

Iran and the cognitive challenge in various perceptions of strategic alliance in international relations

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Original Article</p> <p>Main Object: Multidisciplinary Scope: Iran</p> <p>Received: 04 June 2023 Revised: 06 July 2023 Accepted: 11 July 2023 Published online: 22 July 2023</p> <p>Keywords: cognitive challenge, foreign policy, strategic alliance, transition, world order.</p>	<p>The meaning of “strategic alliance” is not solid in international relations literature. Regardless of various possible understandings, this concept is subject to further modifications that may result from changes in equations of the global order. In this situation, it is possible that what is understood by the two ends of a strategic alliance would be significantly different from the original understanding held by each party. Although Iran is located in a specific and sensitive location in the world's political geography, it is not considered to be in any major alliance with a regional block in its foreign relations: neither from the natural nor civilization perspectives. This is because, both naturally and historically, Iran is not a part of the Turk, Arab or Sunni blocks in the region. Therefore, Iran is somehow accepted as a “special entity” in the region. Along with Iran’s geographical position, which has historically instigated global competition, this “exceptionalism” could be the origin of the concept called Iran’s strategic loneliness. In this research, we use a qualitative analysis approach along with several historical facts. We focus on Iran’s perception of the concept of the strategic alliance with regard to the historical competition of the global powers and Iran’s strategic loneliness, especially at the intersection of the two. We will discuss Iran’s position in its strategic environment in contemporary history along with the misunderstandings it might cause based on how “strategic alliance” is perceived in Tehran vs. other capitals.</p>

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Extended Abstract**Introduction**

The meaning of “strategic alliance” is not solid in international relations literature. Regardless of various possible understandings, this concept is subject to further modifications that may result from changes in equations of the global order. In this situation, it is possible that what is understood by the two ends of a strategic alliance would be significantly different from the original understanding held by each party.

Aims

In this article, we focus on Iran’s perception of the concept of the strategic alliance with regard to the historical competition of the global powers and Iran’s strategic loneliness, especially at the intersection of the two. We will discuss Iran’s position in its strategic environment in contemporary history along with the misunderstandings it might cause based on how “strategic alliance” is perceived in Tehran vs. other capitals.

Discussion

Although Iran is located in a specific and sensitive location in the world's political geography, it is not considered to be in any major alliance with a regional block in its foreign relations: neither from the natural nor civilization perspectives. This is because, both naturally and historically, Iran is not a part of the Turk, Arab or Sunni blocks in the region. Therefore, Iran is somehow accepted as a “special entity” in the region. Along with Iran’s geographical position, which has historically instigated global competition, this “exceptionalism” could be the origin of the concept called Iran’s strategic loneliness.

Method

studies like this article can use either qualitative or quantitative content analysis approaches. A typical challenge in research on the thought processes of politicians is that it is difficult to objectify them and record data in an isolated and controlled fashion. The involved methodology thus differs from the typical data collection in science. Therefore, this type of research is limited to the data that comes from interviews, speeches, and diaries of politicians.

Using large amounts of data in such research used to be considered a disadvantage, and people had to find ways to select data that wouldn't affect research results. But with the accessible computational advances, processing larger amounts of data has now become an advantage. But the other issue, especially in the studies of political history, is that older data is not necessarily digitalized, which would pose a hurdle for methods based on big data analysis.

In this research, we use a qualitative analysis approach along with several historical facts.

Results

Theoretically, there are a few recognized types of misperceptions beyond the different meanings of a word in a language. What we study in cognitive research, including the current article, is focused not on the language-based bottlenecks, but what we call here “cognitive blindness”. Cognitive blindness means how our cognitive traps stop falsifying our presumptions in using new data, dismiss new data that contradict one’s beliefs, and misinterpret occasional ambiguities within the environment. Cost-benefit calculations can make one vulnerable to ignoring new disproving data. At the same time, politicians and policymakers often need confirmation about their beliefs and decisions, a tendency that can drive them to “neglect undesirable inputs”.

Conclusion

When a decision is made before enough studying, the only role of studying would be approving the decision and those who make them. This process does not necessarily happen consciously. Interests often have an impact on one’s beliefs, again, not necessarily consciously. Specifically, when we discuss misperceptions and cognitive errors, we focus on the mistakes people genuinely make, i.e., when interests unconsciously cause misperceptions.

In this research, we try to explore some examples of misperceptions and cognitive traps that Iran’s foreign policy suffered due to a lack of a shared understanding of the term “strategic alliance” during the transitional era in international relations. The “look to the East,” which is an observable tendency in Iran’s foreign policy, is entangled with different meanings and perceptions of the term alliance, in particular, strategic alliance. A mature and efficient foreign policy needs to detect the similarity of perceptions at both ends of a relationship, a process that potentially entails cognitive blindness.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

Ethical considerations

The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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