



The Role of Constructive Elements of Iran's Identity in Relations between Iran and Russia

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Abstract:

Along the history, relations between Iran and Russia always faced with great changes and transitions and always, the foundation of these relations have been on the base of political, security and military and sometimes economical affairs. Iran and its people have special identity elements like: Persian language, Shiite Islamism, nationalism, regional hegemonies, anti-foreignism and etc, that some of them like: Shiite Islamism and anti-foreignism after Islamic Republic of Iran are reinforced and had deep impressions on foreign relations of Iran and Russia. In this survey, we are going to answer this question that, according to constructive elements of Islamic Republic of Iran's identity, how was relation between Iran and Russia?

To answer this question, through the explanatory method with general descriptive, constructive elements of Islamic republic of Iran identity recognized and its effects studied on relations between Iran and Russia after Islamic republic of Iran. Results of the survey show that according to constructivism, relations between Iran and Russia include different paradigms of cultural co operations and common point of views and will be able to affect and transmit from cultural field to political and foreign relations of two neighbor countries.

Keywords: Foreign relation, Islamic Republic of Iran, Russia, Identity, Constructive elements

Introduction

In this research the writers doesn't intend to survey about all the constructive elements of Islamic Republic of Iran in relation with Russia; the first reason is because of this fact that, all the constructive elements of Islamic Republic of Iran are so extensive that bringing them all in this paper is impossible and the second reason is that the authors want to

study about the special cultural constructive elements that are important and impressive in relations between Iran and Russia.

Along the history, the identity of Islamic Republic of Iran as one of the most important regional players was on the base of different elements such as: Islamic identity, Iranian nationalism, and cultural nationalism, lingual and territorial nationalism. After the victory

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of Islamic revolution in 1979, According to special and important role of constructive elements of Islamic republic of Iran's identity on its international and foreign relations, Iran's behavior has changed greatly towards its powerful northern neighbor. Any of these identity elements and tenets has outstanding and important role on willing of two countries for cooperation or conflict on regional and international affairs.

Having emphasis just on mere physical elements to analyze relations between Iran and Russia, cant bring us exact explanations about bilateral ties between two countries. Although anybody can't ignore the role of physical elements, but the important note is this that these elements find their meanings with ideas and tenets, and at the end we can say that governments are in connection with each other by these ideas and tenets which help the governments to know who they are? And what they are? (Wendt, 2005: 542).

To answer this question that according to constructive elements of Islamic Republic of Iran's identity, how was relations between Iran and Russia? This research with explanatory-descriptive method tries to show relations after Islamic republic of Iran's revolution till 2005 and tries to test this theory that "constructive elements of Iran's identity in relations between Iran and Russia, shows different patterns of cooperation".

Until now, we hadn't any thorough inquiry about the affects of constructive elements of Islamic republic of Iran's identity in relations between Iran and Russia and most of the time, the relations between two countries studied on political, security, military and economical context and analyzed on the base of realism theory.

However, this study aims at evaluating the impact and role of Iran's culture and identity

in relations between the two countries. Explanatory method with general descriptive is used in this research and collecting data is performed through library references. With using Constructivism theoretical framework, the authors try to answer this question that why and how Iran's culture and identity affect the relations between Iran and Russia.

To achieve this goal, after presenting a brief description of the Constructivism approach of the unit level, we act to define the constructive elements of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America's identity and the role that culture and identity play for the relations of the two countries.

Theoretical Framework: Constructivism

To explain about the role of culture is very important in international relations. Especially, proposing the recent theories in international relations has led to strengthening the role of culture as a basis for analyzing international issues. While, classical thinkers and scholars of international relations have emphasized on the political, security and economic areas to explain the factors affecting the international issues, some of them have found that achieving the depth of international relations is possible only with considering these areas. This group of thinkers seeks the answers of their questions within their culture and cultural issues and decided to pay a special attention to the cultural issues in addition to adoption of major political, security and economic factors, and study this important dimension of social life in international relations. These thinkers see the culture as an important phenomenon that is hidden in the perspective of classical thinkers. Their main criticism is to the previous theories that have not paid attention to the role of culture at the

international relations. These scholars for explaining the international issues with considering the culture beside the political, security and economical issues led to emergence of two ideas. Some people construed culture as the area of conflict and the foundation of tensions in the international relations area and somebody in contrast to the first group believe that culture is the area of dialogue, interaction and integration in the field of international relations. Thus, it appears that the place of Constructivism theory is unique (Jansiz & Fasihi Moghaddam, 2015: 22-23).

Constructivism is a met a theoretical model in social science and an in-depth analysis of issues of ontology and epistemology that its followers can be located in the middle of the two main parts, i.e., realism and liberalism in terms of met theoretical model concepts in the mid-range of naturalists/ positivists on the one hand and poststructuralists on the other hand and in the substantive issues of International Relations (Moshirzadeh, 2011: 323). This approach uses the constructed and changing nature of identity, opportunity and possibility of change in the international system (Mansbach, 2002: 1-5) and by challenging the assumptions of rational ontology, offers an approach based on principles and different assumptions of the original currents and tries to delineate how factors such as culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, race and nationalism affect the foreign policy through an "Approach to Identity Politics" (Dehqani Firoozabadi, 2009: 43).

Constructivists for analyzing foreign policy of the countries and investigating the materialization of their interests in the international system, instead of focusing on the goals the governments are pursuing in the international system, try to investigate the definition that each state offers about its identity to specify the goals and interests they are

following in the international system (Kubalkova, 2001: 115). Because in Constructivists' idea "identity" is a set of beliefs about "self", "others" and the interactions between them (Fearon & Wendt, 2005: 64) and is strongly influenced by culture and plays a decisive role in determining the interests of a country, Pouliot knows, Constructivism possessing a certain way of reasoning that is based on the meta-theoretical commitments and assumptions like the possibility of recognition despite its construction, the coincided importance of material and immaterial realities and the emphasis on the construction of social reality and the existence of interactive formative relationship between knowledge and social reality (Pouliot, 2007: 361). In fact, ignoring the impact of culture and identity as a social phenomenon and an important factor in determining the interests and foreign policy of countries is one of the most important constructivists' critics to the mainstream theories (Lapid, 2001: 15).

It should be noted that Constructivism theorists are divided into several types based on the level of analysis, methods and strategies. Ted Hopf divides the non-essential current or critical views of International Relations at the two categories of extreme Constructivists and conventional Constructivists (Hopf, 1998: 171). While, conventional Constructivists are divided to three categories of "systemic", "unit level" and "holistic" in terms of analysis level. Alexander Wendt as the most important systemic Constructivist, knows this level of analysis enjoying a social nature and believes that mental vision structure of the international system is based on a common understanding that have a fundamental role in shaping the identity and subsequently delineating the interests of states (Wendt, 1999: 385). Peter Katzenstein emphasizes on the internal factors of developing

the identity of the government (Smith, 2001: 235). He believes that culture, shaping and arranging are crucial in the definition of "self", "other", interests, and orientations and behavior of foreign policy of a state in the international area (Katzenstein, 1998: 28).

So we can see that culture has an important role in foreign relations among the countries and it has great affects and important role in relations between Iran and Russia that the authors after paying attention on the aspects of culture and state identity, pay attention to that in this writing.

Culture and state identity

State identity is only one among several concepts widely used by constructivist approaches, such as culture, norms or ideas. Why, then, should this paper choose the concept of state identity as its primary target? To answer this question, we need to clarify the relationship between state identity, and culture and norms, respectively. This is, however, not an easy task. On the one hand, constructivist understandings of culture and state identity are not uniform. On the other, it seems that some constructivist scholars use the concepts of culture, norms and identity almost interchangeably, without much thought given to whether these concepts should be distinguished at all or how these concepts relate to each other. The resulting ambiguity makes it practically impossible to uncover exact relationship among the concepts, yet some general patterns are readily discernable (Alexandrov, 2003: 34-35).

State identity is generally seen as a part of culture, which most constructivists define as socially shared beliefs. This definition of culture is quite different from and narrower than the conventional or commonsense meanings

of the word. This difference should not come as a surprise since constructivists are concerned with only that part of culture, which is directly related to international relations. Thus, for example, Thomas U. Berger's approach (1998) specifically refers to a state's domestic political-military culture, defined as a "subset of the larger historical-political culture that encompasses orientations related to defense, security, the military as an institution, and the use of force in international affairs" (Berger, 1998: 15). There is, however, a disagreement on whether state identity is part of the domestic or international culture. While most constructivist scholars emphasize state's domestic culture as a source of state identity, Alexander Wendt (1992; 1994; 1999) sees culture of interstate community as a primary determinant of state identity. In his *Social Theory of International Politics*, Wendt (1999) conceptualizes international relations in terms of three ideal types of interstate-level social structures. These are Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian "cultures of anarchy." The term "culture" refers to the "socially shared knowledge," "knowledge" in turn defined as "any belief an actor takes to be true" (Wendt, 1999: 140). Since Wendt assumes states to be unitary actors, the beliefs that comprise cultures of anarchy are shared among states, not among individuals.

Wendt's cultures of anarchy are important because of their mutually constitutive relations with state identities. The key attribute of each culture is "role", or "distinct posture or orientation of the Self toward the other with respect to the use of violence" (Wendt, 1999: 258). Wendt's constructivism sees state's own identities and interests as secondary products of those system-level roles. In Hobbesian culture of anarchy the posture is

that of *enemies*, “threatening adversaries who observe no limits in their violence towards each other” (Wendt, 1999: 258). In Lockean culture the orientation is that of *rivals*, “competitors who will use violence to advance their interests but refrain from killing each other” (Wendt, 1999: 258). Finally, in Kantian culture of anarchy states share the role of *friends*, “allies who do not use violence to settle their disputes and work as a team against security threats” (Wendt, 1999: 258). It is easy to recognize the “state of nature” behind Hobbesian culture and the Westphalia system of sovereign states behind Lockean culture. The states that populate different anarchic systems (with their distinct cultures of anarchy) are under pressure to internalize the dominant “role relationships” of those systems, namely enmity, rivalry and friendship, in their own identities and interests (Wendt, 1999: 259). While the very concept of *state* identity seems to imply unproblematic and unchanging border between the self and other states, Wendt’s approach suggests that the boundaries of the self might expand to include other states (Wendt, 1999: 229). Wendt argues that this is exactly what happens in Kantian culture, when states develop collective identity as “friends” and start to identify with each other’s welfare and security. Such state identities as “liberal democracy” or “European Union member” illustrate the possibility of shifting identity borders in a more familiar setting.

Wendt’s approach is interested primarily in system-level roles or collective representations about self and other among states conceptualized as unitary actors. States’ own identities become vessels for the “roles” that properly belong to interstate culture. But what is the difference between the cultures of anarchy and the state identities they are supposed to constitute? After examining causal

claims of Wendt’s argument, Hidemi Suganami (2002) concludes that a culture of anarchy is no more than a system-level description of a situation when states share a particular role as their identity. Wendt’s cultures of anarchy do not constitute the state identity of a particular state; they are just names for the commonly shared part of the state identities of a group of states.

After having good knowledge about culture and state identity, now we can have better understanding about the constructive elements of Islamic Republic of Iran's identity and its affects in relations between two countries.

Constructive elements of Islamic republic of Iran's identity

Since the Islamic revolution of 1979, Iran's foreign policy has been affected by two important variants at both domestic and systemic levels: On the one hand, the Iran's domestic social discourses encouraged the country to adopt more ideological policy towards the Western countries particularly the United States and On the other hand, such discourse oriented policy radicalized due to the Western countries confrontational policy toward Iran (Mohammad Nia, 2011: 291) that largely affected constructive elements of Iranian identity and foreign policy in regional and international level.

About the constructive elements of Islamic republic of Iran's identity, a combination of Iranian nationalism, Islam and western tenets had given it a special multilayer identity. From the constructivism point of view, different identities can't stand different roles. In reality these roles reflect different aspects of a countries foreign policy (Javadi Arjmandi, 2008: 45).

Some researchers think about Iranian identity on absolute acceptance of western ideas and rules, and some reject it completely

and at the end some others think about Iranian identity in coherency and connection with western powers (Najafi, 2005: 23).

Every nation- state has special unique identity, as well as, Islamic republic of Iran has its special and unique identity; witch it's title shows that completely. According to priority of *Islamic* word to the word of *Iran* and according to it's constitutional law, at first it seems that the *Islamic* adjective is dominant determiner of tenets and values in political structure of the country. Without any doubt, values and concepts of Iran as a nation-state are on the base of principles and ethical rules of Islam (Dehghani, 2007: 125).

Some scholars name other identity elements of Islamic Republic of Iran such as:

- 1.Persian language (Farsi)
- 2.Iranian nationalism
- 3.Islam (base on Shia)
- 4.Cosmopolitanism
- 5.Regional hegemonies'
- 6.Anti- foreignism
- 7.Pro-Justice
- 8.Supporter of Islamic and revolutionary movements
- 9.None alleged to superpowers

The most identity element that the authors pay attention to that in this essay is the affect of culture and its qualities in bilateral relations of two countries.

Identity Issue in Iranian-Russian Relations

The hypothesis being explained in this article is that stressing the merely materialistic factors in Russian Iranian ties cannot offer a precise explanation of relations of two countries. Although no one can ignore the role played by material factors, what is important is that these factors regain their meaning in a bed of ideas and images, and finally, "it is

through ideas that states ultimately relate to one another, and ... that these ideas help define who and what states are" (Wendt, 2005:372). In this process, the international environment in turn, leaves an existential impact on the construction of identities and interests.

The stress put by Mark Smith and many other analysts on the Russian struggle to "display an independent foreign policy" through establishing close relations with Iran, the stress put on Russia's determination to "prevent itself from being isolated" by Yuri Fedorov, Karaganov's reiteration of Russia's "revenge taking" against the West through cooperation with countries like Iran, Katzman's emphasis on "limited alternatives" for Iran and most importantly Russia's interest in playing the role of a great world power, before having material dimensions, are indicative of the existence of a collection of mentalities and notions making Russian and Iranian leaders inclined to cooperate with each other. The West's manner of dealing with Iran and the international community in its entirety also had a direct impact on the formation of both Tehran and Moscow's identities and interests, pushing the two towards specific definitions of themselves. The persistent American attempts to weaken Russia's regional and international position in the post-cold War era have convinced the Russians that to regain their lost international position and identity, they must find a new path for themselves (shoori, 2011: 122).

Another reason why identity problems are important in Iranian-Russian ties is that, with regard to material or spiritual outcomes and achievements, the relations between the two are not eye catching or significant. From the economic point of view, the volume of their

ties is not determining or obligatory for them. As far as cultural relations are concerned, there is not much similarity or strong bonds between the two. Moreover, politically, there is not much in their positions that are in tune, except for some stances at the macro level. From a broader perspective, the leaders of the two countries and even many - international affairs analysts- intentionally and based on their definition of the bilateral ties, avoid attributing the word “strategic” to Russian Iranian relations (Parker, 2008: 210). Even in the military and sensitive technologies field which is considered as the most important area for cooperation between Moscow and Tehran, the two countries are very cautious about synergism. Former Iranian defense minister Ali Shamkhani publicly complained that Russia only sells armaments that are not sensitive in the eyes of the U.S to Iran (Parker, 2008: 213).

Moreover, Russia has the position as the main supporter of the Iranian nuclear and military programs at a time when, on the one hand, its leaders - including Vladimir Putin – have repeatedly announced that in case Iran attains nuclear weapons, Russia has a better reason to be concerned than Western states considering its geographical proximity to Iran, and from the other hand, based on the Russian security and defense doctrines, “any country with a substantial military potential—whether an advanced Western democracy, an emerging Asian power, or a restive Middle Eastern regime—can become a threat to Russia” (Termin, 2007: 35).

Therefore, the question like why cooperation between Iran and Russia has been considered as threatening by many Western politicians, and why Russian-Iranian relations - as a bond which could potentially be decisive- has attracted the attention of international relations theoreticians, indicates that

mere materialistic dimensions do not play a pivotal role in determining the level of ties between Iran and Russia (shoori, 2011: 124)..

The elements that affect on cultural co operations of Iran and Russia

Common people diplomacy

If we consider people diplomacy as an attempt to transferring information and messages to people of all over the world, then people diplomacy will be one of the most important aspects of our national security.

Cultural planning should be guided in a direction that increase our informing and affecting abilities on Russia according to our countries interests and should increase dialogue between Iranian and Russian people and institutions. Now we can see good co-operations and bilateral ties among these groups like exchange of university students and faculties and cultural weeks.

Potential of Russian Muslims

According to formal statistics, more than twenty million Muslims are living in Russia federation and this is four times more than Muslims of Turkmenistan, three times more than Muslims of Azerbaijan and more than Muslims of some Arabic countries.

High potentials of Muslims, their interests to Islam, ascending process of Islam development in Russia federation, independent Muslims institutions and their presence in Russia federation cabinet has brought good opportunities according to religious common point of views. Existence of too many Persian words in different languages of Russian Muslims is a sign of association between Muslims of these regions and Iran.

Cultural similarities

If we pay attention exactly to identity elements of Iran and Russia, we can see that there are

numerous cultural similarities between Iran and Russia. Iranians are pious Muslims, and Shi'ism—as well as ancient Persian culture—is an integral part of Iranian identity. This attitude is very reminiscent of Russian attitude towards Orthodoxy, which is considered an important component of Russian identity though.

Russia, an heir of Byzantium combines the power of secular government with religious power. In theology of the Iranian state, religious establishment and the state are intertwined.

Both Iran and Russia view themselves as multiethnic country with a powerful culture. Many parallels exist between Russian and Iranian rhetoric. One can, for example, find similar motives in the speeches of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian Supreme Leader. Putin speaks extensively about sovereignty and self-sufficiency. Iranian Supreme Leader uses nearly the same terminology, *khodkefa'i*, which means that Iran must rely on its own potential.

Both leaders are pushing for the diversification of their countries' respective economies in order to decrease dependence on hydrocarbon export. Another key term in Iranian Supreme Leader speeches is *pishraft-e elmi ve-fanavari* (scientific and technological progress) (Ayatollah Khamene'i, 2013). To this end, the Iranian leader has called for the establishment of an independent Iranian banking system and an emphasis on domestic production. Putin too has promoted such a system for Russian banks in his speeches. However, for both countries, corruption, bureaucracy, and inefficiency have hindered the implementation of these endeavors as well as further development of bilateral ties.

Government propaganda has been very successful in Russia, owing to the fact that the majority of Russians access information

through print media and official Russian TV channels. Similarly, in Iran, while there are innumerable independent Persian-language media outlets in the virtual space, the population relies mainly on print news and government-run television.

In an attempt to understand both Russian and Iranian motivations, one cannot ignore a particularly striking feature among both cultures: geopolitical interests are never concrete but rather are defined emotionally. Russian official pundits frequently bemoan a lack of respect toward Russia. Political scientist and head of the Council for Foreign Defense Policy Sergey Karaganov's speaks of Russia's humiliation, the failure to consider Russia's position, and "Russia rising from her knees." (Shestakov, 2014) Iranian rhetoric very much resembles this: Iran must be respected; it is a regional power with its own legitimate interests.

Today, however, by contrast, more and more voices in Russia are urging the country to turn to Iran. Among these are Alexander Dugin, Sergey Kurginyan, and other public intellectuals and opinion makers who have stressed the importance of Iran. It is not fortuitous that those calling for closer ties with Iran are staunch proponents of "Eurasianism" and a "multi-polar world." The latter two terms are nothing more than a euphemism for Russian hegemony over its "near abroad."

Literature

Russian literature with its special qualities which shows sadness and suffering has always been wide-read by the Iranian book lovers. Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, Alexander Pushkin and Anton Chekhov are as familiar name to the Iranian book lovers and readers as Ferdowsi, Hafiz or more contem-

porary Persian novelists such as Sadegh Hedayat or Simin Daneshvar. But, it will not be so exiting to say that Russian contemporary literature has been largely eclipsed and neglected in Iran's intellectual circles and some good deeds like Tehran International Book Fair in 2016 has thought to remedy that.

We can find Iran and Russia relations date back to the 16th century. Such historical relations and ties combined with a long-standing tradition of political, cultural and social interactions that give both countries even more reason to step up cooperation in as many fields as possible. It may be surprising to Iranians to know that Vladimir Putin the President of Russia, who is one of the most influential and powerful men in the world, has listed a book of poetry by Persian poet and mathematician Omar Khayyam among his top nine favorite books and Russia also in 2008 published the first edition of '*Khayyam and Putin*', a book containing Putin's favorite quatrains written by Khayyam and all of these happenings show his admiration for the Persian poet.

Appreciation of Russia toward Iran

Russia's positive point of view toward Iran as one of the most important Muslim countries in the world is a relief to Moscow as a friendly Islamic country and open to a "dialogue of civilizations." For the first time this famous concept was favored by former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami and it is supported and accepted by the Kremlin as a special part of efforts to change the global order and make it more multi polar. Such cultural aspects and notions have a pragmatic side. Russians always appreciate that Tehran did not interfere and criticize Moscow's military operations in Chechnya and supported Russia's observer role status in the Organization of the

Islamic Conference which now is "Organization of Islamic Cooperation".

Conclusion

We know that the countries move toward cooperation and coalition that have common background on identity elements and with emphasizing and increasing all the aspects of these identity elements, they will be able to increase their bilateral ties and without paying attention to these common backgrounds on identity elements, increasing the level of bilateral relations will not be possible.

There are some facts about the identity differences between Iran and Russia like the differences about the construction of government and governing rules, different religion, different language and common feelings about regional threats. But beyond the imaginations of two countries about the threats ahead, there are many similarities and common interests like: both countries are against the western countries policies and notions and both leaders of Iran and Russia are currently motivated by strong animus toward the government of the United States, which has imposed sanctions on both countries, and this shapes special worldviews of two countries. Like Russia, Iran rejects U.S. dominance in the global system, and tries to reduce that dominance in the Middle East. Moscow and Tehran are partners in opposing the existing world order, both countries are against the religious fundamentalists and have common point of view about the regional crisis's, Iran is a Muslim state, but follows a highly respected, civilized form of Islam completely different from that of Wahabi Saudi Arabia, Iran and Russia are partners in war on terror, While Russia's domestic policy is far from being purely ideological or theological, the Russian Orthodox Church would like to wield more influence and The

church, similar to the ideas of Islamic cleric elites in Iran, opposes "Western liberalism.". So common notions and point of views of these two countries can increase bilateral ties and relations between two countries.

Islamic Republic of Iran since 1979-2004, according to its constructive identity elements tried to increase its relations with Russia, and tried to use of military and political potentials of Russia on its negotiations with western countries and to be able to decrease the western threats.

This article argued that Russia and Iran have both common interests and cultural similarities and the measures of Islamic Republic of Iran to increase its relations with Russia according to its constructive elements, includes different measures which with paying attention to these identity elements, they would be able to increase their bilateral ties and common point of views toward regional and international issues and could be reflected in the foreign policies of both neighbor countries and the results of survey show that according to identity elements of Iran and Russia, relations between two countries include different paradigms of co operations an common point of views and will be able to affect and transmit from cultural field to political and foreign relations of two neighbor countries.

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