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## **A Comparative Study of Iran's Neighborhood Policy Discourse with the Ottomans and Russia**

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### **Abstract:**

The importance of the historical study of the Russian and Ottoman neighborhood policy lies in the fact that, in addition to the importance of these two countries in geographical, social, cultural, political and economic dimensions, a large number of Iran's neighboring countries were somehow under the control of these two empires before independence. In this research, the historical process of Iran's relations with these two important neighboring countries has been studied using the descriptive method and discourse analysis of Laclau and Mouffe with the approach of historical institutionalism. The results show that during the lifetime of the Ottoman Empire until the disintegration of this empire, coinciding with the Safavid to Qajar governments, we witness two neighboring discourses. The discourse of the first period, the discourse of structural divergence, later with the change of political, economic and social geography and the requirements of the world system, this discourse turns into the discourse of minimal convergence. The discourse of "structural divergence" was formed on the centrality of the neighborhood policy based on the tyranny of the kingdom. The discourse signs of structural divergence included geographical dominance, expansion of religious ideology, political divergence, economic divergence, and world trade. The minimal convergence discourse is based on the centrality of the political signifier based on the court's understanding of global realities. The semantic system of this discourse is based on the main signs of acknowledging the existence of the neighboring country, the unbalanced weight of different aspects of the relations between the two countries, and the continuation of divergence alongside

convergence. However, in comparison, the central sign of the discourse of the neighborhood with Russia is tsarist imprudence and court tyranny, and the main signs are passivity against Russia's expansionism, "military weakness in exercising territorial sovereignty, weakness in attracting the Iranian peoples of Central Asia and the Caucasus, and giving in to disgraceful agreements." they give. With the formation of the Soviet Union and the beginning of a new discourse, Russian expansionism in Iran in its territorial form ended and the chapter of ideological confrontations between communism and capitalism began. The discourse of Iran's neighborhood policy with the Ottomans and Russia is like two pieces of a puzzle that are both complementary and effective on each other's growth. If Iran's neighborhood policy regarding Russia and Ottomans had the same importance for Iran's ruling body, it is possible that a different historical path would have been established for the region and Iran.

**Keywords:** Discourse, Neighborhood policy, Ottomans, Tsarist Russia, Convergence, Divergence, Historical institutionalism

### Introduction

"Neighborliness" and interaction with neighbors is a part of the culture of all the nations of the world. The term "neighborhood unit" as a concept based on development and construction was first introduced by Clarence Perry in the 1920s in the preparation of the New York development plan (Salari & Pourdeihimi, 2016, p. 7). This term was later introduced from the knowledge of architecture and urban planning to other human sciences, including geography, political science, and relations between neighboring countries. A "neighborhood" in Cambridge Encyclopedia is an area of the city that includes a number of houses, and a neighbor is someone who lives very close to me. Neighborhood is not only a geographical reality but also a normative or moral and customary reality. The importance of the neighborhood, when it is transferred from the individual

to the group and larger geographical units such as countries, gets a double and much wider dimension. At the historical level, relations between neighbors are the oldest variable in international relations (Jackson, 2006, p. 217).

In terms of political geography, a neighboring country is a country that is separated from another country by a border. The relations between these two political units can be called "neighborly relations". The beginning of a government's foreign policy is its view of its neighbor. Neighbor is not only the beginning of a state's foreign policy, but simultaneously, the beginning of an imperialist foreign policy and also the beginning of a state's defense or security policies (Chuny, 2010, p. 143).

The tradition of studying relations between neighborhoods in an academic way that goes back to the theory of re-

gionalism; However, in using this theory for the studies of neighborhood relations, despite its advantages and capabilities, it is neglected that our phased neighborhood precedes regionalism and is a necessary rational condition for its realization. Based on this, the neighborhood is the building element of the region, and regionalism in practice is based on neighborhood relations (Tahaei & Mousavinia, 2013, pp. 2-3). As a result, before the theory of regionalism, it is necessary to propose the theory of neighborhood. In other words, at the levels of foreign policy geography, it is necessary to re-establish foreign policy by choosing the neighborhood level from the four geographic levels (neighborhood, region, extra-region, international) with the conceptual premise of globalization (Khalili, 2018, p. 128).

One of the analytical methods that can show us the process of building neighborly relations between Iran and neighboring countries throughout history is discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a special way of talking about the world and understanding it (or understanding one of its aspects) (Jorgensen, 2010, p. 18); And accordingly, the political discourses of relations with neighboring countries are a set of organized political reactions against countries that have formed or were forming in the vicinity of Iran, regardless of whether their sovereignty is recognized or not; But these reactions have been formed in the context of Iran's extensive social and political structures and developments. The-

se developments, while changing discourses, also provide the basis for changing Iran's foreign policies in dealing with these countries.

The choice of two countries Ottoman and Russia to examine the discourse of Iran's neighborhood based on chronological insight in this research is based on the basic premise that Iran's foreign policy in dealing with these two large and important neighboring countries is in constant evolution, but the change rate is not the same in different periods. Also, there have been several factors in the formation of Iran's foreign policy and political relations with these two neighboring countries. The political discourse in Iran's political relations with these two neighboring countries has also experienced various ups and downs based on the importance of each of these variables throughout history.

Studying the impact of these variables on Iran's relations with these two neighboring countries is not possible without a historical perspective. One of the factors of the transformation of the discourses of political relations with these two countries has been the instability of the geography of Iran's neighboring territory throughout history. Iran's neighbors in the Safavid era were India, Ottomans and Russia. Most of the rulers, from Safavid to Qajar, did not have the ability to maintain the territorial integrity of Iran, and Iran had differences with all its neighbors in terms of borders, and many Iranian states were separated from the country and became "neighbors" with

the intervention of France, Russia, and England. (Eslami, 2013, p. 28). These new countries were also not able to maintain their geographical and political existence and gradually came under the control of stronger countries. In addition to the division of Iran, the division of the neighboring countries, including the Ottoman Empire, made Iran become neighbors with new countries that were previously part of the Ottoman Empire. This trend was visible not only in Iran and the Ottoman Empire but also in other countries. After Napoleon, all traditional empires were transformed into nation states. The First World War was the stage of human entering the period of national government and the collapse of traditional and imperial systems. Also, with the disintegration of the Soviet Republic, Iran became a neighbor to new countries that were part of the Soviet Union and before that were part of the motherland of Iran. Based on this, from the Safavid era to the present period, Iran's neighboring countries have not remained constant and have changed. This lack of stability had caused the discourse of relations with neighboring countries to change. This lack of stability continued even with the establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the era of Fath Ali Shah, and weak human resources, lack of budget, and most importantly tyranny were the main obstacles to stability in Iran's foreign policies (Ramezani, 2001).

The discourses of relations between neighboring countries in the ideal type

(a concept taken from Max Weber) can be classified into two categories: discourses of convergence and discourses of divergence. Based on this, the discourses can be placed in a spectrum where the coldness of relations, crisis of relations and war are on the side of divergence and on the contrary, limited cooperation, extensive cooperation and the formation of blocks or regions are on the side of convergence. It seems that throughout the history of Iran, there have been more discourses of divergence than convergence discourses. This trajectory is of particular importance regarding Iran's neighborly relations with two countries Ottoman and Russia. Part of this importance is related to the fact that these two former countries have a longer history in terms of government formation, and other countries in the region somehow gained independence from them and were under their control for a long time. The turning of the discourse of Iran's neighborhood about these two countries from divergence to convergence and vice versa is the result of extensive political and social changes, the study of which is one of the main goals of this research. Meanwhile, choosing the Safavid era as the starting point of this study, in addition to time and research limitations, also has methodological arguments. Safavids were able to make Iran an independent "nation-state" (not in its modern sense), self-centered, strong and respected, whose borders during the

reign of Shah Abbas the Great were equal to the borders of the Sassanids. For this reason, their possessions spread in different parts of Iran and the rule of khans, clans and local dynasties disappeared and the central rule took its place with increasing power (Nawaei and Ghafari Fard, 2009). Despite this long history of political stabilization of sovereignty, although it can create an opportunity to create economic and cultural discourses, we cannot be sure about the stabilization of the discourse of convergence of relations with neighboring countries, especially the Ottoman Empire and Russia. Based on this, the research about the lack of formation of the discourse of convergence between Iran's neighboring countries in the Safavid era can be considered as a suitable starting point.

Based on this, the main questions of this research are designed based on the representation of the discourses of relations with the two neighboring countries, Ottoman and Russia, and the broad social and political structures and developments of Iran in the last few centuries. By examining the historical process of Iran's relations with these two important neighboring countries, we can determine the distinction of historical periods in terms of the type of relations (interaction or confrontation / independence or dependence) and the degree of emphasis, policy-making method and their importance. Critical discourse analysis also helps us to evaluate the country's policies in the history of relations with these

two neighboring countries based on the context and conditions of the society. Based on this, the central research question is:

- What differences can be observed in the discourses of Iran's political relations with the two neighboring countries, Ottoman and Russia, in historical periods?
- How can we explain the turn of discourse of Iran's relations with two neighboring countries, Ottoman and Russia, during these historical periods?

### **Necessity of Research**

Policy-making and formulation of strategies for Iran's political relations with neighboring countries requires observation of relevant discourses and a critical look at them. If the disadvantages and merits of the previous and ruling discourses are identified, a more reliable path can be developed for the future discourses of political relations with neighboring countries. Knowing the historical experiences and attitudes in the field of relations between Iran's neighboring countries, surely a more effective and accurate planning can be formulated for organizing and managing foreign policy programs and moving towards regionalism and convergence.

Despite the importance of paying attention to good relations with neighboring countries, and its positive effects, especially the political stability of the region and the improvement of the welfare of its residents, the historical legacy

left over from the past still casts a shadow on these relations and prevents the expansion of regional and extra-regional cooperation. In addition to economic benefits, neighboring countries play a key role in Iran's political competition with non-neighboring countries. As a result, rival countries help to create tension in the region by recognizing the wounds left by Iran's relations with these countries. On the other hand, Iran, as a multi-ethnic country, especially on the border with neighboring countries, is always exposed to security threats, which is affected by the political relations and discourse governing the foreign policy of the two countries. Also, most of the neighboring countries are in conflict with each other and neighboring countries. Even those who do not have a common border with Iran are in competition and conflict. The Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the rivalry between Pakistan and India, the disagreements between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Russia's war with Ukraine are among these cases. These conflicts affect the relations between Iran's neighbors. In order to control these challenges and threats and take advantage of new opportunities and opportunities in this field, we need historical and rooted knowledge of political geography and its discourse developments. Expanding good relations and repairing not so friendly relations between neighboring countries. It is not possible without understanding the discourse developments of these relations throughout history.

Strengthening the neighborhood policy increases Iran's influence in the region and stabilizes the range of social, political, economic and commercial influence in neighboring countries. This important thing requires a dynamic foreign policy and strengthening the diplomacy of interaction and coexistence with neighboring countries. In this regard, the development of comprehensive and stable relations with neighbors, especially Turkey and Russia, is one of the most important strategies and priorities of Iran's foreign policy.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In order to define the environment around humans, in such a way that it does not interfere with the scope of their neighbor's activity, they are forced to determine contractual lines in the final and surrounding part of their environment or territory. The expanded version of this concept is the boundary line that defines the final part of the activity of a nation and has a political aspect called "border" (Mojtahedzadeh, 2002, p. 40). The border is the factor of identification and separation of a political unit or a country from other adjacent units (Hafez Nia, 2002, p. 69). Also, the border is a contract and is used as a specific internal environment where the people living in that country feel their identity and have a share in a national identity. So that the existence of these border lines can make political unity possible in a land with no natural or human unity (Mirheidari, 2001, p. 161).

Borders are the building blocks of the space in which the people of the nation mix and become the same and find a common identity (Hafez Nia, 2002, pp. 190-190). So that we do not know any nation without a name and without clear borders. Based on this, borders are considered as the most important tools of governments for cultural, economic, and political homogenization and similarization of citizens and maintaining order and security, due to the fact that they limit the exercise of sovereignty and movements on both sides. It is based on this nature that governments make big decisions to create or strengthen national identity and revive and maintain borders in different ways. The French Jacques Ansel recalls that "there is no such thing as a border problem, and what exists is the problem of the nation and national identity" (Mojtahedzadeh & Asgari, 2005, p. 18).

At the historical level, relations between neighbors are the oldest variable in international relations (Jackson, 2006, p. 217); On this basis, it is necessary to pay attention to neighborhood relations as the cornerstone and alphabet of these topics before addressing topics such as regionalism and regional and extra-regional convergence. But in the knowledge of international relations and in the literature of this field, in comparison with regionalism, neighbors have been paid less attention and much less attention has been paid to neighboring (Lin, 2010, p. 5). This is a theoretical neglect, while in practice, diplomats and

politicians of all countries pay much more attention to the closer and more concrete issues around them than global issues, and allocate credit for those issues, mobilize their forces, and insist on urgency. Even in the knowledge of international relations, macro-theoretical concepts often start from small practical concerns, but the neglect of dealing with the neighborhood is evident in this knowledge.

The neighboring countries' relations can be placed in a two-sided spectrum, the negative side of which is from the coldness of the relations, to the crisis in the relations and the state of war between the two countries; And its positive side includes limited cooperation, the expansion of good relations, to the formation of the region and the alliance of the bloc. The relations between two neighboring countries can move in this spectrum throughout history. This shift can have various reasons. Neighborly relations are not created spontaneously, but these relations are historical. Regarding newly established countries, although official relations can be realized after their formation, cultural and social relations are rooted and have historical support.

### **Research Methods**

Discourse is a set of rules, criteria and meanings in the form of a structured cognitive system in a linguistic context that affects all aspects of social life and actors understand the world through it (McDonnell, 2001, p. 69). The descrip-

tive and discourse analysis method of Laclau and Mouffe, which is used in this research, has many advantages for analyzing social and political phenomena. The key concepts of this method include element, articulation, central sign, floating sign, hegemony, alienation, subject, and identity, whose explanations are omitted due to repetition in various books and articles.

The research approach used in this article is based on the dialectical relationship of discourses as macro-level mentalities with the objective realities of society (institutions involved in neighborhood political relations as well as the impact of social, cultural, political and security changes as objective realities), i.e., the approach of discourse institutionalism has been compiled. Using this approach will be beneficial because the formulation of discourse is limited by institutional arrangements. (Hosseini Zadeh, 2011). Based on the mentioned approach, the institutions involved in Iran's relations with neighboring countries produce interests, identities and suitable patterns of action, which are formed in broader social-cultural contexts. These institutions are the arena where special interests and conflicts are negotiated and reconciled. Negotiation with the neighboring countries is also a political-institutional process that is carried out by certain inherent contradictions in the institutions involved in the political relations of the neighborhood. In this process, various interests are competing and conflicting, mediating

and discussing. According to this approach, "neighborhood policy institutions" create pathways in which solutions are sought to regulate neighborhood relations. Based on this framework, "neighborhood policy discourse" is formed in an institutional framework. In this framework, objective and subjective aspects are connected. There is a dialectical relationship between the neighborhood policy discourse as subjective aspects and political and military institutions as objective aspects. Based on this, the stability and change of neighborhood policy discourses depend on institutional functions and vice versa. Unrests are the source of discursive and institutional changes. Unrests are the constructive moments or historical opportunities that make change and rethinking possible and force governments to make a new plan and reconsider their policies with their neighbors. Anxieties can be divided into two categories discourse anxieties and institutional anxieties:

The first category are the crises that go beyond the institutions and threaten the whole discourse structure. These crises cause the creation of new demands or the intensification of previous demands in the field of neighborhood relations. In this situation, the dominant discourse overcomes the existing restlessness with its reconstruction or gives its place to another discourse. In the conditions of discursive restlessness, the institutions are also in a kind of confusion and turmoil. This confusion lasts until the hegemony of the new discourse is estab-

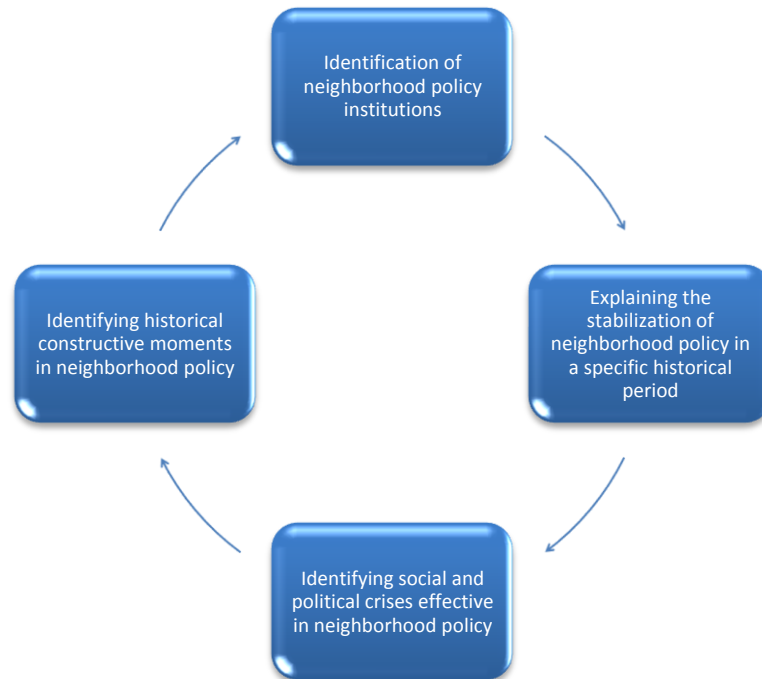


lished, and finally the institutions are reconstructed in the light of the victorious discourse.

The second type of unrest is institutional unrest. Institutional unrest is related to the concept of "historically formative moments". In explaining this process, using the concept of "path dependence" will be helpful. Constructive moments in neighborhood politics are a special period in which the decisions and choices of political actors take on an institutional aspect and it becomes increasingly difficult to return from them. What separates a constructive moment from other eras is that in this moment, options are chosen that lead the countries (or units) in a process of change and transformation and follow certain consequences. This trajectory cannot be easily broken or reversed (Mahooni, 2001, p. 7). In other words, in these conditions, political institutions seem incapable and inefficient in organizing neighborhood relations and responding to political demands and needs. In this situation, the reconstruction of the institutions of neighborhood political relations and their revision can provide a way out of the current unrest. Here, the modifications take place within the dominant discourse and in its light. Changes in basic and normal laws, creation of new organizations and institutions, and changes in procedures and habits are all considered as institutional restructuring. In this situation, the specialized and precise institu-

tional design helps both the continuation and expansion of discourse hegemony and the continuation of the institution. However, if the foreign policy institutions remain weak and ineffective or the institutional designs and reconstructions in the neighborhood relations are not successful, the institutional restlessness will rise to the level of the discourses of the neighbor relations and weaken the hegemony of the dominant discourse and gradually lead to wide discursive restlessness and the conditions provides for deep changes, including revolutionary changes in the form of transformation of the structure of governance and power. These changes will transform neighborhood politics.

In order to show the process of changing the policies adopted in the area of the neighborhood, it is necessary to clearly define the existing and effective social and political pressures in this process in order to stabilize the institutions related to the neighborhood policy and the tendency to normalize activities and create patterned procedures based on the concept of this concept of sedimentation should be explained (Gai, 2007). These research steps show how institutions related to neighborhood policy are reproduced in certain historical paths. This analysis will lead to the division of periods resulting from the determination of "critical stages" and the formation of "new paths" and its stabilization in Iran's neighborhood policy.



**Figure 1- Methodological stages of historical institutionalism analysis**

### **Neighborhood discourses with the Ottoman government**

During the lifetime until the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, coinciding with the Safavid to Qajar governments, we witness two neighboring discourses. The discourse of the first period is "structural divergence discourse". But later, with the change of political, economic and social geography and the requirements of the world system, this discourse turns into the discourse of "minimum convergence".

#### **First period: Discourse of structural divergence**

The discourse of "structural divergence" was formed based on the "neighborhood policy based on the tyranny of the

kingdom". The signs of the discourse of "structural divergence" included geographical dominance, expansion of religious ideology, political divergence, and economic divergence and world trade.

The tyranny of the monarchy: The monarchy traces its origin in ancient Iran and its formation to more than 2,500 years ago. Supporting and favoring the rule of a hereditary family is the main focus of this discourse and the king is the ruler of power, the pole of the country and the owner of the subjects' competition, and he has absolute power, and others are all obedient servants of him. (Fardoost, 1990).

The history of this discourse goes back to ancient Iran, but after the acceptance of Islam by the Iranians and the conquest of Iran by the Army of Islam,

the kingdom's discourse did not have the ability to challenge the Islamic discourse; Therefore, it was severely weakened, but not destroyed. Deviation of the Islamic caliphate and the revival of the behaviors of the monarchy by the behaviors of the Umayyad and Bani Abbas caliphs, as well as the weakening of the caliphate, once again the ideas of the monarchy came to the fore in parts of the Islamic countries and a fusion of Islamic discourse and the monarchy became popular. After the rotation of power in different dynasties, the Safavids finally came to power in the 10<sup>th</sup> century Hijri with a hybrid discourse in which Shia Islam was very prominent. The Safavid kings continued to emphasize the shah-centeredness and hereditary rule of a dynasty until their lives ended at the hands of the Afghans. In the power struggle between the Afshar, Qajar and Zand tribes, the Qajarans won. In the meantime, Zandians tried to introduce a new discourse in the field of politics with the title of legal representation system; But due to the difference and the absence of theorists, they could not explain their concepts and propositions to be an alternative to the discourse of monarchism. Finally, the Qajars seized power with the same royal semantic system.

The propositions of the discourse format of the kingdom are as follows: Monarchy is a gift from God (Amendment to the Constitutional Law, Article 35); The king is the shadow of God; The king is the center, heart and pole of all affairs in the country; The king is a holy

being; Government is the personal and even exclusive property of the king; Ancient Iran is sacred; Government is hereditary; Subjects are considered servants of the king; Subjects mean that people do not have the right to interfere in the affairs of the country; Religion is separate from politics (Ghanbari, 2005, pp. 112-113).

These propositions specified that in all policies the king is the main decision-maker and this was also the case for Iran's neighborhood policy.

**Denial of the existence of the neighbor:** in the discourse of "neighborly divergence policy", the two neighboring countries of Iran and the Ottoman Empire, as two political units, did not recognize not only each other's political structures, but also each other's existence and ideological existence, and at the theoretical and practical level, they tried to negate these structures. Such a process formed a set of divergent elements in the relations between the two governments and brought them to a confrontation.

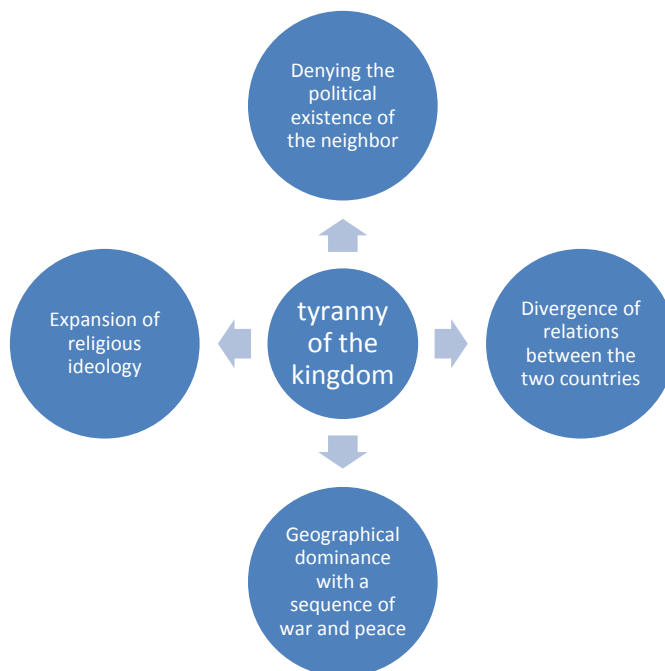
**Development of religious ideology:** The two neighboring countries of Iran and the Ottoman Empire had built their discursive identity distinction on the rejection of each other's ideology. Based on this, the discourse of "neighborhood policy of divergence" covers the historical period of Safavid, Afshar, Zand and early Qajar period, a long period of 330 years which was established by the Safavid Shia religion, Iranian identity

and national independence in the light of the Safavid Shia movement and in opposition to the world of Non-Shia (Sunni) was revived.

**Geographic domination with a sequence of war and peace:** during this period, Iran's relations with the Ottomans were generally based on war, and both governments wanted to annex the neighboring country to their territory. Such a confrontation led to various wars between Iran and the neighboring Ottoman state. The treaties that were concluded between the two governments during this period were only political-border treaties that were agreed upon according to the political-military requirements. In none of the provisions of these treaties, the two neighboring coun-

tries had not explicitly recognized each other's political status. As a result, the parties considered the treaties to be temporary and looked out for an opportunity to gain a dominant position and impose other treaties on each other that would benefit their own country.

The divergence of the relations between the two countries: the discourse of "neighborhood policy of divergence" formed a set of divergent elements in the relations of the two Iranian and Ottoman governments and brought them to a confrontation. This divergence included both political relations and extended to economic and trade relations. As a result, the two governments had to enter into economic interactions with other neighboring countries to meet their economic and commercial needs.



**Figure 2:** *Discourse articulation of structural divergence*

### **The second period: the minimal convergence discourse**

The discourse of minimal convergence is centered on the sign of "policy based on the court's understanding of global realities". The semantic system of this discourse is based on the main signs of "confirming the existence of the neighboring country", "unbalanced weight of different aspects of the relations between the two countries" and "continuation of divergence alongside convergence".

**Policy based on the court's understanding of global realities:** the discourse of "neighborhood divergence policy" covers the historical period of Safavid, Afshar, Zand and early Qajar period. But in the early Qajar period, what caused the transition from the stage of structural divergence to the stage of minimal convergence was mainly the new international requirements and the emergence of colonial powers, as well as the balance of power between Iran and the neighboring countries, which caused the country of Iran to shift from the center of the sequence of war and peace to the neighboring countries. Take a break from the first period and focus on interaction-confrontation in the second period.

The socio-political events of Iran during the period of minimal intellectual, political and social convergence were summarized around the discourse of reforms and modernism with the aim of reviving the weak state, which ultimately affected the course of constitutionalism and the impact of this phenomenon in

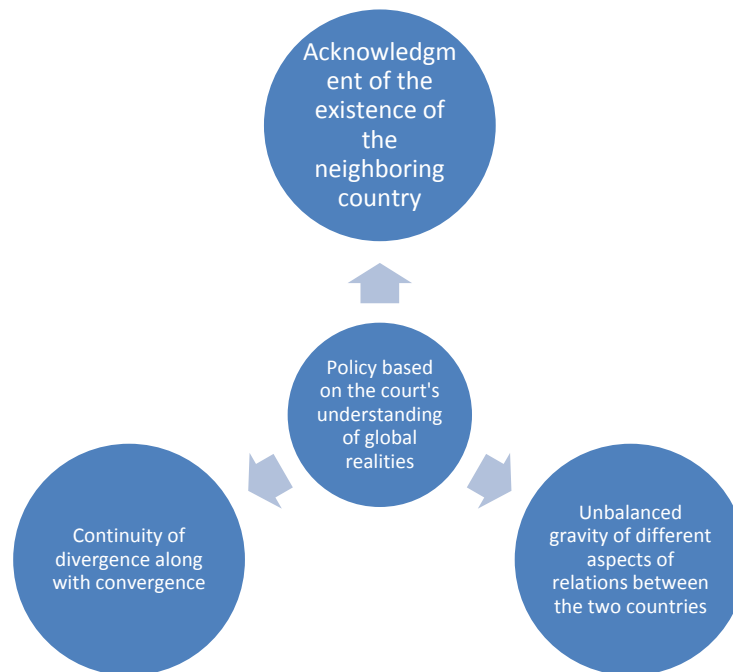
Iran and even some neighboring countries. including the Ottoman Empire. The minimal convergence between Iran and its neighboring country, the Ottoman Empire, is due to the stability and continuity of the traditions of the eastern government, which was not very compatible with the new times and life, and this inconsistency between the assets and needs provided the basis for the decline and decay of the traditional structure of the Iranian and Ottoman governments.

**Acknowledgment of the existence of the neighboring country:** According to the "minimum convergence" discourse, after a long series of wars, the neighboring countries finally enter the convergence phase by acknowledging the existing political and religious structures. The concept of convergence above all refers to the confirmation of the existence of the political structures of both countries. The mentioned convergence is more in the category of structures, especially the political and religious structure, it is caused by the factor of balance of power and new international requirements.

**Continuity of divergence along with convergence:** based on the discourse of minimal convergence, the relations of two neighboring countries are moving away from the axis of war and towards the axis of "interaction-confrontation" whose fluctuations depend on the specific socio-political situation and requirements of each time period. Convergence in this case is not absolute, because di-

vergences move side by side with convergences, or two neighboring countries are more satisfied with maintaining the status quo than convergence or divergence. This convergence cannot be upgraded to the level of a regional strategy; This is the reason why a real alliance is never formed between two neighboring countries. According to the discourse of minimal convergence, the components of divergence in the relations between two neighboring countries do not disappear completely, but their nature is changed or their intensity is reduced.

**Unbalanced gravity of different aspects of relations between the two countries:** despite the reform of the relations between the two countries and the creation of a new platform, the relations between the two neighboring countries are not equal in different dimensions. In other words, there are more relationships in some areas than others. Official political relations between two governments and non-political relations include cultural and economic relations.



**Figure 3 :Discourse articulation of minimal convergence**

### **Explaining the turn of the discourse on Iran's neighborhood policy with the Ottoman Empire**

Based on the approach of discourse institutionalism, the turning of the discourse of "structural divergence" into the discourse of "minimum convergence" can

be explained in Iran's neighborhood with the Ottoman Empire. The discourse of structural divergence, as it is based on the rejection of the political structures, organization and ideological existence of the two neighboring countries, both at the theoretical and practical levels, did not allow the birth of institutions that

managed good relations and interactions between the two political realms. This problem is rooted in the foundation of the governance structure of Iran and the Ottoman state, which were based on the tyranny of the kingdom and the empire. During this period, the issue of the embassy was not discussed in its modern sense, but ambassadors and emissaries used to convey letters and messages of the kings of the two neighboring countries on special occasions. The most important factors that caused the crisis in Iran-Ottoman relations were their greed towards each other, the disorder of the internal situation of Iran and the Ottoman Empire, the rebellion and defection of the tribes and subordinate governments and statesmen of neighboring countries, the intervention and decision-making of foreigners, and the disorder of the internal situation of the Ottoman state. (Hasani, 2003, p. 37). This crisis caused almost half of the 242 years of Safavid reign to be spent in hostility between Iran and the Ottomans. This has left many negative effects in various aspects of the political, economic, social and cultural life of both sides and has eroded the power of both for the benefit of foreigners. This crisis disturbed the borders and security of trade routes and the political and cultural security of Iran, and it had devastating effects on the intellectual comfort and social psychological security of trade between the governments of the East and the West and the amount of income of the Iranian government, and since the establishment

of territorial security, economic security And cultural security through the preservation of natural borders, provision and preservation of trade routes and cultural autonomy were among the traditional principles of Iran's foreign policy. But from the historical evidence, the neighbors' motivation to attack Iran at certain times has been dependent on the existence of an internal variable, i.e., the disorder of the country's internal situation. The increase in internal disputes causes disturbances in the affairs of the government, and the disturbances in the affairs of the government have intensified the level of disobedience of the neighbors (Hasani, 2003, p. 39).

The sequence of war and peace has prevented the establishment of structural and deep-rooted relations between Iran and the Ottoman government. However, cultural and commercial relations between the two countries continued during peace. For example, during the 13-year period of peace between Iran and the Ottomans, due to the non-hostile relations, Shah Abbas sent Ilchiani to the Ottomans. One in 1004 to condole the death of Sultan Murad III and congratulating the accession of Sultan Muhammad, the other in 1007 to announce the victory of Shah Abbas over Uzbeks in Khorasan (Torkaman, 1998, vol. 2, p. 811 & 945). The friendship and empathy between the parties has been such that even some of the Qezelbashans along with Zulfiqar Khan Ilchi were sent to participated in the war of the Ottoman Sultan against the Foreigners in 1004

and spent some time in the captivity of the Foreigners (Monajem, 1987, p. 147 & 148). In addition to the political exchanges, commercial affairs and trade flows between the two countries (Torkaman, 1998, vol. 2, p. 980); But due to the structural divergence, these relations and friendships between the two countries were temporary and ephemeral and led to war with other factors.

From a chronological point of view, the discourse of minimal convergence begins with the conclusion of the first treaty of Erzerum between Iran and the Ottomans, according to which the ruling countries could have a peaceful coexistence as independent parts of the Muslim community. Acknowledging such a common identity for the Muslims of Iran and Ottoman countries led to an increasing reduction of tension in bilateral relations (Kalbris, 1998, p. 76). In the introduction of this treaty, the "Islamic states" and the need to establish peace and harmony between them have been mentioned (Sepehr, 1998, p. 344), which shows that after three centuries of battle and ideological differences between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, the idea of the absolutism of the Sunni religion and the negation of the ideological system Shia was put aside and for the first time Iran was recognized as a political unit with Shia identity in the territory of the Islamic world, and this was an important achievement in the horizon of Iran-Ottoman relations. In the shadow of such a development, Iranian-Ottoman relations were removed from the axis of war

and turned to the axis of interaction-confrontation. This discourse continued until the end of the Qajar and Ottoman governments.

The convergence of Iran and the Ottoman Empire in this period was minimal, not absolute; That is, the components of divergence in Iran's relations did not disappear completely, but changed their nature or their intensity was reduced. In addition, some other divergent elements were added to the previous legacy, which all in all perpetuated the Iran-Ottoman conflict. Among these elements The uncertain and vague situation of the long Iranian-Ottoman border (Habal al-Mattin newspaper, 1946, p. 21); the issue of the border state from the border of Azerbaijan to Khuzestan and the special political interest that Iran and the Ottomans had in them and the issue of their citizenship (Kawoosi Iraqi, 2005, pp. 120-125); Was Iran's influence in Iraq and the dignity of highness (Naqibzadeh, 2002, p. 69; Dringel, 2005, p. 12); The brutality and oppression of the Ottoman officials to Iranian merchants in collecting customs duties and additional taxes and the arbitrariness and policy of the pashas of Baghdad and some local rulers (Mafroudi and Emami Khoei, 2012, p. 7).

Iran-Ottoman relations from the beginning of the Qajar era to the establishment of constitutionalism in Iran included the political, cultural and economic developments of the parties. The dispute between Iran and the Ottomans over the Sulaymaniyah region, the conclusion of the first and second **Erzu-**



**rum** Agreements, the establishment of meetings of the Quadrilateral Commission, and the Mahmarra Border Commission were in line with these relations. The negotiations between the Iranian and Ottoman ambassadors played an important role in solving the differences between the two countries and border issues in order to promote the strengthening of the relations between the two countries, and it can also be pointed out that in order to solve the differences between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, the European governments, including Russia and England played a significant role (Mafroudi and Emami Khoei, 2012, p. 7).

One of the important factors affecting the turning of the discourse of "structural divergence" into the discourse of "minimum convergence" was the influence of the governments of Russia, England and France on the process of relations and the political situation of Iran and the Ottoman Empire; Because the deep-rooted differences between these two neighbors due to political incompatibility caused them to be drawn towards one of the European powers, and this led to the interventions of these countries. Basically, the real goal of the European governments was to create division between two neighboring Muslim countries and to achieve the East-West commercial highway. But on the other hand, instead of unity, Iran and Ottomans engaged in enmity, which ultimately led to the weakness of the two countries. Due to

the fatal blow that the European countries, especially Russia, inflicted on Iran and the Ottoman Empire, the two neighboring and Muslim countries came to the conclusion to start friendly relations with each other (Mafroudi and Emami Khoei, 2012, p. 21).

The minimum convergence is that the adjective "descendant" does not have the same examples in all fields of Iran-Ottoman relations, so that its weight in the official political dimension is much more than in the intellectual and cultural dimension. Such a fluctuation, which is mostly caused by the nature and type of relationship, became more obvious with the expansion of people-to-people relations in the last two decades of Iran-Ottoman relations. With regard to such an approach, it is possible to examine the minimum convergence in the form of two components: the political component that oversees the official relations of governments and the reform component that often oversees cultural and intellectual relations.

### **Neighborhood discourse with tsarist Russia**

The central sign of the discourse "neighborhood with tsarist Russia" is "recklessness and court tyranny" and the main signs are "passivity against Russian expansionism", "military weakness in exercising territorial sovereignty", "weakness in attracting the Iranian peoples of Central Asia and the Caucasus" and They constitute "giving in to disgraceful contracts".

**Imprudence and court tyranny:** The centrality of Iran's neighborhood policy with tsarist Russia is imprudence and court tyranny. Iranian rulers did not have a correct understanding of their relations with neighboring countries and their development ambitions, and did not take the necessary measures and forecasts to deal with and control these development ambitions. The historical roots of this imprudence can be traced back to the Safavid period. Since the Safavid era and parallel to international developments, European countries have been given the opportunity to open diplomatic and stable relations with Iran. Despite the need for Europe's support and its military tools and knowledge, the Safavids did not take advantage of the expertise of the European bourgeois civilization and did not make a serious effort to adapt the knowledge and techniques of the European civilization. Meanwhile, in the position of territorial expansion and consolidation of its political and military authority, Russia had more possibilities to establish and expand relations with Iran; But during the Safavid era, the obstacles caused by occasional internal problems and the actions of rival and opposing states did not make these relations very continuous and forward. The course of relations between the Safavid government and Russia did not reach a pleasant conclusion due to the lack of a correct understanding of international relations and the growing internal obstacles. Rather, it became a test for the colonial governments as well as tsarist Russia to

learn more about Iran's geopolitical position and the country's inability to manage at the same time.

As a result of this test and recognition, Russia's military invasion of Iran's territory was also a result. The Russian government was not among the developed countries until the end of the Safavid era and the beginning of the wave of reforms by Tsar Peter I, so that Iranians could benefit from its capabilities; In addition, the Safavid agents did not learn from the self-interested efforts of the Russians to involve Iran with the Ottomans or take away trade privileges, and they did not adopt a firm and stable policy against Russia. But the caution of the Safavid government to strengthen itself against the Ottomans or the gains from trade and transit of goods, caused the Safavid government not to notice the gradual process of Russian influence in the northern regions of Iran until the fall of Isfahan. As they did not succeed in creating a new cultural trajectory due to feeling satisfied with the status quo and bias towards innovation. As a result, tsarist Russia had an opportunity to strengthen its internal allies, to invade the Caucasus with military aggression and lay the groundwork for the territorial division of northern Iran (Kajbaf et al., 2018, pp. 1-2).

Passivity against Russia's expansionism: imprudence and tyranny of the court made the neighborhood policy with Tsarist Russia based on passivity against the expansionism of this powerful neighbor. Imperial Russia's expansionist

policy regarding Iran was to reach warm open waters and threaten British interests in India. This policy caused Russia to take advantage of the weakness of Iran's sovereignty over the areas under Iran's territory in Central Asia and the Caucasus under various pretexts and impose wars on Iran to occupy these areas. The first period of wars occurred between 1218-1228 AH and the second period of wars occurred in 1241-1243 AH (Shamim, 2019). But the lack of a clear strategy in these wars caused the defeat of Iran and the pursuit of a policy of passivity in agreeing to disgraceful agreements such as "Golestan and Turkmenchai" (Teymoori, 1954).

The policy of passivity towards Tsarist Russia continued even after the 25-year wars between Iran and Russia. For example, under the pretext of creating security and using Iran's lack of power and control over its Turkmen lands in the east of the Caspian Sea, Russia seized vast lands from Iran in this region. The government of Iran had to give in to the demands of its powerful neighbor and without any confrontation with Russia and to gain the satisfaction of that country, it signed the Akhal Agreement in 1881 AD. Although this agreement kept alive the hope of the Iranian government to establish security in the north and east of the country, it did not prevent Russia's expansionist tendencies. From the time of the conclusion of the Akhal Agreement until the end of the Tsarist government of Russia, that government used every opportunity to extract parts of the

north and northeast of Iran; In such a way that the lands that were subject to Russian territorial abstraction in the north and northeast of Iran were about one-fifth of the lands that were assigned to Russia in the Akhal Agreement.

**Weakness of hardware and software in applying territorial sovereignty:**

applying sovereignty over territorial territory is dependent on the soft power and hard power of the government. Soft power depends on the attractiveness of the central government to the dominated peoples and their level of affection and loyalty in accepting the rule. But hard power is related to the extent of suppression and military control of rebellions and disobedience created in the territorial land and the encroachment of other governments on that territory. But the weakness of Iranian governments in applying soft and hard power caused important parts of this territory to be separated from Iran as a result of the policy of Tsarist Russia.

**Weakness in attracting the Iranian peoples of Central Asia and the Caucasus:**

the governmental structure of the Safavid government and the governments after it in formalizing the Shia religion and using it politically as a means of identity caused the groups under Iran's territory to associate with other religions in Central Asia and the Caucasus region. , in this political-religious discourse, become another and find their link with the central authority of the Iranian court

weakened and seek independence and autonomy. This issue was in line with the development goals and discourse of tsarist Russia. From this point of view, these tribes can be divided into two categories:

- Christian groups: two great groups, Georgian and Armenian, were in the territory of Iran's sovereignty for a long time, especially during the Safavid era, despite the Christianity religion. The land of these two Christian ethnic groups was changing hands in the middle of the competition between the two great Muslim powers, Iran and Ottoman. Part of it was in the hands of Iran and the other part was in the hands of the Ottomans. In the meantime, they sought independence and autonomy whenever they had the opportunity. The emergence of a new power in the middle of the rivalry between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, that is, Tsarist Russia, provided an opportunity for these two Christian groups to achieve this independence and autonomy by feeling religious closeness to them. This issue led to Iran's 25-year wars with Tsarist Russia during the reign of Fath Ali Shah Qajar, with Iran's defeat against Russia, and with the Treaty of Turkmenchai, not only Georgia and Armenia, but also parts of Iran's Muslim regions in the Caucasus and present-day Turkmenistan joined the territory of the Russian Empire.

- Sunni ethnic groups: the ethnic group of the Central Asian region, including Turkmens, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, mostly had the Sunni

religion. Due to the oppression of Safavid and Qajar governments, these tribes were seeking independence and autonomy and did not submit to Iran's rule. Meanwhile, the abuse of the Tsarist Russian government and their expansionist policies in provoking these ethnic groups and drawing their attention to the benefits of accepting Russian citizenship and giving them citizenship and the weakness of the Iranian government in attracting these ethnic groups caused the wars between Iran and Russia in these areas. to separate from Iran's sovereign control. On the other hand, despite the desire for independence, these tribes were unable to confront Russia militarily. In the treaty of Golestan and Akhal, some northeastern and border states were separated from Iran.

Compromise to Russian colonialism: After Russia separated the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea regions from Iran in several wars, relying on its superior population and geography, Russia interfered in Iran's internal affairs in military, commercial, banking and political dimensions, that is Directly, he knew his right. The northern states of Iran were dependent on Russia, the Russian lending bank provided financial aid to the Qajar kings, and it was as if Iran surrendered to Russia. With the end of the Iran-Russia wars during the era of Naser al-Din Shah, Russia's expansionism changed its path from territorial and territorial expansionism to economic and cultural domination. Isteghraz Bank Concession, Akhal Contract, Northern

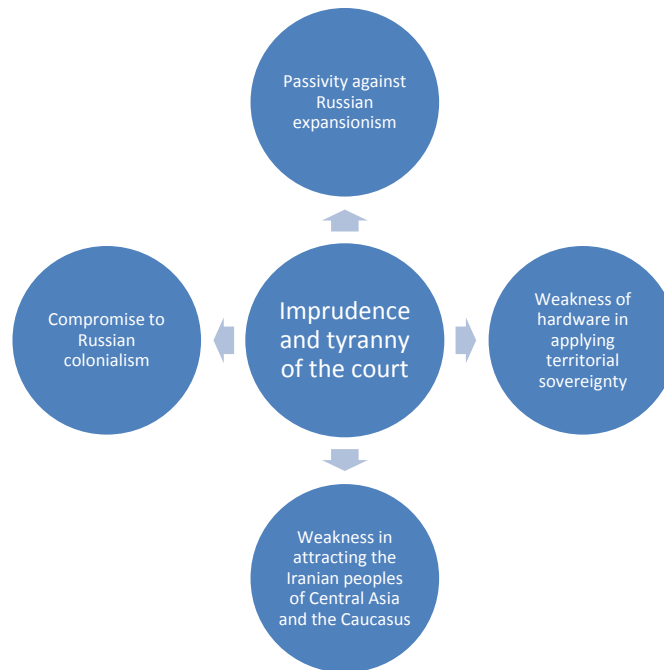
Oil Concession during the Naseri period and the extension of the Northern Oil Concession and the 1921 contract during the Ahmad Shah period are examples of Russia's economic dominance over Iran. It is clear that, Akhal's contract with Russia's tactics is also considered as a kind of territorial expansionism. Attacking Iran and threatening and acting on it had become normal for the Russians; So much so that they attacked the National Assembly and the shrine of Imam Reza with cannons (Zoqi, 1989, p. 103). Russia openly supported the authoritarian regime in Iran, was the enemy of the constitutionalists, and if England did not stand in the way, it would have achieved its wish to reach the warm waters of the Persian Gulf. England reduced Russia's aggressive spirit towards Iran and finally, after the Germans came to power and in the years before the World War, Iran was divided between the two countries and the agreement of 1907 was formed (Zoqi, 1989, p. 51).

For another example, we can refer to the assignment of road construction in the northern and northwestern regions of Iran. Although the Qajar government resisted the proposal of the Russians for many years to prevent this domination, but in the end, due to economic problems and lack of commercial growth, they surrendered to the Russians and

handed over the concession for the construction of the Tabriz-Tehran highway to the Russians. Road building in Iran had many economic and military benefits for Russia; It opened the way for Russian goods to enter Iran and provided the conditions for the Russians to dominate the northwest of Iran (Noorayi et al., 2018, p. 56).

But Russia's dominance over Iran was not only economic and territorial, but also cultural. After Iran's defeat, Russia called the Muslim Georgians and Armenians living in Iran as its citizens and forced them to emigrate. These violent actions aimed to show the power of Russia's cultural domination over Iran were met with the anger of the Iranian people, and the murder of the Russian ambassador to Iran Gribaidov was the result of this humiliating cultural policy.

Tsarist Russia played a very important role in the introduction of western architectural elements to Iran. This role has been the main factor of confronting the new world and observing modernity after the ten-year wars between Iran and Russia and the trips made by officials to Russia. Therefore, in the northern regions of Iran, with the presence of Russians, the construction of various buildings inspired by the Russian neoclassical style of architecture became popular (Hosseini et al., 2019, p. 73).



**Figure 4:** *The elaboration of the neighborhood discourse of tsarist Russia*

### **The turn of the neighborhood discourse with tsarist Russia**

Tsarist Russia wanted Iran as a ruin that would be a smooth road to the Persian Gulf in the war with England. Iran's only luck was the occurrence of the Russian Revolution, which miraculously guaranteed Iran's independence and territorial integrity. The formation of the Soviet Union was the beginning of a new discourse in Iran's relations with the former Russia, which ended Russian expansionism in the form of its territory in Iran, and the chapter of ideological confrontations between communism and the capitalist system began.

A year before the end of the World War, the Bolsheviks, in order to gain prestige, considering the spirit of idealism at the beginning of the revolution,

canceled all the unequal privileges of the tsarist regime with Iran and recognized the independence and territorial integrity of Iran. Iran is still in a period of doubt and did not accept the Bolsheviks' envoy as it should; In such a way that the envoy was killed on the way back to Russia. Iran was worried about the future developments in Russia: the occupying forces of Tsarist Russia were still present in the north of Iran; The government had fallen into the hands of the Bolsheviks, and whispers of the Soviet Union's close relations with Mirza Kuchak Khan could be heard. Finally, after many negotiations, with the conclusion of the contract in 1921. Between Iran and the Soviet Union, the Russian offensive force was restrained to some extent (Zoqi, 1989, p. 384).

## Conclusion

Iran has long been a neighbor of two important countries, Russia and the Ottoman Empire. The importance of studying the neighborhood policy of these two countries, in addition to the importance of these two countries in geographical, social, cultural, political and economic dimensions, lies in the fact that a large number of Iran's neighboring countries were somehow under the control of these two empires before independence.

The discourse of Iran's neighborhood policy with the Ottomans and Russia is like two pieces of a puzzle that are both complementary and effective on each other's growth. In both discourses, imprudence and court tyranny are identified as the basis of existing issues and problems. With the difference that this imprudence in relations with the Ottomans manifests itself in excess of divergence and destructive rivalries, and in relations with Tsarist Russia in passivity against expansionism and military weakness in the exercise of territorial sovereignty.

If Iran's neighborhood policy regarding

Russia and Ottomans had the same importance for Iran's ruling body, it is possible that a different historical path would have been established for the region and Iran. Based on this, Iran's extreme competition and attention to Ottomans paved the way for Russia's expansionism. The Iranian and Ottoman court's understanding of the chess of international relations happened very late and during the decline of their power, and they could not prevent the disintegration and decline of their power despite the achievement of this political and social understanding.

Despite the rotation of the discourse of Iran's neighborly relations with these two countries with the change of political geography, their effects and the legacy left are so deep that Iran still does not benefit much from neighborly relations in different dimensions. Repairing the wounds left by this discursive legacy requires a revision of strategies by understanding the new arrangement of political forces and the chess of regional and extra-regional relations.

**Table 1 .Comparison of Iran's neighborhood discourses with the Ottoman and Russian governments**

The name of the neighboring country	Discourses	Central slab	The main slabs	Historical period	The foundation of neighborhood policy
	Structural divergence	tyranny of the kingdom	Denial of the political existence of the neighbor, expansion of religious ideology, geographical dominance with the sequence of war and peace, divergence of relations between the two countries.	The historical period of Safavid, Afshar, Zand and early Qajar period	Divergence
The Ottoman Empire	Minimum convergence	central slab tyranny of the kingdom	Acknowledging the existence of a neighboring country, the unbalanced weight of different aspects of the relations between the two countries, the continuation of divergence alongside convergence	Early Qajar period	Minimum convergence
Russia	Neighborhood with Tsarist Russia	Politics based on the court's understanding of global realities Imprudence and tyranny of the court	Passivity against Russia's expansionism, military weakness in exercising territorial sovereignty, weakness in absorbing the Iranian peoples of Central Asia and the Caucasus, acquiescing to Russian colonialism.	Safavid until the formation of knighthood	passivity



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