

THE EFFECT OF GLOBALIZATION ON NATIONAL SECURITY OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

The bipolar international order came to an end upon the 1991 demise of the Soviet Empire. This development prompted a wide array of discourses on the essence of international relations in a new chapter of human history. In the field of international relations, complex, detailed, and at times contradictory analyses delved into the nature of the post-Cold War politics. Attempts were made at molding concepts that could best come to the rescue of international relations observers in their understandings of unfolding events.

There are plenty of theories about the end of the Cold War and a triad of different theories lend themselves to analysis. The first theory subscribes to an unabashed victory of the West and the emergence of a new era in international relations based on an almost absolute supremacy of the West.¹ This perspective takes a variety of orientations. On the optimistic front, the end of history is claimed to mark the inability of the non-Western world to confront the West.¹¹ Francis Fukuyama is the proponent of this line of thinking. On another front, however, a more pessimistic outlook warns against the outbreak of conflicts among civilizations, a view first proposed by Samuel Huntington.¹¹¹

The second theory considers the international environment unchanged, arguing that previous longstanding concepts still provide an accurate account of international developments. In other words, no new concept has emerged. Against this backdrop, the realists base their definition of power relations on the pillar of "nation-state," contending that the key concept of "national power" sheds valuable light on the nature of the pre- and post- Cold War eras and a conceptual shift has not taken place. The Marxist perspective still clings on to an unchanged view of international relations, proposing that the capitalist order is still undermined by its inherent crises. In this view, the capitalist international structure abides by the same old rules.^{1V}

However, "globalization" emerges as the third discussion that is drawing increasing attention. Along with other political and cultural conceptual tools, it claims to emerge as a new intellectual catalyst to a better understanding of the post-Cold War world.^V

It must be mentioned that globalization offers a manifold framework of international relations analysis. It stresses that a new environment is emerging on a global scale, affecting all the components of the international system.

An important point, however, is that the global environment is a key component of national security, resting on the incessant interactions between the domestic, regional, and international environment of nation-states. Considering

Iran's national security from this perspective, we will be faced with three inevitable questions:

How has globalization affected the international security environment? How will the latter affect Iran's national security? How can Iran respond to the challenges that surge in the sphere of national security?

Attempting to answer the foregoing questions, this article argues that first, globalization is giving way to structural uncertainties, yet at the same time, it has introduced new and clear parameters to the international security arena in the form of new actors, new rules, and a new combination of national security considerations.

Second, globalization has not and will not be able to fundamentally change Iran's security environment. Therefore, elements of continuity and change will coincide and weigh equally in Iran's national security considerations.

Third the security implications of globalization for Iran are neither good nor bad. This phenomenon, i.e., globalization results in both opportunities and challenges. In this light, Iran must neither forget the traditional challenges inherent in security space, nor must it remain aloof to new development. Each of the foregoing discussions will be elaborated on in this article.

I- Globalization and Change in the International Environment

With regard to security, globalization - which has caused considerable debate in international relations quarters and among international relations theorists and practitioners - wields three distinct characteristics.

First, it is inundated with uncertainties. Was "globalization" premeditated by the west and the U.S.? If it is indeed a premeditated plan, then what institution or organization could have been powerful enough to initiate such a massive scheme? How could any given institution proceed on that path?

Is globalization a trend? If so, when did it start, and how did it evolve? It is important to raise these questions since in any analysis of security issues, observers must be able to resort to conceptual tools in order to develop an accurate understanding of the reality, and hence cast myths aside.

In essence, the concept of globalization is not very clear, partly because there is no consensus on its definition.^{vi} Broadly speaking, three definitions on globalization are offered:

In the first definition, globalization is viewed as the West's master plan and it is used interchangeably with terms such as "Westernization" and even "Americanization." It bears mention that subscribers to this view are not homogeneous in their beliefs and convictions. They can have a wide variety of opinions.^{vii}

The second definition proposes that globalization is not a premeditated plan, but a trend that has been unfolding in the international system for some time.^{viii} Debate continues on the way in which it began. Some contend that the trend was

by the end of the Cold War. Others argue that it is the "next stage" in the evolution of Capitalism and embodies distinct periods of growth and decline. From this perspective, globalization of capital and its expansive nature actually began centuries ago and has been through numerous cycles ever since.

The third definition avoids generalization and attempts to take an analytical glance at the phenomenon, making distinctions between its various cultural, political, and economic facets.¹² Although globalization is primarily economic in essence, its cultural and political dimensions are equally important and thus deserve scrutiny.

Considering the concept of globalization, it seems that at the turn of the 21st century, the world no longer looks the same. Differences need not be discussed; however, although globalization seems to assume political shades from certain angles, the following realities demand attention:

First, new international actors are emerging on a global scale and they seem to perform much more efficiently than their predecessors. Traditionally, nation-states were the primary actors of the international stage. They still remain important, but no longer exert a monopoly, as two other players have actively eclipsed their presence over the past two decades, i.e., the NGOs and individuals. Second, the international environment has witnessed radical changes. In the past, geographical constructs and geopolitical forces went hand in hand to shape the international environment. Developments in the field of communications revolutionized this environment. The speed of knowledge-, data-, and image-transfer assigns a new meaning to the notion of "space." It does not follow that geography and geopolitics have lost significance. What this portends, however, is that the emergence of the new so-called "cyberspace" is creating a special, and hitherto nonexistent, environment. This new space has totally transformed all facets of human life, ranging from economic transactions to individual interactions. Whole new concepts such as economy and e-commerce are affecting the traditional sphere of human sciences and loom large as the by-products of the e-life.¹³

Third, the new international environment has changed the nature of international games. "Hard power" no longer warrants superiority in power-plays. The importance of the "soft" side power has introduced a radical shift in the classical notion of "balance of powers." It bears mention again that these changes do not overshadow the importance or the pivotal role of the military in international relations. However, it cannot be neglected that the arts of image-building, public opinion tracking, or persuasion have gained greater significance in domestic, regional, and international arenas.

Considering the above, the following triadic conclusions follow:

Globalization is a vague notion, yet at the same time new realities are surging to the fore in the international scene. These realities have inexorably transformed the international security scene.

The transformation of the international security stage has resulted in the emergence of new players and games, and the traditional role of classical players is changed.

Change in the international security environment is coupled with continuity in the classical international security scene. Not everything that has existed will be eliminated.

What will be the implications of the above for Iran's national security?

2- Change in Iran's National Security Considerations

Three issues must be analyzed at this point. First, Iran's national security in the era of globalization is still affected by a most traditional national security factor, i.e., characteristics of geographic neighbors and the international aspects of Iran's periphery. From this perspective, globalization and the change in the international security arena have not greatly altered Iran's national security considerations.

The most enduring element in Iran's national security over the past centuries is this country's peculiar geographic position. On the one hand, Iran's geography acts as a magnet and focus of specific and separate peripheral regions; on the other hand, however, Iran is not part of any of its neighboring geographical subsystems.

In other words, Iran sits at the crossroads of Arab Asia, the Turkish world, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Indian peninsula. While sharing cultural and religious commonalities with these regions, Iran is not strategically congenial to its neighbors. Geographic proximity to these regions juxtaposes "strategic rupture," thus assigning a key role to Iran in its national security environment.

Despite our perception of the current situation as a plan or a trend, the raw fact is that Iran is simultaneously faced with numerous neighbors with their own distinct domestic structure and foreign relations. Few countries in the world are surrounded by this degree of diversity. It is with a view to the diversity of its neighborhood that Iran has to shape its national security agenda, going beyond the international construction of bipolarity, multi-polarity, and even globalization. In this context, continuity is a constant in Iran's national security sphere. Another point is that Iran's national security environment does not solely involve bilateral relations. It is inextricably tied and interrelated to the global environment. International developments have lasting impacts on the national security environment. It would not be farfetched to claim that Iran's national security environment is one of the most internationalized security zones in the world. The presence of American forces in the Persian Gulf, the issue of Caspian

oil passing through Iran and America's rejection of this scenario, the obvious containment of Iran and the less conspicuous containment of Russia by the United States, development of a nuclear arsenal by Pakistan, Iraq's international crisis, Turkey's membership in NATO and that country's prospective membership in the European Union. Taliban's support of violent acts throughout the region, all contribute to the internationalization of Iran's national security zone. Each of these neighboring countries and Iran tackle a variety of international issues.

This international dimension is not new and is somewhat a continuation of the past. This dimension's intensity varies in different bilateral situations, and then compounds to internationalize Iran's national security zone.

The above argument concerned Iran's immediate national security concerns, i.e., its neighbors. Were we to proceed to the outer security circles, the international dimension would become more pronounced, reflecting the constancy of the international factor in shaping Iran's security zone.^{x1}

The third subject deals with changes in Iran's national security zone spurred by globalization. The issue referred to in section one of this papers can be equally applicable to Iran's national security zone.

First, the concept of national security zone or space has changed for Iran as much as it has for the rest of the world. Two decades ago, the notion of an "electronic space" was nonexistent. Yet today, the Middle East is very much included in this space. Internet-related issue, ranging from environment-business to satellite footprints and the increasing importance of image-building as a manifestation of globalization all complement the traditional geographical space to delimit a totally new frontier for the Middle East. The electronic space has brought about a paradigm-shift in the security sphere:

1. The new electronic environment and the significance of information-based technology put premium on knowledge and information generation. Economic competition is part and parcel of security rivalry and a whole new aspect of economic competition is emerging in the new space. It is very interesting that Israel that had always harbored deep insecurities about its geographical borders, is directing its economy towards advanced computer technology. In this new electric environment, it draws upon its \$100 billion on economy to shape new security arrangements.

2. In the new electronic space, and considering the importance of rapid and efficient information exchange, the communication aspect of security is gaining importance. The boundaries of this new electronic environment are overlapping, a fact unprecedented in history. This factor is also giving way to the emergence of new actors. A cursory glance at the Algerian space network attests to this fact. The Algiers Television Network broadcasts programs throughout the Arab world via Qatar. The network banks on its professionalism and avoidance

of traditional advertisement gimmickry to appeal to a wide audience, thus turning into an authentic source of information and decision-making.^{xii}

New players are not confined to the Algiers Network. The increasing salience of NGOs in the Middle East reflects the ease of electronic communication on one hand, and the declining of nation-states as the exclusive stars of the international relations scene. The role of NGOs varies from one country to the next and their impact is very much affected by their politico-economic environments. Nonetheless, the fact remains that NGOs are simultaneously forging regional and international links with sister organizations and have at times enjoyed the support of governments in doing so.^{xiii}

3. The new environment is changing the nature of traditional games in the Middle East. Reliance on the military force alone would be futile. Security no longer issues from the barrel of the gun. - Economic and communication parameters interlace to cast a new definition of security. It bears mention that a consensus has yet to emerge on the non-military aspects of security in Iran's environment. However, the viewpoints and opinions of the regional elite are changing gradually. Concern over growing marginalization from the global economy is very real, both in Iran and in the Middle East at large.

The economic impacts of globalization have left a negative impact on many countries. The Asian economic crisis emerges as a case in point a few years ago. Although a number of those countries have put the crisis behind and recovered from the damages, the security implications of that economic commotion were serious. The negative perceptions of the regional counties (especially to the south of Iran) on globalization is partly due to the fact that most of these countries still rely on their oil revenue, a topic that deserves due analysis at some other time. However, the conclusion that can be drawn is that security considerations are highly contingent upon economic and communications factors, the scale of which is historically unprecedented.

Against this background, the following can be deduced:

Immediate security zones (neighboring countries), more distant areas marked by the outer circles (neighboring countries), and Iran's other national security zones still demonstrate that "geography" is a main determinant of Iran's national security, and globalization will not change this fact.

Iran's security areas are affected by the global environment. In this context, development on an international plane, i.e., the globalization of the economy, will impact Iran's national security parameters.

Globalization has brought about a major change in Iran's security zone through the introduction of new actors and new security games.

Iran's proper handling of the impacts of globalization on its security zone depends on the answer to a classic national security question: What are the opportunities and threats?

Answering the above, it bears mention that the traditional threats to Iran's national security still persist and even assumed highly complex proportions. Iran not relinquishes its traditional and historical security concerns due to the phenomenon of globalization. Doing so would be to the detriment of its national security.

First, the security measures of Iran's neighbors follow specific patterns, and these patterns will not be altered by regional and international developments. This argument should not convey a sense of historical and geopolitical fatalism. However, the repeated and persistent patterns of behavior in Iran's national security zone must not go unnoticed.

Second, although traditional threats still appear in their old form, they have in fact assumed new complexities that are not related to globalization in an orderly and systematic manner. What is happening in Iran's eastern border in the case of the Taliban highlights the more traditional aspects of national security rather than the newer phenomena stemming from advances in the field of information technology or a global economy.

Third, the threats of globalization do not only concern Iran, but the region and the countries of the world. These become more pronounced when the spheres of domestic, regional, and international security overlap. A few points should be mentioned here:

1- The vague nature of globalization can be a source of threat itself. Given globalization (despite the realities associated with it) is an unclear concept, it can easily elicit misperception and accurate or inaccurate threat perceptions.

2- Globalization is manifold. The globalization of economy and information technology can once again cause serious rifts in the world and even in regions, entailing severe security ramifications for Iran.

Should the globalization of culture result in cultural homogenization, then it can present a threat to the Islamic identity of Iran, and since identity is a key ingredient of security, then a new threat will be added to existing ones.

3- Globalization has transformed national security environments, security actors, and the rules of the game, and can as such result in new sources of threat for Iran. The key concept here is the threat inherent in cyberspace.

Globalization has at the same time resulted in new opportunities for Iran:

First, Iran can enter the field of information technology, has adequate potential for becoming a player in the field, and has taken concrete steps in that direction.

Second, economic globalization and other international and regional developments have created a special environment for regional actors, Iran included. Economic globalization must not be considered in isolation of other phenomena and spaces. Regional powers have displayed their potential for active presence over the past few years and new regional opportunities are clearly at hand.^{xiv} Over the past decade, the trend of globalization hinged on

multilateralism. In other words, all members of the international community, including Iran, played a part in the shaping of new international norms in the context of international conferences. This fact, in itself, translates into a whole new source of opportunity for Iran.^{xv}

The presence of the U.S. has made the region insecure and this has made the provision of security costly for Iran. Thus the researcher believes that the only solution for Iran to get rid of geopolitical isolation, sanctions, threats, American domination and in order to use the regional and international opportunities is taking advantage of superior geo-politic advantage, increasing deterrence factor through the use of the capabilities of other powerful players, and taking steps for forming coalitions and strategic and tactical alliances.

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^{xi} : On contemporary geopolitical issues affecting Iran, see: Mojtabadzadeh Pirouz, Geopolitical Perspective and Iranian Realities: A Study on the Relationship Between Geography World (Tehran: Ney Publications, 2000)

^{xii} : Alterman John, New Media, New Politics? (Washington D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1999).

^{xiii} : To become familiar with the activities of NGOs in the Middle East see the various issues of Civil Society and Democratization in the Middle East, published by the Ibn-Khaldun Development Center, Cairo.

^{xiv} : For a discussion on regionalism in an age of globalization see, Kacowicz Aric, "Regionalization, Globalization, and Nationalism: Convergent, Divergent, or Overlapping," Alternative, No. 24 (1999), pp. 527-550.

^{xv} : Concerns over globalization are truly global. The concurrence of opportunities and threats are a vglobal discussion.. A conference held in China dealt with this issue:

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Գլոբալիզացիայի ազդեցությունը Իրանի Իսլամական Հանրապետության ազգային անվտանգության վրա

Համաշխարհայնացումը (գլոբալիզացիան) այսօր արդեն տարածված ու ընդհանրական մի հասկացության է վերածվել, որն իր ազդեցության տակ է առել մարդկային կյանքի բոլոր կողմերը տնտեսությունը, առևտուրը, մշակույթը, գիտությունը և այլն: Այս գործընթացը, հատկապես, սառը պատերազմի ավարտից հետո, խոր ազդեցություն է թողել շատ հասկացությունների, դրանց թվում նաև ազգային անվտանգության վրա: Հռոպվածում քննարկվել են ազգային անվտանգության հարցերը և գլոբալիզացման գործընթացների ազդեցությունները միջազգային և Իրանի ազգային անվտանգության ապահովմանը միտված քաղաքականության վրա: Հռոպվածում ներկայացվել են այս հարցերի շուրջ առաջադրված քաղաքական տարբեր վերլուծաբանների տեսակետներ ու մոտեցումներ: