


Examining the Influence of Iranian and Chinese Strategic Cultures on Their Bilateral Strategic Partnership

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Abstract

Despite shared interests, historical ties, and mutual needs in areas such as military and economic cooperation, Iran - China relations have not yet developed into a fully decisive strategic partnership. Accordingly, the authors of this article seek to explore this issue through the lens of strategic culture. By examining the key components of the strategic cultures of both countries, as well as the internal obstacles and challenges stemming from these cultural frameworks, this study aims to answer the following question: How have the strategic cultures of Iran and China at the domestic level influenced the development of their bilateral strategic partnership? Findings suggest that the absence of a shared perspective among the political elites of Iran and China on various issues has hindered the emergence of a decisive strategic partnership. The research indicates that security considerations and domestic factors - including differing strategic cultures reflected in policymakers' perceptions of power, legitimacy, welfare, development, and security - along with internal constraints in both countries, have fundamentally shaped obstacles within Iran-China strategic relations.. This study employs a qualitative-interpretive methodology with an explanatory approach. This study employs a qualitative-interpretive methodology with an explanatory approach.

Keywords: China, Iran, Constructivism, Strategic culture, Strategic partnership.

Introduction

While relations with other actors are often based on strategic interests, it must be acknowledged that emerging situations sometimes stem from intersubjective beliefs, shared values, norms, and convictions. The authors concur with Johnson's definition of strategic culture, viewing it not merely as a set of beliefs and assumptions but also as deriving from the identities and shared experiences of individuals who shape it through their interactions. Therefore, it can be argued that although a country's strategic culture significantly influences its international relations, it is not the sole determinant. Rather, strategic culture creates the environment within which priorities are set and feasible decisions are made. Consequently, it plays a crucial role in providing the context for decision-making, prioritizing strategic goals, and shaping foreign policy objectives.

For instance, the decision-making of Iranian and Chinese elites regarding their countries' strategic issues and their understanding of values is a product of strategic cultures deeply embedded in their respective priorities. Therefore, it is the comprehension of elite values and perspectives, along with decision-making priorities and related factors - collectively constituting components of strategic culture - that determines how Iran or China can act decisively in pursuing strategic objectives within the international system. Consequently, understanding the will of states requires an understanding of their strategic culture, and achieving strategic influence necessitates a deep comprehension of the strategic cultures of the countries involved. This implies that the expansion of relations between Iran and China fundamentally depends on mutual understanding of each other's strategic cultures. Among the various factors shaping Iran-China relations, overlapping economic interests - particularly in the energy sector - as well as military exchanges and converging foreign policy concerns, have contributed to the development of bilateral ties. However, a more critical issue lies in the strategic choices of each country and their domestic conditions, which influence the depth and dynamics of their relationship. These include the divergent strategies of national leaders, elite perspectives, bureaucratic institutions, political culture, sanctions, political and regional considerations, cultural and linguistic differences, domestic policies, the absence of comprehensive legislation on trade and investment, insufficient frameworks for attracting foreign investment, limited investor confidence in domestic legal mechanisms for dispute resolution, the

political system, and other related factors. These internal factors have significantly shaped Iran-China relations and influenced their trajectory.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the present study aims to address the following question: How has the strategic culture of Iran and China at the domestic level influenced their strategic partnership? The tentative answer, or hypothesis, proposed in response is that the lack of a shared perspective among the political elites of the two countries on key issues has hindered the development of a decisive strategic partnership.

Therefore, internal factors such as the geopolitical order, political culture, ideology, military culture, and overall strategic culture of Iran and China have influenced their grand strategy and strategic partnership. Given the significance of the subject, this study, by addressing the theoretical framework, aims to analyze and examine two key areas:

- 1- The components of the strategic cultures of China and Iran at the domestic level,
- 2- The obstacles arising from these components in their strategic partnership.

1. Literature Review

Regarding the subject of the present article, various studies have examined certain aspects of Iran-China relations; however, this study differs from previous research in several key respects. Some of the most relevant studies are briefly reviewed below:

- **Shariatnia (2012), "Determinants of Iran-China Relations"** – In this article, the author examines the convergence in the foreign policies of Iran and China, as well as bilateral exchanges. According to the author, military, economic, and other forms of interaction have been influential in shaping Iran-China relations. However, factors such as China's strategic limitations and its engagement with the West have constrained the full development of bilateral ties.
- **Shamshiri (2020), "An Analysis of Considerations in Expanding Strategic Relations between Iran and China"** – This article examines Iran-China relations and argues that the expansion of developmental interactions depends on strengthening ties with major global powers. In this context, following the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Iran has pursued the development of its relations with China in line with its strategic objectives. According to the author, the expansion of

bilateral relations requires countries to establish clear priorities, and the study presents key considerations that play a decisive role in shaping Iran-China relations

- **Sita (2022), "Iran-China Relations Through the Lens of Sanctions"** – The author examines U.S. sanctions imposed on both China and Iran, as well as the resulting constraints on China's ability to cooperate with Iran. The study also explores Beijing's approach and response to sanctions on Iran. The period of intensified U.S. sanctions - particularly during the Trump administration - is identified as the peak of constraints on Iran-China relations, representing a significant factor influencing bilateral cooperation.
- **Çelik (2022), "A Review of Iran-China Relations and Their Impact on Central Asia"** – This article discusses the 25-year cooperation agreement between Iran and China, emphasizing that the expansion of interactions and collaborations between the two countries serves as a mechanism for increasing China's influence and presence in the Middle East and its connectivity with Central Asia. From the author's perspective, this development represents a significant opportunity for China's comprehensive engagement in these regions.
- **Belal et al. (2024), "Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and China's Role in Regional Politics"** – The authors explore the historical background of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, while focusing on China's growing engagement in the Middle East, particularly its ties with both Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the impact of these dynamics on the regional political order. According to the authors, China's expanding relationships with these countries could open a new chapter in its influence and involvement in the Middle East.
- **Ahmad et al. (2023), "China-Iran Relations: Emerging Challenges for the United States in the Middle East"** - This article examines the strategic potential of the West Asian region and its significance for major global powers. The authors argue that the longstanding relationship between China and Iran - dating back to 1979 and especially after the end of the Cold War - has evolved based on shared interests, including a mutual understanding of the global order. The study explores the underlying factors driving China-Iran cooperation while also considering this partnership as a strategic challenge for the United States in the region.

As observed, numerous valuable studies have been conducted on

Iran-China relations, and the literature in this field is relatively rich. However, the dominant trend in most research has focused on analyzing and evaluating Iran-China relations primarily through political, economic, and commercial lenses. There has been a notable lack of scholarly exploration from the perspective of strategic culture. What distinguishes the present study from previous research is its evaluation of the components of strategic culture in both Iran and China at the domestic level, and the obstacles these components pose to the development of a strategic partnership. By doing so, it addresses existing gaps in the literature, highlighting the innovative nature of this research.

2. Theoretical Framework: Constructivism

One of the international relations theories most closely aligned with the nature of strategic culture is the constructivist approach. Before elaborating on the constructivist perspective, this study first defines strategic culture and subsequently situates it within the constructivist framework.

Strategic culture is one of the internal, normative factors influencing a country's foreign policy, shaping the role of each actor within the arena of international relations. It encompasses beliefs, attitudes, behavioral patterns, traditions and habits, symbols, achievements, and specific methods of adapting to the environment and addressing challenges. These are understood in relation to the nature of the adversary and the threats they pose, as well as the use of force - the capability to control outcomes and eliminate threats - by a nation.

In other words, strategic culture constitutes a comprehensive environment through which the behavior of an actor is shaped. Typically, strategic culture remains stable and persistent over time, although it may undergo changes depending on circumstances (Johnston, 1995, pp. 33–35). As Jack Snyder stated, strategic culture is “an integrated system of symbols and beliefs that generates enduring and pervasive preferences” (Shehzad, 2022, p. 122), and culture shapes actions both in the short and long term.

The constructivist approach is particularly significant because it considers ideational and normative constructs to be as important as material ones. Constructivists argue that reality is intersubjective; from this perspective, reality is socially constructed through human cognition, with agency playing a crucial role in its formation. Moreover, the connection between the mind and society should not be overlooked.

Constructivism emphasizes two key elements: (1) beliefs, which give rise to meaning, and (2) knowledge, which leads to the formation of norms. Beliefs, in turn, generate norms through the process of meaning-making (Farrell, 2002, p. 49). According to this theory, a state's identity shapes its subsequent preferences and actions. A state perceives others based on the identities it attributes to them, while simultaneously reproducing its own identity through everyday social practices.

Examining Iran-China relations through the lens of constructivism and the concept of strategic culture, their relationship reflects an intersubjective structure - that is, shared ideas and beliefs between the two countries. For example, if Iran and China are considered as actors capable of changing or reinforcing the existing structure or hostility, such change or reinforcement originates from the beliefs and perceptions of both states. As long as these beliefs and perceptions remain stable, their social relationship can manifest as either friendship or enmity (Wendt, 1999, p. 250).

From the constructivist perspective, the identity of a small state encompasses a set of interests that differ from those associated with the identity of a great power. A small state is naturally more focused on survival, whereas a great power seeks dominance over global political, economic, and military affairs. Therefore, a state cannot act contrary to its identity, as doing so would undermine the legitimacy of that identity (Katzenstein, 1996, p. 5).

Consequently, from the perspective of constructivist scholars, China's security interests, foreign policy, and diplomacy are not defined solely by its material capabilities. Instead, it is China's identity, values, and overarching strategic culture that determine its interests at the international level. Therefore, strategic culture, as an environment, may directly or indirectly influence the formulation and choices of a country's national strategy. Accordingly, each country pursues its own unique strategic culture.

3. Components of China's Strategic Culture at the Domestic Level and Their Impact on the Strategic Partnership with Iran

China has sought to reform the global governance system and assume a leadership role within it since the era of Mao Zedong. Accordingly, the country's domestic policies toward other states have been shaped by multi-faceted strategies designed to align with China's national interests (Jones & Yeo, 2022, pp. 4–8).

Since 1949, Chinese leaders have held varying perceptions of

internal and external opportunities and constraints - the operational environment - which have profoundly influenced the formulation of the state's security policies. Given that a significant aspect of any country's security strategy involves addressing external threats, the decision-making of Chinese leaders has consistently been shaped by both domestic and international factors. Although China has long sought to expand its comprehensive relations with other countries - including those in the Middle East - this objective has remained central to its strategic agenda. In line with this goal, domestic factors influencing China's foreign relations have gained increasing importance (Abbasi Khoshkar, 2022, pp. 244–245).

Therefore, understanding Chinese policymakers' perceptions of key components such as power, legitimacy, development and welfare, and security - core elements of China's strategic culture at the domestic level - is critical for analyzing the dynamics of the Iran-China strategic partnership.

Table (1): Components of China's Strategic Culture at the Domestic Level

Components of China's Strategic Culture at the Domestic Level	Description
Power	China conceptualizes power across three dimensions: hard power, soft power, and smart power. In relations with other countries, the emphasis is placed on soft and smart power as instruments to gain credibility and safeguard national interests within the international system. This includes engagement in international institutions, cautious application of military force, advancement of foreign policy initiatives, and innovation and technological development.
Legitimacy	Despite undertaking numerous political reforms, China's closed political environment limits the full realization of political legitimacy. The Communist Party retains control over the judiciary, public opinion, legislative bodies, military, and information flows. As a result, legitimacy significantly shapes the decision-making of political elites in foreign relations. Participatory institutions have not evolved in tandem with the nation's economic growth.

Components of China's Strategic Culture at the Domestic Level	Description
Prosperity and Development	The “common prosperity” plan, extending to 2035, reflects China's efforts to ensure welfare and development across the country. This includes revitalization of northeastern regions, promotion of central area growth, and nationwide economic expansion. Such initiatives strengthen the government–people relationship while moderating pressures for democratization.
Security	China's security policy emphasizes development-oriented diplomacy, an open-door approach, and a conciliatory foreign policy. This security posture encourages careful selection of strategic partners aligned with national interests.

Source: (Authors)

Analysis of these components - power, legitimacy, development, and security - reveals that, shaped by the socio-ideational environment and material structures inherent in its strategic culture, China frequently assumes a decisive role in shaping policies and guiding behavior within the spectrum of strategic actions. This influence can manifest both directly and indirectly, impacting its interactions with partners such as Iran.

China consistently implements programs aimed at economic development and industrial growth. These programs encompass the development of various industries, attraction of domestic and foreign investment, expansion of trade and exports, financial system reforms, and the creation of favorable conditions for business. Technological advancement and innovation are also central, including research and development, support for innovative companies, growth of high-tech industries, and upgrading of technological infrastructure.

Policies focused on economic development and improving citizens' living conditions - which facilitate social justice, reduce economic and social disparities, alleviate poverty, promote equal opportunities, develop infrastructure and social services, and ensure equitable distribution of resources - remain a top priority for policymakers and political elites in China. Consequently, since the 1990s, China has pursued its objectives through partnerships, strategic partnerships, comprehensive strategic partnerships, and

alliances with various European, Asian, and African countries.

The depth and scope of China's strategic partnerships have historically been influenced by three key factors: geographic proximity (sharing a common border), the extent of bilateral military interactions, and trade in strategic resources (energy, metals, agriculture), including joint infrastructure projects. Relations with other states are continually evaluated in light of China's security considerations, with policymakers adjusting engagement according to national priorities.

Despite these strategic considerations, internal structural obstacles remain significant challenges to the Iran-China strategic partnership. The primary limitations are summarized as follows:

- 1- International Sanctions: Iran faces extensive international sanctions, primarily imposed by the United States. These sanctions constrain Iran's financial sector, oil exports, transportation, and international trade, creating a major deterrent for Chinese policymakers considering strategic partnerships. China seeks to safeguard its interests during crises, secure access to energy, and avoid the economic pressures or penalties that could result from U.S. sanctions (Davis et al., 2013, p. 19). Notable examples of U.S. sanctions affecting China-Iran cooperation include measures against Zhuhai Zhenrong Corporation, Kunlun Bank, Concord Oil Company, and COSCO Shipping. These sanctions have led to suspended refinery projects, withdrawal of financial support, and reduced Chinese engagement in Iranian energy and infrastructure sectors.
- 2- Political and Regional Factors: Complex political and security dynamics in the Middle East - including regional tensions, conflicts, and competing interests - can hinder the development of strategic relations between Iran and China (Sazmand & Mohammadi, 2023, p. 284).
- 3- Cultural and Linguistic Differences: Differences in language and culture between Iran and China can impede interpersonal and commercial communication. A deeper understanding of each country's culture, norms, and work practices is necessary to mitigate these barriers.
- 4- Limited Export Diversification: China is a major global market, and some Iranian industries remain highly dependent on Chinese demand. Expanding the strategic partnership requires Iran to diversify its exports efficiently. However, some Iranian goods are perceived in China as insufficiently diversified compared to products from other countries.

- 5- Dependence on Resources and Energy: Chinese elites note that Iran's heavy reliance on oil and gas for economic and industrial development reduces the need for broader partnerships in energy and alternative technologies (Esmaeili & Zhang, 2022, pp. 48–50).
- 6- Domestic Policies and Regulations: Iran's trade regulations, legal and financial policies, and currency controls have posed significant obstacles to Chinese investment and bilateral cooperation.
- 7- Security and Political Factors: Domestic political and security conditions in both countries may delay joint projects and the development of strategic relations. From the Chinese perspective, Iran's regional security and political environment is a critical consideration (Belal, 2020, pp. 49–50).

In summary, China pursues innovative, region-specific strategies to safeguard its long-term and vital interests, prioritizing strategic alignment over short-term gains. This approach is rooted in China's strategic culture and its capacity to exercise measured, influence-driven foreign policy (Sajadpour & Shariati, 2011, pp. 71–72).

4. Components of Iran's Strategic Culture at the Domestic Level and the Resulting Obstacles in the Strategic Partnership Between the Two Countries

Iran's strategic culture at the domestic level is shaped by core components such as power, legitimacy, welfare and development, and security. These components are informed by the perspectives of Iranian policymakers, ideological and cultural values, and the spiritual-ethical principles of the Islamic Revolution. Consequently, they differ significantly from the corresponding elements of China's strategic culture. The following discussion elaborates on these components and their implications for the strategic partnership with China.

Table (2): Components of China's Strategic Culture at the Domestic Level

Components of Iran's Strategic Culture at the Domestic Level	Description
Power	Hard and soft power are exercised within the framework of smart power. Emphasis is placed on soft power, particularly in the Middle East, through the projection of political legitimacy, ideological and cultural values, and political and social unity.

Components of Iran's Strategic Culture at the Domestic Level	Description
Legitimacy	Legitimacy derives from the theory of the Absolute Guardianship of the Jurist (Velāyat-e Motlaqeh-ye Faqīh). The Islamic Republic's governance model is grounded in religious authority, with decision-making shaped by Islamic discourse and worldview. Contemporary authority to lead the community (imāmat) rests with a just, knowledgeable jurist (vali-Faqih), who is entrusted with executing governance in accordance with Islamic principles (Mesbah Yazdi, 2010, p. 107).
Prosperity and Development	Development and welfare policies are guided by Islamic principles, emphasizing poverty eradication, fulfillment of human needs, liberation from economic domination, and equitable economic development for citizens. Article 44 of the Constitution highlights these objectives, reflecting the alignment of economic growth with Islamic ethical and social goals.
Security	Security in Iran encompasses multiple dimensions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political: Preservation of the Guardianship of the Jurist, protection of Islam, adherence to independence and rule of law, and maintaining the regime's popular base. • Economic: Promotion of self-sufficiency, poverty alleviation, and support for disadvantaged groups. • Cultural: Combating corruption and fostering social justice as foundations for internal stability. • External: Framing foreign relations according to Islamic and humanitarian principles, defending Islam and Muslim interests, adhering to the “Neither East nor West” doctrine, and upholding mutual respect and non-interference in other nations' affairs (Sallar, 2004, p. 117).

Source: (Authors)

These components, which are deeply ingrained in Iran's strategic culture, play a central role in shaping the country's national priorities,

foreign policy orientation, and decision-making processes. While they offer a coherent framework for domestic governance and regional influence, they also pose structural challenges to establishing a decisive strategic partnership with China. Among the key obstacles are ideological divergence, as Iran's religiously grounded governance model may not fully align with China's pragmatic and secular approach to strategic relations; legal and regulatory constraints, since economic and social policies based on Islamic principles can limit flexibility in joint projects, investment initiatives, or trade agreements; differing security priorities, with Iran emphasizing ideological and cultural dimensions of security that may conflict with China's focus on economic and material security; and contrasting perceptions of sovereignty and influence, where Iran's insistence on independence and resistance to external interference may complicate bilateral or multilateral initiatives in which China seeks broader regional or global leverage. Ultimately, while Iran's strategic culture reinforces national cohesion and identity, its divergence from China's domestic strategic priorities creates both challenges and limitations for the development of a comprehensive and decisive bilateral strategic partnership.

China's reluctance to engage in large-scale investment in Iran stems from multiple domestic and international factors. Given the limitations of its domestic market, U.S. sanctions, and regional tensions that intensify scrutiny over Chinese investments, China has demonstrated a lack of willingness to deepen its economic commitment to Iran. Chinese stakeholders perceive that Iran does not occupy a favorable position in international trade dynamics. As a result, they show limited interest in investing in Iran's oil and energy sectors, especially considering that similar opportunities exist in other countries with significantly lower risk. Foreign investment, however, contributes to the economic growth of the host country by enabling capital accumulation, increasing production capacity, transferring new technologies, expanding sales, and enhancing marketing techniques. It also improves public welfare, creates new business opportunities, and increases tax revenues, thereby strengthening the host country's overall economic situation (Rasooli Saniabadi, 2023, pp. 204–208).

Although Iran has attempted to attract foreign investment through various legislative measures - including the Act on Attracting and Supporting Foreign Capital (1955), the Law on the Administration of Free Trade-Industrial Zones (1993), the Law on Encouragement and Protection of Foreign Investment (2002), as well as the Fifth and

Sixth Five-Year Development Plans and articles of the general policies of the Resistance Economy - the country continues to face persistent obstacles (Taheri, 2005, pp. 46–49). One key domestic barrier, as identified by Chinese officials, is Iran's bureaucratic system. Complex regulations and lengthy procedures for obtaining permits, customs clearance, and cargo handling discourage investors. Lack of transparency in decision-making, absence of clear industrial policies, slow administrative processes, and inadequate legal frameworks regarding investment protection further impede foreign investment (Darabpour & Khezarlo, 2022, pp. 21–22). Although Iran's laws and international agreements include mechanisms for dispute resolution - such as Article 19 of the Law on Encouragement and Protection of Foreign Investment, which prioritizes negotiation and settlement through domestic courts - foreign investors frequently prefer international arbitration, reflecting their reluctance to rely on domestic authorities.

Domestic political factors also complicate the realization of a strategic partnership with China. Views among Iran's elites and policymakers vary widely. Advocates emphasize economic benefits, reduced dependence on the West, and the potential for a counterbalance to U.S. power that could bolster a multipolar world order. Critics, however, highlight risks such as excessive economic dependence on China, potential cultural influence undermining Iranian values, lack of transparency in Chinese agreements, and threats to national interests. Beyond material considerations of economy, power, and geography, ideational and intersubjective factors, including cultural and identity-based perceptions, have shaped bilateral relations by influencing shared mental frameworks and social norms (Farokhi, 2023, pp. 474–475). Decision-makers' value orientations and worldviews further affect national strategies and policies, contributing to the persistence of bureaucratic inefficiencies, regulatory ambiguities, and domestic instability, all of which hinder the deepening of Iran-China cooperation.

Critics also argue that China may be using Iran as a lever to consolidate its influence in the Middle East while simultaneously strengthening ties with the United States. In the region, China has prioritized closer relations with Gulf Cooperation Council member states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which are key partners in defense, economic exchanges, and energy supply. This strategic balancing has led Iranian policymakers to advocate for a more comprehensive and cautious approach to relations with China, emphasizing the need to protect national

interests while pursuing cooperation (Dunford, 2023, pp. 25–30).

Finally, Iran's limited integration with the global financial system and the decline of foreign investment due to international sanctions further constrain bilateral economic engagement. The Tehran Stock Exchange remains largely disconnected from regional and global markets, restricting opportunities for domestic companies to access foreign capital and for investors to transfer tangible and intangible assets. U.S. sanctions, in particular, have imposed significant limitations on Iran's financial, oil, transportation, and trade sectors, deterring Chinese policymakers from large-scale investment. China's strategic preference for risk avoidance, especially in the context of sanctions that could attract heavy penalties, has consequently limited its willingness to commit significant resources to Iran (Davis et al., 2013, p. 19).

Conclusion

Since the strategic culture of each country can significantly influence its foreign policy behavior, its roots are often found in various factors, such as the perspectives of national leaders and decision-makers, public opinion toward political events, prevailing ideologies, political discourses, constitutional frameworks, historical experiences, decision-making structures, and broader national cultures. Strategic culture, by defining the roles of actors, organizes strategic decision-making and plays an intervening variable role in analyzing a country's foreign policy to understand its behaviors and decisions. Accordingly, the strategic cultures of Iran and China - shaped by their respective value systems - have a considerable impact on their foreign policy decisions.

The Islamic Republic of Iran bases its foreign policy decisions on its national identity and role, as well as the norms that shape its strategic culture. Therefore, the influence of intersubjective beliefs and attitudes - rooted in history, religion, Shia Islam, and unique norms such as resistance to hegemonic systems and the defense of the oppressed - plays a significant role in shaping Iran's foreign policy. By contrast, the influence of Confucian culture on China's strategic approaches and decision-making patterns should not be overlooked. Accordingly, it can be argued that the strategic cultures of China and Iran are composed of multiple elements, each of which can independently impact the bilateral relationship. In this context, China-Iran relations are embedded within a complex framework of diverse factors that pull the two countries in various directions.

While there are numerous mutual interests that appear to link the

two countries, it is primarily strategic considerations that currently define the substance of their bilateral relations. This dynamic has led to a situation in which, despite the historical and cultural affinities between Iran and China, the pursuit of strategic interests and a more prominent position in the international system has consistently shaped and influenced their interactions and the nature of their bilateral relationship. Therefore, although the international environment and the behavior of global actors may play a significant role in shaping a country's orientation, internal factors that influence foreign policy direction and the nature of international cooperation should not be overlooked. This is because the goals and national interests of states ultimately derive from the perceptions and decisions of their policymakers.

The perspectives of political elites and leaders in both countries on key concepts such as power, legitimacy, welfare, development, and security reveal that the interpretation and definition of the components of strategic culture differ significantly between Iran and China - differences that stem from the distinct outlooks of their respective policymakers. Therefore, while it is true that achieving a strategic partnership requires shared interests and a mutual understanding of the international system, a more critical factor influencing this process is each country's strategic culture and domestic conditions, which together shape the foundation for such a partnership. Hence, the current inconsistency in relations can largely be attributed to the misalignment of strategic cultures and the divergence in the viewpoints of Iranian and Chinese policymakers. It is evident that any transformation in the strategic culture or the underlying identity-based, cultural, and intersubjective foundations of the two nations could facilitate the advancement of their relationship toward a full strategic partnership and help overcome existing barriers to alliance formation.

According to the authors, Iran - as a regional power and a legitimate authority in the Middle East - must adhere to certain requirements through active and constructive diplomacy to consolidate its role in the region and alter the current status quo. Fulfilling these requirements can pave the way for facilitating a strategic partnership with China. These requirements include: strategic considerations regarding neighboring countries; strategic considerations toward major systemic actors (notably the United States); anticipating necessary measures to change the current situation and aligning with the international system to achieve national interests; utilizing and implementing China's regional

balance of power doctrine in its relations with regional countries; maintaining a strategic focus on Asia, India, and the Pacific regions; promoting economic dynamism and expanding economic and trade exchanges beyond energy sectors as a significant potential complement to a smooth strategic partnership; and prioritizing multilateral relationships at both regional and international levels.

Therefore, implementing the measures outlined above at various levels facilitates the progression of Iran-China relations toward a strategic partnership. The application of a logic centered on balance creates equilibrium in the relationship between Iran and China, helping to avoid tensions and ultimately bringing their strategic cultures closer together. In such an environment, through wisdom and a clear understanding of current conditions, efforts to achieve balance in Iran-China relations take shape, leading to the establishment of a strategic partnership while fostering balanced relations with other countries and sustainable export markets for Iran.

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