

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Civilizational Diplomacy in the Emerging Post-Polar World Order: An Analytical Framework and the Case of Iran

Prof. Mohammad Reza Dehshiri

Full Professor of Political Science School of International Relations (SIR) Tehran, Iran

Received: 10 July 2026 Accepted: 27 July 2026 Published: 03 August 2026

Corresponding Author: Prof. Mohammad Reza Dehshiri, Full Professor of Political Science School of International Relations (SIR) Tehran, Iran, m.dehshiri@sir.ac.ir

Abstract

The transformation of the international system in the twenty-first century has generated extensive debate regarding the nature of the emerging global order. While scholars have described the current transition in terms of multipolarity, post-American order, networked governance, or multiplexity, this article argues that the evolving international environment is more accurately understood as a post-polar world order, characterized by fluid power configurations, overlapping networks of cooperation and competition, fragmented authority, and the growing agency of civilizational states. Against this background, the article examines the implications of post-polarity for foreign policy through the case of Iran's civilizational diplomacy. It argues that the erosion of hierarchical power structures has increased the importance of civilizational identity, historical legitimacy, and cultural influence as complementary sources of national power. Building upon the concepts of soft power, cultural diplomacy, and civilizational states, the study develops a conceptual framework explaining how Iran employs its historical, cultural, religious, and intellectual heritage to enhance regional influence, strengthen neighborhood diplomacy, expand transregional cultural networks, and construct alternative narratives within the emerging international order. Using qualitative and interpretive analysis, the article demonstrates that civilizational diplomacy represents an adaptive foreign policy strategy through which emerging powers seek to transform cultural resources into diplomatic influence under conditions of increasing global uncertainty. The study contributes to contemporary debates on world order, cultural diplomacy, and post-Western international relations by introducing civilizational diplomacy as an analytical framework for understanding the foreign policy behavior of civilizational states in the emerging post-polar era.

Keywords: Post-polar world order, Civilizational diplomacy, Cultural diplomacy, Civilizational states, Iran, Soft power, Foreign policy.

1. Introduction

The international system is undergoing one of the most profound transformations since the end of the Cold War. The relative diffusion of economic, military, and technological capabilities, the rise of emerging powers, the proliferation of digital technologies, the growing influence of non-state actors, and the fragmentation of global governance have fundamentally altered the distribution and exercise of power in world politics (Ikenberry, 2018: 7-23). These structural changes have challenged traditional understandings of polarity rooted in realist international relations theory and

stimulated extensive scholarly debates concerning the character of the emerging international order (Mearsheimer, 2019:7-50).

Although the post-Cold War era was initially interpreted as a unipolar moment dominated by the United States (Wohlforth, 1999: 5-41), subsequent geopolitical developments—including China's rapid rise, India's expanding global influence, Russia's renewed strategic activism, the growing role of middle powers, and the increasing importance of regional organizations—have challenged assumptions regarding the durability of liberal hegemony (Acharya, 2014; Mahbubani,

Citation: Mohammad Reza Dehshiri, Civilizational Diplomacy in the Emerging Post-Polar World Order: An Analytical Framework and the Case of Iran. *Journal of International Politics*. 2026;7(2): 54-70.

©The Author(s) 2026. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

2018). Simultaneously, globalization, technological innovation, transnational economic interdependence, climate change, pandemics, cyber governance, and digital communication have redistributed authority across governmental and non-governmental actors, creating increasingly complex patterns of international interaction that cannot be adequately explained through traditional polarity-based models (Farrell & Newman, 2019: 42-79). Consequently, scholars have proposed a variety of conceptual frameworks—including multipolarity, non-polarity, multiplexity, networked governance, and post-Western international order—to explain these transformations (Acharya, 2017, 2018; Badie, 2018; Buzan & Lawson, 2015; Haass, 2008; Khanna, 2019). While each perspective captures important dimensions of contemporary international politics, none fully accounts for the increasingly fluid interaction among states, international organizations, multinational corporations, digital platforms, transnational networks, cities, and civilizational communities that collectively shape global governance. Rather than being organized around a fixed distribution of power among a limited number of poles, contemporary international politics increasingly exhibits dispersed authority, overlapping networks of cooperation and competition, and multiple sources of legitimacy operating simultaneously across political, economic, technological, cultural, and informational domains (Slaughter, 2004). This article argues that the concept of the post-polar world order provides a more comprehensive analytical framework for understanding these transformations. Rather than describing merely another configuration of material capabilities, post-polarity denotes a qualitative transformation in international power itself. In this environment, military capabilities remain important but operate alongside economic resilience, technological innovation, digital connectivity, scientific leadership, normative influence, cultural attraction, and strategic narratives as complementary sources of international influence (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013). International influence therefore becomes increasingly multidimensional, relational, and networked rather than being determined solely by the distribution of military power. One important consequence of this transformation has been the renewed prominence of civilizational states in international politics. Unlike conventional nation-states whose legitimacy derives primarily from modern political institutions and territorial sovereignty, civilizational states emphasize long-term historical continuity, cultural heritage, philosophical traditions, collective memory,

and enduring civilizational identities as important foundations of both domestic legitimacy and international engagement (Cho & Kavalski, 2015: 429–444). Accordingly, foreign policy increasingly incorporates historical narratives, cultural diplomacy, educational exchange, heritage preservation, scientific cooperation, and public diplomacy as strategic instruments for generating legitimacy and influence beyond national borders (Cull, 2019). Against this theoretical backdrop, Iran provides a particularly significant case for examining the relationship between structural transformation in the international system and the evolution of foreign policy. As one of the world's oldest continuous civilizations, Iran possesses an exceptionally rich historical, literary, philosophical, linguistic, and religious heritage that has shaped political, intellectual, and cultural developments across West Asia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, South Asia, and the broader Persianate world for more than two millennia (Dabashi, 2007; Grigor, 2021; Lewisohn, 1993; Milani, 2008). These enduring civilizational resources constitute important sources of symbolic capital that may complement conventional instruments of diplomacy in an international environment where legitimacy, historical narratives, and cultural attraction increasingly influence interstate relations (Winter, 2015).

The existing literature on Iranian foreign policy has traditionally emphasized geopolitics, security dilemmas, ideological competition, regional rivalries, nuclear diplomacy, and sanctions (Ehteshami & Hinnebusch, 1997; Hunter, 2010; Ramazani, 2004; Takeyh, 2009). More recent scholarship has broadened this perspective by examining Iran's use of soft power, public diplomacy, religious networks, educational exchanges, media engagement, and cultural diplomacy as complementary dimensions of its external relations (Enayat, 2017: 323-326). Nevertheless, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to the broader concept of civilizational diplomacy as a comprehensive strategic framework that integrates historical memory, cultural heritage, intellectual traditions, language, religion, scientific achievements, and transnational cultural networks into foreign policy. This gap is particularly significant because the contemporary international environment increasingly rewards forms of influence that derive from legitimacy, attraction, identity, and narrative construction rather than from material capabilities alone (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013).

Building upon the expanding literature on soft power, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, strategic

narratives, and civilizational states, this article develops the concept of civilizational diplomacy as a distinct analytical framework for understanding the foreign policy behavior of historically rooted states operating within an emerging post-polar international order (Acharya, 2020:139-156) While cultural diplomacy has traditionally focused on promoting national culture abroad to enhance mutual understanding and improve international image, civilizational diplomacy encompasses a broader and more historically grounded process through which states strategically mobilize long-term civilizational assets—including language, literature, philosophy, religion, science, historical memory, and shared cultural spaces—to generate international legitimacy, strengthen regional partnerships, construct strategic narratives, and expand their diplomatic influence (Ang, Isar, & Mar, 2015).

The article addresses three principal research questions. First, what are the defining characteristics of the emerging post-polar world order, and how does it differ from existing concepts such as multipolarity, non-polarity, and multiplexity? Second, how do these structural transformations reshape the foreign policy strategies of civilizational states by increasing the importance of identity, legitimacy, and cultural influence? Third, how has Iran incorporated civilizational diplomacy into its foreign policy to enhance regional influence, strengthen neighborhood diplomacy, expand transregional cultural networks, and construct alternative international narratives?

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative and interpretive research design combining conceptual analysis with a single-case study approach. Drawing upon scholarship in international relations, foreign policy analysis, cultural diplomacy, civilizational state theory, and constructivist approaches to international politics, it develops an analytical framework linking macro-level transformations in the international system with changes in state behavior (George & Bennett, 2005; Gerring, 2017) Rather than testing causal hypotheses through quantitative analysis, the article seeks to develop a theoretically informed explanation of how civilizational resources may be transformed into instruments of diplomatic influence under conditions of increasing systemic complexity and uncertainty.

The central argument advanced in this article is that civilizational diplomacy constitutes an increasingly important dimension of foreign policy in the emerging post-polar era. As authority becomes more

dispersed and international legitimacy increasingly depends upon attraction, credibility, historical depth, and normative influence, states possessing rich civilizational traditions are presented with new opportunities to complement conventional diplomacy through the strategic mobilization of cultural and historical resources (Acharya, 2018). The Iranian experience illustrates how historical memory, literary heritage, philosophical traditions, linguistic influence, scientific achievements, and cultural connectivity may function as long-term diplomatic assets that contribute to regional cooperation, people-to-people engagement, strategic narrative construction, and international legitimacy within an increasingly fragmented and pluralistic world order.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. The next section reviews the principal theoretical debates concerning the transformation of the international system and develops the concepts of post-polarity and civilizational diplomacy. The subsequent section examines Iran's experience as an illustrative case of civilizational diplomacy, emphasizing the mobilization of historical and cultural resources within contemporary foreign policy. The final sections discuss the broader theoretical implications of the proposed framework for the study of international relations and foreign policy in the emerging post-polar world order while identifying avenues for future comparative research.

2. Debating the Emerging International Order

The transformation of the international system since the end of the Cold War has generated one of the most significant theoretical debates in contemporary International Relations. The erosion of unipolarity, the diffusion of economic and technological capabilities, the resurgence of major-power competition, the growing influence of regional organizations, and the increasing agency of non-state actors have challenged long-standing assumptions regarding the organization and distribution of international power (Ikenberry, 2018:7-23). Consequently, scholars have proposed competing conceptualizations—including multipolarity, non-polarity, multiplexity, network governance, and post-Western international order—to explain the evolving architecture of global politics (Haass, 2008).

One influential body of scholarship interprets current developments as reflecting the gradual crisis of the liberal international order established

after the Second World War. According to this perspective, the institutions, norms, and leadership structures that underpinned the post-1945 order are increasingly contested by both established and rising powers. Economic globalization has redistributed productive capacity toward Asia, while political polarization within many Western democracies, declining confidence in multilateral institutions, and the emergence of alternative financial and security arrangements have weakened the cohesion of the liberal order (Lake, Martin, & Risse, 2021: 225-257). Rather than witnessing the complete collapse of liberal internationalism, many scholars argue that the international system is experiencing a gradual transition toward a more pluralistic and contested order in which multiple institutional arrangements coexist (Cooley & Nexon, 2020).

A second perspective emphasizes the emergence of multipolarity. Classical realist scholars contend that the redistribution of military and economic capabilities is creating several major centers of power, including the United States, China, the European Union, India, and Russia (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2016; Walt, 2018). From this viewpoint, international stability will increasingly depend upon the management of strategic competition among these major actors. However, critics argue that conventional multipolarity retains a state-centric understanding of power and therefore underestimates the extent to which authority has become dispersed across technological networks, multinational corporations, international institutions, financial markets, and transnational civil society (Castells, 2010; Slaughter, 2004).

A third body of literature advances the concept of a multiplex world, most prominently developed by Acharya (2014, 2017, 2018). Rather than envisioning a hierarchical system dominated by a single hegemon or a limited number of great powers, the multiplex perspective portrays contemporary global politics as resembling a multiplex cinema in which multiple actors, institutions, regions, civilizations, and normative frameworks coexist simultaneously. Authority is increasingly distributed across overlapping layers of governance operating at global, regional, national, and local levels. This framework recognizes the growing importance of regional organizations, middle powers, cities, private corporations, epistemic communities, and civil society organizations in shaping international outcomes.

Parallel developments within globalization studies further reinforce this interpretation. Castells (2010)

argues that the emergence of the network society has fundamentally altered the nature of power by embedding political, economic, and cultural interactions within global information networks. Similarly, Slaughter (2004) demonstrates that governance increasingly occurs through interconnected networks of regulators, judges, ministries, universities, and technical agencies rather than solely through formal diplomatic institutions. Farrell and Newman (2019) extend this analysis by introducing the concept of weaponized interdependence, illustrating how states exploit their positions within global technological and financial networks to pursue strategic objectives. These studies collectively suggest that international influence increasingly derives from network centrality and technological connectivity in addition to conventional material capabilities.

Recent scholarship has also highlighted the growing significance of strategic narratives, information ecosystems, and digital diplomacy. In an era characterized by social media, artificial intelligence, big data, and digital communication, international influence depends increasingly upon the ability to shape perceptions, construct persuasive narratives, and establish normative legitimacy (Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013; Pamment, 2016). Consequently, diplomacy now extends well beyond traditional state-to-state interactions to encompass digital platforms, global media, transnational advocacy networks, universities, think tanks, and cultural institutions. Power has therefore become simultaneously material, ideational, informational, and relational.

Collectively, these perspectives illuminate important dimensions of contemporary international politics. Nevertheless, each retains certain analytical limitations. Liberal-order scholarship remains closely tied to the evolution of Western-led institutions; multipolarity continues to privilege state-centric distributions of material capabilities; and network approaches often pay insufficient attention to historical identity and cultural legitimacy as independent sources of international influence (Badie, 2018). None fully captures the increasingly fluid interaction among geopolitical competition, technological transformation, cultural influence, civilizational identity, and transnational governance that characterizes contemporary world politics.

Accordingly, this article argues that the concept of the post-polar world order offers a broader analytical framework capable of integrating these diverse

developments. Rather than representing simply another distribution of power among great powers, post-polarity reflects a qualitative transformation in which authority is continuously redistributed across states, regional organizations, multinational corporations, technology firms, financial institutions, international organizations, digital platforms, cities, civil society, and civilizational communities. In this environment, power is no longer defined solely by military strength or economic size but increasingly encompasses technological innovation, scientific capacity, cultural attraction, historical legitimacy, institutional credibility, and the ability to construct persuasive strategic narratives (Nye, 2004, 2011; Winter, 2015). Understanding this multidimensional transformation provides the foundation for explaining why civilizational diplomacy has become an increasingly significant instrument of foreign policy in the twenty-first century.

2.1 The Post-Polar World Order: A Conceptual Framework

While concepts such as unipolarity, bipolarity, and multipolarity have long structured debates on the distribution of power in international relations, they remain primarily concerned with the relative capabilities of sovereign states (Wohlforth, 1999). These frameworks assume that the international system can be understood through the configuration of major powers whose military and economic capabilities determine systemic stability. Although these concepts continue to provide valuable insights into strategic competition among great powers, they are increasingly insufficient for explaining an international environment in which influence is simultaneously exercised by states, international organizations, multinational corporations, technology companies, financial institutions, digital platforms, cities, epistemic communities, and transnational civil society networks (Castells, 2010; Slaughter, 2004; Farrell & Newman, 2019).

The contemporary international system is characterized by a diffusion of authority across multiple interconnected domains rather than by the emergence of a new stable polarity. Military power remains indispensable, yet it now operates alongside technological innovation, economic resilience, scientific capacity, digital infrastructure, financial connectivity, information management, cultural legitimacy, and normative influence as complementary sources of international power (Buzan & Lawson, 2015). Consequently, understanding international order requires moving

beyond traditional measures of material capability toward a multidimensional conception of power that incorporates ideational, technological, institutional, and civilizational resources (Acharya, 2018; Badie, 2018).

Accordingly, this article defines the post-polar world order as an international system in which power is no longer organized around stable geopolitical poles but is continuously redistributed among multiple state and non-state actors across political, economic, technological, cultural, informational, scientific, and civilizational domains. Rather than replacing unipolarity with multipolarity, post-polarity represents a qualitative transformation in international power itself. Power becomes relational, networked, adaptive, and multidimensional rather than being concentrated in fixed centers of authority (Castells, 2010; Slaughter, 2004).

Unlike multipolarity, which primarily measures the number of dominant states, post-polarity emphasizes the diversification of actors capable of shaping international outcomes. Governments continue to occupy central positions, but multinational corporations increasingly influence technological standards and global supply chains; digital platforms shape political communication and public opinion; universities and research institutions generate scientific authority; international financial institutions regulate capital flows; cities participate directly in climate governance; and transnational civil society organizations influence norm diffusion and humanitarian agendas (Keohane & Nye, 2012; Zürn, 2018). International politics therefore evolves through interactions among multiple overlapping governance networks rather than through hierarchical relations among a limited number of great powers.

The post-polar framework also recognizes that power has become multidimensional. Classical realist approaches privilege military capability as the principal determinant of international influence (Mearsheimer, 2001; Waltz, 1979). Contemporary international politics, however, demonstrates that states increasingly compete across economic, technological, informational, financial, cultural, environmental, scientific, and normative domains simultaneously (Nye, 2011). Technological leadership in artificial intelligence, semiconductor production, cyber capabilities, digital infrastructure, and biotechnology has become as strategically significant as conventional military strength (Farrell & Newman, 2019). Likewise, the ability to establish international

standards, shape regulatory regimes, influence global media narratives, and generate scientific innovation constitutes an increasingly important dimension of national power (Acharya, 2018; Castells, 2010).

A second defining characteristic of post-polarity is the coexistence of cooperation and competition, often described as coopetition. States increasingly cooperate within one policy domain while simultaneously competing in others. Strategic rivals may collaborate on climate governance, pandemic preparedness, nuclear non-proliferation, maritime security, or financial stability while remaining competitors in trade, technology, cybersecurity, or regional geopolitics (Keohane & Martin, 2003; Nye, 2017). Such overlapping relationships challenge binary distinctions between allies and adversaries that characterized earlier understandings of international politics.

Third, networked governance increasingly complements traditional hierarchical diplomacy. International cooperation now occurs through interconnected networks linking governments, international organizations, universities, think tanks, multinational corporations, scientific communities, municipalities, philanthropic foundations, and civil society organizations (Slaughter, 2004). Global governance therefore depends less upon centralized authority than upon coordination across multiple institutional layers operating simultaneously at local, national, regional, and global levels (Zürn, 2018). These governance arrangements are particularly evident in areas such as climate change, public health, digital regulation, financial oversight, and scientific collaboration.

Fourth, post-polarity recognizes the growing importance of identity and civilization in international politics. Although globalization has intensified economic integration, it has also stimulated renewed attention to historical memory, religion, language, culture, and civilizational identity as sources of political legitimacy and foreign policy orientation (Katzenstein, 2010). States increasingly employ historical narratives and cultural heritage not merely

to preserve national identity but also to justify international roles, cultivate regional partnerships, and construct alternative visions of global order. Civilizational narratives have consequently become important components of strategic communication and international legitimacy (Winter, 2015).

Finally, the post-polar international system is characterized by persistent systemic uncertainty. Rather than moving toward a stable equilibrium, contemporary international politics is marked by continuous adaptation, overlapping crises, technological disruption, shifting coalitions, and contested normative authority (Buzan & Lawson, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic, accelerating digital transformation, intensifying geopolitical rivalry, supply-chain vulnerabilities, and climate-related challenges have collectively demonstrated that global governance increasingly requires flexible and adaptive forms of cooperation capable of responding to complex transnational risks (Patrick, 2021).

Taken together, these characteristics suggest that post-polarity should not be interpreted simply as another stage in the evolution of polarity theory. Instead, it represents a broader analytical framework that incorporates material capabilities alongside technological innovation, institutional connectivity, strategic narratives, cultural legitimacy, scientific capacity, and civilizational identity. This multidimensional understanding of power provides the theoretical foundation for explaining why diplomacy itself is evolving beyond conventional interstate negotiations toward increasingly diverse forms of public, cultural, scientific, digital, and civilizational engagement.

Most importantly, the post-polar framework helps explain why civilizational diplomacy has acquired growing strategic significance. As international legitimacy increasingly depends upon attraction, credibility, historical continuity, and narrative influence, states possessing rich civilizational traditions enjoy opportunities to complement material capabilities with long-term cultural and intellectual resources. In such an environment, diplomacy is no

Table 1. *Multipolarity, Multiplexity, and Post-Polarity*

Dimension	Multipolarity	Multiplexity	Post-Polarity
Main actors	Great powers	Multiple actors	State & non-state networks
Power	Material	Plural	Multidimensional
Governance	Balance of power	Multiple institutions	Networked governance
Identity	Secondary	Moderate	Central
Civilizational role	Limited	Present	Strategic

longer confined to negotiations among governments but increasingly involves the mobilization of historical memory, education, science, heritage, language, religion, and transnational cultural networks. The following section therefore develops the concept of civilizational diplomacy as an adaptive foreign policy strategy suited to the structural conditions of the emerging post-polar world order.

2.2 Civilizational States and Foreign Policy

The growing scholarly interest in civilizational states reflects broader transformations in the international system and the limitations of conventional state-centric models for explaining contemporary foreign policy behavior. While the modern nation-state derives its legitimacy primarily from territorial sovereignty, constitutional institutions, and citizenship, the civilizational state claims an additional source of legitimacy grounded in historical continuity, cultural heritage, collective memory, and enduring civilizational traditions (Coker, 2019). It presents itself not merely as a political entity established within the modern international system but as the contemporary expression of a civilization whose historical development transcends modern state boundaries.

Although the concept remains contested, it has become increasingly influential in recent debates concerning the changing character of global politics (Kavalski & Cho, 2018). Some scholars view the civilizational state as an analytical category that explains how historically rooted societies mobilize cultural traditions and historical narratives to shape both domestic legitimacy and international behavior (Acharya, 2020). Others argue that the concept is primarily a political discourse through which governments seek to legitimize alternative models of governance and challenge Western liberal conceptions of international order (Coker, 2019). Despite these differences, there is broad agreement that historical identity, culture, and civilizational memory have become increasingly significant components of contemporary foreign policy.

Constructivist approaches to International Relations provide an important theoretical foundation for understanding this development. Rather than viewing state behavior as determined exclusively by material capabilities, constructivist scholars emphasize that interests are socially constructed through shared identities, norms, historical experiences, and collective understandings (Wendt, 1999; Katzenstein, 1996).

Foreign policy therefore reflects not only calculations of power but also interpretations of history, national identity, and civilizational purpose. Historical narratives influence how states define friends and adversaries, interpret threats, and identify appropriate roles within the international system (Hopf, 2002; Reus-Smit, 1999).

Within the emerging post-polar international environment, these ideational dimensions of foreign policy acquire greater strategic significance. As international legitimacy increasingly depends upon attraction, credibility, and narrative influence, states possessing rich historical traditions enjoy opportunities to transform civilizational resources into diplomatic assets (Nye, 2011). Consequently, civilizational identity should not be understood simply as a cultural characteristic but also as a strategic resource that may complement conventional military, economic, and technological capabilities.

Several contemporary powers increasingly employ civilizational narratives to define their international roles. China presents itself as the heir to one of the world's oldest continuous civilizations, emphasizing Confucian traditions, historical continuity, and concepts such as the "community of shared future for mankind" in its diplomatic discourse (Callahan, 2013; Zhao, 2015). India similarly draws upon ancient philosophical traditions, pluralistic cultural heritage, and the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* ("the world is one family") to reinforce its international identity and public diplomacy (Hall, 2017; Malone & Mukherjee, 2010). Russia, meanwhile, has increasingly framed its foreign policy through narratives emphasizing Eurasian civilization, Orthodox Christianity, and historical continuity, particularly in response to perceived Western dominance (Laruelle, 2008; Tsygankov, 2019). Although these countries differ substantially in political institutions, strategic priorities, and regional contexts, each illustrates how civilizational identity can become intertwined with foreign policy objectives.

The increasing prominence of civilizational narratives also reflects dissatisfaction with universalist assumptions that characterized much post-Cold War international relations theory. Scholars associated with post-Western International Relations argue that contemporary global politics is becoming increasingly pluralistic, with multiple historical experiences, normative traditions, and political models coexisting within the international system (Shani, 2008). Rather than converging toward a single liberal model of

modernity, states increasingly emphasize indigenous traditions, historical experiences, and civilizational diversity as legitimate foundations for international engagement (Acharya, 2018).

This evolution has significant implications for foreign policy analysis. Traditional approaches often conceptualize diplomacy primarily as negotiations among sovereign governments pursuing material interests. However, diplomacy in the twenty-first century increasingly involves the management of identity, historical memory, cultural legitimacy, and international narratives (Bjola & Kornprobst, 2018). Educational exchanges, scientific cooperation, heritage preservation, museum diplomacy, language promotion, academic mobility, and cultural institutions have become integral components of long-term diplomatic strategy because they shape perceptions, generate trust, and strengthen interpersonal networks beyond formal political negotiations (Melissen, 2005).

For civilizational states, these instruments are particularly valuable because they draw upon historical resources that cannot easily be replicated by material power alone. Literature, philosophy, architecture, religion, language, artistic traditions, scientific heritage, and collective memory represent forms of symbolic capital that contribute to international legitimacy through attraction rather than coercion (Bourdieu, 1986). When integrated into coherent foreign policy strategies, such resources enhance soft power, strengthen regional partnerships, facilitate intercultural dialogue, and support long-term relationship building.

Nevertheless, civilizational identity should not be romanticized as an inherently benign source of international cooperation. Historical narratives may also become instruments of exclusion, geopolitical competition, or ideological contestation if employed to justify exceptionalism or hierarchical claims among civilizations (Said, 1978). Effective civilizational diplomacy therefore requires an inclusive understanding of civilization grounded in dialogue, mutual respect, and cultural exchange rather than civilizational competition. As UNESCO has consistently emphasized, cultural heritage and intercultural dialogue contribute most effectively to international peace when they promote shared understanding rather than reinforce political divisions.

Accordingly, this article conceptualizes the civilizational state not as an alternative to the nation-

state but as a historically embedded political actor whose foreign policy draws simultaneously upon material capabilities, institutional capacity, and long-term civilizational resources. Within the emerging post-polar world order, these resources increasingly function as complementary instruments of international influence, providing the foundation for what this study defines as civilizational diplomacy. The following section develops this concept by demonstrating how it extends existing theories of cultural diplomacy and soft power into a broader strategic framework linking history, identity, legitimacy, and foreign policy.

2.3 From Cultural Diplomacy to Civilizational Diplomacy

The expanding importance of culture, identity, and historical legitimacy in international relations has significantly broadened scholarly understandings of diplomacy beyond traditional interstate negotiations. Contemporary diplomacy increasingly encompasses public engagement, educational cooperation, scientific exchange, digital communication, heritage preservation, and cultural interaction as integral components of foreign policy (Cull, 2019). These developments reflect a broader transformation in which influence depends not only upon coercive capabilities but also upon attraction, legitimacy, credibility, and the ability to establish durable relationships across societies (Nye, 2004, 2011). Within this evolving diplomatic landscape, cultural diplomacy has emerged as one of the principal instruments through which states seek to project national identity and cultivate international goodwill. Although definitions vary, cultural diplomacy is generally understood as the exchange of ideas, values, traditions, arts, language, education, and heritage with foreign publics in order to strengthen mutual understanding and support broader foreign policy objectives (Cummings, 2003; Goff, 2020). Unlike propaganda, which primarily seeks persuasion through one-way communication, cultural diplomacy is most effective when it encourages reciprocal engagement, long-term dialogue, and sustained interpersonal relationships (Ang, Isar, & Mar, 2015).

The literature on cultural diplomacy is closely connected to Joseph Nye's influential concept of soft power, defined as the capacity to shape the preferences and behavior of others through attraction rather than coercion or material inducements (Nye, 1990, 2004, 2011). According to Nye, culture, political values, and foreign policy credibility constitute the principal sources of soft power because they generate voluntary

acceptance rather than compliance based on force or economic pressure. Subsequent scholarship has expanded this framework by demonstrating that soft power operates through multiple channels, including higher education, scientific cooperation, international broadcasting, cultural industries, tourism, sports diplomacy, museums, and people-to-people exchanges (Arndt, 2005; Pamment, 2016).

Nevertheless, important conceptual limitations remain. Soft power primarily explains why attraction matters, while cultural diplomacy focuses on how cultural resources are communicated internationally. Neither concept fully captures the strategic significance of long-term civilizational continuity, historical memory, philosophical traditions, religious heritage, scientific legacies, and transnational cultural spaces as integrated foundations of foreign policy. Most existing approaches continue to examine culture as one instrument among many rather than recognizing civilization itself as a comprehensive strategic resource capable of shaping international legitimacy across generations (Winter, 2015).

Recent scholarship on strategic narratives further demonstrates that diplomacy increasingly involves competition over historical interpretation, identity construction, and normative legitimacy (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, & Roselle, 2013). States seek not only to influence immediate policy preferences but also to shape broader understandings of international order by presenting persuasive accounts of history, development, justice, and global governance. Narrative construction therefore becomes an important dimension of international influence because it connects past experience with contemporary political objectives while projecting visions of future international cooperation.

These developments suggest that the analytical boundaries of cultural diplomacy should be expanded. This article therefore introduces civilizational diplomacy as a broader strategic framework encompassing—but extending beyond—traditional cultural diplomacy. Rather than focusing exclusively on cultural promotion, civilizational diplomacy refers to the deliberate integration of historical continuity, collective memory, language, literature, philosophy, religion, scientific heritage, educational traditions, artistic achievements, and transnational civilizational networks into the formulation and implementation of foreign policy.

Accordingly, this study defines civilizational diplomacy as:

The strategic utilization of a state's civilizational heritage—including its history, language, literature, religion, philosophy, scientific traditions, artistic achievements, collective memory, cultural heritage, and transnational civilizational networks—to advance foreign policy objectives, strengthen regional legitimacy, enhance soft power, construct strategic narratives, deepen people-to-people engagement, and contribute to international cooperation within the emerging post-polar world order.

This definition highlights several important distinctions between civilizational diplomacy and existing concepts.

First, civilizational diplomacy emphasizes historical continuity rather than short-term reputation management. While public diplomacy frequently responds to contemporary political circumstances, civilizational diplomacy derives legitimacy from long historical experiences that extend across generations (Winter, 2015).

Second, civilizational diplomacy integrates multiple dimensions of national identity. Rather than treating culture as an isolated diplomatic instrument, it combines language, religion, philosophy, literature, scientific achievements, architecture, education, and historical memory into a coherent foreign policy framework capable of generating long-term international credibility (Acharya, 2020).

Third, civilizational diplomacy places particular emphasis on shared civilizational spaces rather than exclusively national audiences. Historical interactions among neighboring societies frequently produce overlapping linguistic, intellectual, religious, and cultural traditions that transcend contemporary political borders. These shared civilizational spaces create opportunities for regional cooperation based upon common historical experiences rather than purely geopolitical calculations (Hall, 2017; Lewisohn, 1993).

Fourth, civilizational diplomacy is fundamentally relational. Its effectiveness depends not upon unilateral cultural projection but upon sustained dialogue, mutual recognition, educational exchange, collaborative research, heritage preservation, and long-term interpersonal trust. Universities, museums, libraries, research institutes, cultural foundations, scientific academies, cities, diaspora communities, and civil society organizations therefore become central actors alongside ministries of foreign affairs (Cull, 2019).

Fifth, civilizational diplomacy functions as a bridge between material and ideational power. Military strength, economic capability, and technological innovation remain indispensable components of national power. However, their effectiveness increasingly depends upon legitimacy, credibility, cultural attraction, and the capacity to construct persuasive narratives that resonate with diverse international audiences (Nye, 2011; Miskimmon et al., 2013).

Importantly, civilizational diplomacy should not be interpreted as a substitute for conventional diplomacy. Rather, it complements political, economic, security, scientific, environmental, and digital diplomacy by providing a deeper reservoir of symbolic legitimacy and historical continuity. States possessing rich civilizational traditions may therefore employ civilizational diplomacy to reinforce regional partnerships, strengthen neighborhood relations,

facilitate conflict management, promote educational cooperation, and contribute to more inclusive forms of global governance without abandoning traditional instruments of statecraft. In this sense, cultural diplomacy represents one operational dimension of civilizational diplomacy, while civilizational diplomacy functions as a broader strategic framework linking identity, history, culture, and foreign policy.

Within the emerging post-polar international order, where authority is increasingly dispersed and legitimacy has become a central dimension of international influence, civilizational diplomacy represents an adaptive foreign policy strategy that enables historically rooted states to transform cultural and intellectual resources into enduring diplomatic assets. The following analytical framework operationalizes this concept by explaining the mechanisms through which structural changes in the international system encourage the adoption of civilizational diplomacy.

Table 2. Comparing Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, Cultural Diplomacy, and Civilizational Diplomacy

Dimension	Soft Power	Public Diplomacy	Cultural Diplomacy	Civilizational Diplomacy
Primary resource	Attraction	Communication	Culture & arts	Civilizational heritage
Main objective	Influence preferences	Engage foreign publics	Mutual understanding	Strategic legitimacy & long-term influence
Key actors	State & society	Foreign ministries	Cultural institutions	State, academia, religious/cultural institutions, civil society
Main instruments	Values, policies	Media, exchanges	Arts, language, education	History, language, religion, philosophy, science, heritage
Time horizon	Medium–long	Short–medium	Long	Very long/intergenerational
Analytical focus	Power	Communication	Culture	Identity + history + strategy

2.4 Analytical Framework

This article develops an analytical model linking structural transformation in the international system with foreign policy adaptation by civilizational states (Buzan & Lawson, 2015).

The model assumes that structural changes associated with the post-polar world order increase the strategic importance of cultural legitimacy, historical continuity, and civilizational identity. These developments encourage civilizational states to employ civilizational diplomacy as a mechanism for transforming cultural resources into diplomatic influence (Nye, 2008).

Within this framework, Iran serves as an illustrative case study. As one of the world's oldest continuous civilizations, Iran possesses extensive historical, linguistic, philosophical, literary, and religious resources that can be mobilized to strengthen neighborhood diplomacy, regional cooperation, narrative construction, and international cultural engagement (Wastnidge, 2015).

The following sections examine how these civilizational resources have increasingly become integrated into Iran's foreign policy in response to the opportunities and constraints of the emerging post-polar world order (Acharya, 2020).

Table 3. Analytical Framework

Stage	Content
Independent variable	Emergence of the post-polar world order
Intervening variable	Civilizational resources (history, language, religion, heritage, science)
Policy mechanism	Civilizational diplomacy
Foreign-policy outcomes	Soft power, legitimacy, regional partnerships, strategic narratives
Systemic outcome	Inclusive cooperation in a post-polar order

3. Iran's Civilizational Diplomacy in the Emerging Post-Polar World Order

3.1 Iran as a Civilizational State

Iran occupies a distinctive position within the emerging post-polar international order because of its long historical continuity as one of the world's oldest civilizations. Unlike states whose national identity is primarily rooted in the modern international system, Iran's political and cultural identity has developed through millennia of civilizational experience. Successive imperial traditions, the Persian language, Islamic intellectual heritage, philosophical schools, literary achievements, and artistic traditions have collectively shaped a civilizational identity that transcends contemporary political boundaries. (Huntington, 1996).

This historical continuity provides Iran with sources of legitimacy and influence that extend beyond conventional measures of national power. Iranian civilization has contributed significantly to the development of philosophy, medicine, mathematics, architecture, literature, and political thought across West Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, and parts of the Mediterranean world. Consequently, Iran's foreign policy possesses cultural and historical resources that many modern states do not. (Nye, 2004).

Within the framework of the post-polar world order, such civilizational assets constitute strategic resources rather than merely historical legacies. As international influence increasingly depends upon attraction, legitimacy, and narrative construction in addition to military and economic capabilities, civilizational identity becomes an important component of foreign policy. (Nye, 2008).

Accordingly, Iran may be understood not simply as a nation-state pursuing geopolitical interests but also as a civilizational state seeking to project historical continuity, cultural confidence, and intellectual traditions through diplomatic engagement. (Acharya, 2020).

3.2 Civilizational Resources in Iranian Foreign Policy

The effectiveness of civilizational diplomacy depends upon the availability and strategic mobilization of civilizational resources. Iran possesses an extensive repertoire of such resources that can support international engagement across multiple diplomatic arenas. (Scott-Smith, 2018). The Persian language remains one of the principal

carriers of Iranian civilization. For centuries it functioned as a language of administration, literature, diplomacy, and scholarship across large parts of Asia. Today it continues to connect intellectual communities and cultural institutions throughout the broader Persianate world. (Acharya & Buzan, 2009).

Classical Persian literature represents another significant source of diplomatic influence. The universal themes found in the works of Ferdowsi, Saadi, Hafez, Rumi, Omar Khayyam, and other scholars continue to resonate across diverse societies and provide opportunities for intercultural dialogue founded upon shared ethical and humanistic values. (Nye, 2008)

Iran's scientific and philosophical heritage likewise contributes to its international cultural standing. The achievements of medieval Iranian scholars in medicine, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, and the natural sciences constitute an enduring component of global intellectual history. Contemporary scientific cooperation, academic exchanges, and university partnerships therefore represent natural extensions of Iran's civilizational diplomacy. (Nye, 2004).

Intangible cultural heritage further strengthens Iran's diplomatic resources. Festivals such as Nowruz, traditional arts, architecture, music, handicrafts, culinary traditions, and religious pilgrimage collectively reinforce cultural connections among neighboring societies and contribute to people-to-people diplomacy beyond formal governmental relations. (Melissen, 2005).

Taken together, these resources provide Iran with substantial opportunities to transform historical and cultural capital into diplomatic influence within an increasingly interconnected international environment. (Wastnidge, 2015).

3.3 Civilizational Diplomacy as a Foreign Policy Strategy

The transition toward a post-polar world order has expanded the importance of non-coercive instruments of foreign policy. Under conditions where legitimacy, narratives, and social connectivity increasingly shape international influence, civilizational diplomacy complements conventional diplomacy by emphasizing shared historical experiences and cultural cooperation. (Ikenberry, 2018).

Iran's civilizational diplomacy operates through several interconnected mechanisms. Educational exchanges strengthen academic cooperation and

cultivate long-term interpersonal relationships. Cultural institutions promote Persian language education, artistic collaboration, and heritage preservation. Scientific diplomacy facilitates research partnerships in areas of mutual interest. Religious and intercultural dialogue encourages communication among diverse communities, while public diplomacy employs media and cultural initiatives to project alternative narratives concerning regional and international affairs. (Melissen, 2005).

An important feature of this approach is its emphasis on neighborhood diplomacy. Countries sharing historical, linguistic, religious, or cultural ties with Iran constitute natural partners for civilizational engagement. Rather than relying exclusively upon geopolitical calculations, civilizational diplomacy seeks to reinforce mutual trust through recognition of common historical experiences and cultural affinities. (Acharya, 2020).

Within this framework, cultural cooperation should not be interpreted merely as symbolic activity. Instead, it becomes a strategic instrument that contributes to conflict management, regional confidence-building, economic cooperation, tourism, educational exchange, and long-term diplomatic resilience. (Melissen, 2005).

The effectiveness of this strategy ultimately depends upon the degree to which cultural and civilizational resources are integrated with broader foreign policy objectives. In the emerging post-polar world order, successful diplomacy increasingly requires states to combine material capabilities with cultural legitimacy, historical credibility, and attractive narratives. Iran's experience illustrates both the opportunities and the practical challenges of pursuing such an integrated diplomatic strategy. (Acharya, 2014).

4. Opportunities and Constraints of Civilizational Diplomacy in the Emerging Post-Polar World Order

4.1 New Opportunities in a Post-Polar International Environment

The emergence of a post-polar world order has created new opportunities for states to diversify the instruments through which they pursue foreign policy objectives. As power becomes increasingly dispersed among multiple actors and domains, influence depends not only on military and economic capabilities but also on cultural legitimacy, technological innovation, knowledge production, and the ability to shape

international narratives. In such an environment, civilizational diplomacy has become an increasingly valuable strategic resource. (Buzan & Lawson, 2015).

For Iran, the post-polar transition provides opportunities to complement traditional diplomacy with its rich civilizational heritage. Its historical experience, cultural diversity, philosophical traditions, and intellectual legacy constitute sources of attraction that can facilitate dialogue with neighboring societies and broader regional communities. Rather than competing exclusively through geopolitical means, Iran may employ its civilizational assets to expand educational cooperation, scientific partnerships, cultural exchanges, and people-to-people diplomacy. (Wastnidge, 2015).

Regional integration presents another important opportunity. Shared historical experiences and cultural traditions among countries in West Asia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and South Asia provide a foundation for cooperative initiatives in education, tourism, heritage preservation, environmental governance, and economic connectivity. Civilizational diplomacy may therefore contribute to strengthening regional trust while complementing conventional diplomatic negotiations. (Acharya, 2020).

Digital transformation has further expanded the scope of civilizational diplomacy. Digital platforms, virtual educational exchanges, online museums, artificial intelligence, social media, and digital archives enable states to communicate directly with international audiences at relatively low cost. These technological developments reduce dependence on traditional diplomatic channels and create new opportunities for projecting cultural narratives across national boundaries. (Nye, 2008).

4.2 Constraints and Challenges

Despite these opportunities, civilizational diplomacy operates within a complex international environment characterized by significant political and structural constraints. (Ikenberry, 2018).

The first challenge concerns geopolitical competition. Historical narratives and civilizational identities are frequently interpreted through the lens of strategic rivalry. Consequently, initiatives intended to promote cultural dialogue may be viewed by competing actors as instruments of geopolitical influence. Such perceptions can reduce trust and complicate regional cooperation. (Huntington, 1996).

Economic constraints also influence the effectiveness of civilizational diplomacy. Financial limitations, sanctions, and restrictions on academic, cultural, and technological exchanges may reduce opportunities for sustained international engagement. Since civilizational diplomacy relies heavily upon long-term educational, scientific, and cultural cooperation, interruptions in these activities diminish its effectiveness. (Wastnidge, 2015).

A third challenge arises from the increasingly competitive global information environment. States now operate within a digital ecosystem characterized by misinformation, competing narratives, algorithmic communication, and rapid dissemination of political content. Successfully communicating civilizational narratives therefore requires sophisticated digital public diplomacy supported by credible institutions, professional communication strategies, and sustained engagement with international audiences. (Melissen, 2005).

Institutional coordination represents another important constraint. Effective civilizational diplomacy requires cooperation among ministries, universities, cultural organizations, research institutes, museums, media organizations, municipalities, and civil society. Fragmented institutional structures may reduce policy coherence and limit the strategic utilization of civilizational resources. (Scott-Smith, 2018).

Finally, the effectiveness of civilizational diplomacy remains difficult to measure. Unlike military or economic power, cultural influence develops gradually through long-term processes of relationship-building, educational exchange, intellectual cooperation, and mutual trust. Developing appropriate indicators for evaluating civilizational diplomacy therefore remains an important challenge for both scholars and policymakers. (Nye, 2004).

4.3 Toward an Integrated Model of Civilizational Diplomacy

The preceding analysis suggests that civilizational diplomacy should not be understood simply as an alternative to conventional diplomacy. Rather, it represents a complementary dimension of foreign policy that integrates cultural resources with political, economic, technological, and security strategies. (Scott-Smith, 2018).

This article proposes an integrated analytical model consisting of five interrelated dimensions. (Acharya, 2020).

The first dimension is civilizational identity, encompassing historical continuity, language, religion, philosophy, literature, collective memory, and cultural heritage.

The second dimension comprises strategic resources, including cultural capital, scientific traditions, educational institutions, artistic production, and transnational intellectual networks.

The third dimension consists of diplomatic instruments, including cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, educational diplomacy, scientific diplomacy, digital diplomacy, and heritage diplomacy.

The fourth dimension concerns foreign policy outcomes, such as increased international legitimacy, enhanced soft power, strengthened regional partnerships, expanded people-to-people relations, and improved capacity for narrative construction.

The fifth dimension relates to systemic impact, whereby civilizational diplomacy contributes to more inclusive forms of regional cooperation and supports dialogue among diverse civilizations within the emerging post-polar world order.

The Iranian experience demonstrates that the effectiveness of civilizational diplomacy depends not only on the richness of a country's historical and cultural heritage but also on the capacity of state institutions to transform these civilizational resources into coherent, credible, and sustainable foreign policy initiatives. Accordingly, civilizational diplomacy should be viewed as a long-term strategic investment rather than a short-term instrument of image management. (Wastnidge, 2015).

5. Discussion: Civilizational Diplomacy and the Future of Foreign Policy in the Post-Polar World

The emergence of a post-polar world order requires a reconsideration of several core assumptions within the study of international relations. Traditional theories have generally explained state behavior through the distribution of military and economic capabilities, emphasizing polarity, balance of power, institutional cooperation, or strategic competition. While these approaches remain valuable, they provide only a partial explanation of contemporary international politics, where influence increasingly depends upon legitimacy, identity, knowledge production, technological capacity, and the ability to construct persuasive international narratives. (Buzan & Lawson, 2015).

This article has argued that the concept of the post-polar world order offers a broader analytical framework for understanding these transformations. Unlike multipolarity, which assumes the existence of several relatively stable centers of power, post-polarity describes an international system in which power is simultaneously dispersed across states, regional organizations, multinational corporations, technology firms, international institutions, civil society organizations, digital platforms, and transnational cultural networks. Under these conditions, international influence becomes increasingly relational, dynamic, and multidimensional. (Acharya, 2014).

The analysis also demonstrates that the growing importance of culture and identity has enhanced the diplomatic relevance of civilizational states. Their foreign policies are not determined solely by geopolitical interests but are also shaped by historical experience, cultural memory, philosophical traditions, and civilizational self-understanding. Consequently, foreign policy increasingly incorporates instruments designed to generate legitimacy and attraction rather than relying exclusively on coercive or material capabilities. (Acharya, 2020).

Within this context, the article proposes civilizational diplomacy as a broader analytical concept than either soft power or cultural diplomacy. Soft power explains the capacity to attract others through culture, values, and policies. Cultural diplomacy refers to one of the principal instruments through which that attraction is communicated internationally. Civilizational diplomacy, by contrast, integrates identity, history, language, religion, philosophy, scientific traditions, education, and cultural heritage into a comprehensive foreign policy strategy. It therefore represents a higher-order strategic framework rather than a single diplomatic instrument. (Scott-Smith, 2018).

The Iranian case illustrates how a civilizational state may mobilize historical and cultural resources to complement conventional diplomacy. Iran's experience demonstrates that civilizational assets—including its literary heritage, philosophical traditions, linguistic influence, scientific achievements, and rich cultural legacy—can strengthen regional dialogue, educational cooperation, scientific exchange, and people-to-people engagement. At the same time, the case study also shows that the effectiveness of civilizational diplomacy depends upon favorable political conditions, institutional coordination, sustained investment, and the credibility of diplomatic initiatives. (Wastnidge, 2015).

Although this article focuses on Iran, its analytical framework is not limited to a single country. Other civilizational states, including China and India, have similarly incorporated historical narratives, cultural heritage, and civilizational identity into their foreign policy strategies, albeit in different institutional and geopolitical contexts. The proposed framework therefore provides a basis for comparative research on how civilizational resources influence diplomacy across different regions and political systems. (Acharya & Buzan, 2009).

The study also contributes to ongoing debates regarding post-Western international relations and global governance. Rather than assuming that international order will be defined by the replacement of one hegemonic power with another, the concept of post-polarity suggests a more complex pattern of interaction characterized by overlapping authorities, multiple normative frameworks, and increasing civilizational diversity. In such an environment, diplomacy increasingly becomes a process of managing diversity, constructing shared narratives, and building cooperative networks among actors possessing different historical experiences and cultural traditions. (Ikenberry, 2018).

Finally, the article suggests that civilizational diplomacy should be understood as a long-term investment in international legitimacy rather than a short-term communication strategy. Its effectiveness depends upon consistency, institutional credibility, mutual respect, and genuine cultural engagement. States that successfully integrate civilizational resources with economic cooperation, scientific exchange, digital innovation, and multilateral diplomacy are likely to enjoy greater resilience and influence within the evolving post-polar international system. (Melissen, 2005).

6. Conclusion

This article has examined the relationship between structural transformation in the international system and the evolution of foreign policy through the concept of civilizational diplomacy. It has argued that the transition toward an emerging post-polar world order is reshaping the distribution of power and expanding the importance of non-material sources of international influence, including culture, identity, historical legitimacy, scientific knowledge, and strategic narratives.

To explain these developments, the article introduced the concept of the post-polar world order as an

analytical framework describing an international environment characterized by dispersed authority, multidimensional power, networked governance, and increasing civilizational diversity. Unlike traditional understandings of polarity, post-polarity recognizes that contemporary international politics is shaped simultaneously by states, international organizations, technological platforms, transnational networks, private actors, and civilizational communities.

Building upon this framework, the article developed the concept of civilizational diplomacy, defining it as the strategic use of a state's historical memory, cultural heritage, language, religion, philosophical traditions, scientific achievements, and transnational cultural networks to advance foreign policy objectives. The analysis demonstrated that civilizational diplomacy extends existing concepts of soft power and cultural diplomacy by integrating them into a broader strategic approach that links identity, legitimacy, and long-term foreign policy planning.

The Iranian case study illustrates how a civilizational state may employ its historical and cultural resources to strengthen regional engagement, educational and scientific cooperation, intercultural dialogue, and public diplomacy. At the same time, the analysis has shown that civilizational diplomacy is not a substitute for conventional diplomacy but rather a complementary strategy whose effectiveness depends upon coherent institutions, political credibility, and sustained international engagement.

The article makes three principal contributions to the literature. First, it advances the concept of the post-polar world order as a framework for understanding the contemporary transformation of international relations. Second, it develops civilizational diplomacy as a distinct analytical concept that expands existing theories of cultural diplomacy and soft power. Third, it demonstrates how these concepts may be applied empirically through the case of Iran while offering a framework that can also be tested in other civilizational states. Future research should examine the practice of civilizational diplomacy through comparative studies involving different regions and historical traditions. Comparative analyses of China, India, Iran, Türkiye, and other states with strong civilizational identities could further refine the theoretical model proposed in this article. Additional research should also investigate the impact of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, diaspora networks, and global knowledge systems on the evolution of civilizational diplomacy in the twenty-first century.

As the international system continues to evolve beyond traditional structures of polarity, diplomacy will increasingly depend not only on material capabilities but also on the ability of states to mobilize their civilizational resources responsibly, foster meaningful intercultural dialogue, and contribute to more inclusive and cooperative forms of global governance. In this context, civilizational diplomacy may emerge as one of the defining dimensions of foreign policy in the post-polar era.

7. References

1. Acharya, A. (2014). *The end of American world order*. Polity Press.
2. Acharya, A. (2017). After liberal hegemony: The advent of a multiplex world order. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 31(3), 271–285.
3. Acharya, A. (2018). *The end of American world order* (2nd ed.). Polity Press.
4. Acharya, A. (2020). The myth of the civilization state: Rising powers and the cultural challenge to world order. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 34(2), 139–156. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679420000200>
5. Acharya, A., & Buzan, B. (Eds.). (2009). *Non-Western international relations theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia*. Routledge.
6. Ang, I., Isar, Y. R., & Mar, P. (2015). Cultural diplomacy: Beyond the national interest? *International Journal of Cultural Policy*.
7. Arndt, R. T. (2005). *The first resort of kings: American cultural diplomacy in the twentieth century*. Potomac Books.
8. Badie, B. (2018). *New perspectives on the international order: No longer alone in this world*. Palgrave Macmillan.
9. Bjola, C., & Holmes, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Digital diplomacy: Theory and practice*. Routledge.
10. Bjola, C., & Kornprobst, M. (2018). *Understanding international diplomacy: Theory, practice and ethics* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
11. Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.
12. Brooks, S. G., & Wohlforth, W. C. (2016). *America abroad: The United States' global role in the 21st century*. Oxford University Press.
13. Buzan, B., & Lawson, G. (2015). *The global transformation: History, modernity and the making of international relations*. Cambridge University Press.

14. Callahan, W. A. (2013). *China dreams: 20 visions of the future*. Oxford University Press.
15. Castells, M. (2010). *The rise of the network society* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
16. Cho, Y.C. and Kavalski, E. (2015). Governing uncertainty in turbulent times. *Comparative Sociology*, 14(3), 429–444.
17. Coker, C. (2019). *The rise of the civilizational state*. Polity Press.
18. Cooley, A., & Nexon, D. H. (2020). *Exit from hegemony: The unraveling of the American global order*. Oxford University Press.
19. Cull, N. J. (2019). *Public diplomacy: Foundations for global engagement in the digital age*. Polity Press.
20. Cummings, M. C. (2003). *Cultural diplomacy and the United States government: A survey*. Center for Arts and Culture.
21. Dabashi, H. (2007). *Iran: A people interrupted*. The New Press.
22. Ehteshami, A., & Hinnebusch, R. (1997). *Syria and Iran: Middle powers in a penetrated regional system*. Routledge.
23. Enayat, Hadi (2017) *Driving Culture in Iran: Law and Society on the Roads of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, *Iranian Studies*, 50(2), 323-326
24. Farrell, H., & Newman, A. L. (2019). Weaponized interdependence: How global economic networks shape state coercion. *International Security*, 44(1), 42–79.
25. George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*. MIT Press.
26. Gerring, J. (2017). *Case study research: Principles and practices* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
27. Goff, P. M. (Ed.). (2020). *The Routledge handbook of public diplomacy* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
28. Grigor, T. (2021). *The Persian revival: The imperialism of the copy in Iranian and Parsi architecture*. Penn State University Press.
29. Haass, R. N. (2008). The age of nonpolarity: What will follow U.S. dominance. *Foreign Affairs*, 87(3), 44–56.
30. Hall, I. (2017). *Modi and the reinvention of Indian foreign policy*. Bristol University Press.
31. Haug, S., & Roychoudhury, S. (2023). Civilizational exceptionalism in international affairs: Making sense of Indian and Turkish claims. *International Affairs*, 99(2), 531–549.
32. Hopf, T. (2002). *Social construction of international politics: Identities and foreign policies, 1955 and 1999*. Cornell University Press.
33. Hunter, S. T. (2010). *Iran's foreign policy in the post-Soviet era: Resisting the new international order*. Praeger.
34. Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. Simon & Schuster.
35. Hurrell, A. (2007). *On global order: Power, values, and the constitution of international society*. Oxford University Press.
36. Ikenberry, G. J. (2018). The end of liberal international order? *International Affairs*, 94(1), 7–23. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix241>
37. Katzenstein, P. J. (Ed.). (1996). *The culture of national security: Norms and identity in world politics*. Columbia University Press.
38. Katzenstein, P. J. (Ed.). (2010). *Civilizations in world politics: Plural and pluralist perspectives*. Routledge.
39. Keohane, R. O., & Martin, L. L. (2003). Institutional theory as a research program. In C. Elman & M. F. Elman (Eds.), *Progress in international relations theory* (pp. 71–107). MIT Press.
40. Keohane, R. O., & Nye, J. S., Jr. (2012). *Power and interdependence* (4th ed.). Pearson.
41. Khanna, P. (2019). *The future is Asian: Commerce, conflict, and culture in the 21st century*. Simon & Schuster.
42. Krauthammer, C. (1990/1991). The unipolar moment. *Foreign Affairs*, 70(1), 23–33.
43. Kupchan, C. A. (2012). *No one's world: The West, the rising rest, and the coming global turn*. Oxford University Press.
44. Lake, D. A., Martin, L. L., & Risse, T. (2021). Challenges to the liberal order: Reflections on international organization. *International Organization*, 75(2), 225–257.
45. Laruelle, M. (2008). *Russian Eurasianism: An ideology of empire*. Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
46. Lewisohn, L. (Ed.). (1993). *Classical Persian Sufism: From its origins to Rumi*. Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications.
47. Mahbubani, K. (2018). *Has the West lost it? A provocation*. Penguin.
48. Malone, D. M., & Mukherjee, R. (2010). *India and the emerging world order*. International Affairs.
49. Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics*. W. W. Norton.

50. Mearsheimer, J. J. (2019). Bound to fail: The rise and fall of the liberal international order. *International Security*, 43(4), 7–50.
51. Melissen, J. (Ed.). (2005). *The new public diplomacy: Soft power in international relations*. Palgrave Macmillan.
52. Milani, A. (2008). *Eminent Persians: The men and women who made modern Iran, 1941–1979* (Vols. 1–2). Syracuse University Press.
53. Miskimmon, A., O’Loughlin, B., & Roselle, L. (2013). *Strategic narratives: Communication power and the new world order*. Routledge.
54. Nye, J. S., Jr. (1990). Soft power. *Foreign Policy*, 80, 153–171. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148580>
55. Nye, J. S., Jr. (2004). Soft power: The means to success in world politics. *PublicAffairs*.
56. Nye, J. S., Jr. (2008). Public diplomacy and soft power. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 94–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311699>
57. Nye, J. S., Jr. (2011). The future of power. *PublicAffairs*.
58. Nye, J. S., Jr. (2017). Will the liberal order survive? *Foreign Affairs*, 96(1), 10–16.
59. Pamment, J. (2016). *British public diplomacy and soft power: Diplomatic influence and the digital revolution*. Palgrave Macmillan.
60. Patrick, S. (2017). *The sovereignty wars: Reconciling America with the world*. Brookings Institution Press.
61. Patrick, S. (2021). The international order isn’t dying. It’s transforming.
62. Ramazani, R. K. (2004). *Iran’s foreign policy: Both North and South*. University Press of Florida.
63. Reus-Smit, C. (1999). *The moral purpose of the state: Culture, social identity, and institutional rationality in international relations*. Princeton University Press.
64. Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
65. Scott-Smith, G. (2018). Cultural diplomacy. In C. M. Constantinou, P. Kerr, & P. Sharp (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of diplomacy*, SAGE Publications.
66. Shani, G. (2008). Toward a post-Western IR: The Umma, Khalsa Panth, and critical international relations theory. *International Studies Review*.
67. Slaughter, A.-M. (2004). *A new world order*. Princeton University Press.
68. Takeyh, R. (2009). *Guardians of the revolution: Iran and the world in the age of the Ayatollahs*. Oxford University Press.
69. Tsygankov, A. P. (2019). *The rise of Russian civilizationism: The evolution of Russian national identity and foreign policy*. Routledge.
70. Takeyh, R. (2009). *Guardians of the revolution: Iran and the world in the age of the Ayatollahs*. Oxford University Press.
71. Tsygankov, A. P. (2019). *The rise of Russian civilizationism: The evolution of Russian national identity and foreign policy*. Routledge.
72. Walt, S. M. (2018). *The hell of good intentions: America’s foreign policy elite and the decline of U.S. primacy*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
73. Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of international politics*. Addison-Wesley.
74. Wastnidge, E. (2015). The modalities of Iranian soft power: From cultural diplomacy to soft war. *Politics*, 35(3–4), 364–377.
75. Wastnidge, E. (2017). *Diplomacy and reform in Iran: Foreign policy under Khatami*. I.B. Tauris.
76. Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. Cambridge University Press.
77. Winter, T. (2015). *Heritage diplomacy*. Routledge.
78. Wohlforth, W. C. (1999). The stability of a unipolar world. *International Security*, 24(1), 5–41.
79. Zakaria, F. (2008). *The post-American world*. W. W. Norton & Company.
80. Zhao, T. (2015). *The Tianxia system: World order in a Chinese utopia*. University of California Press.
81. Zürn, M. (2018). *A theory of global governance: Authority, legitimacy, and contestation*. Oxford University Press.