

## **Migration and Iranian Foreign Policy**

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**Abstract:** The movement of people across national boundaries, which began a long time ago, is a real issue both a matter of interest and concern in twenty-first century. How to analysis the relationship between Iran's foreign policy and migration is the main question of this essay. Based on the analysis of data and conducting studies of historical and international trends on the issue, at least there assumptions could be raised as following:

- 1- During the past two centuries, migration has been an efficacious factor both in Iran's bilateral relations as well as the development of its foreign policy executive structures;
- 2- Iran has been dealing with extended aspects of migration as a phenomenon in various forms of migration either immigration inflow, emigration outflows, or transit gateway as well as;
- 3- The expansion of migration and its increasingly consequences and in order to increase its opportunities and alleviate the threats, Iranian foreign policy requires to formulate conceptual and operational frameworks to manage the issue of migration.

### **Migration and Iran foreign policy**

How the relationship between Iranian foreign policy and migration could be analyzed? To answer this question, several factors

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including the actions and reactions in history of Iran's foreign relations and their linkage with migration phenomenon; the development of the migration in the past two decades and its effects on countries' foreign behavior; and also systematizing the thoughts and developing operational and conceptual frameworks with a futuristic perspective on the relationship between foreign policy and migration in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The three following assumptions could initially address the question of linkage between migration and Iranian foreign policy:

1-During the past two centuries, migration has been an efficacious factor both in Iran's bilateral relations as well as the development of its foreign policy executive structures;

2-Iran has been dealing with extended aspects of migration as a phenomenon in various forms of migration either immigration inflow, emigration outflow, or transit gateway as well as;

3-The expansion of migration and its increasingly consequences and in order to increase its opportunities and alleviate the threats, Iranian foreign policy requires to formulate conceptual and operational frameworks to manage the issue of migration.

Each of the assumptions has been derived from the analysis of the several trends and facts and the essay is methodologically formed of researches taken on trends. While analyzing each of the assumptions separately, the essay tends to policy-making ends and therefore has got some conceptual and operational foreign policy recommendations.

### **1- Migration and the Foreign Relations of Iran**

Although Iran has a long history of interactions with other nations and states, its formal foreign policy structure historically and administratively was established in Naser-e-Din Shah-e-Ghajar Era, and the establishment of its consulates and embassies stems from measures led by the chancellor, Amir Kabir. Merchants, migrants and Iranian nationals living abroad had a great role in setting up Iran missions during the Amir Kabir tenure. The major Iranian mission

was set up in Istanbul in that period of time. In addition to bilateral relations between Iran and Ottoman at macro level, some other factors such as assisting and accommodation of Iranian migrants' need and carry out their consular affairs, all motivated Iran to set up mission in the Ottoman Empire.

In other geographical regions Iranian migrants also contributed to the establishment of missions despite the fact that the nature and structure of Iranian migrants living abroad were different<sup>1</sup>. Iranian mission in Bombay was among the important ones but Iranian's residents in India were so different from those living in Ottoman in terms of trade and cultural interactions.

Securing the interests of plentiful Iranian labors working in the newly emerging Russian industries in the Caucasus region caused Iran to open its consulate in Tbilisi.

While the impact of Iranian residents and migrants abroad on establishment of Iran's missions had initially economic, trade and consular nature, it gets political importance too at final years of Ghajar Dynasty. Iranian residents in European and Asian countries as well as Iranian Muslim clerics in Najaf (Iraq) played a key role in the processes of Iranian Constitutional Revolution. The Iranian diplomats also contributed to the transformation and development of Iranian domestic politics. Such interactions were outcome of the Iranian migration which contributed both to the further extension of Iranian bilateral relations and illuminated the international perspectives of Iranians.

After the Constitutional Revolution, while the dispatch of Iranian students abroad got more organized form and speeded up during the Pahlavi Dynasty, the bureaucratic system of Iranian foreign policy developed at a higher speed.

The post- World War II developments transformed the nature of Iranians' presence abroad and foreign migrants in Iran, and affected the practical aspect of foreign policy. Prior to that time, Iranian residents abroad traditionally comprised of traders, Iranian students in Europe, clerics and pilgrims of the holy shrines, individual with Iranian origin in Indian sub-continent, seasonal and un-seasonal labors in the Caucuses. The Second World War provided new arenas

for Iranians in abroad in the form of political immigration to the Eastern bloc; increased the number of Iranian students and residents in North America and expanded the number of the Iranian businessmen in the European countries and somehow in Asia<sup>2</sup>.

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Any single of these events directly and indirectly affected Iran's bilateral relations. In the last two decades of Pahlavi Dynasty, increase in the number of dissidents and opponents of the monarchy regime in the region and among the students and Iranian residents in the United States and Europe led the Intelligence and Security apparatus of the regime (Savak) to set up foreign outposts in order to control Iranian residence abroad. Restriction and suppress of Iranian oppositions abroad turned to be part of external interactions and one of preoccupations of the foreign affairs and security service bureaucratic system. Intelligent officer were appointed in many Iran consulates abroad and there were instances that their presence contributed to some implicit and explicit tensions between diplomats and intelligent agents. Even Iranian ambassadors, particularly in neighboring countries were picked among the high rank intelligent authorities. This in turn, underscored the sensitivity of Shah's Regime towards the presence of Iranian migrants, residents and students abroad.

Any of the mentioned timeframes and issues are worthy of separate discussion and analysis on the impact of Iranians living abroad on Iran bilateral relations with other countries. But all in all, aggregate of existing data suggest that presence of Iranian migrants abroad in the past two centuries have affected the development of foreign policy bureaucratic mechanisms and help the expansion of bilateral ties, and sometimes caused tensions between Iran and other states.

In the last thirty years of post-revolution era, there have been two waves of migration stemmed from the developments occurred at the early stages of the Islamic Revolution and Iraqi imposed war on Iran. Those Iranians who left the country to live abroad as migrants, were not monolithic in their conformation and were diversified in terms of intent and motives for migration. They could even be categorized into three different generations: those grew up in Iran and

left the country in their middle age or upper stages of their lives, those born in Iran and left the country while being at their childhood, and the last group consisting of those born and grew up abroad from Iranian origin parents<sup>3</sup>.

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What is important about this period of time first is the assumed population of Iranians living abroad which according to some cautious estimates mount to three millions. The Second factor is the geographical scope and range of Iranian migrants' presence which extends from South Africa to Finland and from Chile to Canada. And the third important aspect is their social, economic and somehow political position in the Western countries. All these dimensions have direct effect on Iran's bilateral relations with other states and indicate the three mentioned assumptions in the present essay.

The impact of migration on Iran's foreign policy is not restricted to the instances addressed above. There were certain cases in which issues of Iranian-origin migrants have caused major political tensions in Iranian foreign relations. The presence of Iranians or Iranian-origin residents in holy shrines and sacred places of Iraq has been among the issues of tensions between Iran and Iraqi B'athist regime before and after the Islamic Revolution. Collective expelling the Iranians out of Iraq resulted in serious tensions between the two countries in the 1970s. Eradication of Iranians' presence in Iraq was a tenacious policy pursued by B'athist regime. In post-revolution era, deployment of anti-revolutionary terrorist groups in Iraq, some other Arab nations and Western countries was among elements negatively affected Iran's foreign policy.

Another side of migration impact on Iran's foreign policy is dealing with foreign immigrants in Iran during the recent century. Turbulences in Iran's adjacent political environment have brought up a surge of immigrants and refugees into the country. This phenomenon has turned to be an element of bilateral or multi-lateral foreign relations, plus the economic condition of Iran has been a point of attraction for foreign labors.

Among worthwhile mentioning events, were the Russian Revolution of October 1917 and the collapse of Romanov dynasty, and the rise of Bolshevik government which brought some opponents of

the new Russian government into Iran as political dissidents. It made Iran as an arena of competition and tensions between pros and cons of Bolshevik government. This development and Iran's tendency to restrict anti-Bolshevik forces (White Movement of White Russians) in exchange for some concessions resulted in 1921 Treaty of Friendship between Iran and Russia. According to chapter 5 and 6 of this treaty if a third party should attempt to carry out a policy of usurpation by means of armed intervention in Persia, or if such Power should desire to use Persian territory as a base of operations against Russia, or if a Foreign Power should threaten the frontiers of Federal Russia or those of its Allies, and if the Persian Government should not be able to put a stop to such menace after having been once called upon to do so by Russia, Russia shall have the right to advance her troops into the Persian interior for the purpose of carrying out the military operations necessary for its defense. Anti-Bolshevik White Russians living in Iran and their activities against the Bolshevik government in the early years of October Revolution were the principle cause contributed in the conclusion of Russo-Persian Treaty of Friendship signed on February 26, 1921 between representatives of Iran and the Soviet Union.

The First and Second World War led considerable movement of foreigners into Iran; some of them lived there for a long time with positive as well as negative impact on Iran's foreign policy. There were large numbers of anti-Hitler Polish refugees lived in Iran for a long time and some of them married to Iranians and could obtain Iranian citizenship. Some of the Polish victims of Hitler invasion were buried in Iran. The ever lasting memory of Iranian hospitality enhanced the Iran-Poland bilateral ties and memorial events would be held during the years to commemorate it.

The consequences of the Soviet Union military occupation of Afghanistan in 1979, and the Iraqi imposed war (1980-88) against Iran were followed by waves of Afghan and Iraqi refugees to Iran. More than two millions of refugees at that time made Iran as the world largest refugee recipient country; some of them were being accepted as permanent Iranian residents. Such a development played and is

still playing a key role in Iran's relations with multilateral international institutions in charge of refugees. Indeed, the collapse of Taliban Regime in 2001 and Saddam Hossein in 2003 paved the way for Afghan and Iraqi refugees to return back home and this in turn opened new spaces in bilateral ties between Iran and those countries.

The arguments presented shortly on the Iranian emigration and foreign immigration into Iran highlight the deep linkage between migration and foreign policy in the past two centuries. It also underlines the impact of this phenomenon on Iran foreign relations with other countries in various ways.

## **2- Migration Outspread and its Impact on Iran foreign policy**

Although human being has experienced the migration as a permanent phenomenon of life, and the migration inflows and outflows have regularly happened in Iranian history, migration never was so much universally extended in the human history as it is today. According to some statistics, there are about 175 million migrants recognized in the world. If such a number of migrants could possibly gather on a land, such a land would be among the world populated countries. Putting it another way, %3 of the world population are migrants and one out of each 35 persons is immigrant who lives out of his/her own homeland.

Despite the fact that advanced industrial countries are the destination of % 60 of the world migrants but emigration is not limited to a South-North direction but and it is also common among the South-South and developing countries in which one out of each 70 persons is a migrant while such a figure in the developed countries stands one out of each 10 persons. Statistics indicate of a twofold increase in the number of world migrant population from 1965 to 2005. During 1990-2000 around 21 millions migrants had been added to the world migrants' population. All in all, the total aforementioned data highlight the universality of the migration issue which itself is one of the globalization indicators. (Callinson, 1991)

Positive and negative dimensions could be distinguished in the globalization of migration. From the positive point of view,

migration contributes to in the alleviation of economic and personal difficulties, expansion of interactions between societies and communities, and enhancement of their capacity. From a negative viewpoint, the pernicious problem of human trafficking has a close link with the issue of migration. Furthermore, the racism and xenophobia is a negative aspect of globalization of migration as well. There are some surprising statistics and figure on both negative and positive sides of migration globalization equilibrium.

The amount of the money transferred by the migrants to their homeland, according to the World Bank Estimates, accounts for more than hundred billion dollars. This amount of money along with some migrants' skills has prompted the growth and development of countries like India and China in the recent years. (Manzele & Dilip, 2005) In contrast, around 700 thousands to 2 million people including women and children are victims of human trafficking which have horrible consequences for themselves and their families.

In the globalization of the migration almost all countries including Iran simultaneously are immigrant recipient, emigrant sender or/and transit gateway of migrants at the moment. Globalization of migration raised the issue of migration management as a key discussion in bilateral as well as multilateral relations. The migration management is presumed upon the fact that the migration is uncontrollable and it is impossible to restrict migration or prevent foreign migrants to enter another country. Therefore migration has become an integral component of the international economic, social and political interactions and managing the migration as the only solution could alleviate its disadvantages and increase its benefits. (IOM, 2004)

The globalization of migration and the fact of Iran's placement in all three categories of migration's issues both have some consequences and functions for Iranian foreign policy.

The migration management is an intergovernmental issue in which the active involvement of all states is required. Although transnational societies have taken roles in the management of the migration, states eventually should develop multilateral frameworks for norms and mechanisms to manage the migration. The

International Migration Organization is an important transnational bodies involved in this issue whose history goes back to post- World War II era, nevertheless it has just recently opened up for the membership of developing countries and Iran joined this organization in 2001. Iran's newly membership to this intergovernmental organization is significant because Iran gets awareness of systematic developments in the management of the migration and would actively participate in the effective trends of decision making and adopting the standards. From another perspective, Iran's membership also indicates that the management of the migration is possible and partly has to be done by the foreign ministry that politically represents Iranian sovereignty in multilateral institutions assigned to the management of the migration. (Sajadpour, 2005:31-9)

Irrespective of Iran's engagement in International Organization of Migration and with regard to migration issues, there are some other intergovernmental mechanisms in which Iran is partly involved and in some others Iran's role is not much. International Labor Organization (ILO) is one of the intergovernmental organization developed some mechanisms to manage migration and adopted some protocols regarding the rights of foreign labors. (Sepehri, 2004)

Formulation of foreign labors' rights, both with regards to migrant workers living in Iran and also to protect the rights of Iranians who are as formal workers in some Asian countries like Japan and South Korea, is the direct obligations of Iran's government. It requires political and diplomatic as well as foreign policy interactions.

There are two more international initiatives concerning the management of migration. One of them -name the Berne Process- is a consulting process in the migration management at national, regional as well as international level established in 2001 by the pivotal role of Swiss government. The second initiative is the International Commission for the Management of the International Migration which culminated to the report delivered to the United Nations General Assembly of 2006 and International Conference on Migration held in Brussels in 2007. These trends would contribute to the norm establishment in field of migration management that directly or

indirectly would introduce legally binding commitments and obligations to the country's foreign policy.

### **3- Need for Development of Policymaking Frameworks**

The sustained consequences of migration along with globalization of the migration have deeply transformed the relations between migration and foreign policy. It has also realigned several substantive concepts of the state sovereignty considered to be the cornerstones of foreign policy structure. This, in turn, has introduced simultaneously new horizons as well as challenges to foreign policy.

From a positive perspective, the cross border movements of Iranians deepened the concept of "Cultural Iran" across the globe and enhanced the Iranian cultural frontiers. Speaking Persian language anywhere per se has something to deal with the borders of Iranian culture. Today, the Persian language-protected by the Iranian migrants around the world- is spread out more than ever. This is the same with regard to Iranian religious and cultural values, introduced to the people around the world over the time and nowadays a globalized Iran is the fact of life. Optimal application of this phenomenon in foreign policy would serve the public interests of the country.

The knowledge, expertise, wealth and international experiences achieved by Iranians living abroad are valuable assets and -as a global phenomenon- Iranian foreign policy naturally functions to maintain and make use of them to meet the requirements of country.

Most countries that have considerable number of migrants in other places of the world take their migrant communities into serious consideration in terms of economic and social development macro strategies, and enhancement of their power and capacities.

The aforementioned issues have evolved the legal aspects of nationality and citizenship as a derivative of the states sovereignty. Iran's citizenship law and regulations are firm and strong enough and have the capacity of adaptation to the changing conditions stemmed from the status of the Iranians who have obtained the citizenship of the host countries, while keeping their own Iranian nationality. But

this issue remains as a challenging political-legal dimension facing the Iranian foreign policy. The multiple identities of some Iranians living abroad and inconsistent exigencies arisen of such identities may result in security challenges. Moreover, the cognitive gap between the migrant societies and their native localities may be so widened that its alleviation gets impossible.

In today's interconnected world the national and international issues are intertwined and mutually affect one another. The deep impact of such development on Iranians residing outside Iran makes their security concerns inseparable of Iran's security of Iran.

At the same time, Iran is still a desired place for regional cross-border movements of people and its more development level compared to its Eastern and Northern neighbors and furthermore its labor market opportunities contribute to the continuous migration from neighboring countries to Iran. It will pose more pressure on Iran economic structures and provide Iran with some opportunities, especially from political and cultural point of view. Iran is also a gateway for transition of African and Asian migrant en route for Europe.

The points mentioned here, all would directly or indirectly suggest the importance of relationship between migration and foreign policy. A relation which both horizontally- in terms of extent and scope, as well as geographical aspects- and vertically-owing to the deep affect on Iran's security, economy, culture and its geographic location- is complicated and crucial, and requires multilateral as well as comprehensive policy making comprised of conceptual and operational elements. Therefore without formulating a conceptual and strategic deduction on migration and its linkage to foreign policy, an effective decision-making in this regard is not possible. Understanding the structural link between foreign policy and migration requires the exploration of historical patterns, precise attention on different migration dimensions on the basis of geographical differences or generational aspects of migrants, their link with the country of origin, and at the same time understanding the global and international trends of migration, as well as foundations of emigrational management.

From the operational point of view, policy making on emigrational affairs could not exclusively rely on just the triple dimensions of migration inflows, migration outflows as well as migration transition. To think in isolation about different parts of the issue would complicate the executive measures. Policy making in operational field is not also limited to foreign policy structure, but it requires coordinated measures by all other existing executive bodies. However the foreign policy department due to their direct connection and practical experience, presence in field and having the possibility of comparative analysis on countries in migration area could play a key role.

The outcome of a balanced combination of conceptual and operational frameworks normally prevents temporal, one-dimensional, expository and emotional policies and in contrast, it considers security, cultural, economic, legal and bureaucratic elements in formulating the final policy framework governing migration. This requires a precise and proper perception on migration and its linkage with foreign policy, as well as a strategic mindset about ongoing migration affairs by elites, authorities and the entire Iranian society.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, this paper analyzed the relationship between migration and Iran's foreign policy. It has been based on aspects of the issue like the consistent influence of Iranians migration outflows; immigration inflows of foreigner to Iran; and the globalization of migration and the emergence of norms on management of migration. It also concludes that migration as an intergovernmental phenomenon is linked with active participation of foreign policy authorities of states including Iran, and finally there is necessity for setting up of balanced conceptual and operational framework for migration. It has also been suggested that short of consideration of global emigrational trends in general, and Iranian inflows and outflows migration in particular, understanding and formulating the Iran's foreign policy would not be possible.

## MIGRATION AND IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY

In the forthcoming years the international migration would even gets more layered and developed and therefore its impact on in foreign policy of all countries would be more crucial. Iran also needs to an improved access to the conceptual and operational instruments to manage and benefit from emigrational developments. The role of intellectual elites and foreign policy experts in this regard, is significant, sensitive and historical.

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<sup>1</sup> For an overall review on Iranian Migrants and their differences see:  
Yeganegi, Ismael (2002). *Major Iranian Migration*, Tehran, Elm Publication.

<sup>2</sup> For political groups in migration see:

Normohamadi, Ghasem (2006), *Iranian Todeh Party in Migration: A study conducted based on unpublished documents from Eastern Germany*, Tehran: Akhavan Publication,

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on Iranian Migrants diversities after the Revolution see:

Mohamadi, Boyok (2003). *Iranians in Canada: A research on Iranian life living in Vancouver, Canada*, Forth Edition, Tehran: Vajhe Ara.

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