Future scenarios of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy towards the Palestinian issue in the horizon of 2035

Seyyed Jalal Dehghani Firouzabadi[*], Alireza Sahraie

Department of International Relations, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Allameh Tabataba'i University (ATU), Tehran, Iran.

Article Info	Abstract
	The main objective of the present study is to explain the key drivers affecting Iran's foreign policy towards Palestine and the scenarios related to these relations. Meanwhile, the Palestinian issue has become an identity-building and institutional factor at the center of the foreign policy discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Considering the persistence of this issue as a structural crisis in the Middle East, the dependence of Iranian policy on it, and the dynamic changes in the regional and international environment, analyzing the future of this policy is of scientific necessity. The basic question in the following article is formulated as follows: What are the most important drivers and uncertainties affecting the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the Palestinian issue in the next ten years? Due to its exploratory nature, this study lacks an initial hypothesis. The method used in this study is GBN scenario-based planning or critical uncertainties. The data collection method is qualitative and uses interviews, expert panels, and Delphi surveys. Also, Miqmac and Scenario Wizard software were used to analyze the data. The research findings show that based on the software output, out of 23 selected variables, 5 variables are in the influential variables group, 5 variables are identified in the bimodal variables group (1 risk variable, 4 variables as target variables), 4 variables are in the influenced variables group, and 9 variables are in the independent variables group. Based on the research findings, the two drivers of "Iran's regional influence" and "building a coalition against the axis of resistance" are selected as the main axes with the highest uncertainty, and four possible scenarios of "stabilization of hegemony", "balance of power", "decline of influence", and "systemic shock" can be drawn.

[*] Corresponding author: ✉ dehghani@atu.ac.ir, 🆔 https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1055-531X

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The Palestinian issue has become an identity-building and institutional factor at the center of the foreign policy discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Given the persistence of this issue as a structural crisis in the Middle East, the dependence of Iranian policy on it, and the dynamic changes in the regional and international environment, analyzing the future of this policy is of scientific necessity.

2. Aim

The main purpose of this study is to explain the key drivers influencing Iran's foreign policy towards Palestine and the scenarios related to these relations.

3. Methodology

The method used in this research is scenario-based planning with the GBN or critical uncertainties approach. The data collection method in this research is qualitative and uses interviews, expert panels, and Delphi surveys. Also, the MiqMaq and Scenario Wizard software have been used for data analysis. The basic question in the following article is formulated as follows: What are the most important drivers and uncertainties influencing the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the Palestinian issue in the next ten years? Due to its exploratory nature, this study lacks an initial hypothesis.

4. Findings

The research findings show that, based on the software output, out of 23 selected variables, 5 variables are in the group of influential variables (textural or determinant), 5 variables are identified in the group of bimodal variables (1 risk variable, 4 variables as target variables), 4 variables are in the group of influenced variables, and 9 variables are in the group of independent (or leverage) variables. Using the results obtained from the previous step (interaction analysis), a list of uncertainties is identified and then, based on the two criteria of "importance of uncertainty" and "intensity of uncertainty", critical uncertainties are selected, which ultimately form the framework of the scenarios. The selection process is based on the opinion of experts. Among the above bimodal factors, two factors are selected as the axes of the scenario because they have the highest characteristics of "high uncertainty" and "strategic impact". The selected drivers for the scenario axes are:

    X-axis: Iran's regional influence and power (bottom-up)
    Y-axis: Level of coalition building against the resistance axis (bottom-up)

5. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, for scenario building, the two drivers of "Iran's regional influence and power" and "building a coalition against the axis of resistance" were selected as the main axes with the greatest uncertainty, and four possible scenarios of "stabilization of hegemony", "balance of power", "decline of influence", and "systemic shock" can be imagined and drawn.

Scenario 1. Hegemony stabilization scenario (Best case)
- Scenario description. This scenario is realized when the key variables of Iran's regional influence, deterrence, and leadership in the Palestinian issue are strengthened, while opposing variables such as coalition building against the axis of resistance and Iran's isolation are weakened.
- Driving factors
  o Reduction in the involvement of foreign powers in the region;
  o Arab countries' halt in normalizing relations with the Zionist regime; and
  o Interim negotiations with the United States fail or end in Iran's favor.
- • Results
  o The balance of power in the region shifts in favor of the resistance movement.
  o The Palestinian issue remains in the spotlight.
  o The impact of sanctions on Iran decreases.

Scenario 2. Balance of power scenario (Balanced state)
- Scenario description. In this scenario, the two-way variables are in equilibrium. Iranian influence and coalition-building against the axis of resistance are activated simultaneously, but neither prevails over the other.
- Driving factors:
  o Continued intermittent negotiations with the US without a definitive outcome;
  o Increasing the cost of resistance inside and outside Iran; and
  o Continuing Palestinian civil war.
- Results
  o The balance of power in the region is maintained in a fragile manner.
  o The Palestinian issue is not marginalized, but no fundamental change occurs either.
  o Sanctions remain effective on Iran, but the resistance system is stable.

Scenario 3. The scenario of declining influence (Worst case)
- Scenario description. This scenario is accompanied by the

weakening of positive variables (influence, deterrence, leadership) and the strengthening of negative variables (coalition-building against the resistance, isolation of Iran).

- Driving factors:
  - o Normalization of relations between Arab countries and the Zionist regime;
  - o Increasing the impact of sanctions on Iran;
  - o Reduction of Iran's deterrent power due to international pressures.
- Results:
  - o The balance of power changes to the detriment of the resistance movement.
  - o The Palestinian issue is marginalized.
  - o Iran's regional isolation is intensified.

Scenario 4. Systemic shock scenario (Unexpected scenario)

- Scenario description. This scenario is designed based on the occurrence of an unexpected event (such as a direct conflict between Iran and Israel, a sudden change in leadership in Iran, or a widespread civil war in Palestine).
- Triggers
  - o Direct conflict between Iran and Israel;
  - o Death or transfer of power in Iran; and
  - o Sudden change in the regional balance of power.
- Results:
  - o The system faces a complete redefinition.
  - o Bimodal variables change rapidly and change the direction of the system.
  - o Previous scenarios become meaningless and new scenarios are formed.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

Ethical considerations

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or

falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability

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

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