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A Documentary Analysis of the Role of the Shanghai Pact in Enhancing Eurasian Security: A Qualitative Approach

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ABSTRACT

In light of ongoing geopolitical transformations and the intensification of great-power competition, Eurasia has become one of the principal arenas of global security and economic dynamics, and the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in shaping a multipolar order and enhancing regional security has gained increasing significance. Nevertheless, despite the expansion of cooperation within this organization, the precise dimensions of its impact on Eurasian security—particularly in connection with the membership of countries such as Iran—have not yet been comprehensively and systematically examined in scholarly research. The present study aims to explore the role of the Shanghai Pact in enhancing Eurasian security through a qualitative documentary analysis. To this end, official documents, research reports, scholarly articles, and relevant library-based data concerning the political, security, and economic performance of this organization over the past two decades were reviewed and coded. The findings indicate that the Shanghai Pact exerts influence in four main domains: (1) power balancing and political–security convergence in response to Western hegemony, (2) economic resilience and the strengthening of energy security, (3) infrastructural development and regional economic convergence, and (4) support for the “Look East” policy and the reduction of dependence on the Western bloc. Through their synergistic interaction, these four domains have transformed Eurasia into an emerging pole within the global multipolar order and have played a vital role in regional stability and security. In particular, the results suggest that Iran’s permanent membership, while deepening the Look East policy, provides new opportunities for circumventing sanctions, attracting investment, and strengthening the country’s geopolitical position. Accordingly, the Shanghai Pact can be analyzed not only as a security institution but also as a comprehensive platform for economic resilience and the enhancement of regional convergence.

Keywords: *Shanghai Pact; Eurasian security; power balancing; economic resilience; qualitative documentary analysis.*

Introduction

Given the importance of Eurasian security and the pivotal role of regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the study of security developments in this region from both theoretical and practical perspectives has gained substantial importance. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of independent Central Asian states, the Eurasian security structure underwent fundamental transformations, giving rise to new threats such as terrorism, drug trafficking, political instability, and extra-regional pressures (1). Although numerous studies have examined the role of regional powers and cooperative mechanisms in mitigating these threats, comprehensive analyses that simultaneously assess hard and soft dimensions of



security, the influence of extra-regional actors, and economic and political interactions within the SCO framework remain limited (2). This research gap obscures a full understanding of the actual role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in strengthening regional security in Eurasia and enhancing the capacities of its member states.

Another important research issue concerns the position of Iran as a newly acceded member of the SCO. With Iran's accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the country has encountered new opportunities and challenges in the security and economic spheres; however, existing research has largely been confined to analyses of economic and political opportunities and has paid comparatively less attention to evaluating the impact of Iran's membership on Eurasian regional security (3). This limitation has created a significant gap in the scholarly literature, as understanding Iran's role can contribute to explaining security interactions, multilateralism strategies, and the reduction of extra-regional threats. A comprehensive examination of the security dimensions of Iran's SCO membership can therefore provide domestic and regional policymakers with practical and scientific insights.

Moreover, most existing studies have focused primarily on military dimensions and border security, while softer aspects of security—such as economic, energy, and environmental security—have received less attention (4). This narrow focus prevents a thorough analysis of the relationship between hard and soft security and their role in fostering comprehensive stability in Eurasia. Consequently, another research gap lies in the simultaneous examination of all security and economic dimensions of the region and the analysis of their interaction with the multilateral policies of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which could offer a more integrated framework for understanding Eurasian security.

Finally, another significant research gap concerns the analysis of the impact of interventions by extra-regional actors—particularly the United States and NATO—on Eurasian security and the domestic policies of member states. While some studies have addressed the geopolitical influence of major powers, integrated analyses of the role of external interventions and their effects on regional multilateral cooperation remain limited and fragmented (1). Accordingly, identifying these gaps in the literature highlights the necessity of comprehensive research focusing on all dimensions of security, Iran's position, and the effects of extra-regional interventions, which can contribute to the theoretical and practical development of security policies in Eurasia.

The issue of security holds significant importance in both domestic and international arenas, and it is not possible to meaningfully address security without considering certain indicators. All Eurasian countries agree on the detrimental effects of external interventions and believe that security and peace in the Eurasian region can only be achieved through the participation of the region's own states. Countries seek to enhance their national security by joining economic, security, and other alliances, and the Shanghai Pact is one of the regional arrangements in which Iran obtained permanent membership in 2021. Although the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has an economic orientation, the simultaneous presence of its members in military and security alliances can potentially ensure the security of all its members. While the intrinsic nature of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization lies primarily in the economic domain, it is evident that economic integration within the geographical scope of a pact cannot be achieved without collective security in that area. Therefore, any security threat against one member is considered a threat against the entire organization and a cause of economic decline for the whole collective. Consequently, it cannot be assumed that, in ensuring the security of a member such as Iran, other members would refrain from involvement, even if such involvement is indirect.

Literature Review

Review of Domestic Studies

Bakhshayesh Ardestani et al. (2024) conducted a study entitled “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the ‘Look East’ Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” in which they employed a descriptive–analytical method based on the examination of documents, library data, and trends in Iran’s foreign policy. The findings generally indicated that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as one of the major multilateral institutions in Eurasia, provides a key capacity for advancing the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Look East approach. In this regard, the organization can function both as a platform for multilateral diplomacy and as a mechanism for strengthening economic and security relations with Asian powers. By explaining the opportunities arising from cooperation with the organization’s core members—particularly China and Russia—the authors argued that Iran’s effective linkage with the SCO can, while reducing dependence on the Western bloc, contribute to strengthening the country’s geopolitical position and national security, and provide diverse grounds for strategic interactions, energy cooperation, transportation, and the management of shared security challenges. The study also identified structural barriers and political challenges, including pressures from the United States and certain disagreements among SCO members, as constraining factors, and ultimately suggested that Iran could maximize the benefits of the organization for its Look East policy through an active foreign policy, enhanced economic capacity, and the use of multilateral diplomacy (5).

Bakhshayesh Ardestani, Shafiee, and Dehshyar (2024) conducted a study entitled “The Impact of Iran’s Permanent Membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on Its Political–Security Relations with the United States.” Using a descriptive–analytical approach and relying primarily on library and online sources, their findings showed that Iran’s permanent membership in the SCO has increased the country’s institutional power in regional and international equations and has reduced the impact of political and security pressures and interventions by the United States, thereby enabling Iran to achieve a stronger position in political–security bargaining (6).

Moradi Haghghi, Hosseini, and Nasirzad (2023) carried out a study entitled “Iran’s Regionalism with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Compared to the Eurasian Economic Union,” employing content analysis and comparative case study methods over the period from 2000 to 2019. Their findings indicated that although the Eurasian Economic Union explicitly prioritizes economic objectives and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization does not necessarily place economic goals at the forefront of its agenda, the effectiveness of trade convergence within the SCO has been more tangible and meaningful than within the Eurasian Economic Union, while macroeconomic convergence indicators in both institutions have not reached an optimal level (7).

Mohebbour, Shafiee, and Babri Gonbad (2023) conducted a study entitled “The Economic Capacities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization for the Islamic Republic of Iran,” using a descriptive–analytical method and drawing on library and online sources. Their research highlighted that these capacities can assist Iran in enhancing its economic position in the international arena (8).

Zarrati (2023) carried out a study entitled “Analyzing the Security and Economic Consequences of Iran’s Membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” using a documentary and library-based method combined with expert opinion analysis. The findings indicated that Iran’s accession to the SCO reveals eight strengths, seven weaknesses, and twenty-two opportunities across security, political, economic, and cultural domains. These strengths and opportunities, particularly in enhancing economic security and improving Iran’s geopolitical position, were found to be significant; however, weaknesses such as the lack of binding structures and dependence on the

collective will of members, as well as threats including extra-regional interventions and sanction pressures, should not be overlooked (9).

Mohebbour, Shafiee, and Babri Gonbad (2023) conducted another study entitled “The Impact of Iran’s Permanent Membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on Reducing the Effects of U.S. Sanctions,” employing a descriptive–analytical method and relying mainly on library sources, academic articles, and analytical documents. Their findings demonstrated that Iran’s permanent membership in the SCO can provide opportunities to counter Western sanctions, particularly due to the population size of member states, their energy needs, the potential design of multilateral financial and monetary agreements, and the facilitation of trade exchanges, some of which may serve as alternatives to sanction-affected channels. This, in turn, can improve Iran’s foreign trade situation and reduce the negative effects of sanctions (10).

Shariatnia (2022) conducted a study entitled “Iran’s Permanent Membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Security and Economic Consequences,” applying a realist conceptual framework in the analysis of international regimes and examining documents related to the requirements and conditions of permanent membership in the SCO. The findings indicated that power and power relations among members constitute a central variable in shaping the organization’s security and economic regimes, and that achieving relative gains for Iran is important; however, the institutionalization of the SCO remains weak. Binding commitments for Iran in the security domain are mainly limited to counterterrorism, while cooperation in other security and economic areas is largely dependent on consensus among heads of state and is not mandatory.

Biyari, Haghighi, and Zarei (2022) conducted a study entitled “Opportunities of the Permanent Membership of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Explanation of Its Geopolitical and Geographical Dimensions,” using a descriptive–analytical method and data from library, documentary, and prior studies. Their findings showed that Iran’s permanent membership in the SCO offers significant geopolitical and geographical opportunities, including increased influence in Eurasia, an enhanced position in regional power equations, access to new energy markets and natural resources, and the strengthening of trade connectivity routes between Iran and member states. The study also noted that these opportunities could reduce Iran’s economic vulnerability to sanctions and international pressures, provided that Iran actively utilizes existing cooperation frameworks and overcomes geographical and infrastructural barriers.

Abdoli and Hosseinkhani (2022) conducted a study entitled “Examining the Causes of Iran’s Permanent Membership in the Shanghai Pact and Its Impact on the National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” using a descriptive–analytical method and documentary and library sources. Their findings indicated that Iran’s permanent membership in the Shanghai Pact potentially serves as an effective tool for strengthening Iran’s foreign policy in the face of international pressures, particularly from the United States. Through membership in this organization, Iran has been able to employ strategies such as hard balancing and alliance-building with regional countries to counter strategic pressures. The study further suggested that this active presence enhances national security by enabling greater regional cooperation in counterterrorism, border security, security intelligence exchange, and reducing Iran’s security dependence on extra-regional powers.

Hamiani and Sajjapour (2022) conducted a study entitled “Geopolitics and Eurasian Identity: Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” adopting a descriptive–analytical approach and documentary review to explain the identity and geopolitical dimensions of Iran’s linkage with this regional organization. Their findings indicated that the SCO is not merely a security and economic cooperation institution, but also an effective platform

for shaping a shared Eurasian identity among its members and strengthening the discourse of multilateralism against Western hegemony. By analyzing Iran's position in Eurasian geopolitical equations, the authors argued that Iran's active membership in the organization can significantly consolidate its role as a bridge between Eastern and Western Eurasia, particularly in connecting China and Russia with Central Asia and the Caucasus. They further explained that the Eurasian identity emerging from SCO cooperation facilitates cultural and political rapprochement among members and enhances security convergence in the face of Western power pressures.

Jafari, Balbasi, and Esfandiari (2017) conducted a study entitled "National Interests and Iran's Membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," using a descriptive–analytical method and library and documentary sources. Their findings indicated that Iran's membership in the SCO can provide substantial opportunities for advancing national interests, including improving geopolitical standing, increasing bargaining power in international equations, accessing energy and economic markets of member states, and strengthening security cooperation to counter regional and extra-regional threats. The study emphasized that full utilization of these capacities requires active policymaking, inter-agency coordination, and effective use of multilateral diplomatic mechanisms.

Koushki and Hosseini (2017) conducted a study entitled "Opportunities and Challenges of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," employing a descriptive–analytical method and drawing on documents, books, and related articles. Their findings showed that Iran's membership in the SCO creates opportunities such as enhanced economic, energy, and security cooperation, increased regional influence, and improved diplomatic standing; however, challenges including divergent interests among members, international pressures, and institutional limitations of the organization also exist. The authors emphasized that capitalizing on opportunities requires intelligent management of challenges and the strengthening of internal coordination mechanisms and active diplomacy.

Akhavan Kazemi Bahram and Pirzad Shahnani Morad (2011) conducted a study entitled "The Role of the Shanghai Organization in the Formation and Development of Regional Convergence (with Emphasis on Iran's Accession)," using documentary and analytical methods to examine the process of regional convergence in Eurasia and Iran's position within it. Their findings indicated that the SCO plays a key role in promoting political, economic, and security convergence among member states, and that Iran's accession can strengthen regional cooperation, particularly in the fields of security and energy. The study also noted that despite significant potential, limitations such as consensus-based decision-making structures and intra-organizational rivalries may restrict Iran's full utilization from the organization's benefits.

Koulaei and Tishehyar (2012), in an article entitled "The Security-Building Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the Periphery of Afghanistan," examined the role of the SCO in providing regional security around Afghanistan. Using a descriptive–analytical method and library and documentary sources, they analyzed various security dimensions of the organization. The findings showed that the SCO, through a focus on security, economic, and cultural cooperation, can play an effective role in ensuring regional security and addressing shared threats in the Afghan periphery, emphasizing the importance of multilateral cooperation and the strengthening of regional institutions to enhance stability.

Ezzati and Yazdanpanah-Darou (2007), in another article entitled "An Analysis of the Geopolitics of the Shanghai Economic–Security Pact with Emphasis on the Prospects of Iran's Membership," examined the geopolitical and strategic dimensions of the SCO and its impact on Iran's national interests. Using analytical and documentary methods, they analyzed the organization's structure and objectives and Iran's position within it. The findings

indicated that Iran's membership in the SCO can create opportunities to strengthen the country's geopolitical position, enhance economic and security cooperation with member states, and counter shared threats, with particular emphasis on Iran's strategic location and its influence on regional and international policies.

Review of Foreign Studies

Tercovich and Meijer (2025) conducted a study examining how the European Union, with the aim of preserving its strategic autonomy in foreign policy, pursues actions and policies that simultaneously manage the reactions of the United States and China to sanctions and arms-related restrictions (11). This research, using an analytical and documentary method, showed that political and economic convergence within the European Union, alongside external pressures, can create a framework for resisting the influence of major powers and open pathways toward strategic autonomy.

Lukin, Novikov, Puzanova, and Yenikayeff (2025) conducted a study using descriptive and analytical methods and a review of international documents and data (12). The results showed that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as a regional institution, plays an important role—amid rising international tensions—in stabilizing regional security and strengthening political and economic cooperation among members. The study also indicated that the SCO's emphasis on multilateral diplomacy and the creation of collective cooperation mechanisms can enhance the capacity to withstand unilateral pressures from extra-regional powers.

Mumtaz, Cheema, and Khalid (2025) carried out a study drawing on case studies and an analysis of geopolitical trends (13). Their findings showed that active membership of states in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization not only strengthens security and regional convergence, but is also effective in redefining the balance of power at the Eurasian level. The researchers found that the SCO plays a complementary role in the foreign policies of member states and can be positioned as a lever for reducing dependence on traditional global powers and increasing states' political and economic independence.

Ergül Jorgensen and Jørgensen (2025) conducted a study that, using an analytical approach grounded in foreign-policy studies and international institutions, examined the crisis of multilateralism (14). The results showed that pressures arising from great-power competition have compelled the European Union to reconsider its international strategies. The researchers also emphasized that multilateral interactions under conditions of crisis require redefining the role of regional institutions and security organizations such as the SCO and similar structures in order to strengthen global stability and security.

Jackson and Shepotylo (2024) conducted a study in which, through a quantitative method and analysis of politico-economic data, they examined how the formation of alliances and trade agreements among states in a multipolar world directly affects Europe's economic and geopolitical security (15). The findings showed that EU member states should calibrate their strategic policies in light of regional developments and multilateral organizations such as the SCO, and that balancing economic cooperation with political considerations can contribute to regional stability and help prevent the escalation of geopolitical tensions.

Bokeriya (2019) conducted a study examining the linkage between global and regional security structures (16). The findings indicated that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in addition to its regional role, enhances the capacity to confront extra-regional threats by strengthening military, security, and economic cooperation among its members, and functions as a complement to global collective security institutions such as the United Nations and the Collective Security Treaty framework.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is among the multilateral regional institutions in Eurasia that, over the past two decades, has become an important platform for political, security, and economic interactions among member states. Domestic studies, including those by Bakhshayesh Ardestani and colleagues (2024), indicate that Iran, through a “Look East” approach, can benefit from the organization’s capacities to strengthen multilateral diplomacy (5). These studies emphasize that the SCO serves as a platform for enhancing economic and security relations with Asian countries—especially China and Russia—and can strengthen Iran’s geopolitical position and reduce the country’s dependence on the Western bloc (5). Within this framework, opportunities such as energy, transportation, security, and economic cooperation are among the main avenues through which Iran can leverage the organization, although obstacles such as U.S. pressure and intra-member disagreements are also raised as structural and political challenges (5).

Other studies, including the research by Bakhshayesh Ardestani and colleagues (2024), evaluate Iran’s permanent membership in the SCO as an effective factor in increasing institutional power and reducing the impact of U.S. political and security interventions (6). The results of these studies indicate that Iran’s membership not only improves the country’s political and security bargaining position in regional and international equations, but also increases Iran’s ability to counter extra-regional pressures (6). Alongside this, the research by Moradi Haghghi and colleagues (2023), through a comparison between the SCO and the Eurasian Economic Union, shows that although the economic objectives of the Eurasian Economic Union are more explicit, the effectiveness of trade convergence in the SCO is more tangible and more impactful (7). These findings underscore that security and economic convergence within the SCO can function as a model for strengthening Iran’s regional capabilities, even if macroeconomic indicator homogeneity among members has not reached a desirable level (7).

The studies by Mohebbour and colleagues (2023) and Zarrati (2023) emphasize the economic, political, and security capacities of the SCO (8, 9). The results of these studies show that Iran’s membership in the organization provides opportunities to enhance economic standing and reduce the effects of Western sanctions, because member states have substantial populations and significant energy needs and can replace sanction-affected routes with multilateral trade and financial channels (9, 10). In addition, Iran’s active participation in the SCO strengthens security areas such as counterterrorism cooperation, border security, and intelligence exchange, although the lack of binding structures and reliance on member consensus are considered among the organization’s constraints (9).

International research also shows that the SCO plays a key role in stabilizing regional security and redefining the balance of power in Eurasia. Tercovich and Meijer (2025) examined how the European Union preserves strategic autonomy in foreign policy and showed that political and economic convergence within the Union can create a framework for countering the influence of major powers—an insight that can help in understanding the SCO’s role in supporting the political and economic independence of its members (11). The study by Lukin and colleagues (2025) likewise emphasizes that the SCO, by focusing on multilateral diplomacy and creating collective cooperation mechanisms, increases the capacity to confront unilateral pressures from extra-regional powers (12). Furthermore, the research by Mumtaz and colleagues (2025) shows that active membership in the SCO can strengthen security and regional convergence and contribute to redefining the balance of power at the Eurasian level, while also playing a complementary role in member states’ foreign policies (13).

The research by Ergül Jorgensen and Jørgensen (2025) indicates that the crisis of multilateralism driven by great-power competition necessitates redefining the role of regional institutions and security organizations such as the SCO (14). Jackson and Shepotylo (2024), through analysis of politico-economic data, also showed that alliance formation and trade agreements in a multipolar world have a direct effect on Europe's economic and geopolitical security, and these findings can be used to analyze the impact of Iran's SCO membership on reducing economic vulnerability and strengthening the country's geopolitical security (15). Finally, Bokeriya's (2019) research emphasizes that, beyond its regional role, the SCO can enhance the capacity to confront extra-regional threats by strengthening military, security, and economic cooperation among members and can function as a complement to global collective security institutions such as the United Nations (16).

By synthesizing domestic and international findings, it can be argued that the theoretical framework of Iran's membership in the SCO is structured around three key axes: first, the capacities of multilateral diplomacy and the reduction of external pressures; second, economic and trade opportunities to enhance the country's position in the international arena; and third, strengthening regional security and the capacity to confront extra-regional threats.

This theoretical framework provides the basis for analyzing Iran's geopolitical, security, and economic relations within the SCO and facilitates an understanding of the organization's role in strengthening strategic independence, regional convergence, and achieving the objectives of the Look East policy.

Research Methodology

In general, research methods in the behavioral sciences can be classified based on two criteria: the purpose of the research and the method of data collection. In terms of purpose, this study is applied, and in terms of descriptive method, it is of the correlational type. This research is descriptive because its aim is the objective, real, and systematic description of events, occurrences, and issues related to the scope of the study. Descriptive research is research whose objective is to describe the conditions or phenomena under examination. This study is among applied studies conducted to enhance Eurasian security. Given the lack of access to a laboratory setting, it is also categorized as descriptive research. With respect to the nature of the study, it is also considered among evaluation research. The information and data required in this research will be collected through a library-based method, whereby the materials needed to formulate the theoretical foundations of the study—an important phase of a research project—will be reviewed through visits to various academic and research centers and by examining reputable domestic and international scientific publications, collections of articles, reports, and the results of studies from plans, projects, and prior research records. In addition, the internet and relevant websites will be used to extract and apply the required materials. For data analysis, the content analysis technique has been employed.

Findings and Results

This qualitative study was conducted within the body of research carried out on the role of the Shanghai Pact in enhancing Eurasian security, and for data analysis it employed qualitative content analysis with a conventional approach. The present research method is descriptive–analytical, of the content analysis type. Content analysis is a method that refers to any systematic and objective technique for extracting the characteristics of a message.

First Step: Formulating the Research Question

In the figure below, the research questions, along with the parameters under examination, are specified.

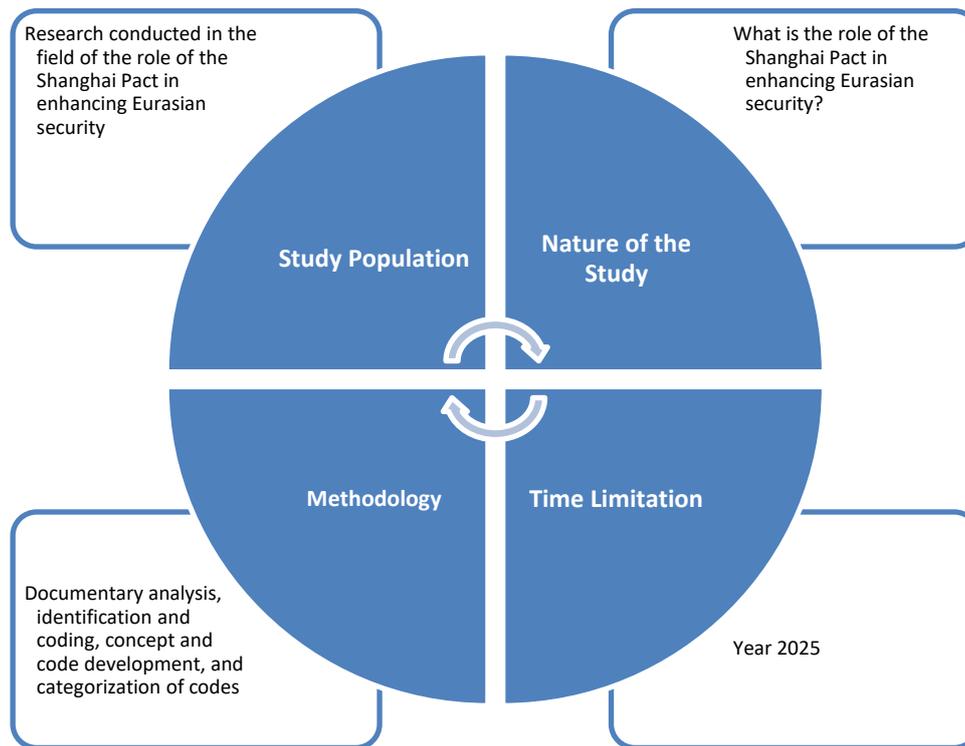


Figure 1. Parameters and research questions based on the first step of the meta-synthesis method

Second Step: Systematic Review of Works

In this step, all texts relevant to the research objectives were reviewed. Studies that met the eligibility criteria were selected for inclusion in the meta-synthesis analysis. In meta-synthesis studies, secondary data drawn from prior qualitative research conducted within the subject area are used for data collection.

Third Step: Selecting Appropriate Categories

At this stage, the researcher must assess the quality of the stored sources based on the selected keywords "Shanghai Pact" and "enhancing Eurasian security."

Fourth Step: Extracting Information from Texts

At this stage, using the qualitative meta-study (meta-synthesis) method, the researcher must, in view of the nature of the topic and the collected sources, select one of the nine methods of this approach. In this study, content analysis was used as the method for extracting information from the final sources.

In a qualitative thesis, the aim is to understand phenomena from the perspective of participants and within their specific institutional and social context, an aim that is ignored when findings are quantified. A qualitative thesis may be positivist, interpretive, or critical. Rather than measuring and evaluating an organizational phenomenon, a qualitative thesis is concerned with its meaning.

Qualitative research processes assume that organizational realities are not fixed and certain, but rather are the result of the projection of human imagination. Those who prefer qualitative research argue that, in order to discover new knowledge, direct intervention in organizations and the use of human feelings to interpret organizational phenomena are necessary.

The coding stages used in qualitative theses include open coding based on categories extracted from a preliminary study of the theoretical foundations of the research, axial coding, and selective coding.

Fifth Step: Analyzing, Interpreting, and Synthesizing Qualitative Findings

In the fifth step, after extracting information in the previous step based on the content analysis method, the qualitative findings derived from prior studies are analyzed, examined, and interpreted in order to present an integrated and systematic interpretation with a novel approach (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). In this manner, all identified codes are categorized into groups with similar concepts based on the meanings they convey.

It shows the comparative approach as follows:

Table 1. Codes and categories of the research components in the first stage

Related studies	Role	Code
Bakhshayesh et al. (2024), Biyari et al. (2022), Lukin et al. (2025)	Strengthening multilateral diplomacy as a platform for negotiation among members	R01
Mohebbour, Shafiee, Babri Gonbad (2023; 2023), Bakhshayesh Ardestani et al. (2024), Mumtaz et al. (2025)	Reducing the impact and effectiveness of sanctions and unilateral pressures (increasing economic–political resilience)	R02
Jafari et al. (2017), Biyari et al. (2022), Hamiani & Sajjapour (2022)	Increasing bargaining power and geopolitical influence of member states	R03
Shariatinia (2022), Akhavan Kazemi et al. (2011), Koulaei & Tishehyar (2012)	Counterterrorism cooperation and confronting regional terrorism	R04
Shariatinia (2022), Zarrati (2023), Bokeriya (2019)	Intelligence exchange and intelligence cooperation among members	R05
Koulaei & Tishehyar (2012), Akhavan Kazemi et al. (2011), Lukin et al. (2025)	Coordination of border security and control of shared borders	R06
Koulaei & Tishehyar (2012), Koushki & Hosseini (2017)	Crisis management and stability around Afghanistan and neighboring areas	R07
Akhavan Kazemi et al. (2011), Moradi Haghighi et al. (2023), Bokeriya (2019)	Developing regional convergence—political, economic, and security	R08
Hamiani & Sajjapour (2022), Bakhshayesh et al. (2024)	Shaping a shared Eurasian identity and a discourse of multilateralism	R09
Biyari et al. (2022), Mohebbour et al. (2023)	Ensuring transport security and transit routes (logistics security)	R10
Biyari et al. (2022), Mohebbour et al. (2023), Jafari et al. (2017)	Ensuring energy security and cooperation in regional energy resources	R11
Bokeriya (2019), Lukin et al. (2025), Zarrati (2023)	Strengthening joint military cooperation or complementing defense capabilities	R12
Tercovich & Meijer (2025), Bokeriya (2019), Mumtaz et al. (2025)	Collective confrontation with extra-regional threats and external interventions	R13
Shariatinia (2022), Akhavan Kazemi et al. (2011), Ergül Jørgensen & Jørgensen (2025)	Creating collective cooperation mechanisms (regional decision-making frameworks)	R14
Bakhshayesh et al. (2024), Bakhshayesh Ardestani et al. (2024), Mumtaz et al. (2025)	Reducing security–political dependence on the Western bloc (redefining the balance)	R15
Mohebbour et al. (2023), Bakhshayesh Ardestani et al. (2024)	Developing multilateral financial–monetary tools and pacts to circumvent sanctions	R16
Biyari et al. (2022), Moradi Haghighi et al. (2023), Jackson & Shepotylo (2024)	Increasing regional geopolitical stability through networking among regional powers	R17
Mohebbour et al. (2023), Moradi Haghighi et al. (2023)	Strengthening regional markets and infrastructures to reduce economic vulnerability	R18
Shariatinia (2022), Bokeriya (2019)	Developing monitoring mechanisms and coordination on arms and regional security	R19
Zarrati (2023), Koulaei & Tishehyar (2012)	Law-enforcement, judicial, and legal cooperation to combat transnational crimes	R20
Mohebbour et al. (2023), Moradi Haghighi et al. (2023), Jackson & Shepotylo (2024)	Enhancing economic security (stability of regional trade and investment exchanges)	R21

Mohebbour et al. (2023), Tercovich & Meijer (2025)	Increasing member states' resilience against external shocks (economic/political)	R22
Shariatnia (2022), Bokeriya (2019)	Empowering intelligence mechanisms to prevent attacks and emerging threats	R23
Bakhshayesh et al. (2024), Hamiani & Sajjapour (2022)	Supporting the national "Look East" policy and enhancing Iran's diplomatic capacities	R24
Biyari et al. (2022), Mohebbour et al. (2023)	Providing a platform for regional energy agreements and projects	R25
Biyari et al. (2022), Moradi Haghighi et al. (2023)	Facilitating joint infrastructure projects (railways, corridors) that enhance economic security	R26
Koulaei & Tishehyar (2012), Zarrati (2023)	Reducing border risks (arms, drug, and human trafficking) through operational cooperation	R27
Moradi Haghighi et al. (2023), Jafari et al. (2017)	Enhancing trade convergence in Eurasia and reducing economic tensions	R28
Tercovich & Meijer (2025), Lukin et al. (2025), Mumtaz et al. (2025)	Exchanging research experience and developing capacity to analyze regional security policies	R29
Bakhshayesh et al. (2024), Jackson & Shepotylo (2024)	Creating a regional balance of power (diversifying strategic partners vs. single hegemony)	R30
Ergül Jørgensen & Jørgensen (2025), Bokeriya (2019), Bakhshayesh Ardestani et al. (2024)	Strengthening regional cohesion against external interventions and geopolitical pressures	R31
Mohebbour et al. (2023), Biyari et al. (2022), Jackson & Shepotylo (2024)	Facilitating economic diplomacy and attracting regional investment for long-term stability	R32

In the following, by integrating the indicators, the new codes below are extracted:

Table 2. Codes and Categories Using a Comparative Approach (Second Stage)

Integrated Codes	Integrated Role Title	Code
R01, R09, R15, R24, R30, R31	Multilateral diplomacy and balance of power against Western hegemony	M01
R02, R16, R18, R21, R22, R32	Reducing the effects of sanctions and strengthening economic resilience	M02
R03, R17, R28	Enhancing geopolitical position and regional bargaining power	M03
R04, R05, R06, R07, R19, R20, R23, R27	Counterterrorism cooperation, confronting transnational threats, and strengthening border security	M04
R11, R25	Ensuring energy security and developing joint energy projects	M05
R08, R26, R28	Expanding Eurasian political-economic convergence	M06
R14, R29	Creating institutional mechanisms and collective cooperation structures	M07
R12, R13, R19	Strengthening military and security cooperation at the regional level	M08
R10, R26	Enhancing transport security, transit routes, and logistics infrastructure	M09
R09, R24	Shaping a Eurasian identity and the discourse of multilateralism	M10
R01, R15, R24	Strengthening the "Look East" policy and reducing dependence on the Western bloc	M11
R07, R13	Improving coordination in managing regional crises (especially around Afghanistan)	M12
R18, R21, R32	Facilitating economic diplomacy and attracting investment for long-term stability	M13

In the following, by integrating the indicators, the new codes below are extracted:

Table 3. Codes and Categories Using a Comparative Approach (Third Stage)

Integrated Codes	Final Theme	Code
M01, M03, M04, M07, M08, M10, M12	Power balancing and political-security convergence in Eurasia	F01
M02, M05, M13	Economic resilience and energy security	F02
M06, M09	Infrastructure and transit development and regional economic convergence	F03
M11	The Look East policy and reducing dependence on the West	F04

In the following, the status of the network of main and sub-themes is presented:

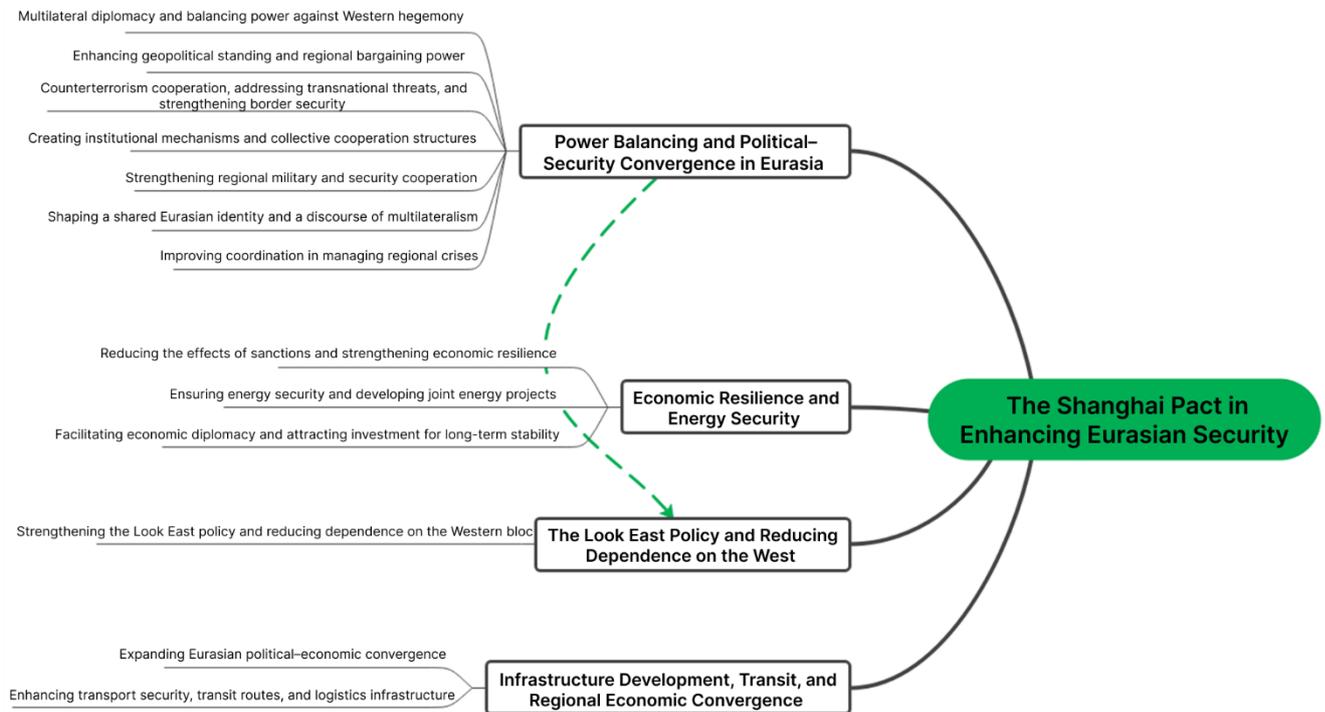


Figure 2. Thematic network of the research

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the present study, a documentary examination of the role of the Shanghai Pact in enhancing Eurasian security was conducted using a qualitative approach. The results obtained from the collected data, in light of the analyses carried out on the research background, overall indicate that the Shanghai Pact, as one of the most important multilateral institutions in Eurasia, has been able—by combining political, security, economic, and geopolitical capacities—to present a novel model of regional cooperation that goes beyond a merely security-oriented pact. The findings of the present research show that this pact has not only contributed to establishing a balance of power against Western hegemony, but has also provided a platform for the formation of sustainable structures of economic and infrastructural cooperation in Eurasia, and has offered members such as Iran an effective strategy to reduce dependence on the Western bloc and deepen the Look East policy. Relying on its capacities to confront transnational threats, economic sanctions, energy instability, and transit insecurities, the pact has been able to transform Eurasia into a reliable geopolitical and economic pole. Accordingly, it can be stated that Shanghai has simultaneously played an essential role in four dimensions—power balancing and regional security, economic resilience and energy security, infrastructural development and economic convergence, and, finally, strengthening the Look East orientation for members such as Iran—and has charted a new pathway for regional governance. In the section below, the interpretation of each of the research components is addressed:

1. **Power Balancing and Political-Security Convergence in Eurasia:** The most important function of the Shanghai Pact in recent decades has been the formation of a multilateral framework for balancing power against the hegemony of the United States and its Western allies. By bringing together major actors such as China, Russia, India, Pakistan, and the Central Asian countries, the pact has provided a platform for establishing a regional order independent of the Western bloc. Extensive counterterrorism cooperation,

security intelligence exchange, and the holding of joint military exercises—beyond strengthening border security—have created a level of mutual trust among members that is unprecedented in Eurasian history. This political–security convergence, while reducing the influence of extra-regional powers, has contributed to strengthening Eurasian discourse and consolidating the position of member actors in managing regional crises—especially in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Consequently, the Shanghai Pact not only plays a deterrent role against security threats, but also functions as the backbone of a multipolar order in Eurasia and has offered the world a new model of security cooperation.

2. **Economic Resilience and Energy Security:** In addition to its security dimensions, Shanghai has become an important platform for economic resilience and reducing vulnerability resulting from sanctions. Intra-pact mechanisms such as facilitating bilateral and multilateral financial exchanges, concluding long-term energy contracts, and developing regional markets have made it possible for countries such as Iran, Russia, and even China to circumvent Western sanctions. Cooperation in exploring and transferring energy resources and expanding gas and oil pipelines not only ensures the energy security of members, but also grants Eurasia a key position in the global energy market. On the other hand, these economic collaborations have led to the formation of a network of joint investments that minimizes economic risks arising from international pressures. Therefore, Shanghai can be regarded as an economic shield and a platform for strengthening resistance against policies of economic pressure and Western sanctions.
3. **Infrastructure and Transit Development and Regional Economic Convergence:** Another dimension of the Shanghai Pact's influence can be observed in the area of infrastructure development and the facilitation of regional transit. By coordinating economic policies and creating new trade routes, this organization has become a connector between the East and the West of Eurasia. Major initiatives such as China's Belt and Road Initiative, the development of North–South corridors, and joint investments in rail and maritime transport—while increasing logistical efficiency—have significantly reduced the costs of trade exchanges. Moreover, by establishing frameworks for economic cooperation among members, regional economic convergence has accelerated and countries' competitiveness in global markets has improved. In this context, landlocked Central Asian countries have gained specific advantages such as easier access to open waters and international markets, which in turn has a direct impact on economic stability and regional security.
4. **The Look East Policy and Reducing Dependence on the West:** For countries such as Iran, the Shanghai Pact provides a strategic opportunity to realize the Look East policy and reduce historical dependence on the Western bloc. Iran's permanent membership in this pact, while creating broad access to Asian markets, enables the expansion of economic and political relations with emerging powers such as China, India, and Russia. This transformation allows Tehran to move beyond the monopoly of Western markets and to organize its economic interactions on the basis of multilateralism and cooperation with Asian powers. Furthermore, Iran's deeper linkage with Shanghai entails important geopolitical consequences such as increasing bargaining power in international negotiations, diversifying energy export routes, and enhancing the country's position in Eurasian equations. Overall, this dimension of the pact opens a new horizon for reducing pressures arising from unilateral Western policies and strengthening Iran's strategic independence, and plays an important role in changing the region's geopolitical balance.

Based on the review of the presented research backgrounds, it can be understood that the findings of this study regarding the role of the Shanghai Pact in Eurasian security are aligned with the results of researchers such as Bakhshayesh and colleagues (2024), who have considered the Shanghai Cooperation Organization the main platform for realizing the Islamic Republic of Iran's Look East policy (6); however, at the same time, it operates beyond a purely political strategy and contributes to establishing a balance of power against Western hegemony. Compared to studies that focused primarily on the pact's counterterrorism function—such as research emphasizing security cooperation and intelligence exchange among members—the results of this study show that Shanghai, in addition to hard security, has an increasing focus on the soft dimensions of economic power and resilience against sanctions, thereby becoming a comprehensive, multidimensional institution. Moreover, in comparison with foreign studies that have often concentrated on the role of China and Russia in shaping a new multipolar order, the present findings emphasize the importance of the presence of countries such as Iran in strengthening this order and show that Iran's membership, while diversifying energy and transit routes, helps enhance Tehran's strategic independence and geopolitical position. Consequently, this research, through an integrative approach, is consistent with prior studies but highlights a complementary dimension that has received less attention: the linkage between economic and energy security with the political–security balance of power, which—especially for Iran and other new members—constitutes a key factor in strengthening regional stability and reducing dependence on the Western bloc.

Research and Policy Recommendations Based on the Findings

1. **Strengthening security cooperation frameworks and regional crisis management:** In light of the findings showing that the Shanghai Pact plays a central role in balancing power and reducing the influence of extra-regional powers, it is recommended that Iran and other members expand joint security and military exercises in order to enhance mutual trust, and strengthen rapid-response mechanisms to security crises (such as developments in Afghanistan and Central Asia). Establishing a regional coordination center for monitoring transnational threats and sharing intelligence data can contribute to improving Eurasian security.
2. **Establishing intra-pact economic institutions to enhance resilience against sanctions:** The research findings indicate that Shanghai has a high capacity for circumventing sanctions and strengthening economic resilience. It is recommended that a regional development bank or a joint financial settlement mechanism (similar to an Asian SWIFT) be activated within the framework of the pact, so that bilateral and multilateral exchanges among members are freed from dependence on the Western financial system. This measure could generate strategic advantages, particularly for Iran and Russia, which are under intense sanction pressure.
3. **Joint investment in transit infrastructure and energy projects:** The findings show that one of the key functions of Shanghai is enhancing energy security and strengthening Eurasian transit networks. Accordingly, it is recommended that member states undertake joint investments focused on projects such as the North–South Corridor, multinational gas pipelines, and high-speed rail networks. Iran, by leveraging its geopolitical position as a bridge linking Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Persian Gulf, can transform itself into a regional energy and transit hub.
4. **Formulating a long-term strategy for Iran's Look East policy:** Given the pivotal role of Shanghai in strengthening the Look East policy and reducing dependence on the West, it is necessary for the Iranian government to develop a comprehensive roadmap for relations with key members of the pact—especially

China, Russia, and India. This roadmap should include medium- and long-term plans for expanding economic, scientific, technological, and cultural relations in order to maximize the benefits of Iran's permanent membership and strengthen the country's position in Eurasian geopolitical equations.

5. **Enhancing multilateral diplomacy and Iran's active role in Shanghai decision-making structures:** The research findings show that active participation in the pact's committees and specialized working groups can increase countries' bargaining power in shaping a regional multipolar order. It is recommended that Iran, through proactive diplomacy, secure key positions in areas such as cybersecurity, energy, and electronic commerce, and propose new initiatives for scientific and technological cooperation, thereby both enhancing its own standing and contributing to the sustainability and balanced development of the pact.
6. **Expanding soft and scientific cooperation among members:** Based on the findings indicating that economic and security convergence gradually acquires cultural and scientific dimensions, it is recommended that member states establish structured cooperation in academic fields, student exchanges, and joint research on renewable energy and advanced technologies. Such cooperation will enhance long-term cohesion among societies and strengthen a shared Eurasian identity.
7. **Developing energy diplomacy and diversifying export destinations:** Given the emphasis of the findings on energy security, Iran can prioritize diversifying its gas and oil export markets by utilizing the capacities of Shanghai. Participation in multinational pipeline projects and renewable energy initiatives will not only generate sustainable revenues, but also enhance the country's role in Eurasian energy equations.

Research Limitation

Although this study has sought to present a comprehensive picture of the role of the Shanghai Pact in Eurasian security, it has faced several fundamental limitations:

1. **Limited access to up-to-date and classified data:** Many official documents and security and economic reports related to the Shanghai Pact are not published due to political or security considerations or become available only with delay; therefore, part of the analysis inevitably relied on secondary data and unofficial sources.
2. **Dependence on qualitative documentary analysis:** While the qualitative documentary method is suitable for examining geopolitical trends, the absence of quantitative and field data limits precise generalizability and the application of statistical testing.
3. **Rapid dynamics of regional developments:** The geopolitical situation in Eurasia—particularly regarding the Afghan crisis, Russia–West tensions, and China–U.S. competition—is changing rapidly, making the findings subject to the need for frequent updating.
4. **Focus on the Iranian perspective:** Although centering on Iran was necessary for this study, this focus reduced the depth of comparative analysis from the perspectives of other pact members.
5. **Lack of field studies or interview-based data from policymakers:** The inability to engage in dialogue with decision-makers and senior experts from member states limited a deeper understanding of the pact's internal mechanisms.

Research Recommendations Based on the Limitations

1. **Expanding quantitative and field-based data:** Future studies may use economic and statistical data and field surveys in member states to assess the economic and security impacts of the pact through quantitative models and more precise statistical tests.

2. **International comparative studies:** It is recommended that future research compare the Shanghai Pact with other regional organizations such as BRICS or the Eurasian Economic Union in order to examine its functions, strengths, and weaknesses within a broader framework.
3. **Analyzing temporal dynamics:** Employing foresight approaches or scenario planning to assess the impact of rapid geopolitical changes—such as developments in Ukraine or China–U.S. relations—on the security and economic functions of the pact can enrich the theoretical contribution of research.
4. **Examining intra-pact pluralism:** Conducting comparative studies that analyze the interests and perspectives of countries such as China, Russia, India, Pakistan, and Central Asian members can help better understand internal power balances and collective decision-making challenges.
5. **Policy-oriented studies with elite participation:** Conducting in-depth interviews with diplomats, policymakers, and senior security experts in member states can provide richer data for understanding the motivations and obstacles of security and economic cooperation.
6. **Focusing on the consequences of Iran’s membership:** Future research can specifically assess the economic and security impacts of Iran’s permanent membership after several years, using quantitative indicators to measure the extent of Iran’s benefits from the organization.
7. **Examining the effects of secondary sanctions and Western pressure:** Analyzing how U.S. and European economic pressures affect the internal dynamics of the pact and members’ counter-strategies can contribute to more robust economic and security policymaking.

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Authors’ Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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