



Iran's Multilateral Parliamentary Diplomacy: Institutional Engagement and Neighborhood Policy

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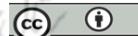
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Abstract

In the context of efficient governance, all the pillars of any political system in the 21st century utilize their capacities to ensure and guarantee national interests as facilitators and complements of the state, whereas in the past this was the sole responsibility of the state. The role of parliaments in this field, which is referred to as parliamentary diplomacy, falls within the aforementioned framework. In this regard, the Iranian Majles, as an active actor in parliamentary diplomacy, has participated in the establishment of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) and the Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States (PUIC). In addition, by constantly attending the meetings of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), it has emphasized its importance in international relations. Therefore, in the present article, using documents and library resources in an exploratory approach, an attempt is made to answer the question of what activities and achievements the Iranian Majles has accomplished within the framework of parliamentary diplomacy. In response to the aforementioned question, based on the Rational Choice Institutionalism approach, the hypothesis is put forward that the Iranian Majles has been active in establishing trans-regional parliamentary mechanisms in the form of parliamentary diplomacy, but further measures are needed to develop parliamentary diplomacy that complements and facilitates official diplomacy in providing national interests

Keywords: Rational choice institutionalism, The Iranian Majles, Neighborhood policy, Parliamentary diplomacy, Parliamentary mechanisms.



Introduction

Diplomacy is a tool for dialogue and negotiation. From the past to the present, governments have always sent representatives as diplomats to other countries to advance their noble, superior, and lofty goals, and ensure their country's national interests through bargaining and negotiation. Although diplomacy benefits from various tools, it should be noted that, on the one hand, no intelligent and peaceful diplomacy is based solely on the threat of force, and, on the other hand, diplomacy that sacrifices everything for persuasion and compromise cannot be called intelligent and peaceful either. The art of diplomacy is to correctly emphasize the existing possibilities at any given moment (encouraging compromise and threatening to use force). In addition, in the contemporary world, national interests have a wide scope and include everything that serves the national interest of the country, and naturally, the actors involved in providing this are also diverse and numerous..

Meanwhile, the parliament and its representatives, in the form of parliamentary diplomacy as a complementary and facilitating diplomacy, can play a role in ensuring national interests. In particular, among forms of complementary diplomacy, parliamentary diplomacy has developed as a representational tool. Therefore, diplomacy has evolved from a tool solely at the disposal of the government to a comprehensive framework that also includes the institution of parliament. In addition, parliamentary diplomacy adds a democratic dimension to international relations by reflecting the will and aspirations of the people.

As mentioned, since diplomacy is a tool for negotiation with the aim of ensuring and guaranteeing national interests, and since parliament is the legislative body of any country that facilitates the achievement of the aforementioned goal, parliamentary diplomacy in its broadest sense refers to the process of negotiation between parliaments to harmonize laws. However, given that parliaments, including the Iranian Majlis, have other duties such as oversight and consultation, parliamentary diplomacy is broadly referred to as a set of processes of interparliamentary oversight and consultation, in different formats, resulting from new environmental requirements at the regional and international levels, with the aim of ensuring national interests in pursuit of common interests. In this regard, parliamentarians can conduct negotiations that governments are unable to undertake, and the communications established between parliaments of countries by representatives may not be possible for

representatives of governments and ambassadors.

Therefore, strengthening parliamentary diplomacy in the Islamic Republic of Iran has been one of the concerns of the Iranian Majles in recent decades, to assist administrations in ensuring national interests. Of course, no matter how effective a parliament is in the field of domestic politics, its parliamentary diplomacy will be influential in the field of regional and international politics. Accordingly, the following article will address the importance, capacity, and prospects of the parliamentary diplomacy of the Iranian Majles. In this regard, using library documents and resources, and by reading texts through an exploratory method, the question of what activities the Iranian Majles has undertaken within the framework of parliamentary diplomacy is examined. Thus, it is assumed that although the Iranian Majles has turned to multilateral parliamentarism in recent years, it is necessary to take further steps to achieve parliamentary diplomacy as a complementary and facilitating diplomacy.

1. Theoretical Framework: Rational Choice Institutionalism

Given that parliamentary diplomacy is considered a tool at the disposal of the parliamentary system of each country to facilitate the pursuit of national interests, the Islamic Republic of Iran also uses parliamentary diplomacy consciously and actively on this basis. Therefore, examining this fact within the framework of the Rational Choice Institutionalism approach is valid. Since Rational Choice Institutionalism is based on the assumption that all institutions are purposeful units, it explains institutional behavior in rational terms and aims to maximize utility (Geddes, 2020, p. 17). According to the Rational Choice Institutionalism approach, political actors make decisions based on their own interests. Therefore, actors often support the development of institutions, because they tend to reduce the costs of interactions and exchanges by creating a stable environment that facilitates cooperation (Luciano, 2019, p. 38). Accordingly, the Rational Choice Institutionalism approach has been considered an appropriate and relevant framework within which the interest of parliaments in creating diverse transnational parliamentary mechanisms in recent decades can be explained (Aboelwafa, 2024, p. 367). In this regard, the Iranian Majles, by participating in the establishment of transnational parliamentary mechanisms, is considered an activist in the field of parliamentary diplomacy with the aim of ensuring national interests and realizing common interests, and its analytical study requires drawing a

realistic perspective of this process. Therefore, a brief reference to the research conducted in this regard is enlightening.

2. Literature Review

Before reviewing the existing works, it should be noted that researchers in the field of parliamentary studies in Iran have gradually studied the issue of parliamentary diplomacy over the last two decades. For example, Seyyed Hossein Seifzadeh (2008), in his article "The Role of the Legislative Branch in Foreign Policy: Diversity of Approaches," believes that the Islamic Consultative Assembly plays a role in four areas of foreign policy: oversight of the Assembly over international treaties, enactment of foreign policy laws, the role of the Foreign Policy Commission, and the role of representatives (Seifzadeh, 2008, p. 161). Mansourian and Akbari Talarposhti (2019), in an article titled "The Status and Importance of Parliamentary Diplomacy in the Islamic Republic of Iran," state that, considering the speed and scope of issues ongoing in the bilateral or multilateral relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the international system, alongside the government and affiliated political institutions, the legislative branch has been able to play a fundamental and unparalleled role through public-parliamentary diplomacy in resolving international issues and developing relations (Mansourian and Akbari Talarposhti, 2019, p. 213). According to Hajimineh and Abedi (2021), in their article "Parliamentary Diplomacy in Iran's Foreign Policy," parliamentary diplomacy is an accepted and growing category in the field of advancing the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, but it faces obstacles and challenges in shaping Iran's foreign policy. The lack of legislation, the lack of a strategic vision, and the lack of a defined mission for parliamentary diplomacy of the Iranian Majles are among these obstacles (Hajimineh and Abedi, 2021, p. 123). Hosseini and Shirzadi (2023), in their article "The Role of Parliamentary Diplomacy of the Iranian Majles in Ensuring the National Interests of the Islamic Republic," believe that parliamentary diplomacy at both national and transnational levels has great potential to strengthen the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Hosseini and Shirzadi, 2023, p. 133). Khalili (2008), in his article *The Islamic Parliament and Foreign Relations*, believes that due to the complex nature of foreign relations, which are tied to security components, the Iranian Majles has not been able to deviate from its popular role and has achieved an effective role in decision-making in foreign relations by exerting a particularistic influence. The

Iranian Majles has essentially found a permeable and decision-making role and engages in justifying, approving, delaying, and accelerating the decisions of other institutions (Khalili, 2008, p. 70). Dehghani Firouzabadi and Delavarpour Aghdam (2016), in their article "Shortcomings and Strategies for Empowering Parliamentary Diplomacy in the Islamic Republic of Iran," argue that empowering parliamentary diplomacy in Iran requires redefining and reforming some of the structures and policy-making processes in the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Delavarpour Aghdam and Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2016, p. 408). Rasoulizadeh and Khoeini (2018), in their article "How the Iranian Majles Interacts with Regional and International Parliamentary Assemblies," state that parliamentary diplomacy can facilitate and complement state diplomacy (Rasoulizadeh and Khoeini, 2018, p. 1351). However, the question of how parliamentary diplomacy can constructively facilitate and complement the official diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran government for building trust, security, stability, and regional prosperity remains a matter of debate, which will be examined below after discussing the importance of parliamentary diplomacy.

3. The Importance of Parliamentary Diplomacy

If parliaments lacked the capacity to act in the transnational arena, the world would not have witnessed the formation of numerous inter-parliamentary mechanisms at different levels. Therefore, the establishment and development of inter-parliamentary mechanisms at various bilateral and multilateral levels, in the form of collective cooperation regarding the oversight, consultative, and legislative functions of parliaments with the aim of advancing common interests, continues to be of interest to parliaments in different regions of the world. This form of parliamentary activity, which has become known as parliamentary diplomacy, includes a wide range of inter-parliamentary communications aimed at coordinating and enhancing consensus on agreed issues..

Thus, relying on and paying attention to the increasing importance of the role of parliaments in the decision-making process and foreign policy, and considering the need to account for public opinion in this process, reminds us of the need for parliaments to become more active in this regard. Considering that the system of the Islamic Republic is based on democracy, and that the parliament and its representatives are directly elected by the people, it is appropriate for the Islamic Consultative Assembly to demonstrate greater initiative in utilizing this strategy.

Reconciliation with new concepts in the diplomatic field and adaptation to new approaches in international relations can be a beginning of this approach. In addition, the history of diplomatic institutions and agencies has shown, and continues to show, that civilized nations that continuously evolve to overcome changing conditions - and countries that can better adapt themselves to these changes and evolutionary processes- have greater hope of ensuring their interests and influencing transnational processes. In this regard, parliamentarians and parliamentary mechanisms are involved in parliamentary diplomacy in three ways:

- By influencing foreign policy through national parliaments;
- By facilitating bilateral relations in the form of friendship groups;
- By empowering parliaments in the form of regional and trans-regional organizations.

According to these explanations, the most important feature of parliamentary diplomacy is that it can benefit from both the capacities of traditional and public diplomacy. Accordingly, the following functions can be listed for parliamentary diplomacy:

- Improving the performance of parliamentary mechanisms at the national level through the exchange of knowledge and experience between parliaments,
- Facilitating first regional coordination, then regional cooperation, and eventually regional integration through regional networking in the form of efficient parliamentary assemblies and
- Controlling the performance of governments in regional, transregional and international organizations.

Considering the aforementioned functions, experts believe that parliamentary diplomacy, as an effective and new tool, can be effective in advancing the national interests of countries and reducing the costs of governments' actions in the field of foreign policy. For this reason, there has been an increasing desire in many countries to provide the prerequisites for developing the international role and influence of parliaments.

The Iranian Majlis, aware of the importance of this issue, has also played a role as an active parliament in the field of establishing parliamentary assemblies such as the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA). It also continuously participates in inter-parliamentary mechanisms such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). In addition, given that the secretariats of the APA and the Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States (PUIC) are located in Tehran, the Islamic Consultative Assembly has a very valuable capacity to develop inter-parliamentary relations with the aim of

strengthening the regionalization process, for example, with the parliaments of its neighboring countries, because all of Iran's neighboring countries are present in the aforementioned mechanisms, including the IPU. Of course, Armenia is the only neighboring country of Iran that is not a member of the APA or the PUIC. In any case, the optimal use of the potential inter-parliamentary capacities of the Iranian Majles to ensure national interests and realize common goals requires taking planned measures at various levels.

4. Establishing Parliamentary Diplomacy at the National Level

Today, parliaments, as sovereign and popular institutions, play a role alongside governments in foreign relations and policy, and through actions such as ratifying international agreements and treaties, they participate in matters that were not, until recently, the exclusive duties of governments and official diplomacy. It is also no secret that in many democratic countries of the world, the role of parliaments in international arenas is increasing in matters such as efforts to develop world peace as a principle and necessity. Accordingly, parliamentary diplomacy is included in the bargaining instruments that have enjoyed significant growth in the last two decades, and its field of activity is cross-sectoral, spanning all political, social, economic, and cultural fields. Parliaments can facilitate many initiatives to develop economic relations by passing laws. Therefore, in many cases where official diplomacy may not be effective alone, parliamentary diplomacy can act as a complement and facilitator to it. The Iranian Majles is no exception.

Although the political system in Iran is not parliamentary, due to the broad powers that the parliament has in various areas, it is involved in the country's foreign policy through three channels: legislative, oversight, and consultative. In its direct role in foreign policy, these three channels - legislative, oversight, and consultative - can be identified. The most important task of the Islamic Consultative Assembly within the framework of the Constitution is legislation, which is manifested through the approval of bills and plans. In this context, when the parliament passes resolutions on foreign policy matters, it exercises its legislative role in foreign policy. In addition, the Iranian Majles has an oversight and consultative function and can therefore participate actively in foreign policy. Given these explanations, if the Iranian Majles can demonstrate its effectiveness in ensuring and guaranteeing national interests at the national level by fulfilling its roles, the parliamentary diplomacy of the Iranian Majles

can play a role at the bilateral, neighborhood, regional, and international levels in advancing common interests and building trust. Although this article focuses on the multilateral parliamentarism of the Iranian Majles, with an emphasis on its neighbors, it will also briefly mention the capacity for bilateral parliamentary diplomacy in the form of friendship groups.

5. Bilateral Parliamentary Diplomacy: Parliamentary Friendship Groups

One of the important capacities is the use of parliamentary friendship groups on a bilateral basis. (Haji Mina and Abedi, 2010, p. 136). Therefore, part of the mission of parliamentary diplomacy can be implemented through friendship groups (Mansourian and Akbari Talarpashti 2010, p. 225). Parliamentary friendship groups consist of representatives of one country interacting with another country and, as their name suggests, are interested in facilitating and strengthening friendly relations between each other's parliaments. Although parliamentary friendship groups cannot directly influence the foreign policy of countries, they can indirectly provide grounds for greater cooperation between their governments and other states (Moradi and Maghsoudi, 2005, p. 35). Many interactions cannot be carried out at the level of the government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; they can be realized through parliament through parliamentary friendship groups by influencing the foreign policy process. This requires addressing the shortcomings and providing appropriate solutions for maximum use of parliamentary friendship groups as one of the most important diplomatic tools in the form of bilateral parliamentary interactions. Of course, in recent decades, parliamentary diplomacy has been more concretely considered at the multilateral level by parliaments in different regions of the world in the form of parliamentary assemblies. the Iranian Majles has also been influential and has had an active presence in the process of multilateral parliamentarism, which will be explained below.

6. The Iranian Multilateral Parliamentary Diplomacy and Neighborhood Policy

One of the areas where multilateral parliamentarism can be implemented is the area of neighborhood policy, because multilateral activities and interactions are at the center of parliamentary diplomacy (Majidi, 2021, p. 319). In the framework of an institutional understanding of parliamentary diplomacy, the set of relationships and mechanisms originating from the geographical

proximity of neighboring countries can be used as an opportunity and a basis for coordinating policies in the neighboring territory. If the parliament and the administration move forward together as two complementary powers, they can have a significant impact on facilitating the progress process of any country. Iran and its neighbors are no exception. Accordingly, the axis of neighborhood policy is sustained and stable based on the concentration of the flow of interactions in the field or fields of common interest. In this way, facilitating and strengthening mutual relations between neighbors is considered the center of gravity of the parliamentary diplomacy of any country. This is particularly important, especially in the field of foreign relations, where many challenging laws can be reformed by engaging with our neighbors in a context of neighborhood-oriented parliamentary diplomacy with the aim of achieving inclusive and sustainable progress.

Therefore, the Iranian Majles, like any other parliament, can use parliamentary diplomacy to facilitate and strengthen neighborly relations with an emphasis on the economic dimension. Especially considering the diverse neighbors, there are significant capacities in this regard. Thus, among the benefits of parliamentary diplomacy based on an efficient parliament, one can mention the facilitation, launch or strengthening of regional cooperation with optimal utilization of capacities in the form of consultative, oversight and ultimately legislative cooperation in parliamentary assemblies and unions. In order to take effective steps in this area, on the one hand, there should be an active presence in existing inter-parliamentary assemblies, and on the other hand, efforts should be made to create efficient parliamentary assemblies such as the Iranian Majles's Neighbors with the aim of improving and promoting relations with them in all aspects on the agenda of the Iranian Majles. In this regard, pursuing parliamentary diplomacy with neighbors can be effective in providing national interests and achieving some levels of convergence by formulating international standards based on logic, law and efficiency. As a preliminary step, meetings could be held with these countries in the context of existing inter-parliamentary mechanisms such as the IPU, the APA, and the IPU of the Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

6-1. Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) was established in 1889 and has its permanent headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. It is one of the most inclusive international institutions engaged in

parliamentary diplomacy, with a history of over 126 years and comprising 166 full members and 10 associate members. The IPU is a multilateral, non-governmental organization that brings together national parliaments from around the world. In fact, this union provides an excellent platform for exercising and strengthening parliamentary diplomacy. The union convenes twice a year, in spring and autumn; the time and place of the assembly meetings are determined by the Executive Council of the IPU. This assembly is composed of parliamentary representatives appointed as part of delegations designated by the union's members. The president of the IPU assembly at each session is the president of the parliament of the host country, while the president of the council holds this position according to a geographical quota for a period of three years. Among the main goals of this international union are the promotion of democracy; the advancement of peace and security through political dialogue; the respect for and observance of human rights; participation in developing effective representative and legislative institutions; and the adoption of mechanisms for preventing and resolving conflicts through multilateral negotiations (Alshareef, 2022, p. 2). The union also maintains contacts and interactions with several United Nations institutions and has consistently sought to enhance women's participation in political and social life worldwide. Given that all parliaments of Iran's neighboring countries are members of the IPU, the delegation of the Iranian Majles can use this biannual opportunity to engage with them in various ways, laying the groundwork for discussions on issues of collective interest by building trust and coordination - for example, by proposing joint resolutions. This is of particular importance, especially considering that the status of the IPU has been significantly elevated within the United Nations system in recent years.

6-2. Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA)

The Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) is an institution comprising 43 Asian parliaments that was established in Tehran on November 13, 2006, with the aim of coordinating parliamentary activities to strengthen freedom and equality, justice and social welfare, security and stability, peace and friendship, and regional convergence in Asia (Prokhorenko, 2020, p. 121). This assembly was established at the suggestion of Bangladesh and in response to the necessity of cooperation among Asian countries to ensure peace as a foundation for development, with the support of the United

Nations, under the initial name Asian Parliamentary Association for Peace. This association was later renamed the Asian Parliamentary Assembly and has emerged as one of the most significant civil institutions dedicated to fostering regional convergence and developing mechanisms to ensure the implementation of parliamentary resolutions across Asia. The main task of this assembly is to strengthen parliamentary diplomacy and enhance the role of parliaments in major decision-making processes on the Asian continent. This mission is particularly important given the large number of countries and the diversity of cultures in the region, as it seeks to provide a foundation for the adoption of common or harmonized laws on issues affecting the majority of Asian nations. Given that the Iranian Majles is one of the founding members of the APA, the scope for cooperation between its member parliaments and the Islamic Consultative Assembly should, in principle, be broader than that within the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). This potential for collaboration also aligns closely with the neighborhood policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as the member parliaments of an assembly with shared civilizational roots often possess common motivations and concerns in pursuing coordination and cooperation. However, since the APA was established without an accompanying intergovernmental mechanism, its sphere of influence has so far remained limited to the adoption of several resolutions.

6-3. Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States (PUIC)

The first gathering of representatives of the parliaments of Islamic countries was held in March 1995 at the invitation of the Inter-Parliamentary Group of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the presence of representatives from 16 Islamic countries during the 93rd World Inter-Parliamentary Assembly in Madrid, Spain. The countries participating in this gathering emphasized the necessity of forming an Inter-Parliamentary Assembly. Thus, the second gathering of representatives of the parliaments of Islamic countries was held in Bucharest, Romania, at the initiative of the Inter-Parliamentary Group of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the presence of representatives from 12 countries in October 1995..

Following this, the third gathering was held in Istanbul through the efforts of the Iranian group, one day before the start of the 95th IPU (April 1996), with the presence of representatives of the parliaments of 10 Islamic countries and the Secretary-General of the Arab Parliamentary Union. Continuing its efforts, the Iranian Parliamentary Delegation held two more meetings on the sidelines

of the 96th Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (Beijing, September 1996), and in the second meeting, the attendees agreed to participate in the first meeting of the Planning Committee of the Union of Islamic Countries in November 1997 in Tehran.

The initial core for the establishment of the Islamic IPU was formed at the planning committee meeting held in Tehran in Aban 1376 (November 1997), attended by representatives of the parliaments of Iran, Indonesia, Libya, Sudan, Syria, Palestine, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The Founding Conference of the PUIC, held in Tehran on 17 June 1999, decided to establish the Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States (PUIC) with its Permanent Headquarters in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran. The Union's headquarters remain in Tehran. The Union is composed of the parliaments of the OIC Member States, and at present, there are 54 Member Parliaments.

Among the objectives of establishing the PUIC are: to introduce and promote the noble principles of Islam with emphasis on its various civilizational aspects; to consolidate and support the realization of the Islamic principle of shura in all Member States of the Union and to advance this principle in accordance with the constitution and conditions of each Member State; to provide a framework for extensive and fruitful cooperation and coordination between the parliaments of the Member States in international organizations and forums; to promote meetings and dialogue between the parliaments of the Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and their representatives; to exchange parliamentary experiences; to discuss and examine economic, cultural, social, and political issues of interest to the Member States; to address serious challenges and efforts made to exercise cultural, political, and economic dominance; and to adopt appropriate proposals and decisions regarding these issues. It also aims to strengthen contact, cooperation, and partnership with other parliamentary, governmental, and non-governmental organizations in order to advance common goals, as well as to strengthen the spirit of coordination among the nations of the world in order to respect and defend human rights and humanitarian principles and to establish peace based on justice.

The most important, fundamental yet complex, issue affecting the Islamic world that led to the establishment of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, with Iran's participation, is the issue of Palestine and occupied Jerusalem. If the Iranian Majles, as one of the founders of the PUIC, can effectively cooperate to end the long-

term suffering of the Palestinians by utilizing the capacities of the parliaments of its neighboring countries, it will significantly contribute to creating the necessary basis for peace, stability, and prosperity in the West Asian region as a fundamental part of the Islamic world. The prerequisite for this movement is also cooperation far greater than in the past or at present, through the adoption of practical resolutions and concrete joint actions.

Conclusion

Although the inter-parliamentary mechanisms discussed - of which all or most of Iran's neighboring countries are members - possess the potential to facilitate regional trust-building, coordination, and cooperation, this potential can only be realized through a minimal and realistic foundation rooted in the actual dynamics governing relations among member states. Neglecting this essential foundation has caused many of these broad and long-term mechanisms to fall short of their ambitious goals, often reducing their practical output to the mere holding of multilateral meetings without tangible outcomes.

Given that all inter-parliamentary mechanisms emphasize peace, stability, and prosperity, it becomes crucial to evaluate how, and to what extent, the interactions of the Iranian Majles within these mechanisms—where it is both a member and an active participant - can serve as a facilitator for national development. While the Majles should continue to work through existing platforms and seek to enhance their efficiency, achieving meaningful and measurable results requires starting from the foundation, namely with Iran's neighboring countries. If the Majles succeeds in bringing together the parliaments of its neighbors, it will unlock the latent potential of parliamentary diplomacy as a tool for trust-building, security-building, peace-building, stability-building, and prosperity-building at the regional level - processes that will naturally yield positive spillover effects at the national level.

The complexities of initiating a new inter-parliamentary mechanism among Iran's neighbors are well understood by experts, particularly given the dominance of geopolitical tensions over cooperative dynamics. However, thematic trust-building and structured dialogue through inter-parliamentary meetings can gradually pave the way for deeper coordination and eventual regional integration. This requires a long-term strategic perspective, grounded in real possibilities and an awareness of the shortcomings of existing mechanisms. In the early stages, the Iranian Majles must develop the capacity to engage directly with the parliaments of

neighboring states to address barriers to cooperation. Leveraging the shared cultural and civilizational heritage of the region, and drawing on the support of intellectual and social leaders, could make such an initiative both legitimate and sustainable. In doing so, several key principles should guide its approach:

- The Majles should maintain active participation in existing inter-parliamentary mechanisms and pursue their declared goals in close cooperation with other members.
- It can use these existing mechanisms as platforms to convene neighboring states under a more cohesive inter-parliamentary framework.
- The greater the geographic contiguity and political cohesion of a parliamentary mechanism, the higher its potential for effectiveness and efficiency.
- Any regional parliamentary mechanism is only as effective as the level of power and authority delegated to it.
- In line with Rational Choice Institutionalism, if the establishment and operation of a regional inter-parliamentary mechanism are coupled with meaningful delegation of authority, it can evolve into an intergovernmental organization, benefiting from greater proximity and cohesion.

More broadly, in today's international environment, national interests have expanded in scope, encompassing a wide range of economic, political, security, and cultural dimensions. Consequently, the number and diversity of actors involved in safeguarding these interests have increased. Parliaments and their representatives, through parliamentary diplomacy as a complementary and facilitative channel, can play a significant role in advancing these interests. Strengthening parliamentary diplomacy has therefore been a strategic priority of the Iranian Majles in recent decades.

In addition to being an active participant in the IPU, the Majles has been a founding member of two key inter-parliamentary mechanisms - the APA and the PUIC. Within the framework of multilateral parliamentarism and neighborhood policy, the Majles can harness the institutional capacity of these mechanisms to pursue shared regional interests, which in turn support national interests. Because most of Iran's neighbors are already members of the IPU, APA, and PUIC, the Majles can pursue this objective effectively within the Rational Choice Institutionalism framework, focusing on cost-benefit logic, proximity, and functional cooperation.

Ultimately, leveraging parliamentary diplomacy - whether through existing mechanisms or new regionally focused

frameworks—offers a powerful pathway for regional trust-building, security, stability, and prosperity, thereby laying the groundwork for deeper regional integration. This strategy would not only advance Iran's national interests but also contribute to a more cooperative and stable regional order.

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