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The Asianization of the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Scenario of the Opportunities and Threats of the Eastward Pivot

1. Mahdi. Khodarahimibougar¹ : Department of Political Science, Shi.C., Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran
2. Hamidreza. Haghighat^{2*}: Department of Political Science, Shi.C., Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran
3. Abdolamir. Jofri³: Department of Political Science, Shi.C., Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran

*corresponding author's email: drhagh@iau.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

The concept of Asianization in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran can be analyzed as an alternative strategy for reducing dependence on Western-centric structures amid transformations in the international order and intensifying geopolitical competition. The dissertation on which this study draws emphasizes that this approach seeks to establish “a new structure and a new order without the participation of the West and the United States” by utilizing Asia’s economic, political, and security capacities. Within this framework, Iranian foreign policy seeks, on the one hand, to expand its strategic room for maneuver by strengthening relations with East Asia and other Asian actors and, on the other hand, to balance against Western pressure, sanctions, and the security alliances maintained by certain Asian states with the United States. Drawing on Peter Schwartz’s eight-step scenario-planning model, this study examines plausible scenarios concerning the effects of Asianization on the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The findings indicate that this approach simultaneously presents opportunities, including access to extensive economic markets and the enhancement of Iran’s regional role, as well as threats, such as the dependence of certain Asian powers on the West and their alignment with anti-Iranian security arrangements. Accordingly, the central question of this article is what function Asianization serves in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in confronting Western and U.S. hegemony and how it may contribute to the formation of a new East-oriented discourse.

Keywords: Asianization; foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran; futures studies; scenario planning; Look East policy

Introduction

Following the Islamic Revolution, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran departed from its previous patterns in response to transformations in the international structure and gradually sought to redefine the relationship among Iran, the West, and the East. This change entails moving beyond relations based on an alliance with the West and advancing toward a “new definition of foreign policy” in which relations with the East are highlighted as an alternative means of confronting the West. From this perspective, Asianization is not merely a geographical orientation; rather, it represents a strategic reconstruction of the understanding of national interests,



the threat environment, and foreign policy opportunities. In other words, this idea constitutes an attempt to redefine Iran's position within a multipolar yet unequal environment in which Western hegemony continues to overshadow global relations.

The article appropriately demonstrates that, from the perspective of its policymakers and theorists, Asianization represents a form of "balancing against the West"; a balancing strategy that performs both defensive functions and generates opportunities. On the one hand, through its pivot toward Asia, Iran seeks to neutralize Western pressures, United States sanctions, and the constraints arising from the Western-centric order. On the other hand, it endeavors to assume a more active regional role by utilizing Asian economic markets and its own geopolitical position.

Accordingly, drawing on Peter Schwartz's eight-step model, the present article seeks to analyze plausible scenarios concerning the effects of Asianization on the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The use of scenario planning is important in this context because the issue is not merely the description of a political orientation, but rather the understanding of alternative futures and their potential consequences. Therefore, the central question of the article concerns not only the nature of Asianization but also its strategic implications in confronting Western hegemony, utilizing the economic opportunities of the East, and managing conflicting security alliances in Asia.

The Theoretical Framework of Asianization in Foreign Policy: Balancing, Power Transition, and Transformation of the Global Order

The analysis of major foreign policy orientations is impossible without considering the structure of the international system and the distribution of power within it. Classical theories of international relations, particularly the structural realist tradition, assume that state behavior is largely shaped by the constraints and opportunities generated by the anarchic structure of the international system. According to this perspective, to preserve their survival and enhance their security, states are compelled to adopt balancing policies against the concentration of power in the hands of a dominant actor (1). From this standpoint, strategic changes in foreign policy orientation often occur when states perceive that the dominant international order threatens their interests or security. Under such conditions, they seek to establish a new balance against the hegemonic power by forming alliances, diversifying foreign relations, or repositioning themselves within international cooperation networks (2).

The orientation toward Asia in the foreign policies of certain states can be analyzed within this theoretical framework. In recent decades, many international relations analysts have argued that the center of gravity of the global economy is gradually shifting from the Atlantic region to Asia. China's rapid economic growth, the industrial development of East Asian countries, and the increasing role of emerging actors in the global economic system have led some scholars to refer to the emergence of an "Asian century" (3). This transformation has influenced not only the economic sphere but also geopolitical power. Accordingly, the power-transition literature refers to the emergence of new actors capable of challenging the Western-led international order (2).

Within this environment, the concept of "Asianization" in foreign policy can be understood as a strategic response to structural transformations in the international system. Asianization may be defined as a process through which a state seeks to redirect its economic, political, and security orientations toward Asian actors and institutions to benefit from the opportunities generated by the growth of power in the East. This concept does not merely involve expanding bilateral relations with Asian countries; rather, it encompasses a broader redefinition of geopolitical and economic priorities. Within this framework, Asia is regarded as a sphere for expanding economic cooperation, strengthening regional ties, and increasing strategic autonomy from the Western-centric order (4).

From the perspective of balance-of-power theories, this orientation may also constitute a form of “soft balancing.” In the international relations literature, soft balancing refers to a set of measures adopted by states to constrain the power of a dominant actor without engaging in direct military confrontation. Such measures may include creating multilateral institutions, expanding economic cooperation, or using regional arrangements to reduce the hegemon’s influence (5, 6). Within this framework, strengthening cooperation with Asian powers may be regarded as a strategy for reducing dependence on Western-led economic and political structures.

Alongside realism, institutional theories can explain other dimensions of this phenomenon. From the perspective of liberal institutionalism, economic and institutional cooperation can reduce the costs of conflict and create new foundations for interaction among states (7). According to this perspective, establishing links with Asian economies and participating in regional institutions can provide opportunities for economic development and increased international engagement. In other words, Asianization within this framework is not merely a reaction to political threats but also a strategy for utilizing Asia’s economic and institutional capacities.

Nevertheless, an analysis of Asianization cannot be completed solely by relying on material factors. Constructivist theory in international relations emphasizes that identities, discourses, and states’ subjective perceptions also play an important role in shaping foreign policy (8). From this perspective, an orientation toward Asia may constitute part of an identity-redefinition process in foreign policy through which states seek to define themselves differently in relation to the dominant global order. In other words, Asianization may reflect not only structural changes in the international system but also transformations in foreign policy perceptions and discourses.

In this regard, some scholars argue that the international order is transitioning toward a more complex and multipolar stage. Richard Haass describes this situation as a “nonpolar world,” in which power is distributed among various state and non-state actors and no single power is capable of fully controlling the international order (9). In such an environment, states are compelled to create diverse networks of cooperation and partnership to increase their room for maneuver. From this perspective, the pivot toward Asia may represent an adaptive strategy for addressing the complexities of an international order in transition.

Nevertheless, Asianization also faces constraints and challenges. First, many Asian powers maintain deep economic and security relations with the West and, in many cases, demonstrate no inclination toward direct confrontation with the United States-led liberal order (4). This means that any strategy based on closer relations with Asia must also consider the complex realities of power politics in the region. Second, excessive reliance on one or two major Asian powers may result in a new form of dependence, a condition identified in the dependency literature as one of the principal challenges facing developing countries (10).

Overall, the theoretical framework of Asianization can be analyzed at the intersection of three major trends: first, changes in the global distribution of power and the growing role of Asia in the international economy and politics; second, states’ efforts to establish a balance against the hegemony of dominant powers; and third, the redefinition of foreign policy identities and discourses in response to the international order. Together, these three trends demonstrate that Asianization is not merely a temporary or tactical policy but part of a broader transformation in the way states understand their position within the international system.

The Look East Policy and Asianization in the Foreign Policy Experience of the Islamic Republic of Iran

An analysis of the foreign policy experience of the Islamic Republic of Iran toward the East and Asia demonstrates that this orientation has not been a temporary policy but rather a gradual and multilayered process shaped by

domestic and external developments. Indeed, the Look East policy in Iranian foreign policy should be regarded as the simultaneous outcome of several factors: structural transformations in the international system, Western political and economic pressures, Iran's geopolitical capacities in relation to Asia, and changes in the country's foreign policy discourse. Therefore, the Asianization of Iranian foreign policy cannot be reduced to a short-term political decision. Rather, this orientation should be understood within a historical and strategic process through which Iran has attempted to redefine its position in the evolving global order.

To develop a more precise understanding of this experience, the Look East policy and Asianization in Iranian foreign policy can be examined through several analytical dimensions.

Historical Roots of the Look East Policy in the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran

A precise understanding of the Look East policy requires consideration of transformations in Iranian foreign policy following the Islamic Revolution. The 1979 Revolution was shaped by the principles of independence and the rejection of domination, and from its inception, Iranian foreign policy developed a profound distrust of Western powers, particularly the United States. This gradually led Iranian foreign policy to seek alternative partners for economic and political interactions. Under such circumstances, the East, particularly Asian countries, emerged as an important option.

Nevertheless, during the early years following the Revolution, the Look East orientation had not yet developed into a coherent strategy. During the first decade after the Revolution, Iranian foreign policy was primarily influenced by security issues and the Iran–Iraq War. During this period, relations with certain Eastern powers, such as China and the Soviet Union, were largely pragmatic and limited in scope. However, following the end of the war and the beginning of economic reconstruction, cooperation with Asian countries gradually became more important. During the 1990s and 2000s, with the expansion of Iran's economic relations with China, India, and several Central Asian countries, the Look East policy emerged as an important foreign policy option (11).

Meanwhile, the intensification of tensions between Iran and the West, particularly regarding the nuclear issue, increased the importance of the Look East policy. Some Iranian analysts argue that under such conditions, this policy became an instrument for reducing Western political and economic pressures (12). Therefore, it can be argued that the Look East policy in Iranian foreign policy gradually evolved from a limited orientation during the first decades after the Revolution into a strategic option in more recent decades.

The Position of Asia in the Geopolitics of Iranian Foreign Policy

One of the most important factors strengthening Iran's Asianization policy is the country's geopolitical position. Iran is located in a region connected, on the one hand, to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf and, on the other hand, to Central Asia, the Caucasus, and South Asia. This position has naturally placed Iran at the intersection of major energy, trade, and transit routes. Some geopolitical analysts argue that such a position could transform Iran into a "geopolitical node" connecting the East and the West (13).

Within the framework of Asianization, this geopolitical position assumes particular importance. By developing transit infrastructure, energy routes, and transportation corridors, Iran could become an important link in Asia's connectivity networks. Projects such as the International North–South Transport Corridor and participation in regional transit initiatives exemplify this geopolitical capacity. Within this framework, the Asianization policy does

not merely entail expanding diplomatic relations with Asian countries; it also involves using Iran's geographical position to become an active participant in Asian economic and transit networks.

The geopolitical literature also emphasizes that countries situated at major transportation crossroads can attain strategic roles in regional economies through intelligent policymaking (14). Iran could similarly utilize this capacity through the appropriate management of its foreign policy.

Relations with Asian Powers: China, Russia, and India

One of the most important dimensions of the Asianization of Iranian foreign policy is the expansion of relations with major Asian powers. China occupies a particularly important position in this regard. Over the past two decades, China has become Iran's largest trading partner and has cooperated with Iran in various fields, including energy, infrastructure, and technology. From an economic perspective, cooperation with China could provide Iran with opportunities to access extensive markets and attract investment. Some scholars argue that China's rapid economic growth and the Belt and Road Initiative could create new opportunities for developing countries (4).

Alongside China, Russia is also considered an important actor in Iran's Asian policy. Relations between Iran and Russia are particularly significant in security, military, and regional affairs. Cooperation between the two countries on certain regional issues demonstrates that they share interests in some areas. Nevertheless, relations with Russia have always been complex and influenced by Moscow's geopolitical calculations.

India is another major Asian power with an important position in Iranian foreign policy. Economic relations between Iran and India are particularly important in the energy sector and in projects such as the Port of Chabahar. India requires Iranian transit routes to access Central Asia and Afghanistan, which could provide a foundation for long-term cooperation between the two countries.

Nevertheless, it must be recognized that none of these powers constitutes a comprehensive strategic ally of Iran. Each pursues an independent foreign policy and, in many cases, seeks to preserve its relations with the West. Therefore, for the Asianization policy to succeed, it must be based on diversified relations with several Asian powers rather than excessive dependence on a particular country.

Challenges and Constraints of the Asianization Policy

Despite its considerable opportunities, the Asianization policy also faces challenges and constraints. The first challenge concerns the structure of the global economy. Many Asian economies, particularly China and Japan, are significantly dependent on Western markets. Consequently, these countries frequently seek to preserve their relations with the West and avoid severe confrontation with the United States (15).

The second challenge concerns imbalances in economic relations. In some cases, economic relations between Iran and Asian powers have developed asymmetrically, meaning that Iranian exports are primarily limited to raw materials and energy, whereas its imports consist of industrial and technological products. In the long term, such a pattern could result in economic dependence.

The third challenge concerns competition among the major powers in Asia. Asia itself is an arena of competition among powers such as China, India, Japan, and the United States. In such an environment, Iran must pursue a cautious and balanced policy to avoid becoming involved in geopolitical competition among these powers.

Analytical Summary

Overall, the foreign policy experience of the Islamic Republic of Iran demonstrates that the Look East policy and Asianization have gradually evolved from a limited option into an important foreign policy orientation. This process has been shaped by structural transformations in the international system, Asia's growing role in the global economy, and Iran's need to diversify its foreign relations. Nevertheless, the success of this policy depends substantially on the management of relations with Asian powers and Iran's ability to utilize its geopolitical position.

In other words, Asianization can become a successful strategy only when it is based on diversified relations, balanced engagement with major powers, and the intelligent utilization of Iran's geopolitical capacities. Otherwise, instead of increasing strategic autonomy, this policy could create a new form of dependence in foreign relations.

The Rise of Asia and Transformation of the International Order: Implications for the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran

In recent decades, one of the most important transformations in the international system has been the increasing economic, political, and strategic weight of Asian countries, a process referred to by many analysts as the "rise of Asia." This transformation is not limited to the economic growth of several countries but reflects a gradual change in the global distribution of power. Whereas the international order throughout the twentieth century was largely shaped under the dominance of Western powers, particularly the United States, indications of a gradual shift in the center of gravity of the global economy and politics toward Asia are now apparent. This structural change has significant implications for many countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, because it may create new foreign policy opportunities and constraints. Within this framework, analyzing the rise of Asia and its implications for Iranian foreign policy requires consideration of several fundamental dimensions.

Asia's Economic Rise and Changes in the Global Distribution of Power

The first and most important dimension of Asia's rise concerns the rapid economic growth of many countries on the continent. Since the 1980s, countries such as China, India, South Korea, and several Southeast Asian economies have experienced remarkable economic growth by adopting development-oriented policies, attracting foreign investment, and integrating into the global economy. China has played a central role among these countries. Over the past several decades, the Chinese economy has expanded at high growth rates, transforming the country into one of the world's largest economies. Many analysts argue that the continuation of this process could gradually alter the structure of global power (4).

This economic transformation has also directly affected international politics and security. Increased economic capacity enables countries to strengthen their military capabilities, assume more active roles in international institutions, and obtain greater political influence in different regions of the world. Consequently, Asia's economic rise has gradually increased the region's political and geopolitical importance. From this perspective, some scholars have referred to the emergence of an "Asian century," a concept indicating the gradual shift of the center of gravity of the global economy from the West to the East (3).

The Emergence of Asian Powers and the Formation of New Regional Arrangements

Alongside economic growth, the emergence of major Asian powers represents another important dimension of Asia's rise. China, India, Japan, and, to some extent, Russia are recognized as influential actors within the global

power structure, and each seeks to enhance its role in the regional and global order. China, in particular, has attempted to create a broad network of economic and transit cooperation throughout Asia and beyond through extensive economic and infrastructure initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative.

Simultaneously, new regional institutions and arrangements have emerged in Asia. Organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and regional economic arrangements demonstrate the efforts of Asian countries to expand regional cooperation and reduce dependence on traditional Western-centric structures. In the international relations literature, this trend is regarded as an indication of movement toward a more multipolar or polycentric global system (9).

These developments demonstrate that Asia is no longer merely a geographical region but is gradually becoming one of the principal centers of power in the international system. For countries such as Iran, this change may create new opportunities for interaction, economic cooperation, and the formation of more diversified alliances.

Opportunities Created by Asia's Rise for Iranian Foreign Policy

Asia's increasing role in the international system may create important opportunities for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The first opportunity concerns the economic sphere. Many Asian economies require energy resources, and Iran, as a country possessing substantial oil and gas reserves, could play an important role in meeting this demand. Energy cooperation with countries such as China, India, and several East and Southeast Asian states could provide a foundation for expanding economic relations.

The second opportunity concerns Iran's geopolitical position. Iran is located at the intersection of transportation routes connecting Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. This position could transform Iran into an important route for transporting goods and energy within regional economic networks. Within the framework of transit projects and regional initiatives, Iran could use this position to enhance its role in the regional economy.

The third opportunity concerns diplomacy and the balance of power. Expanding relations with Asian powers could provide Iran with more options for confronting Western political and economic pressures. Theoretically, this can be analyzed within the framework of balancing policy, namely, a state's attempt to reduce its dependence on a dominant power by expanding relations with other actors in the international system (1).

Constraints and Complexities of Engagement with Asia

Despite the available opportunities, engagement with Asia is also accompanied by constraints and complexities. The first constraint concerns the fact that many Asian countries maintain extensive economic and political relations with the West. China, India, Japan, and South Korea all conduct a substantial proportion of their foreign trade with Western economies. Consequently, these countries generally seek to avoid severe confrontation with the United States or Europe.

The second constraint concerns competition among Asian powers. Asia itself is an arena of geopolitical competition among different powers. China–India competition, China–Japan competition, and the active presence of the United States in the Indo-Pacific region exemplify such rivalries. Under these conditions, countries engaging with the region must adopt balanced and cautious policies to avoid becoming entangled in competition among major powers.

The third constraint concerns the structure of the Iranian economy. If Iran's economic relations with Asian countries remain primarily limited to the export of raw materials and the import of industrial products, an imbalance

may emerge in these economic relations. In the long term, such a pattern could result in economic dependence and impede sustainable economic development.

Analytical Summary

Overall, the rise of Asia represents one of the most important structural transformations in the international system in recent decades. The increasing economic and political weight of Asian countries has transformed the region into one of the world's principal centers of power. This transformation may provide significant opportunities for countries such as Iran to diversify their foreign relations and utilize the region's economic and geopolitical capacities.

Nevertheless, utilizing these opportunities requires an intelligent and balanced foreign policy. In its interactions with Asian powers, Iran must seek to expand economic and political cooperation while simultaneously avoiding unilateral dependence on a particular power. Within such a framework, the Asianization of foreign policy can enhance Iran's power and strategic autonomy only when accompanied by diversified relations, effective management of great-power competition, and the efficient utilization of the country's geopolitical capacities.

Scenario Planning for the Future of the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran within the Framework of Asianization

Analyzing the future of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran within the framework of Asianization requires methods capable of accounting for uncertainties in the international environment. In recent years, many scholars in strategic studies have employed scenario planning to examine the future development of the international system and the foreign policies of individual countries. Scenario planning enables researchers to examine a set of plausible futures based on key trends and uncertainties rather than attempting to predict the future with certainty. Within this framework, the future is not regarded as a single predetermined pathway but as a set of possible scenarios, each shaped by a different combination of political, economic, and geopolitical variables (16).

The use of scenario planning is particularly important in analyzing Iranian foreign policy because Iran's strategic environment is characterized by high levels of complexity and uncertainty. Great-power competition, changes in the international order, global economic transformations, and regional developments may all influence the future trajectory of Iranian foreign policy. Therefore, scenario planning can help policymakers develop a better understanding of possible future pathways and become more prepared to address them. Scholars of foreign policy in the Persian-language literature have similarly emphasized the importance of futures studies and scenario planning in foreign policy analysis, regarding them as instruments for improving decision-making capacity under conditions of uncertainty (11, 12).

The Logic of Scenario Planning in Foreign Policy Analysis

Scenario planning is fundamentally a method for studying possible futures. Rather than attempting to predict the future precisely, it examines a range of possible trajectories that may emerge from the interaction of different factors. In other words, scenarios are analytical narratives about the future constructed on the basis of existing trends and key uncertainties. Under this method, the researcher first identifies the factors influencing the subject under investigation, then determines the most important uncertainties, and ultimately combines these factors to formulate different future scenarios.

Peter Schwartz is one of the leading theorists of scenario planning and developed an eight-step model for future analysis. According to this model, the scenario-planning process includes such stages as defining the focal issue, identifying key factors, analyzing driving forces, determining critical uncertainties, and ultimately developing plausible scenarios (16). The application of this method in foreign policy studies can help researchers develop a better understanding of potential transformations in the international system.

Some Iranian scholars have also emphasized that scenario planning is particularly important for countries situated in complex geopolitical environments. From this perspective, countries such as Iran, which are located in a conflict-prone region and simultaneously exposed to structural transformations in the international system, require future-oriented approaches to foreign policy analysis (17).

Driving Forces Influencing the Asianization of Iranian Foreign Policy

Within the framework of scenario planning, one of the first stages is identifying driving forces, namely, the factors that could exert the greatest influence on future trends. Several important driving forces can be identified in relation to Iranian foreign policy and the Asianization process.

The first driving force concerns structural transformations in the international system. The increasing economic and political role of Asian countries, particularly China and India, has transformed the region into one of the world's principal centers of power. This structural transformation may create conditions conducive to the expansion of different countries' relations with Asia. Some scholars argue that the gradual shift in the center of gravity of the global economy toward Asia constitutes one of the most important trends of the twenty-first century (3).

The second driving force concerns relations between Iran and the West. The level of tension or cooperation between Iran and Western countries may play an important role in determining the orientation of Iranian foreign policy. When relations between Iran and the West are characterized by tension, Iran is more likely to orient itself toward the East. Conversely, reduced tensions could result in a more balanced foreign policy.

The third driving force concerns Iran's economic and geopolitical capacities. Iran's geographical position at the intersection of major transportation routes connecting the East and the West could provide a foundation for a more active role in regional economic networks. Some Iranian scholars argue that utilizing Iran's geopolitical capacities could enhance the country's role in the regional and global economy (18).

Key Uncertainties in the Future of Iranian Foreign Policy

In addition to driving forces, the scenario-planning process requires the identification of key uncertainties. Uncertainties are factors whose future trajectories remain unclear but that may exert significant influence on future developments. Several important uncertainties can be identified in relation to Iranian foreign policy.

One of the most important uncertainties concerns the future of the international order. It remains unclear whether the international system will move toward complete multipolarity in the coming decades or whether the United States will retain its dominant position. This issue could significantly affect the foreign policy orientations of many countries.

Another uncertainty concerns the relations of Asian powers with the West. Although powers such as China and India are increasing their influence, they also maintain extensive economic relations with the West. It is therefore unclear to what extent these countries would be willing to support their partners when confronted with Western pressure.

At the domestic level, several factors may also influence Iranian foreign policy. For example, the country's economic conditions, its level of integration into the global economy, and the strategic priorities of policymakers are among the factors that may shape its foreign policy trajectory (12).

Analytical Summary

Examining the Asianization of Iranian foreign policy within the framework of scenario planning demonstrates that the future of this process depends on a complex combination of domestic and external factors. On the one hand, the rise of Asia and the increasing economic and political importance of countries in the region may create significant opportunities for expanding Iran's relations with the East. On the other hand, uncertainties within the international system and competition among major powers may complicate this trajectory.

Therefore, to utilize the opportunities generated by Asia's rise, Iranian foreign policy requires a flexible and future-oriented approach. The use of methods such as scenario planning can help policymakers develop a better understanding of possible future developments and formulate appropriate strategies for addressing them. Within this framework, the Asianization of Iranian foreign policy should be analyzed not as a predetermined choice but as one of several possible trajectories in the future of the country's foreign policy.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Asianization of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran demonstrates that this orientation is neither a temporary choice nor an emotional reaction to Western pressure, but rather a multidimensional phenomenon based on structural changes in the international system. In recent decades, the rise of Asian powers and the gradual shift in the center of gravity of the global economy from the West to the East have created a new foundation for reconsidering the foreign policies of many countries. As a country that is situated in a complex geopolitical environment and has simultaneously faced Western political and economic pressures, Iran has naturally sought to pursue alternative pathways of cooperation and interaction within the context of these changes.

In summary, the Asianization of Iranian foreign policy can be regarded as the outcome of interaction among three principal levels:

First, the structural level, which includes power transition, the emergence of China and India, and the formation of new regional arrangements. Second, the regional level, which concerns the growing importance of Asia in energy, transit, and security cooperation. Third, the national level, which includes the need to diversify foreign relations, reduce vulnerability to sanctions, and utilize Iran's geopolitical capacities. Together, these three levels have transformed Asianization into a strategic option for Iran.

Nevertheless, closer examination demonstrates that this policy is accompanied by both opportunities and constraints. On the one hand, the presence of large and growing Asian economies, their increasing demand for energy, and the development of regional transit networks create important opportunities for Iran. On the other hand, geopolitical competition among Asian powers, their extensive relations with the West, and the possibility of new forms of economic dependence create constraints that may limit Iran's foreign policy options. Therefore, Asianization can strengthen Iran's strategic autonomy only when it is designed on the basis of diversified relations, the active utilization of geopolitical advantages, and a future-oriented approach.

This article demonstrated that scenario planning, particularly Peter Schwartz's eight-step model, can provide an appropriate instrument for analyzing the future of Iranian foreign policy within the framework of Asianization. The application of this method facilitates a better understanding of uncertainties in the international system, great-power competition, and future transformations in Iran's relations with the West and Asia, thereby enabling a more precise formulation of possible future trajectories for the country's foreign policy. Within this framework, Asianization is not a predetermined pathway but one of several possible futures for Iranian foreign policy, the success of which depends on the management of opportunities and constraints.

Ultimately, Asianization can become a sustainable and successful strategy for the Islamic Republic of Iran only when it strengthens domestic capacities while simultaneously expanding balanced economic and political cooperation with Asian countries. It must also be emphasized that no state in today's complex international environment can rely exclusively on a single region. Therefore, Asianization should be pursued within the framework of an intelligent multilateral policy rather than as the complete replacement of the West by the East. Only under such conditions can this process increase Iran's room for maneuver, reduce its vulnerabilities, and strengthen the strategic autonomy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

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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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