Dynamics of Iran-Russia Relations; Changing Regional and International Scenes and the Necessity of Cooperation
The Institute for Regional Studies (IRS) as an academic think tank in Shahid Beheshti University is going to engage academics and practitioners in order to study the regional issues in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. IRS was established in 2015 with three departments, which focus on Iranian and Islamic World Studies, US and European Studies, and Eurasian Studies. Our leading objective is to improve the linkage between the decision-making apparatus and the university on the Iranian regional policy in an increasingly complex and uncertain world. In our globalized world, the understanding of the global trends and acquiring the common experiences need to be monitored and interpreted meticulously by means of futures studies.

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Preface

With more than five centuries of bilateral relations, Iran-Russia relationship, its nature, developments and implications for the wider regional and international arenas have always been an important subject to discuss. Geographic vicinity and long-lasting historical ties on the one hand and a range of common political, security and economic interests and challenges on the other, have caused the relationship to be defined as a special one, attracting the attention of the other international actors. The Issues related Iranian-Russian relations specially conceptualizing and defining a stable pattern for these relations in changing regional and international order; identifying and activating highly-neglected potentials in the relations; re-exploring or re-defining the common interests of the two countries and the ways to achieve them in regional spheres, such as the Middle East, Central Asia, the Caspian region and the South Caucasus; identifying and defining mutual agendas to more effectively overcome common trans-territorial and fluid threats in the abovementioned regional scenes; identifying new areas of Iran-Russia cooperation in “Greater Eurasia”; finding ways to manage the negative effects of the international factors, such as the US policies, on Iran-Russia relations and identifying the potentials for cooperation in regional organizations, especially SCO, EEU and CSTO are discussed in the joint scientific seminar of the Institute for Regional Studies (IRS) and the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund on November 2017. This paper is an executive summary of the articles, presented at the seminar.

Davoud Gharayagh Zandi, Dean of the Institute for Regional Studies
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The Middle East and North Africa Developments in Prospect and
Islamic Republic of Iran’s Foreign Policy
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Since 1980s up now the MENA did manifest itself through the political instabilities, the regional tensions, the ideational ferments, the arm races and the entangled in the warlord cycles. In this regard, it deems that it did fabricate the MENA such as the unfinished region, the exception area and also the region with the predominantly conflictual structures. At the outset of the current century, the two events made an exponential increase that would not been expected: one of them is that the US attack on Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 in retaliating of the 9/11 terrorist one. And the second one is related to Arab spring storm in the throughout the Arab World. By these events had two harmful effects on the political development in the region too: they are considerably weakened in justifying the state agency in post-conflict and post-revolutionary situations and the other one they are fostered the terrorist groups in the throughout the region. To be affect that we witnessed three trends now and in future of the region: the separatism such as in Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Syria, the new authorism like what occurred in Egypt and the possibility of chaos situation when the state agents means Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are escalating the situation by growing the conflict-interests.

Some Iran’s Geopolitical Characters: These ones are as follows; First, Iran with 1.648.195 s q km extend is in the 18th position in the world that large amount 1.531.595 s q km of it is extended in the land and just 116.400 s q km are in its sea property. In the periphery of Iran, Russia with 17.098.242 s q km and Saudi Arabia with 2.249.690 s q km are larger than it. Second, in quantity, Iran's population by 78.878.711 amount stands in the good situation and with 18th position in the world comes after Pakistan, Russia and Turkey in fourth in the periphery. Third, Iran has also 5.894 km land boundaries with the seven neighbors' as follows Iraq, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Armenia in sequence. Fourth, Iran has 2.440 km sea boundaries in that of 740 km it is in the Caspian Sea. In spite of being the close sea of the latter, it connects Iran with four countries of the north of Iran include of Russia too. The Persian Gulf and Oman Sea in the south are actually the vital water gate and widows of Iran on the world. Fifth, Iran located in the core of the several sub-systems – the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, the Central Asia and the Transcaucasia and the south western regions.
Sixth, in addition Iran is one of the richest countries in the world in the energy resources. Iran with 157.3 bbI oil proved reserve is the fourth country after Venezuela (297.700 bbI), Saudi Arabia (268.400 bbI) and Canada (173.200 bbI) and also in the natural gas is in the second rank with 33.8 billion cu m reserve comes after Russia (47.8 billion cu m). Seventh, alongside the energy reserves Iran are located in the energy transformation route too. The Strait of Hormuz does lonely transmit the 17 percentage of oil in the world and it is in-between the energy routes to the western countries via the Suez Canal and to the east via the Strait of Malacca too. (See the map in the below)

Map 2: Energy Routes in 2013

Eight, Iran is a mosaic country in the culture, the language, the ethnic and also in the race. By its empire nostalgia in the far past, it comes together some pieces of the Persia as the main ethnic with the Lures, the Kurds, the Azeri and the Arabs; and the majority of the Shia with Sunni minority; the Persian language as the official and lingua franca with the Kurdish, the Turkish and the Arabic. (See the ethnic map of Iran in below)

Map 1: Major Tribal Groups in Iran

And the last one, there are some cultural communalities and diversifications among Iran with their neighbors in Shia and Sunni, Arab/Ajam, Muslim/non-Muslim distinctions that those made some conflicts and cooperation in the past and could be set ground for them in the future too. Iran’s Foreign Policy in the MENA: The main items of Iran’s foreign policy in the MENA would be as follows; Iran does not feel very comfortable with any foreign involving in the region due to it made more complicated situation and resulted many difficulties for the region by experienced in history.
- Iran is against any forms of terrorism in the throughout region from the North Africa to the Persian Gulf and does greet for coping on them with open arms as such we are doing with Russia in Syria.
- Iran deems that it needs to do a conscious effort in holding steady in state building and also promoting and strengthening so that it due to be as an effective in its function.
- Iran believes that holding the stability manner in the state building in the region needs to prevent from any authoritarian inclinations alongside to being effect in essence of the state’s functions.
- A relative lack of the two latter postulates, it could be made a highly volatile situation that could be lead to a chaos situation in the region.
- As a concluding remark, Iran would be welcome all efforts in the region to set proper context for fighting against terrorism, consolidating the state constructions and the regional cooperation with the mutual understanding, interests and responsibility in the globalized world that now we live in.

**Keywords:** Iran, Foreign Policy, Middle East, North Africa, Geopolitics
Russia – Iran: Strategic Partnership or Strategy of Relationship

Vladimir Sazhin

Based upon the academic definition – not the propaganda interpretation – of the term “strategic partnership,” the answer to the above question is “no.” In the words of Gholamreza Shafei, Iranian Ambassador to Russia in 1999–2005: “I still believe that every nation must first consider its own national interest and their relations must be built upon these frameworks. Relations with Russia must follow the same path.” It should be added that Russia’s attitude to Iran is the same. Russia’s interests in the Middle East are multidimensional, and focus not only on the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is currently facing a number of difficulties, both at the geostrategic level (the Iran–Shia confrontation with Sunnis), and within the framework of the region, where Iran’s military and political interests come into conflict with virtually all the countries in the region.

While asserting its interests in the Middle East, specifically in Syria, Russia has managed to maintain normal business relations with nearly all the countries in the Middle East, including the main adversaries of the IRI – Saudi Arabia and Israel. In this situation, a strategic alliance with Iran could considerably weaken Russia’s positions and cause a confrontation, first of all, with most of the countries in the region, and, second of all, with the global Muslim Sunni majority, which could have internal political consequences for the Russian Federation. Nematollah Izadi, Iran’s last ambassador to the USSR and first ambassador to Russia, said in one of his recent interviews: “We cannot have strategic relations. In some areas, our objectives are in conflict... However, we can have the best relations at the highest level possible.” In this connection, Mr. Izadi shared a very reasonable and timely idea: “Tehran and Moscow cannot be strategic allies, but we should have a strategy for our relations.”

Unfortunately, there is no strategy for the development of bilateral relations. As far as politics is concerned views often do not coincide even when it comes to such crucial areas as the Caspian Sea issue and the situation around Syria. There is no joint plan to address these issues, either. Arguably, one of the few items that brings Moscow closer to Tehran politically is their opposition to the West. However, it would seem that it is not enough. The idea put forward at the conference “Development of Strategic Partnership between Russian and Iran” by Igor Ivanov, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, is the best illustration we can give: “You cannot build bilateral relations on joint opposition to the West. We need a constructive agenda, a list of priorities that would enable us to move forward; albeit based primarily upon mutual interests.” When it comes to the bilateral business relations in commerce and economics, unfortunately, Russia’s potential is limited to only a few sphere. There are many obstacles to the development of economic relations between Russia and Iran. What Steps Should be Taken to Ensure Long-Term Partner Relations between Russia and Iran?

A solid foundation needs to be formed – especially a legal framework – to work out a strategy for the consistent development of cooperation for the long run in all areas: politics, business, military and

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culture, without which there will be no stability or sustainability of the bilateral relationship. In this connection, it is necessary to prepare and approve a comprehensive document on the basis of bilateral partner (and non-strategic) relations, taking the fundamental interests of both countries into account, and with a clear understanding of what unites and separates them. Given the political, ideological, psychological, trade, economic and even philosophical factors that affect the bilateral relationship, it would seem appropriate to avoid using the term “strategic partnership” to define them, but identify the current status of Russia–Iran relations as a future-oriented “pragmatic partnership.”

**Keywords:** Iran, Russia, Middle East, Strategic Partnership, Strategy, Pragmatic Partnership
Prospects for Russian-Iranian cooperation

Nikolay Kozhanov³

Since 2012, Russia and Iran has been persistently trying to create the solid base for the development of bilateral relations. However, the role of the economic factor in building up of these relations is still substantially underestimated and neglected. Moreover, for the last five years, the volume of trade between the two countries was instable and its dynamics have predominantly been negative. Yet, at the same time the Russian-Iranian economic relations possess certain positive potential. Although the Iranian share of overall Russian trade and investment remains small, the country still holds great interest and, in some cases, even key importance for selected industries including the agricultural and military-industrial complexes, and the petrochemical, space, nuclear and oil and gas industries. Iran retains interest in Russia as an arms exporter. In 2012–17, cooperation with the Middle Eastern countries in the nuclear sphere became another priority of Russian business. In 2014, Russia signed a package of agreements for the construction of up to eight new nuclear reactors in Iran. The first two are expected to be built at the Bushehr power plant, in addition to the power-generating block previously constructed by Russian engineers and handed to the Iranians in 2013.

Russian cooperation with Iran also aims to offset the negative effects of the Kremlin’s sanctions war with the West. Middle Eastern countries including Iran have acquired additional importance as agricultural exporters whose produce may help to replace European products subject to Russian counter-sanctions. By 2017, Russia had offered Iran the opportunity to use their national currencies as legal tender in bilateral trade instead of euros and US dollars, and invited it to form a free trade zone with the Eurasian Economic Union. The current fall in the oil price forced Russia to pay closer attention to the opportunities existing in the Middle Eastern oil and gas sectors. If Russian companies could obtain access to the region’s resources, this would strengthen Russia’s presence in the energy market as the region would provide its energy majors with additional oil and gas resources for re-export. These interests are one of the primary determinants of Russian activity in Iran. It is no coincidence that Russian oil and gas exporters were among the first companies to return to Iran after the lifting of sanctions in 2015–16. For instance, currently, Russian experts close to the country’s main oil producers argue that Iran can provide Russia with additional oil to export to China. It is also not a coincidence that Lukoil became one of the first European companies that returned to Iran after the beginning of the lifting of sanctions in 2015–16. Furthermore, in February 2016, Swiss-based Litasco (a company owned by Lukoil) was one of the first European companies to buy Iranian oil after the nuclear deal was signed between Iran and the P5+1 group.

At the same time, Middle Eastern exporters of hydrocarbons are challenging Russia’s positions in the energy market. Iran has never hidden its intention to compete with Russia as a gas supplier to the EU, and in 2015 Saudi Arabia tried to increase its presence in the East European oil market, which is traditionally considered as one of the main destinations of Russian exports. In these circumstances, Russia is trying to create a plan of action to actively protect the interests of its corporations in

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region. It is notable that even seeing the majority of the Middle Eastern countries as potential rivals in the energy markets, Russia still prefers cooperation to confrontation. Moscow follows the principle of the judo which implies staying in full contact with your opponent and keeping him close. Consequently, wherever possible, Moscow tries to establish good relations with its regional opponents in order to ensure the flow of hydrocarbons in the direction necessary for itself, or at least to make sure that it has a stake in existing energy projects. On the one hand, Moscow clearly supports those energy projects that allow the Kremlin either to take under control or to divert the export flows of the Middle Eastern gas from the EU in order to secure Russian interests in the European gas market. As a result, for instance, Russia several times offered Iran and Pakistan its help in the construction of so-called Peace pipeline. The implementation of this project would guarantee that the huge share of Iranian natural gas will be sold to South Asia and further on to China but not to Europe. In 2016, during the Baku summit of the Azerbaijan, Russian and Iranian presidents, Putin called for the necessity of closer cooperation and coordination in the oil and gas sphere particularly over the shared use of existing pipeline infrastructure and joint development of Caspian hydrocarbon resources. He formulated a plan to supply the northern provinces of Iran with natural gas via Azerbaijan in exchange for the Iranian liquefied natural gas that the Russian companies will receive in the Persian Gulf.

Like in the case of the Peace pipeline project, the implementation of this project would also ensure that at least some Iranian gas will not reach Europe but, instead, it will be channeled by the Russian companies to other regions. Yet, in terms of economic cooperation, the Russian-Iranian dialogue also has its limits. Apart from ferrous metals, wood, and petrochemical products, Russia has a very narrow range of goods to offer Iran—and a continually shrinking range, at that. As officials from the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry explain, it is not the international sanctions, China’s growing economic presence in the region, or the Iranian authorities’ intractability that prevent Russian companies from doing business with the country, but rather the growing technological gap between Russia and the West, as well as Russia’s economic problems. Iran currently lacks engineering and technological support, as well as equipment to upgrade and construct oil refineries and liquefied-natural-gas production plants. However, Russia is unable to provide Iran with the required assistance, equipment, and technology. Moreover, it is badly in need of these itself. With Russia’s economic problems mounting, the technological gap will only increase. International sanctions against Iran also severely limit the options for Russian-Iranian cooperation.

**Keywords:** Russia, Iran, Cooperation, West, US, Middle East, Nuclear Deal
Iran and Russia have experienced very deep and rich socio-cultural relations during about last three centuries. Economic relationship between the two countries paved the route of social interactions. Russia’s interesting and meaningful literature was very interesting for many Iranian readers before and after the October Revolution in 1917. Both Western liberal and revolutionary thoughts had come to Iran via Russia. The role and impact of Russian intellectual’s ideas in Iranian Constitutional Movement was clear. After the formation of the Communist regime in this country, influence of ideological works and slogans in Iran had been expanded. In the new atmosphere, and in the shadow of new political and economic system of the Soviet Union, these socio-cultural relations had been blocked. Iran had been a part of the capitalist system. After World War II, in the context of bipolar system these relations deeply decreased. But from 1960s to the end of 1970s, these relations transferred to technical and economic cooperation. The victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran changes deeply the two countries relations.

After a harsh pessimism in their relations, the collapse of the Soviet Union again changed Iran-Russia’s relations. Soon the two countries decided to increase their exchange, but only in political and military fields. During the first decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran-Russia relations constantly expanded. But these relations were based on political and military issues. Iran and Russia have rich and historical linkages, but they permanently have neglected these fields of cooperation. The number of Iranian students in the US and many European and Asian countries are very great in comparison with them in Russia. Especially this is the case about scholars and researchers of the two countries. Against huge amount of agreements and memorandums of understandings among many Iranian and Russian universities, the practical and real exchange among them are not acceptable with regard to the capacity of implementing these goals. The outcome of continuation of the previous trends in the two countries relations is focusing on hardware policies and systematic ignorance of social and cultural capacities of mutual interests of Iranian and Russian people.

Iran and Russia have very different identity with Western societies. They have similar history in confrontation with the Western civilization. They have similar society and culture with respect the materialist attitudes of the Western societies, especially in the context of religion influence in the two countries both institutionally and practically. Aforementioned they permanently focus on other fields other than their common perceptions and attitudes. Political and security matters are important and vital for them, but cultural and social policies can make stable and durable these relations. After deterioration in Russia and Western countries relations, against very considerable optimism among some Russian policy makers, Iran-Russia’s relation improved constantly, but the weight of socio-cultural relation has not expanded in acceptable manner yet. The permanent feature of Iran-Russia’s relations during last decades was focusing on the security – military dimensions and allocating partially role to socio-economic issues, while the latter are very important area for keeping long

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standing relations. The paper focuses on these shortcomings in the two countries relations and the author propose consolidating Iran-Russia’s social and cultural relation.

**Keywords:** Iran, Russia, West, Politics, Economy, Culture
Although, one cannot find a direct relationship between literature and politics and political relations at first glance, but literature has had a direct impact on political decisions. Due to acknowledgment of politicians to extensive influence of literature, the censorship is a political decision. With the assumption of the necessity of expanding the bilateral development of Iran and Russia, we have to find an approach to stabilize it. Excluding the cultural factor, economic, political and military relations may be considered transient, periodic and due to unstable political decisions which may not be sustained. Dialogue is the first step in establishing cultural relations. The need for mutual recognition should not be ignored to enter the conversation. Recognition of Iran and Russia may be divided into several categories: media cognition, state cognition, incorrect Clichés and people understanding. The latter recognition is the most reliable and lasting approach since there are no prejudices and political interests in it. Traders, litterateurs, tourists, scientists, and historians of the two countries can understand each other through the dialogue. On the other hand, the dialogue gives greater depth and breadth to this recognition.

Various methods are available to a chive documented understanding of each other. The first method is literature and literary works. Due to important position of the literature in social life of Iran and Russia, development in literary translation and direct communication between the authors and poets results to a useful acquaintance about the current literary attitude of the two countries. The second way is knowing, citing history. However, in the relationship between Iran and Russia, first, historical misunderstandings must be eliminated and effective steps to bring about the historical memory of the two nations must be taken. Historical awareness of each other must be public. It would not be helpful to improve the historical image of the two countries, with the holding of historic conferences for historians - who, without these conferences, are aware of historical facts. Defining of historical and documentary projects with the presence of Iranian and Russian experts can be a more effective step in this direction.

The third safe way to know the two countries of Iran and Russia from each other is the kinfolks of the two countries. Iran and Russia, due to ethnic diversity, can think of ways to engage in talks between peoples and minorities in both countries, which can lead to solutions for the better integration of ethnic groups and minorities with other people in their territories. The fourth suggestion is to rely on art and artwork to recognize and introduce itself. The long history of art in Iran and Russia allows for a long dialogue without the need for a language tool - which has a strategic importance in establishing any relationship.

The fifth way of knowing is interfaith dialogue. For many years, the dialogue between Islam and Orthodox Christianity has been taking place and the dialogue between Muslim and Orthodox scholars

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is taking place in religious areas. Although this step is a positive step. But stopping at this level will reduce its impact. The Muslim community of Iran and the Russian Orthodox community must be systematically involved in the field of religion in the context of possible consensus and possible axes. This will prevent the creation of many religious misconceptions that have become a barrier to dialogue between the two nations. The historical experience of Iran and Russia in engaging and discussing with themselves and the other (historically, for reasons such as the ethnic and religious diversity of the two territories and numerous neighbors) has shown that dialogue is the only way to interact with conflicts. Self-conceiving one another, and making yourself thinking, makes the path of cognitive impartiality smoother and makes bilateral relationships more sustainable.

**Keywords:** Iran, Russia, Literature, Inter-Civilization Dialogue, Sustainable Relations
Russia and Iran have been neighbors for over three centuries. Since the beginning of this “neighborly” relationship, Iran has been the smaller and weaker partner in terms of size, military capability, and international stature. This relationship has always been affected by Moscow’s rivalry with Western powers. Throughout the 19th century when the Great Game continued between Britain and Russia, Iran was the scene of intense rivalry between the two powers. During the Cold War, Iran was in the Western camp and its relations with the Soviet Union were dictated by the East-West rivalry. As a staunch ally of the United States, Tehran provided listening posts on the Soviet border, and joined the Baghdad Pact and later CENTOs with other pro-Western neighbors in containing the Soviet Union. After the historic meeting between Khrushchev and Kennedy in the early 1960s, Iran was the first country where Détente was put to the test.

Iran entered into a number of technical and economic agreements with the Soviet Union. The highlight of this cooperation was the deal that led to the construction of the first steel mill in Isfahan by the Soviets and the construction of a pipeline that provided the Soviet Union with Iranian gas. Interestingly, none of the Western Industrial powers would build such a strategic industry in Iran. In the end, it was the Soviet Union that undertook the project. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 promptly exited Iran from the Western camp. With Iraq’s invasion of Iran, the American hostage crisis that occurred shortly after the Revolution and the sanctions placed on Iran by the United States and its allies, Iran found itself isolated. Once again, the presence of a third power directly affected Tehran’s relation with and its policy towards Moscow.

Because of Iran’s increasing isolation on the international scene, Tehran gradually tilted towards and looked to Moscow as an ally against the United States. As late as the 1990s and 2000s, some influential figures in the Iranian government, with a Cold War mentality, advocated forging a strategic alliance with Russia and India against the West. A very important aspect of this policy has been the recognition that Russia’s influence and interests in the region cannot be ignored. This, it seems, has meant avoiding actions and comments that may annoy Moscow. Tehran’s position on the Bosnian tragedy and Chechnya is an indication. There is a prevalent view in Iran that for most of this long relationship, Moscow has looked to Tehran as a means of gaining concessions from the West. Following the Islamic Revolution, when Iran’s former allies in the West refused to honor their commitment in building a nuclear energy plant in Iran, Moscow was quick to jump at the opportunity to build it for Tehran. In the final stages of the project, Moscow dragged its feet in completing it, sighting technical and financial reasons. Once again, it seems, Iran was used as a bargaining chip by Moscow to draw concessions from the West.

Keywords: Iran, Russia, West, Great Game, East-West rivalry, Islamic Revolution

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The American Factor in Russia-Iran Relations: Common Challenge or Apple of Discord

Maxim A. Suchkov

In an attempt to square political and international realities with his own promises Trump virtually “outsourced” the Iran policy to Congress. Earlier he followed the similar pattern with Russia and Afghanistan policies on which he “outsourced” to the military. Loading Congress with more agenda now that it has a stock of domestic issues to struggle with makes its functioning even more difficult; The measures Trump is seeking suggest the US is prepared to go unilaterally if it doesn’t like something which further undermines credibility of America as an international negotiator, signatory to documents its signs, and promises it makes.

In this respect the very verification mechanisms matter little since the core of the problem with the Trump team seems to be it doesn’t accept Iran in its “current form” and will go all the way to counter it no matter under what pretext. The JCPOA deal itself is not so much endangered by the administration initiatives. But the overall attempt to attach more conditions to the deal is hitting important nerve with Tehran – it’s a blow to the national dignity of Iranians, humiliates the country’s leadership and thus would have a negative long-term effect. There’re also doubts there’s a “Trump Iran policy” but rather “Netanyahu Iran policy” that the US is following. The current stance of the US administration on the JCPOA is one of rare instances when Russians and Europeans agree with one another more than the Europeans agree with Americans.

Keywords: Iran, Russia, American Factor, JCPOA, Trump

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Nuclear Agreement and post-Agreement Conditions

Nasser Hadian

Trump speech about the US policy on Iran has different important aspects for Iran and the international affairs. The targets of the US strategy on Iran can be analyzed into three levels, including the US domestic politics, and the regional and international affairs. As far as the US domestic politics is concerned, Trump tried to send a powerful message to its social foundation that he sticks to his promises in the presidential campaign, through which he can represent himself as as an exceptional statesman in the White House. At the regional level, Trump sent a supportive message to the US allies in the region especially Israel and Saudi Arabia. At the international level, Trump strategy on Iran showed that the US is perusing re-securitization of Iran which can lead to de-legitimization of the political regime in Iran.

There are three approaches on JCPOA in the USA, including full compliance, tear up the deal and a middle road. The most likely option would be the middle road which was proposed by Senator Corker. This option would imply passing non-nuclear sanction act against Iran in the Congress, passing nuclear sanctions by the States and strict implementation of JCPOA by the US administration. In response, Iran would have four options: rip the deal to pieces if the US tears it up, continuation of its commitments, decreasing its commitments and increasing its commitments. I would oppose to the first and fourth options and I do believe that the best choice for Iran would be an option in-between the second and third ones.

**Keywords:** Iran, JCPOA, US, de-legitimization, Trump

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Iran and Russia in JCPOA saga

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Basic principles and aspirations: Although the topic is related to the JCPOA and Iran-Russia cooperation in the nuclear sphere as well, this subject should be seen in the broader context. For Iran and Russia, several points are defining in their bilateral interactions:

1. History of bilateral ties in pre- and after-revolution period;
2. History of the Iran nuclear profile for the past 10 years (more a pretext for exerting pressure on Iran, the “enfant terrible” of the region);
3. Issue of trust;
4. Perception of each other as a regional and international actor, mutual expectations;
5. Correlation of own actions with the state of relations with the other actors, assessing benefits and possible losses from cooperating with one another;
6. Developments in the domestic politics of both countries.

These factors predefine the relationship as “cautious”, or how Vladimir Sazhin called them many years ago “cautious partnership”. The matter of trust in this relationship is marked as a key one by some scholars, but operationalization of this term might be different from scholar to scholar or from politician to politician. Not the least in the queue is that how Russia behaved in the nuclear negotiations (expressing support for Iran, but supporting the sanctions as well, especially the UNSC resolution № 1929 of 2010 when Russia put S-300 supply on halt). For better understanding by the Iranian side, one should pay attention on certain principles that Russia is guided by in its policy planning:

Russia deems its policies independent and would not engage in creating alternative “axis of resistance”, even in the light of the new US sanctions act of 2017 (however both countries share the unwillingness to accept the American global dominance, so it is a common vision of the world order or at least the order both do not want to see). Iran and Russia’s foreign policy aspirations and weight in the world are asymmetric. Iran possibly would like to have Russia as a strategic partner, but in the list of Russian priorities Iran occupies different position. Russia acknowledges that Iran is an important and powerful regional actor, whose participation is necessary for resolving the regional issues. Furthermore, in some cases it acknowledges that Iran has more capacity to manage certain issues. Russia is pursuing its own interest. Selling its services in the atomic industry and more product of its weaponry industry is included into its interest. Thus, Russia is interested in Iran abiding the requirements that are related to these needs. First, is to make sure its nuclear program is solely of peaceful character; thus Iran is a trustworthy partner and no new international sanctions will be imposed. Second, is Russian own concern about physical security of the projects and materials. Third, is again to make sure there is no sanctions so it could be able to sell heavy arms (like T-90 or SU-30 jets) in a long-term perspective.
JCPOA revision? Due to the roots of the Iran nuclear crisis, JCPOA was more of a politically charged nature, rather than resolving a heavy international security issue. After the so-called “change of strategy” towards Iran within the Trump’s administration, Russia was among the first to condemn the disruption of the normal process within the framework set up by JCPOA. Deputy ministers of foreign affairs Abbas Araghchi and Sergey Ryabkov met in Moscow in October 2017 and confirmed the necessity to adhere to JCPOA. Deputy minister of foreign affairs Sergey Ryabkov stated: “Moscow does not doubt about Iran's performance under JCPOA. No “new configuration” of the deal is possible, and Moscow is not ready to participate in any negotiations to amend the agreement.” During the conference on «25 years of Russia-Iran cooperation in peaceful use of atomic energy: new perspectives according to the Apex3 to JCPOA” held in Moscow on 17-18 October 2017, where representatives of Russian and Iranian governmental bodies and Rosatom took part (deputy head of AEOI Behrooz Kamalvandi from Iranian side), the parties confirmed their commitment to this “working, balanced document that satisfies interests of all the parties that took part in producing it”. Moscow insists on the value of JCPOA and stands for its survival. This case is the first one when the sanctions imposed based on the chapter VII of the UN Charter were withdrawn as a result of negotiations and not the military actions, thus it carries a special value for the participants. However, many other issues that caused the crisis around Iran’s national nuclear program remain unresolved, as the suspicion about Iran’s military ambitions remained a lame cover for a broader problem of geopolitical and historical nature.

Way forward: Interestingly, while Trump speaks about the need to review JCPOA, Iranians raise the issue of the need to review the NPT. It is far not the first time that with all the pressures that Iran considers unfair, officials in Tehran start question fairness of the non-proliferation system in a whole. Russia yet sticks to the non-proliferation narrative about the Iran’s nuclear issue (as opposite to the “political”). Russia’s officials do not comment on Iran leaning towards the West after JCPOA, but the experts outlined scenarios unfavourable for Russia. Now, that Moscow might have a feeling of being “in one boat” with Tehran, yet it is not going to align with Iran on most issues. However, for Russian government Iranian program is not a defining factor for the bilateral ties, security problems of the regional scale play a greater role. Is forming of the united anti-American front as a result of Trump’s demarche against Iran possible? Will this motion unite Iran, Russia and Europe which supports the agreement? Politically might be, technically the other countries and businesses inside them will think about the risks. In fact, JCPOA is not an agreement per se, but exactly the plan of action. Parties did not ratify the agreement. The resolution 2231 of the UN SC that includes JCPOA text calls upon the member countries to support the plan and does not have a reference to the article 41 of the UN Charter. Which means that parties to the agreement keep abiding to it until they feel it serves their interests.

Even if the US quits JCPOA, it is not the end, depends on the political will of the other parties. Good example of this is the EU Council Regulation № 2271/96 that protected the European companies from the American sanctions against Cuba. Will they be willing to apply the same protection means for their companies that plan to expand trade relations with Iran? There is the possibility that Russia can unite with China and try to join forces with the European parties to the agreement (who are the US’s partners in NATO at the same time) to put pressure on Trump’s
administration via available means, but it remains to be seen. Most likely we will see that JCPOA remains on its place but will be practically devalued by the other means taken by the US.

**Keywords:** Russia, Iran, JCPOA, US, EU, Trump
Iran and Russia in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Areas of Cooperation and Causes of Conflict

Hamidreza Azizi\textsuperscript{10}

As two regions at the immediate neighborhood of both Iran and Russia, Central Asia and the Caucasus have always been of special interest for Tehran and Moscow alike. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the areas of converging and diverging interests between the two countries as well as the factors affecting their relations in Central Asia and the Caucasus. **Areas of converging interests:**

1) **Economic multilateralism:** Given Russia’s declared willingness to consider a role to play for Iran in the Eurasian Economic Union as well as Iran’s desire to expand and diversify the areas of its economic interactions after the 2015 Nuclear Deal (JCPOA), this area could be regarded as a potential for Iran-Russia cooperation in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

2) **Transit:** Moscow and Tehran have recently shown a strong willingness to cooperate in the area of transit. In this vein, the North-South Transport Corridor has been once again taken into account by the both sides. The transit issue has been also an important part of the agenda of the regular meetings between the presidents of Iran, Russia and Azerbaijan.

3) **Regional security:** Due to the geographical proximity of Central Asia and the Caucasus to Iran and Russia and the possibility of the transmission of insecurity and instability to these two countries, both of them are sensitive toward the security situation in the region.

4) **Trying to resolve the regional crises:** Any revitalization or exacerbation of the existing crises in the region could threaten the overall status of stability in the region and consequently, the Iranian and Russian interests. However, the extent to which Iran could play a role in helping resolve the regional crises has always been dependent on the Russian approach and whether Russia is ready to consider a role for Iran to play in this regard.

5) **Trying to contain the influence of the trans-regional powers:** Both Iran and Russia see the presence and influence of the trans-regional powers, especially the United States, in Central Asia and the Caucasus as a potential threat to their interests.

**Areas of conflicting interests:**

1) **Energy transition to Europe:** Although the level of energy interactions between Iran and Central Asian states has been so far limited, given the fact that Russia’s priority is to maintain its monopoly over energy export to Europe and the development of Iran’s energy interactions with the region could, in the long run, replace Russia’s energy transit route to Europe with that of Iran, Moscow is by no means in favor of such interactions.

2) **Russia’s desire to maintain its exclusive influence in its “Near Abroad”:** Russia’s desire to preserve its monopoly in different sectors in Central Asia and the Caucasus limits the potentials for any real and effective presence of any other actor.

3) **Russia’s sensitivity to Iran’s religious influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus:** Although over the past two decades it’s been proved that Iran does not have any specific ideological agenda to promote its own version of political Islam in Central Asia and the

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Caucasus and at the same time, the Sunni-dominated societies of Central Asia basically are not good targets for such a goal, Russia’s suspicion to the issue is still in place.

**Main factors affecting Iran-Russia interactions in Central Asia and the Caucasus:**

1) **The Western factor:** The nature of the relationship between Iran and Russia on the one hand and the West on the other, is a determining factor in their interactions in common neighboring territories. However, it could be said that with regard to Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Western factor has always had a kind of “dual role”, meaning that at some points it has limited the potential for Iran-Russia interactions and in some others, has expanded the potential. 2) **The Middle East factor:** Russia’s military campaign in Syria since September 2015 was a turning point in its foreign and military policy after the Cold War, which, due to the shared interests with Iran in some basic aspects of the issue, put Moscow in a process of partnership (sectoral partnership) with Iran. Regarding Central Asia and the Caucasus, it could be said that at least at the current situation, the Syrian issue has led to the creation of a level of trust-building – at least at the political level – between Iran and Russia which reduces Russia’s sensitivity to the expansion of Iran’s relations with the counties in its “Near Abroad”. 3) **The level of pragmatism and realism in the two countries:** Generally speaking, it could be said that the dominance of pragmatist approaches in the foreign policies of both Iran and Russia during the past several years, has led them to have a more realistic view to the areas of their converging and diverging interests and try to develop their relationship based on their common interests.

**Keywords:** Iran, Russia, Central Asia, Caucasus, Economic multilateralism, Regional security
Iran-Russia Interaction in the Neighboring Regions

Sergey Druzhilovsky

In today's regional politics Iran and Russia are united by the desire to stand against the USA and the spread of their influence on the territories of vital interest to both Moscow and Tehran, in particular in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the collapse of the Soviet Union our two countries went through an uneasy path in order to define the mutual agenda in bilateral relationships. At first, these were small but very important steps towards each other which eventually culminated into the coordinated actions in the region. Certainly, the turning point in rapprochement of the two countries was when the Islamic Republic leader Imam Khomeini sent the famous message to the USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1989. After this interaction between our governments never interrupted, including that on regional political issues. Despite different political stance taken by some Muslim countries, Iran did not intervene into the Chechen events in Russian Caucasus and treated the Russian operation on peace enforcement in Georgia during the events in South Ossetia in 2008 with a great understanding. Iran was among a few countries that did not blame Russia after the Crimea became a part of the country, and the Crimean issue did not influence the development of Russia-Iran ties. At the same time, unlike many Western countries led by the US, who included Iran into the so-called “Axis of Evil”, Russia refutes the statement and underlines that Iran play a stabilizing role in its south borders.

The basic factor for good neighbourhood relations between Iran and governments of former Soviet republics is that after a while it gave up on the idea of «export of the Islamic revolution» and instead appealed to build the relationships based on common historic and cultural values. This does not go against Russia’s interests which acknowledges the original, indigenous character of culture and social life of the Central Asian people. Russia and Iran played a crucial role to put an end to the civil war in Tajikistan and strike the peace agreement between the Republic of Tajikistan and the United Tajik Opposition in 1997. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan occupies a special place in the interests of both countries. Both Russia and Iran have been coordinating their efforts for many years in preventing drug trafficking from Afghanistan, interacting with the other stakeholders in this regard, for instance, with five Caspian countries including Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Iran and Russia regularly discuss political and security problems on the sidelines of Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It is important that Afghanistan which has an observer status in the organization is engaged into this process as well.

South Caucasus can be called a strategic crossroads for Russia and Iran. For Russia Caucasus is an important link between Moscow and Tehran, as well as the other capitals in the Middle East. For Iran South Caucasus is an alternative route to Europe and to the Black Sea region. Thus, any instability or crisis in Caucasian republics carries a potential threat for the security of both Russia and Iran. That is why our policies in the region are complimentary to each other. Russia and Iran hold that security and sovereignty of Azerbaijan and Armenia must be maintained by preventing the escalation

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of the bilateral tensions between the two countries. Same goes for Georgia, which is a part of Iranian course for good neighborly relations and multilateral cooperation, while Russia also stands against this country getting closer to NATO and the US. With all the positive moments in Russian-Iranian relationships in the neighboring regions, there are unresolved or disputable issues.

Iran and Russia do not participate together in any regional organizations, apart from the Caspian forum, and even there they did not succeed to work out a mutual position on the legal status of the Caspian Sea. Iran did not support yet Russian suggestion to create “Casfor” – the military forces made up of the Caspian countries navy, as well as the other idea on creating the Organization of economic cooperation of the Caspian countries. For many years the issue of Iran’s full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was not resolved, and if previously the sanctions regime was the main excuse for not to accept Iran as a member, now Tajikistan is non-constructively blocking the other members, including Russia, from including Iran into the organization. Fortunately, there are not so many serious obstacles to the mutually beneficial cooperation between Iran and Russia, and all existing ones can be resolved in the course of normal negotiation process between our two countries.

**Keywords:** Iran, Russia, South Caucasus, Central Asia, Caspian Sea, Afghanistan
The Pattern of Active Balance and Deterrence in Iran-Russia Relations in Syria

Alireza Noori

One of the major deficiencies in Iran-Russia relations during the post-Soviet period is its instability and the fact that it is influenced by third variables, especially the “West”. Therefore, a question has always been raised whether a stable basis can be defined for these relations? In response to this question, avoiding one-dimensional black-and-white look at Tehran-Moscow relations and stressing on a realistic approach to the set of differences and commonalities, agreements and disagreements of the two countries, we argue that Iran and Russia’s positive experience in Syria in implementing the model of "active balance and deterrence" against symmetrical (US aggressive policy) and asymmetric (terrorism (ISIL)) threats can be re-used in other areas of their common interests.

Considering the security and geopolitical imperatives, this model can be used to relatively stabilize relations and as a basis for long-term interactions. These necessities are; 1) changing regional and international conditions and the instability caused by transition of the international and regional systems to the new ones, 2) US emphasis on the continuation of aggressive policy in the international arena, including against Iran and Russia and on implementing long-term strategy of pressure on these countries, which is evident in the form of sanctions and military containment and 3) persistence and increase of asymmetric threats, including international borderless terrorism, which by themselves or by manipulation of some countries will challenge the interests of Iran and Russia now and in the future.

Afghanistan is an arena where this pattern can be implemented. Although Afghanistan is different from Syria, in this country are the same three immediate security and geopolitical necessities that forced Iran and Russia to cooperate in Syria; 1) Afghanistan's contribution in instability in the region around this country, 2) US’s use of Afghanistan to geopolitical containment of Iran and Russia and 3) threats of transboundary terrorism (Taliban and ISIL). Although the security and geopolitical emergencies in Syria “forced” Iran and Russia to cooperate in a non-selective manner, the two countries with a selective, innovative, collaborative and mutually beneficial approach can interact with each other to reduce and eliminate the symmetrical and asymmetrical threats arising from this country. The type of this cooperation is not necessarily military and active balance and deterrence can take place in different ways. At the same time, such cooperation will continue to be "selective", will have its own limitations, and the broad interpretation of it, such as the issue of Iran-Russia interaction in Syria, is not correct.

Keywords: Iran, Russia, Syria, Afghanistan, deterrence, balance, West, USA, Middle East

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In July Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joseph Dunford said that Russia and Iran compete for ability to exert influence on the government of Syria and they interests will be diverging in future. At this point of time, according to Dunford, it is hard to say who has an upper hand in Damascus – Moscow or Tehran. He is not the first or the last who poses this question – what is going on? Do Russia and Iran cooperate or, in fact, compete in Syria? The right answer most likely will be defining the balance of powers in the region. Obviously, many would like to benefit from Moscow-Tehran rivalry, trying to cause jealousy in between them to the advancement of one another. In this regard, it is good to point at the US Secretary of State words (26.10.2017): “I do not see Syria as a triumph for Iran. I see Iran as a hanger-on. Iran has not particularly been successful in liberating areas. The Russian Government, providing significant air support for Syrian regime forces, have been successful. They’ve had their successes. We’ve had our successes, enormous successes, with our coalition forces. So I don't think that Iran should be given credit for the defeat of ISIS in any way in Syria. Rather, I think they have somewhat taken advantage of the situation with their presence there.”

In this context, it is very important how Moscow and Tehran themselves see their partnership. It appears that Russia and Iran in Syria turn to be a kind of forced allies. Rivals-partners that cannot achieve their goals in that country without one another. A lot has been said about the benefits of cooperation between the two countries in various aspects.

**Military aspect:** Syrian army, Hezbollah and various Shia forces save Russia the necessity to increase its own military presence too much. At the same time, Russian Air Forces provided Syrian army and its allies with an unprecedented support. **Diplomatic aspect:** Possibility of dialogue between Moscow and Tehran gets on Washington’s nerves and brings more weight to the Russian stance in the Syrian negotiations. Many see Moscow as the sole deterrent factor for Iran’s growing influence in the Middle East. While the real extent of Russia’s influence on Iran (if we can talk about it at all) does not matter much, the pretense of it is important. Such a role gives a key to getting closer to the new partners, including Saudi Arabia. For Iran, Russia's stepping-up into the region is considered as a counterweight to Washington's policy. Besides, without Moscow Iran might not have been included into the negotiations about Syria’s future. Tehran owes stronger networks on the ground, at the territories under the control of the “official Damascus”, closer ties to the Syrian government. At the same time, it has next to none influence on the external players.

**Negative aspects:** Since the beginning of military operation in Syria Russia promoted its military achievements. Russia’s own audience at home was a primary target of this. Nevertheless, both Tehran and Damascus were not happy with that all the success was ascribed to Moscow and the role of its Iranian and Syrian colleagues was neglected. Damascus expressed its grievances in an unofficial manner. Tehran could afford itself be more vocal. Let’s remember the situation with the Russian Air Forces using the Hamedan military base in August 2016. Iranian Defence Minister Hossein Dehghan

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13. Author for the Moscow Carnegie Centre and Al-Monitor Russia-Mideast
scolded Moscow for unnecessary boasting and improper behavior. In 2017 with the success of Astana process and approaching victory over the Islamic State forces, Russian rhetoric changed. When it is spoken of the success at various fronts, Moscow tries to mention the role of Syrian army and its allies (implying Iran, Hezbollah and other Shia forces). Yet, in Russian statements they are rarely mentioned by name. To acknowledge the military alliance with Iran and some other actors in the region would mean that Russia might lose its other partners. In this way, Moscow could transform from the neutral mediator (self-assigned role) to one of the parties to the conflict. This is the scenario Russia is trying to avoid by any means.

**Economic rivalry:** One more potential area for the conflict is economy. A part of it was vividly illustrated by the case with phosphate mines. It was the case when contracts deemed for Iran (according to the media reports) were given to Russia instead. Competition is possible for the oil fields and contracts in the electric energy sphere. However, coordination of efforts on the economic track is necessary. The issue of Syria’s reconstruction in the post-war period is coming up, and the required funding is estimated at up to $200-350 billion. Apparently, even Iran and Russia combined will not be able to cover such expenses. For now, the West is ready to invest only when guarantees that Assad will leave and Iran will not meddle into the Syrian affairs, are provided. A lot will depend on the position of Russia and if Tehran and Moscow will learn to trust each other. Otherwise, both will lose a lot in Syria and in the Middle East in a whole.

**Keywords:** Iran, Russia, Syria, Middle East, USA, Alliance, Rivalry
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