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Iran's foreign policy should go beyond survivalism



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#### OPINION

In the history of Iran's foreign relations, following the emergence of modern diplomacy, the country's foreign policy was initially shaped around survival. From almost the era of the Iran-Russia wars onward, external policies were crafted primarily to preserve the state's existence. Over time, that approach shifted toward a strategy of development and later toward expansionism. Yet today, Iran's foreign policy appears to have once again reverted to a phase defined solely by survival.

The shift toward a survival-centered doctrine stems from a serious theoretical fallacy in how foreign policy is understood by key actors in the field. A review of the prevailing discourse in Iran's foreign policy suggests that the theoretical framework guiding decision-makers and principal actors rests on four main pillars that lie at the heart of this misreading.

**1. Classical realism:** A view of foreign policy that reduces security exclusively to its military dimension, subordinating all other considerations to a particular understanding of security — one attainable only through military power.

**2. Marxism:** A perspective that portrays the world as a realm of domination, holding that the capitalist system is controlled by specific capitalists, particularly Jewish ones, who in turn use states as instruments of control.

**3. The duality of good and evil:** An outlook rooted in Manichaean culture, depicting the world as an arena of an endless struggle between good and evil, not grounded in monotheism, but in a perpetual conflict between opposing moral forces.

**4. Dependency theory:** A theory asserting that the more extensive a country's ties with the global capitalist system, the less development it will achieve, thereby emphasizing inward-looking policies and self-sufficiency.

The convergence of these four elements has made it difficult for the country to grasp the realities of today's international system. Some [Page 8 >](#) of the pillars underpinning this framework have outlived their historical relevance, while others are internally inconsistent. The very concept of security, for instance, has undergone a profound transformation. It is no longer defined solely by military capabilities or nuclear energy.

# Iran Daily

Vol. 8049 • Thursday, February 12, 2026 • Bahman 23, 1404 • Sha'ban 23, 1447 • 100,000 rials • 8 pages

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