

Four Approaches to Foreign Policy Analysis: The Case of Existing Administration

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to study changes in the Iran's foreign policy during the administration of Hassan Rouhani. The paper uses four ontological and epistemological approaches in analysis of foreign policy which constitutes explanatory individualism, interpretive individualism, explanatory collectivism and interpretive collectivism. The major question of the present research is: how changes in the foreign policy of the eleventh government can be explained by using each of the four analytical approaches. In response, the author hypothesizes that in order to reach a complete understanding of changes in Iran's foreign policy during President Rouhani's administration, a simultaneous attention to all the four analytical approaches is required; the present article considers these approaches as the "contextual level of analysis". Exploring the four levels of foreign policy analysis, the author concludes that to have a complete understanding of an actor's foreign policy in the international system, the contextual level of analysis should be used as it combines different levels in its approach. This level of analysis includes material and ideational dimensions in both minor and major levels, all at the same time.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Eleventh Government, International Relations, Individualism, Collectivism

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Introduction

During the recent years foreign policy analysis as an important sub-discipline of international relations has attracted significant attention among western scholars. Some commentators believe that it was revived as a sub-discipline's in the aftermath of the Cold War (Hudson and Vore, 1995). Foreign policy analysis studies the relations between different actors in the international system particularly, states. Diplomacy, information, negotiations, cultural exchanges and above all exploring the process of decision-making are among the subjects that are dealt with under the banner of foreign policy analysis. According to Singer, foreign policy analysis emphasizes on individual and state levels of analysis. Thus it is the key to understanding the nature of international politics and international relations (Khosravi and Mirmohammadi, 2014: 13-14).

In Hudson's terms, while international relations underline the structural restrictions of the international system and the similarities of states' behaviour as a result of such restrictions, foreign policy analysis is reliant on the unavailability of human agency in the international developments and focuses on differences between actors. Hudson maintains that the most important role of foreign policy analysis in the international relations theory is to identify the theoretical match-point between the material and ideational elements that affect states' behaviour. This match-point is not state but rather human decision – makers (Hudson, 2005: 45).

It should also be stated that foreign policy analysis assumes foreign policy as a dependent variable; its formation process is the

result of different independent variables including material and ideational elements in different levels. They give life to different foreign policy options in the framework of causations. This significant sub-discipline of international relations holds foreign policy as a distinctive policy-making area with fundamental differences from other areas of public policy-making. This is because foreign policy analysis pursues national interests and basic values instead of particular interests (Cohen, 1968: 530).

Foreign policy analysis has paid a special attention to the subject of “change”. Study of change in foreign policy approach of international actors can be useful in predicting and explaining their future course of action. The concept of change can be analyzed from different perspectives. Accordingly, the primary objective of this article is to study change in Iran’s foreign policy with the rise of Hassan Rouhani to power by using the four ontological and epistemological approaches of explanatory individualism, interpretive individualism, explanatory collectivism and interpretive collectivism. The main hypothesis of the research is that for a comprehensive understanding of change in Iran’s foreign policy during the eleventh government, a simultaneous attention to all the four foreign policy analytical approaches is required; the present article terms these four approaches as “contextual level of analysis”. In line with this, first, types of change in foreign policy from different international and theoretical perspectives will be analyzed. By introducing the four approaches that were mentioned, the changes in the foreign policy of the eleventh cabinet will be explored.

I. Change in Foreign Policy

Before dealing with change in foreign policy and its types, it is necessary to have a look at foreign policy as a concept. A review of the literature on foreign policy reveals that there is a variety of definitions about the concept of foreign policy. Christopher Hill, for instance, regards foreign policy a targeted action among actors (Hill,

2008: 24). In this paper, foreign policy is regarded as “a set of objectives, prescriptions, incentives and oral, written and actual actions that are designed by the officials or authoritative institutions in relation to other actors with the aim of leaving impacts on the target in a way that policy-makers desire”. Generally speaking, in study of international affairs and foreign policy phenomena, its dynamics and varied aspects are often less attention is paid and the analysts tend to focus more on stability and continuation instead of transformation and change (Gustavsson, 2014: 219). From Gustavsson’s perspective, theorizing change in foreign policy has to be focused on the simultaneous change in three elements: the fundamental structural conditions, political leadership and crisis (Gustavsson, 2014: 221). He also maintains that the sources of change can be divided into two groupings of domestic and international; each, in turn, is split into three factors of political, economic and cultural (Gustavsson, 2014: 232).

Gustavsson further discusses that the most significant factor of change in foreign policy is that of cognitive. Decision-making is deeply impacted by cognition. In his view, with change the key individual beliefs changes in policy-making will be expected through their activities within the present institutional structures. To study this process, the analyst should not limit him/herself to formal procedures of policy-making, but should rather heed the political dynamics. In other words, they should take into account the strategies by which actors bring others under their influence and convince them to accept their new political orientations (Gustavsson, 2014: 233).

Herman has also identified four levels of change in foreign policy: adjustment change which is indicative of minor changes in foreign policy; change in plans that reflects change in tools and methods of policy-making while the major objectives remain intact; change in objectives that points to change in aims and ideals; change in the international orientations that expresses fundamental shifts in

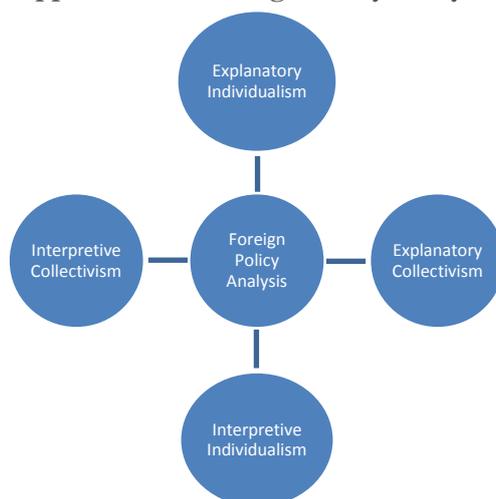
state orientations with respect to international issues. With regard to different levels of change, he suggests four sources for change in foreign policy which are leaders, bureaucracies, domestic structures and external pressure (Herman, 1990: 5).

According to Rosati, the level of change in foreign policy includes refinement, amendment and change in structures that indicates slight changes, medium changes and intensive changes in the domain and objectives of foreign policy respectively (Rosati, 1994: 236). Goldman's definition of change in foreign policy centers on intensive variation of previous situations and change in conditions (Goldman, 1988: 10). By bringing the most important viewpoints about change in foreign policy (different levels and sources for change) the major theoretical framework of the research i.e. the four ontological and epistemological models in analysis of the ways change in foreign policy occurs will be explained.

II. The Analysis of Change in Foreign Policy

The theoretical framework for analyzing changes in foreign policy of the eleventh government of the Islamic Republic is Carlsnaes's four ontological and epistemological approaches to Foreign Policy Analysis. According to Carlsnaes, when it comes to analysis of foreign policy we are dealing with four approaches and perspectives (Carlsnaes, 2002).

Figure 1. The four Carlsnaes's Ontological and Epistemological Approaches in Foreign Policy Analysis



Among these approaches, the explanatory individualism and explanatory collectivism are regarded as objective. In accordance with their material epistemology, these approaches study their subjects from the outside and offer explanations for foreign policy. In contrast, the interpretive individualism and interpretive collectivism are based on study of actions from within and seek to offer interpretations for foreign policy (Holis and Smith, 1990: 72).

Explanatory individualism approach: emphasizes on the material dimensions of human action, this approach assumes actors as rational, and inspired by the positivist epistemology [and studies actors' behaviour from outside. It also assumes a causal relation between outside material variables and change in the foreign policy behaviour of an actor. According to this approach, to analyze change in foreign policy, attention should be paid to the rationalist logic of actors and their cost – benefit calculation in accordance with the material variables. In fact, all the rational actor's efforts to achieve material benefits bring about change in foreign policy.

The interpretive individualism approach is concerned with the

ideational aspects of human behaviour and takes people as interpretive actors that live in a world of inter-subjective meanings. With respect to its ideational ontology, this approach adheres to study of phenomena or subjects from their within (Carlsnaes, 2002). In this approach, change in foreign policy is derived from changes in the decision-makers perceptions and understandings. Political psychology with its emphasis on individual characteristics (the psychological dimension of foreign policy) is one of the disciplines that can be very useful in this level of analysis. The concept of 'operational code' is extensively used in such arguments. By operational code, understanding the basic political beliefs of the leaders of decision-making elites about the world, their understanding about the national power, their assessment of the state's power, and also their favored tools and styles in pursuit of foreign policy objectives is meant (Johnson, 1997; Holsti, 1997).

The explanatory collectivism approach: this is based upon the material structure of the international system. Giving priority to material structures in social and political developments, this approach also holds that the main elements of change in a state's foreign policy are those of environmental ones (capabilities and weaknesses). Waltz is regarded as the representative of the neorealist theory of international relation and supporter of this approach (Waltz, 1979). In this level of analysis, the future foreign policy behaviour of an actor is dependent to the structural transformations of the international system and internal changes within the structure (Khosravi and Mir-Mohammadi, 2014: 74).

Interpretive collectivism approach: this approach is best represented by Alexander Wendt and the school of Structural Constructivism; it emphasizes on the structure instead of agent and, contrary to the explanatory collective approach, underlines the non-material and ideational structures of the international system that impose themselves on actors (Wendt, 1999). According to this approach, the ideational affairs of the international system can be regarded as the

most important factors of change in a state's foreign policy. The ideational affairs may include general values, norms, international law principles or the dominant culture of the international system. This level of analysis regards the international norms in the construction of foreign policy or change in foreign policy actions as the most significance. International norms may be used to refer to common expectations of actors about a proper behaviour including setting beliefs, standards, international conventions, and decision-making processes (Farrel, 2002).

As stated above, in analyzing change in a state's foreign policy, each approach comes up with a different result based on specific level of analysis it pursues. In the remainder, change in the Iran's foreign policy after president Rouhani's rise to power will be studied by using such analytical perspectives that were discussed.

III. The Case of Rouhani's Administration

In this part I first the indicators of change in the foreign policy of Rouhani's government will be deal with and then interpretation of such changes will be discussed considering the four mentioned approaches. In general, to study change in the foreign policy of the Rouhani's cabinet some indicators like "choice among the available options" should be taken into account. At the same time, Rouhani's choices should be compared with the previous government's choices. Another indicator will be "foreign policy behaviour" and the last one is the "outcome or result of behaviour" that enters the political system in form of external reactions and inputs.

Figure 2. The Indicators of Change in Foreign Policy of Rouhani's Administration



Choice among the available options: one of the most important indicators of change in the foreign policy of Rouhani's cabinet is "choice among available options" in comparison with the choices of the previous government of Ahmadinejad. For instance, with regard to the nuclear policy, it is possible to narrow down the options into four categories: surrender (complete suspension of uranium enrichment, closing of the nuclear centers and putting an end to the nuclear science researches), confinement (limiting of the nuclear –related activities, reduction of the uranium enrichment level, acceptance of the international inspections), combination (cooperation with the West in form of sufficing to an internal enrichment of uranium in a low level) and confrontation (non-limited uranium enrichment, withdrawal from NPT or threatening to do so, rejection of the International Atomic Energy Agency inspections and calling into question the credibility of the United Nations Security Council's resolutions). Among all mentioned options, the eleventh government has opted for the confinement of the nuclear activities (for more information about Iran's nuclear orientations see: Seifzadeh and Saeedabai, 2011: 209-243). In other words, the Rouhani's cabinet has chosen the "constructive engagement" option over the "deterrent confrontation" as the central signifier of the discourse of contest and "looser surrender" as the central signifier of the discourse of appeasement (Dehghani – Firouzabadi and Ataee, 2014: 105).

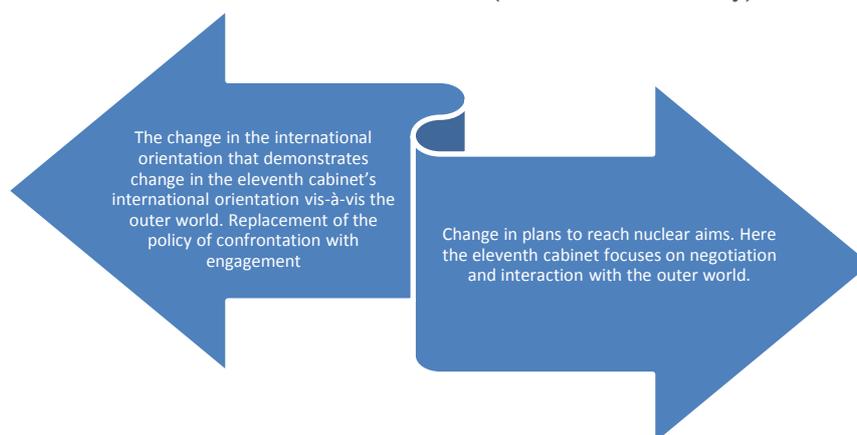
The other indicator of change in Rouhani's foreign policy should be sought within the orientation of the government vis-à-vis other members of the international community. In this respect, the eleventh cabinet could have opted for the following options: West-inclination (inclination to Europe and America), Third-Worldism (expansion of relations with countries of the South and Third World countries), East-inclination (expansion of relations with China and Japan) and Russia-inclination. Among them Rouhani's government has adopted the policy of building coalitions with the West including Europe and the United States. This is while in the previous ninth and tenth cabinets the choice was that of Third-Worldism and establishing relations with Latin American and African countries (For further reading about this principle of the ninth and tenth cabinets see: Sabouri and Salehian, 2013: 170-178).

Foreign policy behaviour: another indicator for change in foreign policy of Rouhani's presidency is the behaviour of the government. One of the most important manifestations of this, is change from confrontational discourse in foreign policy to constructivist engagement. In line with this, when explaining moderation in foreign policy, president Rouhani said, "the policy of the government with respect to the foreign policy issues is one of moderation that is neither surrender, nor appeasement or inaction and confrontation" (Rouhani 11/02/2014). Elsewhere he states that, "victory is never achievable under the shadow of isolation; it is rather achievable through interaction, one that is constructive ..." (Rouhani, 03/12/2013). The other manifestation of the existing administration are the trust-building and transparency-creating initiatives, de-securitization instead of securitization of foreign policy issues, insistence over peaceful coexistence and multilateralism in within the framework of cooperation with international institutions and organizations.

The outcomes of foreign policy behaviour of the other manifestation of change in foreign policy is the feedback or outcomes

of new foreign policy behaviour that the political system receives from the surrounding environment. To cite some examples of such outcomes, reference can be made to acceptance of Iran's right to uranium enrichment by the West, direct negotiations between Iranian and American high-ranking officials for the first time after the Iranian revolution, gradual reduction of some economic sanctions, and gradual release of Iranian frozen assets. In this regard, president Rouhani has stated that, "... in the second step we are after preserving our nuclear rights, removal of sanctions as well as constructive engagement with the world. These three are of importance to us ... within the framework that we have agreed upon with the 5+1, they accepted Iran's enrichment in its own land. Before this, they used to say that enrichment in Iran is a threat for the world and the region; today they agreed that enrichment in Iran is no threat to no one. At the same day that the agreement becomes operational, all the sanctions against Iran will be removed and new cooperation between Iran and the World will be started; both in the nuclear field and other sectors. Therefore we see that the approach of my government has been successful" (Rouhani 03/ 04/ 2015).

Figure 3. Change in the Foreign Policy of the Rouhani's Cabinet Based on Hermann's Model (Nuclear Case Study)

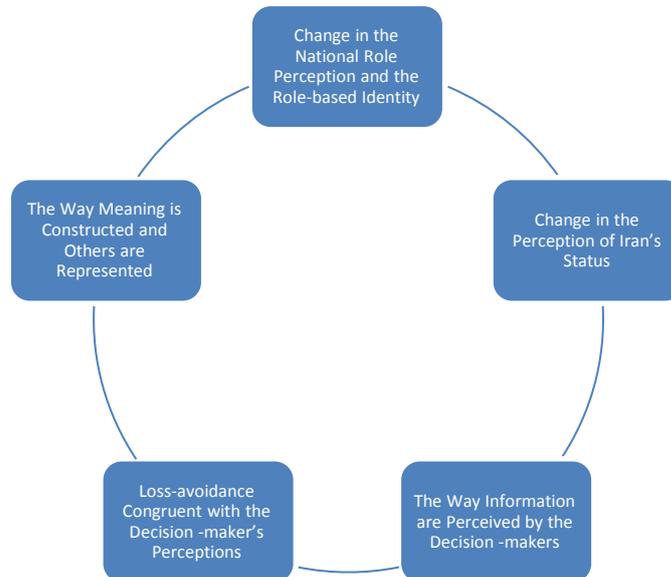


Change in the foreign policy of Rouhani's cabinet based on the explanatory individualism approach: in this model changes in Iran's foreign policy by the eleventh administration is perceived as a rational actor to maximize its utility. In this model, the emphasis is on the homo economicus that makes cost-benefit calculations using its practical rationality to choose the best option among all available options. In this approach, reason and choice are of primary importance. In this perception, removal of sanctions, as one of the priorities of the eleventh government, is a rational act of a rational actor for increasing material interests and economic benefits. In this regard, Hassan Rouhani explicitly states, "the cruel sanctions have to be lifted for it to open way before absorbing of investments and resolution of problems related to environment, unemployment, industry and drinking water" (Rouhani, 08/ 07 / 2015). In other words, Iranian government as a rational actor seeks development and attempts to build bridges between development and foreign policy by pursuing a foreign policy that is development-oriented (For further reading see: Rezaei and Torabi, 2013: 131-161). Accordingly president Rouhani emphasizes that his government is trying to open world gates to Iranian export products (Rouhani 29/ 04 / 2015).

According to the explanatory individualism, the Iranian government, as a rational actor, tries to replace securitization of foreign policy with de-securitization. Within the securitization process one state is regarded by other states as a security threat (for more reading about securitization and de-securitization see: Pour Ahmadi and Mohseni, 2012: 143-145). In this respect, president Rouhani clearly states that, "One of the ways to create and promote national power is to talk with the world over the political issues and have interaction. The power to interact is one of the most important components of national power: "We negotiate with 5+1 to say the world that Iran is not a threatening actor but is rather a country with logic and reasoning" (25/ 06/2015).

Changes in the foreign policy of the eleventh government based on the individual interpretive approach: In this view, the main reason for change in Rouhani's cabinet is the change in perceptions of the major decision-makers (the president, minister of foreign affairs and political advisors) in addition to their self-image, and the image they have of other actors and the international system. In the previous approach, the emphasis was on rational choices in foreign policy actions while in this approach main foreign policy decision maker's mode of reasoning is central. Modes of reasoning are the rules through which the discourses give life to particular representation of the social world, interests and political issues (for further study see: Khosravi and Mir Mohammadi, 2014: 214).

Figure 4. The Ideational Factors Affecting Change in Foreign Policy Action of the Eleventh Cabinet Based on the Interpretive Individualism Approach



As the figure indicates, based on the interpretive individualism approach, the most important factor which affects foreign policy

actions of the eleventh cabinet of Rouhani are:

Change in the national role perception, role-based identity: Holsti believes that the decision-making elite's perception of their countries' national role vis-à-vis the outer world may leave significant impacts on the foreign policy choices (Holsti, 1970: 234). Generally speaking, the role-based identity is an identity that is built not on the basis of the actor's inherent characteristics but is formed in relation to other actors' behaviors. This identity is related to the kind of mission a given state perceives for itself in relation with other actors (Wendt, 2007: 133). In fact, this identity forms the basis for the states' interests and foreign policies in the international system. In this regard, change in the foreign policy of the eleventh cabinet can be expressed in terms of change in the role-based identity of Iran in the international system. In this period Iran holds itself an interactive, cooperative, pro status-quo and adherent to the rules of the international system.

Change in the perception of the desired status of Iran in the international system: status is a set of ideas about the place and rank of a country in the international hierarchical political, military, social and economic system. These ideas are about the country's role, the desired place and the way this desired place may be defined (Noori, 2013: 16). The reason for change in the perception of desired and favored status can be explained using the concept of 'effectiveness task' which is rooted in psychology. In this task, the main issue is the outcomes, policies (successes and failures) and the external actors' reactions to these policies. This task evaluates identity and achievements through the process of 'self-verification' (Cast and Burke, 2002). This demonstrates whether the perceived status is achievable in the present conditions or not; whether is compatible with the norms of the international system or not; and, whether the logics of appropriateness and consequences are observed or not. Therefore, the adopted status, tools and strategies to achieve the goals are different in the Rohuani's cabinet compared with those of the

Ahmadinejad's administration

Meaning construction and representation of the 'other' in foreign policy decision-making: in the ninth and tenth cabinet, 'other' was defined as the western members of the international community particularly the United States with a hegemonic and anti-Islamic nature. Accordingly, providing ontological security of Iran was defined as fight against the United States and the West (see: Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2012, 96). In the eleventh cabinet, however, the West as the "other" is represented in a way that can be interacted with, neither countered nor appeased. In this perception, Iran's ontological security is best preserved by interaction and friendship with the West. According to President Rouhani, "We want to improve our relations with those countries that we have soured relations and even to end hostilities with those countries with them our relations are tense. We maintain that such a cooperation is for the good of all" (Rouhani, 03/04/2015).

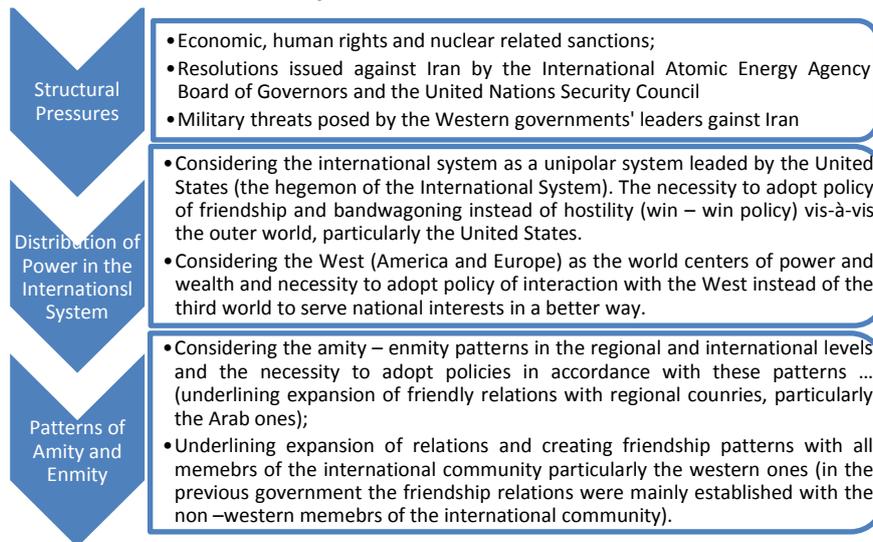
Loss-avoidance in conformity with the foreign policy decision-maker's perceptions: According to the 'perspective theory', which is regarded as one of the most important psychological theories in foreign policy, in decision-making what matters the most is loss-avoidance; avoiding loss is more important than securing and obtaining new achievements (for further study see: Levi, 1994: 174).

Information arrangement: according to this viewpoint, when choosing one option over its alternatives, the foreign policy elites collect and arrange related information in a way that shows the positive sides of their choice and a desirable perspective of that is presented (Levi, 2000: 195-197).

Exploring changes in foreign policy of the eleventh cabinet based on the explanatory collectivism approach: in this approach, the main reasons for change in the foreign policy of the eleventh cabinet should be sought within the material factors of the international system. It is assumed that the structural pressures, division of power and interaction between the international system actors and the enmity – amity patterns are all among the factors that shape changes in Rouhani's foreign policy. This

level of analysis, introduces foreign policy decision-making as dependent to structural material variables (Neack, 2008: 11).

Figure 5. The Material Structural Factors of Change in the Foreign Policy of the Eleventh Cabinet



Change in the foreign policy of the eleventh cabinet based on the interpretive collectivism approach: in this level of analysis, the main reasons for change in the foreign policy of the eleventh cabinet should be sought in the ideational structures of the international system particularly international norms. In this approach, actors are expected to adhere to international norms through political socialization processes. In other words, if a state tends to be known as respectful to international norm, it has to adjust its foreign policy actions in accordance with the international norms. Norms are here defined as collective understanding of the proper behaviour or collective expectations about the acceptable behavior of a particular identity (Legro, 1997: 33).

It is noteworthy that in the international arena, two types of norms are faced: the first are general norms that entail similar value

expectations from all states (like the norm of non – interference in the internal affairs of other states), and second particular norms in which meaning is dependent to particular contexts (Khosravi and Mir Mohammadi, 2014: 144). With respect to these two categories, it can be said that the eleventh cabinet headed by President Rouhani has tried to show adherence not only to the first set of norms but also to the second ones through diplomacy and negotiations with the world for example in the nuclear issue. Observing both normative categories can boost a state’s identity as a legitimate member of the international system (responsible and civilized) (about norms see: Prais and Tannevals, 2011: 227).

Figure 6. Interpretive Collectivism and Change in the Foreign Policy of the Eleventh Cabinet

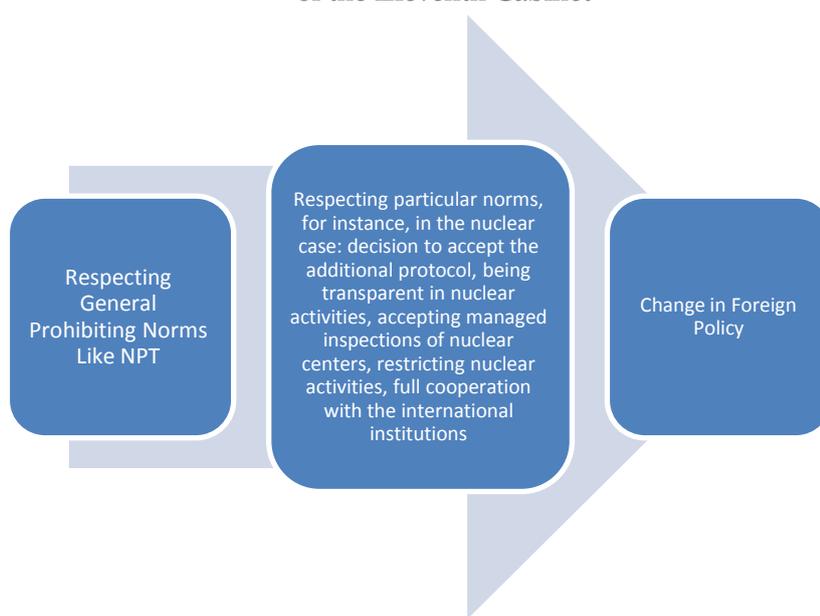


Figure 5 demonstrates how accepting particular norms in a given subject – area by the eleventh cabinet, for instance the nuclear case, has led to construction of a particular and different foreign policy in comparison with the previous governments. It should be noted that

the nuclear agreements reached upon is a result of adhering to such norms in negotiations between Iran and p5+1 countries.

Conclusion

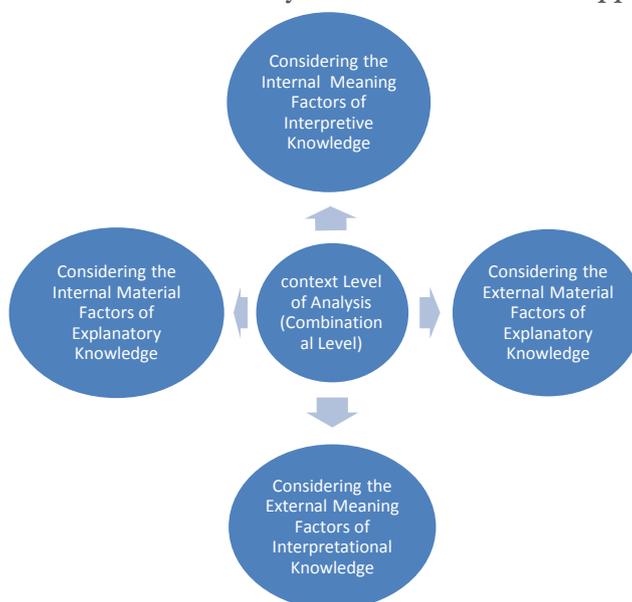
The article argued that the eleventh government of the Islamic Republic perceives foreign policy not only a tool to achieve national goals but also as an instrument that shapes and creates identity. The foreign policy discourse of the eleventh cabinet is constructed based on a different set of choices compared with those of previous governments particularly with respect to the nuclear case. This discourse introduces identity of Iran's political system as a peaceful that is in congruity with the international standards and international law. Assuming this, the primary question of the article was addressed: how change in the foreign policy of the Rouhani's cabinet can be studied based on the ontological and epistemological foursome approach to analysis of foreign policy? In the first part of the article, types of change in foreign policy were dealt with from perspective of different foreign policy and international relations theorists and then the four approaches were analyses. The paper discussed how each of these approaches can explain change in the foreign policy of the eleventh cabinet.

In this article foreign policy analysis as one of the sub-disciplines of international relations was used to explain how foreign policy can be constructed and changed in response to different independent variables in material and normative dimensions and within different levels. In this important sub-discipline of international relations, foreign policy is held as a distinct policy-making area that seeks serving national interests and basic values that are fundamentally different from other public policy-making spheres. One of the most important aspects of foreign policy is the issue of change. Considering the foursome ontological and epistemological approaches to Foreign Policy Analysis, the foreign policy of the eleventh cabinet was

discussed in this paper.

By introducing the four approaches and they explain change in the foreign policy of the eleventh cabinet, the article concludes that for a more comprehensive understanding foreign policy of an actor in the international system and its changes, a simultaneous attention to the four dimensions (combinational approach) is needed. The article terms the combinational approach as ‘the context level of analysis’ in this article. This level of analysis includes all material and meaning dimensions in both minor and major levels and helps convergence of explanatory and interpretive knowledge to understand foreign policy and its changes. The interpretive knowledge helps in understanding ntentional and meaning dimensions that affect change in foreign policy. The explanatory knowledge is assistive in understanding the material and structural aspects as the main reasons of change in foreign policy actions (Carlsnaes, 2002)

Figure no 7 – The Four Levels of Change in Foreign Policy Analysis Considered Simultaneously in the Combinational Approach



Considering the figure and having the contextual level of analysis in mind, it is concluded that foreign policy and policy-making analysts should consider the meaning factors in individual and structural levels and the material factors simultaneously in both individual and structural levels. In this way, a comprehensive understanding can be achieved and the future developments in foreign policy of the eleventh cabinet can be predicted.

Notes

1. Alexander Wendt the systemic constructivist thinker of International Relations states that International Relations theories are distinct from foreign policy theories (Wendt, 1999: 11).
2. Level of analysis is a standpoint from which a researcher observes the world realities. Level of analysis determines from where to start our observation and what method we choose. Therefore level of analysis is both an ontological and methodological matter (Khosravi and Mir Mohammadi, 2014: 51).
3. Third-Worldism is a type of discursive and meaning system in foreign policy that is of anti-empirical and counter-hegemonic nature. This ideational structure is opposed to the status-quo in the international level and is after revision and change of the world order aspiring new propitious conditions for meeting the demands and interests of the third world and developing countries (Dehghani Firouzabadi and Nouri, 2012: 112 – 114).

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