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The Effects of the Global Established-Outsider Figurations on The Role-Playing of the Components of Iran's Strategic Culture

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Abstract

The dominance of the Western International order and institutionalization of Western civilization within it caused the ancient Eastern civilizations to have common and similar experiences of marginalization and to be portrayed as "inferiors" and "uncivilized" nations. The reproduction of similar strategic culture's elements of these civilizations has led to a common demand to regain their former role and status in the International System. In this context, the main question is what factors have led to the re-orientation of the revisionist Eastern civilizations towards each other and the international system, which revived the civilizational discourse? The overall result of the research shows that the long-standing civilizational war, as well as a similar strategic culture between Iranian, Chinese and Russian civilizations, led to the formation of an Eastern historical-civilizational bloc that seeks to create two Eastern and Western "bounded orders" against Western international order. The method adopted in this research is descriptive-analytical and its theoretical framework is based on Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations theory and Robert Cox's Critical Theory.

Keywords: Strategic Culture; Global Established-Outsider Figuration; Historical-Civilizational Blocs; Iran's Orientation; Identity Politics; Bounded Order.

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Introduction

After the domination of the Western international system around 1500 AD, the process of marginalization of the ancient Eastern civilizations, as the superpowers of the previous international system began. During the past centuries until the present era the marginalized civilizations have been divided into two general categories. First, the civilizations that maintained and strengthened the continuity of their strategic culture and second, the civilizations that experienced discontinuity or severe weakening of their strategic culture. The countries which belong to the first category demand to return to their previous status and role in the international system through withdrawing from the exclusion of established figuration. This article argues that this common demand among them is derived from elements of their strategic culture, which have been intensified by historical experiences, and as the result, led them to portray themselves as great powers in the international system. In this regard, the main question is, what civilizational factors have led to the coalition of the revisionist Eastern civilizations and the attempt to form an Eastern historical-civilizational bloc in the international system? The general result of the research, which was obtained by using the descriptive-analytical method, shows that the ancient civilizational war, common experiences under the Western international system (especially marginalization and exclusion) and the akin strategic culture between the Iranian, Chinese and Russian have led to the formation of identity politics among them and a demand to obtain their previous status and role in the international system through establishing bounded world orders.

This article adopts two main theories, namely Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* and Robert Cox's *Critical Theory*. In the early years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Huntington came to the conclusion that the future conflicts will be cultural-civilizational encounters. He believed that with the elimination of the Cold War's classifications, the nation-states will do their best to define their identity and interests in a civilizational way based on the main factors arising from their civilization. Although, he accurately recognized the basis of the issue but he could not identify the main roots and actors. Huntington

believed that eight civilizations will be the main actors in the forthcoming clashes, namely 'Western', 'Confucian', 'Japanese', 'Hindu', 'Islamic', 'Slavic-Orthodox', 'Latin American', and 'African'. In fact, this theory needs to be modified according to the realities of the present era. Robert Cox's theory, on the other hand, is examining and analyzing the rise and fall of different international orders throughout history. In this context, applying Cox's analyses can illustrate why and how the liberal international order is declining in the current era. On the other hand, Cox's theory - inspired by Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony - assigns a prominent role to culture and cultural conflicts in the international system, which can be linked with Huntington's theory. Finally, Cox's hypothesis about the formation of historical blocs in the international system can be applied as a theoretical framework for the analysis of cultural-civilizational blocs in the current era in international system.

To better understand the civilizational roots of Iran's orientations towards international order, this article develops and applies Clash of Civilizations, Strategic Culture and Critical theories. This aims to bridge a gap in the literature on global established-outsider figurations from the process-sociology standpoint. Both process-sociology and English School in International Relations argued about the effects of the global established figurations on internal and external re-orientations of so-called "outsiders". But the impact of strategic culture on outsider's self-perceptions and their foreign policy orientations towards the Western-dominated world order has been neglected by scholars. This article has twin objectives. The first is nomothetic: to contribute to the development of a theory of civilization and strategic culture. The second is empirical: to shed light on the civilizational dimensions of Chinese, Russian and Iranian orientations towards each other and international order. This article starts by examining the rise and fall of different international orders and the status of the Eastern civilized countries in them. It then applies strategic culture theory to the coalition between China, Russia and Iran versus Western-dominated world order.

1- Eastern Civilizations: From Diarchy to Exclusion

The competition between the Eastern and Western superpowers in ancient times was the starting point of the civilizational war between the East and the West, which according to Martin Wight manifested itself in the form of competition between the 'Hellas and Persia state-systems' (Wight, 1977: ch 3). The primary roots of such competition can be traced back in ancient wars between Iran and Greece, which were reflected in the efforts of ancient Greek historians to represent Iran as a 'barbarian' and themselves as free and 'civilized' nation. "It was out of such elements as these that Herodotus wove his theme of an eternal conflict between East and West going back to the Trojan War, a struggle between the vast numbers, indefinite territorial extent, and political shapelessness of Oriental despotism, and the compact, limited, maritime, free communities of Europe. It is a theme that seems to explain recurring features of European history." (Wight, 1977: 74). In this period and from this point of view, the connection between 'democracy and the West' on the one hand and 'tyranny and the East' on the other hand, was created as one of the identity pillars for the Greeks -and later for the Westerners. Evidently, this self-perception institutionalized and deepened throughout history. "It is interesting that although the other of the democracy is tyranny, but this system was identified and defined by the Greeks not in the Spartans, but in the Iranian Empire. From this point, the roots of the idea based on the West and Rest were laid." (Sayyid, 2014: 101). In this manner, by examining the developments of the international system in ancient times, we can come to a conclusion that the international system in this era was a diarchy between the East and the West.

The transformation of the international system to the Western international system - alongside the supremacy of the Western civilization - intensified and deepened the marginalization and exclusion of the Eastern civilizations. Accordingly, to the dominant Western self-images, it is unsurprising that the discourse of civilization rise again and the Europeans tried to represent the rest of the world as "uncivilized" and "inferior" groups, to which the Europeans are obliged to transfer the blessings of civilization to them. In Mill's writings, for

example, 'civilization' acquired an additional dimension which is that the 'barbarous' would profit from prolonged 'benign colonial rule'. (Mill, 2002: 487). Through such perceptions, the idea of civilization became integral to new established–outsider relations within the European states-system and between European societies and the wider world. Observable in every social group, Norbert Elias argued, is the tendency for the dominant strata to control the standards of correct behavior, and accordingly, to confer high status on themselves in their relations with less powerful groups. They have often regarded greater power as evidence of the natural superiority which is the basis of their 'group charisma'. They have often regarded the deficiencies of the lower strata as markers of 'natural inferiority' and as the source of 'group disgrace'. Over and over again, 'they have not only stigmatized others, but have also encouraged them to incorporate feelings of lesser worth in the collective psyche.' (Elias, 2008: 6-7).

Classical Greek and Roman perceptions of their superiority over barbarian peoples clearly left their mark on the construction of discourses of civility and civilization in later periods. More recent writings have enlarged the discussion by analyzing the 'Eastern origins of the Western civilization' and by challenging traditional assumptions that 'European civilization developed in a separate silo.' (Hobson 2004; Go 2017; Kister 1956; Tibbetts 2002). In addition to the structural and institutional issues, the marginalization of other achievements of the East in the international system is evident. The intellectual innovations of the East, for example, had a significant influence on some aspects of the European Renaissance however, for a long time, the academic main stream in the West sought to deny earlier non-European influences on European developments. (Brehier 2001; Henry 2007; Zarrinkoob 2000; Nasr 2007; Durant 1987). As Michael Edwards stated that, the "Renaissance, with its classical Greek face, was alive due to the influences of the East ... and this was a matter that was often kept hidden ... and the sources of the Renaissance remained almost always unknown." (Edwards, 1971: 94). In this regard, Europe's unique accomplishments were assumed to be entirely internal or endogenous in origin. It is hardly surprising that the most of the Eastern civilized nations such as Iran,

China and Japan have had similar experiences. Thus, the first stages of fierce competition between Western and Eastern civilizations were formed between Iran and Greece in the ancient era.

1-1- Marginalization and Strategic Culture

Most analysts observed the strategic culture in relation to countries specific defense and war methods, but new studies in this field have led researchers to the point that strategic culture includes a much wider scope. The second and third generations of strategic culture's studies emphasize that this factor affects both perception and action of the actors. (Booth 1990; Forest 2003; Lord 1985; see also Vasilis 2009; Gray 1999). "Strategic culture", *Jeffry Lantis* points out, "includes shared historical experiences, geostrategic conditions, articulation of elite national identity, and even legends and myths" (Lantis, 2009: 468). Iran is also among the countries that, on the one hand, was an ancient Eastern civilization and played a key role as a superpower in the ancient world order, and on the other hand, it has maintained the continuity of its strategic culture throughout history. Therefore, it is possible to identify and trace the elements that keeps continuity in Iran's strategic culture and explain their impact on the self-perceptions and actions of the government. By identifying this long-term historical process, the main actors of the *clash of civilizations* in the international system will be determined.

From this point of view, Huntington's theory needs some modifications. Huntington stated that eight civilizations - each has a country as the "natural leader" - will shape the forthcoming clash of civilizations (Huntington, 2007: 20; Huntington, 1993). In practice, however, four of the eight civilizations mentioned by Huntington, namely Japanese, Hindu, African and Latin America should be excluded from 'civilizational revisionist bloc' because they have either lost the continuity of their strategic culture or their strategic culture has undergone a fundamental transformation. Needless to say, the "Islamic civilization" considered by Huntington also suffers from a number of serious shortcomings. By way of illustration, Huntington has not mentioned "Iran's civilization" at all; on the contrary, he stated that the Islamic civilization has its

Arab, Turkic and Malay subdivisions. It is not clear what sources made Huntington reach this conclusion, but there are many in-depth Persian and Western sources in this regard that prove the inaccuracy of Huntington's argument. (Mohammadi-Malayeri, 2016; see also Mottahedeh, 1976). In short, there is no doubt that the transfer of the culture and achievements of the Sassanid Empire to the Islamic era has led to the formation of what is wrongly called the "Islamic civilization".

Accordingly, the ancient civilizations that have natural leaders and formed the established-outsider rival figurations are "Western civilization", "Iranian civilization", "Chinese civilization" and "Russian civilization". In the meantime, under the Western international system, Iranian, Chinese and Russian civilizations had similar historical experiences based on exclusion and marginalization that led them to a mutual demand and orientation towards the global order. Based on such experiences, the Chinese Prime Minister said in a meeting with the Iranian delegation in Beijing in 1971 that "The two countries have had good relations with each other for more than two thousand years, and both have experienced similar bitterness from foreign countries" (Abidi, 1982: 104). In other word, after experiencing a range of 'civilizing offensives' that were intended to promote a global civilization that embodied European or Western moral and political preferences and predilections and also after implementing unsuccessful imitative strategies to comply with Western standards of civilization in order to be accepted by global established group, these three "outsiders" came to conclusion that they need to change their internal and external orientations. Through such trajectory that is deeply related to the reproduction of their strategic culture, they have been sought to regain their previous status and prestige in international system in a different way. All in all, some similar elements of Iran's, China's and Russia's strategic culture that be reproduced in accordance with the civilizational background and historical long-term processes, led them to form a rival bloc in international system in front of established figurations.

In Iran's strategic culture, for example, elements such as "distrust towards foreigners", "being the center of the world", "the battle of good and evil",

"historical loneliness", "God's support of Iran", "being surrounded by enemies", "Iran as a holy land and a promised utopia" ", "determinism", "empirehood", "civilizational exceptionalism", "Messianism", "belief in world hierarchical divine system" and "divine mystical power of Iran's leaders", can be traced in self-perceptions and various internal and external orientations. (Masoud et al, 2020). Approximately similar elements can be traced in the strategic culture of China and Russia. For instance, "China-centric world order" in Chinese strategic culture has played a fundamental role in its self-perception and external orientations. "An overarching issue", Guangyi Li stated, "is the China-centric world order ... the dream of the future is always characterized by China's leadership. To be the leader, China has to not only outdo its rivals in force, but also convince the world of its values."(Li, 2013: 173). In this context, many scholars have stated that Russian strategic culture plays a key role in constructing its foreign policy. "Messianism is a set of ideas", Alicja Curanovic stated in her book 'The Sense of Mission in Russian Foreign Policy', "that assume that the history of humankind is heading towards the realization of a certain Ideal in accordance with Providence's plan. In this plan, the 'chosen one' (individual or collective) has a special role to play. Russia's messianism in the area of foreign policy is a counter-hegemonic narrative. Russia has a great historical mission to fulfil. ... To protect itself and other nations from the pressure exerted on it by more powerful countries that dominate the normative order and protecting the world from evil." (Curanovic, 2021: 2-3, 70, 80). In general, the desire to return to the previous status in the international system is a common demand among these three civilizations. Therefore, it is not surprising that the common experiences under the Western international system, as well as the similar strategic culture, lead these three civilizations to an alliance with each other against the global established figurations.

2- The Decline of the Liberal International System

Robert Cox asserted that four elements can be considered as the main elements of the international order, namely "distribution of capabilities", "Ideas",

"institutions" and "interests". Cox, by applying these factors, has investigated the rise and fall of international orders from 1789 to the Cold War era (Cox, 1987: 107). According to Cox's theory, if these four factors of the international system are used in relation to the liberal international system (which became hegemonic in the world after the collapse of the Soviet Union), it will be clear that the liberal international system has declined in all four areas. The emergence of China and Russia as challenging powers, along with other emerging powers that do not necessarily belong to the revisionists bloc, has changed the distribution of capabilities in the international system. As Robert Gilpin stated "it is possible that the distribution of capabilities in the international system will change and the power of revisionist countries will increase, and in this way, a change in the international system will also be possible." (Gilpin, 1981: 8). Obviously, the role of international organizations has also decreased. The deterioration of international institutions such as NATO and, according to the French president, its "brain death", the idea of an independent European army, the decline of the role and functions of international organizations such as the United Nations (especially the Security Council), as well as international monetary and financial institutions, indicate that the institutions of the liberal order have been disturbed in their functioning (Nye, 2020: 78; Keohane, 2020: 83).

The new wave of rising nationalist-populist political actors as well as cultural far-right orientations in Western liberal-democratic countries, which manifested itself since 2016 with the victory of the Brexit in UK and Donald Trump in USA, is the most important turning point that portrayed the decline of liberal 'ideas' in the international system. Francis Fukuyama was rightly stress that the victory of liberalism occurred primarily in the field of ideas (Fukuyama, 1992: 39-44), but he did not predict that decline of liberalism and liberal order will also originate from the same root. In this regard, Yascha Mounk stated that "in countries such as Britain or United States of America, which are longstanding democracies, their citizens have adopted more negative views towards their political system." (Mounk and Stefan-Foa, 2017: 7). Other examples of the expansion of this decline are evident in the rise to power and gaining high popularity of far-right

movements in countries such as Poland, Italy, Hungary, Germany and France. In other words, an increasing part of the citizens of these longstanding democracies consider more negative orientations towards the European Union, democratic government and the regional liberal order and regulations. One straightforward way to get a sense for how attached citizens are to their political system is to ask them how important it is to them to live in a democracy. Related surveys show that the older people do seem to have such a fervent attachment to democracy, but younger people who live in these longstanding democracies are far less invested in their political system. "Among American millennials, born since 1980, less than one-third consider it essential to live in a democracy." (Wike and Fetterolf, 2020). The global picture is similar since disappointment with democracy has also increased in Great Britain and the Netherlands, in Sweden and New Zealand. Indeed, "even young people in countries that are often portrayed as especially resistant to the current crisis of liberal democracy - like Canada, Germany and Sweden - are much more critical of democracy than their parents or grandparents." (Mounk, 2019: 107). In this context, another element of the liberal order, namely 'ideas', has weakened too.

As a result, the international liberal system has declined and established-outsider figurations are experiencing significant changes. In this regard, John Mearsheimer observed that "it was clear that the liberal international order was in deep trouble. The tectonic plates that underpin it are shifting, and little can be done to repair and rescue it. Indeed, that order was destined to fail from the start, as it contained the seeds of its own destruction." (Mearsheimer, 2019: 7). Although America's hegemonic position may be declining, John Ikenberry stated, the tenets of liberal international order, such as openness, rules, multilateral cooperation are "deeply rooted and likely to persist". Instead, "the crisis of the American-led international order may just provide opportunities for a rising power like China to reshape the global order." (Ikenberry, 2018: 24). Albeit Ikenberry believed that the next world order will be a liberal one (Ikenberry 2020), but there is no concrete evidence to support his prediction. In fact, the evidences points to the weakening of the liberal aspects of the

international order: Liberalism is in retreat; Democracies are feeling the effects of growing populism; Parties of the political extremes have gained ground in Europe; The vote in the United Kingdom in favor of leaving the EU attested to the loss of elite influence; Even the US is experienced unprecedented attacks from its own president on the country's media, courts, and law-enforcement institutions; Authoritarian systems have become even more top-heavy and countries such as Hungary and Poland seem uninterested in the fate of their young democracies.

The liberal world order established in the aftermath of Second World War may be coming to an end, challenged by forces both without and within. The external challenges come from the ambition of dissatisfied large and medium-size powers to overturn the existing strategic order dominated by the United States and its allies and partners. Their aim is to gain hegemony in their respective regions. "China and Russia", Robert Kagan observed, "pose the greatest challenges to the world order because of their relative military, economic, and political power and their evident willingness to use it, which makes them significant players in world politics and, just as important, because the regions where they seek strategic hegemony - Asia and Europe - historically have been critical to global peace and stability. At a lesser but still significant level, Iran seeks regional hegemony in the Middle East and Persian Gulf, which if accomplished would have a strategic, economic, and political impact on the international system." (Kagan, 2017). Nevertheless, none of these scholars have explained the civilizational roots and the influence of the reproduction of the strategic culture of these three countries on their external orientations. Weakening of the long-term global civilizing processes, which led to the degradation of Eastern civilizations and placing them among the "inferiors", contributes to the intensification of the influence of strategic culture on their orientations. Furthermore, decline of the liberal international order has provided the opportunity for marginalized actors – or former "outsiders" - to regain their previous status and prestige. The current clashes between rivals strategic cultures is similar to the process of "revolt against the West" that occurred at the end of

the colonial era and led to the change in the established-outsider relations and transition to the post-European society of states. "The classical standard of civilization", Andrew Linklater observed, "lost its commanding place in a Western-dominated world order as a result of the revolt against the West and changes in the global power distributions, but traces of the doctrine survive in contested norms regarding human rights, democracy promotion, market relations, and state-building projects which many Western groups regard as testifying to the modern achievements of their civilization." (Linklater, 2020: 216). As a result of changing power distributions, the world is now returning to the status quo ante in which other societies that have undergone distinctive civilizing processes can shape global political, cultural and economic relations on more even terms.

2-1- Historical-Civilizational Figurations in the International System

Robert Cox believed that "the historical structure is an image of a particular configuration of forces". This configuration does not specify any specific action by mechanical and direct influence, but imposes restrictions and pressures. "Individuals and groups may go along with the pressure or resist it, but they cannot ignore it. If they can successfully resist and overcome the historical structure, it is replaced by a new configuration of forces or a competing structure." (Cox, 1993). In this regard, English School responses to changing established-outsider figurations and to the rising pressures to transform the global order in the light of the particular needs and interests of non-European peoples were geared towards restoring and recreating the civilizing role of international society. Vincent's approach, for example, to human rights reflected what Norbert Elias called the 'factual observation' that changes in 'conscience-formation' can occur in conjunction with 'small shifts in power to the disadvantage of former established groups, and to the advantage of former outsider groups'. (Elias, 2013: 29). What was not considered at the time Vincent was writing (the early 1980s) was the possibility that power balances could alter again, with the consequence that support for protecting subsistence rights stalled or failed to have much practical effect. From this point of view, Iran, China and

Russia have created a new figuration in international system in front of the historical structure of the West, which can be called the historical structure of the East or the historical-civilizational bloc of the East. A significant part of the orientations and perceptions of these three countries towards the international order, their place and role in it, as well as the efforts to weaken the Western international system's four fundamental factors - namely 'the distribution of capabilities', 'Ideas', 'institutions' and 'interests'- are influenced by the continuity and role-playing of their strategic culture. Francis Fukuyama's *Identity Politics* theory refers to a similar issue. Fukuyama asserted the "material benefits are important, but there are other things that motivate ... a humiliated group which seeks reparations for its humiliation or which feels its dignity has been disparaged or damaged", acts far more emotionally than people who seek economic gain. (Fukuyama, 2018: 25).

The formation of a common perception among the marginalized countries regarding the decline of the international order marked a return to their civilization in order to regain their previous role in the world. "China's goal is to rebuild the country in the form of a great power, and in this regard, the Chinese Communist Party has initiated the project of revitalizing Chinese civilization, which is what it once vowed to destroy. Returning to Confucianism and creating Confucian academies is one of the ways to achieve that goal." (Page, 2015). Analyses of China's rise to power have contended that as a result of changing global power balances, the epoch of deferral to a standard of civilization centered on Western liberal-democratic capitalist norms is giving way to an era of "increasing tensions between rival civilizational standards." (Suzuki, 2012). In addition, specialists have described the ambivalence of Chinese elite attitudes to the West, noting how the desire to gain international recognition from sections of an 'idealized West' coexists with opposition to any effort to use liberal-democratic yardsticks in protests against its human rights record (Suzuki, 2014: 640-41; Buzan 2014). By way of illustration, painful memories of China's 'century of humiliation' in the colonial era find expression in a strong defense of territorial sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention (see Suzuki, 2009:

ch 3).

Likewise, resembling goals and approaches can be traced in Russia's external orientations. The successor of the Soviet Union - which once had trans-national goals and was opposed to national civilization and culture of Russia - moved away from cosmopolitan and trans-national ideals by rebuilding "Russian nationalism" based on its own history and civilization. If in China, due to its rich and ancient civilization, Confucius was considered as the basic point of "civilizational nationalism", in Russia the return to Ivan Alexandrovich Ilyin's views has played the same role. "No thinker of the 20th century", Timothy Snyder stated, "has been revived in the 21st century like Ilyin, and no one has had as much influence on Russia's global policies as he has." (Snyder, 2019: 31). Needless to say, the reproduction of similar roles and self-perceptions among these Eastern civilizations is an outcome of the continuity of their strategic culture, which some scholars have portrayed it as the 'resurrectional quality'. "This cycle has endowed Russia a history with a resurrectional quality, in which Russian civilization is inevitably resurrected... Today's Russia, despite the loss of vast territories, still bears the marks of an empire." (Snyder, 2019: 109; see also Knezys and Sedlickas 1999). The reproduction of such perceptions and characteristics in the strategic culture of Iran and China can also be traced. John Garver, for example, observed that "This shared ideas between China and Iran leads to the conclusion that the current international system, which was created by West and is still dominated by them, is deeply unfair and should be replaced with a new and fairer system ... This is a sentiment that has been shared in various ways by different leaders of China and Iran." (Garver, 2006: 7-8). It is hardly surprising that efforts to form the rival figuration by these three countries, in front of the established global figuration, were inevitable. "The interests of Tehran, Moscow and Beijing appear to be converging in a way that experts say could prove a challenge to the United States' attempts to maintain dominance over international order ... The three countries find themselves coming together for both strategic and pragmatic reasons. Strategically, they share a common aversion to a U.S.-led world order. Pragmatically, it makes sense to work with

each other." (O'Connor, 2020). China has traditionally viewed the Middle East as part of the U.S. sphere of influence, but Beijing's engagement with the region in the last decade is slowly challenging this paradigm. China-Iran relations in one hand and strengthening its relations with Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states in other hand, are the clear examples of Beijing's engagements with this region. However, this strengthening of ties in different regions of the world is part of the China's plan to form a rival international bloc against the West.

3- Bounded or International Order?

The marginalization of Eastern civilizations in the international system led them to adopt identity politics for a long time. The emergence of China as a potential superpower, as well as Russia and Iran as major global and regional powers, alongside the decline of the Western international system, the road was paved for gaining the previous status and prestige in global order. "An inner sense of dignity seeks to be recognized", as Fukuyama stated, "If not, the modern meaning of identity will evolve into identity politics, a politics in which people demand public recognition of their worth and validity" (Fukuyama, 2019: 25). This is the same policy that has adopted by the members of the Eastern civilization bloc for a long time. From this point of view, four 'Western', 'Iranian', 'Chinese' and 'Russian' civilizations under the two historical blocs, namely Western and Eastern historical-civilizational blocs, have challenged and competed with each other to create and consolidate their bloc and weaken the rival bloc. In other word, according to Cox's theory, the competition of the hostile blocs is over the four fundamental factors of the international system, namely 'distribution of capabilities', 'institutions', 'ideas' and 'interests'. The intensification of these competitions is one of the results of the entrance of the international order into the transition period. As Linklater stated, "Chinese pride and confidence in providing an alternative civilizational model for developing societies has led to the thesis that the global order has indeed entered a period of transition, particularly as a result of Chinese as well as Russian reactions against core Western liberal-democratic commitments."(Linklater, 2020: 214). Immensely

significant following high levels of economic growth and poverty reduction was the 'Beijing Consensus' which encapsulated the supposition that China's non-democratic model of economic development surpasses the Western 'market state model' as the appropriate ideal for many postcolonial societies. In this regard, western 'ideas' lost its dominance in a Western-dominated world order as a result of the 'revolt against the West' and changes in the global 'distribution of power'.

The Eastern civilization bloc seeks to create its own international 'institutions', define its 'interests' differently from the interests of the members of the Western civilization bloc and emphasize its own 'ideas', history and civilization by rejecting Western ideas and finally, change the 'distribution of capabilities' in the international system with close economic, military, security and defense cooperation. In Mearsheimerian terms, the Western bloc seeks to preserve, restore and re-establish the "Western international order" and on the other hand, the Eastern bloc seeks to create its own "bounded order" and also tries to accelerate the decline of the rival order, which means to reduce the Western 'international order' to a 'bounded order'. "With the rise of China and Russia's comeback", as Mearsheimer stated, "the international system has become multipolar, which is a death knell for the liberal international order ... Even if China and Russia had not become great powers and the world remained unipolar, the liberal order would still be falling apart today because of its intrinsic flaws." (Mearsheimer, 2019: 42). Acquiring their former status and role by the revisionist Eastern civilizations in the international system is realized through the formation of the transition period in which two Eastern and Western bounded orders are formed. In this orientation, the deep historical experiences as well as the strategic culture of these countries play an essential role in changing the international established-outsider figurations. In this regard, "Vladimir Putin calls the collapse of the former Soviet Union a tragedy... and stated that Russia should not be a weak regional actor, as Obama once said, but should be considered as a great power ... The Xi Jinping's government in China remarks in detail about a hundred years of humiliation of China and how America, Japan and other countries are trying to prevent this country from returning to the

position it enjoyed as a great power in the past millennia." (Fukuyama, 2018: 23).

In the same way, Iran, influenced by its strategic culture, demands to achieve its past status and prestige and this desire reproduces itself in every era according to its ruling discourse. John Garver describes these common demands between China and Iran as following:

"A corollary of common pride in ancient accomplishments and resentment of treatment by the West is determination by both Iran and China to restore their well-deserved high international status destroyed by putative humiliation at Western hands. Both China and Iran are inspired by a sense that their outstanding civilizational achievements over long stretches of history entitle them to an esteemed rank in the community of states, and a sense that the current international order, dominated as it is by the West, that does not accord them such a status is profoundly unjust. This drive for restored national / civilizational greatness has existed, I believe, under both Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping and under both Iran's pre-1979 Kingdom and the IRI, although manifest in different ways during each of these periods." (Garver, 2006: 11).

As the result, Russia, China, and Iran have coalesced around a common vision for international order, characterized by a state-centric, albeit at times qualified, view of sovereignty and by an anti-hegemonic multipolar balance of power. "Moscow and Beijing have articulated alternative understandings of societal relations, domestic governance, and world order to liberal ones emanating from Western based agents and multilateral institutions ... in order to mobilize support globally for projects closer to Russian and Chinese values and interests" (Bettiza and Lewis, 2020: 571). However, there is a major difference between China – and also Russia – with Iran. Both China and Russia were dominated by the discourse of transnationalism in the past and did not give due importance to their culture and civilization while the court society of Iran and the ruling discourse at that time was strongly influenced by nationalism and ancient Iranian civilization. Nevertheless, the long-term processes could be reversed and this reversal occurred over several decades. As a result, Iran became dominated by

transnational ideas and the Islamist ruling elites began to expand and deepen ideas that were in sharp contrast with the Iran's pre-Islamic civilization. On the other hand, the orientation of Russia and China changed dramatically towards strengthening nationalism and society's ties with their civilization. Nonetheless, despite the fundamental differences between these three countries, the influence of the similar strategic cultures and historical experiences has led to some comparable orientations among them towards the Western international system. For instance, "In addition to the promotion of a counter-normative order, Russia, China, and Iran have engaged in civilizational essentialisation, a form of normative contestation that challenges the validity of concepts emanating from the "West" through the contention that different civilizations are unique." (Grajewski, 2022: 171).

All in all, the rise of China as a potential superpower is undermining Western power and influence that makes a considerable shifts in global power balances. The emerging concepts like "post-Western international order" illustrated those shifts in global power balances and established-outsiders orientations. Building on such themes, Buzan observed that " We are quite radically entering a new phase in which the West is no longer going to be the completely dominant power center behind international society. ... So China, India and the Islamic world were all centers of power in their own right. We are now returning to something like that more equal world, but now with all of these centers of power closely connected and highly interdependent. This is a really big change. I now use the label 'deep pluralism' to describe this emerging world order." (Buzan, 2020: 7-8). Looking at current developments in international politics, the Iranian authorities have concluded that the international order is changing in favour of Eastern powers and through cooperation with China and Russia as revisionist powers, it is possible to gain the former status and prestige in the international system. The policy of "look to the East" in the road map of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been formed on this basis. Therefore, the fundamental logic driving Tehran-Beijing-Moscow coalition is opposition to American hegemony and their shared belief in the decline of US relative power regionally and globally and as

a result, the decline of Western-dominated international order.

Conclusion

Iran has been able to maintain the continuity of its national self-awareness and strategic culture for a long time and prevent a complete and deep rupture of them. The reproduction and continuation of elements and perceptions such as "being surrounded by enemies", "historical loneliness", "living in an unjust system and being a victim", "mistrust towards foreigners", "cultural-civilizational exceptionalism", "empirehood", "utopianism" and "divine mystical power of leaders", can be traced to the present era and its effects are evident in thoughts and practices of Iranians. This article has argued that such perceptions portray a special role and status for the country in the world and shape certain orientations towards its external environment. Similarly, these connections and continuity are also evident in the strategic cultures of China and Russia. At the level of the international system, the experience of being marginalized under the Western international order became a common experience and trauma among Eastern civilizations. In addition, as 'inferior' and 'uncivilized' people, they were subjected to the Western civilizing offensives. Nevertheless, most of the Eastern civilizations were able to maintain the continuity of their strategic culture during this period, but the turning point was after the World War II.

In this regard, some of the Eastern civilizations underwent profound changes in their strategic cultures and as a result, the reproduction of some of the most important components of their strategic culture declined. For instance, drastic changes in the strategic culture of some Eastern civilizations like Japan or India turned them into either a merchant government or a passive actor. In this way, four of eight civilizations considered by Samuel Huntington in the theory of the *clash of civilizations* is shaping the rival blocs. From this point of view, the Western civilization became superior through the Western international system. According to Robert Cox and Antonio Gramsci, hegemony will be possible through the hegemony of the culture and civilization of the hegemon, and in the same way, since 1500 AD, the Western civilization through the Western

international system became a hegemon. In fact, the declining of the liberal international system in the current era has realized the long-standing hope for the marginalized Eastern civilizations.

The rise and fall of any international system, according to Robert Cox's theory, can be analyzed with four factors. These four factors are "distribution of capabilities", "institutions", "ideas", and "interests". As this article illustrated, the declining of the current international system is evident in all four factors. The strategic culture and similar historical experiences under the Western international system have led Iran, China and Russia to similar demands and perceptions of the international system to regain their previous role and status. By utilizing Cox's theory, it is concluded that these three actors, through maintaining the continuity in their strategic culture's components and getting close to each other, have been able to form a historical-civilizational bloc which has risen in front of the hegemon's bloc. In this way, the Eastern civilization bloc consisting of three Iranian, Chinese and Russian civilizations is standing in front of the Western civilization bloc, each of which competes with each other to create and establish the four fundamental elements of the international system. Iran's government has tried to foster closer ties with Russia and China, seeing that they are willing to challenge the U.S.-led world order. The Western civilizational bloc seeks to restore the Western international order and dominate it once again, while the Eastern civilizational bloc seeks to transform the international order into two Eastern and Western bounded orders. This is more or less the same picture about the "hegemonic bloc and counter-hegemonic bloc" and "Clash of Civilizations" portrayed by Robert Cox and Samuel Huntington. The future of the Beijing-Tehran-Moscow relationship will depend to a great extent on the power competition between China and the United States and the path China takes to increase its power. But, influenced by similar strategic cultures, their orientations towards the Western-dominated international order remains constant.

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