



Iran's China Pivot: Neo-classical Realist Vision (2005-2024)

**HDR FINAL ORAL PRESENTATION
BY NILOUFAR BHAGERNIA**

For more than twenty years, Iran's consistent eastward shift occurred despite significant political and ideological disparities among Iranian leaders. Why did Iran pivot toward China from 2005 to 2024? What explains this continuity among otherwise diverse administrations? During this time, Iran faced the continual pressure of U.S. unipolar dominance, crippling sanctions, and global isolation. The rise of China and its growing worldwide presence provided an alternative centre of power for Iran. The evolving dynamics established a context in which a tilt towards China became not only rational but also increasingly strategically imperative for the Islamic Republic. Nonetheless, whereas structure explains the rationale, it does not fully explain how. Despite identical structural forces, the timing, depth and form of the shift differed with administrations. Hence, this study also argues, through a neoclassical realist lens, that structure was the principal catalyst of the pivot, while domestic agency influenced its timing, presentation, and intensity. Ahmadinejad engaged with China for ideological resistance; Rouhani prioritised a formal strategic partnership; and Raisi furthered the relationship and pursued an attempted strategic alliance. This study employs a qualitative research method and qualitative content analysis to interpret themes, patterns, and meanings within the materials.

Details

Thursday, 04 December
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CAIS Lecture Theatre

Online via Zoom

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