Abstract

What is the role of identity in Iran’s and Russia’s foreign policy in Central Asia? This article discusses that identity in Iran’s foreign policy is debilitating and limits Iran’s performance in Central Asia, although the perception of identity in Russia’s foreign policy justifies its continued and permanent presence in this region. The paper utilizes the constructivist approach as its theoretical framework to analyze the question under investigation. Unlike Iran’s foreign policy, Russia’s foreign policy defines identity considers Central Asia as an area within Russia’s strategic and vital interests to expand its presence in this region. As a descriptive-analytical study, the paper elaborates on the relationship between identity and foreign policy and the position of interests in the constructivist approach to foreign policy. Then, it will study the performance of both countries in Central Asia. Results obtained from this paper confirm the difference in this remarkably effective concept of foreign policy, which leads both countries to have different perceptions of the whole region and their place in the region.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Identity, Interests, Iran, Russia, Central Asia

*Mahdi Sanaei is an Associate Professor of Russian Studies at the Faculty of World Studies, University of Tehran.
**Fatemeh Atri Sangari is an MA Graduate of Central Asia and the Caucasus from Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Tehran.

Introduction

Iran as a country located within or in the neighborhood of several strategically important regions such as the Caucasus, Central Asia, Persian Gulf, and the Middle East has always focused on developing its relations with Central Asia. Consequently, historical and cultural common grounds have been among the most chief reasons behind the significance of Iran's relations in this region. The membership of Iran and other countries of the region in the ECO and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (despite many obstacles for cooperating with these organizations) is due to the increasingly importance of the regional cooperation in the world and Iran's position in the region.\(^{(1)}\) Russian cultural and economic bonds in the region are also important and should not be simply ignored. While interacting in the region, Iran-Russia shared features and dissimilarities will also emerge for which many factors can be mentioned and several reasons can be scrutinized.

Considering all these factors, this paper is an attempt to investigate the possible role of "identity" in Iran and Russia's foreign policies in Central Asia. Accordingly, the hypothesis here is that the concept of identity has different meanings in the foreign policies of these two countries. Russia's foreign policy considers Central Asia as an area within Russia’s strategic and vital interest to expand its presence in this region. In contrast, Iran's foreign policy does not define Central Asia as an area for strategic interest and its relative limitation has resulted in Iran's performance constraints in the region which results from the mechanism in which identity is defined based on different identity-making norms; that in turn create specific roles and interests for the country. Results obtained from this paper confirm the differences in this effective concept of foreign policy which leads both countries to have dissimilar perceptions of the region and their place in the region.

This study is descriptive-analytical in nature. It, therefore, elaborates on the relationship of identity and foreign policy and deals with the performance of both countries in Central Asia. The
significance of the study lies in the fact that it works on content challenges and strategies as well as formal and temporal challenges in Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia and Russia. It also attracts Iranian foreign policy makers' attention to Iran-Russia relations in this region. Removing these obstacles and challenges will substantially influence Iran-Russia relations in the region, reinforcing Iran's position concerning cooperation-seeking attempts with Russia and delineating convergence of Iran and Russia's interests in the region.

1. Identity and Foreign Policy

Identity is an essential concept in every country's foreign policy-making. Since identities shape interests and actions of the actors, it is essential to understand them appropriately for analyzing foreign policy and actors' international behavior. Identity means a relative stable understanding based on one's own specific roles and others' expectations. Therefore, it is a relational issue. According to "Alexander Vent" social identities shape specifically in relation with other agents, hence they also shape specific interests and decisions of policy-making. Whether "one's own" or "self" percepts the "other" as a friend, competitor, or enemy can make significant differences in their interaction. However, acceptance of identity and interests as predetermined as well as certain affairs is rejected by interactionist and constructivist theories. Because they are created by human beings so they can also be created in an alternative manner.

Constructivists relate identity with interests through three methods. First, inherent national values of a government determine objectives, rewards, and advantages pursued by the government. Second, special beliefs rooted in the actors' identity help determine positions where the actions shape to complete these interests or benefits. This has an impact on determining government's priorities on special behaviors. Third, "identities" include certain performances and rules determining which strategies should be prioritized. Of course, they may also impose some particular restrictions on foreign policy's special choices.

In a systemic structure, identity of the government creates some
interests for it, which in turn shape performance and behaviors of the government. The governments define their interests based on their roles and situation and any change in this situation may result in disturbance of their identities and the obscurity of their interests that also influence foreign behaviors. In order to analyze and compare foreign policies of countries in a certain region, we should consider several indicators based on above issue, and then we can study foreign policy. These indicators, influenced by identity, are considered with respect to two criteria: first, the effect of identity on "own" or "self" perception and the perception of the "other", and second the effect of this perception on their performance in a given region. The indicators based on which the regional foreign policy are determined in this paper are as follows:

1. How do the states evaluate the totality of the region? What distinct features do they attribute to the region and how do they consider their own roles? For example, do they believe that the region is distinctly characterized by its geopolitics, or its economic-commercial potentials or its civilization and cultural features?

2. At a regional level, they may benefit from the regional institutions and their regional cooperation, or in contrast, they may benefit from conflicts in the region.

3. How do they see threats, opportunities and the future and how do they perceive them? That is the way the cooperation or conflict grounds will shape between the countries of a region.

4. What role do they consider for trans-regional powers?

5. How do countries of a region perceive themselves, or in other words, how do they justify their agency in that region? Do they consider themselves as a global power or a regional power? Because the countries make their foreign policy and broaden or restrict their performance based on their self-perception.(6)

2. Iran's Foreign Policy in Central Asia and the Role of Identity

Identity plays its major role in foreign policy through the direct influencing of national interests of the country. The most important
determinant for Iran's national incentives and interests is the identity that it defines for itself, which is in turn determined by national and transnational norms. Therefore, different identities require different interests and their change will result in changes of the country's national benefits. The pivotal element in defining national identity prioritizes national benefits. Moreover, concurrent conflicting national identities will lead to inconsistency of the benefits.

Many intersubjective meaning systems and resources seem to be at work in shaping fundamentals of national identity and identity-making norms of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This paper applies a framework in which Iranian identity resources and norms are divided to "nationalism" or "Iranism," "Shiite Islamism," "Third-Worldism" and the "international value system dominating on international relations." Therefore, there are various identity-making norms for the Islamic Republic of Iran and each of them, in turn, are divided into different branches, some of which, such as Shiite Islamism, considers a trans-border role for Iran and others, such as the discourse of international relations recognizes national borders for authorization or governance. Consequently, each of those national roles created by identity-making norms of the Islamic Republic of Iran entails certain national interests. Although, the identity-making norms of the Islamic Republic of Iran are various, each of which can define roles for Iran within and out of geographical borders, none of them dominates on Iran's foreign policy and Iran has followed different norms in different regions to apply its policies. It seems that the appropriate norm for a given condition is determined in accordance with the country's interests in different states. Different approaches and outcomes about the national interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran come from its value-based national benefits.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has had different national interests and foreign policy objectives during different periods. However, these objectives have always included economic growth, preserving territorial integrity, national authority and opposition with the West. One of the objectives stated in Iran's 20-years vision plan or document
is to achieve the first economic, scientific, and technological place in Southwest Asia (including Central Asia, the Caucuses, the Middle East and the neighboring countries).\(^\text{10}\) Therefore, Iran as an actor in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea region can play different roles. Iran as a nation-state, an ancient culture and civilization and one of the key players in the Islamic civilization can be effective in this region while it can seek interests resulted from these roles.\(^\text{11}\) However, with respect to the variation of identity-making norms, Iran's foreign policy in this region has not always followed a regular process.

From late 1991 to early 1993 is a period known as a period when some Iranian public institutes or establishments tried to organize a religious revitalization in Central Asia. Since then and simultaneous with the Iranian president, Hashemi Rafsanjani's visit of the region in October 1993, Iran's foreign policy regarding this region had changed; as a result, it focused less on "Islam" in negotiations and concentrated more on economic issues.\(^\text{12}\) This first era (from late 1991 to early 1993), therefore, could be called as the dominance of the norms resulted from "Shiite Islamism" intersubjective meaning system and second era (October 1993 up to date) could also be regarded as the dominance of "international value system dominating on international relations" on Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia. It should be noted that during post-soviet years, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait have obviously influenced Central Asian countries in terms of religious dimensions. However, it is not the case with Iran, as a Shiite country, to expand Shiite principles,\(^\text{13}\) unlike Sunni countries in the region. More importantly is the relationship of these identity-making norms and factors with the interests determining which norms should be predominated in various periods.

Interests defined by Iran in Central Asia are initially based on preserving regional stability and security. Analysis of relationships between identity and interests of Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia indicates that the difference in identity-making norms would firstly lead to a difference between defined roles and diversity in defined interests, hence cultural and economic interests have never been prioritized.
Secondly, it indicates that Iran's self-perception, as a regional power is inconsistent with its cultural, economic, and political performance in the region; in contrast, it sought to prioritize security interests concerning Russia’s position. Therefore, despite religious-historical similarities and closeness, due to some reasons, Iran does not consider Central Asia as a penetration area for exerting its influence.

Because of the fact that security and stability in the region was previously provided by this former superpower, Iran has tried to remove the vacuum through bilateral and multilateral cooperation from the initial stages of independence in Central Asian countries. However, the important point is that Iran's foreign policy in the region has essentially aimed at preventing this vacuum to be removed by countries such as the USA, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia (in religious terms), yet, Iran has never aimed at removing it by itself. Generally speaking, Iran's efforts for establishing bilateral relations with all countries in Central Asia, establishing multilateral and regional relations between these countries through organizations such as the ECO and the SCO, playing a moderating role in the internal war of Tajikistan and similar efforts all indicate that Iran has underlined security and the necessity of institutions with security function in the region. Although economic interests obtained by economic organizations and institutions are small because of structural problems in the economy of Iran and the region, it does not prevent Iran from obtaining security applications and providing grounds for political cooperation through these institutions.

Iran is situated in the neighborhood of several regions. Each of these regions faces its own challenges in terms of security, which result in permanent tension in Iran's neighboring regions. These tensions lead international and trans-regional forces to have more presence in these regions. Presence of foreign forces is felt as a threat to the security of Iran and the region. However, in order to provide security in a region by the countries of that region, there should be a regional security plan. Iran's efforts to reinforce the SCO (with Russia and China as its main participants) and to join this organization can
then be justified\(^{(15)}\) which of course indicate Iran's constraints as well. Also, Iran's increased conflicts with the USA, and the stabilization of America’s position in the region in late 2001 and early 2002, significantly determined Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia. Following 9/11, Iran's policy in Central Asia has always been decided through considering USA’s military presence in the region; therefore, increasing its cooperation with Russia, China, and India seemed necessary. Particularly, because these countries have close, and partly different, positions from that of Iran’s concerning the undesired development of the American dominance in this region. Consequently, some believe that Iran, through understanding America’s dominance, accepts that only powerful Russia can guarantee balance, providing the interests of the countries of the region\(^{(16)}\).

The role of the definitions of identity and national interests and even the effect of different meanings on Iran-Central Asia relations are also obvious in separate relationships with other countries of this region. Iran was the first country to recognize Tajikistan's independence and to open an embassy in Dushanbe. In 1995, four years after the opening of Iran’s embassy in Dushanbe, the Tajik embassy was opened in Tehran after Imam Ali Rahmanov, the then Tajik president, paid a visit to Iran. By the end of the internal war and ensuring relative stability in the central government of Tajikistan, Tehran-Dushanbe relations improved to some extent. Iran played a particularly major role in ending the internal war in Tajikistan. The opening of Sarakhs-Tajan's railroad and the construction of "Enzab" five-kilometer tunnel, taking "Khujand" out of a deadlock helped to provide security for this region and to preserve Tajikistan's territorial integrity; this indicated that unlike initial expectations, Iran had not defined its policy in the region in terms of Shiite Islamism identity-making norms. Yet, the quality of these relations compared to relations with Russia showed that Iran had essentially defined its policy based on none of these identity-making norms and their resulting interests. Although, Iran's policy in Central Asia during the post-soviet era could be evaluated as a balancing policy, it had
included no defined priority and Iran's relations with these countries had been left in a kind of “vacuum.”(17)

In spite of deeply-rooted civilization and cultural bonds with Iran, Uzbekistan was frightened to develop its political relations with Iran due to broad propaganda against its Islamic fundamentalism. (18) From the time that the National Islamic Movement seized power in Tajikistan, distrust between these two countries increased. Moreover, in its early years of independence, Uzbekistan expressed concern over Iran's presence in the region and that it might lead to the Tajik cultural revival and nationalism in Uzbekistan. This challenge together with similar challenges led Iran to be more cautious of its identity perceptions in the region and in its definition of interests.

In addition to political-security interests, Iran also considered its cultural interests. Cultural interests include common religion, traditions, and interests in the Persian language, present in the region. National and cultural closeness between Iranian and Tajik people resulted in higher relations between Iran and Tajikistan than other Central Asian countries. In the recent years, within the framework of the "Aryan Unity", Iran has tried to emphasize on the coalition of Persian speaking countries in the region, hence creating a nationality axis between Tehran-Kabul-Dushanbe. During a meeting in July 2006 summit meeting of the Iranian, Afghan, and Tajik presidents in Dushanbe, the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stated that the "security of Afghanistan and Tajikistan depends on Iran and the security of Iran, in turn, depends on the security of these countries"(19) indicating the security priority in the region for Iran. In fact, during these years, Iran's primary focus had not been on cultural interests. In addition to economic problems for cultural investment in the region, some researchers argued that Iran did not use tools such as the Islamic lever in the region due some reasons, for example, so as to avoid raising Russian hostility, due to the lack of required capacities in the regions (propagation of Hannifin Sunni religion in the region), or because Iran did not apply racial policies in the region as one of the permanent characteristics of Iran's foreign policy. (20)
Two main objectives of Iran in Central Asia are to seek stability in common borders and to attempt adjusting its Central Asian diplomacy with Russia's objectives. Its moderate position toward Russia and its need for following Russian diplomatic strategies indicate Iran's restricted ambitions for playing a role as the regional independent power in a post-soviet environment.\(^{(21)}\) Therefore, despite differences and competitions between Iran and Russia in Central Asia, Iran has never damaged Russia’s interests in this region.\(^{(22)}\) Another issue in Iran and Central Asian relations is that of the economic factor. In the early 1990s, immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran found intact markets in the newly independent countries of Central Asia, particularly in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan and started activities, such as doing businesses in those markets. Generally, however, in the 1990s, Iran had restricted effect of much less volume of imports of products compared to Chinese or Turkish products.\(^{(23)}\)

In terms of commercial trade-offs, Iran's non-oil exports to Kazakhstan valued 70 million dollars and Iran's imports from this country valued 150 million dollars, in 2012.\(^{(24)}\) The total amount of the two countries trade-offs, including oil and gas trades reached 1.2 billion dollars\(^{(25)}\), indicating negative balance of Iran-Kazakhstan trade. Iran-Tajikistan commercial trade-offs amounted 217 million dollars, in 2012.\(^{(26)}\) Iran-Turkmenistan commercial trade-offs amounted 3.713 billion dollars, in that same year\(^{(27)}\), that was essentially related to natural gas, oil products, and electricity imports from Turkmenistan to Iran. Iran's non-oil exports value to Turkmenistan was 400 million dollars including cement, detergents and food related material and Iran's non-oil imports from Turkmenistan valued 90 million dollars.\(^{(28)}\) The volume of commercial trade-offs with Uzbekistan was 350 million dollars, in 2012.\(^{(29)}\) While, this value was about 600 million dollars in 2009 and it was supposed to reach one billion dollars within one year.\(^{(30)}\) nevertheless, it decreased. Iran and Kyrgyzstan commercial relations were at lower volume. In 2011, Iran's export to Kyrgyzstan was 40 million dollars and its imports from this country was 10 million dollars.\(^{(31)}\)
It seems that Iran has never stated explicitly that Central Asia is located in its strategic and security domain, but rather has tried to preserve security in this region through Russia (which considers this region under its own influence). By broadly defining "national identity," concerning Central Asia, we can consider this region under Iran's specific influence and with regard to the roles resulted from this definition, we can consider broad political, economic, and cultural interests. However, by looking into cultural and political-security dimensions of mutual relations, it can be found out that the low volume of commercial trade-offs and investments in various sectors (that is somehow natural due to Iran's economy) represents Iran's economic interests defined in terms of limited framework of identity. These interests are also influenced by preserving security and stability in the region through cooperation with Russia.

3. Russia’s Foreign Policy in Central Asia and the Role of Identity

Geographically speaking, Russia is situated in the Eurasia domain and the dominant thinking on Russia’s democratic experience after the Cold War was also a new version of Eurasianism. Eurasianists do not focus on deep faith of Orthodox and broad western effects as defining elements for Russian identity. They believe that Russia is a unique bi-continental civilization. Therefore, Eurasianism is essentially a geographical concept concerning the Russian identity. In this definition of "national identity," Central Asia is considered as a domain for Russia’s essential or vital interests where two concepts of identity and Russian interests are interconnected. We will shortly discuss this issue as we proceed.

Furthermore, following the Soviet collapse, a new phase of studying and understanding Russian national interests began. Many believe that in post-soviet society, the term "nation" is synonymous with "ethnic or tribe," leading to discussions about the existence of specific national interests for the regions and republics of the Russian Federation. The first foreign minister of the Russian Federation, even, used to say that the government's foreign policy was determined based on "interests of
multi-nationalism" of the Russian Federation. However, to elaborate on the identity role in Russia's foreign policy is a much more difficult task. Russia has dealt with identity crisis and the problem of self-definition in different periods, whether in the pre- or post-Soviet collapse. In terms of collective identity, Russia has always been confused and torn up between both western, European concepts in one hand and after the Soviet collapse, the remaining structural bonds from the Soviet time on the other hand, Russia found it difficult to remove itself from these countries' structures. In terms of its role and function, due to economic problems, it was difficult for Russia to continue its superpower role as well. Indeed, during this era and various periods, difficulties for its global role and its emphasis on being an Asian country, led Russia to redefine its interests in near abroad, including Central Asia.

Self-perception and understanding of the role and function, plays an important role in Russia's foreign policy in Central Asia. Once a superpower, in new situation, Russia did not have its former power, but also many countries intervened with it up to the mid-1990s. Few years after the Soviet collapse, efforts were made to revive former situations. The "Foreign Policy Concept Document" approved in April 1993 emphasized Russia's rights and responsibilities in the Soviet territory near abroad countries) and referred to Eastern Europe as a "historical domain of Russia's interests." This document also underlined that Russia would remain as "a great power."

The "Russian Federation, despite its crises, and based on its power potential and influence on the flow of global events and responsibilities resulted from this power, was to remain a great power". At the core of this document was a three-dimensional attitude about Russia's role: "Russia as a regional superpower, Russia as a great global power, and Russia as a nuclear superpower." Such perceptions from "self" and "roles" resulted from the "identity" concept in Russia are effective on determining its national interests. In order to understand the concept of national interests in Russia's foreign policy, one should consider some other concepts such as nation, state, society, and people. However, ambiguity in identity

36
leads to ambiguity in national interests and challenges foreign behaviors. In immediate post-Soviet years, based on the definition of Russian identity as a democratic government and as a member of international community, national interests were mostly defined in terms of economic issues. Such a limited definition of national interests, in different regional and international levels, determined Russia’s foreign behaviors in near or far abroad. By development of rival attitudes (nationalists, communists, Eurasianists) and different view of identity, however, national interests were redefined in near and far abroad. Therefore, change in the concept of national identity, position, and role of Russia changed national interests, improved relations with neighboring countries in the south and east, and proposed a so-called "Look East" policy. Unlike Iran, the definition of Russia's identity and national interests aimed at expanding Russia’s geographical performance in Central Asia.

Three main domains of national interests, which shaped Russia’s foreign policy in relation with the West are: the near abroad region, Europe, and the international system. The first domain mostly is related to foreign behavior caused by national identity. Different definitions of national identity (particularly religious and ethnical definitions), will change the concept and range of Russia’s national interests in near abroad. Civil definition does not propose "Russian Diaspora" (Russians living abroad), but according to the ethnolinguistic definition, millions of Russians living in this region have always attracted Russia's attention.\(^{(35)}\)

The Foreign policy concept document (1993) stated that "all soviet territory is an essential domain for Russia and that Russia’s national interests should not be ignored in this territory". It has been also explicated in Russia’s military doctrine (1993) that Russia has a unilateral right to intervene in internal affairs of those countries separated from the Soviet. In practice, we have been witnessing Russia’s military presence in the countries of the region during past years. Russia’s military act for empowering those ousted officials and returning Tajikistan to its former status is just an example in this regard.\(^{(36)}\)
In his annual address in a meeting on May 2001 with State Duma deputies and the council of federation, Putin called cooperation with commonwealth countries as a priority in Russian foreign policy. In his annual message in federal assembly on May 2003, he underscored that "these countries are our immediate neighbors and our deeply rooted economic, cultural, and historical relations unite us; interdependence is also obvious. In addition to other issues, millions of Russian people live in these countries. We should clearly state that we consider commonwealth community as a domain of our strategic interests."(37)

Following the collapse of the Soviet, main issues and objectives of Russia’s foreign policy changed. The era of Euro-Atlantic perspective dominance and the lack of attention to former republics of the Soviet were a more stable and important era for commonwealth countries. When Putin came to power during this era, a new stage began in Russia’s foreign policy, in which relations with the West and the USA as well as cooperation with important Asian and European countries, especially with commonwealth countries were of prime importance. Economy played a significant role in Russia’s foreign policy during this era.

Three important national documents proposed by Putin at the beginning of his first presidency as a baseline for Russia in international policy included:
- The Foreign policy doctrine (June 2000)
- The National security doctrine (January 2000)
- The Military doctrine (April 2000)(38)

Articles in this document indicated a substantive change in Russia’s policy with respect to the Western World. New Russian foreign policy doctrine emphasized on efforts to support national interests for achieving these objectives: to guarantee the country's security, to safeguard and reinforce its authority and territorial integrity and to achieve a strong and prestigious position in the global community which could be fully consistent with interests of Russia as a great power and as an influencing center.(39) Marlène Laruelle argued that Putin's rise had led to the condition of return to this view:
"considering Russia as a great power in international forum, particularly in post-soviet environment."**(40)**

The most important aspect of Russia’s foreign policy in the region was its security dimension. After the Soviet collapse, southern borders of Russia have always been viewed from security perspective and any movement of foreign forces in these areas has been felt as a threat. Indeed, "by focusing on its traditional, geopolitical view about territory, Russia had considered its southern borders as a monopolized area for its military, political, and economic dominance. Therefore, any action by other actors for entering this area felt as a threat to Russian interests."**(41)**

This issue was underlined again in the strategy document of the Russian federation foreign policy approved in July 2000. According to this document, Russia should minimize the dominance of those rival countries in the region and regain its hegemonic role in the region through gradually increasing its economic capacity.**(42)** Russian concerns came from the fact that after the collapse of the Soviet, new elements and concepts entered the region influencing Russia’s stance. For example, the constitution of oil consortiums and establishment of foreign companies in the region, the penetration of ideas such as pan-Turkism, nationalism and Islamism, Tajikistan's crisis, NATO's expansion, plans such as the participation for peace, the influence of organizations such as the European Cooperation and the Security Organization, the European Council, as well as the attention paid by Central Asian countries to regional organizations and unions such as the ECO and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

One of the Russian tools for turning conditions in the region to move toward its benefits and interests is the application of regional institutions, in line with this, institutions such as Commonwealth Community, Common Economic Space, Collective Security Treaty Organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) were established; in all of which Russia is the greatest power (or one of the two great powers in SCO). Economically, Eurasian Economic Community has many
activities in Central Asia. However, the most influencing and active regional organizations in Central Asia are those constituted for security purposes. In order to handle security affairs in its borders, Russia supports regional organizations such as the Organization of Commonwealth Independent Countries, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and the SCO, where less emphasis was given to common authority and governance and governments’ interests continued to be the main issue.\(^{(43)}\)

In January 2005, Sergei Ivanov, Russia’s former Minister of Defense, traveled to the Republic of Azerbaijan. There he called for forming the "Caspian Naval Forces" consisting of all countries along this sea (Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan) to cope with weapons of mass destruction and other regional challenges and threats. Sergey Lavrov, Russia’s foreign minister, also warned against the threats caused by foreign military forces presence in the region, in a working meeting with the Caspian Sea coastal countries on problems of the region, saying: "if we open the doors for foreign military forces presence in the Caspian region, we will lose many things. Experience has shown that giving permission to presence of foreign forces is easy; however, expelling them from the region will be very difficult."\(^{(44)}\) That was the way, Russia pointed out to one of the most important security threats against its interests and functions in Central Asia.

Measures taken by Central Asian countries in order to decrease their dependence on Russia and to develop their relations with western countries have always resulted in some concerns for Russia, too. In 1999, for example, Uzbekistan joined the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (though it left this organization after a while). Due to its great energy resources, Turkmenistan has tended to act independently in its relations with Russia, its presence in the Nabokov project is an example. This was while such tendencies threatened Russia’s identity bonds such as protecting the rights of Russian minorities or the Russian language in the region. American military presence is another threatening issue for Russia, because of the 9/11 event leading the USA to reinforce its
military and political presence together with other western countries in Central Asia. Consequently, the USA and its coalition members obtained the right for using Khanabad airbase, Uzbekistan, and Manas base near Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

As a result, during the past years, Russia has tried to play a more effective role in security equations of the region. It has played this role either by moderating important issues of the region, such as the internal war of Tajikistan, or through reinforcing military forces in countries of the region. Russia continues to influence significantly on the collective security treaty organization. Possessing the greatest reserve personnel resources and military industrial complexes, Russia supplies five percent of this organization's budget.\(^{(45)}\)

Thus, Russia has sought to make Kazakhstan as its most important strategic partner and ally in Central Asia. It has rented seven military bases in Kazakhstan, including air and radar installations.\(^{(46)}\) In November 2005, Russia and Uzbekistan signed a security treaty known as the "Allied Relations Treaty". By virtue of this treaty, if each party is attacked, it will be considered as an attack to the other party and quick actions should be taken to confront the attack. It also allows each party to use the other party's military bases, installations and equipment.\(^{(47)}\)

These measures have been developed after the proposing of installation of the American Missile Defense System in Eastern Europe near the Russian borders. Moscow's officials stated last year that they allocated 1.5 billion dollars to equip armed forces of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Military aids to Bishkek included light weapons, war vehicles, helicopters, portable mortars, satellite equipment, and fixed and makeshift hospitals. They also stated that they granted military equipment valued 200 million dollars to Tajikistan and by the beginning of 2013; Russia exempts Tajikistan from custom’s tax which brings annually more than 200 million dollars for Tajikistan.\(^{(48)}\)

In terms of economic interests or benefits, it should be noted that Russia mostly trades off with this region. Following the Soviet
collapse, most of the commercial trade-offs of Russia have taken place with those republics of Central Asia. In 2012, Russia's commercial exchange with Uzbekistan valued 7.6 billion dollars.\(^{49}\) Based on statistics presented by Russia, Russia-Turkmenistan commercial relations including gas exports were 4.3 billion dollars in 2011.\(^{50}\) Moreover, Russia has the first place among the exporting countries to Kazakhstan, and fourth place among importing countries from there.

The most important indicator in these two countries relations is commercial trade-offs which was 24 billion dollars in 2012, including 17 billion dollars for Russian exports and 7 billion dollars, its imports.\(^{51}\) Russia was the largest Tajikistan commercial partner in 2012 and their commercial transactions valued more than one billion dollars.\(^{52}\) In fact, military and commercial relations between Russia and Central Asia indicate that the interest’s domain of Russia was defined in Central Asia. Thus, in order to play its superior role in Central Asia, Russia follows its economic interests as a ground to make other countries its dependents in the region.

Energy is another important tool for returning Russia to the international arena. Russia’s energy strategies are: to follow up bilateral agreements, to control energy resources of the region, to adopt a strategy of opposition with pipeline plans connecting energy producing countries in central Eurasia directly to European markets such as Baku-Tiflis-Jeyhan and Baku-Erzurum gas pipelines, to pursue internal convergence of Russia’s government with oil-gas sectors of this country, and collecting less taxes by these companies and at the same time, preventing great international companies to have access to this sector.\(^{53}\)

At present, Russia’s commercial firms and trade groups control many oil, gas, and electricity transfer infrastructures in Central Asia. Companies such as "Lukoil", "Gazprom," and "United Energy" majorly invest in various sectors of energy production and transfer sectors. Gazprom delivers about 80 percent of Turkmenistan's gas exports annually and according to an agreement signed between Turkmenistan and Russia in 29th December 2005, Turkmenistan
allocated its total exporting capacity to Gazprom during the first three months. In late December 2009, Gazprom and Turkmengas signed an agreement based on which Turkmenistan was supposed to export 30 billion cubic meters of gas to Russia in 2010.

Energy cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan are also significant. Gazprom has constituted two joint companies with Kazakhstan. Kazrus is a company consisted of Gazprom and Kazakhstan’s Gazmona for refining extracted gas from Gare Chaganak gas resource and the rebuilding of Kazakhstan’s gas pipeline. In February 5th, 2007, Russia and Uzbekistan signed an agreement including five common oil discovery plans and 36 years of common development programs in the south west of Uzbekistan. In 2009, Lukoil loaned 1.28 billion dollars from Gazprom bank as a financial aid to develop Uzbekistan's gas plans. In 2003, this company signed a strategic agreement with Tajikistan concerning the gas industry until 2028. In January 2006, a 25-year-long-term agreement was signed between Gazprom and Kyrgyzstan for cooperation in the gas industry; the discovery, development of oil and gas. In order to facilitate economic relations with independent countries, Russia constituted organizations such as Common Economic Space and Eurasian Economic Community. Russia's ability to reinforce regional bonds with Central Asia mostly depends on its economic state; due to its investment constraints, Russia's hands are dealt for further action. However, as Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan’s president, stated in the summit of Organization of Commonwealth Independent Countries in November 2001 "if Ruble and Russian economy are strengthened, none of us (members of Commonwealth Community) will be able to escape from its dominance."

**Conclusion**

Generally, through examining and comparing Iran and Russia's foreign policies in Central Asia, one can realize that "identity" has different interpretations in the foreign policies of Iran and Russia. Since Russia's foreign policy considers Central Asia as a strategically essential
domain for Russian interests, Russia should develop its presence in this region. However, Iran's foreign policy does not provide such a definition or concepts for Central Asia. The Islamic Republic of Iran has various identity-making norms, some of which such as Shiite Islamism, attributes to Iran a role beyond geographical borders, and others such as discourse of international relations accepts national borders for governance. Yet, none of these norms entirely dominates Iran's foreign policy. It seems that it can be determined through considering Iran’s national interests in various circumstances. Therefore, despite the religious-historical closeness between Iran and Central Asia, the latter is not as a particular domain for Iran's dominance.

Iran and Russia have different perceptions about the region and their positions in the region, so that according to Russia’s perception about the region and its position, Russia can justify its presence in this region as a domain for its strategic and vital interests. In contrast, relative limitation in concepts of Iran's foreign policy together with a security perspective and tendency for preserving security in the regions near the Iranian borders shape its behaviors. To this end, Iran follows Russian policies and has less innovation. Moreover, Iran and Russia agree on issues such as the necessity of institutions and organizations with regional functions, opposition with the presence of trans-regional powers, facilities, and to some extent, on regional threats.

With respect to identity and national interests, Iran should pay enough attention to the "Islamic civilization" and "Iranian civilization" in Central Asia and exhaust all its capacities. Indeed, to become a regional hegemony, Iran needs to consider both Islamic and Iranian civilizations simultaneously; it needs to turn into an axis for regional equations and relations by relying on its historical position among neighboring countries, and needs to consider trans-regional and global powers. This approach entails having access to power, increasing political, scientific, economic, industrial, cultural, and social potentials and capacities, and following up a new plan based on orientations of regional unions and international coalitions. Furthermore, Iran should redefine its national objectives. Therefore, it is necessary to redefine national interests.
Based on what is said, on the one hand, capacities of system's internal environment, i.e. present regional trends, regionalism, and the structure of international system and its impact on foreign policy input should be identified. On the other, legal conflicts concerning the foreign policy of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran need to be resolved regarding the connection or missing link between ideological dimensions and transnational ones. Furthermore, there should be appropriateness and proportionality between internal and external objectives of the system and the harmonization between regional and international dimensions of foreign policy as well, since due to its geopolitical and geo-economic situation, peripheral regions of Iran follow the international system.
Notes

6. This framework was written in 2009 under the supervision of Professor Homeira Moshirzadeh.
8. Ibid.
35. Ibid., pp. 183-188.
36. Ibid., pp. 186-187.


45. Ibid, p. 95.


