



# Russia's foreign policy towards Iran; Security Challenges and Opportunities (2012-2022)

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## Abstract

Russia-Iran relations have been associated with many ups and downs throughout history, and sometimes they have lined up side by side and sometimes against each other. The purpose of this study is to examine the security challenges and opportunities of Russia's foreign policy towards Iran, especially from 2012 to 2021. The question of the article is what are the challenges and opportunities of Russia's foreign policy towards Iran from 2012 to 2021? And to answer the question, we test the hypothesis that after 2012, Russia's approach in the form of a Multilateralism perspective has led to challenges and opportunities for Iran, the common denominator of which is the relationship between Moscow and Washington. The data collection method is library and Internet, and the data analysis method is based on the process tracking method and is inspired by the Copenhagen School's security theory. Research findings show that establishing relations with Russia poses challenges and opportunities for Iran. Challenges include monitoring Iran-China relations, the lack of a strong Iran near Russia's borders, the lack of confidence in an alliance with Russia, Russia's regional hegemony, using Iran as a tool to counter Washington, and Preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Opportunities also include the establishment of a non-Western international order, the advancement of technology and defense and military systems, bilateral participation in the new Middle East order, alignment to counter US unilateralism, and the use of Russia to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA.)

**Keywords:** Iran, Russia, foreign policy, geopolitics, security.

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## 1. Introduction

Historically, Iran-Russia relations have a special complexity and sometimes we see unity and sometimes divergence in the relations between the two countries. Especially in the last two centuries, the convergence and divergence of Iran and Russia have been manifested. Russia, under Soviet rule, shared a 2,000-kilometer border with Iran and was Iran's neighbor. This made the elites of the two countries suspicious of each other, and Iran was

more concerned about its northern neighbor. The collapse of the Soviet Union caused the destruction of the Iran-Russia neighborhood and the political elites in Iran have a convenient look at Russia. Today, Russian officials see Iran as an old partner, a key country in curbing US dominance and strengthening its influence in the Middle East, which has waned since the Soviet era. However, regional domination for Iran is not in Russia's foreign policy interest, because Russia relies on balance to maintain stability.

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Numerous notes have been written on Iran-Russia relations, most of which provide analysis at the micro-level of agency-centered or macro-level of the structure-based. Since Iran-Russia relations have improved significantly since 2012, bringing the two countries closer together and building extensive cooperation, some are talking about deepening relations and evaluating them positively. They believe that given the West's hostility to Iran, relations with Russia will be in Iran's interest. On the other hand, some also evaluate the relations between the two countries negatively. In his view, Russia's relations with Iran as a whole, and given historical considerations, will be to Iran's detriment. However, since 2012, Russia's foreign policy has undergone many changes such as increasing its attention to Iran. Therefore, the issue of the present article is the ambiguity and lack of sufficient knowledge of the security consequences of Russia's foreign policy towards Iran after 2012.

## 2. Method

In The method of this research is the process tracking method. Tracking is a technical process in which the qualitative analyst tries to identify the causal mechanisms that link the explanatory variable to an outcome or effect (Beach, & Pedersen: 2019). The breakdown of cause-and-effect relationships into smaller links that can be seen by the researcher (Beach, 2012: 4) is one of the main features of process tracking. Thus, trying to deduce causality by identifying causal mechanisms is called process tracking. Process tracking involves analyzing a case based on the sequence of events or incidents (or chain sequences of several interconnected sequences) (Taliban, 2008: 96).

## 3. Review of Literature

In the field of research background, several works have been written about the relationship between Iran and Russia, which are divided into some categories:

- I. Works that have studied the historical relations between the two countries, such as Mark N. Katz (2002) and Y.Y. Belobrov (2014). In these works, the historical aspects and the process of events that took place in the context of history are mentioned.
- II. Works that, despite the distrust of the two countries towards each other, have considered their relations towards convergence, such as Elahe Kolaei and Afife Abedi (2018), Ali Akbar Jafari, and Ruhollah Taghinejad (2013), and Nikolay Kozhanov (2015). In their opinion, the relationship between the two countries has moved towards unity and some of

them have referred to it as a strategic alliance.

- III. Works that consider the role of a factor in having close relations between the two countries, namely Biswas and Chakraborty (2019), Josef Vesely (2018), Akbar valizadeh and Mohammad Reza Salehi (2020), and John W. Parker (2019). They have studied factors such as the Syrian crisis, Iran's nuclear program, etc.
- IV. Works that examined Russia's foreign policy towards Iran before 2012, including Mona Dinpajouh (2019), Marcin Koczmarski (2009), Mohammad Shoori (2012), and Mariza Y. Omelicheva (2012). Although these works have similarly addressed Russia's foreign policy toward Iran, they have not examined Putin's re-emergence.

Other categories of works have referred to the relations between the two countries with a pessimistic view. In their view, Russia's foreign policy towards Iran is a sign of Russian colonialism and is seen to the detriment of Iran, such as Helen Belopolsky (2009), and Seth G. Jones (2021). They believe that Russia and Iran have caused disorder in the world.

## 4. Theoretical Framework: Copenhagen School Securitization Theory

Regional security complex theory is one of the three dimensions of the Copenhagen School, along with "Securitization" and "sectors approach", which form a comprehensive set for understanding and analyzing international security. The Copenhagen school has based its studies on a realistic understanding of international politics and security, and at the same time enjoys constructivist insights (specifically in the discussion of patterns of friendship and enmity), linguistic theories (in the theory of Securitization), and peace studies and critical approaches in the general sense (in the discussion of expansion / Narrowing the concept of security and discussing the sections) in their analyzes (Chegnizadeh and Asgari Kermani, 1397: 9).

The theory of regional security can be categorized by the same logic. The general premise of this theory is that in the post-Cold War security order, more autonomous regions were found than during the Cold War. This has led to a change in the bipolar system, in which geography plays a more important role in security-related issues, and neighboring actors, given the logic of geographical proximity in the ease of shaping the security threat, increasingly adopt regional patterns to understand the threat and related dynamics. These dynamics are based on four main variables: 1. anarchy-based structure; 2.

certainty between the main powers of the region; 3. factors shaping the borders of the security complex; 4. the social structures of the series, which are related to the long-standing patterns of friendship-enmity between its actors. Regional security complexes are organized by the above four components and, along with another important variable, the "interfering superpower" form the main security dynamics and provide more or less stable patterns for their analysis. The theory of regional security complex based on this region, divided the world map into different regions, each of which has formed a specific type of security complex with logic (Bozan and Weaver, 2009).

For Bozan and Weaver, the future of the international system is a function of regional levels; so these are the areas that make up the power system. Their perception of the power system is a kind of central focus on the role of regions and their geopolitical importance in the global power system. According to this school, regional security is a security system in which the countries in which, firstly, have similar security concerns. Secondly, have common memories or destinies historically, geographically and culturally, and its constituent units are according to concerns and Equal perceptions of threats, to create and maintain themselves, adhere to specific rules and mechanisms. Of course, the Copenhagen school, with more or less the same resemblance to constructivists, believes that mere interaction is not enough to create a regional system and that the mental factor is the perception of regional actors that they are in a regional system. Is important. According to the Copenhagen school, this definition of the region refers to mental factors and other factors such as culture, history, identity, and common destiny, which are closely related to security and regional security in general (Ebrahimi, 2007: 451).

## **5. Research Findings**

### **5.1. Principles of Russian Foreign Policy**

#### **A) Strategic stability with tactical flexibility:**

The West and the international order for Russia are associated with relative confidence and concern. Putin has sought broader international credibility and legitimacy, yet his goals remain largely the same, and any behavior change is seen as a style and a tactic rather than a transformative principle (Trenin, 28 August 2019). Russia's main concern after the collapse of the bipolar system is the unilateralism of the United States of America, which acts unilaterally in general global issues (Shiravand and Jahanbakhsh, 2016: 71). However, in order to overcome the problems and reach a common understanding with the West, Russia has interacted with it and strategic stability is observed in relations with the West (Kolaei and Nouri, 2010:

217-218). However, Putin's new policy is distancing and independence from the West.

#### **B) Strategic Dependence on the East:**

The annexation of Crimea to Russia led to Ukraine's accession to the European Union and, consequently, to NATO expansion. Similarly, Western sanctions and the Kremlin's sensitivity to the US weakening of Russia have led to economic fragility and international pressure, leading to strategic dependence on the East, especially on China (Lo, 17 September 2018). Another important factor is Russia's geopolitics, which has prevented it from properly defending its borders, and it has sought a kind of defensive security that has led Russian officials to ally with coordinated governments in the East. (Dehshiri and Saadabadi, 1398: 330).

#### **C) Rebuilding of the golden age of Russia:**

Putin's foreign policy is influenced by the belief systems of the Tsarist and Soviet times. For example, the three principles underlying the rule of Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855) including Dictatorship (samoderzhavie), Orthodoxy (pravoslavie), and Nationalism) are similarly perusing by Putin. Putin, who is increasingly authoritarian (narodnost), is widely referred to as the Tsar. The Russian Orthodox Church has become more prominent over the past century, promoting "moral-spiritual values."

"Nation-thinking" that is reflected in emerging historical narratives, the "patriotic" education of the youth, and popular mobilization have become a mass political and cultural phenomenon. The ideological confrontation of the Cold War between communism and capitalism has disappeared, but we see a new normative struggle between conservative nationalism and liberal internationalism. Putin has positioned himself as a "defender of the faith" - not only of Russian values, but also of the essence of European civilization. Putin's conservative nationalism is based on two assumptions: first, that Russia is a unique country; Second, Russia is a powerful country because of its historical role (Lo, 17 September 2018).

### **5.2. Russian Foreign Policy Objectives**

In order to protect the national interests of the Russian Federation and to achieve its strategic national priorities, the government's foreign policy activities must be aimed at achieving the following main objectives:

- Ensuring national security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and strengthening the rule of law and democratic institutions;
- Creating a favorable external environment that allows the Russian economy to grow steadily and become more competitive, and to improve technological modernization as well as higher

living standards and quality of life for its population;

- Strengthening the position of the Russian Federation as a center of influence in the world today;
- Strengthen Russia's position in world economic relations and prevent any discrimination against Russian goods, services and investments;
- Efforts to strengthen international peace and ensure global security and stability with a view to establish a fair and democratic international system;
- Seeking neighborly relations with neighboring countries, helping them to eliminate the existing situation and prevent the emergence of new centers of tension and conflict in their territory;
- In bilateral and multilateral frameworks, promote mutually beneficial and equal partnerships with foreign countries, intergovernmental associations, and international organizations and within communities, guiding the principles of independence and sovereignty, pragmatism, transparency, predictability, multidisciplinary approach, and commitment. Pursuing national priorities on a non-reciprocal basis; expanding international cooperation on a non-discriminatory basis; facilitating the emergence of network alliances and Russia's active participation in them;
- Strengthening Russia's role in international culture; Improving and strengthening the position of the Russian language in the world; Increasing global awareness of Russia's cultural achievements and national historical heritage, the cultural identity of the Russian people, and Russian education and research; Consolidation of the Russian-speaking diaspora;
- Strengthening the position of Russian mass media and communication tools in the global information space and conveying Russia's views on the international process to the wider international community;
- Facilitate the development of dialogue and constructive participation to promote coordination and mutual enrichment between different cultures and civilizations (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, 30 November 2016).

### **5.3. Iran and Russia's approaches to each other**

#### **5.3.1. Russia's view of Iran**

To explain the consensus in Russian foreign policy, one must first examine the views of the Russian elites on Iran. The views of the Russian elites differ on the three spectrums of Atlanticists, Eurasianists, and nationalists about Iran. Eurasianists can also be divided into traditional and modern groups. Traditional or classical Eurasianists paid little attention to Iran, but the new Eurasianists consider Iran as the most stable ally and regional power and follow the tradition of the Russian continents,

which plays a key role in Russian Eurasianism (Shlapentokh, 2015: 32). Russian nationalists use Iran as a tool to balance the West and make big profits in economic transactions and do not believe in military cooperation with Iran (Shlapentokh, 2015: 64-32). In addition to these two dominant views among the Russian elites, the views of the Atlanticists and the Israeli-influenced groups and currents must also be taken into account in the foreign policy decision-making process and consensus-building on an issue, especially about Iran. Among these groups, we can mention the powerful Jewish lobby in this country (Sadeghi, 2018: 104-105).

From the point of view of Russia's ruling elites, Iran relies on Russia to advance its nuclear program, and while under arms embargo, needs Russian military equipment, which is a useful and effective way for Russia to increase its position and influence in Iran and its market. Iran also has a special view of Russia in the Syrian crisis and the Arab Spring (Belobrov, 2014: 10-33). At the regional level, Russia has traditionally seen Iran as a stabilizing force in the face of common challenges and threats such as drug trafficking, terrorism, and transnational crime. Iran has also been part of Russia's ambitious Greater Eurasian project, an ambiguous and underdeveloped framework for strengthening geopolitical and economic integration throughout the region (Sim and Grajewski, 29 October 2021).

#### **5.3.2. Iran's view of Russia**

Iran's view of Russia over the past two decades was a "strategic" one. Thus, although Iran's foreign policy approach is not entirely "Eastern", the East, and especially Russia, has an important place in it. Regarding the possibility of convergence in Iran-Russia relations, there are three views: 1- Optimistic view (in this approach, the positive aspects of Iran-Russia relations are considered and the two countries are considered strategic allies of each other). 2. Pessimistic view (this approach considers Russia's policies as a continuation of Tsarist policies).

Some proponents of this approach examine the history of Iran's foreign relations and believe that in the past two centuries, Iran's territory has always been threatened by its northern neighbor and the fear of aggression has been involved in all the country's plans. 3. The utilitarian view: this approach considers the relations with Russia as utilitarian and emphasizes the national interest as the only criterion and unit for measuring the establishment of such relations. According to this approach, Russia is not a strategic ally of Iran; it is a tactical ally. Just as Moscow has benefited greatly from Iran's isolation in order to strengthen its position in the region, it has also reduced the

intensity of pressure on Iran with its support (Sadeghi and Moradi, 2017: 199-200).

#### **5.4. Security implications of Iran-Russia relations**

##### **5.4.1. Challenges**

###### **A) Monitoring Iran-China relations:**

Iran and China have signed a 25-year agreement, according to which the two countries will cooperate in various fields. Although there are many ambiguities in this regard, Russia, with Iran's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, has decided to monitor Iran-China relations in this way, and this platform will be provided for Moscow. That is why Russia has ratified an agreement with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Also welcoming the membership of three other countries, namely Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which will be a reduction of the influence and scope of Iran's authority in this organization (Sim and Grajewski, October 29, 2021).

###### **B) Lack of a strong Iran:**

Tendency to the Superpower has many defenders in Russia. In the field of foreign policy, Putin announced that he would oppose any power in the sphere of influence and borders of this country. Putin's officials see the loss of some traditional areas of Russian influence, including in the South Caucasus, as a blow to its prestige and political influence in those areas internationally. Under Putin's rule, Russia entered into a strategic alliance with Iran to prevent Western pressure on its southern borders and its presence in Central Asia and Afghanistan. The practical form of this geographical strategy is cooperation between the two countries in the Syrian crisis (Rabiee and others, 2016: 841-842). Iran is well aware that Russia is reluctant to see an overly strong and independent Iran, and therefore refuses to sell some weapons or looks at them reluctantly (Khoshnood, 12 February 2020).

Russia's approach to Middle East issues also confirms this. Soviet support for Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War was the cause of much suspicion that still exists today (Wheeler; Desai, 12 Sep 2016). Russian officials like to see Iran as more flexible and coordinated in Syria. Tehran is concerned that the Kremlin may see it as a subordinate partner rather than an equal partner in Syrian affairs. The Russians' ultimate goal is not the regime of Bashar al-Assad, and their military incursion into Syria has led to a relative reduction in Iranian influence in Damascus. Moscow has also paid attention to Israel's security needs in Syria and elsewhere - something that clearly contradicts Tehran's use of Hezbollah as its geopolitical tool on Israel's borders (Trenin, 18 Aug 2016). Russia's reluctance to side

with Iran in its disputes with Saudi Arabia and Yemen has called into question Russia's trust in accompanying Iran (Kozhanov, September 2, 2016) and reinforced the statement that Russia is looking for a weak Iran. Russia is interested in Iran being militarily dependent on that country. Most of the contracts that have been concluded with that country so far have led to the purchase of weapons and military equipment for Iran. Given the high cost of maintaining Russian weapons and armaments, these contracts have generated a steady income for the Russians. Russia has provided S-400 anti-aircraft missiles to countries with good relations with the United States, such as Turkey and India, but has not had military relations with Iran at this level. During the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, Russia did not involve Iran in negotiations in which even Turkey participated (Alaei, 2021: 1-2).

###### **C) Lack of confidence in alliance with Russia:**

In the post-Cold War self-help system, the Islamic Republic of Iran sought to balance itself and strengthen its military structures in order to ensure security and maintain its existence in the face of new security threats, especially from the West and the United States. (Dowlatabadi, 2014: 40-41). Iran believes that in the event of a war with the United States, it will have the support of the Russians, but even then, Russia will be primarily interested in securing its own interests.

In the event of a war between Iran and the United States, Russia will not only occupy Georgia and prevent the establishment of US military bases in that country, but will also occupy other Caucasus countries. Perhaps because of Iran's fear of Russia not adhering to its alliance, Tehran is increasingly moving closer to China, especially in the area of military cooperation. Close cooperation between Iran and China will definitely upset Russia (Khoshnood, 12 February 2020). A clear example of this uncertainty is Russia's non-compliance with US sanctions against Iran.

The problem of trust between the people of Russia and Iran also remains unresolved, even because they have very little knowledge of each other. What they do know are mostly "hearings" come mainly from Western sources, which at least are not always objective. Moreover, the history of Russia-Iran bilateral relations has several pages, and it would probably be wrong to claim that old-fashioned dissatisfaction, stereotypes, and prejudices that have formed over the centuries do not affect on public morale (Kortunov, May 6, 2021).

###### **D) Russia's regional tendency to become hegemon:**

The country's behavior pattern is strongly influenced by its efforts to ensure stability in an unstable environment. So when Russia's regional hegemony is reduced in power, it tries to make up for it by dominating other actors. Russia's military

intervention in the disputed territories after the collapse of the Soviet Union illustrates this pattern. Understanding and accepting regional responsibility for intervening in regional disputes means that Russia can expand its hegemony through intervention.

Russia's military intervention promotes the notion that stability on Russia's borders as well as in the region takes precedence over the Argument of neighboring countries. Russia's vast geography and sense of insecurity and vulnerability to this territorial situation have led Moscow to base its foreign security policy not on rivalry with the United States or economic interests, but fears of environmental threats and territorial integrity. Accordingly, the Russian authorities consider the control and management of their adjacent territories as a necessary and preventive measure to survive in an environment in a competitive and international environment (Niakoei and Safari, 2018: 122).

Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Iran remained Russia's neighbor across the Caspian Sea. With more than 2,500 years of the largely unbreakable country, Iran is practically a stable place in a very unstable environment south of the Russian border. Any regime that come to power in Tehran, Russia needs a relationship with it. In general, Russia wants Iran to be a stable and friendly neighbor. Moscow may have a preference for more genuine Iranian leaders, but it is basically ready to deal with anyone in charge in Tehran unless they challenge Russia's interests. There is little ideological affinity between the leaders of Russia and Iran, even in the form of a political system. Both the leaders and the societies of the two countries are highly nationalistic and sensitive to their former glory and determined to regain their stages in the global and regional context (Trenin, 18 Aug 2016). Russia ended its concerns on its southern border with the South Caucasus by cooperating with Iran.

#### **E) Using Iran as a tool to counter Washington:**

While the Kremlin has acted as a bulwark against Iran's political and economic isolation, it has also enhanced the speculation that Iran is a temporary counterweight or a bargaining chip. According to this narrative, the extent of expansion or contraction of Russian-Iranian cooperation depends on whether US-Russian relations at that time would be friendly or hostile (Tazmini, 18 Jan 2021).

While Iran had already suffered three rounds of UN Security Council resolutions (1696, 1737, and 1747) at the time of its signing, the Kremlin has declared international sanctions to justify delaying the delivery of sanctions. Tehran used it as a bargaining chip with the United States to pursue its strategic interests with Washington. While Russia

has consistently supported Iran's nuclear deal with its European signatories, increasing international pressure on Tehran over its regional activities provided a real opportunity for Moscow to strengthen its relations with Tel Aviv and finally to Satisfy Washington. Russia sees itself as a superpower, on par with the United States, not the Islamic Republic, and is fundamentally outraged by the West's continued refusal to deal with it in this way. In this regard, the Kremlin has historically used Tehran as a weight of balance or a source of leverage to balance its relations with Western powers, especially Washington. Today is no exception to this rule, and Iran is likely to fall victim to Russia's desire to recognize and respect the great powers as soon as a strategic opportunity arises for Moscow (Behravesht, 20 Jan 2018).

One concern was that the deal would lead to a broader US-Iranian rapprochement that would marginalize Russia and even weaken its role as a major power. In addition, with the lifting of economic sanctions against Tehran, the Russians worried that rising Iranian oil exports would lower oil and natural gas prices, thereby reducing oil export revenues, on which Moscow is heavily dependent. Russia's logic that Iran-US relations are bad for Moscow shows that the Kremlin will not be saddened if these efforts fail. Even if the United States and Iran find common ground on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Moscow no longer needs to fear that it will lead to a wider de-escalation of tensions between the United States and Iran, as there are many other issues on which Washington and Tehran disagree. (Katz, 28 April 2021).

#### **F) Keeping Iran away from nuclear weapons:**

Russia acknowledges Iran's ambition to become a major player in the Middle East, but wants it to remain without nuclear weapons. Moscow's position on the Iranian nuclear issue has been largely in Russia's national interest and therefore unaffected by the US-Russia confrontation in 2014. The Russians certainly want a nuclear deal with Iran – The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Obviously, the alternatives are either a nuclear-armed Iran or a major war on the eve of Russia. Moscow, which generally understood Iran's position more than the Western members of the P5 + 1 during the talks on Iran's nuclear program, will play an important role, for example, in reprocessing spent fuel.

However, if JCPOA If does not work and tensions between Iran and the United States escalate again, Russia will have to make tough choices. It may try to play the role of a good cop or act as a mediator. However, it should not be expected to automatically follow the United States. Depending on the level and intensity of the U.S.-Russian confrontation, the isolated pocket of cooperation between the two

countries on Iran may not always remain a protected area. Moscow is also concerned about the development of Iran's medium-range missile program (Trenin, 18 Aug 2016).

#### **5.4.2. Opportunities**

##### **A) Establishment of a non-Western international order:**

Russia's view of international order and the balance of power in such an order is strongly influenced by the Munich Doctrine in its foreign policy. The main idea of the Munich Doctrine is to criticize US unilateralism in the international system. In the eyes of Russia, and especially Putin himself, the actions taken by the United States in the international arena have always been problematic. The first feature in Russia's view of the balance of power in the international system is the fight against American unilateralism. A country like Russia does not accept the worldview that the United States encourages about the values and norms that govern international relations, and in many cases has a different understanding of what kind of pattern of behavior should be adopted in the international arena. In other words, the tensions in Russia's relations with the United States possess identity devices and are not similar to the cross-cutting and political tensions in the relations between the two ordinary actors in the field of international relations. This issue is rooted in the mission-oriented tendency and mission-oriented world and identity infrastructures governing the political worldview of these two countries (Niakooi and Safari, 2018: 117).

In Russia's 2015 National Security Strategy document, although relations with the West deteriorated due to the Ukraine crisis, it seemed that the world was still one and Russia did not see the United States as another. But the latest version of the strategic document goes far beyond that. It has an anti-Western orientation as the confrontation with the United States and its allies continue to escalate. In this document, the United States and some of its NATO allies are now officially recognized as unfriendly countries. Relations with the West are no longer a priority, and now, after the former Soviet republics, strategic partners such as China and India, non-Western organizations (such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the BRICS) and other member states are listed (Ternin, July 8, 2021).

Russia and Iran's strained relations with the United States have brought the two countries closer together. Moscow and Tehran tend to see the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a sign of a growing multipolar order. Russia's support for Iran's membership is linked to Moscow's desire to establish a strong regional power in the

organization. At the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Iran is advancing Russia's goals of portraying the organization as a Eurasian powerhouse, and may be a sign of the coming days of Russian-Chinese leadership in the non-Western international order.

##### **B) Upgrading technology and defense, military and intelligence systems:**

Military-defense agreements as well as holding joint military maneuvers between Iran and Russia in recent years has become one of the most dynamic areas of cooperation between the two countries and Russia sells military weapons to Iran. The visit of the military and political officials of the two countries paved the way for the further strengthening of technical and military cooperation between the two countries. Moscow and Tehran subsequently lifted arms sanctions against Iran. By expressing interest in cooperating with Iran, Russia can be an important supplier of weapons systems, military equipment and advanced technology. Among Iran's arms purchases from Russia, we can mention S-300 missiles, which have strengthened the defense system of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Gady, July 16, 2016).

According to Russia's 2021 national security strategy, "unfriendly countries" (including the United States) are determined to weaken Russia militarily, technologically, economically (sanctions) and even "spiritually". Therefore, reducing dependence on foreign technologies is on the agenda. Another innovation is the importance given to "information security". The document states that new information technologies are increasingly being used to interfere in Russia's internal affairs. Russia's sovereignty in the region is in jeopardy, despite the large platforms involved in "spreading false information."

Thus, the 2021 Strategy envisages a set of measures that include the creation of an independent Internet sector, the strengthening of safeguards against cyber-attacks, the systematic development of national technologies, and more generally, the creation of "intelligence forces and means" (Duclos, 2 August 2021). In this regard, Iran is also looking to create domestic Internet platforms to act like Russia, which has replaced Yandex with Google.

##### **C) Bilateral participation in the new Middle East order:**

After the Arab Spring in 2011, the strategic Middle East region has entered a new security order. Perhaps before the crisis in this region, we saw the least cooperation between Iran and Russia. But the two countries' common interests in controlling and preventing terrorist groups, as well as countering US unilateralism, helped to create good neighborliness and coordination between them.

The most important example of the changes in Iran-Russia relations was the cooperation of the two sides in the crisis-stricken region of the Middle East, especially Syria and Iraq. Given the changes in Syria and Iraq and the power vacuum in the region, Iran and Russia were able to successfully fill it. The two countries' growing influence in the region now includes strengthening ties with Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Assad government in Syria, Hamas in Palestine, the Iraqi government and the Houthis in Yemen. On the other hand, military cooperation between Iran and Russia in the fight against terrorism was not limited to Syria. Iran and Russia, in cooperation with Syria and Iraq, have established a counter-intelligence exchange center in Baghdad where information and intelligence were exchanged and analyzed (Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, October 1, 2021).

Russia-Iran defense cooperation, beyond arms sales, has been conducted through joint and coordinated military maneuvers. Since Iran is one of the main players in the Middle East, a stable power in a troubled region and has wide influence in the region, having it as an ally is a security issue for Russia. Iran is considered a valuable regional ally for Russia in Syria, Afghanistan and the southern parts of the former Soviet Union, the area where countries have mutual interests. Maintaining relations with Iran benefits more than Moscow's strategy to balance Russia's relations with Saudi Arabia and Israel, Iran's two traditional enemies in the Middle East (Islamian, November 20, 2019). In the Russian view, bilateral relations are seen as a gateway to regional and international cooperation. They want a strong Iranian presence in West Asia capable of resisting the goals and policies of the United States and Europe and their allies in the region. In the view of Russian leaders, Iran has been a consistent and cooperative actor in responding to Russia's concerns and worries in the "near abroad" (Kolaei and Afife, 2017: 156-157).

#### **D) Using Russia to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA):**

The JCPOA, Trump's withdrawal from JCPOA and the pursuit of negotiations to revive the plan during the Biden administration are also factors influencing Tehran-Moscow relations. After the withdrawal of the United States from JCPOA and the pursuit of the strategy of "maximum pressure" and Iran's new policy of "looking east", the strengthening of economic, political, military-security cooperation with Russia has gained more credibility. Russia, as an effective player in JCPOA, believes that Washington should return to the treaty and lift sanctions against Tehran. Russia's foreign policy apparatus believes that the US withdrawal from the UN Security Council and the elimination of Iran's main incentive to fully comply

with its nuclear obligations led Tehran not only to impose further restrictions, but also to withdraw from existing commitments.

#### **E) Moscow-Tehran alignment to counter US unilateralism:**

At the geopolitical level, we are experiencing a period of transition that began in the second decade of the 21st century. The world is moving from a unipolar system to a bipolar or multipolar system. The new bipolar geopolitical model will have two main poles: a pole consisting of the United States and the European Union, and a strong pole including China and Russia, backed by Europe and Asia, whose influence will increase day by day.

Among all this, the participation of Russia and Iran is in the common interest and their strong opposition to American hegemony. Russia is a key player in Iran's efforts to combat US aspirations in the Middle East and enjoys widespread support across the political spectrum in Tehran. They believe that the Trump administration's unilateralism has disrupted the international system and severely jeopardized their interests. Thus, they seek a more balanced and multi-polar international order (Khoshnood, 12 February 2020).

Preventing the invasion of the Caspian Sea by Western powers has long been a concern of Russia and Iran and is perhaps the most important common interest in the Caspian Sea. The Aktau agreement gave Russia and Iran the upper hand so that the two countries could show their power to the West. In November 2015, the Russian Caspian fleet fired a barrage of cruise missiles at Syria, about 600 km away, and in 2021, Moscow sent part of its Caspian fleet west through the Volga-Don Canal to challenge Ukraine's ambitions in the Black Sea. Iran, on the other hand, has used its navy to challenge Azerbaijan and its plans.

#### **6. Conclusion**

The common interest of Iran-Russia relations should be considered in the confrontation with the United States and the policy of unilateralism of this government. Although Putin seeks to resolve foreign policy disputes with the West, he is critical of US unipolarity and unilateralism and does not see it as in Russia's national interest. Hence, instead of a multipolar system, it seeks a system of multilateralism and Russian participation in different parts of the world. Accordingly, the Middle East region can be considered as a field for Russia's participation in the security order of the region, which can be assessed in line with Putin's multilateral policy. Due to its mosaic texture, the Middle East has become a battleground for the emergence of new regional regimes in which most governments tend to pursue Western policies and

align with those of the United States government. Meanwhile, Iran, due to its ideological confrontation with the United States, welcomes Russia's presence in the region and wants to establish large-scale relations with Moscow, which has been accompanied by challenges and opportunities. It seems that in a Cost-Benefit Relationship with Russia and the foreign policy of this government relation towards Iran, the benefits of opportunities outweigh the security challenges. However, it should not be overlooked that Russia has a policy of weakening its neighbors as a foreign policy priority. This means that Iran should not rely on one state and should use the capacity of other states in the international system especially in relation to the West and its allies, it can moderate Russia in adopting its hard-liner stance towards Iran and follow a softer and more balanced model. Russia-Iran relations have been dependent on Russia-US relations, and the Kremlin will continue to exploit Iran to advance its bargaining position with the United States, and to that end, the influence and power of Israel's massive lobby in Washington can serve as a useful catalyst.

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