



Assessing the National Security Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Integrated Societal Security Approach

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Abstract: Pathologizing national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran requires the adoption of a model derived from a scientific theory with multifaceted dimensions. This approach facilitates the identification of potential pathologies and prevents oversight. Through this method, policymakers in this domain can achieve greater success in recognizing possible pathologies, addressing existing deficiencies, and providing appropriate strategies. This article has been written with the aim of pathologizing through the theoretical model of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran based on societal security. The research process is grounded in a system of questions, structured in the form of a main question and sub-questions, and employs the “correlational interpretive method based on a descriptive matrix,” which is aligned with the type of research and its requirements. After examining the background and literature on the subject and presenting selected theories, using the proposed theoretical model, weaknesses and potential pathologies in the national security policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran within the framework of the societal security theory have been identified.

Keywords: Islamic Republic of Iran, Policymaking, Public policy, National security policy, Societal security.

Introduction

1-1 Statement of the Problem: Security can be classified and studied at three levels: passive, active, and supra-active. At the first level, a passive response to security threats and insecurity is addressed. At the active level, countermeasures against the components that generate insecurity are considered. These two levels fall within the framework of a negative discourse, and their implementation is the responsibility of law enforcement and judicial agencies. The third level of security, namely supra-active security, is situated within a positive discourse and seeks components that enhance the quality of life for individuals and enable society to achieve its designated goals and values. The primary responsibility and role at this level lie with the policymaking apparatus. Improving and enhancing national security policymaking depends on identifying weaknesses and giving due attention to their resolution. Thus, the importance and role of pathology become increasingly evident. Pathology consists of two parts: 1- A scientific process for identifying pathologies; 2- A scientific theory through which pathologies are discovered.

In a scholarly-research article titled "Theoretical Model of National Security Policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran Based on Societal Security," a relatively effective model has been extracted, indicating the scientific process and indicators of the scientific theory.

For pathology within the framework of the aforementioned model, it is first necessary to explain the current state of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran, examining the effective institutions and their processes. Subsequently, pathologies must be categorized and presented according to criteria aligned with societal security.

1-2 Significance: The present research, given its nature in describing the current situation and identifying pathologies, holds applied-theoretical significance; as it contributes to understanding the existing

state of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran and practically reveals the pathologies in the policymaking process for resolution and facilitation, potentially yielding desirable practical outcomes.

1-3 Necessity: Using the results of this research, pathologies in the national security policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran based on societal security can be identified, and efforts can be directed toward providing corresponding strategies for potential pathologies to ensure effectiveness at the executive level. Therefore, this research possesses applied necessity.

1-4 Objectives: Addressing deficiencies in the decision-making and decision-taking processes and taking effective action in the domain of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the aim of utilizing the novel capacities of societal security theory, constitutes the main objective of this study. In this regard, two sub-objectives have been defined: assisting in reforming the national security policymaking process in the country; and incorporating and strengthening the societal security approach in recognizing, analyzing, and managing national security issues.

1-5 Questions and Hypothesis: The present study is not hypothesis-testing and is based on a system of questions as follows: The main question is: "What are the pathologies in the national security policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran from the perspective of societal security?" In this context, the following sub-questions have been formulated: "What is the current state of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran?"

1-6 Research Background: The topic of national security policymaking in Iran has been the subject of numerous studies, each approaching the issue from a specific angle. These studies are divided into two categories: A. Works dedicated to the current state of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Fallahpisheh (2001) described the existing security conditions at the domestic, regional,

and international levels, addressing opportunities and threats to the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran, its regional objectives, and international obstacles following the Second Gulf War. Fazeli (2010), critiquing conventional and traditional theories of national security analysis in Iran, sought to present a theoretical framework based on a four-dimensional interaction between government/society, grounded in governmental efficiency or inefficiency. Yazdani Zazrani (2008) examined the process of social security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran, asserting that the level of social security is influenced by social security policymaking, which in turn is affected by variables such as the political regime, national development level, and type of national development. Ali Naghi (2002) investigated the position of the security concept and security issues in the national strategy, considering the common divisions in prevalent security discourses in the country (expansion-oriented, preservation-oriented, and growth-oriented) as unclear, viewing them as indicative of discursive transformation rather than a shift in the country's national security strategy. Ziaeddini and Reihani (2023) developed a functional model for the Supreme National Security Council in the national security governance of the Islamic Republic of Iran, attempting to represent, depict, and prioritize the dimensions, components, and indicators of the Council's role. Ahmadzadeh and Sohrabi (2017) analyzed the status of the Supreme National Security Council, the foundations of the validity of its decisions, and the position of its decisions within the hierarchy of legal norms.

B. Works dedicated to the pathology of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Asarian Nejad (2006) examined challenges and problems in the decision-making process in the national security domain, using scientific and analytical approaches to pathologize this process and identify and explain existing weaknesses and gaps. Vali Pour Zaromi (2004) addressed principles, objectives of national security in specific discourses (expansion-oriented,

preservation-oriented, and growth-oriented), the position of national power within those discourses, threat levels, and pathology of the discourse and national security policies. Gharayagh Zandi (2011) explained the current state of national security policymaking in Iran, pointing to several main pathologies: lack of a clear definition of security policies, complexity of the national security structure, instability in the national security decision-making structure, detail-orientedness and lack of future-orientedness in security issues, and ineffective public participation in security decisions. Yazdani Zazrani (2008) researched the same topic with an emphasis on social security, concluding that the level of social security is influenced by social security policymaking, which is affected by variables such as the political regime, national development level, and type of national development. Amiri Moghadam (2012) went further, attempting to present a suitable model for national security policymaking in Iran. The same objective, focusing on internal security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran, was pursued by Razavinejad (2018), leading to a model based on Etzioni's and Hirschman's theories.

Evaluation of works in the policymaking domain reveals that they have focused on critiquing and pathologizing the national security policymaking process and have achieved good results. However, in explaining national security policymaking, they have not utilized the societal security theory. Therefore, the position of a pathology approach that can effectively combine theory and process remains vacant. The innovation of this article lies in pathologizing the national security policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran from the perspective of societal security, to display the current situation and identify its weaknesses.

1-8 Research Method: This research, in terms of the researchers' approach, is descriptive-explanatory; and in terms of application, it is applied. Since it uses the "Theoretical Model of National Security Policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran Based on Societal

Security” to enumerate and identify pathologies, it is considered applied. For data collection, the documentary method was used, and for qualitative analysis, the “correlational interpretive method based on a descriptive matrix” was employed.

1-8-1 Introduction to the Method: If data are presented in words (rather than numbers) to describe realities, they are referred to as such. This type of data is used to describe and explain the environmental conditions of a phenomenon. With the help of this data, relationships among variables can be formulated. The correlational study method is one in which the researcher seeks to identify or understand the type of relationship among several variables. Simply put, correlational studies aim to depict the type of relationship among variables. In some studies and books, this method is considered a subcategory of descriptive research.

1-8-2 Application of the Method: Given the qualitative nature of the research and its descriptive-analytical method, in terms of execution, the present study was conducted in five main steps: In the first step, by studying sources to operationalize the research method, initially using the library and documentary method (books, conducted research such as articles and research projects, speeches, and reputable scientific databases on the internet), the current state of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran was examined. In the second step, sources related to the pathology of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran were reviewed. In this regard, results from qualitative interviews conducted to access existing pathologies from the perspective of elites were utilized. These interviews were conducted face-to-face in a deep and purposeful manner, considering the foundations of public policymaking, with experts and managers in the country’s national security domain. In the third step, using the “Theoretical Model of National Security Policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran Based on Societal Security,” a matrix was drawn in which selected components of

societal security intersected with the combined approach of public policymaking. In the fourth step, for better differentiation, pathologies of the approach were divided into two categories: institutional and procedural. In the fifth step, the results obtained from the absence or deficiency of each selected component of societal security in each stage of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran were compiled in the matrix table.

2- Conceptual Foundations

The conceptual and theoretical foundations of the research revolve around the theory of public policymaking pathology, societal security, and the configured pathology theoretical model, which include:

2-1 Public Policymaking

A. Definition: Policymaking in its simple sense is defined as “a specific way of shaping action” and is more of a conscious and purposeful effort than regular or random (Forouzandeh and Vojdani, 2009, 181). Eymoni and Jean-Claude Thoenig, in their book—one of the notable reference works in the Anglo-Saxon tradition—define public policymaking as a phenomenon that appears in the form of a government program in a sector of society or a geographical space (P. Muller, 2008, 28-30). The diversity of definitions provided around the meaning and concept of public policymaking share a common feature: the agent of public policymaking is the government. Thus, when discussing public policies, government actions are in focus. It is clear that public policymaking has a close relationship with the mode of interaction between government and society, consisting of the private sector and civil society, which together with the government form the components of governance (Yazdani Zazrani, 2012, 126-127). In traditional government, policy is a tool for preserving the interests of rulers, but in modern government, policy is a tool for protecting political order. Therefore, the use of indirect instruments of sovereignty, namely policymaking and regulation techniques, is common in developed governments. The shift of sovereignty from

direct intervention in public affairs to public policymaking is evident. Thus, one of the most important manifestations of modern governance is access to indirect governance tools such as public policymaking (Rezvani Far, 2019, 18).

B. Theories: Multiple theoretical approaches to public policymaking have been presented, the most important of which are:

- 1- Rational choice-processual approach
- 2- Systemic approach
- 3- Institutional approach

Public policymaking approaches, depending on their perspective and focus on a particular aspect of the policymaking process, have advantages and disadvantages. For example, the institutional approach focuses on analyzing institutions or government organizations, or the systemic approach does not focus on processing stages within the policymaking institution. Therefore, to achieve greater efficiency, a combined approach with the least flaws and the most coverage was selected.

4- Combined Approach to Public Policymaking

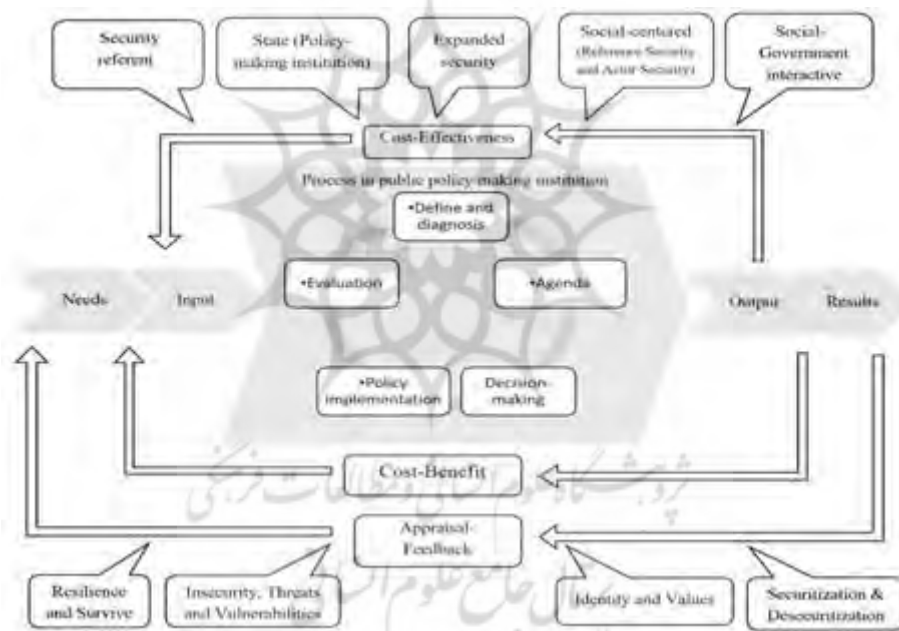
This approach is composed of systemic, institutional, and rational-processual approaches. The main structure of this model is formed by the systemic approach, as it depicts the policymaking steps (needs, processing, and output), cost-benefit, cost-effectiveness, feedback, and monitoring in the simplest possible way. The major role of government as the policymaking institution and executor of security policies is performed in the data processing section. However, the systemic approach is silent on describing actions within the policymaking institution. In other words, the greatest gap in this approach is Easton's inattention to what happens inside the policymaking apparatus and how policies are formed and implemented (S. D. Spiegeleire, 2012, 165).

Each institution has a structure through which its inherent functions are performed via processes within this structure. The institutional

structure is influenced by the physical and material environment (consisting of internal and external factors). The examination of the institutional structure and the manner of performing processes has been overlooked in the systemic approach. Therefore, comprehensive coverage and achieving the desired model require addressing overlooked points. Examining and analyzing the structure of the policymaking institution necessitates employing the institutional approach, which is essentially the study of formal-legal arrangements. The criticism raised regarding the institutional approach is that by emphasizing structuring and environmental conditions as effective factors in policymaking and describing it through factors such as law, the scope of this model has been expanded. Although this criticism is valid, the reason for selecting this approach is the direct connection of the national security policymaking institution in Iran with the Constitution and the influence of internal and external factors on its function and structure. The intervention of the institutional approach can lead to discovering new dimensions of the impact of variables on outcomes, resulting in more comprehensive coverage of the angles of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The processing section or processing box in the intended model is significant from two perspectives: first, ensuring that all policymaking stages and the internal cycle sequence are correctly performed, while simultaneously observing the considerations of each stage (such as evaluating all possible options and selecting the appropriate option, unobstructed execution of the selected option, achievable goals and options, absence of problems in the process of achieving goals). Second, separating the policymaking cycle stages to apply the selected components as necessary principles in various stages of this cycle. Consequently, the impact of the component will be observed during each stage. The rational-processual approach possesses these two characteristics. Therefore, alongside the institutional analysis model,

the rational-processual analysis model is placed within the processing stage of the systemic approach to yield a more complete model. In addition to combining approaches and their stages, processing occurs in a context where selected components of societal security are incorporated as essential indicators. In this discursive configuration, societal security acts as the central signifier of the discourse, with other discursive components positioned around it. Consequently, the impact of each selected component in each stage of the combined approach is examined, and the impact of these indicators in each stage can be extracted.



2-2 Societal Security

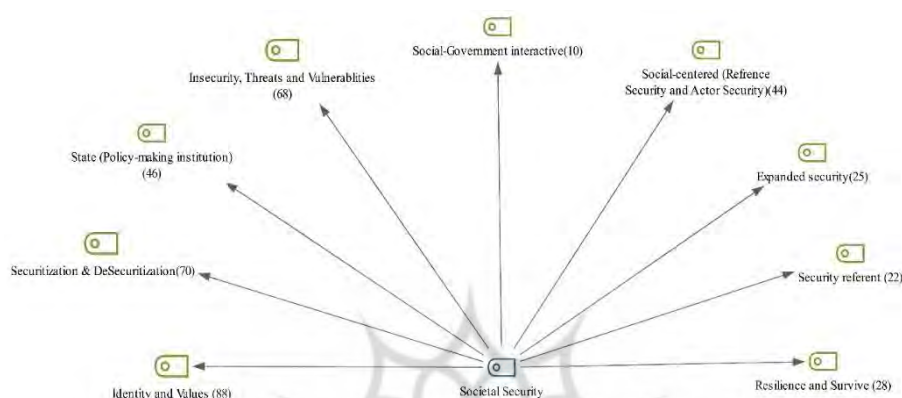
A. Definition: The Copenhagen School was the first intellectual current to establish an independent position for security studies. Barry Buzan, one of the main theorists of this school, believed that with the reduction of military threats, other threats would increase. Therefore, the concept of security expanded to other domains, adding political,

social, economic, and environmental domains. Political security pertains to the stability of the state organization, social security to the preservation of identity, culture, and national values, economic security to access to financial resources and free markets, and environmental security to the preservation of the environment as a requirement for human life.

B. Theory: In societal security, we encounter an identity-oriented narrative of security that has transformed the subject of security and confirms the existence of a social root for security. In simpler terms, societal security deals with understanding threats and society's reaction to real or perceived threats to its identity and cohesion. Both types of threats can be real or merely imagined, but as long as they generate a reaction or counter-reaction, they are part of the determining factors in societal security analysis. Similarly, the determining factors of societal security can be internal (intra-social factors) or external (bilateral, multinational, subnational, or regional factors).

The theory of "societal security" aims to reduce the security burden on issues and prevent the securitization of space. Expanding the new dimensions of societal security theory will help alleviate some weaknesses in national security policymaking to a certain extent. The novel and different perspective of Asghar Eftekhari has ensured that identity is not merely a subset or part of security in the societal security theory but has become a security discourse itself. Through this viewpoint, several important criteria have been added to the opinions of other thinkers in this field, including: 1- Positive interaction between government and nation, 2- Belief values and norms, 3- Human education, and 4- Common collective interests. The concepts of societal security in this perspective, in accordance with the Iranian-Islamic structure, Islamic worldview values and principles, have been emphasized, redefined, or completed. The main components and

concepts of the societal security theory are presented in the figure below.



3- Current State of the National Security Policymaking System in the Islamic Republic of Iran

For pathology, it is necessary to first describe the current state of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this regard, effective institutions and then the process of this trend are addressed.

3-1 Effective Institutions in National Security Policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran

One - Leadership Institution

Article 110 of the Constitution, after granting the authority to determine the general policies of the system to the Leader, also assigns the supervision of their proper implementation to this authority. In Article 176 of the Constitution, determining the country's defense-security policies within the framework of general policies set by the Leader is assigned to the Supreme National Security Council. In both aforementioned institutions, approvals are valid and executable only with the Leader's confirmation. Thus, the originality of determining and confirming national security policymaking lies with the leadership institution. Apart from confirmation and determining outlines, the

Leader participates in the national security policymaking process and discussions of approvals through appointing individuals and representatives to the Expediency Discernment Council and the Supreme National Security Council.

Two-Supreme National Security Council (SNSC)

Article 176 of the Constitution designates the Supreme National Security Council as the most important decision-making and policymaking institution in the national security domain and states its duties as “determining the country’s defense-security policies within the framework of general policies set by the Leader” and “coordinating political, intelligence, social, cultural, and economic activities in relation to general defense-security measures” through “utilizing the country’s material and spiritual capabilities to counter internal and external threats.”

Securing national interests, safeguarding the Islamic Revolution, territorial integrity, and national sovereignty are among the objectives pursued by the Supreme National Security Council, which, depending on the issue and priority, are evaluated and reviewed in the Council’s Secretariat, and if deemed necessary, are presented as agenda items in the Council’s sessions. All approvals and announced policies of the Supreme National Security Council are valid only after the Leader’s confirmation.

Three- Expediency Discernment Council

The Expediency Discernment Council, after the constitutional revision in 1989, has eleven duties based on Articles 110, 111, 112, and 117, two of which—providing consultation to the Leader in determining the general policies of the system and supervising their proper implementation—are effective and determining in national security policymaking. The general policies of the system are determined and announced for coordinating ideals, macro-goals, and creating cohesion, coordination, and movement on a specified track. According to legal scholars, the general policies of the system, developed by the

Expediency Discernment Council and announced after the Leader's confirmation, rank above ordinary laws and executive regulations after the Constitution and aim to achieve the goals set in the Constitution. In Clause 1 of Article 176, determining the country's defense and security policies, which is a duty of the Supreme National Security Council, is placed within the "general policies set by the Leader." Clause 2 of the same article also enumerates the principle of coordinating political, intelligence, social, cultural, and economic activities in relation to general defense and security measures. Therefore, the position of the Supreme National Security Council's approvals is ranked after the general policies of the system and is influenced by the policies adopted and announced by the Expediency Council. To date, no mechanism has been foreseen regarding the manner of performing this alignment.

Four- Islamic Consultative Assembly

In the Constitution, national security policymaking is explicitly assigned to the Supreme National Security Council. The Islamic Consultative Assembly cannot legislate regarding various aspects of the Supreme National Security Council's approvals, including the process of their enforceability, but it has the right to legislate regarding the duties and authorities of the Council's subsidiary councils (Moqaddasi Akbari, 2017, 878).

According to Articles 77 and 125 of the Constitution, in the legal system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, regardless of how the international law system considers a common text as any type of agreement – whether legal or courteous and ethical – if this text entails any commitment for the country and is concluded among subjects of international law, it requires the approval of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Hashemi, 2005, 180).

On this basis, the Islamic Consultative Assembly plays a determining role in accepting or rejecting various agreements such as security-defense, economic, and political agreements that affect the national

security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, this role does not imply national security policymaking by the Islamic Consultative Assembly as an institution involved in the national security policymaking of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

3-2 National Security Policymaking Process in the Islamic Republic of Iran Policymaking in the Supreme National Security Council is carried out through the following stages:

One- Policy Calendar:

Issue Identification and Agenda Setting The Secretariat of the Supreme National Security Council, as the authority for receiving information and data, conducting expert activities and auditing, preparing the agenda, is responsible for announcing and supervising the implementation of approvals. All session agendas and related work instructions must be presented in the Supreme National Security Council sessions through this Secretariat.

To take the first step in policymaking, the Secretariat receives issues and topics from various sources, including government agencies, scientific and research centers, elites, societal platforms, legal and natural persons, prioritizes them, provides solutions, and places them on the agenda of the Council's sessions. This stage is performed by specialized committees after receiving opinions from experts of related agencies.

Two- Decision Adoption, Policy Formulation, and Policy Alignment

The second stage of the process, namely decision adoption, must be approved in the Supreme National Security Council session with an absolute majority of members present. Then, the approvals are formulated by the Secretariat and sent for the Leader's confirmation. Alignment of approvals with the general policies of the system is considered in the Secretariat. However, sometimes due to urgency or changes in the current situation, it is necessary to approve a resolution contrary to the general policies, in which case the confirming and

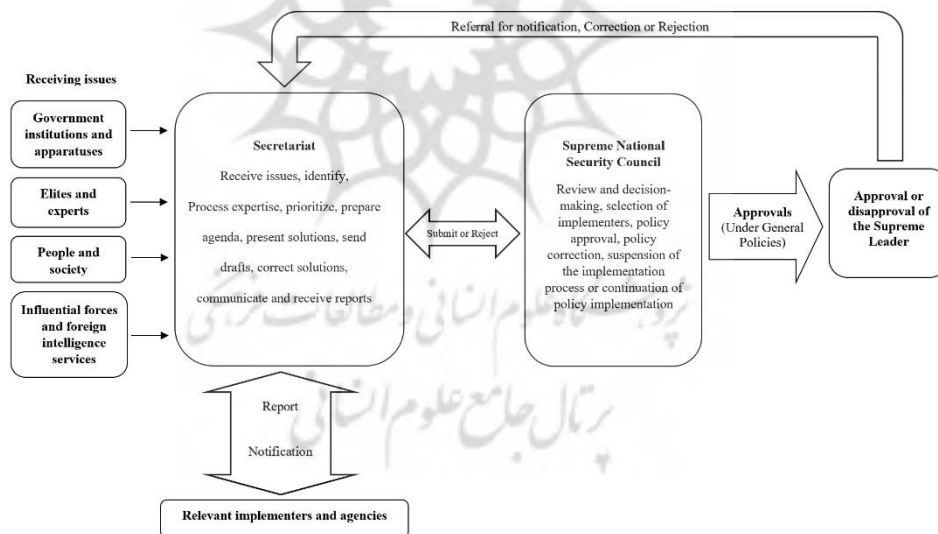
aligning authority will be the Leader, and the approvals become enforceable after His confirmation.

Three- Selection of Executors, Policy Announcement, and Policy Execution

To perform the third stage of the process, the duties of various governmental, military, and public institutions are announced, and further interactions are conducted for proper execution.

Four- Receiving Evaluation, Feedback, and Reports

During and at the end of the execution stage, various reports from executors are received, and the evaluation and manner of executing the announced policy are conducted in the specialized committees of the Supreme National Security Council Secretariat. The overall schematic of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran is displayed in the figure below.



4- Desired State of National Security Policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran

The desired state can be examined from two perspectives: first, from the perspective of societal security; second, public policymaking.

4-1 From the Perspective of Societal Security

A- Preference for Identity and Social Life the main assumption of the societal security approach indicates that the survival and continuity of any society depend on preserving its identity. Therefore, societal security refers to preserving the set of characteristics based on which individuals consider themselves members of a social group (Saebi, 2020, 66)—that is, those beliefs and practices that identify and recognize individuals as members of a specific society. In other words, societies are formed from a sense of social identity; the same thing that allows individuals and groups to regard themselves as part of society. Therefore, from this perspective, creating, preserving, and consolidating identity is the primary priority in the desired state of societal security.

B- Society as the Referent and Source of Security In the ideal societal security, the referent of security is society, not government. At the same time, no government can shoulder the responsibility of producing and maintaining security without society's role. Thus, government is not only the referent of security but also no longer the sole source of security; rather, non-governmental forms, social and political organizations, non-governmental organizations, and private institutions play an increasingly central role, and the positive potential of various social structures manifests.

In the desired state, government is not biased or polarized but is the guarantor of security and protector of the general interests of society. There is no longer incompatibility or conflict between governmental security and individual security, nor between governmental security and social security. Anything that causes social division and separates the individual from society must be resolved in the desired state. The anomic social state, meaning systemic disintegration, will not occur in this situation. Therefore, security begins from the infrastructures and sub-systems of society and its foundational institutions, continuing as

an interconnected whole in interaction with other sub-systems of society, following the laws and rules of social systems (Bayat, 2009, 77). C- Compatibility of Societal Security with Resilience and Social Cohesion Societal security is achievable in proportion to cultural maturity, social cohesion, and national will. In the desired state, societal security is considered a function of social cohesion within society and even among international societies. Socializing security, making it pervasive in the societal context, and delegating some security provision duties to society are indicators of the desired state. In fact, security is the product of the societal social system, and sustainable and continuous security for citizens is achievable through citizens.

4-2 From the Perspective of Public Policymaking

Explaining and depicting the desired state of national security policymaking from the theoretical perspective of public policymaking is also necessary. In a combined research conducted by Ahmad Amiri Moghadam titled "Toward a Suitable Model of National Security Policymaking in the Supreme National Security Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran," notable results regarding the current and desired state of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran were obtained using face-to-face and qualitative interviews with some national security elites and experts, assessing their judgment on the desired model of the national security policymaking process.

The investigated variables	Favorable situation	
	Rank score	Priority number
Strengthening legality and legality in national security policymaking	15/59	11
Increasing the efficiency of the Supreme National Security Council and security institutions	15/36	12
Increasing the effectiveness of the Supreme National Security Council and security institutions	16/38	6
Increasing the accountability and responsibility of security institutions	15/89	9
Increasing the transparency of interests and national security	16/16	7

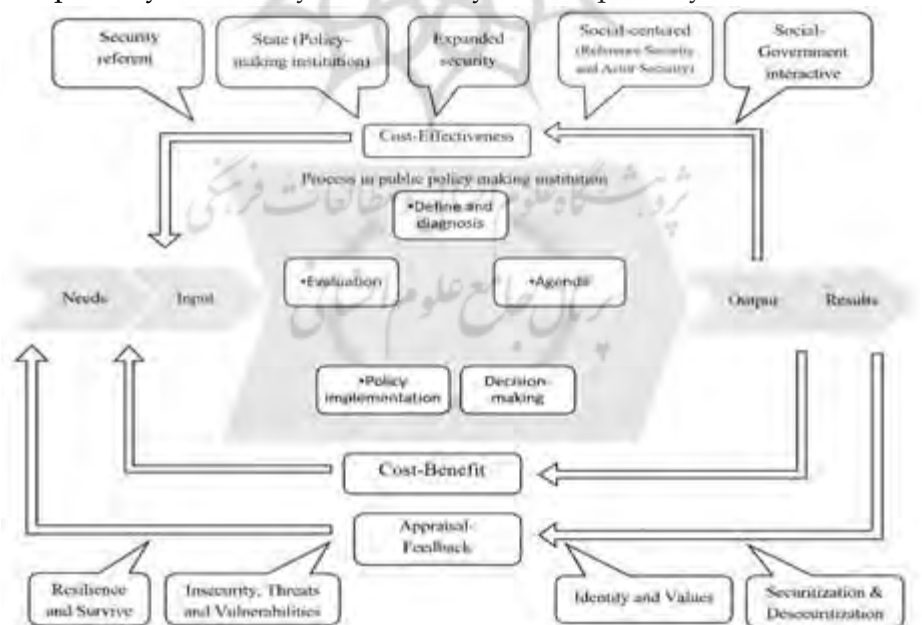
Prioritizing national security issues	17/55	2
Strengthening national consensus building at the elite level	13/55	21
Strengthening monitoring and evaluation of national policies	15/93	8
Strengthening a comprehensive approach to national security dimensions	14/04	18
Managing issues in various political, economic, cultural and social areas before they become a security issue	12/52	24
Increasing national rather than individual and institutional monitoring and evaluation	14/79	12
Increasing the country's capability to confront internal and external threats	13/05	23
Strengthening the country's deterrence power in the regional and international arenas	12/23	25
Strengthening the country's preventive power in the domestic arena	13/07	22
Increasing the legitimacy of national security policies in the country	14/48	15
Strengthening the role of the Supreme National Security Council in policymaking and providing advice to the leadership of the system and national security management.	18/04	1
Strengthening coordination between the country's main national security institutions and agencies	16/84	5
Effective and optimal use of the country's resources	11/02	26
Strengthening the national authority of the country	14/36	16
Increasing the country's consensus-building power in regional and international arenas	13/79	19
Strengthening the country's strategic intelligence in policymaking	17/64	3
Preventing non-security issues from becoming security issues	14/8	13
Increasing the targeting of national security policies	17/41	4
Increasing innovation, creativity and learning	7/68	28
Increasing foresight and anticipation of developments	13/77	20
Systematizing the country's policy-making mechanism	14/29	17
Coherence in crisis management in national security matters	15/8	10
Reducing unnecessary costs of managing the country	10/16	27

It is observed that multiple indicators of the desired state have been expressed. The first indicator, according to interviewees, is strengthening the role of the Supreme National Security Council,

indicating the importance of the policymaking institution. The second priority is prioritizing national security issues, arising from deficiencies and pathologies observable in the initial stage of the policymaking process, namely the identification stage. The third position in desired indicators relates to “strengthening the country’s strategic intelligence in policymaking.”

5- Pathology Using the Theoretical Model

Identifying pathologies in this research is based on the “Theoretical Model of National Security Policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran Based on Societal Security” (Eftekhari, Mazinani, et al., 2025), which is a multifaceted model. In this model, scientific analysis is based on the components of societal security and their intersection with institutional and systemic approaches derived from public policymaking. Thus, only pathologies that manifest in the alignment of societal security theory with public policymaking are examined. The intended model, discursively similar to societal security, is based on the primacy of identity; functionally on the primacy of satisfaction;



strategically on the primacy of government in public policymaking; and contextually on the primacy of society and citizens.

5-1 Institutional Pathologies

Pathology 1- Complex and Ambiguous Structure

One of the pathologies of the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the complex and ambiguous structure and lack of proper understanding of its mechanisms (Gharayagh Zandi, 2011, 165). If we designate an institution responsible for setting permanent general and public obligations and foresee complex formalities in its procedures or ignore its downstream policies, what benefit does this serve? The constitutional legislator, when approving the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, never explicitly mentioned the separation of powers in the political administration of the country and only after dividing the ruling powers into three legislative, executive, and judicial branches explicitly stated that firstly, these powers are independent of each other, and secondly, they are under the supervision of the guardianship of the affair and leadership of the Ummah.

Pathology 2- Lack of Determination of the Supreme National Security Council's Position

If we consider the independence of branches of government synonymous with the separation of powers, we must specify the position of the Supreme National Security Council as the national security policymaking institution. If we regard this institution as part of the executive branch – given that the majority of members also favor the executive branch and the Council's president is also the President of the Republic – then its nature, function, and duties will manifest inter-sectorally. Another pathology raised is the lack of clarity regarding the position of the Supreme National Security Council. Some consider it a specific institution separate from the three branches of government, believing that the legislator sought an inter-branch

institution with efficiency in decision and execution, while others, due to the presidency of the President of the Republic over this Council and the greater number of its members from the executive branch, regard the Supreme National Security Council as part of the executive branch.

Pathology 3- Lack of Determination of the Hierarchy of Laws

The approvals of the Supreme National Security Council do not have legislative status and are inherently executive. In fact, this executive nature arises from the policymaking process within this Council. However, the process of supervising the executor and enforcement guarantees is not defined as it should be, which is another pathology. Regarding the position of this Council's approvals, no specific definitions, boundaries, and limits have been universally accepted; thus, determining the position and rank of the Council's approvals in the hierarchy of laws and regulations is necessary and important.

At first glance, the approvals of the Supreme National Security Council will fall under the approvals of the Expediency Discernment Council. However, the notable point is that the Supreme National Security Council is responsible for duties related to the country's national security, and pursuant to Clause 3 of Article 176 of the Constitution, utilizing the country's material and spiritual capabilities to counter internal and external threats is among the duties of the Supreme National Security Council, which, although its contradiction with the Constitution and religious rulings is unsound and illogical, substantively ranks above the general policies of the system (Jahanbozorgi, 2009, 28). These characteristics mean that in case of conflict between the decisions of the Supreme National Security Council and the general policies, no preference exists for adhering to the general policies. Because on one hand, in urgent and immediate situations to counter any threat, the possibility of abrogating, interpreting, or changing general policies does not exist, and on the other hand, limiting the authorities of the Supreme National Security Council in adopting decisions and performing duties would defeat the

purpose of Clause 3 of Article 176 of the Constitution and would thus be unjustified and illogical.

Overall, in case of accepting conflict between approvals, the supervising institution and determining authority are not specifically known, and the priority of approvals is not evident. The aforementioned pathologies stem from the lack of a comprehensive and precise view in drafting Article 176 of the Constitution, as it contains ambiguous terms without conceptual and exemplar clarity.

Pathology 4- Influence of Internal and External Variables on the Policymaking Institution

Internal variables refer to the internal structure of the institution, such as its commissions and committees, which act as the thinking brain of the policymaking institution. The committees and commissions of the Supreme National Security Council are present in the Council's Secretariat, which, due to their outdated formal structure and lack of updated job descriptions, do not achieve maximum effective performance. After the formation of this Council, no law has mentioned the establishment of the Council's Secretariat and its job descriptions. The manner of extracting approvals and the voting system in the Supreme National Security Council is also ambiguous. In rare cases, voting has been conducted based on specific topics and agendas, and in fact, the summary of each topic is concluded at the end of discussions, but votes are not counted, and voting in case of equal votes is not determined.

In the annual budget, the budget line and financial resources of the Supreme National Security Council are included under the Presidency institution. This has caused financial resources and budget variables to become a combination of external and internal variables, affecting its policymaking power. This issue also applies to human resources. Beyond the composition of the Supreme National Security Council, where the weight of executive branch members is 5 out of a total of 10, the selection of the secretary and subsequently the deputy secretary,

committees, and experts is at the disposal of the executive branch. Thus, budget and human resource factors can become tools for directing national security policymaking.

Political parties and factions are other external factors whose influence on the national security policymaking process becomes evident with changes in the governmental faction. As the three ministers of intelligence, interior, and foreign affairs, the head of the Planning and Budget Organization, and the President himself are functions of factionalism and parties.

Institutional pathologies are summarized in the table below:

Institutional damages
Failure to determine the position of the Supreme Council of National Security (extraordinary or under the executive branch)
Failure to define tasks and their description
Failure to define the rank of approvals in the hierarchy of laws
Ambiguity in the text of Article 176 of the Constitution

Table 2- Institutional Pathologies

5-2 Procedural Pathologies

The inefficiency of a policy in solving an issue can stem from weakness in recognizing and root-causing the issue, poor formulation of solutions, inappropriate legitimization of the policy (converting it to law), improper execution, or lack of supervisory, control, and feedback mechanisms. In the following, the pathology of the national security policymaking process is presented.

Pathology 1- Deficiency in Identification (Policy Calendar Setting)

The current pathologies of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran in the identification stage are focused on not extracting issues from the perspective of societal security criteria. First, receiving messages from reference groups as expressers of concerns and issues is done slowly. The second flaw is not addressing the issue in its initial and golden time, as if concerns are not addressed until they turn into problems and crises. The third flaw is the low importance of

identifying issues that threaten identity, cohesion, and national convergence. The fourth flaw is expanding the scope of securitizing issues.

Pathology 2- Deficiencies in Adopting or Not Adopting Decisions

Employing scientific indicators and achievements in decision adoption is of high importance. Achieving the goals of societal security requires documented, continuous, and future-oriented programs.

One of the current pathologies in the decision-making stage is the lack of long-term decisions. A prominent feature of policymaking in many sectors in Iran is preferring short-term policies over long-term programs. In some sectors, the short lifespan of management on one hand and the prospect of rotating authority on the other force the manager to adopt a short-term perspective (Vahid, 2005, 266-268).

Therefore, on one hand, quantitatively achievable short-term policies are preferred over qualitative long-term actions, and on the other hand, radicalism and the tendency for rapid change emerge. Thus, the thinking of gradual changes does not prevail. Another pathology is the lack of impartiality in adopting decisions as policy from the perspective of societal security, as it does not create or foster a common sense among individuals, groups, and ethnicities of the country. Iranian society, for various reasons including unresolved historical gaps, change and diversity of reference groups, and biased management, exhibits signs of a polarized society; to the extent that this polarization at the societal level has also extended to polarization between nation and government.

The security dilemma of societal security manifests in such a society and can increase tension capacity. The security dilemma of societal security may emerge when a decision taken to increase national security leads to a reactive action in a specific social group or another society, ultimately reducing the security of the first society and weakening its identity.

In such a society, a powerful and centralized but relatively impartial government, if it can perform the functions of arbitration and creating balance, can prevent anarchical emergence and the appearance of the security dilemma among groups. However, the tragedy of the societal security dilemma occurs when the government in a polarized society is either collapsed and bankrupt or openly oriented toward one of the two main groups.

A biased government allows the supported pole to institutionalize its supported principles and values compulsorily, sanctifying them in official rules, laws, and procedures of society. The result will be an increasing gap between the normative and legal-cultural system and the informal level of society. The societal security dilemma in a polarized society has high potential to turn into mutual violence, which is contrary to the goals of societal security, as cohesion and common identity fall into oblivion, and the identities of micro-groups gain more power and prominence.

Pathology 3- Inefficiency of Executors and Execution Manner

The execution manner can have a significant impact on the success rate of decisions in national security policymaking. Neglecting the study of policy execution, lack of a specific and clear theoretical framework in planning and execution, absence of explicit policy instructions, and a governmental expert body equipped with necessary skills for policy execution (Ashtarian, 2006), and lack of integrated performance are pathologies of the execution stage.

From the perspective of societal security in the execution stage, actions should not be taken in a way that damages or disintegrates unified national identity. Therefore, the view of traditional tools for providing national security and their uses must also be transformed. Some pathologies inflicted on societal security criteria in the execution stage are as follows:

First- Military Actions

Executing policies through military confrontation with a specific ethnicity or opposition group to the government causes disintegration and lack of identity unity. This state also occurs during military confrontation with protests in societies. This disintegration intensifies when it favors the government's supporting group. Currently, this tool is not used correctly in some cases, such as the performance of some law enforcement forces in the fall of 2022 in dealing with protesters against the violation of one of the agents in Sistan and Baluchestan.

Second- Political Actions

Political action through legislation to restrict and limit the identity of society and its minorities, as well as threatening societies with suppression by the government, can be political actions leading to pathology. Political threat pertains to the stability of the government organization and the legitimizing ideology of governments; therefore, a biased government is a threat to identity. Additionally, political threats against organizational stability can also pressure the government and cause events such as separatism and disintegration of the political body.

Deep-rooted group gaps prevent the aggregation of needs, values, and national interests, and in this state, each ethnic group creates its specific collective identity in accordance with the group's values and interests instead of national values and interests. The most common failure of government is the lack of creating a common public sense about national values and interests.

Thus, the core of internal insecurity is precisely these threats arising from group divisions and lack of political unity, which paralyze the country's political ability by expending internal capabilities and resources (Azrin Moon, 2000, 126-128).

The consolidating thoughts of a government are typically nationalism and political ideology, and thus threatening these thoughts can threaten a country's political stability and order. Such threats may target the existing government structure by questioning its

legitimizing ideology, threaten territorial integrity by encouraging separation from governmental identity, threaten the government's existence itself by creating doubt in the government's right to autonomy. Moreover, failure to integrate diverse social groups and turn them into a united political force fragments the macro-political infrastructures of the country and weakens its policy-making ability (Karimi Maleh, 2014, 53-54).

Political actions in relations among groups within a society with each other or relations between groups and government can also cause the societal security dilemma and increase social tension. At the national level, a polarized societal structure, if combined with an inefficient government, provides the ground for the societal security dilemma. It was previously stated that intra-group homogeneity and inter-group heterogeneity are fundamental characteristics of a polarized society.

Third- Actions in the Economic Domain

Economic actions that cause unemployment in traditional societies and also through selecting an economic system contradictory to culture. In this way, by creating products such as television, internet, and consumerism, it replaces another identity, language, and culture, and the traditional identity is neglected. Lack of proportional and balanced investment in different regions of the country causes gaps, contradictions, and discrimination among ethnicities and social groups. In this state, lack of access to market resources and financial resources and creating economic constraints cause pathology.

Fourth- Actions in the Environmental Domain

Some policies, whether developmental, economic, or political, are destructive to the environment. Because they threaten a specific geography and territory linked to ethnic and group identity. This causes disintegration. Groups or ethnicities lose their identity in traditional facilities and biosphere and enter into conflict with its causes. If this destruction causes migration and geographical change,

it brings deeper identity pathologies and social division. Such actions, like the water crisis and its transfer to other points in recent years in the country, are noteworthy.

Fifth- Actions in the Social Domain

By sociological examination of the performance of the Islamic Republic of Iran system and its relations with society, we encounter a set of social challenges and pathologies.

In Iran, we witness active and passive structural and historical social gaps, many of which are active; some cause dynamism, transformation, and progress in society, while others are potentially and actually security crisis-creating. Among the numerous social gaps and conflicts in Iran, tendencies toward Western civilization and Islamic civilization are among the most important obstacles to forming a unified national identity, creating intellectual and cultural alignments in society, and lack of tolerance, forbearance, and mutual acceptance.

The struggle between the two poles of this intellectual spectrum, namely tradition and modernism, and the social conflict among groups and classes representing these two, provided the ground for one of the main conflicts and fragmentations in Iranian society in the twentieth century. Many historical and social transformations have intensified this conflict. This fragmentation naturally entails different views on the political system and has been one of the major obstacles to the emergence of unified and continuous political legitimacy, limiting the ground for consensus and national unity (Bashiriyeh, 2016, 133).

This difference can be interpreted in the common term of conflict between tradition and modernity, although these two terms are not precise. The goal is to express the mental form of this gap in terms of its effects on national security policymaking, particularly the development and expansion of political participation and the formation of national identity on one hand, and on the other hand,

preventing competition and removing obstacles to the expansion of civil political culture in Iran.

Pathology 4- Lack of Precise and Impartial Evaluation

The policymaking process without evaluating executed policies is incomplete and useless. In the evaluation stage, the consequences of executing announced policies must be extracted, even if many of them are inevitable. Two major problems are observed in the evaluation stage of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran: First- There is no specific legal institution and position for supervising announced policies, and the Supreme National Security Council institution as the policymaker does not have the necessary mechanism for supervision. Because receiving executed evaluations is limited to specific governmental and military centers, which are sometimes the executors of the announced policies themselves.

Second- Current evaluations are in administrative wrappers and cannot fully accept analysis and evaluation. In this state, the dominance of political relations over impartial evaluation occurs, and peer evaluations will also be accused of lack of accuracy and oversight. Evaluating national security policymaking is important because it realizes valuation and scoring of different sections. In this stage, the success or failure of policies at the general and sectoral levels becomes evident.

Procedural pathologies are summarized in the next table:

Process damage
Identifying the problem without considering the social security criteria in the recognition stage
Slowness of receiving messages and warnings sent by reference groups and dealing with the issue
Expanding the scope of security issues
Failure to make long-term decisions
Bias in the decision-making phase

Failure to create a common sense and identity in decision making
Lack of specific theoretical framework in planning and implementation
Lack of explicit policy guidelines
Lack of a government expert body equipped with the necessary skills to implement policies
Improper use of tools in the military, political, economic, environmental and social fields in the implementation phase
Lack of guarantee of necessary implementation
Uncertainty of the institution overseeing the implementation of policies
Political evaluation and self-evaluation
Lack of evaluation based on social security components

Conclusion

The issue of this research was to obtain results using the theoretical model of pathology of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran, through which both the policymaking process and the selected criteria of societal security theory can be intersected.

To answer the research question, institutional and procedural pathologies were identified. For greater accuracy, the selected components of societal security were involved in each stage of national security policymaking and intersected with each other.

On a larger scale, in the next table, pathology is performed through the theoretical model. The purpose of drawing this matrix was to pose and answer the question: What are the pathologies of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran from the perspective of societal security? And what results, effects, and potential pathologies will the non-observance of societal security components in various stages of national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran entail?

Selected components	Institutional damages	
	Internal factors of the institution	External factors of the institution

Government - policy-making body	✓ Fat, vague and complex structure ✓ Lack of job descriptions of sub-councils and internal committees ✓ Budget and financial resources	✓ Failure to determine the position of SNSC ✓ Failure to determine hierarchy Approvals ✓ Lack of a comprehensive and accurate view in the description of SNSC's duties ✓ The influence of parties and factions Political
Identity, norms and values	✓ The emergence of government identity, value and ideology against the acceptable identity of society or social groups ✓ Threatening stability and questioning the components of legitimacy ✓ The intellectual and cultural gap between the two trends of Western civilization and Islamic-Iranian civilization prevents the development of a single national identity	
Community-centered	✓ A part of society and people are a source of security, not all of it	
Gov-community interaction	✓ Loss of potential Community capacity in contributing to the objectives of the institution	
Societal security reference	✓ It is the security authority of the government and preserving the identity of the society is not a priority.	
Securitization and non-Securitization	✓ Lack of accountability to oversight bodies For security reasons ✓ Departure from the normal policy and legislative procedure	
Insecurity, damage and threats to societal security	✓ Invalidity and non-acceptability of the institution ✓ Structural inequalities based on gender and ethnicity and tribe and race ✓ Implementation of specific governance policies and directional structural adjustment ✓ The government limits and threatens the security of society	
Resilience and Survival	✓ Paralyzing the country's political power by spending the institution's abilities and resources	
Expanded security	✓ Inadequate knowledge and poor mastery of new theoretical frameworks	

Selected components	Process damage		
	✓Problem identification	✓Setting the agenda	✓Decision making

Government - policy-making body	✓Losing golden time in quickly identifying issues and problems	✓Diminishing the role of humanities and new theories in determining the agenda	✓Lack of long-term decisions ✓Ambiguity of the ideal point and goal in policy making
Identity, norms and values	✓The insignificance of issues threatening identity and values in identification	✓Lack of priority to identity threats as the central sign of life and societal security	✓Damage and rupture in national identity ✓Threats to ethnic identity and values
Community-centered (Source& security actor)	✓Failure to identify the problem through people and society	✓Priority to government agendas instead of agendas related to community interests	✓Failure to calculate the capacity of groups and society as a source of security
Gov-community interaction	✓Slow receipt of messages from reference groups		✓Occurrence of reactive action by different groups due to lack of attention to the opinions of society (social groups)
Societal security reference	✓The approach of maintaining the security of the government instead of providing the security of the society		✓The weak role of society and the needs and requests of society in the decision-making process
Securitization and non-Securitization	✓Increased scope for identifying issues as security issues	✓Issues are placed on the agenda, the designer of which has more discursive influence and justification power and can make the issue appear more important and more secure.	✓Transforming the political decision-making path into a security decision-making path and hiding decisions for intelligence and security reasons as much as possible.

Insecurity, damage and threats to societal security	✓Identification based on perspective, eternity and priority of a specific group and creating discrimination	✓Limited and arbitrary perceptions of issues and laws.	✓Create Gap And polarization ✓Narrowing and limiting the circle of identity of society and ethnic groups with polarized legislation ✓Identity replacement
Resilience and Survival	✓Failure to identify issues that threaten the resilience of the system and society.	✓Inevitable at the right time	✓Imprecise estimation of resilience that leads to decisions that society and government are unable to implement or reduce the power of resilience.
Expanded security	✓Identifying purely military and political issues and not fully identifying national security issues in cultural, social and economic fields	✓The priority of political and military threats over other cultural, social, economic, and environmental fields	✓Lack of a broad and continuous view in various areas of national security (cultural, political, social, economic, and environmental)

Selected components	Process damage	
	Execution	Evaluation and Feedback

Government - policy-making body	✓ Being undemocratic ✓ Unsatisfactory policy environment ✓ Improper implementation of policy by enforcers	✓ Absence of independent monitoring and evaluation mechanism in SNSC ✓ Merger of the implementing, supervising and evaluating body ✓ Distortions in evaluation and feedback despite the correctness of identification, decision-making and implementation steps ✓ Deterioration of the situation with incorrect assessment and cost-assessment
Identity, norms and values	✓ Failure to create a common public sense of national values and interests	✓ Providing feedback and evaluation based on the valuation of other criteria than Societal security components such as identity
Community- centered (Source&security actor)	✓ Reducing executive power and increasing the difficulty of implementing policy ✓ Not using society as an actor and helper of policies	✓ The high cost of the implementation process and the expensive implementation of the policy
Gov-community interaction	✓ Failure to associate ethnic groups and social minorities in assimilation and strengthening of common national identity and insistence on norms and values and group identity	✓ Lack of accurate evaluation due to not receiving the evaluation from the community or incomplete evaluation information
Societal security reference	✓ Not used or The small role of society and social groups in the implementation of policies ✓ Failure to exploit society and people as security actors	✓ Lack of accuracy in estimating and calculating the behavior, action and reaction of society as a reference and security actor
Securitization and non-Securitization	✓ Implementing the policy outside its usual channels and granting special licenses and rent to the executives due to their limited number.	✓ Lack of accurate evaluation and appropriate and favorable feedback due to confidentiality ✓ Lack of complete monitoring of the evaluation process

Insecurity, damage and threats to societal security	✓ The link between inefficiency and polarization in the political dimension ✓ The opportunity for other countries to infiltrate when local and internal conflicts arise ✓ Creating gaps through unbalanced economic and investment measures	✓ Bias of the evaluation process in favor of the policy implementer ✓ The predominance of political interests over impartial evaluation ✓ Denial of the structural causes of inequality and discrimination
Resilience and Survival	✓ Discontent and movementSeparatism Failure to integrate social groups	✓ Weak and non-transparent evaluation of the success and failure of the policy in the policy implementation process
Expanded security	✓ Economic measures lead to identity conflict in traditional society, their lack of access to necessary and sufficient financial resources, economic hardship and unemployment and inflation. ✓ Applying development, political and social and economic policies and... Environmentalist That It leads to migration from the traditional ecosystem and disconnection of identity and separation of territorial belonging. ✓ Economic and social inequalities and lack of balanced distribution of opportunity and wealth, investment, employment and industries.	✓ Imprecise assessment and feedback from the political, military, economic, social and environmental fields

Pathologizing national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran indicates a considerable distance from the current societal needs criteria from the perspective of societal security, and reducing this distance requires substantial effort. Preventing further pathology and reducing the distance between the current state and the desired state require devising strategies, the results of which will provide the necessary ground for presenting suggestions and corresponding strategies to resolve pathologies and establish societal security theory. Undoubtedly, this pathology is not sufficient and complete, but in the

temporal course, it will bring greater recognition and new dimensions. The research result indicates the need to apply societal security theory in national security policymaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran to fill some existing gaps.

If the political system, considering the existing institutional-structural, legal, and material and human resource capacities, seeks to make a fundamental change by providing the possibility of integrated social-political participation of all its citizens (alongside performing other political, social, economic, welfare functions, expanding social justice, eliminating poverty, inflation, and unemployment), then through a unified national-civic identity and citizens' sense of responsibility and participation in the country's social-political life, no serious issue in various domains can turn into a widespread crisis and unsolvable problem at the level of national security. Because ultimately, the vital source of security is the citizens themselves. In such conditions, when the most serious political or social protests by parts of professions, strata, and social forces in the form of demonstrations or strikes regarding a specific domain or institution of government or economy occur, they will not turn into a national security crisis. Because in fact, it is societal security that guarantees the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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