

Shared regional heritage from Herat to Konya



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EXCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE

Although Abdullah Ansari was born and lived in Herat, his legacy is now considered part of the cultural and intellectual heritage of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Iran. This shared heritage extends beyond Ansari to include luminaries such as Jami, Rumi, Magtymguly Pyragy, Nezami Ganjavi, Rudaki, Ferdowsi, Attar of Nishapur, and many others, who are revered in the regions. Nearly all countries in the "Nowruz region" consider these figures part of their cultural and intellectual heritage. What is even more remarkable is the intellectual similarity among many luminaries of this region, forming a cohesive cultural system. This interaction has occurred both among contemporaries, such as the meetings between Ansari and Abu al-Hassan al-Kharaqani or the relationship between Rumi and Attar, and through the systematic influence of members of this cultural system on each other through the study of their works and ideas.

This systematic interaction has led to a unity and similarity of minds among intellectuals and ordinary people in this region. The spiritual teachings of Ansari, with slight variations, are recognizable in Samarkand, Bukhara, Nishapur, Isfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz, Ganja, and Konya. This unity extends beyond intellectuals to the social and pragmatic nature of thought in this cultural system, leading to a similarity in general culture and even daily life among ordinary people. Thus, the Nowruz region possesses a common mental framework, which, if considered in foreign policy by member countries of this region, would be the best basis for cooperation and peacemaking.

However, researchers and political leaders of this region have paid little attention to this concept and have overlooked this unique opportunity for developing more collaborative and peace-oriented regional arrangements. It seems that the continuous organization of "Nowruz diplomacy" events with the participation of university researchers and intellectuals from all parts of this intellectual region, from the subcontinent to Anatolia, would be the best initiative to utilize this common mental framework for establishing cooperative structures. Nevertheless, researchers of this region, in constructing theoretical structures based on this common system, must observe the following principles.

First, they must avoid nationalistic appropriation of personalities and their ideas. These figures had identities transcending their birthplaces or lives, symbolizing a regional intellectual identity. Confining them to a modern geographic or land-centric framework diminishes their influence and reduces their potential for creating peacemaking arrangements.

Second, governments should strive to represent all these figures as part of the common cultural heritage of the region, with the involvement of all countries in this region. For example, Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi, known as Rumi, is not just a Turkish or Persian figure but a shared cultural heritage of the people of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Turkey. Based on these principles, it is proposed that the role of this cultural system in shaping regional arrangements be examined and studied in the form of a collection of articles, with the joint collaboration of Iranian, Turkish, Afghan, Tajik, and Azerbaijani researchers.



Participants take a selfie during a festival marking 'Nauryz' (Nowruz), an ancient holiday celebrating the spring equinox, in Kazakhstan.
● PAVEL MIKHEYEV/REUTERS

Cultural region called Nowruz



The photo shows a Haft-Sin (a tabletop arrangement of seven symbolic items traditionally displayed at Nowruz) at the United Nations' headquarters in New York, US, on March 22, 2022, in front of ambassadors from 11 countries that commemorate Nowruz.
● IRNA



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EXCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE

Hans Morgenthau, an American professor of international relations, in his 1948 book *Politics Among Nations*, wrote, "To paraphrase a statement of Palmerston: While the holder of the balance has no permanent friends, it has no permanent enemies either; it has only the permanent interest of maintaining the balance of power itself." In the aftermath of World War II, when extensive destruction occurred in various countries worldwide, Morgenthau's words held much appeal and laid the foundation for the establishment of realism in international relations.

However, the world witnessed many ups and downs, and international relations expanded in various dimensions, giving rise to new patterns of friendship and enmity. The realist approach, which was among the most important scientific theories during the Cold War era, could not fully explain the emerging events and trends in relations between states and nations. The formation of the European Union and other regional entities indicated the emergence of new elements in international relations. Even the definition of "interests" changed, and, as Alexander Wendt proposed as part of his constructivist theory in the late 1990s, identity-based and cultural affinities were considered the basis for the formation of interests.

As a result, with the end of the Cold War era, instead of witnessing the formation of a unipolar world and globalization of economy, politics, culture, and society, ties between political units with similar identities in various regions increased. Relations at the regional level shaped new patterns of international interactions. Note that identity ties, which had been designated as the building block of common interests, itself stemmed from cultural affinities. In fact, identity can be regarded as a construct of the cultural characteristics of individuals and societies.

Thus, today's world is a "regionalized" world where the bond between culturally similar communities serves as the main basis for cooperation between nations and states. Innovative technologies have provided a suitable platform for advancing such new patterns. Key elements such as borders have become much less prominent in inter-state politics, and even traditional interpretations of the concept of sovereignty have found a different form in this astonishing new world. The concept of region, too, has undergone a transformation. A region is no longer something that could be delineated on geographical definitions alone; rather, in today's world, it refers to a collection of societies that, based on common cultural and identity elements and within the framework of economic, political, scientific, and other relations, have come together to cooperate for the realization of common interests. Therefore, it can be seen that a region can also be a novel construct of redefining common elements that tie societies to-

gether.

In recent years, countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have endeavored to register the Nowruz tradition as an intangible cultural heritage with UNESCO. Since 2010, through resolution A/RES/64/253 in the United Nations General Assembly, March 21, or the first day of the month of Farvardin in the solar calendar, has been designated as the International Day of Nowruz. This is while the list of countries celebrating Nowruz is much longer than the current list and includes countries from Albania in Eastern Europe to China and Mongolia in East Asia. It can be clearly observed that the countries within the Nowruz cultural region enjoy significant diversity. Geographically, these countries encompass regions in West Asia, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and South Asia. From a religious perspective, followers of various religions, from Christianity and Zoroastrianism to Judaism and various Islamic sects, celebrate Nowruz. From a national standpoint, the Nowruz cultural region includes numerous ancient ethnicities that have coexisted in this cultural domain since ancient times, shaping the Nowruz culture alongside each other. Finally, linguistic diversity is another characteristic of the Nowruz cultural region. The speakers of these languages have not only fostered deep linguistic connections among their communities, facilitating a more empathetic understanding of shared cultural and identity-related concepts, but have

also contributed to the vibrant cultural mosaic of this region through the preservation and utilization of various dialects and languages.

In this way, it can be seen that the Nowruz culture, by relying on norms such as compassion, tolerance, and mutual respect and by promoting values such as friendship and kindness towards one another, has been able to serve as a unifying force among many civilized societies in today's world. The universality of Nowruz's cultural values has also empowered it to play an identity-building role in peripheral areas and contribute to the formation of a cultural region. Moreover, it can strengthen humanistic perspectives based on traditions and ancient rituals in today's world.

The Nowruz culture, as a shared heritage of the nations within the Nowruz civilization, requires formulation within the framework of modern international relations theories, especially regionalism theories. Then, based on common strategies, it should shape a broad social movement that secures the economic, political, and security interests of governments and nations. Shaping the discourse of the "Nowruz Cultural Region" requires more than just cooperation among political leaders; it necessitates collaboration and support from intellectuals and academics of the countries in this region to present fresh definitions of national interests, national security, governance, borders, homeland, land, identity, friend, and foe within the framework of common cultural values.