

# COULD IRAN FILL IN THE POWER VACUUM IN CENTRAL ASIA? FOREIGN COMMUNICATION THEORIES AND ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES OF LEADERS

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**ABSTRACT:** This research aims to investigate the potential involvement of Iran in filling the power vacuum in Central Asia. Utilizing foreign communication theories, the study also seeks to analyze the narratives constructed by Iranian leaders regarding potential cooperation and influence in the region. Employing an approach of foreign communication theory analysis, the research aims to understand the communication strategies employed by Iran in response to the power vacuum in Central Asia. Primary data is obtained from interviews, official speeches, and publications of Iranian leaders, as well as media monitoring. The analysis of foreign communication theories provides insights into Iran's role in filling the power vacuum in Central Asia. Narratives of Iranian leaders concerning regional cooperation and geopolitical influence are key to understanding this dynamic. The research results also identify communication strategies used by Iran to strengthen its position in the region. The study concludes that Iran has the potential to fill the power vacuum in Central Asia, especially through careful communication strategies and narratives that foster regional cooperation. This conclusion contributes to our understanding of Iran's role in regional geopolitics and provides a basis for designing more effective foreign policies related to Central Asia.

**Keywords:** Power Vacuum, Foreign Communication, Leaders

## INTRODUCTION

Iran is moving to fill a gap left by Russia, which has long been a security guarantor in Central Asia, conducting regular military exercises with its fellow Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) member states including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (Sakhariyev, 2022); (Javaid, 2017). The hesitance of these countries to involve in

Ukrainian war, showed that Russian was not a motor for security pact in the region.

In the methodology of writing we use both International Relation Theory of 5 steps in Diplomacy and in Communication theory we will use the theory of Framing by Pan and Koshiki (Shigeto, 2009). While research would be conducted in qualitative way, since it is

involving some second Data analysis (media, social media and third person's views).

### **Why Central Asia?**

Iran is moving to exploit the power vacuum in Central Asia to advance its foreign policy priorities, due to the sanction posed by the US and some European countries, it needs to strengthening its forces to project influence, and ensuring regime survival by combating external threats, Iran also need to build up its strength-bond with its neighboring Afghanistan, which provides it with additional leverage for engaging with Central Asia.

### **Foreign policy priorities**

#### **Iran foreign policy for The United States** (Pillar, 2016):

For Khamenei, the Islamic Republic's top foreign policy priorities include resistance against the United States and Israel, which he sees as two sides of the same coin. Khamenei believes that USA wishes to continue its patron-client kind of relationship which it has conducted during the Pahlavi monarchy. His primary concern is not a U.S. military invasion, but rather a political and cultural campaign to undermine theocratic rule through a "soft" or "velvet" revolution. **(The U.S. Needs All the Friends It Can Get - Pragmatism and flexibility will be key to building alliances to counter the influence of China, Russia, and Iran. Institute of Peace US, Wednesday, November 22, 2023 / BY: A. Wess Mitchell, Ph.D.)**

### **The peace process between Palestine and Israel** (Barak, 2005):

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has little impact on the daily lives of Iranians, but Khamenei's contempt for Israel has been remarkably consistent. He has argued that "if Iran stops its support of the Lebanese and Palestinian people, the United States will also change its hostile attitude toward the Islamic Republic. He considered as a supporter for Palestinian and Lebanese people as one of His major Islamic duties." Arguably, the only way that Khamenei would accept a less strident position toward Israel is when and if the Palestinians themselves accept a peace treaty with Israel.

#### **Foreign Policy in the nuclear program** (Kazemzadeh, 2017):

For Khamenei, the nuclear program has been inside the revolution's core themes: the struggle for independence, the injustice of foreign powers, the necessity of self-sufficiency, and Islam's high esteem for the sciences. He wants to ensure that Iran is scientifically and technologically advanced enough to be self-sufficient, self-sufficient enough to be economically independent, and economically independent enough to be politically independent. (US institute for Peace, idem)

#### **In the foreign economic relations with Tajikistan and Uzbekistanin 2023**

Despite such economic sanction by Western countries, include USA and the West Europe/ EU, Iran has managed to make a significant economic tie with its neighbors such as Tajikistan and

Uzbekistan. Iranian contractors have often conducted infrastructure projects in Tajikistan. One of them is the construction project of Anzob Tunnel, which runs from Capital Dushanbe to Khujand, also the construction of Tajikistan's 220-megawatt Sangtuda-2 hydroelectric power plant in 2019, and Iran has begun to construct another power plant at Tajikistan's Rogun Dam. (*Tehran times, Turkmenistan, a strategic partner of Iran: Iranian minister, Economy, November 18, 2023*) (Omidi, 2022).

Iran also increasingly enlarges its trade with Uzbekistan. In 2018 bilateral trade between Iran and Uzbekistan grew by 40. In January 2023, Uzbekistan and Iran has signed an agreement that grants Uzbekistan access to Iran's Chabahar port. As Iran pursues opening for economic growth, integration with Central Asia will continue to open for opportunities (Tehran times, idem).

### **Organization to settling terrorism in the region**

The newly renamed Organization of Turkic States, which includes all the Central Asian states except for Tajikistan,

along with Turkey and Azerbaijan, to strengthen the alternatives to engaging with Iran. The organization has emphasized the need to combat terrorism in Afghanistan and has pursued projects to develop *the Trans-Caspian Corridor*. The organization has also stated that it is ready to "establish partnership relations with all countries," leaving the door open to opportunities with the U.S.

### **Religious demography of Central Asia**

The religious demographics in Central Asia are certainly not as favorable to Iranian infiltration as Iraq's. Central Asia is only about 1% Shiite, while in Iraq the Shiite population is upwards of 60%. Nonetheless, some Central Asian countries have significant Persian-speaking Tajik populations, who Iran may have an easier time engaging with. Tajikistan is roughly 85% Tajik, while in Uzbekistan, estimates regarding the Tajik population range from just around 1.5 million this is around 9 million population. (Daniel Turner, **Iran Eyes Opportunities in Central Asia, State Resilience & Fragility/Power Vacuums**, Nov 8, 2023).



**UN Secretary General recommend US to get back for Iranian’s oil sanction and returning to the Nuclear Deal**

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has pleaded with the U.S. to reopen the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) (El Khalfi, 2020); (Khazaie et al., 2021), the U.S.-abandoned Iran nuclear deal, by lifting or waiving its sanctions against Iran’s oil industry. For the agreement to continue, Guterres

emphasized that the U.S. must also lift or waive its sanctions and prolong exemptions pertaining to the trading of oil with Iran. (*Tehran Times, 18 December 2023*)

**Some of Iran’s Foreign Policies Under President Raisi (Since June 2021 to July 2023)**

Some of foreign policies of other entities with Iranian government: (June 2021- June 2023)

**Table 1. Foreign Policies of Other Entities With Iranian Government: (June 2021- June 2023)**

Number /regions	Targets	Instruments
Central Asia	Improving relations with its neighbours	Shanghai Cooperation Organization, etc
Superpowers: China	Technology transfers	Partnerships, trade <i>Finance Minister Ehsan Khandouzi announced a series of joint trade and cooperation projects between Iran and China. "China is Iran’s largest trading partner and the most important for the export of Iranian goods and an important part of our imports are also from China," said Khandouzi. An office of the Iran-China Chamber of Commerce in Beijing was also opened. (US Institute of Peace, 24 July 2023)</i>
USA	JCPOA / nuclear agreement	Tried to terminated the sanctions <i>Israeli President Isaac Herzog emphasized the need for a united U.S.-Israeli front for halting Iran’s nuclear development during a joint meeting of Congress. "Israel and the United States must act forcefully together to prevent Iran’s fundamental threat to international security (US Institute of peace, 19 July 2023)</i>

Number /regions	Targets	Instruments
	Notes: This policy made the US hesitated to release Iranian development in the area of nuclear weapon. Even all Iranian leaders not admit its nuclear program for weapons, and using nuclear for peaceful means.	
Europe (European Union)	EU's sanctions for Iran entities, in economic, and political sectors	<i>On January 23, the European Union sanctioned 18 Iranian government and security officials for the brutal crackdown on nationwide protests that erupted in September 2022. The group of 27 nations, including some of the world's largest economies, also imposed sanctions on 19 government bodies and private organizations. The list included a cabinet minister, provincial governors, members of parliament, and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) commanders. (US Institute of Peace, 24 January 2023)</i>

**Analysis and perspectives of Iranian foreign policy from diplomacy as a theory:**

Seeing from the above few factors and statements, one can analysis such foreign policies' actions in areas of:

1. Relationship with the Western and US;
2. Nuclear program;
3. Palestinian-Israel conflict;
4. Terrorism;
5. Religious demography of Central asia;
6. Terrorism and other factors.

While analysis from diplomacy as a theory, Diplomacy and its negotiation

process is seen as the art of creating and managing relationships among nations and the art of negotiation is that of forging relationships through agreements.

The process of a negotiation in diplomacy goes through five important stages that is preparation, discussion, proposing, bargaining, and settling process. These 5 processes involving in one communication actions. And Communication defined as a fundamental principle of diplomacy, is the cornerstone of effective diplomatic interactions. It serves as the lifeblood that enables the exchange of ideas, perspectives, and crucial information between states. Through

communication, diplomats foster understanding, mitigate misunderstandings, and build trust, creating a conducive environment for productive dialogue.

Diplomats utilize various communication channels to convey messages accurately and diplomatically. This includes diplomatic cables, official statements, and direct dialogue. Each channel carries its own significance and is strategically employed based on the context and intended audience.

Diplomatic cables, for instance, allow for confidential and secure communication, while official statements offer a formal and public platform to express positions and concerns. Skillful communication is essential for diplomat (Saaida, Muhammad, July 2023, *Al Istiqlal University /Palestinian Academy for Security Sciences, The Four Core Principles of Diplomacy*).

We have to see some articles in the media to understand the trend of Iranian foreign policies during the Presiden Raisi' era, below is one of these proves:

#### **Framing Analysis of Tehran Times on Central Asia**

Iranian media has recently shown news framing that shows its attention to the Central Asian region. Framing analysis using the (Pan & Kosicki, 1993) model of two reports by the influential Iranian news portal, Tehran Times, shows how this media express Tehran's great attention to the Central Asian region which is hit by a vacuum of Russian power in the region due to the raging Russian-Ukrainian war and power

vacuum. Tehran Times reporting on October 18, 2023 (<https://www.tehrantimes.com>) entitled "Iran Hosting Regional Conference on Intangible Heritage Protection" shows that Iran has an important role regarding intangible cultural heritage in the world, including among Central Asian countries. The conference was attended by several Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrdystan and Tajikistan.

The third paragraph shows that Iran currently chairs Unesco's Intergovernmental Committee for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage for the Asia Pacific group of countries. The fourth paragraph also states that Iran is one of many active countries in the world implementing the Convention for the Safeguard of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The second news analysis from the Tehran Times news portal

(<https://www.tehrantimes.com>) on June 23 2023 entitled "Transit and Geo-economy can Advance Iran-Uzbekistan Ties to Strategic Level: Expert" shows cooperation between Iran and one of the Central Asia counties, Uzbekistan, has reached a strategic level regarding geo-economic trade between the two countries.

In the first paragraph it is written "...Mirziyoyev was the first Uzbek president to visit Iran in more than 20 years. 10 cooperation agreements and memoranda of understanding were inked during the joint meeting of the high-ranking of the two countries..." shows how Iran has become an

important country for Uzbekistan because after more than 20 years there has been no visit by the Uzbek head of state to Iran. The inaugural event began with the signing of 10 cooperation agreements and a memorandum of understanding. The second paragraph states "...Pointing to the strategic position of Uzbekistan in the region, Rahimi said the country is geographically located in the heart of Central Asia and neighbors all four other Central Asian republics as well as Afghanistan, and this is considered a unique advantage in terms of geography..." shows how Iran maps Uzbekistan, one of the countries that is geographically located in Central Asia, has a strategic position in the region, as do the other four republics in Central Asia, such as Afghanistan, which has unique advantages in terms of geography, said Iranian scholar Omid Rahimi, an expert on Central Asian issues, as quoted by the Tehran Times.

Rahimi also considers Uzbekistan to have always been an important regional development center. As quoted by the Tehran Times, in the next few paragraphs Rahimi said that previously during the period when Central Asian countries were part of the Soviet Union, Tashkent was also the center for important regional decision making. Due to the changes that have occurred in Uzbekistan since 2017, this country has become very crucial. According to him, it is important for Iran to have close relations and partnerships with the Central Asian region because Iran is able

to play an important role in the Central Asian region and at the Eurasian level it naturally has many benefits. In the eighth paragraph, the Tehran Times quoted Rahimi as saying "...Economy has been the main driver of bilateral interactions between Iran and Uzbekistan in recent years and the main goal of reforms by Uzbekistan is economic development, and in this sense, economic and commercial relations are very important in the country's foreign policy..." which shows Iran's awareness that this country can play an important role for Uzbekistan (as well as other Central Asian countries) through the economic sector and this is an important thing in Iran's foreign policy.

The tenth paragraph in the news, namely "...Recent trends also show that we have witnessed a growth and even a serious leap in the bilateral relations between Iran and Uzbekistan in recent years..." shows how the media borrowed Rahimi's expert statement to show that bilateral economic relations between Iran and Uzbekistan have resulted in a leap in growth and this shows Iran's strong role in influencing the economies of its partners in Central Asia. The fifteenth paragraph reads "...Pointing to the importance of transit cooperation between Iran and Uzbekistan, Rahimi said Uzbekistan is located in the heart of the land-locked Central Asia, and access to open waters is strategically important for the country..." indicating that Iran also considering Uzbekistan as a country located in a land-locked area in the heart



of Central Asia, it is important to build relations with Iran in order to have access to open waters.

Meanwhile, the seventeenth paragraph states "...Rahimi went on to say that Iran has been one of the traditional and strategic routes for Uzbekistan to access open waters, the markets in Persian Gulf countries and West Asian countries, such as Turkey and Iraq..." shows how Iran has become a strategic and traditional route for Uzbekistan to access open waters, as well as for other Central Asian countries.

## CONCLUSION

Its identity as Islamic republic, is an obstacle for Iran to engage more closely and friendly to its neighbors, as for cooperation in the political and security spheres, while the Central Asian republics are secular governments, whom have had to contend with political Islam movement domestically since independence in the 1990's. Yet, an integrated Central Asia with Iran as its prime motor, could be endangered US's influences in the region, sadly this fact was the main concern of US's foreign policies in the regional bases. –

The attack of US Military bases in Iraq and its blame on Iran was a foreign policy of the US that played in the regional area and sources of the increasing of worry about the escalation of war among Mid-East and Central Asia countries. Given the experience of Vietnam, Iraq, and Ukraine wars now, it is time for Washington to leave its endless wars and look for peace.

All of the above mentions factors that interacted inside the implementation of Iran's foreign policies during the Era of President Raisi, would be worth mentioning, since His main focus as stated since the begin of his governance is to Go East. Each of its foreign policies to the Eastern part of the World, which called Asia, has interconnected to the situation internally in Iran. And due to U.S 's sanctions in economic sector, all of these influenced its relation to its Neighbors ( Asian countries).Iran close approach to SCO and BRICS, for pursuing its Asian look attitude, had so far colored its internal and domestic affairs and its development in many sectors.

Iran's primary obstacle for economic engagement with Central and East Asia is U.S. sanctions. The complicated nature of attempting to trade with Iran can make other trade routes, like the Trans-Caspian Transport Route, which travels from Kazakhstan through the Caucasus to Turkey, more appealing alternatives for Central Asian states, competing with Iranian Initiative to become an economic Hub for Central Asian countries.

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