



Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in North Africa: A Comparative Study on Ahmadinejad's and Rouhani's Governments (With Emphasis on Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia)

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Abstract

The North African region, with emphasis on the countries of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, is one of the most important regions in the world. This region can be considered one of the most important regions in interaction with the West Asia region; which is not only affected by the political, security, social and economic equations of the West Asian complex, but also has decisive effects on these equations. This article is trying to provide a recognizable criterion for evaluating the performance of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in North Africa in Ahmadinejad and Rouhani governments (with emphasis on Egypt, Libya and Tunisia) by relying on the theoretical framework of constructivism and the SWOT analysis method. The main question of this research is: How was the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in North African countries (with emphasis on Egypt, Libya and Tunisia) between 2005 and 2021? The main hypothesis states that: The behavior of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the developments in North African countries is inspired by internal, regional and international calculations in which ideology and national power play a prominent role. Based on this, Iran tried to adopt a trend in its foreign policy in its strategic calculations that would be effective in the developments of the North African region and defend its ideological interests. But the available data shows that it has not been very successful in achieving this goal.

Keywords: Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic, North Africa, Islamic Awakening, Human Awakening, Foreign Relations.

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Introduction

North Africa is a region that includes the countries of Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco. This region can be considered one of the most important regions in interaction with the West Asia region; which is not only influenced by the political, security, social and economic equations of the West Asian complex, but also has decisive effects on these equations. The North African region has established close ties with West Asia (Middle East) due to factors such as the religion of Islam, race, Arabic language and culture, the way of looking at the Palestinian issue, economic issues and strategic importance; And it has caused this whole collection to be called the "Middle East and North Africa" region. For this reason, when it comes to political-social developments in West Asia, one leg of these developments reaches the North African region.

On the other hand, geographically, there are regional links between North Africa and the Middle East, and North Africa is considered one of the most important gateways to Europe. In the years after the popular uprisings or in other words the Arab uprisings; Although due to foreign interference and the growth of separatist groups and the spread of terrorist groups, countries like Libya have experienced a kind of pervasive instability; But this region still maintains its importance in regional equations and still has the ability to play an important role in the developments of West Asia. An issue that has caused changes in the relations between these countries and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and in fact, Iran's relations with these countries can be divided into two periods before and after the Islamic awakening in North Africa.

In the current situation, one of the most important issues that connects the security of Iran and the countries located in North Africa

is the issue of ISIS and Takfiri terrorism. Many of the foreign forces that enter Iraq and Syria to join ISIS are from North African countries. For this reason, there are many connections between West Asia and North Africa, which have made the political, security, economic and social equations between these two regions dependent on each other, both throughout history and in the current situation. In such a way that the establishment of stability and security and economic growth in West Asia and North Africa depends on the cooperation of all the countries located in these two geographical areas.

This importance has caused special attention to the African continent in the 9th and 10th governments headed by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and North Africa gained a special place with Ahmadinejad's trip to Egypt and Algeria. However, with the start of popular uprisings in early 2011 and its domino-like spread to other Arab countries, North Africa became one of the main centers for recruiting new forces to ISIS terrorist groups. But in Iran, there were two types of perceptions about the origin and type of reasons for the formation of popular uprisings in North African countries; Both views had a direct impact on the formation of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards these countries.

Some believed that the developments in the Middle East and North Africa, which are referred to as "Islamic Awakening"; It is derived from the model of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, which has made the fight against oppression, arrogance and resistance a literature in the world arena, and today it is heard from the languages of many Muslim nations. According to international relations experts, the developments that started in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East are a

symbol of social revolutions. Revolutions formed based on religious discourse and signs of Islamism. This is obviously a reflection of Iran's Islamic revolution in the Middle East (Mottaghi, 2011: p. 164). At the same time, some others considered the developments in North Africa and West Asia as a "human awakening" that started from North Africa and reached other parts of the world, even Europe and America. In this context, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad believed that; The waves of human awakening will reach all regions of the world, including Europe and America. And they should not think that they are immune from this wave and can disturb other parts of the world. Rather, they themselves are more in danger of these waves (Etedaal news base, 2010). The same situation caused Iran's foreign policy to become passive in the 10th government.

Meanwhile, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in a critical and decisive period in a strategic region called North Africa, could be a support point for Iran's foreign relations with all the countries of this region and such regional security; which was not very successful. Especially since after the 11th and 12th governments headed by Hassan Rouhani came to power, the focus of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy on nuclear negotiations and the development of relations with the West and North African countries almost became very weak in Tehran's foreign policy.

In this regard, the present research tries to provide a recognizable criterion for evaluating the performance of this policy by relying on the theoretical framework of constructivism and the SWOT analysis method. The strategic analysis method or SWOT, which works to achieve the strategies of an organization or a policy by recognizing the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization

and its external opportunities and threats. The SWOT analysis method is a method to draw the current and desired situation of an organizational method or policy adoption method. In this method, based on the identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and the typology of the organization's environment, or the decision-making environment, strategies for the strength of the opportunity, the strength of the threat, the weakness of the opportunity, and the weakness of the threat are presented.

Examining the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran before and after the very influential developments of popular uprisings in the North African region; And its differences in the four governments (9th, 10th, 11th and 12th) headed by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani will tell the factors and reasons why some problems occur and on the other hand will strengthen the relations between Iran and North African countries. The main question of this research is: How was the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in North African countries (with emphasis on Egypt, Libya and Tunisia) between 2005 and 2021?

The main hypothesis states that: the behavior of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the developments of North African countries is inspired by internal, regional and international calculations in which ideology and national power play a prominent role. Based on this, Iran tried to adopt a trend in its foreign policy in its strategic calculations that would be effective in the developments of the North African region and defend its ideological interests. But the available data shows that it has not been very successful in achieving this goal. There are also two sub-questions:

Sub-question 1; How was the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the

countries of North Africa (with emphasis on the countries of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia) in the 9th and 10th governments headed by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad?

Sub-question 2; How was the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the countries of North Africa (with emphasis on the countries of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia) in the 10th and 11th governments headed by Hassan Rouhani?

Sub hypothesis 1: Despite the special attention of the 9th and 10th governments headed by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Africa and especially North African countries, actions were taken in this regard. The disagreement of the Iranian authorities on the reasons and foundations of popular uprisings in this region led to the formation of a kind of ineffective foreign policy.

Sub-hypothesis 2: With the inauguration of the 11th and 12th governments headed by Hassan Rouhani, the foreign policy of the Rouhani government focused too much on nuclear negotiations and expanding relations with the West to lift sanctions; It led to the neglect of regions like North Africa in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic, and finally the absence of Iran's presence in the important and dynamic region of North Africa.

The Importance and Necessity of research

Foreign policy is considered the most important aspect of social-political life of nations and countries and is one of the intellectual and mental preoccupations of scientific and academic circles. Examining how governments function in foreign relations, especially with different regions of the world, is considered very important in this framework; In the meantime, despite its importance, the African continent has always been neglected and less attention has been paid to it. Of

course, the North African region is more important for the Islamic Republic of Iran due to its proximity to the West Asian region compared to other African regions; In this research, the performance of Iran's foreign policy in this region will be explored. Examining the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in a region like North Africa and its effects, especially in the two periods of the governments of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani, can be a light for formulating and determining future strategies in foreign relations in different governments in our country; And it can provide the conditions to solve possible problems and defects.

Of course, the occurrence of very important developments of Islamic awakening in northern countries and the need for active diplomacy in a region that was pregnant with influential events, adds to the importance of this research. Especially, with the fall of the governments that were at the top of affairs in the North African countries for years, governments with new policies came to work, which has also affected the development or reduction of the level of relations between these countries and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The growing activity of the great powers and the significant presence of the regional powers and their impact on the developments in North Africa have been and are influencing the relations of the countries of this region with Iran. And the same issue affects the decision-making in the field of foreign policy. At the same time, some differences of views about the reasons and factors for the formation of developments in North African countries and even West Asia in Iran were not without influence in the type of view and even the adoption of approaches towards North African countries. Examining this difference in views and its impact on the foreign

policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards African countries can answer many questions about why Iran's relations with the countries of this region are up and down.

Background of Research

A group of writers from Burhan think tank in a book in 2020 titled *Contemporary Islamic Movements in North Africa* examines and analyzes the evolution of Islamic movements in this region. In this book, Islamist currents in the region are also considered and their role in contemporary developments in North African countries is examined. In a book in 2019 titled *Islamic Awakening and Social Political Developments in West Asia and North Africa*, Davoud Gheriyagh Zandi examines the uprising of men in these regions with emphasis on the role of armies. In this book, which was published by Farabi Faculty of Science and Technology, he points out the vital role of the army in the protests along with other factors. The author wants to come to the conclusion that the army has played a very important role in the countries of West Asia and North Africa since the independence of these countries and has also played a role in the new developments in these countries.

In an article for the Middle East Center of the Carnegie Institution in 2020, Tamer Badawi and Osama Al-Saeid pay attention to the view of Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood on how to use the Arab uprisings. In this article, written with the title (*Mismatched Expectations: Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood After the Arab Uprisings*), an attempt has been made to point out the efforts of Iran and al-Ikhwan al-Muslimīn to get closer to each other and the benefits of this association.

Majid Alavian and Garineh Keshishyan Siraki in 2018 in an article entitled *Politicizing the Tunisian Ennahda Islamist Move-*

ment, which was published in the *International Journal of Political Science*; They have written about the impact of the Islamic Revolution of Iran on Islamic awakening movements, especially in Tunisia, and bilateral relations.

Fatemeh Al-Samadi tries to examine the Iranian narrative of the Arab revolutions in the research she conducted at the Qatar Al Jazeera Research Center in 2017. In this article published under (*Iran and the Arab Revolutions: Narratives Establishing Iran's Monopolism*); An attempt is made to explain how Iranian narratives deal with the Arab revolutions as an influential event that shapes the future of the region and Iran should play a role in it.

In a book in 2016 titled *Iran and the Arab World: Arab Developments and Iran's Geopolitics*, which was published in Information Publications, Mohammad Masjed Jameh deals with the commonalities, issues and problems between Iran and the Arab countries. In this way, he takes an analytical look at Arab developments and their influence on Iran's geopolitics and discusses the reasons for the formation of these developments.

Abbas Ali Ranjbar, Majid Nejatpour and Mujtaba Mousavinejad in an article titled (*Soft Power Influence of Islamic Revolution of Iran in Islamic Awakening*) in the fourth issue of 2015 of *Allameh Tabataba'i University's Journal of Strategic Political Studies*; They are trying to pay attention to the influence of the soft power of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in the formation of the popular uprising in North Africa, especially in the countries of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya.

The authors believe that the main values of Iran's Islamic revolution, such as martyrdom, ethics, justice, independence, and cooperation with the West and the Zionist regime,

have been able to shape the process of re-belief and awakening in North Africa.

Abdullah Moradi, in the fifth issue of *Islamic Awakening Quarterly* in 2014, in an article entitled the political position of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the intersubjective and post-revolutionary space of the Arab Middle East; points out to the formation of a new understanding of Iran's role after the revolution in Arab countries and the new global conditions. This article studies some of the realities of developments in the Arab countries of the region, especially in relation to the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, based on the understanding and perceptions of the parties.

Mustafa Mohammadi, in issue 4 of *Islamic Awakening Studies Quarterly* in 2014, in an article entitled the effects of Islamic awakening in the Middle East and North Africa on Iran's national security; Examines the effects of Islamic awakening in the Middle East and North Africa on the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran from the perspective of security in the Copenhagen school. In this article, he tries to prove that the developments of Islamic awakening in addition to affecting the security of the Islamic Republic of Iran; It has caused the expansion of Islamic populism, the further political isolation of the Zionist regime, the disruption of the balance of power in the region, the intensification of Islamophobia and Iran phobia, and the intensification of conflicts within the region.

Seyed Ali Nejabat in an article in 2014 entitled the approach of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the recent developments in the Middle East; In the 4th issue of the politics magazine, he examines the developments in the Arab countries after the popular uprising. In this article, he emphasizes, the popular uprising is considered a

unique phenomenon in this political geography region, which has affected the foreign policy of all regional actors, including the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this regard, the question arises as to what are the influencing factors on Iran's foreign policy regarding the recent developments in the Middle East. In his hypothesis, he considers the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran to be influenced by ideological factors and realism in relation to the new developments in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Ali Admi and Najmeh Pouresmaili in an article in the 4th issue of 2013 of *Foreign Studies Journal* titled (Saudi Arabia and Iran: The Islamic Awakening Case) try to address the regional position of Iran and Saudi Arabia after the formation of Islamic awakening. The authors believe that Islamic awakening has strengthened Iran's regional position and for this reason has forced Saudi Arabia to adopt a more balanced policy towards Iran.

Abdul Naser Naji and Roza Azarkamand, at the National Conference on Geopolitics of Southwest Asia, *Issues of Development and Perspective* in 2013, in an article titled *Foreign Policy Strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Light of New Developments in the Middle East*; They point to the effects of popular movements in the countries of the Middle East region and the creation of opportunities and threats for the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this article, the authors try to examine the view of the Islamic Republic on the developments in the Middle East and introduce Iran's solution to achieve these developments through reforms and transformation in the region based on an endogenous model and in accordance with local values and norms.

In the second issue of the *Journal of Political Sociology of the Islamic World* in 2013, Mohammad Taghi Qezelsofla and Somayeh Far-

rokhi believe in an article entitled Paradigm of Islamic Resistance and Awakening in the light of developments in Africa and the Middle East; The Islamic revolution is the most important link of the contemporary Islamic movements and has been proposed as a new paradigm in the challenge to the international system since the beginning of the eighties of the 20th century. In this article, the authors tried to show how and under what conditions simultaneously with the occurrence of the Islamic revolution in the field of practice, two other important components in the field of theorizing helped the formation of the resistance paradigm. In fact, how are resistance and Islamic awakening related to each other?

Jahangir Kiamarath and Morteza Ismaili in issue 1 of the Politics Journal of the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences in 2013 in an article entitled the impact of the Islamic Revolution of Iran on the Islamic Awakening Movement of North Africa (2010-2012), a case study of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya; Dealt with the origins of this phenomenon in the mentioned countries. In this context, the authors believe: Islamic awakening is not only a new phenomenon in these countries, but also has deep roots in the past, the most important of which was the Islamic Revolution.

In an article in 2012 titled Islamic Awakening in North Africa, the old and new situation in Andisheh Taqrib magazine, Morteza Shiroudi deals with various reasons for popular uprising in North African countries; And at the same time, it examines the dangers and harms of the new Islamic movement in this region.

In a book in 2012 entitled Islamic Awakening (Analysis of the emergence of the wave of Islamic awakening in the Arab Middle East and North Africa), Ali Haider Amiri analyzed the emergence of the wave of Islamic awakening in the Arab Middle East and

North Africa. In this way, after finding the background and stating the foundations of the formation of Islamic awakening, he recounted the works and blessings of this movement and challenged the dangers ahead of them. In this article, the origin of this wave is presented according to the countries studied, namely Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Quito, Qatar. At the end of the book, the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in these movements has been studied and Western strategies to curb it have been studied.

Elham Rasouli also discusses the foreign policy of the new revolutionary governments in the Middle East and North Africa based on James Rosenau's model of continuity in an article in the Strategy magazine in 2012. In this review, the author deals with factors such as the decision-maker, the role he plays, governmental variables of new governments, society, or non-governmental variables that include value orientations; and finally adds environmental variables to them.

Farzad Jahanbeen and Parto Fathullah in the article in 2012 under the title of foreign policy strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the recent Islamic awakening movement in the third issue of the Research Journal of the Islamic Revolution deals with the many opportunities and challenges of the Islamic awakening for the Islamic Republic of Iran. The authors emphasize in this article; Considering the context of the Middle East region and various theoretical approaches in the field of international politics; In order to increase the national power and not arouse the hostility of regional rivals the adoption of Iran's regional strategy based on the theoretical approach of "defensive realism" has more potential for success in facing regional developments. In this regard, while defining two immediate and non-urgent circles in its

security environment, Iran has tried to use two strategic and ideological tools to resolve its strategic concerns; To eliminate security threats on the one hand and on the other hand by supporting most of the revolutions in the region in order to increase its regional role, take steps to win the Islamic front and strengthen the axis of Islamic resistance.

Ali Soroush and Zeinab Asgharian in an article in 2011 entitled *Islamic Awakening of Libya and the Horizons Facing the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Regional Research Quarterly* examines the grounds, manner and process of the Libyan people's protests and uprising against Colonel Gaddafi. At the same time, in this article, the authors discuss the capacities that can be used for the Islamic Republic of Iran in the internal field of Libya in the direction of Islamic awakening.

Seyed Amir Niakouie, in an article titled "Recent Developments in the Middle East and North Africa: Different Origins and Consequences" in issue 4 of 2011, *Foreign Relations Journal*, deals with the results and reasons of protests in the Arab world. In his article, he used Goldstone's theory about why some revolutions won and others failed. Based on this, the hypothesis of the article is: the different political results of the protests are due to a combination of factors including the political legitimacy of the governments, the level of social mobilization of the protesters and finally the reaction of the army and international powers; Therefore, the different status of the above components in the crisis countries has caused different political results.

The difference between the current research and the books, articles and research done; The vast majority of the researches that have been mentioned in the literature of this research deal with the reasons and contexts of the developments of the last two decades in

the North African region; Some of them have a brief look at the performance of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in this regard. This is while the current research tries to investigate the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the position of the North African countries in this policy in two very important periods before and after the Islamic awakening; which is new and novel in its own way, and no such research has been done from this point of view. Besides, in this research, due to considering a specific period of time, it actually evaluates the foreign policy of four governments with two different types of thinking and its impact on relations with North African countries. In this research, the independent variable: the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic from 2005 to 2021 and the dependent variable: the position of North Africa is considered.

Research purposes

General goal: explaining the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in North African countries (with emphasis on Egypt, Libya and Tunisia) between 2005 and 2021.

Sub-objective 1: Examining the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in North African countries (with emphasis on the countries of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia) in the 9th and 10th administrations headed by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Sub-objective 2: Investigating the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in North African countries (with emphasis on the countries of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia) in the 10th and 11th governments headed by Hassan Rouhani.

The New Aspect of Research

Examining and comparing the foreign policy performance of the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani governments towards North African coun-

tries during one of the most important historical developments in this region seems to have been done less in the researches of this field. At the same time, examining the impact of the differences in the perceptions of Iranian officials about the origin of popular uprisings in North African countries in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic is also one of the neglected points in the researches related to the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in this region; which is tried to be paid attention to in this research.

Theoretical Framework

Constructivism theory deals with the role of culture in international relations. In fact, one of the promises of constructivist theory is to return domestic culture and politics to the field of international relations theory. From the point of view of structuralists, the international system consists of the distribution of ideas rather than the distribution of material capabilities, and it gives priority to ideas and thoughts in the debate of substance and meaning; And the main focus is on inter-intellectual beliefs that are widely shared among the people of the world. From the perspective of constructivism as an analytical framework and approach in the meta-theoretical field, actors act based on the meanings that things and other actors produce for them, and these intersubjective meanings are formed in the interaction.

This process of formation of meanings is formed in a process of marking, interpreting and responding in a way that leads to common recognition. "A person" interprets the signs based on interaction, discussion, conversation, debate and reasoning, and he reacts and responds to those signs and actions based on his perception and interpretation. And in this process, identity is formed in the form of

"self" and "other" or "friend" and "enemy". From this point of view, these are common cognitive structures that act as a definition and platform for material resources. Therefore, in the conceptual structure perception, actions always define and redefine the perception of "self" and "other". Constructivism believes that governments act based on their mental meanings, language, and perceptions, which are derived from their identity. In fact, in this theory, mental patterns are a determining factor in foreign policy, and these mental patterns are caused by the identity of the states, a large part of which is the product of their social system and internal identity. In this treatise, we will use constructivism as a theoretical framework.

By rejecting rationalist concepts, neorealism and neoliberalism, constructivism offers a logical and social perspective to world politics; which emphasizes the importance of commercial and material structures and the role of identity in the construction of interests, actions and the mutual development of the structure and agent (Asgarkhani and Mansouri Moghadam, 2010: p. 195). In other words, this theory does not accept the idea of countries as selfish actors whose interests were formed before international social interaction. Constructivism tries to explain the role and effects of intersubjective communities in global politics and foreign policy by presenting an understanding of identity politics. Understanding how identity and interests are formed and the type of norms and procedures and their mutual consistency are the most important goals of the constructivist research program. To mean identity politics means to recognize differences and distinctions between different countries by acknowledging the constructive role of culture as a system of intersubjective meanings in the formation and development of the identity

and interests of countries (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2007: p. 112).

Constructivism is one of the most serious epistemological schools in the field of international relations and foreign policy; Despite its ancient philosophical roots, in the second half of the last decade of the 20th century and the first half of the beginning decade of the 21st century, it has received the attention of philosophers, interpretivists and thinkers in the field of international relations and foreign policy. The main axis of this theory is that the subject actively creates knowledge and meaning based on his previous experiences, and its roots go back to the thought of philosophers such as Hegel, Kant and Nietzsche. In the 1990s, this theory was introduced into the theoretical field of international relations by Nicholas Onuf. In 1989, he emphasized the role of rules in the formation of the world in a book entitled "The World Made by Us". From the point of view of this thinker, there is no possibility of independent and direct access to the world, and all human actions are formed in a social space and in interaction with others and gain meaning. And this is meaning-making that more or less shapes the world (Onuf, 1989: p. 157).

This approach is a framework for the analysis of international relations in the middle of realism and liberalism and an attempt in the transtheoretical field in the middle of the two spectrums of positivists and poststructuralists. Constructivists consider the world as something that has been created and invented, something that can be assumed to be certain, natural and pre-given (Hadiyan, 2003: p. 915).

Wendt sees the problem of structural theories in reductionist (neorealism) and structuralist (world system) ontological view. He believes that the structuralism of the neorealists in the ontological dimension is not ac-

tually structuralist; Rather, it reduces the structure of the international system to these units (states) by defining it based on constituent units. And therefore, the ontological priority in it is with the agents (governments). On the other hand, in the structuralist view of the world system that can be seen in the theory of Emmanuel Wallerstein. Governments are secondary to the structure, because it is the structure that gives them consistency as a unit (Wendt, 1987: p. 67). According to his belief, constructivism is a social theory based on the assumption that social actors are socially constructed; And what we know as government or national interests is the result of social identities of activists (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraf, 2001: p. 166).

Identity is a key concept in constructivist theory, especially that the structures and political action of a country can be explained by referring to the identity of that country (Karimifard, 2012: p. 240).

Constructivists believe that people build the world around them based on their contextual identity and act in it. As a participant in the international arena, the government cannot pursue its goals by ignoring the dominant norms. They believe that beyond the objective distribution of power (the basis of realist theories), it is the countries' perception of the power of others that enables a nation to interact with its environment. This constructed world, which has value implications, shapes the actions of governments. Governments themselves are social constructions that participate in this collective mentality and understand the world with this mentality (Willmer, 2002: pp. 59-30).

One of the fundamental principles in constructivism is that people act on the basis of their perception compared to other actors and the distribution of power affects the calculations of governments. But how to act depends

on mutual understanding and expectations from yourself and the other. Therefore, in relation to power and its distribution, it is important for the parties to understand and understand each other, and governments find their interests in the process of defining their own and other's situation (Folker, 2000: p. 44). Therefore, from the point of view of constructivists, identities and mental perceptions of a state are among other states that shape power (Guzzini, 2005: p. 33).

Constructivists attach importance to the issue of structure-agent and the government and consider the government as the main actor of the international system, just like the realists, so these governments are the main actors in the international system. According to Guzzini and also McIntosh, constructivists are different from other theories of international relations by emphasizing the ontological, epistemological and difference in perceptions and concepts from each other (McIntosh, 1997: p. 53).

In the structuralist understanding of the international structure, the structure also includes the resources (in the sense of physical characteristics) that constitute capabilities; It also includes rules (that is, the media through which actors communicate with each other and coordinate their actions). Therefore, the use of resources and capabilities takes place in a meaningful framework. Therefore, it can be seen that constructivists consider both material and semantic aspects in their definition of all issues related to international politics and foreign policy. Adler has collected this issue well in his definition of constructivism. He considers constructivism as a point of view that shows how the material world is shaped by human action and the shaping of the material world by human action and interaction is dependent on the normative dynamic interpretations of the material

world. This means the role of the material world in building the social world (Adler, 1997: p. 323).

From the constructivist point of view, the common analysis of foreign policy has a static view of the agent and only considers the influence of the internal environment on the formation of its decisions; And the alternative ontology of structuralism, while believing in the mutual development of the agency structure, states that if the structure is something that arises from the interaction of actors and agents. Each of them act based on their identities. This is why Smith, based on Wendt, who said that anarchy is something that governments create (Wendt, 1994, pp. 424-425). Regarding constructivist foreign policy, he claims that foreign policy is something that governments create (Smith, 2001: pp. 37-38). and this theory will be used as a theoretical framework in this article.

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran with a constructive view

Foreign policy is a pre-designed strategy by decision makers, through this process political actors find their position in front of other countries or international institutions. Governments are obliged to determine their orientations, goals and interests in the framework of foreign policy in the international arena (Sanaei, 2010: p. 11).

Analytical approaches of foreign policy pay attention to several factors in examining the foreign behavior of governments, therefore, in the first impression, the foreign policy of governments is based on the norms, values and tastes of policymakers. In this situation, foreign policy may provide different data. Based on this view, there are no fixed and unchangeable factors in policy-making, and the coming to power of new leaders and parties can create changes in foreign policy

data. In the second perception of foreign policy, it emphasizes various factors such as historical traditions, geographical location, interests and goals of governments. This means that the foreign policy data is analyzed from the historical point of view and the importance of the interests and policies of the predecessors, regardless of which party or person is at the head of the government. But the third point of view in the analysis of foreign policy is a combination of the two previous views, which means that foreign policy data is, on the one hand, a combination of unchangeable factors such as the creation of a coup or the effectiveness of new parties and elites; And on the other hand, it considers a series of stabilizing factors such as geographical, historical factors and the geopolitical position of the political unit (Qavam, 2015: p. 116).

A major part of Iran's foreign policy behavior towards the West and the conservative countries of the region is derived from the type of identity that this country has defined for itself. This identity is formed not based on material structures, but based on interactions, procedures, norms, cultural values, ideology and basic beliefs (Moshirzadeh, 2016: p. 252). Today, it can be seriously claimed that a realistic analysis of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic will not be possible; Unless, in our perceptual framework, there are tools to consider the fundamental importance of the "identity" category of the Islamic system. This approach will help us to examine its discourse developments in different periods. By understanding the identity of the system, we will be able to find the conceptual structures according to which the government and its agents define and categorize the world. In constructivist logic, identity is not a given thing, but in the sense that it is a historical thing, it is the result of the participation of a

conscious entity in the concepts of the accepted mental base of a society. Identity refers to its sources and roots in the sense that it is a self-developed thing. Therefore, in the analysis of the foreign policy of a political system from the perspective of its identity, one should first of all look at the sources of identity, the sources of this "self" in the society and its history in order to prove its relevance (Mottaghi, 2008: p. 222).

Since these concepts are included in the constructivist theory, the most suitable theory for analyzing the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the constructivist theory. According to this approach, the behavior of Iran's foreign policy is influenced by the domestic and international normative environment, that is, on the one hand, Iran's foreign policy is caused by the layers and complexities that exist inside it. Understanding this complexity depends on a reasonable understanding of the interactions and infrastructures and the value system of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran after the Islamic Revolution. This value system defines the identity of this country in the international system and the type of identity also determines the direction of foreign policy. On the other hand, the type of international normative environment, whether peaceful or aggressive, moderates or intensifies this identity in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In other words, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the result of the interaction of the domestic and international normative system. On the one hand, in the domestic arena, Iran's foreign policy behaviors are the result of several discourses that have dominated Iran's foreign policy since the Islamic Revolution. These discourses include the discourse of resistance and anti-domination, responsibility, self-reliance, independence, dignity and negation

of sin, Islamic unity (strengthening relations with Islamic countries), the discourse of seeking justice, and the discourse of anti-enemy, etc. (Dehshiri, 2015: p. 64).

In fact, the semantic and discursive transformations of the Islamic Revolution led to the formation of a new identity, from Western-oriented before the revolution to anti-Westernism after the Islamic Revolution; which implied new interests and ideals for this country. These discourses contain a set of concepts that give meaning to the identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the other hand, in terms of the type of international normative environment, we have witnessed adjustment or intensification of discourse in foreign policy in different periods. That is, the rule of the aggressive normative system in the international and regional arena has strengthened and intensified the revolutionary discourses of Iran's foreign policy and has made the foreign policy inflexible or has the least amount of flexibility

On the other hand, the rule of the non-aggressive normative system has directed the discourses of the Islamic Revolution towards moderation and increased the level of flexibility of foreign policy. Based on this and since the constructivist approach has paid special attention to the role of identity building sources; In defining national interests and its influence on the foreign action of governments, it has a more effective explanatory power for analyzing the identity-building sources of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. For example, the definability of the foreign policy arising from the Islamic revolution in this approach owes a great deal to what Bokele and Rittberger call expectations related to appropriate behavior based on the logic of proportionality (Rittberger, 1999: p. 18).

It is based on these expectations and logic that we can expect a certain foreign behavior from the Islamic Republic of Iran in the international arena. Accordingly, this country is expected to make decisions according to accepted norms and rules based on the background of religion and culture, mental factors, historical experience, etc. and regulate its foreign behavior in the foreign arena. For example, these expectations and the aforementioned logic make the Islamic Republic of Iran appear in international and regional forums as a supporter of Muslim rights. Therefore, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is connected to a chain of countless influential elements such as the influence of religious teachings and affiliations, the historical view and traditional idealism of Iranians towards friends and enemies, the mental environment, peripheral and continuous.

Due to the multiplicity and intertwining of these elements, it is difficult to determine the weight of each of them. Especially, the acceleration of developments and the entry of new elements adds to the complexity of the issue and sometimes changes their position and weight according to the requirements. In addition, the performance of different functions and roles sometimes causes that a specific norm is not a guide for foreign policy. All of these indicate the multifacetedness of the foreign policy phenomenon and are indicative of multiple and overlapping sources of norms, the prominence of elements of which is a function of multiple considerations and the mental development of societies.

The importance and place of norms is because according to the constructivist approach, by understanding how norms affect identity, one can understand how to define national interests, which is the basis of a country's foreign policy. With this approach,

it seems that after the Islamic revolution, the "Islamic-Shia" religious norms have a special weight and credibility among the many layers of identity and culture of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Of course, in addition to this index norm, several types of general norms are effective in the formation of the foreign policy identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which can be classified into two dimensions, internal and external. In the domestic dimension, norms related to foreign policy mainly originate from political culture.

We assume that the contemporary political culture of Iran has three layers or three dimensions "religious", "Iranian" and "modern" or a mixture related to the three elements of religion, nationality and modernity. Among these basic dimensions, the religious layer is known as one of the pillars of the identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is also reflected in the drafting of the constitution. These norms, which have been accepted in the contemporary social and political culture of Iran as the dominant and governing approach to its relations; It has led to a set of new positions and behaviors that show how the mental perceptions and semantic variables derived from it have made the Islamic Republic of Iran unique coordinates (Dehshiri, 2015: p. 67).

The interaction and intersection of the aforementioned norms, especially the development of the internal dimensions of the norms on the eve of the Islamic Revolution, led to the emergence of a distinct identity in Iran, which is represented by the title "Islamic". With the formation and emergence of a new identity in the form of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the way of thinking about power and political developments in international relations has undergone drastic changes and the material concepts for foreign policy analysis have been in a bottleneck. In fact, if Hoffman observed an inevitable enmi-

ty between "truth" and "power" in the image and perspective of mainstream theories (Hoffman, 2006: p. 136).

In the new image of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, "Religion" and "Politics and Power" have found a glorious connection, which can be acknowledged with the use of constructivist literature on the importance and independent role of religious and identity concepts. Along this process, the Islamic revolution, while connecting with close identity circles, challenged the theories of power in the global macro equations and was considered as a new design in the general and external outcome; Beyond the Shi'a atmosphere, it became the spiritual inspiration of nations and liberation movements, especially in Muslim societies. And as a result, the religion of Islam left the sidelines of international policies and equations and sat in the center of the mental space of the contemporary world. This process shows that identities, as emphasized by constructivists, are not just philosophical or sociological categories; Rather, it is a determining variable in the way political units interact with each other and has a direct relationship with power. With these explanations in the theoretical framework of constructivist theory, understanding the foreign policy approach of the Islamic Republic of Iran by considering the friendship patterns between the Islamic Republic of Iran and revolutionary forces (such as Islamic and liberation movements around the world) on the one hand; And the patterns of enmity with the governments and forces opposed to the Islamic Revolution, such as the Israeli and American regimes, are understandable on the other hand (Dehshiri, 2015: p. 68).

Conclusion

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to power in 2005 when one of the main slogans of his

government in the foreign dimension was cooperation with South-South countries, and in this regard, he started a double effort to cooperate with the countries of the African continent. While the previous presidents of the Islamic Republic of Iran traveled to this continent only in the last months of their presidency; Ahmadinejad visited Gambia only one year after the formation of the government in 2006 as a special guest of the African Union summit and showed that Africa has a special place for his government. The head of the 9th and 10th governments visited the African continent seven times in his eight years as president and tried to show that Africa is important to him.

In the general analysis of Ahmadinejad government's motivations regarding relations with Africa, its origin can be seen in the internal and international axes of the Islamic Republic of Iran. From the domestic side, it must be acknowledged that since the beginning of the presidential campaigns, the president made his slogans of paying attention to the third world countries, South-South cooperation, rejecting the domination of the great powers on a large scale, and spreading human and Islamic values. From the international perspective, after more than two years of completely peaceful and transparent interaction between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Western countries regarding Iran's peaceful nuclear activities; By fully cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency and complying with all existing laws and regulations, the Westerners not only did not reduce their insistence and opposition along with their threat to completely stop these activities, but also intensified it. These conditions coincided with the start of the new government in Iran; Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran decided to pursue a more ex-

plicit and aggressive foreign policy to defend its positions and plans.

For this purpose, a new movement was needed to communicate with third world countries to gain their support for the positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran and to consolidate the orientations and efforts that have been made; In order to break the taboo of exploitation of the fuel cycle and uranium enrichment by limited western countries, it should be done. Therefore, interaction and cooperation with the countries of the African continent with the capacity of 54 third world and developing countries, along with the previous reasons and motivations, could easily be used to achieve the country's goals.

In fact, in the Ahmadinejad government, in addition to trying to confront the norms governing the international system, an Islamic-revolutionary identity was introduced in Iran's foreign policy. In general, the political approaches of the Islamic Republic of Iran in relations with Africa in this period are as follows:

- Development of economic and political relations and openness in the export of Iranian goods.
- Deepening the presence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in different parts of the world.
- Enjoying the support of African countries in international forums, including nuclear issues, human rights, developing relations with the African Union and regional organizations.
- Deepening cooperation with the countries bordering the Indian Ocean and the Non-Aligned Movement.
- Increasing Iran's political representation in Africa and encouraging African countries to open embassies in Tehran.
- Increasing exchanges in various fields of cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and African countries.

Although Ahmadinejad did not visit Tunisia and other North African countries, his general approach to the African continent had a significant effect on the activation of relations with these countries.

In June 2013, Hassan Rouhani won the presidential elections of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the slogan of moderation and formed the government of Hope and Resourcefulness. The 11th government and especially the twelfth government stated that its foreign policy is economy-oriented and its main goal is to help the development and national welfare through constructive and effective interaction in international relations. Although almost all post-revolution governments, especially after the end of the imposed war, felt the need to develop foreign economic relations and have taken this issue into consideration in their foreign policy plans. However, it seems that the 11th and 12th governments gave special priority to economic diplomacy, which, in addition to being influenced by general and relatively constant internal and external factors, was mainly derived from the ruling discourse and agenda priorities of this government. In other words, the programs presented by Rouhani and the Minister of Foreign Affairs are based on the discourse of moderation and in the framework of the drawn goals. In the country's strategic documents, it was implied that the government paid more attention to economic factors in its foreign policy, and for this reason, it declared its foreign policy to be economy-oriented.

However, in order to achieve the development goals of the country, it is necessary to have a suitable foreign policy. The general principle of the 11th government and then the twelfth government in the field of foreign policy was "constructive interaction in international relations", which was considered

appropriate for a developmentalist government. Based on this principle, constructive interaction with the world has always been emphasized by the Islamic Republic of Iran system, and in fact, without a constructive relationship with the world, the interests of the country cannot be secured. Therefore, our economy should have a constructive interaction aimed at providing mutual benefits with the global economy. From Mr. Rouhani's point of view, constructive interaction based on mutual respect and common interests and from an equal position formed the basis of Iran's relations with other countries.

In the African continent, in the official scene, the development of relations with African countries was the focus of the government. In his meeting with Tanzanian Foreign Minister Agustin Mahiga, Rouhani considered the development of relations with African countries as one of the principles of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and emphasized that Tehran welcomes the expansion and deepening of its relations and cooperation with all African countries.

But this declared policy could never reach the practical stage and the visits of political, cultural and economic officials, although they were effective in improving relations, were forgotten in practice on the African continent during the two terms of Hassan Rouhani's presidency. So that Rouhani did not visit the African continent even once, despite the official invitations and the need to respond to the trips of the presidents of the African countries. So that this continent full of opportunity and capacity remains hidden in the shadow of the 11th and 12th government's view on nuclear negotiations and Iran's relations with the West.

With 55 countries and a population of about one billion, the African continent is one of the regions where the world's econom-

ic powers have competed for a serious presence. Even despite the destructive effects of the Corona pandemic on the African economy, this continent now has more than 1200 billion dollars in economic relations with the countries of the world, of which only one billion dollars was related to Iran in the best case in the past years. In the period after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the development of political and economic relations with African countries, at least at the slogan level, has always been on the agenda of various governments. The work agenda that became a priority in some governments and was followed with seriousness at least in the political field, in this connection, we can mention the performance of Ahmadinejad's government and his numerous trips to some countries of this continent. However, this move was not repeated in the 11th and 12th governments, contrary to the slogans raised. As during the presidency of Hassan Rouhani, despite numerous plans, not even one trip to Africa was recorded in his record.

Since the analytical approaches of foreign policy pay attention to several factors in examining the foreign behavior of governments. Therefore, in this article, an attempt was made to first examine Iran's foreign policy based on the norms, values and tastes of policymakers in the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani governments; The findings of the research showed that the foreign policy of these two presidents towards Africa in general and North African countries in particular showed different data. Also, considering that historical traditions, geographical location, interests and goals of governments are very effective in their foreign policy decisions. The data of foreign policy represent a combination of changeable and unchangeable factors.

The findings indicated that in Ahmadinejad's so-called justice-oriented government, being involved in some internal tensions and lack of a fixed procedure in foreign policy; And in the so-called moderate Rouhani government, excessive desire for relations with the West and being involved with the JCPOA slowed down the development of relations with North African countries. And the historical background, cultural and political commonalities along with the opportunity created by the Islamic awakening could not help these relations much.

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