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Iran and Central Eurasia: Twenty-Five Years After the Collapse of the Soviet Union



Institute for Regional Studies (IRS)

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Preface

Twenty-five years from the one of historical events of the 20th century means the collapse of the Soviet Union passed. On the trial date, we witnessed some dramatically changes in the region situation, the relation of Iran with the region and also in the international power transition. In this regard, it seems to need to appraise what made in this period, what was the wrong that would be stopped or mustn't appear again and what gone to the right manner that would be improve it to reach a stable and peaceful situation in that region. Examining of it needs to know more on the key characters of the region and their effects on the region, the peripheries and internationally too.

As a main geopolitically region, the Eurasia would be introduced with some key characters: the first it is a landlocked region, means that it does not available to the suitable sea route for facilitating its connecting with the world. Second, it is the one of the core region of oil reserve of the world and also the transmitting it to the rest by any means such as pipe lines would be so critical issue of the region too. Third, The Eurasia is located in-between three most important area of the world – the EU, the Middle East and the East Asia.

Transporting the goods and energy from one side to the side is connecting them together and made an attractive route for investing and doing economic exchanges. Fourth, the region is entangled with the challenges of the nation-building process, modernization route and industrialization too. In this regard, economic problems, extremist Islamism, organizational crimes, ethnic conflicts, territory disputes and military clashes did delay on that processes in reality. The all did convey an image of penetrable region instead of a developing one. In a word, it did substitute the security issues into the sustainable development and economic growth process.

By the bare facts stated till now, it puts this issue on the agenda to re-examine the region situation in this period of time passed from the Soviet collapsing and also Iran's relation with its north ward of borders in collaborating with the Iranian experts from the broad fields of subject mattered. What provided in this booklet are the all-important subjects discussed in a joint scientific seminar of the Institute for Regional Studies (IRS) of Shahid Beheshti University and The Institute for Iran and Eurasia Studies (IRAS) which held on 25 Oct. 2016.

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Iran-Eurasia Relations in Post-Soviet Era: from the Geo-Security Perspective

Davoud Gharayagh-Zandi¹

The paper is going to elaborate the relation between Iran and the Eurasia from the geo-security perspective. It deemed that by defining the geo-security with the three component parts of it such as territoriality, conflict and scarcity, it would be made a better picture of relation of Iran with the Eurasia. By collapsing the Soviet Union Empire, Iran faced with the cross-border in its north ward with the five countries that newly established as aftermath of that overturning instead of the one neighbor had before that time.

It means that it made the most diversification in the Iran's foreign policy towards to the region. On the other side, it needs to note that the shadow of a superpower from the land border of Iran disappeared and it made a multiply security safety for it in the new era too. The Eurasia is located in-between the Iran and Russia as the buffer region and by virtue of this new destination made some common and contradictive issues between two countries from the north and south sides.

In spite of what Iran's endeavors for facilitating the peaceful initiates in the region, there is a reluctance for sharing with Iran between the most interesting regional and trans-region powers such as Russia, China, US and also Turkey. It would be introducing some critical reasons of it by the three component of geo-security view. First and foremost of it related to how could be divide up the territory sharing of the five coastal countries of the Caspian Sea that it is continued till now.

In deal with the second component of geo-security - the conflictual one – there are many issues such as the political Islamism, the ethnic conflicts, the presence of the US and Israel in near of Iranian borders and at last the illicit drug transmitting. The scarcity as the third part is related to the Economic Eurasian Union (EEU), the energy transformation route, the Silk Road and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) too.

As result the Eurasia region does need to a proportional pendulum balancing between the regionalism and globalization, the economic attitudes and the independentism, the regional security and the international one, the federation orientation and the intergovernmental one. In the vein, Iran would be managing its relation with the region in so that the all issues do make transform from the territoriality orientations to the scarcity one from the geo-security perspective too.

Keywords: Eurasia, Iran, Post-Soviet Era, Geopolitics, Geo-Security.

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Iran-Russia Relations a Quarter Century After the Collapse of the Soviet Union

Mahmood Shoori²

The topic of Iran-Russia relations has been one of the most controversial issues in Iran's foreign policy regarding the post-Soviet era. Even Iran-US relations have not been so controversial. Because the dominant discourse in Tehran's relations with Washington is "hostility to the United States", but relations with Russia do not have a definite analytical and conceptual framework. This ambiguity has caused some sensitivities in these relations.

Now the question is that is there any define criteria to evaluate the relations between Iran and Russia 25 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Sometimes economic and political criteria are used to answer this question and analyze the relations. But due to fluctuations in relations, these criteria do not reflect the realities. More realistic criteria for exploring the relations between Iran and Russia is the strategic opportunities and threats which affect the two countries' interests in international arena.

In terms of opportunity, for example, if Moscow after the collapse of the Soviet Union had a final choice to join the West (as it had been in Yeltsin period), the situation would have become difficult for Iran. It means that not only bilateral relations between Tehran and Moscow, but also Iran's foreign policy was also negatively affected in Central Asia and Caucasus. With this note in mind, its current position with regard to the West can be considered an opportunity for Iran. In terms of threats (as the second criteria), Iran and Russia have their own ambitions at regional level. The fact that the two countries, despite their long-term goals in the region, have not been seriously confronted with each other and did not create a threat to each other is a positive point in their relationship.

While Iran and Russia might not have provided assistance for one another they have certainly provided many opportunities for each other. In any case, Russia has provided strategic opportunities for Iran such as constructing nuclear plant in Bushehr and selling arms to Iran. The fact is that Russia has not met the Western expectations for containing Iran which is in itself a strategic opportunity for Tehran. When it comes to facing threats, Iran and Russia show regional expansionist ambitions but these ambitions are not at odds which is another positive point in their relations.

Iran and Russia entering the Syrian arena must be seen as an ordering process. Nevertheless, the perspective depends on how the two countries view towards the future events. It yet not clear whether Russia will demand its presence in other regional affairs after the Syrian crisis is resolved and whether its presence will be at odds with Iran's

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interests. The main thing is that if the relations between Russia and Iran in Syria, which was the non-declared division of labor benefiting both countries, is taken as a model for future course of action the Iran-Russia ties will be successful.

Keywords: Iran, Russia, West, strategic opportunities, threats, Syria

Geopolitics and Russian Foreign Policy After the Dissolution of the Soviet Union

Julia Zotova³

Geopolitics is an important issue for Russia in contemporary international conditions. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Treaty of Warsaw, Russia and the world entered the new geopolitical era. The geopolitics in the Soviet era was based on nuclear deterrence and balance of power between the two enemy blocks. In the present circumstances, situation has changed qualitatively and the relationship between Russia and NATO has changed in favor of NATO. Unlike the Soviet period and the history of Russia, Moscow is now standing alone in front of NATO (The West).

Russia's geopolitical losses after the collapse of the Soviet Union was great. One quarter of the country's land lost and Russia returned to the borders of the Peter the Great time. Russia also lost half of the Soviet-era population and about 20 million Russians (Slavic) were placed outside Russia's borders. Russia also lost a lot of agricultural and mineral lands and was restricted to northern areas. Russia's infrastructures, for example in the field of transportation faced serious problems and Moscow lost many important transit routes, including many ports in the Black Sea and the Baltic sea.

After the collapse of Soviet Union, Russia lost all its geopolitical zones of influence, including in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa. In this situation, the Russian borders became vulnerable and some of its neighboring countries took a hostile approach against Moscow. Some others like Tajikistan, Georgia and Azerbaijan were in tension and an unstable situation. Due to the transition of the Russian economy from a socialist economy to a market one, the economic conditions in the country also changed and faced serious challenges. This situation led to a 40% drop in GDP in Russia during 1992-1998 and an 80% reduction in investment. Given these problems, Russia was called a poor superpower. The reason for this naming was the fact that the losses of the collapse of the Soviet Union was twice more than damages caused by the Second World War.

In this difficult situation, one of the most important issues was the choice a political and managerial structure for the country. Russia had three choices; return to the era of the former empire, fall down again or create a federal democratic state. Russian people's choice was the third one. Due to all efforts to realize this option, Russia has now become one of the most important and influential powers in the world.

Keywords: Soviet Union, Russia, Geopolitics, US, NATO, Zone of Influence, CIS

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Iran, Central Asia and Transregional Powers

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Russia seeks regional dominance, especially in the sphere of the former Soviet Union. Due to its weakness, Moscow lost some of their geopolitical influence but now it wants to turn into a major power in the region and neutralize other player's plans. The 2020 act shows Russia trying to insulate its surrounding regions. It, for example, through its effective presence in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, seeks to create a buffer zone around itself. One of the goals of these actions is to become an international power.

An important reason for Russia's focus on abovementioned regions is the importance of Eurasia. The Central Eurasia region is important in geopolitical, geoeconomic and geostrategic terms, which has led to rivalries. Russia, along with the United States, Europe, China, Iran and Turkey, are among the most important actors in this region. In analyzing the competition between these powers, attention should be paid to regional and international dynamics and the transformation of concepts and trends.

Although Russia has capabilities and capabilities in "hard" geopolitics, it has problems in "soft" geopolitics. Meanwhile, relying on its own, Moscow tries to Draw a new map of the region and dominate Central Eurasia. In this regard, the Kremlin is seeking to consolidate Russia-centered integration in this area. By contrast, the United States seeks to strengthen and intensify the divergence of Moscow in this area. The West sought to deter Russia to limit its regional and international ambitious goals.

In the eyes of the West, Russia is a revisionist power and while the US is involved in many issues the rising tensions between the two is probable. That's why US is trying to diverge regional governments from Russia's side. Washington sees Russia as a threat and is looking for ways to avoid Russia unleashing its power. But China is a mysterious player in the region trying to capture regional markets, gain access to energy sources, and safe transit and it will use other player's abilities to achieve its aims. In fact, China seeks multilateralism and wants to keep things as they are now.

Among other things, Beijing is pursuing a positive interaction with different countries through the new Silk Road project, encouraging multilateralism. At the same time, China is focusing on providing stability and security in central Eurasia to fulfill its economic goals through maintaining the status quo. On the other hand, the EU faces internal problems and has a negative outlook for Russia's ambitious goals. Turkey also has a lot of troubles in the country due to the coup and is focusing more on strengthening its position in the South Caucasus. Meanwhile, Iran must enter into controlled cooperation with Russia and

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avoid trusting an unpredictable country without predicting possible outcomes. The future regional prospect will be decided by Russia's 2020 act, Iran's 2025 act, and China's 2025 act.

Keywords: Iran, Central Asia, Russia, South Caucasus, Central Eurasia, Geopolitics, China, multilateralism

Iran and Regional Institutionalism in Central Eurasia

Jahangir Karami⁵

After the fall of the Soviet Union an existential threat was eliminated from the borders of Iran (Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union). This was the first step in strengthening Iran's regional power. The second step was taken by power change in Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam. As a result of these two developments, the geopolitical map of the region has changed in favor of Tehran and its regional power has increased. These events have created many opportunities for Tehran's foreign policy, including for developing its relations with Central Eurasian countries.

For Iran, economic development in Central Eurasia is important. It is also important for Tehran what is going on in the region and what contributes to Iran's development in it. Economic development, energy transit, regional integration, and security process are some of the important factors that have to be considered by Iranian policy makers while dealing with Central Asian and Caucasian countries.

The four basic trends point to Iran's position in Central Eurasia.

- Economic development; in this regard, it is important to determine the type of economic relations between Tehran and the countries in the region and the role of Iran in regional development.
- Transit and Communication process; in this regard, it is important to define the Iran's position in transit and communication routs of Central Eurasia.
- Regional integration; in this regard, it is important to analyze the fact that Central Eurasia has been pushed into the integration process both from within and by foreign powers (regional and transregional).
- Security trends; in this regard, it is important to analyze the security integration process in the region, which is pushed both by internal and external forces and has had its own effects.

Current security processes in central Eurasia have posed threats, which can affect Islamic Republic's role, but they are not existential. Nevertheless, the intervention and presence of major powers, trespassing Iran's sphere of influence by regional and transregional powers, border and ethnic tensions, security and intelligence breaches, and the efforts made to alienate Iran are some of the major challenges facing Tehran, which is trying to improve its relations with the countries in the region.

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Meanwhile, there are opportunities for Iran to cooperate with countries in central Eurasia, including within CSTO. This organization and its members look to Tehran positively. Iran can work with this organization selectively such as in fight against drug smuggling and terrorism. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is another organization, with which Iran can work and through it participate in regional processes.

One should take a strategic look at the capabilities of this organization, including in maintaining national sovereignty, combating drug trafficking and managing regional issues. It should also be noted that some regional organizations are Russian-based and some others Western-based. This has led to varying positive and negative views about Iran by these organizations.

Keywords: Iran, Central Eurasia, Economic Development, Communication Process, Regional Integration, Security Trends

Iran's Foreign Policy Towards the South Caucasus

Vali Kaleji⁶

Regarding Iranian foreign policy towards Central Asia and Caucasus, the Iranian governments have not released specific strategy or policy papers; however, the Iran's 20-year grand vision, commonly known as Horizon 2025, has put huge emphasis on these regions. Under the approval of the Iranian Supreme Leader, the government published Horizon 2025, a document which, in terms of formality and legality, is second to the Constitution. The 2025 vision demonstrates the Iranian decision-makers' focus on Central Asia and Caucasus which includes the regions in the broad geography of 'Southwest Asia'.

Therefore, based on this official document, Republic of Azerbaijan is very important for Iran foreign policy. No doubt that there are some distinct relations between Iran and Republic of Azerbaijan. Iran was among the first to recognize independence of Azerbaijan and opened diplomatic mission in Baku. Republic of Azerbaijan has close religious (i.e. shiite) and ethnic ties with the Iranian society and millions of Azeri speakers in Iran. Needless to say, there are common and shared cultural values, traditions and rituals between the two states.

The overall tenets of Iran's foreign policy towards the Caucasian states are to respect their independence and sovereignty, maintain their territorial integrity, peace, stability and security, preserve the current territorial borders without their consents, expand regional cooperation and oppose negative intervention of foreign Powers, to the detriment of regional order, stability and security. With respect to these principles, in the past two and half decades, Iran attempted to adopt a balanced approach to the south Caucasian states.

In that regard, since early 1990s, Iran has actively mediated in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, never recognized the independence of Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia and invited Azerbaijan to join the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and simultaneously improved its relations with the Christian Armenia and Georgia, and finally, resisted the presence and intervention of foreign powers, namely NATO and the USA in order not to let the region turn into arena of Russian-Western geopolitical conflicts.

There is no comprehensive regional mechanism to which Iran and other countries in the region are committed and since multilateral mechanisms are able to communicate with bilateral and regional mechanisms Iran should try to make multilateral mechanisms. Therefore, it seems that establishment of three- or four-lateral limited mechanisms with definite agendas, can remove a great share of the inefficiencies within the regional organizations; overcome the limitations of two-lateral diplomacy; and contribute to the

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revival of the role and position of Iran in the historical Silk Route. At present, a number of multilateral mechanisms have been established between Iran and its surrounding countries which need to be improved and expanded.

There are also other cases which should be established as soon as possible with the regional leaders' political wills. In the South Caucasus, the three-lateral mechanism of Iran-Russia-Azerbaijan is the most important mechanism established in line with the North-South transit corridor, with its turning point being the three country's summit of 8 August 2016 in Baku. This three-lateral mechanism is important since the Republic of Azerbaijan, as a non-EEU country, borders both Russia and Iran from north and south, and due to its suitable transit and economic infrastructures can play an important role in connecting Iran with EEU.

Indeed, two new multilateral mechanisms can establish in the South Caucasus. First, Iran-Armenia-Georgia; fulfilment of "North-South Road Corridor Investment Program" that requires political coordination of and economic support for reviving the Iran-Armenia-Azerbaijan road corridor and the railroad between Armenia and Iran, commonly known as the "Southern Armenia Railway" and is linked to the Georgian railway network, necessitates the activation of Iran-Armenia-Georgia trilateral mechanism in order to bring another South Caucasian economic and transit pillar into force.

And second, Iran-Armenia-Russia; given the fact that Armenia is the only South Caucasian states which is a member of the EAEU, some requirements including transit coordination, customs tariffs, banking/insurance issues and FTAs establishment lead to facilitate the trigger of Iran-Armenia-Russia trilateral mechanism, quickly accelerating and expanding the connection between Iran the EAEU.

Keywords: Iran, South Caucasus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, Geopolitical Conflicts, Geoeconomics

Iran and Energy Equations in Eurasia

Abbas Maleki⁷

There is still a lack of proper knowledge of Eurasia in Iran. Eurasia is the main geographic part that Halford Mackinder called the heart of the earth. Eurasia Central is part of this vast area. Apart from Mackinder's Heartland Theory which argued that Eurasia is the center of the world, it seems that nowadays we are witnessing an important issue, namely, the Eurasian Economic Union. Members of this regional organization, under the leadership of Russia, are trying to start ambitious projects such as introducing a single currency for all member countries.

It is realistic for Iran to participate in this regional institutional process to further its political and economic goals. The Eurasian Economic Union, with its focus on economics, including energy, ... has long-term purposes, one of the most important of which is economic unity. Iran should pay close attention to this issue. Europe's dependence on energy resources in Eurasia is a very important issue of this region. In this regard, Russia has an important role and supplies about 60% of Europe's energy.

In the past, countries like Iran and Russia were producers of natural gas while Europe and the United States were consumers of gas. But the current transition is that either the producers and consumers of energy have become one and the same or they have come closer to one another. For example, countries like India, China and the countries in South-East Asia have come closer to being producers of energy.

Russia has a balanced energy policy, a balance between its energy needs, goals and capabilities. At the same time, Moscow's energy policy including its relations with Ukraine have created restrictions and problems for Russia and its energy relations with other countries like Europeans. In this context, sanctions imposed by the Western governments against Moscow have resulted in various problems for it.

At the same time and in spite of some problems with some Western countries, Russia has a good energy policy and relations with China and Germany. But in a broader view, a proper balance between Russia's specific actions in the sphere of energy and the benefits expected from this area has not been achieved and the results have been negative. For example, some policies have caused a shortage of capital and technology in the energy sector. However, Russia is developing its energy resources from land to sea and from the Barents Sea to the Caspian Sea, the Baltic sea and the Arctic, in order to stabilize its position in the international energy market.

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Keywords: Russia, Iran, Eurasia, Eurasian Economic Union, Energy, Western Countries, China

Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union; Barriers and Opportunities for Cooperation

Esfandiar Omidbakhsh⁸

The issue of concluding free trade agreements is a subject that has been less addressed in Iran's foreign economy, but in recent years we have been focusing more on this topic. The new approach is particularly evident with the Eurasian Economic Union. Efforts are underway to conclude such an agreement with this regional institution and last December, a memorandum of understanding was signed. This is the first time, after the Islamic Revolution that Iran has signed such a free trade agreement with a regional organization. In fact, Tehran, until now has no such an agreement with any country or region in the world (however Iran has a preferential trade agreement with eight countries, including Belarus).

Eurasia is the world's largest land, with an area of 53 million square kilometers, covering 103 countries. Russia is one of the most important countries in this region, which plays an important role in its trade and economic issues. On the other hand, the Eurasian Economic Union is an important trade organization in the region. Its member states exported about \$ 600 billion between 2010 and 2015, from which about \$ 330 billion worth of Russian imports. These countries also imported about \$ 1 trillion, with Russia contributing \$ 780 billion.

The current average tariff of the Eurasian Economic Union is 7.8% while that of Iran is 26%, therefore, should a Free Trade Agreement be signed by Iran and the Union in order to expedite and facilitate trade relations between Tehran and Central Eurasian countries. But It is Iran that needs to lower its tariffs. Among the obstacles for lowering tariffs in Iran is that, based on the law, the minimum tariff should be around 4%. Therefore the Iranian parliament should make a decision regarding the lowering of tariffs for the Free Trade Agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union.

Analyzing the benefits of concluding such an agreement, these tariffs should be carefully scrutinized. The technical details on this matter require a lot of time and all the issues related should be reviewed with a technical view, not just political one. For example, Iran's negotiations with the World Trade Organization have begun since 2001 and have not yet come to an end. It should be noted that Iran does not intend to join the organization as a permanent member and the debate is just about signing a free trade agreement. The same agreement has been signed with Vietnam so far.

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Among the advantages of such an agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union is the fact that 4 out of 5 members of the Union are members of the World Trade Organization. At the same time, it should be noted that the Union is a young organization, whose structures have not yet been fully established. Therefore, its technical details must be carefully checked. It is necessary to have strategic thinking in this regard and interaction with other eastern organizations, including ASEAN, as a balanced strategy should be considered.

Keywords: Iran, Eurasian Economic Union, CIS, Russia, free trade agreement

The Prospects for Iran's Relations with Central Eurasia

Hamidreza Azizi⁹

To discuss the current status, as well as the prospects for the Islamic Republic of Iran's relations with the Central Eurasian countries, it's necessary to first have a look at the history of the relations. In this vein, four periods can be distinguished from each other. The first period of relations between Iran and Central Eurasia began by the collapse of the Soviet Union and continued through the first years after the independence of the former Soviet republics, in which, the newly independent states were struggling to define their place in the international arena. In this era, Iran's foreign policy toward the region was based on a miscalculation of the real situation on the ground – which was indeed a common feature among almost all the regional and trans-regional actors involved in Central Eurasia at the time – and this provoked many sensitivities among the Central Eurasian countries over Iran's real aims and objectives in the region.

However, with the outbreak of the Tajik Civil War, which led to a pragmatic cooperation between Iran and Russia to initiate a reconciliation among the conflicting sides, Iran's approach toward the region started to change. In this vein, the second period, from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s marked with the dominance of a pragmatic approach on Iran's policy toward the region and the prioritization of economic ties over ideological objectives. The third period which came immediately afterwards and lasted till 2013, coincided with Mahmud Ahmadinejad's presidency in Iran.

As a result, Iran's relations with Central Eurasia were mainly defined within the context of Ahmadinejad's "Look East" strategy. However, the extremely anti-Western orientation of Iran's foreign policy at the time, accompanied by the severe sanctions imposed by the United States and the other Western countries on Iran, appeared as serious barriers in line of the development of Iran's ties with the Central Eurasian states. Finally, the fourth period, started with the beginning of Hassan Rouhani's presidency in Iran and his pragmatic foreign policy agenda, witnessed a new openness in Iran's relations with the region, represented in the developments of economic, political and diplomatic ties with the region.

Generally speaking, it could be said that Central Eurasia currently provides Iran with more opportunities for the expansion of positive ties, comparing to Iran's other neighboring regions, especially the Middle East. There are several reasons for this, including the distinct nature of regional order in the post-Soviet space, adoption of a pragmatist and economy-oriented policy by Iran in this region, the more limited role of the

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United States in this region comparing to the Middle East and South Asia, and the existence of deep-rooted social and cultural ties between Iran and the countries of the region.

If Iran wants to build upon these opportunities in order to cement its ties with the region, a two-sided approach should be developed, focusing on the cultural and economic aspects of relations at the same time. The cultural aspect means utilizing measures such as public diplomacy in relations with the Central Eurasian countries and the economic aspect deals with devising plans to enhance the economic ties. At the same time, institutionalizing the relations, i.e. entering multilateral regional initiatives could be considered as another factor with the potential of strengthening Iran's relations with Central Eurasia.

Keywords: Iran, Central Eurasia, pragmatic approach, ideological objectives, Look East, Middle East.

An Economic and Infrastructure look to the North-South Corridor

Majid Raoufi¹⁰

In 1999, the first containers were shipped from India to the Caspian Sea. This was the beginning of a new look at the North-South Corridor. The route that has long been at the center of attention and has been important in many ways for a long time. One of the major problems for finalizing and speeding up this route is the financial and infrastructural problems in Iran. Due to the necessity of activating this route, in recent years more attention has been paid to this corridor.

In this regard, the St. Petersburg Summit in 2000 was held with participation from Iran, India and Russia and with a focus on the North-South corridor. Although sanctions imposed on Iran prevented Iran from participating again but eventually in 2016 a trilateral meeting between Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia was held in Baku which also focused on the North-South corridor. Ships were supposed to move from India's Mumbai port toward Iran's Bandar Abbas port city from where their cargo would be carried on land toward the Caspian Sea and Bandar Anzali port on route to Russia and then Europe. This route is an alternative for the Suez Canal route, which is much shorter and transportation through which will be less costly.

After a railroad route connecting Iranian cities of Qazvin, Rasht and Astara is made operational, the way would be paved for taking advantage of railroad in order to connect the southern Iranian port of Bandar Abbas to the northern port city of Astara. Further on, with the revival of the Russian railroad to Azerbaijan, consignments sent from Bandar Abbas – and before long from Chabahar port – will reach Moscow aboard freight train. Despite the existence of infrastructural problems and international sanctions against Iran, which made taking advantage of the high capacities of this corridor difficult, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Belarus and Oman joined the project in one stage and were followed in the following stage by Ukraine, Armenia, Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Syria.

Intense activity by Chinese contractors in Pakistan's Gwadar port has also doubled India's motivation to take advantage of the North-South Corridor. The Chinese officials have made huge investment in the one Belt, one road initiative and are trying to get access to the Indian Ocean. They are also building a highway, which is supposed to connect the city of Kashghar in China's Xinjiang province to Pakistan's Gwadar port. By turning Gwadar into a full-fledged trade port, economic and security conditions in Pakistan will change a lot. The highway connecting Kashghar to Gwadar would pass through the disputed Kashmir region. This will give Pakistan the upper hand compared to India in that

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region. At the same time, China's access to the Indian Ocean will overshadow India's control over that region.

Due to being landlocked, it is difficult for countries in Central Asia to have access to global markets and especially, they cannot establish suitable trade ties with India despite all cultural commonalities that exist between the two sides. India, on the other hand, does not like Central Asia to gradually turn into China's backyard. In the meantime, Russia is also trying to maintain close ties with India despite cordial relations that exist between India and the United States of America. Since 2000, Russia and India have been holding regular annual economic sessions alternatively in Moscow and New Delhi, but the volume of their trade exchanges is still relatively low. Iraq and Jordan's interest in participating in the project and also Georgia's interests in the matter are among new issues.

Keywords: North-South Corridor, Iran, Azerbaijan, Russia, international transit, Central Eurasian countries, foreign trade.

Iran and Eurasian Integration; Aspects and Perspective

Alireza Noori¹¹

The purpose of this paper is to examine the dimensions and perspective of Eurasian integration and Iran's participation in it. Eurasia is a dynamic region in the process of regionalization of international relations and through its resources and capacities will have an important place in future world order. Transformation in concepts of hegemony and great power, as well as profit-oriented rather than value-oriented tendencies in Eurasian integration, provides a suitable platform for countries to selective cooperation. Eurasia is described as trans-regional concept which geographically goes beyond CIS borders and covers various issues including economy, politics and security. This concept has parallels with the concept of regional development that seeks to bring Eurasian countries and around it to a more sustainable development through regional cooperation.

In Iran, despite theoretical emphases, practical attention has not yet been given to the subject. Lack of objective look at trends and benefits, inadequate understanding of capacities, lack of a Eurasian strategy, the follow-up policy to constructed models and structures are main reasons for the failure. A deductive-analytical approach to theory and performance of Tehran and Moscow could give a better understanding of Iran's Eurasian policy. This view of point would also help to determine the benefits of cooperation between two countries in Greater Eurasia.

Russia in its Eurasian policy pursues two main aims. The first one is tactical to decrease pressure from the West and the long-term aim is related to strategic approach to the changes in international order in order to ensure a proper position for Russia in it by conducting a balance between China and the West. In the process of Eurasian integration, Iran is an attractive partner for Russia because of geopolitical reasons and its regional capacities. There are some commons between two countries;

- Relative common regional views in various political, economic and security fields
- Synergistic capacities as influential actors in regional and transnational spaces
- Mutually beneficial capacities to geographically and thematically balance each other's foreign policy
- A comprehensive look at cooperation and willingness to expand interactions from one region to another (Middle East and Eurasia)
- Mutual Geopolitical need, in particular to deter destabilizing policies of the West and its allies

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- Emphasis on managing regional issues “in region” without external interference
- Common benefit for two countries in maintaining the stability in Central Eurasia
- Geoeconomical necessities of collective interaction, including in the field of transit
- The need for collective coordination to deal with asymmetric security threats like terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking.

These commons have pushed Iran and Russia to cooperate in Eurasia. Moscow supports Iran's partnership with Eurasian institutions like Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Eurasian Economic Union. Iran's relative advantage for Russia is to help it counter the United States, China, India and Turkey. At the same time, it should be noted that Russia peruse selective interaction with various countries in Eurasia including Iran. Accordingly, we do not have a broad interpretation of Iran-Russia Eurasian cooperation. Their cooperation is limited and is not defined in terms of “alliance”. However, a reasonable level of relations with Russia is necessary for Iran to operate in Eurasia. But Tehran does not have a sustainable model for such relations.

As a result, emphasizing the multi-dimensional benefits for Iran's participation in Eurasian integration, it is stated that active foreign policy in this vector requires a thorough understanding of the Eurasia's position in future international order, internal consensus on a strategy, adopting a multi-vector approach and balanced engagement with all parties involved in the integration process without unnecessary emphasis on the "West", "Russia" and "China", interacting with Moscow as pivotal actor in this process (at least in the medium term) and at the same time trying to engage in making process not just follow constructed models.

Keywords: Iran, Russia, Eurasia, Great Eurasia, Integration, Regionalism, Regionalization, International Order

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