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Opportunities for the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Transitional International System

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Extended Abstract

The rise and fall of great powers has always been a significant subject in the international system. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the perception among observers and analysts has strengthened that a period of transition in the international system has begun, and the US-led international order after the collapse of the Soviet Union is changing. Given neorealism's emphasis on how states are influenced by the international system, this transitional period could present opportunities for the Islamic Republic of Iran as a regional power. Therefore, the main research question is: What opportunities does the transitioning international system offer the Islamic Republic of Iran? Using neorealist theory, the research hypothesis posits that the transitioning international system provides opportunities for Iran, such as

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strategic cooperation with emerging powers, utilizing the potential of regional and international alliances and treaties, enhancing the agency of discursive power, and reducing the impact of sanctions.

This study employs a descriptive-analytical research method. Data collection was conducted through library research, scholarly articles, and internet searches, and the information was analyzed qualitatively and interpretively using rational reasoning and analysis.

The international system is a concept that has been used since the 1960s to describe interactions among state actors. It encompasses the environment in which units of international politics operate, where their intentions, orientations, and demands are influenced by the international system itself. Throughout history, international systems have undergone transformations in two domains: evolutionary and paradigmatic. In the evolutionary domain, systems have progressed from limited, regional forms (such as those in Mesopotamia, Greece, China, India, Africa, etc.) to more comprehensive systems (like those in Asia and Europe), culminating in the 20th century with a global international system. In terms of paradigmatic change, the international system, with its specific logic, norms, and rules, has given way to new systems. Examples of such changes include the multipolar system pre-World War II, the bipolar system during the Cold War, and the unipolar system in the 1990s (Karami, 2004: 83). Consequently, the primary focus here is on the second type of transformation, which neorealism theory is particularly well-suited to explain.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the proposition that a transitional period has begun in the international system has gained traction among observers and analysts. They posit that the international order envisioned by the United States following the collapse of the Soviet Union is undergoing significant change. Consequently, this transitional phase in the international system, which aligns with the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran, can present certain opportunities for the country. The most significant of these opportunities will be outlined below.

Strategic Cooperation with Emerging Powers: The transitional period in the international system provides a conducive environment for cooperation with emerging powers. The Islamic Republic of Iran should leverage the in-

ternal contradictions within the international community currently evident between the United States (which advocates for maintaining the status quo) and certain powers such as Russia and China (which advocate for changing the status quo and playing an active role in the international system)—while bearing in mind that all actors in the international system seek to secure their national interests. By forging strategic ties with these countries, Iran can enhance its agency.

Utilizing the Potential of Regional and International Alliances and Treaties: Given that regional powers have gained greater opportunity and scope for active engagement in the transitioning international system, the formation of regional unions and alliances represents another opportunity presented by this transitional phase. With the aim of consolidating its political, security, and economic role in the region, ensuring national security against regional instabilities, and maximizing economic, social, political, security, and cultural cooperation with its neighbors, the Islamic Republic of Iran can foster regional convergence by reducing points of divergence with both neighboring and non-neighboring countries. This is because, with the decline of U.S. power during the transition of the international system and the emergence of new powers, countries' dependence on the United States has diminished, thereby creating grounds for convergence, union, and alliance among nations.

Enhancing the Agency of Discursive Power: Accordingly, given that the transitioning international system provides a foundation for the emergence of cultural power, discursive power, soft power, and norm-setting power, this situation presents an opportunity for the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this context, owing to its possession of discursive and normative power, Iran can attain a distinct position and role, enabling it to exert influence within the international system.

Reducing the Impact of Economic Sanctions: In the context of the transitioning international system, the formation of regional organizations with an economic focus and effective participation in them can serve as a strategy to mitigate the impact of economic sanctions. The Islamic Republic of Iran's membership in BRICS and other regional organizations can create opportunities to alleviate economic sanctions. If the power of such organizations is

strengthened, BRICS countries can support Iran in international forums and help reduce political pressure on the country. This support may include opposing unilateral sanctions.

Conclusion

Throughout history, no similar pattern has consistently dominated power relations in the international system, which has undergone transformations corresponding to historical conditions. Changes in the structure of the international system have not only influenced its constituent units but have also been influenced by political units themselves. Following World War II, a bipolar structure prevailed in the international system, which shifted to a unipolar structure with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of American power. Given recent changes in the international order and the gradual weakening of US hegemony, a transitional period has begun in the international system, which could present significant opportunities for the Islamic Republic of Iran as a regional power opposed to the US-centric order. Based on the theoretical framework of neorealism, which emphasizes the influence of the international system's structure on states, Iran can utilize these developments to strengthen its position. This transitional period offers opportunities such as strategic cooperation with emerging powers, leveraging regional and international alliances, enhancing agency based on discursive power, and mitigating the impact of sanctions.

Key words: International System, Transition, Islamic Republic of Iran, Alliance, Discursive Power.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.