

## The Geopolitics of Arba'in and the Construction of a New Islamic Civilization

Mohammad Sotoudeh Arani 

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Baqer  
al-Olum University, Qom, Iran. m.sotode43@gmail.com



### Abstract

The Arba'in pilgrimage, as a capital for Islamic countries, with its long-standing history, especially in recent decades, has influenced the regional and global distribution of power and altered geopolitical calculations, ushering them into a new phase. The most significant geopolitical achievement of Arba'in is that it has transformed Muslim nations, which previously occupied a marginal position, into central players by leveraging their strategic location, thus creating a foundation for profound changes in the process of building the new Islamic civilization. This article, in response to the main question of what role the geopolitics of Arba'in plays in the construction of the new Islamic civilization, employs a descriptive-analytical method and uses the theoretical literature of critical geopolitics to test the hypothesis that the geopolitics of Arba'in, according to its codes—consisting of the presuppositions, principles, goals, and ideals of the Arba'in actors—has significant potential in the construction of the new Islamic civilization. These potentials are explained according to the guiding, normative, and behavioral rules. In this context, at the level of geopolitical weight and status, the evaluation and elevation of the status of Muslims in the light of Arba'in's significance were discussed, and the concept of power accumulation, security-building, and influence was clarified. Regarding the geopolitical identity of Arba'in, three factors (place) or geography (space), networks and social relations, and (time) or history were considered. It was stated that the spiritual realm of Arba'in is not confined to the territorial borders of a single country but, like a shining sun, embraces all Muslim people. The geopolitics of Arba'in has impacted all freedom-loving humans, regardless of their ethnicity, race, or nationality. Furthermore, civil society institutions and grassroots networks have emerged spontaneously and voluntarily in collective actions to support the symbols and representations of Husayni values, playing their historical role with sincerity and spirituality in the formation of civilizational and transcendent relations within the Arba'in community. On the other hand, the long-standing

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history and institutionalization of this unparalleled event over time reflects the foundational roots that nourish the tree of Islamic civilization. Accordingly, the relationship between the geopolitics of Arba'in and civilization-building in terms of religious centrality, rationality, ethical transcendence, community building, and the creation of an inclusive ummah was examined. It was stated that the foundation of the new Islamic civilization is the divine values and beliefs entrusted to the great community of Arba'in. The elevated human being is the primary architect of the new Islamic civilization—humans who, based on both material and spiritual rationality, pursue divine closeness in their plans and actions. Adherence to human and elevated ethics within the Arba'in community prepares a powerful capacity for civilization-building. The formation of grassroots institutions in light of religious teachings, rational thought, and the ethics of the elevated human being illustrates capacities that can lay the groundwork for a civilizational society. This society, united by a common goal based on the deep beliefs of Arba'in, creates an inclusive ummah that transcends the state-nation and geographical borders.

### **Keywords**

Arba'in processions, critical geopolitics, power equations, construction of a new Islamic civilization.

## Introduction

The phenomenon of Arba'in of Husayn (anniversary of the fortieth day of Imam al-Husayn's martyrdom), with its long-standing history, has entered a new phase in recent decades and, in turn, has created profound and extensive capacities for the development, progress, and civilization-building of the Islamic world.

The link between the geography of Arba'in and politics, culture, and civilization reflects the emergence of geopolitical changes in Islamic territories, from the national to the global level. The conceptual literature of critical geopolitics, which places intra-regional processes and non-state actors at the center of its studies, can effectively explain the geographic, cultural, political, and popular aspects of Arba'in.

To this end, in the discussion of geopolitical codes, presuppositions, principles, and foundational bases shaping the perspectives and actions of actors are examined. In the study of the geopolitical weight and status of Arba'in, the accumulation of power, security-building, and the territory of influence and behavioral impact of Arba'in actors are addressed. In the explanation of the geopolitical identity, three concepts—(place) or geography (space), networks and social relations, and (time) or the history of Arba'in over the past decade—are studied in the context of new Islamic civilization-building.

Studying the Arba'in pilgrimage from a critical geopolitical perspective shows that the building of the new Islamic civilization, through the production of shared values and spiritual forces, credibility and identity-building, elevating the status of Muslims, and generating common insights and awareness among Muslims about belonging to a global and inclusive group, forms the core elements of the new Islamic civilization. These shared mentalities direct collective actions that lead to civilization-building behaviors.

In this article, in response to the main question of what role the geopolitics of Arba'in plays in the building of Islamic civilization, a descriptive-analytical method is employed, utilizing the theoretical literature of critical geopolitics. The hypothesis tested is that the geopolitics of Arba'in, based on its codes—which include the presuppositions and the core essence of the messages of Arba'in—and at the levels of weight and status, encompassing power, credibility, and influence, as well as at the level of identity, which includes the dimensions of place, space, and time, holds significant potential in shaping the new Islamic civilization.

## **1. Theoretical Framework: Employing the Conceptual Literature of Critical Geopolitics**

### **1-1. Critical Geopolitics**

Multiple definitions have been presented regarding the concept of geopolitics as a science of power. In one definition, geopolitics is the study of political phenomena based on their spatial and territorial relationships, as well as their dependency and impact on the land and all cultural and human factors, which is generally the subject of human geography (Sayyadi & Sanaei, 2017, p. 85). Critical geopolitics, in fact, is a critical response to traditional or classical geopolitics and one of the later critical approaches within the field of geopolitics, which emerged in the 1980s. The primary task of critical geopolitics is to critique politics, with its goal being to uncover and reveal the hidden political motivations behind the formation of classical geopolitical propositions and to expose the relationship between power and the production of knowledge (Torkmeh et al., 2022, p. 2).

In recent theoretical literature, geopolitical actors are not just states but also individuals, political parties, groups, and civil society organizations, all of which are considered geopolitical agents pursuing their own objectives. Accordingly, these actors influence the formation of new geopolitics (Flint, 2006, p. 26). In critical geopolitics, where the researchers Gerald O'Tuathail and Simon Dalby are prominent, emphasis is placed on the bottom-up formation of geopolitics, its production and reproduction through popular culture, its construction, and the role of political culture (O'Tuathail & Dalby, 1998, p. 86). On the other hand, critical geopolitics addresses how places and people are described to explain the actions and statements of foreign policy actors in order to legitimize and justify foreign policy actions (see Ahmadipour & Badiei, 2002, p. 7). Additionally, in critical geopolitics, it is possible to discuss the position of a country, nation, or civilization within regional and global power equations based on its physical and geographical environment and its geopolitical actors.

### **1-2. Geopolitical Identity**

The concept of geopolitical identity refers to the regional system to which a country belongs. In fact, the geopolitical, security, historical, cultural, and economic characteristics of a country, as well as its level of dependency on a region, determine its geographical and geopolitical identity. Defining geopolitical identity is a significant issue in politics and governance, and it is

used to maintain the power and legitimacy of a country among other nations. Furthermore, "there is a high level of correlation between geopolitics and the foreign policy behavior patterns of states" (Hafeznia, 2013, p. 12), and geopolitical identity plays a crucial role in shaping strategies and geopolitical relations.

### **1-3. Geopolitical Codes**

A geopolitical code is the operational code of a state's foreign policy, which involves assessing areas beyond its borders based on their degree of importance to its interests and goals (Pishgahi-Fard & Soleimani-Moghadam, 2009, pp. 105-104). It also refers to the way a country orients itself towards the world (Flint, 2006, p. 55). Furthermore, in this context, evaluations and the determination of the importance of values, assumptions, principles, and the attitudes of actors are taken into consideration.

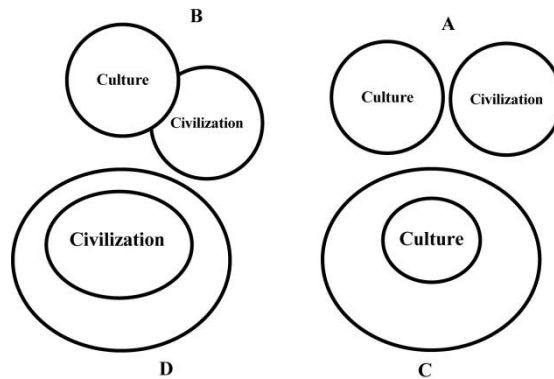
### **1-4. Geopolitical Weight**

Geopolitical weight refers to the influence of positive and negative forces and factors affecting a country's national power, such as its geographic location, relative territorial position, territorial size in proportion to population, skilled human resources, and natural and strategic resources (Hosseinpour Pouyan, 2013, p. 179). Therefore, geopolitical weight represents a country's national power, credibility, and status on the regional and international stage, with the behavior of other countries, states, and political actors being shaped based on it.

### **1-5. New Islamic Civilization**

There have been multiple definitions of civilization. In some definitions, civilization is distinguished from culture, while in others, they are considered synonymous (see Babaei, 2014, p. 31). Civilization, in its linguistic sense, refers to urbanization (or civil life), social life, and the cooperation of people with one another; civilization or urbanization stands in contrast to nomadism. One definition of civilization is described as "a productive society with tools for expansion" (Quigley, 2000). Will Durant believes that civilization, in its broadest sense, can be seen as a social order through which cultural creativity becomes possible and flows. Additionally, from his perspective, four fundamental elements of civilization can be identified: prediction, caution in economic matters, political organization, moral traditions, and the pursuit of knowledge and the expansion of art (Durant, 1986, Vol. 1, p. 3).

Culture also comprises components that, over time, have been accompanied by orientations and issues, and it continues to grow as an academic field (see During, 1993, pp. 17-28). In general, civilization can be understood at its broadest level as the cultural, social, political, and economic systems of a nation, with its core formed by beliefs, values, and stances rooted in the culture of that nation. Furthermore, the relationship between civilization and culture can be expressed as follows:



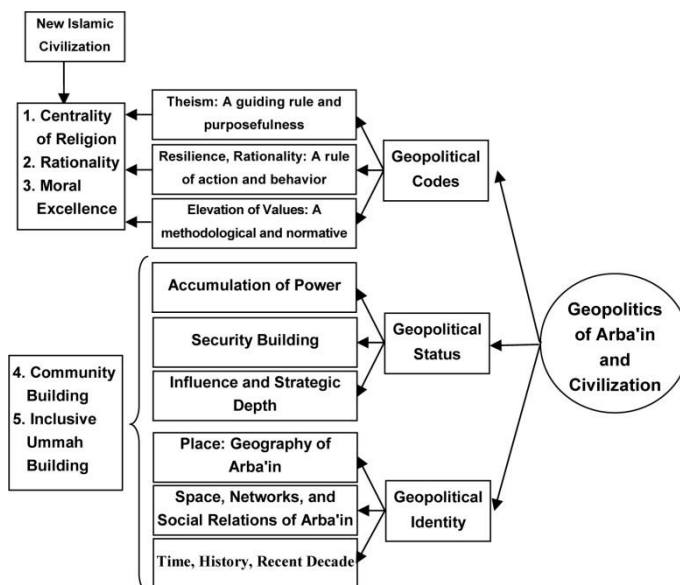
According to the diagram above, the relationships of A and B include separation and overlap. In the situations of D and C, culture or civilization is positioned at the center, with the other surrounding it. In this article, the concept of the new Islamic civilization refers to the definition in which Islamic culture is at the center and civilization is positioned around it. In other words, religion and Islamic culture form the foundational elements of Islamic civilization. This definition can be associated with the state C.

The Supreme Leader views the formation of the new Islamic civilization as being closely tied to the main goal of the Islamic Revolution. He refers to five stages in this regard: the Islamic Revolution, system-building, state-building, society-building, and civilization-building. From his perspective, in the new Islamic civilization, science is combined with ethics, materialism with spirituality, and religion with political power, all alongside justice (Khamenei, July 5, 2000). In this civilization, science, ethics, rationality, and justice are its core components. In this context, the Supreme Leader emphasizes that Islamic civilization is not about expansionism, but rather about the intellectual influence of nations by Islam (Khamenei, March 26, 2016). This represents the necessary transition from the early and intermediate stages— "Islam as Culture" and "Islam as Ideology"—to the higher and final stage of "Civilizational Islam" (Khorramshad, 2013, p. 130). The most important

distinguishing feature of Islamic civilization compared to Western civilization is its focus on reviving divine-human values that have been forgotten in the current global context.

The facets of the new Islamic civilization are based on four key values: vision (worldview and divine beliefs), knowledge (wisdom), action (culture of jihad and effort), and character (adherence to ethics and values) (Memari, 2017, p. 26). The development of civilization follows its foundational principles, with progress being achievable through reflection and learning from past experiences ("Civilizational progress is possible through thought and utilizing past experiences," Banner, 2023). The revival of Islamic civilization does not mean returning to the Islamic civilization of the 3rd to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AH, but rather, it involves linking with the legacy of past civilizations while constructing the new Islamic civilization through the achievements of modern human civilization in the era of information, communication, new technologies, and global demands, all founded on divine-human values. Western civilization, on the other hand, is beset by multiple crises (see Mozaffari, 2002, pp. 151-170). However, the spirit of the new Islamic civilization is rooted in exalted ethics, humanity, science, and human dignity, which protect it from the moral decay and crises faced by other civilizations.

The following diagram illustrates the role of Arba'in's geopolitics in the construction of the new Islamic civilization, utilizing the theoretical framework of critical geopolitics at the levels of geopolitical codes, status, and identity.



## **2. Geopolitical Codes and Arba'in Agents/Actors**

Geopolitical codes are the basis for the actions of the actors and are directed towards the assumptions, foundations, and principles of behavior, which form the core of both micro and macro strategies, as well as a foundation for mapping out operational paths for future development at national and transnational levels for every country and actor (Hosseinpour Pouyan, 2013, p. 179). The human factor is the most important element in the formation of civilization. A person, in the first place, is a living being and a vital unit who possesses innate abilities for thinking, feeling, and acting. At the same time, each individual who lives in a particular time and place is a product of the interaction and intertwined influences of their innate talents and physical and mental powers with environmental factors (Linton, 1958, p. 38). The human factor or the Islamic Ummah, as the primary actors of the new Islamic civilization in Arba'in, engages in action based on its assumptions, principles, goals, and ideals. According to the shared mental development of these actors, the most important guiding, normative, and behavioral rules can be expressed as follows:

### **2-1. Theism: An Ultimate Guiding Rule**

Each individual, group, and society is shaped by its foundational beliefs and convictions, which determine the direction of life and destiny. Monotheists and believers in God, who recognize the One God as the most perfect being, endowed with the most perfect attributes, free from any defect or deficiency, engage solely in His worship, servitude, and devotion. Their mode of action is thus distinct from other societies. The conduct and actions of believers and Muslims are aligned with the path of truth and the journey toward God, and their deeds are imbued with a divine hue: “[This is] the color of God—and who is better in coloring than God?” (Quran 2:138). The great Arba'in gathering is a concrete manifestation of God-believing individuals whose actions are directed toward a divine destination and whose behaviors reflect the divine. They consider God alone as the source of power and praise, for the monotheist deems only God worthy of worship, and the entire life of the God-conscious person is one of obedience to Him. Such a person finds tranquility in the remembrance of the One God: “Indeed, I am God; there is no deity except Me, so worship Me and establish prayer for My remembrance” (Quran 20:14); “Surely in the remembrance of God do hearts find rest” (Quran 13:28). One of the behavioral traits of the monotheist is sincerity in action: “Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for God, Lord of



the worlds—no partner has He. And this I have been commanded, and I am the first of the Muslims” (Quran 6:162–161). Sincerity in action leads to the worthiness of receiving wisdom and abundant goodness: “He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever is given wisdom has certainly been given much good. But none will remember except those of understanding” (Quran 2:269). The sincere actions of monotheists during the Arba'in of Ḥusayn, as a collective phenomenon, constitute the most vital element of civilization-building—qualifying them to play an effective role in the process of Islamic civilizational development in the upward journey of the Muslim community.

## **2-2. Elevation of Values: Methodological and Normative Rule**

The movement of a faithful human being toward moral refinement and perfection unfolds through a process intimately tied to the principle of belief in God. The model for the believers is Prophet Muḥammad, who said, “Indeed, I was sent to perfect noble character” (Ṭabarsī, 1993, p. 500). The Prophet’s life conduct offers a complete example of a religious and elevated way of life. In a monotheistic society like the great Arba'in community, values such as self-sacrifice, cooperation, mutual assistance, eagerness in doing good, compassion, collective reflection, problem-solving, and a sense of harmony and shared destiny are among the community members’ exalted ethical beliefs. The individuals in this society are distanced from carnal desires and base traits, for the human being is the only creature who, by God’s permission, holds the freedom to shape their own character and determine their existential dimensions and status among other beings. Humanity’s unique trait among God’s creatures is its ability to move along the spectrum from *asfal al-sāfilīn* (the lowest of the low) to a *‘lā ‘illiyyīn* (the highest of the high). A human being is beholden to their own virtues and vices—living by them, thinking with them, judging, deciding, acting, and ultimately dying and being resurrected with them. One’s ultimate happiness or misery is determined by these very traits (Nouri & Fallah, 2008, p. 2). The elevation of values and the journey toward a *‘lā ‘illiyyīn*, encompassing all moral virtues, are vividly observed in the Arba'in community. The movement of monotheists within the Arba'in society—guided by the four cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, chastity, and justice—creates broad capacities for shaping a new Islamic civilization.

## **2-3. Steadfastness and Rationality: Conative and Behavioral Rule**

Attaining a new Islamic civilization faces various obstacles and challenges, the realization of which is not possible without steadfastness, wisdom, and

rationality. Broadly categorized, some of these challenges stem from within the Islamic society itself and require transformation in the path of human and societal development: “Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves” (Quran 13:11). Steadfastness along the path can help bring about change and the construction of a renewed society. In verse 112 of Surah Hūd, God says: “So remain steadfast as you have been commanded—and those who have turned in repentance with you—and do not transgress. Indeed, He sees all that you do” (Quran 11:112). Another dimension of the challenge lies in the external realm—the disbelieving societies and external adversaries—whom the Islamic ummah must overcome: “Make our feet firm and grant us victory over the disbelieving people” (Quran 3:147; 2:250). Achieving such victory depends on perseverance, rationality, and prudence. God also states: “God will never allow the disbelievers a way over the believers” (Quran 4:141). Victory in both the internal domain of the Islamic society and the external front is conditional upon the resistance, steadfastness, and sound judgment of the ummah. A vivid manifestation of this can be seen in the Arba'in gathering of Husayn. This spirit of resistance draws from the lived example of Imam Husayn, who refused to submit or coexist with an oppressive regime and sacrificed all he had for higher ideals. The Islamic resistance demonstrated by the Arba'in community of monotheists, which serves as the groundwork for civilizational construction, can pursue various goals—among them the establishment and defense of an Islamic system, deterrence, the provision of security and justice, the defense of the oppressed, and the promotion of social cohesion (see: Yousefi-Moghadam, 2020, p. 7063).

### **3. Arba'in's Geopolitical Weight and Status**

The validation and elevation of the status of Muslims is clearly manifested in the light of the Arba'in of Husayn. Cultivating trust, self-belief, courage, and boldness in the face of oppressive powers—through adherence to the school of Imam Husayn—not only enhances the collective identity and human dignity of the Islamic ummah but also consolidates a discourse of strength and resilience within its belief system. In other words, the dignity and standing of the Islamic ummah—through unity, lofty ethical conduct, and a growing spirit of solidarity—continues to inspire oppressed nations under the global hegemonic order. It embodies the signs present in the Arba'in discourse that serve to secure the honor and authority of regional nations and the Islamic ummah as a whole.

### **3-1. Accumulation of Power**

Nations, in their path toward development and progress, possess both material and spiritual sources of power. National power comprises a collection of capacities, capabilities, potentials, population, morale, and material resources that a nation holds within its geographical domain. The advancement of a country toward civilizational formation occurs when these dispersed and latent sources of power are consolidated into an accumulation of power. Accordingly, the revival of Islamic civilization requires the formation of a civilizational structure grounded in the accumulation of power and the mobilization of all available forces. This accumulation of power finds full expression in the phenomenon of Arba'in. The Islamic power manifested in Arba'in demonstrates the might and grandeur of Islam and the solidarity of the Islamic ummah. Through Arba'in, spiritual serenity, dignity, identity formation, perseverance, and resistance are fostered—accelerating the Islamic ummah's journey toward civilizational construction.

### **3-2. Security Building**

Any gathering or assembly, in any location, requires the presence of security and stability. The participation of millions in the Arba'in pilgrimage necessitates a high level of security across various dimensions and layers. Despite security challenges arising from threats and attempts to instill fear along the pilgrimage routes, the vast Arba'in community succeeded—through popular strength and broad-based cooperation—in establishing and maintaining security and stability. The establishment of such security, enabling a mass gathering of Muslims, not only reflects the significant power of the Islamic ummah but also reveals the constructive and effective capacities within the Arba'in society. These capacities can play a major role in the formation of a new Islamic civilization.

### **3-3. Influence and Strategic Depth**

An increase in the level of power and shifts in the regional balance of power reflect the influence and strategic depth of a unified and cohesive state or nation. The influence of the Islamic ummah during Arba'in —across political, cultural, social, security, and economic dimensions—can be extensively studied both in objective and subjective terms. This is an ummah united by shared religious and cultural foundations around Islam and the ideals of Husayn, playing an active role in shaping its own destiny. The geopolitical outcome of Arba'in is that this gathering possesses a high capacity to mobilize

its resources and capabilities in pursuit of its goals. The strategic influence and depth of Arba'in's outcomes become especially apparent when its soft power and sphere of impact are considered. This influence—both formal and informal—penetrates the minds, thoughts, and hearts of the lovers of Arba'in, extending beyond Islamic lands to non-Muslim countries as well. The most significant outcome of this strategic penetration and the geography of Arba'in's soft power is the creation of deterrence, the reduction of threats, and the establishment of lasting security within the Islamic ummah of the region—laying the groundwork for advancement and Islamic civilizational development. The effects and outcomes of Arba'in's soft power for the Islamic ummah can be observed in both deterring enemy threats and enhancing the power and influence of the Arba'in community (see: Dehshiri & Ghafouri, 2015, p. 186).

#### **4. The Geopolitical Identity of Arba'in**

The characteristics and components of a country's geographical, economic, cultural, political, and security environment—as well as its interactive domains with a region or another country—constitute its geopolitical identity. Accordingly, a country's belonging to a particular region and its connections with surrounding and global spheres determine its geostrategic domain and the strategic weight of its places and spaces, thereby influencing its national power. “Identity is linked to three categories: place or geography (space), networks and social relations, and time or history—and is shaped by the features and transformations of these three elements” (Mosallanejad, 2012, p. 139). With the fall of Saddam's regime, the regional identity of Arba'in underwent a transformation. It moved beyond its traditional geographic fabric and expanded its cultural and social reach to include other countries. In the first stage, it influenced the surrounding geography of Iraq—what is referred to as place.

##### **4-1. Arba'in's Place or Geography**

The study of the cultural geography of Arba'in reveals that its values and spiritual domain are not confined to the territorial boundaries of Iraq. Rather, like a radiant sun, it encompasses all Muslims and the oppressed people of the region and the world. Arba'in, with its unifying, inclusive, and transcendent teachings rooted in monotheism, is a movement for the victory of all the oppressed over the oppressors, based on the verse: “This is your community, a single community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me” (Quran 21:92).

In essence, it is the geographical, human, cultural, and civilizational characteristics of Arba'in that determine the extent and impact of its reach. According to the theory of diffusion or "dissemination," the spread and innovations of Arba'in can encompass all fifty-seven Islamic countries that are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, or any subsystem of the international system (see Barzegar, 2015, p. 54). Therefore, the Arba'in pilgrimage is not limited to the mass movement of the people of Iraq from various cities toward Karbala, but it includes Muslims from around the world—from India to Europe and even to the Americas (see: Daneshgar, 2023, p. 11).

Based on this, empirical evidence shows that the millions-strong Arba'in gathering from Islamic countries not only encompasses the regional and transregional territories of Islamic lands but also includes Muslims and monotheists in non-Islamic countries. The geopolitics of Arba'in has affected all freedom-loving people, regardless of ethnicity, race, or nationality.

#### **4-2. Space or Networks of Propagating the Arba'in Culture**

The elevated teachings and culture of Arba'in, rooted in the school of Imam Husayn, combined with the deep love of the Muslim people in the region, have fostered spiritual relationships, empathy, cooperation, and harmony among the nations of the region, transcending geographical borders. These have created a widespread social, identity-based, and supportive network among various ethnicities, groups, and cultures in the region. Spontaneously and voluntarily, grassroots organizations and networks have risen to defend the ideals and goals of the Husaynian school, with their members dedicating their lives and wealth to the cause. This spiritual aspect has the potential to plant the seed for a civilization-driven movement, cultivating higher-level relationships within the Arba'in Islamic community—a seed that, over time, will grow into a prosperous and radiant tree in fertile lands. Furthermore, the presence of hundreds of organizations and social networks playing a significant role in this social, cultural, and political event contributes to the spatial dissemination of Islamic civilization. Spatial diffusion refers to "a process in which people's attitudes and behaviors change" (Barzegar, 2015, p. 34). In the era of globalization, with the growth of communications and information technologies, new capacities have emerged for "bottom-up movements," enabling people and civil society organizations to play a crucial role (see: O'Tuathail et al., 2001, pp. 680-990). The role of grassroots actors and the expansion of horizontal relationships have been effective in shaping

transformations and creating changes in attitudes and processes both within the region and globally. These developments lay a solid foundation for moving toward a new Islamic civilization. As networks expand and a new geopolitical identity emerges in cyberspace, it leads to the production of power: "In this context, countries and companies can increase their functional authority and public power, enhancing their geopolitical standing in a competitive environment, and against other real or hypothetical actors and competitors" (Hafeznia, 2015, p. 329). The most significant feature of this process is the prioritization of collective goals and interests over individualistic concerns, wherein collective trust—being the most vital social capital and the foundation for strengthening civilizational relations—emerges.

#### **4-3. Time: History and Recent Decades of Arba'in**

The sanctity of Arba'in has always existed among Muslims in past centuries, which in turn has created a tremendous resource for the observance of Arba'in of Husayn for the Islamic community. The movement of the Shia of Iraq towards Karbala on the day of Arba'in existed during the time of the infallible Imams and has continued in later periods as well (Ghazi Tabatabaei, 1989, p. 29). The pilgrimage to Imam al-Husayn after forty days, which was carried out by Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī, and its continuity over time, laid the groundwork for the formation of the Arba'in culture as a social asset for the Islamic community. With the fall of Saddam's regime, a new era began, which in turn has had wide-ranging effects and consequences for the Islamic community in terms of influencing power dynamics in the region. The ancient history and deep-rooted foundation of this unparalleled event, as well as its institutionalization over time until the present day, reflect strong and deep-rooted foundations that the tree of Islamic civilization can bear fruit from, enriching the human community.

### **5. Building the New Islamic Civilization**

Considering the geopolitical codes of Arba'in, which are related to the assumptions, principles, values, and norms of the agents and actors in the Arba'in community, one can harness its significant potential in explaining the foundations of a new Islamic civilization. The most important of these pertain to the centrality of religion, rationality, and moral excellence.

#### **5-1. Centrality of Religion**

In Islamic civilization, the place and role of religion is considered the soul and

the genuine foundation of it, and the religious community is the true driving force of civilization-building. The distinction between Islamic civilization and Western civilization is that, in Islamic civilization, divine-human values and spiritual elements are at its core, with material elements deriving their meaning from it. In contrast, in Western material civilization, the primary and central element that plays a decisive role is materialism and worldly values, with spirituality relegated to the margins, serving as a tool to achieve material goals. In Western material civilization, inequality, discrimination, injustice, exploitation, colonialism, and superiority-seeking, deception, and manipulation exist to secure the interests of global powers. However, authentic Islamic civilization strives for equality, justice, the pursuit of rights, and the realization of divine-human values. The Supreme Leader says in this regard: "In creating Islamic civilization, the nation must implement Islam and the teachings of the Prophet. These teachings are aimed at building a new Islamic civilization, which differs from Western principles for humanity. The new civilization does not mean the use of force, territorial conquest, or the imposition of morals on nations, but rather it means showing correct ethics, behavior, and principles of life so that people can choose the right path" (Khamenei, 29 October 2015). He also states: "Therefore, the enemy seeks to halt the movement of the Islamic Revolution, which is the movement of the Islamic system toward the new Islamic civilization; because they know this movement is directly opposed to the interests of Zionist capitalists and the exploitative, bloodthirsty corporations of the world" (Khamenei, 18 February 2015). In summary, one can say that the geopolitical significance of Arba'in and the Islamic Revolution, which is connected with Islam, serves as the driving force of civilization-building and is in contrast to Western material civilization, always facing threats and harms resulting from the politics of great powers, because the essence and foundation of the two civilizations are different (see Ahmadi Kachaei, 2021, pp. 33–51).

## 5-2. Rationality

Rationality is one of the key features of civilization-building, and modern civilization, with its specific definition of rationality, laid the foundation for material civilization. This civilization, without referring to God and by replacing autonomous reason, which has the ability to perform tasks without the need for revelation, established a worldly civilization and embraced its material manifestations. In contrast, in Islamic civilization, the material aspect of rationality alone is not sufficient; it must be connected with the spiritual and

heavenly aspects of human beings. Ayatollah Javadi Amoli, in his message to the National Conference on the New Islamic Civilization, states: "In explaining Islamic civilization, we must have a conference that highlights the commonalities between humans and angels... The most prominent of these are the three well-known principles of world knowledge, world governance, and world beautification... Since humans share these principles with angels, they are good world governors, world knowers, and world arrangers" (Javadi Amoli, 10 October 2015). In this regard, the Supreme Leader, in outlining the key components of the new Islamic civilization in the teachings of Imam Khomeini, states: "The Imam's school is a complete package, a collection with dimensions. These dimensions must be viewed together. The two main aspects of Imam's great school are spirituality and rationality... There is also a third aspect... and that is justice" (Khamenei, 3 June 2011). Arba'in, which is filled with love and sacrifice, never leads to the neglect of rationality, insight, and the individual and collective knowledge and awareness of its followers. It encompasses all the aspects of achieving happiness.

### **5-3. Moral Excellence**

Human ethics, based on innate and divine values, is one of the main foundations of the new Islamic civilization. A civilization without ethics, human values, and norms, such as justice, equality, and the absence of discrimination, lacks the spirit and true essence that cannot claim to bring about happiness and the advancement of humanity. As mentioned in the elevation of values as one of the potentials of Arba'in, moral excellence is not only a methodological rule for the progress and development of individual and collective actors in the new Islamic civilization, but also a normative and obligatory rule, adherence to which distinguishes Islamic civilization from material civilization.

### **5-4. Community Building**

Social building, system creation, and organizing collective life is another dimension of civilization-building. The formation of a faithful community in the light of the religious, ethical, and value-based capacities of Arba'in offers a unique potential for creating a civilizational society. In this regard, the formation of the new Islamic civilization, based on human relationships, is the most important characteristic observed during Arba'in of Husayn, amidst the love and the millions-strong presence of the Islamic community. This community, which is an example of a pure and virtuous life within a religious



society, is founded on three key elements: a) Love and affection; b) Altruism; c) Mutual trust. This social capital leads to the accumulation of power, security-building, and the expansion of influence, as discussed in the geopolitical significance of Arba'in. In other words, the capacities of Arba'in at the level of credibility and prestige play a decisive role in the creation of a civilizational society with a spirit of faith, love, and affection in a defined territory, eventually expanding globally. For instance, in a meta-analysis study of Arba'in pilgrimage research, selecting 38 papers out of 83 conducted studies, the social concepts developed by researchers are shown, and their relevance to community building and the movement towards nation-building is observable (Tajbakhsh et al., 2022, p. 17).

Primary Code	Secondary Code	Category
Religious Self-Awareness	Religious and Spiritual Identity	Community-Centered
Familiarity with Religious Values		
Attachment to Place		
Spirit of Cooperation		
Religious Epistemology		
Social Identity		
Centrality of People	Social Consequences	
Reinforcing Social Habits		
Interpersonal Confidence-Building		
Suspending the Class System		
Eliminating Social Struggles		
Improving Social Responsibility		
Convergence of Nations		
Building Confidence between Iranian and Iraqi Pilgrims		

Field observations also show that numerous groups and factions, in a spontaneous movement from various ethnicities, tribes, and cultures, selflessly serve the vast multitude of pilgrims of Imam al-Husayn. In this context, they race to assist one another. It is in this way that it can be said: Arba'in has planted the seeds of human-building, community-building, and civilization-building, and the Islamic community is nurturing and flourishing them in all their dimensions and levels. In other words, "The existence of spiritual and human love for an infinite perfection—where all draw from the love they share—makes it so that lovers, instead of fighting over the beloved, love one another, and through collective love for the shared beloved, they ignite

each other's spiritual love even more. In the end, they create a network of connections and social ties full of love and affection, where love is both the goal and the means, both in the individual and the community. This love-centered system of communication creates very advanced human relations and fosters a new unity and cohesion, which is hard to find a counterpart for in the history of humanity, or even in today's modern societies. Today, in political discourse, such an ideal society is regarded as a dream and a utopia, and the possibility of such ideal and human relationships, especially in today's soulless world, is often imagined as unattainable. This is the miracle that Husayn ibn Ali creates in a world devoid of love and spirituality, opening new horizons for contemporary humanity. Creating such human relations and ties in the fragmented and virtual state of modern and postmodern society is an extraordinary feat, as it even fosters unity and solidarity in the deepest layers of humanity" (Babaei, 10 November 2016).

### **5-5. Inclusive Ummah-Building**

The geopolitical identity of Arba'in, which pertains to the place, space, and time of Arba'in, shows that the core values of Arba'in are inclusive and universal. They are not tied to a specific place or geography but attract all humans across the world, and the elevated human and social relations of Arba'in have significant potential for global nation-building within the framework of the new Islamic civilization. In this regard, American scholar David Philip says about the Arba'in gathering: "Whenever I think there is no hope left for humanity and the world is at its lowest stage of humanity, when I remember Arba'in, I become hopeful because in the story of Arba'in, you see people from all religions and sects, of all colors and races, coming together. This shows that there is hope for humanity. There are people around the world who support truth and justice, but because they are scattered, they are not easily seen. Arba'in is the best opportunity for the truth-seekers of the world to gather, and this movement will certainly reach a good end and will eradicate disbelief and oppression. In general, it can be said that in the love and passion for Imam al-Husayn, there is hope for humanity, because the Imam himself was filled with hope and the satisfaction of God. He certainly saw these and thanked God" (Philip, 27 October 2018).

Given the above, the great Arba'in community not only possesses the latent elements of human-building, community-building, and global nation-building, but these elements are actively manifest in the actions and behaviors of the Arba'in participants at national, regional, and transnational levels, showing

their deep connection to the process of civilization-building.

## Conclusion

In critical geopolitical theory, unlike classical geopolitics and the tradition of realism, in the age of globalization of communications and information, politics and governments are not the only actors in the geopolitical arena. Rather, cultures, identities, values, organizations, individuals, and nations also influence the construction of geopolitics. Horizontal and intra-regional processes must be considered when studying geopolitical transformations. The phenomenon of Arba'in, as the most significant cultural-political gathering in the region, encompassing the millions-strong power of the Islamic community, has been able to influence the discourse of power, culture, and politics at national, regional, and transnational levels, offering broad and observable potentials for Islamic civilization-building. This article examines the role of the geopolitical significance of Arba'in in the creation of the new Islamic civilization, utilizing the theoretical literature of critical geopolitics, in terms of codes, prestige, and geopolitical identity of Arba'in. It was demonstrated that the Arba'in march plays a decisive role in the construction of the new Islamic civilization, particularly in the elements of religious centrality, rationality, moral excellence, community-building, and global nation-building—elements that are symbolized in the school of Imam al-Husayn and the Arba'in community. By preserving and expanding this authentic culture, the foundations of the new Islamic civilization can be formed. On the other hand, acquiring knowledge and higher science based on rationality and wisdom, equipping oneself with up-to-date knowledge and technologies, are essential to securing the material power dimensions of Islamic civilization, which is the condition for the advancement and growth of civilization in the face of competing civilizations and emerging threats. Achieving these sources of power is a significant step in preserving the social capital of Arba'in and nurturing it toward the construction of the new Islamic civilization.

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