead to heightened regional tensions and conflict, threatening Iran's national security and increasing military and economic costs for regional states.
3. U.S. efforts to neutralize regional and trans-regional agreements: The United States uses various tools, including pressure, threats, and economic and military sanctions, to limit Iran's ability to form and strengthen regional and trans-regional alliances. These sanctions particularly target the energy and banking sectors, aiming to deprive Iran of financial resources needed to support its alliances.
4. Direct threats and attacks by Israel and the United States: Direct attacks by the Israeli regime and the United States on Iranian military and security facilities,

particularly the Twelve-Day War, constitute one of the major challenges for the Islamic Republic. These threats may weaken Iran's national security and escalate regional tensions. Moreover, one of the most significant challenges is the emergence of the belief among Israeli and American officials that direct strikes on Iranian territory are feasible.

Overall, the multiple challenges facing the Islamic Republic of Iran after Operation al-Aqsa Flood reflect the complexity and diversity of threats in the regional security environment. These challenges require a comprehensive and coordinated strategy to address both internal and external threats. Iran must respond effectively through active diplomacy, strengthened regional relations, and enhanced deterrence capabilities in order to safeguard its national interests.

Nevertheless, despite the disruption of Iran's land connection to the Axis of Resistance, a gradual, subtle transformation has emerged in the deeper layers of the Islamic world and in regional dynamics. The discourse of resistance is shifting from a centralized form to a decentralized one. In other words, while the discourse of resistance remains firmly intact, its structure and organization are evolving from a center-based system to a more distributed one, and it continues to expand not only regionally but also globally.

Ethical Considerations

According to the authors, there is no conflict of interest in this article.

The authors have adhered to ethical principles in conducting and publishing this scientific research, and that this has been confirmed by all of them.

The data of the present study are available upon request from the authors.

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Contemporary Researches on Islamic Revolution

Requirements for Realizing the New Islamic Civilization in the Domain of Attitudes from the Perspective of the Supreme Leader in the "Second Phase of the Revolution" Statement

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The New Islamic Civilization, as the transformative horizon of the Islamic Republic of Iran and a rational-theoretical response to the decline of Western civilization, requires redefining indicators and models for their realization across various fields. Among these, the domain of attitudes is one of the most fundamental dimensions, since changes in individual and collective attitudes are considered a prerequisite for transforming institutions, behaviors, and civilizational structures. Given Ayatollah Khamenei's repeated emphasis on the formation of a New Islamic Civilization, it is essential to identify and systematize the attitudinal requirements for cultural and educational struggle (Jihad). This effort aims to provide both theoretical and practical foundations for guiding public discourse and macro-level policymaking toward the realization of a New Islamic Civilization. Accordingly, the main research question is whether the realization of a New Islamic Civilization can rely solely on institutional and technical mechanisms, or whether transformation in individual and collective attitudes is a prerequisite for civilizational realization.

Method: This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach to explain the requirements for realizing the New Islamic Civilization in the domain of attitudes, based on the "Second Phase of the Revolution" statement.

Findings: The findings indicate that these requirements encompass attitudes toward the future of Islam, individual responsibility, society-building, and an emphasis on ethics and spirituality, all of which should be considered in light of the Supreme Leader's perspective. The attitudinal requirements identified in this research provide an essential framework for movement toward the New Islamic Civilization.

Conclusion: Achieving a New Islamic Civilization requires the design of targeted educational and training programs, the reconstruction of media discourse, and coherent coordination among cultural policymakers to effectively facilitate the path toward building this civilization.

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Introduction

Urbanization and the formation of civilization, as collective and complex phenomena, have long been enduring concerns throughout human history. Civilization is the result of the continuous interaction of individual and social life across various domains, and its emergence depends on a complex set of factors and indicators. For this reason, numerous civilizations have arisen and declined throughout history, leaving behind only traces of their existence. Among them, Islamic civilization, an integrated system of institutions, values, and social actions centered on monotheism and Islamic teachings, has experienced multiple periods of rise and decline. The peak of this civilization's influence can be observed in the fourth and fifth centuries of the Islamic calendar (AH), a period that began with the mission of the Prophet and the Imams and continued through the efforts of philosophers, mystics, and rulers. Although the Mongol invasion weakened the outward manifestations of this civilization, it could never completely destroy it. From the seventh to the eleventh centuries AH, a second phase of Islamic civilization emerged, established through the great empires of India, Iran, and the Ottoman state (Najafi, 2011 AD/1391 SH: 7).

The Islamic Revolution of Iran in the present century, by establishing a government based on Islamic teachings and religious laws, has once again brought the possibility of reviving and reproducing Islamic civilization in new forms to the forefront of attention. This civilization aims not only to promote Islamic culture domestically but also to expand it globally and to reflect Islamic teachings within social and civilizational structures.

Imam Khomeini, by reintroducing pure Islam into human life, breathed new spirit into the Islamic world and, through establishing an Islamic system in the face of the complex Western civilization, implemented the theoretical and intellectual foundations of religious and Islamic culture in Iran (Yousefi Gharavi, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 230). In this regard, the "Second Phase of the Revolution" statement, issued by the Supreme Leader on the fortieth anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, serves as a strategic document that emphasizes the necessity of collective participation in achieving the "New Islamic Civilization." It also considers the decline of the materialistic values of Western civilization as a context for this movement. In this statement, the realization of a New Islamic Civilization is emphasized as one of the fundamental ideals of the Revolution and as a related prelude to the subject of the appearance of the Savior.

Achieving this objective requires preparation and development in various dimensions, including attitudinal requirements and the provision of appropriate social conditions. Furthermore, the revival of a New Islamic Civilization demands multidimensional

strategies at both theoretical and practical levels and across individual and collective dimensions, which must be examined through fundamental research. The present study, therefore, aims to answer the central question: 'What fundamental attitudinal changes are required for the realization of the New Islamic Civilization according to the Second Phase of the Revolution statement?'

This research is conducted using a descriptive-analytical method based on textual analysis of the Second Phase of the Revolution statement. Following this introduction, the next section explains the concept of civilization and, more specifically, the New Islamic Civilization from the perspective of the Supreme Leader. Subsequently, the role of attitudes in civilizational transformations and their importance are discussed. In the main section, the most important attitudinal changes required in areas such as attitudes toward the future of Islam, individual responsibility, society building, and the centrality of ethics and spirituality are extracted and analyzed based on the Supreme Leader's Second Phase statement. Finally, the study concludes with a summary and conclusions, emphasizing the role of these attitudinal changes as an essential social foundation for movement toward a New Islamic Civilization.

Addressing this issue is important from several perspectives. First, the revival of Islamic civilization in the contemporary world requires a renewed reading and the development of a theory capable of explaining its foundations, structures, and practical requirements. On the other hand, the "Second Phase of the Revolution" statement, as a macro-level roadmap, outlines ideal goals, and identifying attitudinal requirements as a prerequisite for any practical action is a necessary Phase toward implementing this roadmap. Moreover, any enduring civilizational transformation is rooted in changes in the worldview, values, and attitudes of social actors. Therefore, without recognizing and planning for the necessary attitudinal changes, movement toward the New Islamic Civilization will face fundamental obstacles. This research is conducted to bridge the gap between the articulation of overarching ideals and the identification of their psychological-cultural prerequisites.

1. Theoretical Foundations and Research Background

The emphasis of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, especially in the "Second Phase of the Revolution" statement, has led to growing attention to the issue of building a New Islamic Civilization among researchers. This broad attention has led to numerous studies examining the factors contributing to its formation, the obstacles to its realization, and the theoretical and practical solutions to achieving this lofty goal.

In this regard, researchers have addressed various dimensions of the New Islamic Civilization. For example:

- Ali Asghar Rajabi, in his book "New Islamic Civilization: Challenges and Strategies," provides a comprehensive and general analysis of the context for the formation of Islamic civilization, the causes of the weakness and decline of the early Islamic civilization, the pillars of Islamic civilization, and the obstacles and strategies for overcoming these challenges from the perspective of the Supreme Leader.
- Karimi and Dimeh Kargar (2014 AD/1394 SH), in the article "Principles of Building a New Islamic Civilization," relying on Qur'anic evidence, discuss the necessity of compilation an Islamic model of New Civilization and its principles. They emphasize the key role of a fully qualified leader, the use of the foundational teachings of the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt, the utilization of scientific elites, jihadi effort, and popular participation in the path toward realizing this civilization.
- Akbari and Rezaei (2014 AD/1394 SH), in their study titled "An Examination of the Characteristics of the New Islamic Civilization in the Thought of the Supreme Leader," identify characteristics such as morality, work and effort, faith in God, rationality, scientific capability, a flourishing economy, strong media, and international relations.
- Farmihani Farahani (2015 AD/1395 SH), in the study "Requirements for the Realization of the New Islamic Civilization," examines these requirements in general across both hardware and software dimensions, raising issues such as a civilization-building university, self-confidence, scientific leap, political and economic power, monotheism, and Islamic rationality.
- Sadrifar and Molavi (2021 AD/1400 SH), in their article "Prerequisites and Requirements for Creating a New Islamic Civilization," also pointed to factors such as self-belief and dignity within society, the strengthening of social will, idealism, and perseverance.

While the aforementioned studies hold significant scientific value and have contributed greatly to expanding concepts related to the New Islamic Civilization, they have primarily focused on general explanations or on hardware, institutional, and structural dimensions. It appears that the objective realization of Islamic civilization requires more detailed and operational concepts focused on the individual level and fundamental attitudinal shifts. A comprehensive and dedicated analysis of attitudinal requirements, independent of purely institutional and technical mechanisms and

specifically focused on the Supreme Leader's recommendations in the "Second Phase of the Revolution" statement, remains a significant research gap in this field. Therefore, the distinction and merit of the present article lie in its integration of the content of the Second Phase statement with the domain of attitudinal changes as a key, yet under-explored, variable. Most previous research has addressed the institutional, economic, or political dimensions of civilization, whereas this study operates on the assumption that without a transformation in the underlying layer of individual and collective attitudes, the realization of those other dimensions will remain incomplete or unsustainable. Consequently, the present study aims to fill the existing gap in the literature by focusing specifically on the attitudinal requirements mentioned in the said statement. Thus, the current research, centered on the Leader's Second Phase statement and the analysis of his recommendations, specifically evaluates the attitudinal components effective in realizing the New Islamic Civilization. This approach is oriented toward attitudinal changes in every individual within society, which can align with collective and jihadi movements and contribute significantly to creating the social foundation necessary for the realization of this civilization.

2. Islamic Civilization

Will Durant defines civilization as a social system that facilitates collective creativity; it arises when chaos and insecurity subside, and innovations and discoveries lead humans toward the pursuit of knowledge and the improvement of the tools of life (Durant, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 1, 3-5). Accordingly, throughout history, humanity has lived in two stages: primitive and urban. As societies moved past the cave-dwelling stage and entered advanced urbanization, social and intellectual achievements expanded, and the concept of civilization took shape. Hence, the semantic commonality of "Civilization" in Arabic (*Tamaddun*), Persian, and Latin can be explained by the fact that in all three languages, urbanization is considered the criterion for identifying civilization (Rouhani, 2019 AD/1399 SH: 35).

Of course, some definitions also emphasize the companionship of culture with civilization. In this regard, Huntington writes: "Civilization is a space or a cultural area and a set of cultural characteristics and phenomena." (Huntington, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 61) However, this certainly does not imply an absolute synonymy between culture and civilization, as some non-civilized nations, such as the Australian Aborigines, possess their own distinct culture and customs. Ultimately, it can be accepted that culture and civilization can play a role in each other's elevation (Jafari, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 11). On this basis, it appears that civilization is a comprehensive concept

encompassing all dimensions of human life, including cultural, political, social, economic, scientific, artistic, and material aspects, representing a secure, dynamic, and flourishing state following the development of humans in all fields (Najafi, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 30).

Islamic civilization is the civilization that emerged with the appearance of Islam. Owing to its reliance on demonstrative and rational foundations, it spread rapidly across the world and, within a short period, reached China in the East and Andalus in the West.

By Islamic civilization is meant a civilization that possesses all the characteristics of a divine civilization within the framework of Qur'anic teachings and is grounded in the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH). Its components include religion, ethics, knowledge, justice, laws and regulations, and the principles of religion, among others (Jan Ahmadi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 54). Therefore, the output of such a civilization must likewise be built upon Islamic teachings. One of the most important features of Islamic civilization is its ability to draw on other cultures and civilizations while preserving its own authenticity and distinct identity. In this way, it not only incorporated other cultures and civilizations into its sphere without mere passive adoption, but also absorbed their positive and constructive elements into Islamic civilization and, through them, produced a new civilization (Kashefi, 2015 AD/1395 SH: 64). Scholars in the field of civilization maintain that the combination and intermingling of the two elements of Iranian identity and Islamic identity was among the effective factors that contributed to the enduring nature of Iranian-Islamic civilization (Garshasb Chouski, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 177).

Despite this, the Islamic civilizations of the Abbasid and Umayyad periods, or even those of the Ottoman and Safavid eras, were in their foundations and roots often far removed from the teachings of Islam and the Qur'an, and at times even in conflict with them. Therefore, the more accurate term for the historically realized Islamic civilization is "Civilization in the Islamic world." (Khoshdouni et al., 2022 AD/1401 SH: 16) During the Qajar period as well, Iran's scientific and cultural achievements after Islam were either denied or, even when known, not regarded as valid or valuable (Moeini Mehr et al., 2022 AD/1401 SH: 5). In the Pahlavi era, although a project of modernization and movement toward civilization-building was initiated, it proceeded without regard to Islamic components. For this reason, many challenges arose between the modernization process and society's religious values. The gap resulting from this conflict persisted until the final days of the Pahlavi dynasty, since its modernization project was based on three axes: "Ancient-oriented nationalism, modernism, and secularization." (Zariri, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 4)

The victory of the Islamic Revolution, through the movement of Imam Khomeini marked a turning point, underscoring the necessity of laying constructive foundations for the formation of Islamic civilization in future horizons. In contrast to Western civilization, which had reduced the human existential sphere to the material realm, the Islamic Revolution elevated the horizons of human life beyond the material level and offered the world a new religious, divine, and spiritual mode of life (Najafi, 2011 AD/1391 SH: 33).

Ayatollah Khamenei has defined civilization as follows: "Islamic civilization means that space in which the human being can grow, both spiritually and materially, and can attain the desirable ends for which Almighty God created him; can have a good life, can have a dignified life; a dignified human being, a human being with power, with will, with initiative, with the ability to build the world of nature. Islamic civilization means this. The goal and ideal of the Islamic Republic system is this." (Khamenei, 2012 AD/1392 SH)

At times, the newness of civilization is understood in relation to the past of Islamic civilization, and the emerging advances of the Islamic Ummah are explained under the title "New Civilization." At other times, it is understood in relation to Western civilization, because it has emerged after the rise of Western materialist civilization and following the several-century passivity of Islamic civilization, revealing the capacities of the earlier civilization in confrontation with the West. The Islamic Revolution seeks to create the conditions for the emergence of such a civilization (Mirmohammadi, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 26). Therefore, despite the multiple definitions of "New Islamic Civilization" in the humanities, this article, due to its focus on the Leader's Second Phase statement, adopts Ayatollah Khamenei's definition of the New Islamic Civilization.

3. The Role of Attitudes in Civilizational Transformations

The word attitude in Persian has been translated as inclination, thoughts, beliefs, mode of behavior, and the like (Nafisi, n.d.: 5, 3763). Accordingly, attitudes play a serious role in laying the groundwork for and shaping behaviors, generating motivations, and directing inclinations (Sharaf al-Din, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 86). Attitudes are an integrated complex of beliefs, values, and emotions that shape an individual's orientation toward people, objects, and groups, and cause the individual to respond to them either positively or negatively.

In the religious sphere, one of the most effective examples of attitude change is the practice of the prophets and divine saints, those who, through adherence to ethical and

religious principles, and even with limited media tools, were able to exert the greatest influence on transforming human attitudes and behaviors (Jalaei Nobari, 2019 AD/1399 SH: 167). The life course of the prophets in the Qur'an demonstrates their effort, patience, and perseverance in realizing a divine civilization, serving as a guiding model for communities (Taghinia et al., 2019 AD/1399 SH: 7).

In this regard, Almighty God states in the Qur'an: "Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves." (al-Raʿd: 11) The central point of this verse is that God does not alter the blessings bestowed upon a group unless that group itself changes its attitudes and behaviors. This teaching reflects the monotheistic worldview of Islam regarding the position of individuals and human societies: "As commentators suggest, any change or transformation in the destiny of societies depends, first and foremost, on the will, internal reform, and intellectual and cultural transformation of those societies themselves." (Makarem, n.d.: 10, 145) In fact, divine beliefs, attitudes, and values form the foundation for the flourishing of Islamic civilization. Therefore, the reform of attitudes and the formation of an intellectual-cultural revolution are necessary conditions for creating external transformations and social progress; such changes can pave the way for a revolution of faith and morality to accelerate the formation of the New Islamic Civilization (Abbaszadeh, 2019 AD/1399 SH: 140).

Transforming religious attitudes plays a pivotal role in shaping behaviors, creating motivation, meeting needs, and directing individual and collective inclinations. Insights and inclinations are mutually dependent: "Cognitive insight is a prerequisite for inclination, and when knowledge, inclination, and a sense of worthiness coexist, an attitude is formed and translated into external behavior." When a monotheistic attitude becomes dominant in society, it can achieve dynamism and excellence, manifesting divine beliefs and values in individual and social behaviors. Consequently, fields such as economics, politics, and the family take on a divine direction and color, and relations of citizenship are regulated by kindness and justice. Conversely, if religious attitudes become distorted or damaged, the underlying value foundations and the beliefs derived from them weaken, and their influence on the social atmosphere diminishes, leading the society toward confusion and inefficiency in various fields. Ultimately, individual and collective attitudes toward various issues play a decisive role in the emergence or disappearance of a civilization; the structural and cultural reform of these attitudes is among the key prerequisites for the realization of an integrated Islamic civilization.

4. Attitudinal Requirements for the Realization of the New Islamic Civilization

One of the most important and successful missionary and propagation movements throughout human history has been the employment of attitude-change methods while adhering to ethical and divine principles. In the field of civilization-building, after gaining a correct understanding of the New Islamic Civilization, efforts must be directed toward changing attitudes. Since the Leader's "Second Phase" statement is one of the most important charters in this field, examining and analyzing it enables the identification of requirements in the domain of attitudes, which are discussed below.

4.1. Attitude Toward the Future of Islam

Future-oriented thinking and attention to the consequences of actions are among the central teachings of Islam, and they can serve as a guiding principle and key strategy in realizing the New Islamic Civilization. Islam not only gives glad tidings of a bright future but also calls its followers to observe principles that must be applied in the present for the construction of a desirable society. Islamic society must constantly move along the path of perfection and growth, and this movement should be gradual, purposeful, and progressive. For this reason, religious futures studies and future-oriented thinking should be taken into account in determining values, norms, and the orientation of social action (Karami Telzali et al., 2023 AD/1402 SH: 130).

The Qur'an regards attention to the future as both a human and a religious necessity and calls believers to anticipate and assess the consequences of their actions (Tavassoli and Asadi, 2011 AD/1391 SH: 33). For example, the noble verse states: "O you who have believed, fear Allah. And let every soul look to what it has sent ahead for tomorrow. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is All-Aware of what you do." (al-Ḥashr: 18) This verse emphasizes that before making important decisions, a Phase-by-Phase evaluation should be undertaken and a long-term, program-oriented perspective should be considered. The Qur'an's intent goes beyond merely promising reward in the Hereafter; its main emphasis is on laying the foundation for a sustainable future through reflection, planning, and conscious action (Tabataba'i, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 19, 375). In other words, the verse warns that one should not merely wait for reward, but must also strive to build a sustainable future (ibid: 13, 442).

The realization of a sustainable future is conditional upon preparedness. Thus, the Holy Qur'an states: "And prepare against them whatever force you can and steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah and your enemy…" (al-Anfāl: 60) This verse underscores the necessity of preparing manpower, equipment, and effective means for confronting threats, preparedness that must deter both known and unknown

enemies. A practical interpretation of this command in the civilizational context means ensuring defensive, political, propagative, and logistical capacities, such that Islamic society remains continually at an advanced level of readiness in both military and non-military capabilities, so that it may protect its independence, security, and path of development and provide the necessary infrastructure for the emergence and endurance of the New Islamic Civilization.

The Supreme Leader's approach in the "Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution" statement is likewise grounded in future-oriented analysis. In this statement, he believes that the Islamic Revolution, within the framework of an evolutionary process, is advancing toward development and the realization of the New Islamic Civilization, and that the Second Phase is an effort to outline the future horizons of the Revolution before their full realization. The spirit of this statement is grounded in futures studies; that is, beyond mere prediction, it also identifies the operations, driving forces, and strategies necessary to move toward those horizons.

This approach is derived from the Qur'an's definitive program for future-oriented vision. The Qur'an promises future victory and governance to the righteous and this promise is part of a definite divine tradition that shapes the future destiny of humankind (Mohajernia, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 1, 50). In this regard, there are numerous verses, including: "And We intended to favor those who were oppressed in the land and make them leaders and make them inheritors…" (al-Qaṣaṣ: 5-6) This means that God has willed to bestow His favor upon those who have been oppressed and wronged, to make them leaders of the people and heirs of the earth. Such definitive Qur'anic promises in religious futures studies are regarded as fundamental assumptions of the New Islamic Civilization and reveal the distinguishing feature of our perspective in contrast with certain Western approaches to the study of the future.

The Supreme Leader has also affirmed and elaborated this Qur'anic outlook in his analysis of the present condition and the future. In his view, those groups that once spoke despairingly of the decline of religion and spirituality are today confronted with the relative collapse of the legitimacy of those materialist assaults, and they now witness the reemergence of Islam and the life-giving power of the Qur'an. The Leader of the Revolution states with confidence that this is merely the beginning of the path, and that the full realization of the divine promise, namely, the victory of truth over falsehood, the reconstruction of the Ummah, and the formation of the New Islamic Civilization, still lies ahead. He emphasized: "The general direction of the Islamic system is to reach Islamic civilization." (Khamenei, 2000 AD/1379 SH)

The Qur'an, in another verse, also expresses God's unfailing promise concerning the empowerment of believers and the establishment of religion: "Allah has promised

those among you who have believed and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession upon the earth…" (al-Nūr: 55) An important and initial manifestation of this promise can be seen in the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and the establishment of a political system founded upon revolutionary values, an event that occurred at a time of peak distrust, and at times even despair, regarding religion and spirituality, and which came to be regarded as a point of hope in the Islamic world. The emergence of this exceptional phenomenon and its endurance in the face of various political, military, economic, and propagandistic pressures opened a new horizon for rebuilding the Ummah and universalizing Islamic values, inspiring enthusiasm and hope among Muslim societies (Khamenei, 2008 AD/1387 SH).

Accordingly, the Second Phase Statement adopts and develops a future-oriented and planned outlook grounded in definitive Qur'anic assumptions and the historical experience of the Islamic Revolution. From the outset, the thought of the Islamic Revolution has been characterized by an innate, human, and universal character. Islamic governance and the laws based on it encompass all dimensions of human existence and concern both worldly and otherworldly well-being. The lofty aim of Islam in governance is the cultivation of the human being and the preparation of the ground for the realization of the New Islamic Civilization. This is because the combination of material and spiritual affairs is considered an essential feature of this civilization and can create a new condition in all social dimensions of Muslim life. The Supreme Leader has regarded "Comprehensive Progress" as one of the important components of this civilization and believes: "We can establish the New Islamic Civilization and build a world full of spirituality, one that proceeds with the help of spirituality and under the guidance of spirituality." (Khamenei, 2012 AD/1392 SH)

The founder of the Revolution also emphasized the universal nature of this movement, considering it not only to belong to Muslim nations but to all peoples, and deemed its dissemination through culture, knowledge, and human values necessary for all societies. In the words of the Supreme Leader: "This means that the pleasant fragrance of this merciful phenomenon must spread throughout the world, so that nations may understand what their duty is, and Muslim nations may know what and where their identity is." (Khamenei, 2010 AD/1389 SH)

The victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran should therefore be regarded as a turning point in the history of human civilization. This revolution was not merely a political transformation, but rather a shift in global outlook and a challenge to the hegemony of Western civilization. One of the Revolution's outstanding achievements was the establishment of the Islamic Republic, whose fundamental aim is to prepare the ground for and advance the New Islamic Civilization on a global scale (Ebrahimi,

2015 AD/1394 SH: 185). In pursuit of this goal, designing the desired Islamic future and mapping the path to its realization are central. Purposeful movement toward the New Islamic Civilization is not possible without using futures studies appropriate to Islamic foundations. It is therefore necessary to employ a model of futures studies that, in addition to being compatible with the Islamic worldview, uses religious teachings to determine assumptions, goals, and driving forces (Pedram and Eyvazi, 2015 AD/1395 SH: 142).

Of course, it should be noted that despite the promotion of the foundations of Western civilization and the imposition of a Western lifestyle in Islamic societies, the essence of Islam continues to live with strength, and it has preserved its spiritual power among Muslims (Alami, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 177). If the influence of Islamic foundations and manifestations continues within Muslim societies, such a future may indeed be envisioned for the Islamic world.

For this reason, Islamic society must always base its movement on gradual perfection and continuous growth, and preserve future-oriented thinking as an essential requirement for guiding decisions and policies. From this perspective, the future of the Islamic world is interpreted as belonging to the New Islamic Civilization, and all efforts, planning, and resources must be directed toward realizing this civilizational ideal.

4.2. Attitude Toward Individual Responsibility

Responsibility in the Qur'an and the traditions means recognition of duty, acceptance of discipline, and commitment to obligation, all of which are rooted in human nature and conscience (Izadi and Hosseini, 2017 AD/1397 SH: 103). The order of existence is formed on the basis of responsibility, and it is responsibility that gives the human community the spirit of life. One of the aims of human creation is to bring forth a committed and responsible human being; therefore, awareness, which is the greatest distinction of the human being, gains value only when it places the person on the path of responsibility (ibid: 112).

The placing of commitment and responsibility upon the human being demonstrates his status and superiority over other creatures, as expressed in the noble verse: "Indeed, We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it and feared it; yet man undertook it. Indeed, he has always been unjust and ignorant." (al-Aḥzāb: 72) Therefore, the human being must be nurtured in such a way that he chooses the correct path and brings it into practice. Responsibility and commitment arise from within the human being and constitute an inner and moral

obligation that impels the person toward worthy deeds. Thus, accepting commitment and responsibility is the foundation and basis of a social order.

Human beings are responsible in two ways regarding what they possess: "First, they are responsible for preserving and safeguarding the trusts entrusted to them so that they do not waste them; second, they are responsible for making the best and fullest use of the blessings at their disposal." These blessings must be used in such a way that they bear fruit in this world and place the human being on the path of human perfection. From a profound perspective, all the material and spiritual capacities granted to the human being will be subject to questioning on the Day of Judgment, as the Qur'an states: "Then, on that Day, you shall surely be questioned concerning the blessings." (al-Takāthur: 8)

In the Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution statement, the Supreme Leader elaborates extensively on the desired form of responsibility for officials in the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran across all fields, with particular emphasis on the responsibility of youth. He states: "The path traversed so far is only a portion of the honorable road toward the lofty ideals of the Islamic Republic system. The continuation of this path, which in all likelihood will not be as difficult as the past, must be traversed through your determination, vigilance, speed of action, and initiative, you young people. Young managers, young officials, young thinkers, and young activists, in all political, economic, cultural, and international arenas, as well as in the fields of religion, ethics, spirituality, and justice, must place their shoulders under the burden of responsibility, benefit from past experiences and lessons, apply a revolutionary outlook, a revolutionary spirit, and jihadi action, and make dear Iran the complete model of a system of Islamic progress." (Khamenei, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 355)

In reality, the human factor plays a highly significant role in the creation and expansion of civilizations, and the aware Muslim individual, through intellectual and spiritual refinement, the correction of motives, and a sense of responsibility, can fulfill this key role and take Phases toward creating the foundations for civilizational realization (Yousefi Gharavi, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 226).

Since the human being is, by nature, a social being, one of the requirements for realizing the New Islamic Civilization is that each individual should feel responsible toward others and regard himself as influential in the destiny of others, and others as influential in his own destiny. This is the same sense of responsibility that has been emphasized in religious sources, and the flourishing of the New Islamic Civilization depends upon the ever-increasing growth and appreciation of this very component (Sharifi, 2018 AD/1398 SH: 201). Based on this perspective, it is incumbent upon the

youth and those who bear responsibility for realizing the goals of the Islamic Revolution in the Second Phase not only to fulfill their personal responsibilities toward themselves and society, but also to assume the country's managerial responsibilities. In this view, accepting such responsibility may be regarded by them as a practical, field-oriented mission, and, more than other missions, it can bring them closer to realizing the New Islamic Civilization in accordance with the goals of the Second Phase of the Revolution. In line with this responsibility, they will also face fewer obstacles in realizing the New Islamic Civilization (Ghorbani and Ghazanfari, 2019 AD/1399 SH: 131).

Therefore, one of the necessities for realizing the New Islamic Civilization is the existence of a culture of responsibility, meaning that each person should consider himself committed and bound with respect to his own talents, to Islamic society, and to the blessing of the Revolution in order to cultivate and advance them. At the same time, individuals must fulfill the responsibilities entrusted to them in the best possible manner and avoid any negligence or shortcomings that would undermine the productivity of the Islamic system and lead to inefficiency.

4.3. Attitude Toward Social Responsibility

In the Islamic perspective, society is not separate from the individual; rather, the two exist in mutual interaction. To the same extent that individuals are important, society, too, as a significant component in Islamic civilization-building, enjoys great importance. Islamic society is a society formed within the framework of the shari‘a and consists of Muslims who, through religious bonds and the rationality grounded in them, are connected to one another in both material and spiritual dimensions for the fulfillment of needs (Motaharnia, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 93). In general, the relationships, values, and prevailing outlooks within Islamic society are derived from the Qur’an and the religious school of thought (Abolghasemi, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 74).

From the earliest period of Islam to the present, scholars and thinkers have sought to design the ideal Islamic society because society is the arena in which religious teachings and moral-social values are realized, and it is closely linked to public culture and political structures. For this reason, society's value-based identity varies with governments and the dominance of different cultures. In periods of despotism, society declines, whereas in periods of the rule of the Infallibles or the expansion of religious values, a dynamic and healthy society takes shape (Khosropanah, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 1, 328). God Almighty presents the purpose of sending prophets and revealing heavenly books as the formation of society; that is, the call of the prophets and divine

books is for the growth of people in such a way that they themselves rise for justice and equity: "We certainly sent Our messengers with clear proofs, and sent down with them the Book and the Balance so that people may uphold justice…" (al-Ḥadīd: 25) In the Quranic view, the establishment of justice follows from the establishment of a just society through revealed teachings.

From the perspective of the Supreme Leader, society-building is among the great aims of Islam, and individual and social growth or decline depend on the conditions of society. In his thought, society is divided into two types: Islamic society (monotheistic, spiritual, and ideal) and Jahili society; he identifies one of the prophets' missions as constructing a monotheistic society (Khosropanah, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 1, 238). The prophets are charged with building a society founded on monotheism, social justice, human dignity, and the provision of freedom, so that the conditions for the negation of exploitation and despotism may be established.

In the Second Phase of the Revolution statement issued by the Supreme Leader, the ultimate goal of the Islamic Revolution of Iran is introduced as the creation of the New Islamic Civilization. He emphasizes: "The Islamic Revolution has now entered its second stage of self-construction, society-building, and civilization-building." (Khamenei, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 344) This indicates that all three components were present continuously, even in the first stage. Therefore, society-building is considered one of the essential requirements and important foundations for the formation of the New Islamic Civilization.

In fact, society-building means "The cultivation of society and the guidance of people toward social ideals." In other words, the nurturing, development, and direction of society along the path of revolutionary values, and its shaping on the basis of Islamic-revolutionary foundations, is called society-building (Ostovar Mimandi, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 129). Society-building is a jihadi process and a form of capacity-building for the realization of the aims of Islamic society, and it also lays the groundwork for the creation of the New Islamic Civilization and a monotheistic order at the global level (Nouri, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 7).

The central points of the Second Phase statement in the realm of society-building include the advancement of knowledge, the pursuit of justice, the reform of incorrect structures inherited from the past, the strengthening of independence and national freedom, and the improvement of the economic condition of society (Kazemi Varmaleh and Shokrbegi, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 39). Reforming the attitude toward society-building must aim at creating national dignity and must be grounded in realities drawn from society itself; if this is neglected, growth and progress in society will come to a halt. Only with such a goal, in line with God-centeredness, can society-

building be achieved. Such a society possesses a sense of identity, and no loud and domineering voice will easily overpower it (Khamenei, 2017 AD/1397 SH).

Based on this approach, Islamic society is a society whose governance and laws are divine: divine ordinances are implemented, its institutions derive from the religion of God, and the noble religion of Islam determines and supports social relations, the economic system, and legal rights (Khosropanah, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 1, 331). This approach is exactly contrary to the Western approach to society. They believe that religion and religious values are entirely private matters and that their manifestations should not appear in society. Secularist thought means the removal of religion from society (Saber and Javadi, 2017 AD/1397 SH: 4). By contrast, in the New Islamic Civilization, religion and monotheistic values must be present in all dimensions of society, from economics and culture to education and upbringing, and the whole of society must take on a monotheistic character. So long as an attitude of society-building and the expansion of monotheistic foundations in the pillars of society do not take shape, one cannot hope for the realization of the New Islamic Civilization. Therefore, society-building is a jihadi effort to realize the goals of Islamic society and is regarded as a form of capacity-building and groundwork for creating the New Islamic Civilization based on a monotheistic order.

4.4. Attitude Toward Ethics and Spirituality

Ethics refers to the inner traits of the human being that have become ingrained and include both good and praiseworthy qualities as well as ugly and blameworthy ones (Moallemi, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 19). Spirituality, in the lexical sense, is defined as that which is non-material (Dehkhoda, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 14, 121) and it has often been used metaphorically for religion. Spirituality refers to sacred or unseen matters, moral and religious values, mysticism, and any form of meaning-giving to life (Sharifani, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 179).

Unlike Christianity, which confines sanctity exclusively to the space of churches, in Islam, sanctity and spirituality permeate all dimensions of a Muslim’s life. This includes social etiquette, styles of dress, and even urban architecture and buildings. Authentic Islamic traditions, whether in family life, human interactions, or artistic and architectural expressions, overflow with manifestations of spirituality (Alami, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 142).

In the Second Phase of the Revolution statement, ethics and spirituality are identified as fundamental components of the New Islamic Civilization: "Spirituality means highlighting spiritual values such as sincerity, sacrifice, trust in God, and faith within

oneself and society; ethics means observing virtues such as benevolence, forgiveness, helping the needy, truthfulness, courage, humility, and self-confidence." (Khamenei, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 17) The spirituality and ethics emphasized in this statement are distinctly religious, not secular or detached from divine principles. While religious rituals play a significant role in cultivating spirituality, spirituality is not limited to ritualistic worship alone; it is a way of life and the essence of a Muslim's existence (Kangarani Farahani and Sobhani, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 17).

Ethics and spirituality are not purely personal matters; they must also be promoted across societal spheres. The Second Phase statement emphasizes the expansion of ethical virtues into political, economic, cultural, and managerial domains. Thus, the desired ethics in the Islamic Republic are comprehensive, encompassing individual, familial, and social domains, including governance, policy-making, economics, trade, jurisprudence, and international relations. Spirituality, too, must be integrated into daily challenges and the realities of social life (Roudgar, 2008 AD/1386 SH: 47). Only when ethics and spirituality permeate all aspects of personal and social life can one hope to realize the New Islamic Civilization.

Therefore, spirituality and ethics are among the most important requirements for realizing the New Islamic Civilization. The Islamic Revolution possesses a spiritual and ethical nature, and its continuation requires serious attention to these foundations. Spirituality and ethics are regarded as the underlying basis of every action within the framework of the Revolution and the system. Furthermore, since spirituality is part of human existence and ethics is a need of human societies, in confronting the crisis of meaning and morality in the West, attention to the spiritual and ethical dimension can herald a kind of civilization that restores the connection between the material and spiritual dimensions of human life (Ghorbani and Ghazanfari, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 64), just as the New Islamic Civilization seeks to do.

The Second Phase Statement holds that responsibility for promoting ethics and spirituality does not rest solely on the state, and that coercive approaches and direct state control in these areas are unacceptable, as they conflict with the foundations of Islamic anthropology. At the same time, the Second Phase Statement also does not accept the theory of absolute laissez-faire, and regards neither complete coercion nor total abandonment as the solution. Rather, it introduces "Creating the proper conditions" as the principal strategy for promoting ethics and spirituality. Accordingly, the state must provide the grounds for the spread of ethics and spirituality, give room to social institutions, and seek their assistance, because these institutions can function as mechanisms for the production of values and norms, and if they are aligned and

coordinated, they can generate considerable positive social effects (Alijanzadeh, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 360).

In addition, just as Islamic governance in Islamic civilization considers itself responsible for the welfare of the people; it must also regard itself as responsible for their spiritual, moral, and ethical growth and elevation; thus, liberal and secular thought, which sees the state as responsible only for the material aspect of people's lives and leaves the ethical and spiritual issues of society unattended, stands in direct opposition to Islamic civilization. This is because the New Islamic Civilization seeks to create a link between religion and the lived experience of the people, and so long as no attitudinal change takes place regarding ethics and spirituality at both the individual and broader social levels, and people do not attend to them as important and influential matters in all dimensions of life, one cannot expect the emergence of the New Islamic Civilization. Therefore, one of the attitudinal requirements for realizing the New Islamic Civilization is attention to spirituality and ethics in both the individual and social spheres.

Conclusion

The realization of the "New Islamic Civilization," presented in the Second Phase of the Revolution statement as a strategic and ideal horizon, requires, above all, a reconsideration and reconstruction of individual and collective attitudes, more than it requires structural measures. The main issue in this article is whether the realization of the New Islamic Civilization can rely solely on institutional and technical mechanisms, or whether a transformation in individual and collective attitudes must be regarded as a precondition for civilizational realization.

The present study shows that without effecting fundamental changes in attitudes toward the future of Islam, individual and social responsibility, the process of society-building, and ethical and spiritual values, other structural and institutional measures alone will not be sufficient. An attitude grounded in hope for the future of Islam and belief in the indigenous capacity to shape civilization constitutes the motivational foundation for individual and collective action. Likewise, individual responsibility, from an operational perspective, lays the groundwork for the spread of participatory and ethically oriented behavior at the social level. The findings emphasize that effective society-building on the path of civilization-building requires support for formal and informal education, knowledge production, and culture-building in accordance with Islamic values, and intelligent policymaking that targets and strengthens attitudes.

The centrality of ethics and spirituality in this process, in addition to providing normative cohesion, helps confront identity crises and cultural assaults and leads to the formation of sustainable social capital. In other words, attitudinal transformation is both a prerequisite for and a requirement of institutional transformation: on the one hand, attitudes determine the direction of policymaking; on the other hand, purposeful policies can reproduce and deepen attitudes. On this basis, it should be emphasized that civilization-building is a gradual, systematic, and intergenerational process; changing attitudes is time-consuming, but without it, institutional and technical efforts will not bear fruit.

Therefore, prioritizing the attitudinal requirements highlighted by the present study is essential for effective progress along the path of the Second Phase. It is recommended that the following be treated as fundamental programs in this field: "Prioritizing attitudinal transformation programs in Second Phase policymaking; designing intergenerational educational and cultural programs; supporting the production of indigenous knowledge; formulating integrated structural-cultural policies; and establishing attitudinal indicators for monitoring progress."

Ethical Considerations

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Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no conflict of interest.

Adherence to Research Ethics Principles

The authors have observed ethical principles in conducting and publishing this scientific research, and this has been confirmed by all of them.

Data Availability Statement

The data of the present study are available upon request from the authors.

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Contemporary Researches on Islamic Revolution

Representation of Foreign Countries in the Curriculum of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Case Study: Social Studies in Secondary Education)

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ABSTRACT

Objective: School textbooks consistently reflect political orientations aligned with the dominant political-social system. This is because one of the fundamental missions of the educational system, and more specifically the curriculum, is political socialization. Accordingly, a significant portion of textbook content, either explicitly through formal curriculum objectives or implicitly through hidden curriculum elements, conveys the ideological orientations of political systems. One manifestation of political socialization is the portrayal of foreign governments in school textbooks. Based on this premise, the present study was conducted with the aim of examining the representation of foreign countries in the social studies curriculum of secondary education in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Therefore, the study seeks to answer the central question: 'What image of foreign countries is presented in secondary-level social studies textbooks in the Islamic Republic of Iran?'

Method: The study employed a mixed-method content analysis approach (quantitative and qualitative). The statistical population consisted of social studies textbooks for lower secondary education during the 2024–2025 academic year (1403–1404 in the Iranian calendar), and the entire population was selected as the sample. Data were collected using a researcher-developed checklist. The content validity of the indicators was confirmed through the Lawshe Content Validity Ratio (CVR) based on expert evaluations. Data reliability was established with an inter-rater agreement coefficient of 98%. Data analysis was conducted using frequency tables, percentages, and the chi-square test in the quantitative section, and thematic analysis in the qualitative section.

Findings: The findings showed that there were a total of 540 references to indicators related to the representation of the outside world. Among these, the highest frequencies belonged to the indicators of "Identification of Enemies" with a frequency of 245 (45.37%), and "Introducing colonialism and imperialism and emphasizing the necessity of combating them" with a frequency of 163 (30.18%). These were followed by the indicators of the "Necessity of unity among Muslim nation-states," "Familiarization with allied/neighboring countries," and "Rejection of domination/rejection of subordination and independence in foreign policy neither (Neither East nor West)," with frequencies of 45 (8.33%), 40 (7.4%), and 37 (6.85%), respectively. The indicator "Support for the oppressed, liberation movements, and defense of Muslims' rights" had the lowest frequency, at 10 (1.85%).

Conclusion: Analysis of the textbooks indicates that within the curriculum of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the identity and image presented of different countries are largely shaped by the prevailing ideology. In addition to introducing students to various countries, the curriculum appears to represent national identities in accordance with the existing political paradigm and the relationship between Iran's political system and other political systems.

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Introduction

The world as portrayed through media serves as a powerful source of meaning about the social world, because the continuous and repeated media representation of others has a significant influence on audiences' thoughts, perceptions, attitudes, and actions, to the extent that they often perceive these representations as reality itself. Therefore, in social and political communication, the stereotypical images created by media and embedded in our minds have a substantial impact on how we perceive one another (Pakzad and Jebelli, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 2).

For this reason, official media occupy a prominent and highly sensitive position within the political structure of states (Golbach and Sonin, 2014: 165). Accordingly, analyzing official media in nation-states can reveal the position and image constructed of other political systems and nation-states (Salim, 2007: 133).

One of the principal instruments for transmitting political beliefs and values in centralized educational systems is the national curriculum (Mansouri and Yahyaei, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 184). In centralized political systems, all learners are influenced by a single medium in the form of a national textbook; therefore, textbooks play a significant role in shaping representations of different nation-states (Wiseman, 2021: 248). Consequently, the relationship between the educational system and the political system and its institutional components has long attracted scholarly attention, to the extent that education can be regarded as one of the main agents of political socialization. Political socialization, which is achieved through the political curriculum, refers to the cultivation and transmission of values, attitudes, skills, and awareness that foster a sense of responsibility and active participation in political affairs. It also develops the ability to evaluate and monitor political matters in order to prevent potential deviations of governments from accepted norms and desired ideals (Gholtash, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 51).

Moreover, specific policies regarding curriculum content are approved by political authorities and implemented in schools. Therefore, political decisions made outside the educational system can alter students' and the public's mental images and perceptions of individuals and groups (Alaghehband, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 72). Curriculum is considered one of the most important elements in directing the educational system and serves as its core (Abedini Baltork and Nili, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 2). It provides an appropriate platform for delivering knowledge, shaping attitudes, and teaching skills to students, adults, and primary decision-makers (Nour al-Dahr Yazdi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 74).

In the country's current centralized educational system, the curriculum's primary output is textbooks, which are used nationwide. Textbooks are also regarded as one of the most important and widely used media within the educational structure. They contain written content, images, and exercises designed and developed to achieve educational objectives (Niknafas and Aliabadi, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 140). Furthermore, textbooks, as learning tools, do not merely convey explicit messages; like any other medium, they can also contain implicit or hidden messages (Nouriyan, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 81). As influential media, they can play an effective role in raising students' awareness and shaping their understanding of social and political issues (Abedini Baltork and Saffar Heydari, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 284).

One of the school subjects that specifically addresses students' political socialization is Social Studies. Accordingly, the representation of the outside world and the portrayal of foreign nation-states in the Social Studies curriculum can concretely reflect the broader orientations of national policy. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the image of foreign nation-states presented in secondary-level Social Studies textbooks.

One of the key theoretical frameworks for understanding the formation of mental images of the outside world is the concept of representation. Representation refers to a set of processes through which the meaningful actions of objects or behaviors in the real world are interpreted and assigned meaning. In this sense, representation is a symbolic practice that reflects an independent external world (Barker, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 66). In other words, representation means presenting reality in a particular way, which may occur verbally, in writing, or visually. Based on this understanding, representation, because of its influence on the real world and social realities, has become one of the most important tools through which dominant ideologies exercise influence over other groups. That is, representation enables various forms of power to communicate the objectives and functions of their policies to audiences through different media such as books, films, and similar platforms, thereby shaping people's ideas and attitudes (Ramezani, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 121).

Accordingly, the present study seeks to answer the following question: 'What image of foreign countries is presented in secondary-level Social Studies textbooks?'

1. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

With regard to the portrayal of foreign countries, two conceptual frameworks can be identified as the theoretical foundations of this study. One framework concerns the portrayal of foreign countries within curriculum discourse and the theory of the

political curriculum. Another influential framework on representation and image construction is Stuart Hall's theory of representation.

Hall argues that representation is the use of language to express meaningful ideas about the world around us and serves as a tool through which meaning is constructed. Through language, meanings can be transmitted to and exchanged with other members of society. Consequently, our thoughts, emotions, and ideas are reflected within culture through language. Based on this perspective, Hall considers representation to be part of the circuit of culture, connecting meaning and language to culture, because culture is concerned with shared meanings, and we can understand these meanings only through a shared language (Ramezani, 2021 AD/1400 SH).

According to Hall's theory of representation, there are three general approaches to representation:

A) Reflective Approach

According to this perspective, the primary function of language is to imitate or reflect nature. Language acts as a mirror that reflects the true meaning of events existing in the external world exactly as they exist. Hall illustrates this idea by explaining that the image or word *rose* is a sign and should not be confused with the actual plant that exists in reality. However, he emphasizes that human thought cannot always operate through direct interaction with real objects, such as a real rose growing in a garden, and that abstract concepts and signs are sometimes necessary in the realm of thinking and understanding.

B) Intentional Approach

Regarding this approach, Stuart Hall argues that systems of representation merely express what the author or communicator intends to convey. In other words, words carry the meaning that the speaker or writer intends to communicate. However, Hall identifies shortcomings in this perspective, one of which is that individuals cannot be regarded as the sole and unique source of meaning in language construction. This is because such an approach turns language into an entirely private game, whereas language is fundamentally a social system.

C) Constructionist Approach

This approach consists of two dimensions: the semiotic dimension (which examines how meaning is produced through representation and language) and the discursive dimension (which examines the effects, consequences, and broader politics of

representation). According to this approach, meaning does not depend on the physical or material characteristics of signs but rather on their symbolic functions. In fact, this theory is based on the assumption that phenomena and objects do not inherently possess meaning; rather, humans create meanings through systems of representation, concepts, and signs.

Accordingly, Hall argues that nothing meaningful exists outside discourse. This does not imply a denial of the external and material world; rather, it means that what carries meaning is the linguistic system, not the external material world itself. Human beings communicate with one another by drawing upon their systems of cultural concepts and linguistic systems, or other representational systems, and through these processes, meanings are constructed (Ramezani, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 178).

Therefore, based on Hall's theory of representation, the image presented of different countries in the curriculum of the Islamic Republic of Iran can be understood as embodying the meanings and interpretations through which the political system seeks to portray other countries to students.

In addition, the portrayal of foreign countries in the curriculum can also be examined from the perspective of political curriculum theory. According to scholars of political thought, curriculum is inherently political and addresses concepts such as values, the hidden curriculum, domination, popular culture, and identity (Fathi Vajargah, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 87).

A political curriculum is defined as a curriculum that, through educational processes and methods, seeks to cultivate stable perspectives and attitudes regarding broad and evolving local, national, and international political and social issues, as well as political and social events and phenomena, among learners. These perspectives are intended to become internalized so that they manifest in learners' behavior across different times and contexts.

From the perspective of political theorists, curriculum plays an important role in shaping and consolidating students' various political, cultural, and social identities. Consequently, political curriculum studies should examine both the explicit and hidden effects of the educational system, as conveyed through educational media, on people's attitudes and behavior (Yousefzadeh Chousari and Shahmoradi, 2016 AD/1395 SH).

Therefore, through the political curriculum, the educational system engages in the process of transmitting and internalizing the norms and values of the political system of society among students and fostering their political development. In other words, the educational system pursues the objectives of political socialization through curricula and textbooks such as history, geography, social studies, and similar subjects

(Alaghehband, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 90). Based on this perspective, and given that curriculum is inherently a political construct; the portrayal of different nation-states can be considered part of the process of political socialization.

A considerable body of research has examined the representation of the outside world and the portrayal of countries in media. However, a substantial portion of these studies has focused on non-official media, while others have examined visual media, including television networks. For example, Moradifar and Omidi (2021 AD/1400 SH), in a study titled "Trump's Image Construction of Iran through Twiplomacy (Twitter Diplomacy)," showed that the representation was constructed through two concepts: "The image of self (the United States) and the image of the other (Iran)."

Regarding the image of self, the findings suggest that Trump sought, on the one hand, to present himself as restoring American power and to demonstrate stronger performance than Obama. Through this portrayal, Trump represented the United States as a trustworthy and democratic actor confronting Iran, which was depicted as a state seeking nuclear weapons and disrupting U.S. security and the international order. On the other hand, Trump portrayed Obama and the Democratic Party as actors undermining American power, arguing that by supporting Iran's national and regional objectives, they exhibited weak resolve and unstable leadership.

Regarding the image of the other, Iran was represented as an enemy of the United States, portrayed as disrupting the international order and as possessing an authoritarian political system with deficiencies in democratic governance.

Ejazi et al. (2020 AD/1399 SH), in a study titled "The Impact of Mainstream United States Media on U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Iran (2007–2020)," found that American media, by amplifying issues such as Iran's nuclear program, not only negatively influenced the perceptions of U.S. political elites toward Iran but also contributed to the development of unfavorable attitudes among American political leaders toward Iran.

Sepehri (2018 AD/1397 SH), in a study titled "The Representation of Iran in American Television News Networks," found that American networks, including NBC and CNN, sought to construct an image of Iran based on discursive components such as Iran's support for terrorism, the polarization of "Us" versus "The Other," Iran's unreliability, public dissatisfaction within Iran toward the government of the Islamic Republic**,** and, more broadly, the presentation of a negative image of Iran aimed at promoting Iranophobia.

Haghbin (2018 AD/1397 SH), in a study titled "The Representation of Iran in the Russian News Agencies RIA Novosti and Interfax," found that with the expansion of military and security cooperation between Iran and Russia, particularly during the

Syrian crisis, and the parallel development of economic relations, Iran was portrayed positively in these news agencies and ultimately represented as Russia's principal partner and ally. However, this partnership was described as fragile and unstable due to Russia's desire to maintain a regional balance of power, its insistence on preserving relations with all Middle Eastern actors, especially Israel, and its pursuit of its own national interests.

Forghani and Bakhshandeh (2017 AD/1396 SH), in a study titled "The Impact of Foreign Policy Discourse on News Coverage: The Representation of the United States and the United Kingdom in Major Iranian Newspapers During the Conservative and Reformist Periods," demonstrated that major Iranian newspapers reflected the foreign policy positions adopted by the Iranian government of the time when covering developments related to the United States and the United Kingdom. Accordingly, during the Reformist period, when foreign policy emphasized détente and de-escalation, the United States and the United Kingdom were represented positively in major newspapers. In contrast, during the Conservative period, when tensions with the West increased, these countries were represented negatively.

Nazari and Nemati Anaraki (2017 AD/1396 SH), in a study titled "Reverse Orientalism in the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting's News Representation of the West," found that the West was frequently represented through discursive components such as racism, support for terrorism, human rights violations, Islamophobia, colonialism, violence, and arrogance (hegemonic dominance). According to the authors, such representations challenged Western norms and values.

Nemati and Nazari (2016 AD/1395 SH), in a study titled "The Representation of England in State Broadcasting News: A Discourse Analysis of the 9 PM News Bulletin," found that news coverage in this program predominantly represented England through discursive themes such as Islamophobia, support for Zionism, criminality, conspiracy, colonialism, and violence.

Pakzad and Jebeli (2015 AD/1394 SH), in a study titled "A Comparative Study of Foreign Television News and People's Mental Framework of the Outside World: With Emphasis on the Palestinian Crisis," found that continuous coverage of events in Palestine on foreign television news influenced audience conceptualizations and shaped public perceptions toward viewing Palestine as characterized by instability, unrest, and violence, while identifying Israel and the United States as the two actors responsible for conflict and occupation.

Azizi (2013 AD/1392 SH), in a study titled "The Representation of Iran in American High School Textbooks," found that Iran was commonly represented in U.S. secondary school textbooks through themes such as: "Anti-Western Iran, important

Iran, troublesome Iran, oil-rich Iran, weak Iran, Islam as a threat, and justifications for U.S. actions in Iran."

Hashemi (2009 AD/1388 SH) found that school textbooks, in relation to peace education, emphasized issues such as preserving national cohesion and territorial integrity, identifying enemies, familiarizing learners with the colonial policies of powerful Western countries, recognizing imbalances of power and international political, economic, and cultural exchanges, and confronting external threats and aggression.

Ivana and Suprayogi (2020 AD), in a study titled "The Representation of Iran and the United States in Donald Trump's Speech: A Critical Discourse Analysis," found that Iran was portrayed as a country pursuing nuclear ambitions and engaging in terrorist activities, while the United States was represented as a powerful and invincible nation. The findings also showed that Trump was portrayed as a figure highly aware of his country's political conditions and capable of identifying Iran's weaknesses. Moreover, as president, he called upon both the American people and countries around the world to cooperate in achieving global peace. Consequently, the study suggested that countries around the world supported U.S. actions and expressed serious concern regarding Iran's conduct.

Dunocombe (2016 AD), in a study titled "Representation, Recognition, and Foreign Policy in Iran-U.S. Relations," examined the impact of how one country's representation of another influences foreign policy behavior. The findings showed that these dual representations of self and other generate identity narratives for both countries that contribute to mutual misrecognition and intensify tensions between Iran and the United States in the context of nuclear negotiations.

Jaspal (2014 AD), in a study titled "Representing the Zionist Regime: Anti-Zionist Mass Communication in Iran's English-Language Media," found that these media outlets, acting as spokespersons for Iran, adopted and promoted a strong anti-Zionist position by refusing to recognize the Israeli state and civilian population and by constructing the Zionist regime as a terrorist threat that should be collectively confronted by the Islamic world. In other words, these media sought to export anti-Zionist ideology to international audiences and globalize this ideological perspective. According to the study, this process could contribute to the delegitimization of the State of Israel, increased antisemitism, negative intergroup relations, and greater isolation of Israel.

Therefore, a review of the research literature indicates that a substantial portion of previous studies has focused primarily on visual media and social networks, while textbooks, as a widespread and influential medium, have received comparatively less

attention. Accordingly, the present study seeks to examine textbooks based on indicators related to the construction and representation of the outside world.

2. Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive-analytical approach and falls within the category of applied research, using a mixed-method content analysis design (quantitative and qualitative). To answer the research questions, the pages of secondary-level Social Studies textbooks, including text, questions, exercises, and images, were examined and analyzed through document analysis.

To accomplish this, the first stage involved developing indicators related to the portrayal of foreign countries through the research synthesis technique (meta-synthesis). Research synthesis refers to the production of new knowledge by clarifying relationships and differences across reports from individual studies that had not previously been examined collectively. This method involves the purposeful selection, review, analysis, and integration of primary research reports addressing a similar topic.

Accordingly, previous studies concerning the political representation of nation-states and political systems in the research literature were first identified, searched, and selected; subsequently, themes related to the representation of foreign countries were extracted.

The statistical population in this stage of the study included all documents and records available in the databases of the Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC), Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research (ACECR/SID), Magiran, and Google Scholar. Sampling was purposeful, and the sample consisted of all available documents relevant to the topic. Collection of sources and documents continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Out of 58 retrieved studies, 23 studies were selected based on their degree of relevance to the present research. Data analysis was then conducted using an inductive approach, and the main themes were developed, as presented in Table 1.

Subsequently, to examine the indicators of the representation of foreign countries in thematic form, frequency counts and percentages were calculated. Qualitative data analysis was also conducted, and examples of these indicators were presented.

The statistical population of the main study consisted of all Social Studies textbooks at the lower secondary level (Grades 7, 8, and 9) that were developed during the 2024–2025 AD/1403-1404 SH academic year by the Office for the Development of General and Secondary Education Textbooks of the Ministry of Education. To ensure precise

and reliable findings, the entire statistical population, that is, the full content of all Social Studies textbooks at the secondary level, was selected as the sample.

Table 1. Indicators of the Representation of the Outside World Based on the Research Literature

Indicator	Sources
Introducing colonialism and imperialism and emphasizing the necessity of combating them	Mohammadi Mehr (2003 AD/1382 SH); Jafari Zadeh Bahabadi & Khalili (2014 AD/1393 SH); Dehghani Firouzabadi & Vahabpour (2015 AD/1394 SH); Dehghani Firouzabadi (2016 AD/1395 SH); Alipour (2014 AD/1393 SH); Akbarzadeh & Ziarat (2019 AD/1398 SH); Hashemi (2009 AD/1388 SH)
Supporting the oppressed, liberation movements, and defending the rights of Muslims	Mohammadi Mehr (2003 AD/1382 SH); Dehghani Firouzabadi (2016 AD/1395 SH); Mansour (2023 AD/1402 SH); Rasouli Sani-Abadi (2012 AD/1391 SH); Akbarzadeh & Ziarat (2019 AD/1398 SH); Safavi (2008 AD/1387 SH)
Rejecting domination and maintaining independence in foreign policy (Neither East nor West)	Alipour (2014 AD/1393 SH); Madani (2014 AD/1393 SH); Dehghani Firouzabadi (2016AD/1395 SH); Akbarzadeh & Ziarat (2019 AD/1398 SH); Jafari Zadeh Bahabadi & Khalili (2014 AD/1393 SH); Shojaei (2010 AD/1389 SH)
The necessity of unity among Muslim nation-states	Madani (2010 AD/1389 SH); Jafari Zadeh Bahabadi & Khalili (2014 AD/1393 SH); Izadi (2016 AD/1395 SH); Mansour (2023 AD/1402 SH); Akbarzadeh & Ziarat (2019 AD/1398 SH)
Familiarization with allied countries	Haghbin (2018 AD/1397 SH); Mohammadi Mehr (2003 AD/1382 SH); Paul & Adamson (1990 AD)
Enemy identification (recognition of enemies)	Mohammadi Mehr (2003 AD/1382 SH); Hashemi (2009 AD/1388 SH); Jaspal (2014 AD); Paul & Adamson (1990 AD)

Next, to assess the validity of the indicators of the representation of the outside world, the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was calculated based on evaluations by specialists in educational sciences and political science. The results showed a CVR value of 1.00 for all indicators, indicating complete content validity of the indicators for measuring the intended variable.

Data reliability was also established using an inter-rater agreement coefficient of 98%. For data analysis, descriptive statistics (including frequency and percentage tables) were used in the quantitative section, while thematic analysis was employed in the qualitative section.

3. Research Findings

To examine the status of indicators related to the representation of the outside world in textbooks, the content was first analyzed using a researcher-developed checklist and assessed in terms of frequency and percentage distribution. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Indicators of the Representation of the Outside World in the Secondary Social Studies Curriculum

Indicators	**Grade 7 Social Studies**		**Grade 8 Social Studies**		**Grade 9 Social Studies**		**Total**	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Introducing colonialism and imperialism and emphasizing the necessity of combating them	1	2.77	23	11.44	139	45.87	163	30.18
Supporting the oppressed, liberation movements, and defending the rights of Muslims	1	2.77	8	3.98	1	0.33	10	1.85
Rejecting domination/rejecting subordination and maintaining independence in foreign policy (Neither East nor West)	11	30.55	1	0.49	25	8.25	37	6.85
The necessity of unity among Muslim nation-states	2	5.55	39	19.41	4	1.32	45	8.33

Familiarization with allied/neighboring countries	3	8.32	35	17.40	2	0.66	40	7.40
Enemy identification (recognition of enemies)	18	49.97	95	47.24	132	43.56	245	45.37
Total	36	100	201	100	303	100	540	100

Based on the results presented in Table 2, indicators related to the representation of the outside world appeared a total of 540 times across the lower secondary Social Studies curriculum. The frequency varied across the textbooks examined: 36 instances in Grade 7 Social Studies, 201 instances in Grade 8, and 303 instances in Grade 9.

The findings further indicate that, within the lower secondary Social Studies curriculum, the highest frequencies were associated with the indicators of "Enemy Identification" with a frequency of 245 occurrences (45.37%), and "Introducing colonialism and imperialism and emphasizing the necessity of combating them" with a frequency of 163 occurrences (30.18%).

Next in frequency were the indicators "The necessity of unity among Muslim nation-states" with a frequency of 45 (8.33%), "Familiarization with allied/neighboring countries" with a frequency of 40 (7.4%), and "Rejection of domination/rejection of subordination and independence in foreign policy neither (Neither East nor West)" with a frequency of 37 (6.85%). The indicator "Support for the oppressed, liberation movements and defense of the rights of Muslims" had the lowest frequency, with 10 occurrences (1.85%).

The qualitative analysis of the indicator "Introducing colonialism and imperialism and emphasizing the necessity of combating them" in the Grade 7 Social Studies textbook shows that this theme appeared once. The textbook states that:

"The main reason for the greed of certain colonial countries toward our country is precisely these abundant resources and capabilities, as well as the resistance of the people of this land against the bullying of others." (p. 50)

Similarly, the Grade 8 Social Studies textbook refers to examples and historical cases concerning the negative effects of colonialism on different countries. Among these are references to:

"The competition among colonial powers to gain access to the waters of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean," and "The establishment of military bases by colonial

powers such as the United States and England in order to secure their interests in dependent countries." (p. 128)

The textbook also discusses the challenges faced by Africans as a consequence of European colonial rule, stating:

"Over the past five hundred years, European colonialism, widespread genocide, civil wars, and repeated famines reduced the population of the African continent, while poor sanitation, the spread of various diseases, and droughts also hindered population growth." (p. 145)

In addition, the textbook explains European colonial practices in Africa as follows:

"When European colonial powers discovered and occupied the Americas, they abducted Africans and transported them as slaves to work on plantations and in mines. Between 1500 and 1800 CE, when millions of Black people were shipped to America, the horrific conditions in which slaves were kept during transportation caused several million of them to lose their lives along the way. In America, these enslaved people were sold to plantation and mine owners. They endured extremely harsh living conditions and were frequently subjected to severe punishment by their masters. Several centuries of colonial rule in Africa had such a profound effect on the continent that it deprived it of opportunities for growth and development." (p. 146)

Elsewhere, the textbook refers to the colonial role of the United States, stating:

"After the Second World War, the United States surpassed the European powers and replaced them in dominating and exploiting the resources of countries that had previously been European colonies." (p. 147)

In the Grade 9 Social Studies textbook, colonialism is also discussed extensively. For example, the colonial practices of countries such as England, the United States, and France are described as follows:

"For the past several centuries, arrogant and hegemonic countries such as England, the United States, France, and others have engaged in the exploitation and plundering of various countries through colonialism and in different forms, using their resources for their own benefit and preventing their progress." (p. 48)

The textbook also identifies the colonial objectives associated with the Treaty of Turkmenchay, stating that:

"Russia entered the war with all its forces and equipment and, after defeating the Iranian army, imposed the Treaty of Turkmenchay on our country, a treaty even more disgraceful than the Treaty of Golestan. Under this agreement, Iranian territories north of the Aras River came under Russian control, and, as with the Treaty of Golestan, Iran was deprived of maintaining warships in the Caspian Sea and was required to pay indemnities." (p. 75)

The textbook further addresses this issue through an activity question that asks:
"In your opinion, why did Amir Kabir insist on not employing Russian and English teachers at Dar al-Fonun School?" (p. 79)
The implied explanation is that Amir Kabir's intention was to prevent the influence of the colonial governments of Russia and England within Iran.
In addition, the textbook continues by presenting historical examples of colonial concessions embedded in agreements between Iran, Russia, and England (p. 80).
The textbook also discusses the selection of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi by the United States as a means of advancing American colonial objectives, stating:
"He [Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi], like his father, was not chosen by the people and was dependent on foreign powers; therefore, he obeyed the plans and objectives of those upon whom he believed his continuation in power depended." (p. 93)
The textbook further describes the conduct of the Allied powers regarding the division of global influence during the Second World War, stating:
"At one stage of the Second World War, the leaders of the Allied powers came to Tehran to make decisions regarding the future of the war and the division of the world among themselves. The leaders of the United States, England, and the Soviet Union stayed in the Soviet embassy in Tehran from 27 to 30 November 1943 without informing Mohammad Reza Shah or even notifying him of their visit. After holding their meeting and making certain decisions, they returned to their countries without showing the slightest regard for the Shah of Iran." (p. 93)
In addition, the textbook explains the nature of American influence through capitulation (extraterritorial rights) in Iran, Japan, and South Korea, stating:
"The United States compelled the Iranian government not only to cover the expenses of American military personnel but also to grant them judicial immunity, or the right of capitulation (extraterritorial jurisdiction). Under this immunity, if Americans committed any crime in Iran, Iranian courts had no authority to prosecute them." (pp. 99-100)
The textbook then expands on this issue and explains that:
"The United States stationed its military forces in Japan and obtained capitulatory rights there. Accordingly, an agreement titled "SOFA" was concluded between Japan and the United States, under which, if a member of the American military or civilian personnel committed an offense or crime, the Japanese government was not authorized to take action against that individual, and only the U.S. military could prosecute them. At the same time, a similar agreement was signed with South Korea. Capitulation, with slight modifications, continues to be implemented." (p. 100)
Elsewhere, the textbook states:

"Over the past two hundred years, our country has faced not only domestic authoritarianism but also the policies of Western colonial powers (Europe and the United States)." (p. 125)

Therefore, the textbooks strongly emphasize colonialism and imperialism, particularly through historical examples involving interactions with Western countries.

In addition, the Social Studies textbooks attempt to emphasize support for the oppressed, liberation movements, and the defense of the rights of Muslims. For example, the Grade 7 Social Studies textbook states:

"Every day we witness that the people of Palestine are wounded or martyred as a result of the unjust attacks of the occupying regime of Jerusalem. Or we hear in the news that people in some countries in Asia and Africa are being killed due to drought, poverty, and war, conditions that are sometimes caused by the intervention of bullying powers. Upon hearing such news, we say: If only we were there to help those harmed and oppressed."

Similarly, the Grade 8 Social Studies textbook states:

"Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran supports the oppressed people of all countries, especially Palestine." (p. 129)

The textbook also identifies Palestine as the most important issue facing the Islamic world and explains its significance as follows:

"The issue of Palestine and the injustice inflicted upon its people following its occupation by Zionist Jews is not merely an issue concerning Arab people, nor even solely an Islamic issue; rather, it is an issue of great importance." (p. 131)

Furthermore, the textbook presents support for the Palestinian people as both a religious and humanitarian duty, stating:

"In addition, it is the religious obligation and human responsibility of every free person that if enemies occupy a part of another country's territory and oppress its people, they should assist those people and struggle against the oppressors." (p. 131)

The discussion continues by stating:

"They did not allow people to feel that the issue of Palestine was part of the issue of Muslims and Iran, and that it was connected to Iran's future and progress." (p. 132)

Here, the textbook presents Iran's progress as being linked to the resolution of the Palestinian issue. It then refers to Quds Day as an expression of the importance of the Palestinian issue, stating:

"Imam Khomeini, for the first time in the history of Arab, Islamic, and Palestinian struggles, designated a day as Quds Day, as a symbol of the struggle against Zionism."

In addition, the Grade 9 Social Studies textbook, in the lesson "Iran in the Period after the Victory of the Islamic Revolution," also addresses this issue:

"From the very beginning of its establishment, the Islamic Republic of Iran supported liberation movements throughout the world; for this reason, it severed relations with the occupying regime of Jerusalem and supported the uprising of the Palestinian people for the liberation of their land." (p. 107)

Therefore, one of the forms of representation of foreign nation-states in the Social Studies textbooks is the emphasis on support for liberation movements and Muslim causes.

The Social Studies textbooks also attempt to portray "The rejection of domination/rejection of subordination and independence in foreign policy (Neither East nor West)" as a major policy orientation of the Islamic Republic toward foreign countries.

For example, the Grade 7 Social Studies textbook links national independence to economic self-sufficiency and reduced dependence on foreign countries, stating:

"Our country strives both to increase its production and to improve the quality of its products through advances in science and technology so that, economically, we will not become dependent on foreign countries." (p. 34)

The textbook also refers to Iran's resistance after the Islamic Revolution against the encroachment of dominant powers:

"After the Islamic Revolution, despite the aggression of enemies, not even one square meter of its territory has fallen into foreign hands." (p. 50)

In Grade 9 Social Studies, regarding Amir Kabir's efforts to limit foreign influence, the textbook states:

"In foreign policy, he [Amir Kabir] paid special attention to preserving the country's independence and sought to eliminate the influence of Russia and England in Iran." (p. 77)

The text on the same page also refers to public opposition to granting economic concessions to foreign powers that would increase their control over the country's wealth and markets:

"The Muslim people of Iran understood that granting economic concessions to Russia and England would lead to greater foreign domination over their country's sources of wealth and markets. Therefore, they opposed granting some of these concessions." (p. 80)

The textbook further refers to the Tobacco Movement as one of the broadest social movements formed in protest against granting economic concessions to foreigners, stating:

"The Tobacco Movement was the first serious movement by the people of Iran to free themselves from foreign influence and domination and to resist domestic oppression,

and its success strengthened people's self-confidence and their spirit of resistance and struggle." (p. 80)

Elsewhere, the textbooks depict the background to the nationalization of Iran's oil industry, stating:

"The competition among England, the Soviet Union, and the United States to gain greater political and economic influence in our country undermined the country's political stability and tranquility. It was under these circumstances that the conditions for the Oil Nationalization Movement emerged." (p. 94)

The consequences of oil nationalization are also presented as a response to foreign domination:

"After the nationalization of the oil industry, Dr. Mossadegh became Prime Minister in order to implement that law and remove foreign control over the country's resources and oil industry." (p. 94)

Elsewhere, by presenting Imam Khomeini's perspective on domination and resistance, the textbook states:

"Relying on religious beliefs and values, the Imam called on the people to stand against oppression and foreign domination over the country."

In addition, the textbook refers to public dissatisfaction with American influence and domination in Iran:

"After the coup of 28 Mordad [19 August 1953] and Mohammad Reza Shah's return to power, a new phase of American influence and domination over Iran began. At that time, the Iranian people were dissatisfied with the defeat of the Oil Nationalization Movement and the influence of foreign powers over their country." (p. 98)

Also, in relation to dependence and the loss of national independence, the textbook states:

"In an important speech, Imam Khomeini described granting judicial immunity to Americans as a humiliating act and contrary to the country's independence, and he strongly criticized the Shah for his dependence on the United States." (p. 99)

Elsewhere, public dissatisfaction with the political, economic, and cultural conditions of the country due to intervention by foreign powers, particularly the United States, is highlighted:

"The Pahlavi government was dependent on foreign powers and the influence and intervention of foreign countries, especially the United States, in Iran's affairs increased public dissatisfaction." (p. 101)

The textbooks also seek to promote religious identity and reinforce the necessity of unity among Muslim nation-states.

For example, in the Grade 8 Social Studies textbook, in a chapter titled "The Emergence of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and the Rise of the Sun of Islam in Mecca," efforts are made to emphasize shared Muslim symbols, rituals, and beliefs. Various images of religious sites and mosques across the Islamic world are presented as symbols of common identity among Muslims (pp. 49-116).

Elsewhere, through presenting images of Masjid al-Haram, Karbala, and the massive Arbaeen pilgrimage of Imam Hussein, accompanied by the explanation that:

"Mecca and Medina, which are the holiest cities for Muslims, host hundreds of thousands of people each year during the Hajj pilgrimage and become the site of a magnificent and large gathering," the textbook further emphasizes the shared religious and cultural bonds among Muslims.

"Other large gatherings, such as the Arbaeen pilgrimage march, bring together millions of people every year," (p. 128) thereby referring to the religious and cultural unity of Muslims.

Furthermore, one of the reasons given for the importance of Palestine is that it is presented as the birthplace of the Abrahamic religions, which can demonstrate to students the role of Muslim unity in supporting and rescuing the Palestinian people:

"This land [Palestine] is the birthplace of the divine religions and the place where many prophets lived, and numerous holy sites are located there. For this reason, it is the focus of attention for many people around the world, including Muslims, Christians, and Jews." (p. 131)

The textbook also refers to the unity of Islamic nations for the elimination of Israel, stating:

"The only way forward in the struggle against Israel until its complete eradication is the unity of Muslims, the continuation of resistance, and the strengthening of the courageous protests and popular struggle (Intifada) of the people of this country." (p. 132)

Moreover, by presenting an image of the Great Mosque of Mali, as well as an image of the Hassan II Mosque, accompanied by the following description:

"The Hassan II Mosque is located in the city of Casablanca in the country of Morocco. With a height of 210 meters, it has the tallest mosque minaret in the world. The mosque is situated on the seashore, and part of it is built over the water," (p. 146) and also by providing a map of Muslim countries in Africa (p. 147), the textbook introduces students to Muslim countries and their mosques with the aim of strengthening the religious and cultural unity of Muslims worldwide.

Likewise, by presenting an image of a Shi'a mosque in the state of Michigan in the United States and providing information about Muslims in the Americas, the textbook emphasizes Muslim solidarity:

"Muslims also constitute a considerable population in the American continent, and there are important mosques in the United States." (p. 156)

On the other hand, the textbooks seek to emphasize familiarity with allied and neighboring countries.

For example, they devote particular attention to describing and introducing students to neighboring and allied countries such as China and Russia:

"At that time, silk was the most valuable and profitable commercial commodity that was exported from China to Iran and other lands." (Grade 7 Social Studies, p. 139)

Similarly, in the Grade 8 Social Studies textbook, in the lesson entitled "The Human and Economic Characteristics of Asia," images depicting the design, construction, and launch of a satellite in China, as well as an advanced train in Tokyo, Japan, are presented, and the following statement is made:

"China, Russia, India, South Korea, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Malaysia are among Asia's powerful countries in the fields of economy, industry, and agriculture. Japan and Russia are members of the Group of Eight countries. China and India are also members of the BRICS economic alliance." (p. 117)

The textbook further states:

"Over the past two decades, China has been able, through new planning and by relying on its domestic capabilities, to significantly increase its production and exports, thereby improving both its economic income and the living standards of its people. Today, nearly all types of goods produced in China are exported to various countries around the world."

Now, it is stated that:

"Malaysia has also made significant progress in industry over the past two decades and has earned good income through it." (p. 118)

However, part of the descriptions in the Social Studies textbook refers to other Western and Asian countries, but what is clearly evident is that the textbooks, in their portrayal of countries, primarily emphasize allied, partner, or neighboring countries.

Another prominently emphasized theme in the textbooks is the issue of "Enemy recognition" (hostile awareness/discernment of adversaries). For example, in the Grade 7 Social Studies textbook, the United States and Zionism are described as enemies characterized as unjust and criminal:

"A Basij member is someone who passionately and courageously defends Islam, the Qur'an, and the Revolution against enemies such as the oppressive United States and

criminal Zionism, fights against oppressors, and remains friendly and humble toward people and always ready to help others." (p. 10)

Elsewhere, it refers to the martyrdom and injury of the Palestinian people as a result of attacks by the occupying regime of Jerusalem, as well as the deaths of people in some Asian and African countries due to poverty, drought, and war, which are attributed to the intervention of bullying powers:

"Every day we witness that the people of Palestine are wounded or martyred as a result of the inhumane attacks of the occupying regime of Jerusalem, or we hear in the news that people in some countries in Asia and Africa are killed due to drought, poverty, and war, which are sometimes caused by the intervention of bullying powers. Upon hearing such news, we say: if only we were there to help those harmed and oppressed." (p. 23)

It is also stated that, in violation of ethical and humanitarian principles, some countries such as the United States or the illegitimate state of Israel prevent the delivery of medical services and medicine to countries in need, thereby endangering the lives of thousands of innocent people in countries such as Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, and Syria or putting their health at serious risk:

"Despite the necessity of mutual assistance based on moral and humanitarian principles, some countries such as the United States or the illegitimate state of Israel prevent the delivery of medical services and medicine to countries in need, thereby taking the lives of thousands of innocent people in countries such as Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, and Syria or seriously endangering their health." (p. 23)

It is further stated that enemies have attempted to dominate the country:

"After the Islamic Revolution, despite the aggression of enemies, not even one square meter of its territory has fallen into foreign hands." (p. 50)

It also recalls the looting of Iran’s archaeological artifacts and artistic treasures by countries such as France, England, and the United States:

"Before the Islamic Revolution, part of Iran’s archaeological remains and artistic treasures were plundered by certain countries, especially France, England, and the United States." (p. 105)

Elsewhere, by assigning a research task about the moral characteristics and military capabilities of the courageous and powerful Iranian commander, Lieutenant General martyr Qassem Soleimani, who was unjustly assassinated by criminal American terrorists, and asking students to present their findings in class, the textbook also conveys an image of hostility associated with the United States to students.

The Grade 8 Social Studies textbook also repeatedly and explicitly, both directly and indirectly, reminds students of the concept of the "Enemy" and "Enemy Recognition."

For example, regarding U.S. and British support for Israeli actions against Palestine and Muslims, it states:

"The occupying regime of Jerusalem (Israel), with the support of the United States and England, in addition to suppressing the oppressed people of Palestine and occupying neighboring territories, engages in conspiracies and hostility against Muslims in the region."

At the same time, the textbook attempts to present the authority and stability of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the face of dozens of American military bases as those of an adversary:

"After the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani during his official presence in Iraq by the United States, and Iran's decisive response through a missile strike on one of the most important American bases in the region (Ayn al-Asad in Iraq), the pace of withdrawal of American occupying forces from the region increased."

It also presents an image of the detention of American military personnel after their illegal entry into Iran's territorial waters in 2015 (p. 130), and refers to the resistance of Iran's naval, ground, and air forces against the Iraqi Ba'athist regime:

"The brave sailors of the Islamic Republic of Iran, like the ground and air forces during the imposed war initiated by the Iraqi Ba'athist regime against Iran, fought with great courage and bravery in the waters against enemies, defended the country, and ensured that no disruption occurred in the movement of commercial ships or the import of goods into Iran."

Furthermore, regarding the duty of Muslims in response to the occupation of Palestine and the oppression of its people by Israel, it states:

"In addition, it is the religious duty as well as the human responsibility of every free person that if enemies occupy a piece of another country's land and oppress its people, they should come to the aid of those people and fight against the enemies."

However, the textbook attempts to distinguish Zionism from Jews. For example, it states:

"In the world, there are many Jews who are opposed to Zionism. Zionism is an aggressive political-ideological movement that considers the establishment of the State of Israel its ultimate goal and uses any means necessary to achieve it. By Zionism, we do not mean only the occupying state of Palestine; rather, the establishment and administration of the State of Israel is only part of the activities of this group. They are, in fact, major capitalists who have extensive influence in countries such as the United States and largely dominate that country's politics. Today, even some international organizations have fallen under the financial, military, propaganda and cultural policies of Zionist expansionism." (p. 132)

Also, in the Grade 9 Social Studies textbook, by portraying the enemies of Muslims, it states:

"The forced migration of the Palestinian people from the occupied territories, or the mass migration of groups of people from Afghanistan, Syria, or Iraq to neighboring countries, due to war conditions and the military occupation of their countries by Israeli and American aggressors." (p. 45)

It is also stated that:

"The attack of the terrorist (fear-inducing) group ISIS, with the support of the United States and its allies" (p. 46) led to the migration of the people of Iraq.

In another section, referring to the reasons for hostility between Israel and the United States and Iran, it states:

"From the very beginning of its establishment, the Islamic Republic of Iran supported liberation movements throughout the world; for this reason, it severed its relations with the occupying regime of Jerusalem and supported the uprising of the Palestinian people for the liberation of their land. Accordingly, the domineering and coercive powers, led by the United States, launched extensive activities to divert and destroy the nascent Islamic system." (p. 107)

Regarding conspiracies by enemies to assassinate revolutionary figures and people, it states:

"One of the criminal actions of counter-revolutionary groups such as the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (Monafeqin), carried out with the support of foreign enemies, was the widespread assassination of revolutionary figures and political and cultural officials. As a result of these terrorist acts, many figures of the Islamic Republic system and close companions of the Imam were martyred. The Monafeqin even showed no mercy toward ordinary people and killed several thousand men, women, the elderly, and children."

The textbook further provides examples of terrorist actions carried out by the Mujahedin-e Khalq (including the assassinations of Ayatollah Motahhari, Martyr Beheshti, and Martyr Rajaei), which are presented as being supported by foreign enemies.

Regarding foreign military support for attempts to destroy the Islamic Republic, it states:

"It has been stated that during the Iran–Iraq war, foreign enemies of the Islamic Revolution (the United States, the Soviet Union, England, France, and Germany) provided military support to the Ba’athist regime of Iraq. At the same time that our country was engaged in extensive domestic counter-revolutionary unrest, the external

enemies of the Islamic Revolution imposed a devastating war upon the Iranian people."

On 22 September 1980 (31 Shahrivar 1359), Saddam Hussein, the head of Iraq's Ba'athist regime, with the support of some arrogant (hegemonic) powers, launched a war against Iran by ordering an attack on Khorramshahr and occupied parts of our homeland's territory. During the imposed war, various countries such as the United States, the Soviet Union, England, France, Germany, etc., provided the Iraqi Ba'athist regime with all kinds of equipment and intelligence support (p. 108).

Furthermore, images are presented of chemical weapons assistance provided by some European countries such as Germany to Saddam Hussein for chemical bombings of certain Iranian cities such as Sardasht, the U.S. attack on an Iranian passenger aircraft resulting in the death of 290 innocent people, and the U.S. attack on oil platforms in the final years of the imposed war. These are presented as evidence of military support and backing from foreign enemies of the Islamic Revolution (p. 109).

The textbook also refers to U.S. economic sanctions against Iran, stating:

"Another action taken by the enemies of the Islamic Revolution to increase pressure on the Iranian people and the Islamic Republic was the imposition of economic sanctions against our country. For the first time, shortly after the victory of the Revolution, the United States quickly imposed economic sanctions on Iran and confiscated many of Iran's funds in foreign banks or the country's assets abroad. Since then, these pressures and sanctions have been increased repeatedly under various pretexts, to the extent that even the Iranian people were deprived of access to some vital medicines."

It is also stated that psychological warfare by hegemonic powers such as the United States and England against Iran continues:

"Arrogant and bullying powers such as the United States, England, and their allies, after realizing that victory in a military war against the Islamic Republic of Iran was not possible, gradually entered into psychological warfare against our beloved country, which continues to this day."

Therefore, one of the most prominent images presented in the textbooks regarding foreign countries is the depiction of enemies, and this representation is constructed through historical examples and cases.

Conclusion

The results of the content analysis of the seventh-grade Social Studies textbook showed that, overall, the indicators of "Representation of the outside world" were

addressed 540 times. Among these, the greatest attention was given to the indicator of "Enemy recognition," with a frequency of 245 (37.45%).

In the next rank was the indicator of "Introducing colonialism and colonial practices and the necessity of fighting against it," with a frequency of 163 (30.18%). After that came the indicators of the "Necessity of unity among Muslim nation-states," "Familiarization with allied/neighbouring countries," and "Rejection of domination/rejection of being dominated and independence in foreign policy (neither East nor West)," with frequencies of 45 (8.33%), 40 (7.4%), and 37 (6.85%), respectively. The indicator of "Support for the oppressed and liberation movements and defending the rights of Muslims" had the lowest frequency, with 10 instances (1.85%).

Based on the findings, it can be stated that the Social Studies curriculum at the lower secondary level, in presenting and portraying foreign countries, follows a politically oriented approach grounded in national and historical values. In this approach, certain representation indicators, particularly "Enemy Recognition," are highly emphasized, while others receive comparatively less attention. Specifically, the authors of the textbooks place greater emphasis on "Enemy Recognition" and "Introducing colonialism and colonial practices and the necessity of fighting against it," whereas less attention is given to "Rejection of domination/rejection of being dominated and independence in foreign policy (neither East nor West)" and "Support for the oppressed and liberation movements and defending the rights of Muslims."

Accordingly, it can be concluded that the Social Studies curriculum at the lower secondary level addresses the indicators of foreign-world representation, derived from the foreign policy framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in an uneven and selective manner. This selective approach primarily highlights negative dimensions such as identifying enemies, external threats, and colonialism. This emphasis may increase students' awareness of security and political issues, as well as the history of colonialism and its role in shaping post-revolutionary political identity, potentially strengthening a sense of enemy recognition and awareness of colonial powers and resistance against them.

In the next stage, greater attention is given to allied countries and the unity of Muslim nation-states; although this attention would benefit from a more balanced and comprehensive approach, it may nonetheless influence students' understanding of the importance of cooperation and unity among Islamic countries and Muslims. However, comparatively less attention is given to concepts such as the rejection of domination, which may lead to an incomplete understanding among students regarding unity in the Islamic world, an issue that is currently strongly felt.

Given that textbooks are a powerful and widely used tool capable of influencing students' perspectives and attitudes by presenting specific information and concepts, careful reflection on the process of representing foreign nation-states is necessary. In fact, the current approach adopted in the Social Studies curriculum at the lower secondary level, due to its strong emphasis on enemy recognition and a pronounced depiction of external threats, may, while contributing to political and national identity formation and creating political distinctions, also lead to the formation of one-dimensional attitudes toward the outside world in learners' minds. It may further challenge the development of learners' political identity as active members of the Islamic Ummah and the global community.

Therefore, it is suggested that textbook authors and curriculum planners revise the content of Social Studies textbooks and strive to create a greater balance among the indicators of foreign-world representation, so that students can develop a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of global issues.

Ethical considerations

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Compliance with research ethics

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Data availability statement

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