Iranian Scholars and Theorizing International Relations: Achievements and Challenges[1]

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Abstract

Since the emergence of the Islamic Republic in Iran, social scientists, including international relations (IR) scholars, have been called to develop endogenous/ indigenous theories to reflect Iranian/Islamic points of view. This theorizing has led some Iranian scholars to develop ideas about international life on the basis of Islamic texts and teachings. Furthermore, due to an increasing awareness of the Eurocentric nature of IR theories over the last few years, the international community of IR scholars has become open to non-Western IR theories. This opening has made homegrown theorizing more attractive to Iranian IR scholars, and debates about it have become more vivid. This article seeks to examine the attempts by the Iranian IR community to conceptualize and theorize IR from Iranian/Islamic points of view and to show how contextual factors have limited such attempts. The first part of the article reviews the IR scholarship in Iran to give a portrait of Iranians' achievements in this regard. The second part examines contextual factors that may have affected homegrown theorizing in Iran, including international agency, sources of inspiration, the dynamism of the IR community, the relationship between academia and government, and intellectual autonomy. An evaluation of this structural context suggests that even if theorizing IR from an Iranian point of view is both possible and preferable, this cannot be done unless certain structural constraints are overcome.

Keywords: International Relations, Iran, homegrown theorizing, Iranian theory of IR

1. Introduction

Since the emergence of the Islamic Republic in Iran, social scientists, including IR scholars, have been called to develop theories to reflect Iranian/Islamic points of view. In the first years after the Islamic Revolution, calls for the Islamization of universities were taken to mean changes in the content and curricula of social sciences and humanities courses. The Cultural Revolution of the early 1980s, which led to a temporary shutdown of university classes, sought the same idea. The curricula were changed to some degree, and Islamization led to including courses on the history of Islam, theology, and jurisprudence as requirements for all majors; adding the adjective "Islamic" to existing courses in social sciences, including political

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science and international relations (e.g., Islamic International Law, Islamic Politics, etc.); and introducing a limited number of specifically new courses such as Political Jurisprudence.

During the last decade or so, another call for change in the existing approaches to the social sciences has emerged, with an emphasis on their becoming *bumi* ("homegrown,"[2] "native," "indigenous," or "endogenous"[3]), which is taken to mean not only Islamization but also a kind of "Iranization" of knowledge pursued and produced in academia. This shift has encouraged some Iranian scholars to develop ideas about international life on the basis of Islamic/Iranian[4] texts and teachings.

At the same time, thanks to calls for marginal voices to be heard as well as to the failure of existing IR theories in their predictions about the end of the Cold War, an increasing awareness and critique of the Eurocentric nature of IR theories has led the international community of IR scholars to become interested in the status of IR in other parts of the world and more open to non-Western understandings of international relations.[5] This change has made endogenous/indigenous theorizing more attractive to Iranian IR scholars, and debates about it have become more vivid. Some Iranian scholars wholeheartedly advocate such an endeavor; others find it somewhat worthwhile; and a few do not agree with it at all.

A review of the work on the status of IR and IR theories in Iran shows a variety of approaches. Some of the literature has a rather descriptive approach and shows the characteristics and trends in the country.[6][7] Other research, in a 'pathological' analysis of IR in Iran that focuses on its shortcomings and defects, emphasizes the Westernized nature of political science/IR in Iran and the need for an Iranian/Islamic perspective to replace or at least co-exist with it.[8] And some research has more of a focus on investigating new openings

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[2]   I must thank the All Azimuth Workshop for the word *homegrown*, which covers much of the meaning implicit in the Persian word *bumi* as I have used it.

[3]   I make a distinction between the last two: an *endogenous* approach may reflect the needs, perspectives, experiences, and history of Iran and Iranians, while it might not rely on Iranian/Islamic sources for conceptualization and/or theory building. Historical events such as the experience of wars against Iran in the modern era, including wars with Russia in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, or the Iraq war against Iran in the 1980s, may lead to specific understandings of the nature of war, and, for example, to a particular Iranian realist or constructivist theory of war that can be called endogenous. An *indigenous* approach seeks to create a genuinely different view of IR and IR theorizing based on Iranian and/or Islamic sources and conceptualizations.

[4]   In Iran, when an author calls her/his work *Islamic*, it usually means that it is based on Islamic teachings, which, in the case of Shiite Iranians, include the *Quran*; the Prophet's sayings and practices (*sunna*); the statements, deeds, and teachings of twelve Shiite Imams; and Islamic/Shiite jurisprudence, mainly produced by Shiite clergy (*shari'a* or *fiqh*). Interpretations of the sources may of course differ enormously, but the sources themselves are more or less the same. Sometimes Persian literary works are not produced by experts in Islam but are either inspired by Islamic concepts and teachings (much of the poetry and works on ethics, for example) or include teachings not taken to be based on *shari'a* (Sufis' work, for example) that may become inspirations for conceptualizations in IR; these can be called Islamic-Iranian. We may also consider non-Islamic but Iranian sources of inspiration with references to pre-Islamic sources, such as the conduct of Iranian kings like Cyrus the Great or Zoroastrian sources; even if the conduct of post-Islamic statesmen is taken as a source of inspiration, it can be regarded as Iranian. For these reasons, I prefer to employ the adjective Islamic/Iranian to include all these "homegrown" indigenous categories. And of course, we may imagine having any combination of these in one particular work.

[5]   See Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, eds., *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and Beyond Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010); Ole Wæver, "The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in IR," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 687-727; Arlene Tickner and Ole Wæver, *International Relations Scholarship around the World* (London: Routledge, 2008).

[6]   All sources with an Iranian date of publication (*hijri* or royal) are in Persian. The Gregorian corresponding years are given for each source.

[7]   For example, Homeira Moshirzadeh, "A Hegemonic 'Discipline' in an 'Anti-Hegemonic' Country," *International Political Sociology* 3, no. 3 (2009): 342-46; Homeira Moshirzadeh and Heidarali Masoudi, "IR Theory and Research in Iran: A Study of IR Dissertations," *Research Letter of Political Science* 5, no. 2 (1389 [2010]): 163-88; Homeira Moshirzadeh and Heidarali Masoudi, "Theoretical Knowledge of Iranian Students of IR: A Pathological Study," *Politics* 41, no. 3 (1390 [2011]): 265-84; Amir M. Haji-yousefi, "Is there an Iranian Perspective on International Relations?" (paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Canadian Political Science Association, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, May 27-29, 2009), accessed December 2, 2013, http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2009/Haji-Yousefi.pdf; Mahmood Sariolghalam, "Iran: "Accomplishments and Limitations in IR," in *International Relations Scholarship around the World,* ed. Arlene Tickner and Ole Wæver (London: Routledge, 2009), 158-71.

[8]   See, for example, Mohammad Sotoodeh, "IR in Iran: An Evaluation," *Political Science Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (1384 [2005]): 93-116.

in the discipline for Iranian/Islamic approaches to IR.[9]

This article seeks to examine the attempts by the Iranian IR community to conceptualize and theorize international relations from homegrown points of view and to show how contextual factors have limited such attempts.

The first part of the article reviews IR scholarship in Iran to give a portrait of its evolution and achievements regarding Iranian approaches to IR. The second part examines contextual factors that have affected homegrown theorizing in Iran, including international agency, inspiring sources, the dynamism of the IR community, the academia-government relationship, and intellectual autonomy. An evaluation of this context suggests that even if theorizing IR from an Iranian point of view is both possible and preferable, this cannot be done unless certain constraints are overcome.

2. IR Scholarship in Iran

One of the first modern higher education institutions in Iran was the "School of Political Science," formed in 1899 to train Iranian diplomats. International Relations was deemed a subfield of political science and was a part of its curriculum.[10] From the beginning, political science in general and IR in particular were more legally oriented due to the influences of French tradition, especially at the University of Tehran (the first modern university established in Iran), where the departments of law, political science, and international relations co-existed. When in the 1960s some Americanization efforts took place, political science and IR became more similar to what was taught at American universities.[11] In 1966, the Center for Graduate International Studies (CGIS) was formed at the University of Tehran, with an emphasis on international law, international organizations, international economy, and peace studies. This center offered an MA program in IR.[12]

Another important university was Melli (National) University, which was modeled on American universities. It was established in 1961 and began to offer political science programs in 1966. The departments of politics and economics were in the same faculty, while the law school was separate. The curricula offered an economic orientation compared to the more legal approach followed by the University of Tehran. It is argued that Melli University's formation put an end to the "monopoly" of the University of Tehran over political science and IR.[13]

Iranian political scientist Homayoun Elahi believes that there was an inclination towards "de-politicizing" political science in Iran by giving it a legal or economic orientation.[14] In general, the curricula, syllabi, and material taught at these universities were mainly inspired by or translated from Western sources, first mostly French and later mostly English. The number of articles and books dealing with Iran's foreign relations was relatively limited. In a few books,[15] some pages were dedicated to Iran; Nazem's work discusses Iran's constitution, and Behzadi's references the Shah's nationalism and his charismatic leadership. My informal

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[9] For example, Moshirzadeh, "A Hegemonic 'Discipline'".

[10] Nasrin Mosaffa, *Changes in Teaching and Research in Political Science and International Relations* (Tehran: Center for Cultural and Social Studies, 1386 [2007]), 152-3.

[11] Mosaffa, *Changes in Teaching,* 162-4; Alireza Azghandi, *Political Science in Iran* (Tehran: Baz, 1378 [1999]), 143-5.

[12] In general, IR programs were offered by departments of political science. The exception was the MA program offered by the Center for Graduate International Studies.

[13] Azghandi, *Political Science in Iran,* 56-66.

[14] Mosaffa, *Changes in Teaching,* 187.

[15] E.g. H. Behzadi, *Nationalism: A Theoretical and Practical Analysis* (Tehran: Hesab, 1354 [1975]); H. Nazem, *Politics and International Organizations* (Tehran: Etella'at Newspaper Publication, 2536 [1977]).

review of books published before the Revolution that were available at the University of Tehran (the oldest library of law and political science in the country) suggests that Iran's foreign relations and its position in the world were not major concerns at the time.

An example might illustrate the above: The CGIS could be considered as the most prominent center working on IR in pre-Revolution Iran. It enjoyed wide financial and institutional support and gathered the most well-known scholars in the field. It also had international links and a few publications in English and French. A journal published by the CGIS between 1973 and 1978, *Ravabet-e Beinolmelal* (*International Relations*), included only a few articles dealing with Iran's foreign policy or its regional environment.[16] The 11 books it published included two on international legal issues, authored by Iranian scholars; an edited volume on the foreign policies of Iran and France, published in French; and eight translated works on European political unification, the history of international relations, IR theories, US foreign policy, China, the Persian Gulf and the Suez Canal, international responsibility, and Islam and international law. The CGIS also published 13 research reports (seven bibliographies, a paper on Iran's foreign cultural relations in French, two descriptive chronological papers on Iran-US and Iran-Soviet relations, two papers on Africa and Iran's economic relations with African countries, and a paper on the Regional Cooperation for Development, RCD). According to the data in the last issue of *International Relations*, 14 MA theses were defended at the Center in 1977-1978, out of which only one dealt with Iran's foreign relations. Among the courses offered, there was one MA course on Iran's foreign policy;[17] there were also some seminars, roundtables, and lectures more directly related to Iran's foreign relations or its regional environment.[18]

The Islamic Revolution and the later sociopolitical developments brought about significant changes in academic life in general and IR in particular. The number of students rose rapidly both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and the number of universities offering political science and IR increased steadily. Unlike the pre-Revolutionary era, when most of the faculty had studied abroad for their PhDs, PhD graduates from Iranian universities became the majority of the faculty members.[19] Furthermore, many PhDs and MAs in IR in Iran have been and continue to be employed as researchers in such areas as strategic studies and foreign policy.

As noted earlier, the Islamic Revolution in the late 1970s and the Cultural Revolution in the early 1980s greatly affected academic life, specifically by introducing an Islamic perspective to the social sciences and humanities. For this reason, Iran might seem to be an appropriate candidate for producing a non-Western knowledge base of IR. Further, because of its Islamism, its anti-hegemonic foreign policy, and the fact that for nearly four decades, religious and political authorities have called for Islamic and/or *bumi* (homegrown) knowledge/theories, one might expect that non-Western, Iranian IR theories exist. But this is not the case.

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[16] The journal published 12 issues until spring 1979. This assessment is based on the review of eight available issues.

[17] The information is based on the appendix of *Ravabet-e Beinolmelal*, 11 & 12 (Winter 1357 and Spring 1358 [1979]): 318-26.

[18] Interview with Professor Nasrin Mosaffa (November 2016). She was an MA student at the Center before the Revolution and later became its director for more than 13 years (1997-2010).

[19] An official record of the total number of the faculty in the field of IR could not be found. A list of full-time faculty at public universities and higher education institutes holding their degrees in political science and IR was published by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology in 2011-2012, and includes 349 names. Yet because IR scholars are not limited to PhDs of IR, and because PhDs in political science work in different fields, this list cannot represent the total number of IR scholars in Iran. My own rough estimation on the basis of information gathered from websites is that about 100 scholars exist in political science and/or IR departments at public universities. Certainly, there are other IR scholars who work in other departments, such as geography, history, social science, etc., and they should be included for a comprehensive list. Furthermore, the Islamic Azad University (a non-profit university with branches all over the country) has dozens of faculty members working in the field not included in this estimation.

Before turning to Iranian scholars' achievements (or lack thereof) in terms of homegrown theorizations, it is appropriate to see how scholars understand homegrown (endogenous and indigenous) knowledge. What do they believe *bumi* knowledge to be? In Autumn 2014 I conducted a research survey on IR scholars' understanding of homegrown knowledge. The survey was based on a 30-item questionnaire, mostly related to the scholars' understanding of IR in general and Iranian IR in particular. The questionnaire was sent to 92 IR scholars teaching at public universities in Iran. In addition to those who were already known to the author, others were identified through the websites of universities. Forty-six scholars replied.

The results of the survey suggest that Iranian IR scholars have different understandings of Iranian or homegrown knowledge. Some believe it should be extracted from Iranian and/ or Islamic sources; some emphasize that if Iran's historical and geographical context is considered, then we can talk about Iranian knowledge of IR; the majority of them consider a piece of work as being *bumi* when it is at the service of the national interest of the country; and finally, some believe that whatever is produced by Iranian scholars can be regarded as Iranian/endogenous. More than 65 percent of IR scholars surveyed see the production of homegrown knowledge as dependent upon the formation of homegrown theory. In other words, without a homegrown theory, we cannot talk of having a homegrown knowledge. Perhaps that is why 76 percent of those surveyed see little or no homegrown knowledge of IR existing in Iran – because they do not see any authentic Iranian theory.

When scholars were asked about possible reasons for the lack of a homegrown theory of IR in Iran, most of them cite the lack of relevant endogenous/indigenous knowledge in other disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, and philosophy, that IR theory building can rely on. In other words, they believe that producing theories of IR in a vacuum is not possible. This question was included because when we look at the theories of IR in the West, we see that almost all of them are built upon knowledge produced in other disciplines.[20]

Iranian scholars definitely do not want to see IR knowledge in Iran limited to homegrown theorizing. In fact, more than 78 percent of respondents are very strongly or strongly against this. More than 72 percent see empirical validation necessary for statements inspired/ informed by local sources. More than 67 percent of the scholars believe that any homegrown knowledge needs to be linked to existing IR achievements, and 89 percent see this as a condition for its existence. Only 21.7 percent of respondents see a possibility for producing Islamic knowledge of international life independent of existing achievements in IR.

One may conclude from the results of this survey that while most Iranian scholars find theorization from an Iranian/ Islamic point of view possible and even preferable, they do not accept ignoring or refuting existing IR theories. The same survey suggests that amongst Western theories of IR, constructivism and realism are more popular and are found to be more helpful in explaining international life. Another survey conducted in 2010 showed almost the same result.[21]

Despite the lack of homegrown knowledge in other disciplines, the IR community in Iran has attempted to produce homegrown IR theories. Islam has been the most important source of inspiration for indigenous theorizing and conceptualizations in Iran. A body of work that

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[20] For a few examples, we see the reliance of classical realism on philosophy, history, and sociology; structural realism on economics; liberalism in IR on liberal ideas in economics and political theory; constructivism on sociology, social theory, and the philosophy of language; IR critical theory on sociology and social theory; and cognitive theories of foreign policy on psychology. The list of source disciplines can be extended when we look at particular theoretical works.

[21] Moshirzadeh and Masoudi, "IR Theory and Research in Iran".

may represent an Islamic approach to international relations was produced after the Islamic Revolution,[22] either by Shiite clergy and/or based on their work. Although some of this work looks like international law from an Islamic point of view (especially that produced by Shiite jurisprudents), one can also find some explanatory or normative content.[23]

There are three basic approaches to Islamic theorizing of IR in Iran:[24] (1) regarding Islam as an encompassing set of ideas with a unique 'true' theory applicable to every aspect of life (including IR), which should be extracted from Islamic sources on the basis of Islamic jurisprudence;[25] (2) considering theorizing on the basis of Islamic jurisprudence as one way of understanding international relations;[26] and (3) seeing the international system as a modern phenomenon with no precedence in Islamic sources and therefore regard it as a realm where human reason should guide our understanding of it.[27] From the last point of view, only some philosophical anthropological Islamic principles, such as non-conflict, can be used as a guide to theory building (in the same way that Western IR theories take, for example, peace or order as a basic principle).[28] These scholars may consider Islamic ideals as a source of prescriptive/ normative theory of IR and Islamic scripts and concepts as an inspiring source for developing hypotheses and theories.

As far as theoretical ideas are concerned, concepts such as power,[29] order,[30] war and peace,[31] security,[32] terrorism,[33] identity,[34] and globalization[35] have been explored on the basis of Iranian literature and culture or Islamic sources to show how they differ from and/or are similar to contemporary understandings in international relations.

In some sources, principles are introduced that are supposed to govern international relations from an Islamic point of view. For example, Alikhani sees human dignity, diversity,

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[22] In my search for such publications before the Revolution, I found just one (short) essay (Balaghi 1350), but there may be other sources. S. S. Balaghi, "International Relations in Islam," *Lessons from Islam* 12, no. 5 (1350 [1971]): 33-4.

[23] S. J. Dehghani-Firoozabadi and M. Ghanbari, "Developments in Theoretical Studies of International Relations in Iran," *Research on Islamic Politics* 1, no. 4 (1392 [2013]): 9-38.

[24] For an almost similar categorization of approaches, see S. J. Dehghani-Firoozabadi, "Meta-Theoretical Foundations of Islamic Theory of International Relations," *Foreign Relations* 2, no. 6 (1389 [2010]): 49-96.

[25] See, for example, A. Javadi Amoli, "Principles of International Relations of Islamic State," *Islamic Government* 13, no. 2 (1387 [2008]): 5-36.

[26] For example, Dehghani-Firoozabadi, "Meta-Theoretical Foundations".

[27] Hossein Salimi, "Islamic Realism and Understanding Modern International Relations," *Research in Theoretical Politics* 12 (1391 [2012]): 49-76.

[28] Hossein Salimi, "Non-Conflict: The Foundation of Islamic View of International Relations," *Foreign Relations* 3, no. 3 (1390 [2011]): 75-112.

[29] Mansour Mirahamadi and Hadi Ajili, "An Introduction to the Concept of Power in International Relations," *Political and International Approaches* 19 (1388 [2009]): 119-45; A. M. Poshtdar and F. Shekardast, "Psychological Operations (Soft Power) in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh," *Fiction Studies* 1, no. 4 (1392 [2013]): 23-34.

[30] S. J. Dehghani-Firoozabadi, "The Model of World Order in Islamic Theory of International Relations," *International Relations Research* 1, no. 3 (1389 [2010]): 9-47.

[31] M. A. Barzanooni, "Islam: The Primacy of War or Peace?" *International Legal Journal* 33 (1384 [2005]): 73-158; S. A. Ghavam and S. A. Fateminezhad, "War and Anarchy: A Critique of Anarchy-Hierarchy on the Basis of *Shahnameh*," *Research Letter of Political Science* 4, no. 2 (1388 [2009]): 159-94; M. J. Mahallati, "Ethics of War in Persian Literary and Epic Texts," *Research on Culture and Literature*, (n.d.); A. H. Mirkooshesh and S. Noorisafa, "Ontology of International Peace in the Iranian Context of Tolerance and Peace," *Strategy* [Rahbord] 68 (1392 [2013]): 7-32; B. Seifoori and A. Tofighianfar, "A Sociological View of Causes and Conduct of War in *Shahnameh*," *Iranian Studies* 12, no. 24 (1392 [2013]): 217-38; E. Soltani, "Foreign Relations of Islamic State in Quran: War or Peace?" *Knowledge* 143 (1388 [2009]): 69-94; Asqar Eftekhari and H. Mohammadi-Sirat, "Peace (*sulh and salm*) in Quran," *Quran and Hadith Studies* 12 (1392 [2013]): 53-78; Hadi Ajili and Ali Esmaeeli, "An Introduction to the Concept of Peace in International Relations," *Research in Islamic Politics* 1, no. 4 (1392 [2013]): 105-34.

[32] Asqar Eftekhari, "Structural Signs of 'Islamic Security'," *Strategic Studies* 26 (1383 [2004]): 641-68; Bahram Akhavan Kazemi, "Security in the Thought of Farabi and Moghegh Toosi," *Islamic Government* 14, no. 2 (1386 [2007]): 89-110.

[33] S. E. Hosseini, "International Terrorism in Islamic Perspective," *Knowledge* 125 (1387 [2008]): 15-32; M. R. Hatami, "Terrorism from an Islamic Perspective," *Political and International Research* 6 (1390 [2011]): 25-47.

[34] Farhad Atai and Majid Behestani, "Identity and Otherness in the Formation of Iran from the *Shahnameh* Perspective," *Iranian Journal of Foreign Affairs* 2, no. 4 (1389 [2010]): 79-109.

[35] S. M. Seyedian, "Components of Islamic Globalization," *Knowledge* 20, no. 10 (1390 [2011]): 13-28.

freedom and equality, peaceful coexistence, refuting violence, observing ethical standards, dialogue, observing pacts and treaties, reciprocity, and military deterrence as the basic principles of international relations in Islam.[36] But he does not elaborate these to introduce a theory.

The most ambitious attempt at producing an Islamic theory of international relations has been made by Dehghani-Firoozabadi, a prominent IR scholar who did his BA and MA at Imam Sadeq University[37] and received his PhD in Belgium. He is the pioneer of the second approach mentioned above. He believes that an Islamic theory should be based on Islamic sources, including its meta-theoretical foundations. In an article[38] later developed into a book,[39] he presents an Islamic meta-theory for international relations and explores the ontological and epistemological foundations of a potential IR theory in Islamic sources, in particular the work of 16th-century Islamic philosopher Molla Sadra. In an article on an Islamic theory of international relations, he sets out a general framework, justifying such an endeavor, clarifying its assumptions, and giving some very broad principles, such as Islamic definitions and descriptions of phenomena such as order, dominance, ethics, change, and justice. He does not provide specific statements on topics such as the nature of the modern state and the international system, the causes of war, change, and dominance, or the ways in which international justice can be actualized.[40]

If we consider products by Iranian scholars who work more or less within existing paradigms of IR but have developed new theoretical frameworks dealing with specific international issues to be a sort of Iranian theorization of IR, an example could be the Conceptual Systematic Schema for Foreign Policy developed by Hossein Seifzadeh. On the basis of systems theory and dialectical method, he develops a complicated schema for analyzing foreign policy, which seems to be an attempt at integrating some existing theories and concepts into a more comprehensive model, where both domestic and international influences are taken into account.[41]

Farhad Ghasemi, an Iranian realist scholar influenced by network analysis and chaos theory, has developed a theoretical framework to explain the balance of power in regional networks. His main argument is that an increase in systemic interactions has led to problems in the balance-of-power theory. By synthesizing balance of power and network balancing, he proposes a new theory called "smart balance of power."[42]

In these two articles we see theoretical endeavors based on existing Western theories and conceptualizations but leading to new models for explaining more specific phenomena such as foreign policy and regional orders in relation to Iran.

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[36] A. A. Alikhani, "Fundamentals and Principles of International Relations in Islam," *Research in International Relations* 12 (1390 [2011]): 11-38.

[37] This university was established after the Revolution as a major measure in introducing a modern Islamic university where modern knowledge is taught besides Islamic Shiite jurisprudence. It offers undergraduate and graduate programs in political science, economics, law, management, and communications.

[38] Dehghani-Firoozabadi, "Meta-Theoretical Foundations".

[39] S. J. Dehghani-Firoozabadi, *Islamic Meta Theory of International Relations.* Tehran: Allameh Tabatabai University Publication, 1394 [2015].

[40] S. J. Dehghani-Firoozabadi, "Islamic Theory of International Relations: What and How It Is," *Research Letter of Political Science* 5, no. 2 (1389 [2010]): 111-42.

[41] S. H. Seifzadeh, "Conceptual Systematic Schema for Foreign Policy," *The Journal of the Faculty of Law and Political Science of the University of Tehran* 26 (1370 [1991]): 153-96.

[42] Farhad Ghasemi, "Theoretical Foundations of Smart Balance of Power in Regional Networks: Towards a New Theory of Regional Balance of Power," *Geopolitics* 8, no. 1 (1391 [2012]): 172-213.

What Acharya and Buzan see as elites' conceptualizations of international life[43] is also a source of theorization in Iran, mostly reflected in a body of work that deals with the perceptions of two leaders of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei.[44] As clergy and politicians, their ideas can be seen as originating both from Islamic teachings and an Iranian experience of world affairs. Some articles about the foreign policy of various administrations deal with Iranian politicians' perceptions of international relations.[45] In addition, Khatami's (President of Iran from 1997-2005) idea of dialogue of civilizations has been reconceptualized within the existing IR theories.[46]

Most Iranian scholars apply existing IR theories to issues significant from an Iranian point of view. As mentioned above, Iranian scholars are more interested in constructivism and realism. The former's appeal rests on its relevance to non-material aspects of social life, which is more applicable to Iranian and Islamic culture. Furthermore, it explains the anomalies in the application of materialist/realist theories to Iran's foreign policy. For these reasons, a constructivist analysis of various aspects of Iran's foreign policy constitutes the theme of many articles.

Realism is also employed to explain different issues in international relations and foreign policy. Many Iranian scholars seek to explain Iran's foreign policy from a realist point of view, while others take realism as a point of departure to criticize aspects of Iran's foreign policy that they do not regard as realistic. Furthermore, realism is usually the preferred theoretical framework for a critical explanation of the existing international system and US foreign policy. Many articles focus on US hegemony-seeking behaviors, especially in the Middle East, and are framed in a way (as stemming from power-seeking impulses) to delegitimize them. Since regional orders are important to a regional power such as Iran, attempts have been made to apply realist theoretical insights about the international system to regional systems[47] or the implications of systemic changes for Iran.[48] These pieces of work, however, have not been elaborated into an Iranian realist theory.

The above Iranian reading of realism reminds us of Edward Said's idea of traveling theories, where "the movement of ideas and theories from one place to another is both a fact of life and a usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity."[49] International relations ideas and theories are not exceptions; they too travel from situation to situation and this travel leads to new understandings and interpretations of world affairs and may nourish IR in general.

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[43] Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, "Why Is There No Non-Western International Relations Theory? An introduction," in Acharya and Buzan, *Non-Western International Relations Theory,* 11.

[44] Dehghani-Firoozabadi and Ghanbari, "Developments in Theoretical Studies," 15.

[45] See Majid Behestani, "Religious Attitude and Foreign Policy: Operational Codes of Bazargan and Ahmadinezhad," *Iranian Journal of Foreign Affairs* 5, no. 3 (1392 [2013]): 211-47; H. Masoodnia and D. Najafi, "Pillars of Iran's Regional Policy on the Basis of Tehran Friday Prayers," *Political and International Research* 6 (1390 [2011]): 77-102.

[46] Hossein Salimi, "Theoretical Foundations of Inter-Civilizational Dialogue," *Discourse Quarterly* 3 (1378 [1999]): 131-48; Homeira Moshirzadeh, "Dialogue of Civilizations from a Constructivist Point of View," *Journal of the Faculty of Law Political Science* 63 (1383 [2004]):169-201; Homeira Moshirzadeh, "Dialogue of Civilizations and International Theory," *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs* 16, no. 1 (2004): 1-44; Homeira Moshirzadeh, "Critical International Theory and Dialogue of Civilizations," in *Civilizational Dialogue and Political Thought*, ed. Fred Dalmayr and Abbas Manoochehri (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007): 101-18.

[47] For example, Farhad Ghasemi, "Conceptual Reconstruction of Regional Deterrence Theory and Designing Its Patterns on the Basis of the Theories of Power Cycles and Networks," *Defensive Strategy* 38 (1391b [2012]): 103-46.

[48] Farhad Ghasemi, "Cycle Theories and the Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Political and International Approaches* 17 (1388 [2009]): 103-46.

[49] Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (US: Edward Said, 1983), 226.

3. Theorizing IR in Iran: Contextual Factors

The achievements mentioned above have not been celebrated by many scholars in Iran, who, on the whole, believe that these attempts are far from substantive theories of IR (and this is easily argued). But why have the attempts not led to a presentable theory of IR? An examination of the literature dealing with IR theorization in different countries reveals that several factors impact the status of IR in a country in general and IR theorizing in particular.[50] This section addresses some of these factors,[51] most of which have worked against the production of Iranian theories of IR.

3.1. International agency

International relations theories have mostly been developed in core countries, particularly the US. For this reason, it is sometimes asserted that IR is an American discipline that explains the world from a narrowly defined American point of view.[52] It may, however, be argued that great powers have the resources and capacities to encourage such endeavors. Furthermore, the more a country is involved in international affairs, the more it needs to explain and predict what is going on at the global level. A better understanding of the world makes one's agential capacity in international interactions more meaningful, which is why academia in these powerful countries are more involved in IR theorization.

Nevertheless, one cannot ignore that IR theorization has not been limited to the US or even the great powers; the plurality and diversity of the discipline has been emphasized in recent studies.[53] Scandinavian academicians have proved that theorists from smaller countries can have a voice in the realm of IR theory. At the same time, the content of the Copenhagen School or Peace Research, for example, shows that these too have their roots in agential projects Nordic countries seek to follow at the global level. The foreign policies of these countries are rooted in Nordic "exceptionalism": "peace-loving, oriented towards peaceful conflict-resolution and hosting 'rational' global 'good citizens'." They emphasize human rights and contributions to peace and stability through multilateralism and international cooperation. Thus we may say the Nordic-centric conception of world politics has its roots in the Nordic model of socioeconomic development and matches the foreign-policy orientations of the Nordic states.[54]

The global south has traditionally faced serious impediments in its road towards agency in international life. Acharya argues that in the modern world, the agency of non-Western societies in international affairs has been denied, even if they too have had a say in the formation of some international rules and norms.[55] During the last decades, however, there have been inclinations towards new conceptualizations by IR scholars from India and

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[50] See Acharya and Buzan, *Non-Western International Relations Theory.*

[51] This section is mostly based on a co-authored published article in Persian. See Homeira Moshirzadeh and Majid Kafi, "Theorizing IR in Iran: A Structural Explanation," *Politics* 45, no. 2 (1394 [2015]): 337-55.

[52] See Stanley Hoffman, "An American Social Science: International Relations," *Daedalus* 106, no. 3 (1977): 41-60; Steve Smith, "The Discipline of International Relations: Still an American Social Science?" *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 2, no. 3 (2000): 374-402; Steve Smith, "The Discipline of International Relations: "Hegemonic Country, Hegemonic Discipline," *International Studies Review* 4, no. 2 (2003): 67-85.

[53] See, for example, Helen Louise Turton, *International Relations and American Dominance: A Diverse Discipline* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2015); Knud E. Jorgensen, "Would 100 Global Workshops on Theory Building Make a Difference?" (paper presented at 2nd All Azimuth Workshop, Widening the World of IR Theorizing, Ankara, Turkey, September 23-24, 2016).

[54] See Matthieu Chillaud, "Peace and Security Re-conceptualizations in the Agenda of PRIO, SIPRI, TAPRI and COPRI since the End of the Cold War*"* (presented at the ECPR Conference in Charles University, Prague, December 7-10, 2016).

[55] Amitav Acharya, "Norm Subsidiarity and Regional Orders: Sovereignty, Regionalism, and Rule-Making in the Third World," *International Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2011): 95-123.

China that can be related to their emerging agency in the world.[56] Yet it can be argued that although a feeling of agency may influence the need for theorization, there is not necessarily a correlation between the two.

Iran seems to see a high agential capacity for itself at the international level, of course more from a critical perspective. In the post-Revolution era, the constitution of the Islamic Republic, inspired by revolutionary Islamic ideals, has paved the way for an active role in the global scene. Iran's support for what it regards as liberation movements all around the world; its criticism of existing international institutions for being manipulated by great powers, especially the US; its opposition to US policies in the Middle East and elsewhere; its opposition to Israel; and its active support for Palestinians are just a few examples of its agential projects at the regional and international levels. These activities and beliefs seem to be rooted in Islamic and Iranian ideals of justice.[57] We might expect critical agency to lead to critical theorization, yet in Iran this has not occurred.

3.2. Sources of inspiration

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of IR, it borrows concepts, models, metaphors, and theories from other disciplines,[58] and thus many Western IR theories rely heavily on Western philosophy, economics, psychology, sociology, and history in building and formulating their hypotheses.[59] In Iran one can find traces of such knowledge in traditional sources such as Persian literature, classic books on history, Islamic philosophy and theology; however, as noted earlier, there is little modern homegrown (Islamic/ Iranian) theories in other disciplines to build on.

Another important factor contributing to the generation or modification of IR theories is genuine research in the field. In Iran, empirical IR research has not led to the formation of a robust body of accumulated knowledge.[60] Most of what is called "research" in Iranian journals and dissertations is not based on a rigorous method leading to reliable findings. Qasem Eftekhari, a prominent professor of methodology in IR and political science in Iran, evaluated political science and IR PhD dissertations defended at the University of Tehran.[61] He applied criteria such as elaborating the objectives of the research, choosing an appropriate method, applying the method in practice, the reliability of the results of data analysis, and the lucidity of findings. On a 20-item scale, the median of the scores he gave were between 12.95 and 14.1. In other words, his study showed that the research done by Iranian students of IR do not meet widely accepted methodological requirements and standards.

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[56] See Siddharth Mallavarapu, "Development of International Relations Theory in India: Traditions, Contemporary Perspectives and Trajectories," *International Studies* 46, 1&2: 165-83; Yiwei Wang, "Between Science and Art: Questionable International Relations Theories," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 8, no. 2 (2007): 191-208.

[57] Dehghani-Firoozabadi, "Islamic Theory of International Relations," 132-3.

[58] Ahmad Naghibzadeh, "International Relations as an Interdisciplinary Subject: Sociology and IR," *International Studies* 5, no. 3 (1387 [2008]): 111-3.

[59] Lucian Ashworth, "Interdisciplinary and International Relations," *European Political Science Review* 8, no. 1 (2009): 8-25; Peter Kristensen, "Dividing Discipline: Structures of Communication," *International Studies Review* 14, no. 1 (2012): 32-50. See also footnote 20 above.

[60] See Kavoos Seyyedemami, "What Is Missed in Political Science in Iran: Empirical Research," *Research Letter of Political Science* 5, no. 2 (1389 [2010]): 143-62.

[61] Qasem Eftekhari, "Methodological Evaluation of PhD Dissertations in Political Science and IR at the University of Tehran," in *Teaching and Research in Political Science and International Relations in Iran,* ed. H. Salimi (Tehran: Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, 1387 [2008]), 269-94.

Although the rate of publication is high, innovation in and sophistication of the works are not satisfactory, which in turn affects theorizing. Proper research contributes to good theory building because it leads to new hypotheses and conceptualizations, it acts as a test for assumptions and hypotheses, it establishes background conditions for the truth or fallacy of hypotheses, and it helps extend theories to new areas. A lack of good research leads to an unreliable context in which to generate theories and models.

Nevertheless, Iran is proud of its body of traditional sources, including Islamic Shiite sources, such as *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet and Imams), *sunna* (deeds of the Prophet and Imams), theological texts, and the *Quran*, as well as Iranian sources (poetry and other forms of literature, traditional historiographies, statements by public figures, and texts known as the Mirror of Prince or *Siasatnameh*). These documents can inspire conceptualizations and theory building in many disciplines, including IR. As noted above, while some attempts have been made in this regard, the result has been speculations rather than theory.

3.3. Dynamic academic community

Even if a country seeks to exercise its agency at the international level and thus encourages IR scholars to conceptualize the world from that perspective, and even if there is a body of knowledge to inspire scholars, if there is no dynamic academic community and significant steady academic activity, one cannot expect much research and knowledge building, let alone theorizing. This environment takes years to develop, and requires encouraging scholars and graduate students to focus on their studies, research, and training new generations of scholars.

As far as scholars are concerned, some studies suggest that Iranian academics are not highly motivated. Their relatively low income has required many of them to take second jobs. Many act as consultants or analysts for the public sector and spend much of their time producing material that is not academically valuable or publishable in academic journals. This situation has also affected the quality of their teaching: many students do not find their courses rich enough and they too become less motivated about and/or incapable of conducting good research.[62]

The high number of admissions to PhD programs, funding limits for PhD students, and uncertainties about finding tenure positions after graduation have led to a lack of motivation, weak academic performance [63] and thus a low quality of research.

Critically reviewing scholarly works and publications is an important aspect in developing and refining new ideas. This can be done at conferences and in academic discussions, in addition to reviews and forums in academic journals. The number of review articles in Iranian journals is very limited; some studies even suggest that Iranian scholars tend to ignore their peers' work.[64] For example, the major theoretical endeavors by Seifzadeh, Ghasemi, and Dehghani-Firoozabadi[65] referred to above have not engendered serious reviews, critique, or challenges, while in China, for example, such endeavors are much more welcome.[66]

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[62] A.M. Haji-yousefi, "Teaching the Basics of IR in Iran: Problems and Solutions," *Research Letter of Political Science* 5, no. 2 (1385 [2006]): 79-94; M. Ranjbar, "The Crisis of Political Science in Iran," *Journal of Political Science* 24, no. 4 (1382 [2003]): 95-112.

[63] See Moshirzadeh and Masoudi, "IR Theory and Research in Iran"; Abolfazl Delavari, "An Evaluation of PhD Curriculum of Political Science and IR in Iran," *Research in Politics* 12 (1389 [2010]): 67-110; Eftekhari, "Methodological Evaluation of PhD Dissertations".

[64] M. A. Taghavi and M. Adibi, "The Weakness of Critique in Political Science in Iran," *Research Letter of Political Science* 5, no. 2 (1389 [2010]): 25.

[65] Seifzadeh, "Conceptual Systematic Schema"; Ghasemi, "Theoretical Foundations"; Dehghani-Firoozabadi, "Islamic Theory"; Dehghani-Firoozabadi, "Meta-Theoretical Foundations".

[66] See Qin Yaqing, "Development of International Relations Theory in China," *International Studies* 46, no. 1&2 (2009): 188.

3.4. Academia-government relationship

The political context is also a contributing or discouraging factor in theory formation. Globally, policy making and theory building have been traditionally seen as separate and even opposing domains, leading to metaphors such as academics' "ivory tower," representing the distance between scholars/theorists' imagined world and the real world politicians have to deal with.[67] As Stephen Walt rightly observes, "Policy makers pay relatively little attention to the vast theoretical literature in IR, and many scholars seem uninterested in doing policy-relevant work."[68] Nevertheless, one cannot deny the fact that theory deals with public questions, is influenced by international and foreign relations issues, usually seeks to find appropriate answers to practical questions,[69] and can be regarded as an "essential tool of statecraft."[70]

In many countries, a significant part of the demand for works on IR comes directly or indirectly from the state sector. This requires an appropriate relationship between the two (state support without jeopardizing the independence of academia) as well as a more or less common definition of the world. The importance of this context is evident in Nordic countries, where despite their rather small size, the academic community is very active. In Iran, however, statesmen have traditionally (even in the pre-Revolution era) had a pessimist view of the political science community in general,[71] resulting in the establishment of research centers in different state departments[72] to become self-sufficient in meeting their research needs and hence more or less independent of universities. Sariolghalam believes that academic IR has little influence in decision making in Iran.[73] According to Heshmatzadeh's survey, 73% of political scientists in Iran believe there is a distance between political science and practice.[74]

There may be different explanations for this situation: academics' abstract language, their lack of knowledge about government's practical needs, the gap between the attitudes of the two sides, a suspicion of academics' "Westernized" approaches, officials' confidence in their own experiences rather than in academic observations, and internal divisions among scholars with various views of international politics and foreign policy.

In practice, of course, many scholars do work with public institutions, yet more often in the form of consultations, debate meetings, lectures, and seminars. Yet there is little willingness on the part of state institutions to support theoretical work[75] because such projects are time consuming and may not meet government needs. Here, resource limitations are more relevant than other factors.

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[67] This has been much discussed and sometimes challenged by IR scholars. See, for example, Joseph Lepgold and Miroslav Nincic, *Beyond the Ivory Tower: International Relations Theory and the Issue of Policy Relevance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Bruce Jentleson and Ely Ratner, "Bridging the Beltway–Ivory Tower Gap," *International Studies Review* 13 (2015): 6-11.

[68] Stephen Walt, "The Relationship between Theory and Policy in International Relations," *Annual Review of Political Science* 8 (2005): 23.

[69] Ebadollah Molaee, "Relationship between Theory and Practice in IR," *Foreign Policy* 16, no. 4 (1381 [2002]): 971. See also Hans Morgenthau, *Truth and Power: Essays of Decade, 1960-1970* (New York: Praeger, 1970).

[70] Walt, "The Relationship between Theory and Policy," 23.

[71] D. Gharayagh-Zandi, *Hamid Enayat: The Father of Political Science in Iran (*Tehran: Bogh'e, 1381 [2002]): 324; Ranjbar, "The Crisis of Political Science," 101.

[72] M. Pourfard, "Political Science in Iran: From Re-Knowing to Re-Constructing," *Political Science* 28 (1383 [2004]): 150; Seyyedemami, "What Is Missed," 150.

[73] Sariolghalam, "Iran".

[74] M. B. Heshmatzadeh, "The Status of Political Science in Iran," *Journal of Political Science* 18 (1381 [2002]): 311.

[75] This has somehow changed during the last few years by the formation of what is called "Chairs for Theorizing" at universities to financially and institutionally support theoretical endeavors.

Considering that scholars need not only to be supported institutionally and financially but also to be heard, if the above gaps are not overcome, they will continue to block the path towards theory building in Iranian IR.

3.5. Intellectual independence and self-confidence

What might be called intellectual independence, meaning scholars' belief in their own intellectual capacity to build theories without being swayed by existing ones, is another factor that affects the context within which theory-building efforts can be shaped. In many southern countries, including Iran, there is a tendency towards assuming that Western IR theories are good enough to explain what is going on at the international level. As their claim to universality is so strong, there is little motivation for developing new theories on the basis of endogenous conceptualizations.[76] This situation may be the result of what some call "epistemological imperialism,"[77] and it is not limited to Iran.[78]

A prerequisite for self-confidence and intellectual independence is a tradition of critical thinking, which as noted above, barely exists in Iran.[79] One Iranian IR scholar suggests that there are only a few people in Iran who have the expertise to adopt a genuine critical approach towards Western IR theories,[80] which is why many Iranian scholars tend to uncritically accept Western theories. Critical thinking should be taught and fostered in primary school and continued throughout one's education. Unfortunately, the educational system in Iran is based on a very large amount of reading and memorizing, and the type and amount of classwork and homework does not allow for analysis, debate, or critiques. It is perhaps for this reason that the lack of rigorous homegrown theories is a cross-disciplinary problem.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this article is to show the conditions of Iranian IR theorizing as well as its limitations and the reasons for them. Although most IR scholars in Iran see the development of Iranian theories as favorable and possible, they do not have a fully shared understanding of it. While there have been conscious attempts at presenting homegrown theories (or at least conceptualizations) they have not been fully welcomed by the community of scholars thus far. There are contextual factors that limit such efforts and result in their marginalization by other Iranian scholars.

To further complicate matters, even the limited conceptual/theoretical productions of Iranian scholars have not been published for non-Iranian audience, partly because of linguistic barriers, but more importantly, due to differences in styles of reasoning and argument leading to non-acceptance by editorial boards of well-known academic journals. It is believed that the English language is more straightforward in reasoning.[81] For example, in English a deductive approach is used in which a direct relationship of ideas exists: from general to particular, from abstract to concrete. This linear logic is different from the circular, lateral, or spiral logics seen in other languages such as Persian. Kaplan found that the type

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[76] A.M. Haji-yousefi, "Teaching IR in Iran: Challenges and Perspectives," *Research Letter of Political Science* 5, no. 2 (1389 [2010]): 105.

[77] See Rosa Vasilaki, "Provincialising IR? Deadlocks and Prospects in Post-Western IR Theory," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 41, no. 1 (2012): 3, 11-18; Acharya and Buzan, *Non-Western International Relations Theory*: 17.

[78] See Yaqing, "Development of International Relations Theory in China," 198.

[79] Taghavi and Adibi, "The Weakness of Critique," 26.

[80] N. Hadian, "Political Science in Iran," *Political Science Quarterly* 2, no. 7 (1378 [1999]): 228.

[81] R. B. Kaplan, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education," *Language Learning* 16 (1966): 13.

of reasoning dominant in one's native language is reflected in his or her writing in English.[82] Ideas are sometimes presented in a sort of ambiguity, or even when the idea is clear, it is more supported by repetition and emphasis than facts or data. This style would cause a Western reviewer to have a low opinion of an article and reject it. During the last few years there have been dozens of workshops to make Iranian scholars familiar with stylistic issues in writing articles for international journals, which may lead to more standard writing in the future.

At the same time, attempts at the domestic and regional levels of non-English-speaking countries to publish IR journals in English so as to attract the attention of IR scholars worldwide can be seen as a first step by non-Western scholars towards internationalizing non-Western theorizing.

If non-Western IR scholars' products are presented at the international level, they should be scrutinized, criticized, and discussed so that they can be refined to the same level as Western scholars' works. This process means they should be somehow linked to existing understandings of international life, and thus must be meaningful and comprehensible for an international audience. An important part of Iranian scholars' work based on Islamic ideas seems to be discursively remote from the existing IR literature, which in itself may be seen as an impediment. In other words, if an Islamic theory is presented within a jurisprudential language, it will not be understandable to the international community of IR scholars.

Perhaps the idea of inter-civilizational dialogue that emerged as a principle in foreign policy in the Khatami administration could have been a good beginning to the goal of introducing Iranian IR theory to the international IR community. First, it was emphasized that the idea had its roots in Islamic thought and Iranian culture; second, it could be seen as an agential project pursued by the Khatami administration; third, IR scholars in Iran (and even some Western thinkers) welcomed the idea and were eager to theoretically invest in it; fourth, one could imagine that the government would support this theoretical investment (and it partly did by forming the Center for Dialogue of Civilizations in Tehran); fifth, since it was internationally welcomed and was somehow linked it to existing critical IR theory, it could be more seriously discussed and criticized; and finally, it could be an internationally understandable intervention (both at academic and practical levels). If the international environment were friendly enough to such an idea, it might have been further conceptualized by Iranian IR scholars. However, the 9/11 events and the developments afterwards marginalized the idea altogether.

Nevertheless, one may hope that over time Iranian IR scholars will learn to develop their ideas more systematically, discuss them more seriously, and locate them in IR's discursive space.

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82 Kaplan, "Cultural Thought Patterns," 11-7.

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