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## RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL FACTOR IN IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA

This article highlights the role of the religious factor in Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia. In order to determine the priority directions of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the stages of formation and development of foreign policy towards Central Asia were analyzed. The significance of the concept of «Shia crescent» (Shia triangle) has been studied as the main direction of Iran's foreign policy and its reflection in cooperation with the countries of Central Asia and the Middle East. In the foreign policy of official Tehran in relation to the countries of the region, the reasons for rejecting the idea of «exporting» the revolution and the reasons for reorientation to a pragmatic policy were also analyzed. Iran's approaches to solving security problems in Central Asia have been studied. Special attention was paid to the strategic importance of Iran for Central Asia, at the present stage, common interests and directions for the development of economic relations between Iran and the Central Asian states were highlighted. In the 90s of the last century, Iran, using religious rhetoric, tried to lay the foundation for a policy towards the countries of Central Asia. It can be said that the countries of the region found themselves in such a difficult situation as the choice between a secular regime and a religious renaissance. Despite the confessional differences with the countries of the region, it should be noted that Iran sought to support political Islamic groups in the region.

**Key words:** Iran, Shiism, Central Asia, religious factor, exporting the revolution, Islam.

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### Иранның Орталық Азиядағы сыртқы саясатындағы діни-саяси фактор

Бұл мақалада Иранның Орталық Азиядағы сыртқы саясатындағы діни фактордың рөлі көрсетілген. Иран Ислам Республикасының сыртқы саясатының басым бағыттарын айқындау мақсатында осы елдің Орталық Азияға қатысты сыртқы саясатының қалыптасу және даму кезеңдері талданған. Иранның сыртқы саясатының негізгі бағыты ретінде «шиит жарты ай» (Шииттік үшбұрыш) тұжырымдамасының маңыздылығы және оның Орталық Азия мен Таяу Шығыстағы елдермен өзара іс-қимылда көрініс табуы зерделенді. Ресми Тегеранның аймақ елдеріне қатысты сыртқы саясатта революцияның «экспорты» идеясынан бас тартудың себептері мен оның орнына прагматикалық саясатты негізге алу себептері талданды. Иранның Орталық Азиядағы қауіпсіздік мәселелерін шешу тәсілдері зерттелді. Иранның Орталық Азия үшін стратегиялық маңыздылығына баса назар аударылып, қазіргі кезеңде Иран мен Орталық Азия мемлекеттері арасындағы экономикалық қатынастарды дамытудың ортақ мүдделері мен бағыттары бөлінді. Өткен ғасырдың 90-жылдарында Иран діни риториканы қолдана отырып, Орталық Азия елдеріне қатысты саясаттың негізін құруға тырысты. Аймақ елдері зайырлы режим мен діни ренессанс арасындағы таңдау секілді қиын жағдайға тап болды деп айтуға болады. Аймақ елдерімен конфессиялық айырмашылықтарға қарамастан, Иран аймақтағы саяси ислам топтарына қолдау көрсетуге тырысқандығын айта кеткеніміз жөн.

**Түйін сөздер:** Иран, шиизм, Орталық Азия, діни фактор, революция экспорты, ислам.

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### Религиозно-политический фактор во внешней политике Ирана в Центральной Азии

В этой статье подчеркивается роль религиозного фактора во внешней политике Ирана в Центральной Азии. В целях определения приоритетных направлений внешней политики Исламской Республики Иран были проанализированы этапы формирования и развития внешней политики в отношении Центральной Азии. Изучена значимость концепции «шиитский полумесяц» (шиитский треугольник) как основного направления внешней политики Ирана и ее отражение во взаимодействии со странами Центральной Азии и Ближнего Востока. Во внешней политике официального Тегерана по отношению к странам региона также были проанализированы причины отказа от идеи «экспорта» революции и причины переориентации на прагматическую политику. Изучены подходы Ирана к решению проблем безопасности в Центральной Азии. Особое внимание было уделено стратегическому значению Ирана для Центральной Азии, на современном этапе были выделены общие интересы и направления развития экономических отношений между Ираном и государствами Центральной Азии. В 90-е годы прошлого века Иран, используя религиозную риторику, пытался заложить основу политики в отношении стран Центральной Азии. Можно сказать, что страны региона оказались в такой сложной ситуации, как выбор между светским режимом и религиозным ренессансом. Несмотря на конфессиональные разногласия со странами региона, следует отметить, что Иран стремился поддержать политические исламские группы в регионе.

**Ключевые слова:** Иран, шиизм, Центральная Азия, религиозный фактор, экспорт революции, ислам.

#### Introduction

Today, Iran's foreign policy is more focused on pragmatism than on exporting the Islamic revolution. A failed attempt of Islamic Republic after 1979 to spread the regime to other countries, its tension with the Persian Gulf countries and its conflict with the West, pushed Islamic Republic of Iran to reconsider its foreign policy. Due to hostile relations with Western countries, Central Asia is an important region for Tehran to meet its security and economic needs.

Tehran's foreign policy in the Middle East and Central Asia is quietly different. We believe that Iran's goal was to spread the regime to neighboring states and create a large Shiite empire through the geopolitical structure of the Shiite Crescent.

However, the influence of the theocratic state in the region cannot be attributed only to religion. Its religious exports to Central Asia are still limited. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been rapidly establishing contacts with the new republics and trying to maximize the potential of diplomatic, economic or social interaction. None of the relations between states is based on religion. It is known that in Iran's foreign policy, it has chosen a policy of soft power rather than openly supporting the religious propaganda groups in the region.

#### Research methodology

Considering the issues of the religious factor in the foreign policy of the state, it should be noted that this direction is an actual direction, but it is not new. In this work, the authors applied the methods of the constructivist paradigm, according to which values and ideas are given priority in international politics. The religious factor in all its manifestations is used nowadays because it allows a subtler and deeper impact on a person and communities of people, on their consciousness and behavior. The authors also used a multifactorial analysis of foreign policy, which allows us to distinguish groups of internal and external factors of foreign policy of modern states. When analyzing the issues of the formation of Iran's foreign policy priorities in Central Asia, the authors widely used methods of historical analysis.

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### **The basis of the religious factor in Iran's foreign policy**

The Shiite factor is of particular importance in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. When the regime of last shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was overthrown, the rule of the clerics led by Shia cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini. The revolution that overthrew the Shah was done in the name of religion, and Iran became the Islamic Republic. The revolution that began in Tehran influenced all movements supporting Islamic fundamentalism for political activism worldwide (Lesch, 2001). It is clear that the recognition of Shia Islam as the state religion has had an impact not only on the government structure of Tehran, but also on the countries of the region from a political, social, cultural and military point of view.

The beginning of the uprising was caused by the US standing behind the policies of King Pahlavi. Because Pahlavi's policy was dominated by programs of westernization, persecution of Islamic elements and modernization of the country. A clear example of this is that the shah, under the influence of the West, was the only Muslim country that recognized Israel and at that time opposed the oil embargo imposed by the Arab states against the West (Malik, 2000). Although the revolution is a manifestation of the conflict between Islamic values and Western values, we can conclude that religion is not the only decisive factor.

Revolution leader R.M. Khomeini's intention to spread and promote the Islamic regime in the country to other countries can be seen from his speech "The revolution of the Iranian people is only the beginning of the great revolution of the Islamic world" (Khomeini, 1989). In the politics of the new regime, Islam became a tool used to liberate the oppressed people of the world from the authoritarian regime and the occupying power of the West.

Seeing the positive attitude of the middle and lower classes in Muslim countries and Third World countries to the exporting the revolution, the Iranian authorities quickly began to provide rhetorical propaganda and financial support. Iran started to encourage the Islamic movement in Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon and Iraq.

However, Ayatollah Khomeini's view that exporting the revolution took precedence over political stability and economic development in the state failed. Encouraging and supporting the revolution in other countries had come at tremendous cost to Tehran.

In addition, most Arab states negatively reacted to the declaration of an Islamic republic in Iran and particularly to some aspects of its foreign policy, especially in the Middle East. The countries of the region, primarily Egypt and Saudi Arabia considered as a serious threat to their international and domestic political interests Iran's persistent efforts to show up the Islamic Republic as an "absolute Islamic model" and present itself as the center of world Islam.

The most successful Islamic revolution was in Lebanon. The reason for its beginning is the pressure of the Shiites from the representatives of the local groups and the invasion of South Lebanon by Israel (Malik, 2000). At the same time, the increasing number of political-religious organizations in Lebanon, which proposed the abolition of the system of religious governance, relegated the role of Shia to the secondary position. The leadership of Iran considered Lebanon a suitable place for the spread of the revolution, and directly participated in igniting radical movements there. The influence of radical organizations such as "Hezbollah" and "Amal", which advocates the establishment of a theocratic state, had increased in the country. Tehran tried to subjugate the Lebanese radical groups. With the help of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Hezbollah tried to build its weapons base. Among the Shiites, the rise of Hezbollah created a rivalry with representatives of the Amal group. There were even major armed clashes between the groups. The idea of creating an Islamic Republic of Lebanon faced great difficulties.

Iran's most unsuccessful step in spreading the Islamic regime was in Iraq. The proximity of Iraq to the state, where the majority of the population adheres to Shiite Islam, seemed rational to Tehran. However, his action further strained the relationship between the two countries.

However, in 1991 The Shiite insurgency in Iraq has resumed. At that time, Shiite rebels expected support from US President George W. Bush. Saudi Arabia has expressed concern over Iran's growing position in the entire Middle East region. Iran's unrealized attempt in 1980-1988 was carry out with the intervention of the USA in 2003. After the fall of Saddam Hussein's power, Iraq became a direct sphere of influence of Iran. Their main goal achieved when Hussain's power removed. This situation led to radical changes in the balance of power throughout the Middle East. Tehran noted that it recognizes the independence and territorial integrity of the neighboring state. In fact, Iran wanted to influence and take control over the formation of a new

government in Iraq. However, Iraqi Shia groups did not want to be a political tool in solving Iran's foreign problems. They also expressed their disapproval of the assumption of a theocratic state. It is clear that there are still differences between Sunnis and Shiites within the country (Kurshakov, 2013).

One of the priority directions of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the "Shiite Crescent". 2004 In December, the King of Jordan declared that he was afraid of the emergence of a "Shiite crescent" in the Middle East from Iran to Lebanon, known as the Iran Corridor. However, many researchers were skeptical about this statement of King Abdullah (Litvak, 2017).

"Shia Crescent" is a geopolitical entity consisting of Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. These countries make up the majority of Shiites in the Middle East. Although the term Shiite Crescent was first used by King Abdullah of Jordan, this concept has been used in Iranian politics since the 1960s. Radical groups in Iran started an armed struggle to create a transnational Islamist geopolitical entity in the Middle East – the Shiite empire. After significant changes in the Middle East in 2003, the influence of Shiites in the region increased. The conflict in Syria and Iraq has brought millions of refugees and internal migration to the territory's demographic changes. The demographic balance in the Iran Corridor has shifted in favor of the Shiites. The victory of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, the defeat of the Sunni leadership in Iraq and the dominance of the Shiite organizations in Lebanon have shown that the Shiites dominate the Middle East.

Middle Eastern countries, especially Syria, have become the most important strategic point in Iran's Shiite crescent plan. If this country's ties with Iran were severed, the Islamic regime's plans for the crescent were in danger of being disrupted. Also, in case of failure to implement the goal of the Shiite crescent, Tehran could lose the "land borders" it shares with Israel. For Iran, this territory is an effective target for oppressing the Jews. Along with this territory, there was a risk of losing many strategic objects in the Mediterranean Sea (Parchizade, 2021).

The collapse of the Shiite crescent will lead to a radical change in the balance of power in the Middle East. The rejection of the Islamic regime's nuclear project of 2015 was a step to preserve the territorial integrity of the Shia crescent. When the US overthrew Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, Iranian Islamists realized that it would be their next target. As a result, they abandoned their nuclear

project. But as the US intervention in Iraq began to decline, the Iranian regime began to revive. Tehran turned Washington's main attention to the nuclear issue, took advantage of the crisis in the Middle East, created terrorism and military structures, and conducted its rule quietly and steadily. Today, the Islamic Republic uses the ideology and values of Shiism as a tool to exert its political influence in the countries of the Near and Middle East.

### **Iran's anti-ideological policy in Central Asia**

From a geopolitical point of view, Central Asia has always been a zone of influence of neighboring great powers. Iran was the most active among the Muslim countries in developing relations with countries in the north. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the renaissance of Islam in Central Asia and the majority of the population being Muslims corresponded to Iran's religious and political interests.

The role of religion in Central Asian countries is special. Although the region is multi-confessional, Islam is the dominant religion. During the Soviet Union, religion was considered the most conservative ideology, so measures were taken to suppress religious movements. Only after the collapse of the Union, the revival of Islam began in this region. Even before that, there are signs of religious revival among the countries of the region. The Iranian revolution and the Afghan war fueled a religious movement in remote areas of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the 1980s ("Iran," n.d).

Traces of Iranian, Islamic and Chinese civilizations can be seen in Central Asia. Islam has always been a part of the identity of the people of this region, so religion has played an important role in ethnic and national unity both before and after the independence of these countries. In addition to religious commonality, Tehran has a common cultural and historical environment with Central Asian states.

The religious orientation of Central Asian states is based on the Sunni Islamic teachings of the Hanafi sect. However, its scope is limited. That is, it is forbidden to introduce elements of Sharia law into the legal framework. The most important task of using the religious factor in state administration is to promote "good" Islam, which makes a great contribution to the development of the state, and to fight against "bad" Islam, which threatens the stability and security of the state.

Despite the fact that the constitutions of all Central Asian countries protect the separation of

religion and state, Islam has risen to the status of state ideology throughout the territory. The destruction of Marxist-Leninist ideology could lead to anarchy. To fill the ideological vacuum, urgent measures were taken to promote Islam as a component of the national heritage and the ethical basis of the state. At the inauguration, the President of Kyrgyzstan A. Akayev and President of Uzbekistan I. Karimov's signing and swearing in both the constitution and the Koran can be recognized as a reflection of the political science of Islam in the region (Akiner, 2000).

The fact that each of the heads of state has expressed their particular Muslim religious beliefs has allowed the Iranian leadership to increase its geopolitical, cultural and Islamic presence in the region. However, the fact that Iran is a theocratic state and its aggressive policy with neighboring countries has caused concern in Central Asian countries.

It is assumed that Iran's diplomacy in Central Asia and the Caucasus was initially aimed at exporting the Islamic revolution. However, the spread of radical Islam in Central Asian countries was not threatened by Iran. As the population consists mainly of Hanafi Sunnis, the widespread acceptance of Iranian Shia Islam is unlikely. The threat of Islamization arose from Sunni radical movements based in Pakistan and Afghanistan (Sadeghi et al, 2000).

From the beginning, Iran rejected the idea of exporting the Islamic revolution, and since the presidency of Rafsanjani, its policy in this region has acquired a pragmatic character.

In his policy, he denied ideological features and did not overuse ethnic and linguistic ties. In its pragmatic policy, IRI understood that cultural dominance could become a reliable base for intensively spreading its influence in the region. He quickly worked to revitalize the cultural community, promoting the region's shared cultural heritage, especially in the 1990s. At the same time, it was emphasized that Iran is ready to provide significant assistance, paying attention to the need for cultural modernization in order to achieve true independence.

Iran moved away from cultural and political Islamic postulates in the region and focused on spreading and promoting monuments of Iranian cultural tradition: Persian language and poetry, the text of the Qur'an in Persian, general pre-Islamic ethnic and Islamic principles. The Muslim heritage was presented only as a general background in this doctrine.

Tehran stated that the role of its cultural heritage would allow to strengthen the economic union of

countries and to have a stable image in the Islamic world through establishment of an economic organization like the Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran (OIC). According to Iranians, the distinctiveness of its culture, the deep roots of its shared history with the people of Central Asia, help to integrate more effectively into the region (Varnavskiy, 2008).

Despite all the contradictions, Iran tried to establish economic and political ties with Central Asia in the 1990s. Despite Uzbekistan's crackdown on Tajik society, including the closure of Tajik language schools and a general rejection of Iranian features in the region's culture, Tehran has taken steps to maintain effective relations with Uzbekistan. For example, President Islam Karimov's support for sanctions declared by the USA in 1995 against Iran made it very likely that it would refuse to seek to break its relationship or even seek better ties with it. However, Iran did not allow open hostile actions of Uzbekistan.

Tehran emphasized the importance of interstate relations rather than supporting various militant ethnic groups in Central Asia. A clear example of this is the attitude of the Islamist ethnic groups who opposed the government during the devastating civil war in Tajikistan (1992–1997). Tehran refused to provide military aid to the Islamist forces that opposed the rule of Nabiev and Rakhmon, and did not provide any ideological or rhetorical support. Tehran believed that linguistically close Dushanbe could become a key partner. During the civil war, the presence of representatives of the United Tajik opposition in Iran had a negative impact on the relations between the two countries. Tajik authorities have accused Iran of supporting the banned Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan and trying to "export" the Islamic revolution.

However, he refused to characterize the conflict in Tajikistan as an ideological battle between those who want to establish a new system of governance based on Islam and the Soviet-era leadership. On the contrary, Tehran linked the conflict in Tajikistan with regional conflicts and rivalries between clans. Tehran's position on this conflict caused tension in relations with the Islamic opposition in Tajikistan and was criticized by the Iranian press (Menashri, 2007). Despite this, Iran managed to maintain relations with the Islamic and secular opposition leaders of Tajikistan. These ties allowed Iran to play a decisive role in ending the civil war in Tajikistan, but its crucial role was not recognized by either Russia or regional states.



Also, despite the differences between Uzbekistan and Iran in the 1990s, Tehran did not support the Uzbek Islamist movement. Iranian media, including the official Islamic Republic News Agency, criticized the Uzbek government's brutality against Muslim activists. However, in 1996 the possibility of sponsoring Islamic groups in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan after the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan became the main problem of the Central Asian states. Wahhabism, not the Iranian Islamic Revolution, was recognized as the main ideological threat.

Iran has been accused of trying to increase its influence in Central Asia by supporting Shia communities and parties. Any attempt by Iran to establish contact with the Persian Shiites in Uzbekistan was suppressed by the Uzbek authorities. The fact that the Taliban movement is a common threat to both Iran and Central Asia, as well as Tehran's support for anti-Taliban forces, has created an opportunity to improve Iran's relations with Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan. The coming to power of the Taliban caused fear in the countries of Central Asia. The leaders of these countries were afraid of the influence of the Taliban ideology on their people. Uzbekistan sought to become a guarantor of security in the region and increase its reputation as a fighter against Islamic fundamentalism. Iran and Uzbekistan were forced to join forces to help Tajikistan and resolve the conflict in Afghanistan (Mutahir, 1992).

However, Iran's anti-ideological policy towards Central Asia could not strengthen relations between the states. According to Armenian researcher Mger Sahakian, some leaders in Tehran still talk about the importance of exporting the "Islamic revolution" (Sahakyan, 2021). Kazakhstani researcher Adil Kaukenov noted that "Central Asian countries are very cautious in their relations with Iran, because they do not want the United States to put pressure on the Islamic Republic" (Kaukenov, n.d).

### Security

After the end of Cold War, the United States began to expand its influence in important parts of the world, such as Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Persian Gulf. This situation posed a serious threat to regional actors, especially Iran. Also, NATO's eastward expansion policy undermined Iran's security in the region. This concern has reinforced the need for alliances with major powers such as Russia and China.

U.S. military bases in Central Asia was Islam Republic's concern. In this context, the decision to

close the bases of Harshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan and Manas in Kyrgyzstan alleviated Tehran's concerns.

Tehran's concerns about radicalism, the Taliban and the US presence in the region are shared by Moscow. Their anti-American policies on various geopolitical issues, especially Syria, brought them closer together. These factors indicate the importance of Russia for Iran and the Islamic republic's caution against provoking Moscow in its regional policy (Atrisangari, 2020).

Tajikistan is the only post-Soviet republic with significant security cooperation with Iran. Joint cooperation includes military training exercises, training of Tajik officers in Iranian educational institutions and assistance in equipping their troops. As this relationship deteriorates in 2010, this partnership weakens. However, during I. Raisi's presidency, relations between the two Persian-speaking countries were re-promoted. The revival of this relationship reflects Tajikistan's desire to strengthen its security along its southern border. After the change of power in Afghanistan, it is the only country in Central Asia that did not establish contact with the Taliban for a long time. Among the Taliban, there are Tajik divisions that are dissatisfied with the authorities in Dushanbe. Dushanbe needs as many allies and military partners as possible to show the Taliban that it has strong allies. In 2022 Iran and Tajikistan governments held several interstate meetings to strengthen their ties in the field of security. The start of military operation in Ukraine contributed to further increase of this connection ("Iran I," n.d).

### Economy

In 1993 Rafsanjani noted that the main purpose of his visit to Central Asian countries is to develop business relations. However, before that, Iranian Foreign Minister A. Velayati stated that he does not consider the connection with Iran only from a commercial point of view. The reason for Tehran's pragmatism is that the Central Asian states have repeatedly shown their neglect to develop non-political, mainly economic relations with it. For example, the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan stated that it depends on Iran for the delivery of its goods by sea, but at this point Turkmenistan does not want to become an Islamic state of the Iranian model (Slavin, 2011).

Central Asian energy producers and oil industry experts believe that from a true economic point of view, Iran is the most rationale destination for Central Asian energy exports. Central Asian states could export its energy to Iran without a long pipeline through the Persian Gulf. A limited amount of Kazakhstan's oil is exported through a swap agreement with Iran. Turkmen gas was delivered to Northern Iran through this pipeline (Hunter, 2013).

Iran's greatest advantage, its geographic location and ability to provide rail and sea routes to landlocked Central Asian countries, has helped it expand its ties with the region. In the 1990s, Iran invested heavily in expanding its railway network to the borders of Central Asia to make itself more attractive to the outside world. 1995 A major step was the opening of a 703-kilometer railway line in March, linking Bagh in southern Iran with the port city of Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf. In Iranian President Rafsanjani, brought together 11 heads of state and opened newly the Mashad-Sarakhas-Tejen railway. Thanks to financing and the absence of political obstacles, Iran has been able to expand rail links with Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Thus, it contributed to the growth of a large transport network with Central Asia. As part of the agreement on the modernization of the Silk Road within the framework of the Economic Cooperation Organization, the start of weekly train services from Almaty to Tehran in 2002 was another important step in this direction (Efegil et al, 2003).

Iran is considered as a bridge to the world market to Central Asian states. In this context, Iran is paying great attention to the North-South transport corridor project, which will connect regional markets with the Indian Ocean. For Kazakhstan, this corridor is one of the main directions for developing transport and economic relations with Iran and India. Beijing proposed a project connecting China with Iran through Central Asian countries. In partnership with China, the Islamic Republic plans to build three train routes that will allow it to connect to ports in the Persian Gulf. The parties are developing the

China-Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran transport corridor by launching new routes in order to increase its attractiveness and diversify transport communications ("North-South," 2023).

On September 2021, Iran decided to become a full member of the SCO. According to Iranian media, the full membership process will be completed in 2023. According to expert B. Eragshev, "SCO is becoming an association of large regional leading countries. The entry of Iran will increase the potential of the organization, because Iran is a major regional power and has a significant authority in the Middle East and the Islamic world" ("Rasshirenie," 2022).

### Conclusion

We note that after the Islamic revolution in Iran and the coming to power of Shia clerics, the religious factor had a great influence on the process of forming the country's foreign policy.

Iran has been using Shiite influence tools to achieve its interests in the Middle East. However, in his foreign policy regarding Central Asia, Iran distanced himself from the ideological trap from the beginning, and prevented the rupture of relations with the states of the region as much as possible. Despite economic and financial difficulties, Iran managed to gain a certain place in the region.

Iran tried to establish relations with the countries of the region in different directions. First, he sought economic ties to offset trade and investment restrictions with the United States. Despite various restrictions, he built railways and gas pipelines. Second, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, he followed a policy of avoiding and not interfering with ethnic conflicts in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In none of these conflicts did Tehran support a clear "Islamic" factor.

Although Iran's character in Central Asia is not determined by ideology, it is clear that its assertive behavior in the Middle East will adversely affect its relations with Central Asia.

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