



NOWRŪZ, Cultural Convergence, and **Public Diplomacy**

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■ Geographical, Cultural, and Civilizational Zone of Nowruz

Besides Iran, which is the birthplace of Nowruz, this festivity is celebrated over a large geographical zone from western China to Anatolia, the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan in the east to Mesopotamia in the west, and from Xinjiang and Central Asia in the northeast to the Greater Caucasus in the north and Asia Minor in the northwest.

Turkmens, Uzbeks, Karakalpaks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Azeris, Yazidi Kurds of Armenia, Turks of the North Caucasus including the Azeris of Darband in Dagestan, Afghans, Pashtuns, Baloch people of Pakistan, Tajiks of Central Asia, Kurds of Turkey, Kurds of Iraq, Kurds of Syria, Tat people and Talysh people of the Caucasus, Turks of Anatolia and Balkan, Muslims of Tatarstan, Udmurta, and Bashkortostan, and Muslims of Astrakhan all believe in this festivity and celebrate it simultaneously.

Outside the current geographical boundaries of Iran, along with other main and essential elements of identity such as language and literature, music, art and architecture, national food, and dresses, Nowruz has become a large part of a common identity. According to the writings of the Tajik scholar, Begum Manzar Shahara, Nowruz meant the victory of justice and the beginning of a new life for the ancestors of today's Tajiks. Nowruz is like a national festivity for the people of central Asia who during the communist era in the Soviet Union faced restrictions by the Soviet government because it was considered a religious ceremony, and it was completely banned on December 5, 1936. However, following the independence of these republics in 1991, Nowruz regained its rightful place in these countries and it is being celebrated every year on March 21 with great enthusiasm. In Afghanistan, too, Nowruz festivity has had a long history and the people of this ancient

land and the residents of the Ariana have been celebrating this festivity for thousands of years since ancient times, and one of the best and most magnificent customs of Nowruz among them is to leave behind all anger and begin the new year with a clear heart towards each other.

■ The causes of the perpetuation of Nowruz

Most of the encyclopedias of the world have an entry about Nowruz. In the Turkish encyclopedia of Islam (Islam Ansiklopedisi) there is a lengthy entry about Nowruz. In addition to the entry on Nowruz the Turkish encyclopedia contains explanatory notes about the term Nowruz and other terms consisting of Nowruz in Turkish music. Similarly, another Turkish language encyclopedia (Turk Ansiklopediasi) has an entry on the term Nowruziya, which was a term used for gifts given by the kings to statesmen during the time of Nowruz, as well as the poems that poets used to compose on the occasion of this festivity.

History has shown that the occasions and festivities that are rooted in people's culture, interests, and beliefs are more durable. Therefore, the secret of the immortality and perpetuity of Nowruz should be sought in social values, especially the institution of the family in Eastern society. One of the reasons for the longevity of Nowruz is that it is an extremely popular custom and is held in the hearts of people, among people, and in families. The name of this festivity is "Nowruz" in the language of all the nations that celebrate it and it is a name that has never been translated into other languages.

■ Cultural diplomacy based on Nowruz

The role that Nowruz festivity can play as a cultural element in creating regional convergence is unique and unmatched. This



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is due to the fact that Nowruz has historically been an influential factor in cultural convergence between nations and states and nations have always been looking for factors that enhance their relations. Of course, it should not be overlooked that the idea of using cultural and social commonalities in order to strengthen and enhance relations between peoples is one of the old and long-standing issues of human history and Nowruz is one of those intangible historical contexts that can make relations between nations and governments in the field of culture and civilization more humane and logical.

By the same token, cultural diplomacy can play an important role in cultural exchange among nations and especially neighbor states resulting in cultural growth and elevation of stable peace and peaceful coexistence. Nowruz is a common cultural asset shared by

Iran and its neighbors. The role of Nowruz in cultural convergence takes place in two ways; hard and soft. In its hard form, a union gets formed with the aim of forming a common culture and identity. A clear example of this form of cultural convergence is the European Union the purpose of the creation of which has been to help create a common European

identity, which has, of course, failed in some cases.

But another type of it is soft convergence, where countries are led towards convergence due to their understanding of a similar identity and thus increase their interactions. In this type of convergence, there is more strength and it has a longer and more stable life. Nowruz is an element that can cause convergence. Nowruz is not just a time and a celebration, rather it is a discourse. Nowruz

is a discourse that originates from the heart of peaceful coexistence. Something that the countries of the region are in need of it more than at any other time and the attainment of which can affect the entire human world. Nowruz has the power to connect and unite nations and create convergence among them. This is because, within the context of Nowruz, there is no sign of negativity. Everything there is divine and humane; a world full of light, brightness, blessing, and truth.

After the United Nations recognized Nowruz as an international occasion by passing a resolution entitled “International Nowruz Day”. Iran held the first and second meetings of high-ranking officials of Nowruz countries in Tehran with the participation of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey, and Azerbaijan. The global initiative of Nowruz being recognized as a global festivity was a significant mover in the direction of strengthening the cultural and political relations of countries that have many strategic commonalities.

Keeping in view the importance of this festivity and its potential effects on regional convergence, several points should be noted.

A The cooperation of regional countries in the inscription of Nowruz in the United Nations in the recent past shows the importance and high status of this ancient and regional festivity. Thus, more attention to its high potential at the world level can promote greater regional convergence as well as peace at the world level.

B It should be said that Nowruz can have a significant role in the foreign policy and relations of the countries of the region resulting in an unprecedented positive outcome in different areas. In other words, increased cultural convergence can lead to stronger political and economic cooperation among the countries of the region.

C Countries celebrating Nowruz as a national festivity can join hands and increase their influence on international affairs, and by increasing the level of convergence among these countries they can focus on reducing disagreements and barriers to cooperation and prevent policies that cause divergence in the region.

■ The impact of globalization on the cultural convergence of the Nowruz region

Considering the ethnic diversity in the Nowruz region, the effects of globalization on the ethnic and national identity in this region are unavoidable. Will different national and ethnic identities within the region be a barrier to convergence? Or will they cause consistency and expansion of intra-regional convergence? Ethnicity is a cultural concept that focuses on having common cultural norms, values, beliefs, symbols, and practices. The formation of ethnic groups is based on common cultural symbols that have developed under specific historical, social, and political conditions. Seeking ethnic identity, if intensified, can lead to the emergence of ethnic movements. There are two main views on the impact of globalization on ethnic movements or, in general, cultural particularism. Most of those who have looked at the issue of ethnicity from the perspective of globalization and its related theories believe that globalization has led to the strengthening of these movements. However, there are other people who believe that this effect is not related to the process of globalization. In their opinion, states can succeed when they get out of the passive reaction towards this phenomenon and face it in an active manner. In an interactive mode, affecting and being affected occur simultaneously, and if managers are aware of the competitive advantages of organizations, they will make maximum use of mutual relations with other countries.